

Working Toward EXCELLENCE

THE JOURNAL OF
THE ALABAMA
BEST PRACTICES CENTER

FALL 2003

VOLUME 3 ~ NUMBER 4

No Child Left Behind: Accountability That's Here to Stay

NCLB is pressuring states to hold schools accountable for the academic success of all children. Alabama's education leaders plan to do just that.

EDUCATORS ARE FOND of saying that changes in our public schools come and go in cycles, like the seasons. Wait long enough and the status quo will be restored. The federal No Child Left Behind law is not that kind of change.

NCLB represents a shift in the relationship between the federal government and the states on the scale of a massive geological event. In the past, Alabama and other states largely controlled their own school accountability systems. That era has ended. Using the "big stick" of federal dollars, the 2001 law requires states to raise standards and hold schools accountable for the performance of *all* students. In practice, this means that states can no longer allow schools to satisfy accountability requirements by averaging the performance of every student in the school.

For example, a school may have a student body that is 50 percent "middle class" and 50 percent poor. In the past, the more advantaged students may have performed so well as a group that their test results kept the school's average scores high enough to avoid state notice. The logic behind NCLB is that this kind of "masking of averages" removes the pressure on schools to find instructional solutions for failing students.

The heart of the new federal law is its requirement that states hold schools accountable for the progress of major subgroups, including: economically disadvantaged students; students from major racial and ethnic groups; students with disabilities, and limited-English proficient students. If any one of these subgroups fails to achieve the amount of

progress called for in the state's accountability system, then the school is not performing adequately.

The new law gets its teeth from a series of increasing sanctions that states must include in their accountability plans. To avoid sanctions, schools must address the "achievement gaps" among different student subgroups by reexamining their own practices and identifying research-based strategies that can help teachers be more successful with every student.

At this early stage in NCLB's 12-year anticipated lifespan, many aspects of its implementation are in a state of flux, both in Alabama and across the United States. What does seem clear is the federal government's determination to push forward and enforce the law's core principles.

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ON THE WEB

Talking to the Community about NCLB

A free NCLB guide for educators is available from the Learning First Alliance, a partnership of 12 major education organizations. "The guide will help all educators speak with one voice and discuss the hows and whys of NCLB in careful, clear, bite-size pieces that will help staff members and parents understand this confusing law." Read online or download in PDF or Word format.

<http://tinyurl.com/n480>

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THE ADVENT OF NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

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Alabama education leaders are showing an equal determination. They have moved rapidly to recalibrate the state's accountability, assessment and teacher certification policies to achieve NCLB compliance.

In August, the Department of Education unveiled a new system to classify the academic status of schools and districts. For the first time, status was determined based on the performance of students in each of nine separate demographic groups. Some schools that had enjoyed "clear" status in the past suddenly found themselves classified as needing improvement.

"Many schools and school systems that are doing a good job overall may be on a Watch or Priority list because one subgroup fails to meet standards," State Superintendent Ed Richardson said when the data was released. "While some may feel that seems excessive, it is at the heart of No Child Left Behind. Holding schools accountable for every student is the law, and will ultimately lead to improved student achievement."

Some schools are knuckling down

While some Alabama schools have been slow to anticipate the demands of an NCLB-driven accountability system, others "have already knuckled down and gotten to work," says Cathy Gassenheimer, director of the Alabama Best Practices Center.

"These are educators who realize that the demand for better school performance is not going to go away," she says. "Many of these schools are already seeing positive changes for kids by paying attention to their student performance data and targeting their efforts to close achievement gaps."

Gassenheimer concedes that

the failure of the Governor's tax referendum and the subsequent drastic cuts in funds for professional development and new instructional programs "are making it harder to find the spirit and energy to keep trying." Even so, many schools are utilizing monies available through NCLB, local sources, education grants and reallocations to continue their investments in innovation. "They just refuse to give up."

As important as money is, Gassenheimer says, "there's something even more important in difficult times, and that's vision and will. Schools are getting smarter. They're making strategic changes that don't always require more money. They're using data effectively. They're looking for experts within their own faculties to help lead staff development. Teachers are sharing what they're learning about strategies that work for different kinds of kids. They're beginning to take responsibility for the success of the whole school."

As examples, Gassenheimer refers educators to the Alabama schools profiled in recent issues of *Working Toward Excellence*. "These schools are defying their demographics and accelerating the learning of poor and minority students," she says. One school — Birmingham's Central Park Elementary — is featured in a new 14-minute BPC video, which describes how the inner city school raised scores dramatically by retooling professional development and supporting high expectations for students and adults alike. (The video is available from BPC — call 334-279-1886.)

"We must keep working as a state to solve our school funding problems," Gassenheimer is quick to say. "Our success or failure will ultimately determine whether Alabama has a bright or bleak future. But in the meantime, we can't give up on our kids."

Looking beyond compliance

Although the requirements of NCLB sometimes feel like a vise, states do have flexibility. Caroline Novak, who serves on the Alabama State Accountability Committee, points out that each state determines its own trajectory toward the federal law's requirement that 100 percent of students be proficient in reading and math by 2014.

"Some states are setting minimal progress goals in the early years and shifting the hard part to the end," she says. "In Alabama, we're trying to develop a plan for progress that includes challenging but achievable goals each year."

Those goals will be tied to the state assessment system, now in the midst of a major redesign. The retooled system will be more closely aligned with the Alabama Courses of Study (our academic standards), and it will report on each student's progress towards meeting or exceeding specific standards. The new system will also allow for comparisons to national norms, and it will include opportunities for students to respond in writing to questions requiring the use of higher level thinking skills.

Novak, president of the A+ Education Foundation, says that every state — and ultimately, every school and every educator — has to decide whether NCLB is about compliance or about proficiency. "With or without NCLB, our ultimate goal in Alabama is the same," she believes. "We want all of our kids to acquire the reading and math skills they need to be proficient in school and in life."

Under NCLB, every state must set "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) benchmarks for schools and school systems. As states rush to meet federal implementation deadlines, news reports confirm Novak's observation that the definition of "progress" varies widely across the US, depending on

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Working Toward Excellence is a

quarterly publication of the Alabama *Best Practices Center*. The Best Practices Center, located in Montgomery, works to identify and promote promising education practices, with an emphasis on staff development for teachers and administrators. It collaborates with existing organizations such as the State Department of Education, higher education, local school systems and schools, the regional inservice centers and others. It is facilitated with the generous support of the Alabama Power Foundation, the BellSouth Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, the Kaul Foundation, the Junior League of Birmingham and the State of Alabama. For more information, call (334) 279-1886.

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STATEWIDE ACHIEVEMENT GAP ANALYSIS

Alabama High School Graduation Exam, 2002-03 – Percent of Students Passing – Grade 11

SUBJECT	White ¹	Black ¹	State Gap (in % pts.)	Fully Paid Lunch ²	Poverty ³	State Gap (in % pts.)
Reading	93.33% (26659)	79.39% (14155)	-13.94	92.11% (28934)	79.94% (13110)	-12.17
Language	89.27% (26694)	71.01% (14187)	-18.26	87.44% (28977)	72.51% (13136)	-14.93
Math	86.11% (26708)	65.74% (14205)	-20.37	83.98% (28985)	68.36% (13154)	-15.62
Science	91.50% (26720)	67.35% (14215)	-24.15	88.80% (29008)	70.24% (13160)	-18.06
Social Studies	81.47% (26664)	54.52% (14152)	-26.95	79.38% (28939)	55.98% (13107)	-23.40

(number of students tested in parentheses)

1. Percent of 11th graders who passed in this racial subgroup.

2. Percent of 11th graders who passed and also paid full price for school lunch.

3. Percent of 11th graders who passed and were also eligible for free/reduced lunch (a poverty indicator).

Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing, 2002-03 – Percent of Students Passing

GRADE/AREA	White ¹	Black ¹	State Gap (in % pts.)	Fully Paid Lunch ²	Poverty ³	State Gap (in % pts.)
Grade 5						
Holistic Composition	47.63% (33858)	29.29% (21010)	-18.34	52.15% (25953)	30.94% (29804)	-21.21
Writing Mechanics	47.21% (33697)	33.34% (20804)	-13.87	52.45% (25860)	33.01% (29489)	-19.44
Sentence Formation	42.39% (33697)	24.31% (20806)	-18.08	46.66% (25860)	25.91% (29491)	-20.75
Grammar and Usage	41.06% (33697)	19.48% (20806)	-21.58	44.66% (25860)	22.68% (29491)	-21.98
Grade 7						
Holistic Composition	46.65% (34902)	25.60% (21313)	-21.05	49.38% (29270)	27.48% (27593)	-21.90
Writing Mechanics	58.58% (34716)	44.90% (21060)	-13.68	62.21% (29153)	43.93% (27208)	-18.28
Sentence Formation	62.65% (34716)	41.48% (21059)	-21.17	65.50% (29152)	43.04% (27208)	-22.46
Grammar and Usage	55.51% (34716)	31.95% (21060)	-23.56	58.55% (29153)	33.89% (27208)	-24.66

(number of students tested in parentheses)

1. Percent of students in this racial subgroup who passed.

2. Percent of students who passed and also paid full price for school lunch.

3. Percent of students who passed and were also eligible for free/reduced lunch (a poverty indicator).

Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-10), 2002-03 – Average Percentile Score

GRADE SUBJECT	White ¹	Black ¹	State Gap	Fully Paid Lunch ²	Poverty ³	State Gap
3rd Reading	56 (32748)	28 (20689)	-28	60 (25099)	31 (28865)	-29
4th Reading	66 (33806)	37 (21398)	-29	71 (25693)	41 (29932)	-30
5th Reading	64 (34296)	35 (21235)	-29	69 (26139)	39 (29909)	-30
6th Reading	57 (34650)	31 (21662)	-26	61 (27646)	34 (29028)	-27
7th Reading	64 (35362)	37 (21648)	-27	67 (29514)	39 (27758)	-28
8th Reading	61 (33464)	34 (19459)	-27	64 (28769)	37 (24580)	-27
3rd Math	58 (32984)	32 (20859)	-26	62 (25226)	35 (29104)	-27
4th Math	63 (33909)	39 (21530)	-24	67 (25711)	42 (30157)	-25
5th Math	55 (34382)	32 (21316)	-23	60 (26195)	35 (30014)	-25
6th Math	55 (34713)	32 (21780)	-23	59 (27673)	34 (29175)	-25
7th Math	58 (35380)	33 (21708)	-25	62 (29520)	35 (27814)	-27
8th Math	60 (33399)	35 (19496)	-25	63 (28742)	37 (24583)	-26
5th Science	67 (34351)	39 (21268)	-28	71 (26161)	44 (29957)	-27
7th Science	64 (35383)	39 (21635)	-25	67 (29525)	42 (27755)	-25
6th Social Studies	60 (34621)	36 (21713)	-24	64 (27625)	39 (29064)	-25

(number of students tested in parentheses)

1. Average percentile score for this racial subgroup.

2. Average percentile score for students who paid full price for school lunch.

3. Average percentile score for students who were eligible for free/reduced lunch (a poverty indicator).

Under NCLB's Proficiency Mandate, 'All' Means Special Education, Too

How will Alabama educators meet the challenge to help all students reach academic proficiency? Schools in Shelby County and Oxford City are among those leading the way.

BY JENNIFER PYRON

THE NO CHILD Left Behind law sets the expectation that all students will reach academic proficiency by 2014 — including students with disabilities. How will educators meet this significant challenge?

Under Alabama's new accountability system (which conforms to NCLB mandates), schools are judged not only by the average performance of their students, but by the performance of major subgroups in the school. Many schools in Alabama that received a "clear" rating under the old system now find themselves designated as "Clear with Watch" or "Clear with Priority" because various categories of students, including special education, are not meeting current state standards.

These developments are putting special education under the spotlight. They raise several important questions, not the least of which is: *Are teachers of general education classes prepared to be accountable for the progress of students with disabilities?*

Mabrey Whetstone, director of special education in the State Department of Education, is optimistic. "Expectations for students with disabilities have greatly been raised (by NCLB)," he says. "The requirement of every subgroup of students to reach proficiency puts great pressure on educators to work with students who by definition are disabled."

As educators respond, Whetstone says, they will need to look at special education services through new eyes. "Students with disabilities are part of the general education population and must be viewed by teachers and principals as such. Special education is not a place. It's not a classroom. It's services."

In most settings, special education programs provide services to a selected group of students in addition to the regular school program. The secret to raising the achievement of students in the special-education subgroup, Whetstone believes, is for schools to treat special ed like they would any other intervention program — as a tool to help students in need of extra support make significant progress.

Whetstone says that, historically, Alabama has over-

identified students with disabilities. Better reading programs and positive behavioral interventions are slowly reducing those numbers. In 1998, nearly 100,000 students were identified with disabilities. By 2002, the number dropped to 95,000.

"(School) has to make sense to students," says Whetstone. "Many students can remain in general education programs if they learn to read and if they learn to behave." Current research makes Whetstone's case for him. Quite often, as students become more adept at reading, writing, and comprehending academic material, they become more engaged in learning and their behavior improves.

Moving students into regular classrooms

The Shelby County School System is already making great headway in redefining its special education services. As the staff began looking at its special education practices, they were aware that the 2nd grade class of 2004-2005 is the class that will have to demonstrate full proficiency when they graduate in 2013-14. For that reason, the system targeted grades K-3 as the first priority for reform.

In these grades, says special education coordinator Charlotte Kerr, the school system is making a concerted effort to keep students in general education classrooms for

most of the school day.

"We've found," Kerr says, "that pulling them out of general ed and placing them in 'resource' rooms slows academic progress, resulting in the student either falling behind or dropping out altogether."

As an alternative, Kerr says, "We are using our special education staff to support our curriculum specialists in the classroom," thereby lengthening the time each day when students with disabilities are in regular classroom settings.

To help teachers and aides cope with these changes, the school district is providing training on how to tailor the general education curriculum to meet individual student needs. Lead teachers and special education teachers are trading instruction, allowing each instructor to work with small groups and with individual students to assess areas of need and develop intervention strategies.

Kerr says this team approach is working well, and students are benefiting. "It combines the strength of the curriculum specialist with the strength of the special education teachers who know how to tailor instruction to individual students."

Kerr encourages other systems thinking about this approach to begin by looking at what percentage of students with disabilities are in regular classrooms and what

percentage of the day is spent there.

“Ideally, 80 percent of all students with disabilities should be spending the majority of their day in general education classrooms,” she advises. This strategy helps ensure that students are challenged and will work at a pace that will move them toward proficiency.

The importance of reading

Students will not be able to master skills in other content areas until they are able to read at or near grade level. So a strong focus on improving the reading skills of students with disabilities makes sense.

“We must teach students with disabilities to read,” says Mabrey Whetstone. “This is the most important thing for students with cognitive disabilities to master if they are going to be successful adults.”

The Alabama Reading Initiative has had a significant impact on the reading scores of students with disabilities. The ARI’s emphasis on small group instruction allows each student to receive the one-on-one help they need to improve. The ARI’s individualized approach also allows students with disabilities to remain in general classrooms throughout elementary school. In schools that are following the ARI model, students’ literacy needs are quickly identified by teachers who have been taught to assess and address student performance.

When students with disabilities have needs that are not being met by the general education curriculum, there are many intervention methods and programs available. For example, such programs as LANGUAGE!, Direct Instruction, and the Beginning Reading Model have helped many students with disabilities throughout the state solve the mysteries of reading and gain competency.

A student with reading problems is not necessarily a “special education” student, although many

students are mislabeled when they fail to learn to read in what teachers consider a “normal” way.

In the Shelby County schools, general education teachers must show that they have made every effort to teach students to read before referring them for special education services.

Nationally, says Charlotte Kerr, 38 percent of all students with disabilities fall into the learning-disabled category, “and Shelby County reflects that data.” Of that 38 percent, more than 90 percent are classified as learning disabled because they cannot read. To address this issue, Kerr says, “we are increasing the responsibility of the general education teacher to ensure that all students can read.”

If a child is a struggling reader in Shelby County, the student’s general education teacher is required to analyze results from the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment, which is used in elementary schools across the state. Teachers then make adjustments in their instruction based on the student’s identified needs.

Teachers are encouraged to employ research-based programs and work in small groups with struggling readers. Only after several intervention attempts have failed can the student be considered for special education services.

“This has sparked some deep conversations about reading in our schools,” says Kerr. “Our goal is to have every teacher committed to studying test scores, adjusting curriculum, and providing supplemental strategies for all struggling readers, not just students with disabilities. This will ensure that all students make adequate yearly progress,” as required by NCLB.

Sharing the responsibility for student success

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to ensuring that all students reach proficiency by 2014 is the widespread

Alabama Achievement Gap Analysis Special Education – 2002-03 Assessments

TEST	GRADE/ SUBJECT	All Students ¹	Special Education ¹	State Gap (percentiles or % points)
SAT-10	3rd Reading	44 (55580)	16 (6320)	-28
	6th Reading	47 (58393)	14 (7207)	-33
	8th Reading	51 (54783)	17 (6735)	-34
	3rd Math	47 (55995)	18 (6412)	-29
	6th Math	46 (58586)	18 (7310)	-28
	8th Math	51 (54755)	19 (6794)	-32
HS Graduation Exam	Reading 11th grade	88.32% (42044)	58.76% (2015)	-29.56
	Language 11th grade	82.78% (42113)	45.76% (2026)	-37.02
	Math 11th grade	79.10% (42139)	45.90% (2026)	-33.20
	Science 11th grade	83.01% (42168)	58.99% (2036)	-24.02
	Social Studies 11th grade	72.09% (42046)	46.86% (2023)	-25.23
Writing Assessment	5th Holistic Composition	40.67% (56981)	12.83% (7460)	-27.84
	5th Grammar and Usage	32.80% (56550)	10.74% (7178)	-22.06
	7th Holistic Composition	38.61% (58221)	10.07% (7386)	-28.54
	7th Grammar and Usage	46.53% (57700)	14.57% (7028)	-31.96

(number of students tested in parentheses)
1. SAT-10 — average percentile score
HS Graduation Exam — percent of students passing
State Writing Assessment — percent of students passing

assumption that teachers are only responsible for the success of one category of children.

This attitude is detrimental to all children, Whetstone believes. “Teaching a child with disabilities requires empathy on the part of educators. Teachers who are unwilling to work with any student who is not in the mainstream are not meeting their professional responsibilities.”

To help them build empathy — and the confidence and skills they

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Transforming *No Child Left Behind* From Tired Slogan to Vital Reality

Educators who are frustrated or confused by NCLB need to ask themselves whether they believe in the ideal that public schools should educate every single child to perform proficiently.

ON THE WEB

Staff Development in the NCLB Era

Backward planning and evidence collecting can help staff developers meet NCLB goals, says researcher Thomas R. Guskey (*Journal of Staff Development*, September 2003). NCLB reshapes the roles of staff development leaders, Guskey reminds us, requiring “scientific, research-based programs” and results through high-stakes accountability. “These two aspects have profound implications for staff development leaders’ responsibilities, especially in the area of evaluation.”

<http://tinyurl.ngtj>

BY HAYES MIZELL

ACROSS THE NATION, there is confusion about how to respond to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). On the one hand, it is a federal law that seems to be on the brink of reshaping education in the United States. On the other hand, some state and local educators are upset about the law’s requirements — some even to the point of resisting its implementation.

In some cases, educators praise NCLB’s “philosophy” and “intentions” but object to the requirement that all demographic subgroups of students should demonstrate adequate yearly progress, and that schools not meeting this standard will be identified as needing improvement.

In many communities, the objections seem to stem from hurt feelings. Schools that the public has traditionally considered “good” may now be exposed as not educating *all* their students effectively.

Other educators are frustrated because they are in a genuine quandary about what schools can do to annually raise the performance levels of low-achieving, disabled, and English learner students. Rather than seeking answers to how to respond to this difficult task, they lash out at NCLB as a “threat to public education.”

Still other educators complain that President Bush has not sought,

and Congress has not appropriated, all the funding NCLB authorized. While it is fair to criticize NCLB as “underfunded,” it is not accurate to charge, as many of its critics do, that it is an “unfunded mandate.” In fact, federal financial support for public education is greater than at any time in our nation’s history. The objections to NCLB are so strong that many Democrats in Congress who voted for the law now oppose it. There is every indication that NCLB could become a major issue in the campaigns for President.

Fortunately, there is also evidence that the law is working:

- In Bellingham, Massachusetts, the school system has launched Project 2010, a commitment that all its students will perform at the proficient level or above by the year 2010, well in advance of NCLB’s goal that students should be proficient by 2014.
- In Albuquerque, New Mexico, more than 1,000 students have used NCLB to transfer from failing neighborhood schools to higher-performing schools.
- In Oxford City, Alabama, the high schools are abandoning “resource rooms” and moving special education students into more challenging classes. They are also reassigning special education teachers to academic departments where they co-teach with general education

“content specialists.” This team approach is producing results: last year, 95 percent of students with disabilities passed 9th grade Physical Science and 10th grade Biology. Now the pressure is on for the city’s middle and elementary schools to follow suit.

- In Georgia, many schools did not make adequate yearly progress because too many students were absent and therefore their schools could not meet the NCLB requirement to test 95 percent of students in each subgroup. This fact alone is causing Georgia to focus more attention on the state’s truancy problem.
- In Columbus, Ohio, one school with a majority of students from low-income families was determined to get off the “needs improvement” list. It did so by effectively helping *each* student and by improving its relationship with the students’ parents. The individualized attention to students caused parents to acknowledge, “You really know my child.” Parents became more active in the school, and they began to act on the school’s suggestions for how to work with their children at home.

Promising and flawed

The No Child Left Behind law may be confusing to many Alabama

Working Toward Excellence

teachers because it is both promising and flawed.

The law's authors tried to craft legislation that would cause educators to re-examine their assumptions and practices. NCLB does not accept low levels of performance by any student or any school. It does not assume that even high performing schools are educating *all* students as effectively as they should. It insists that school boards, superintendents, and principals devote greater effort to employing and developing teachers who are highly knowledgeable about the content of the subjects they teach. NCLB does not, however, provide a road map for how educators are to meet the law's requirements. Like many other national and even state laws, it does not apply equally well to the circumstances of all school systems and schools across the United States.

In this environment, teachers and principals may wonder if NCLB contains anything positive for them. Unfortunately, the law does not increase salaries or create smaller classes, but it does hold potential for increasing the professionalism, status, and effectiveness of educators. This is not an entitlement. For those educators who are satisfied with their current performance, and that of their students, they will probably experience NCLB only as a burden.

However, for teachers and administrators committed to developing new knowledge and skills they can use to increase the performance levels of their students, NCLB is a great opportunity.

NCLB and professional development

The No Child Left Behind law provides a clear statement of what professional development is and is not. Every Alabama educator should study this definition carefully because it sets the parameters for the type of staff development educators should expect and demand. For example,

NCLB states that professional development should be "classroom-focused," have a "positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction," and provide educators with the "knowledge and skills to provide students with the opportunity to meet challenging" state standards. The definition provides additional practical leverage to teachers and administrators because it makes clear what professional development *is not*.

NCLB does not specifically prohibit "one-day or short-term workshops or conferences," but the law makes clear these are not staff development experiences school systems or schools should be providing. For educators who are weary of participating in professional development activities conceived and planned solely by central office staff, the definition also offers hope. It states professional development should be "developed with extensive

tion officials — school boards, superintendents, central office staff, and principals — to think about staff development in new ways. At least two factors are prompting this change. First, school officials are beginning to understand that to raise the performance levels of students, their teachers must know more and be more skilled at engaging students in learning. The only way this will occur is to involve the teachers themselves in more effective professional learning.

Second, NCLB requires that by the end of the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers of "core academic subjects" must demonstrate a high level of competency in the subjects they are teaching. In most cases, this means teachers will have to be either fully certified in those subjects or pass an examination. Faced with the challenge of ensuring that all teachers are highly qualified in the subjects they are teaching, school systems are

ON THE WEB

NCLB: Taking the High Road

Put yourself in this situation: You are principal of a Title I school. It is early August and you're expecting the teachers back soon. Your school has just been notified that it is "in need of improvement" as defined by the new federal No Child Left Behind Act. In this article, the leaders of two national principal organizations try to help you put things into perspective.

<http://tinyurl.com/n4aq>

If teachers do not get the staff development they need to become highly qualified, and to help all their students perform proficiently, they and their schools will ultimately experience the full range of NCLB's sanctions.

participation of teachers, principals, parents, and administrators."

Educators should not expect NCLB's definition to be self-implementing. The professional development activities of many school systems and schools may well continue to be very similar to what they have been in the past *unless* educators insist on approaches that reflect the NCLB definition. In Alabama, the nationally recognized Alabama Reading Initiative is one such approach.

Like ARI, No Child Left Behind is causing many local educa-

tion officials aware that effective professional development is one of the few tools at their disposal to reach this goal. Indeed, the law requires that one component of state plans for NCLB funds should be "an annual increase in the percentage of teachers who are receiving high-quality professional development" to enable them to become "highly qualified and successful classroom teachers."

Teachers must demand quality staff development

While these and other NCLB

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where each state sets the annual bar. For example, while only 8 percent of schools failed to meet Wisconsin's first annual goal, nearly 85 percent of Florida schools failed to meet the Sunshine State's more challenging first-year benchmark. (Alabama is among several dozen states that are still preparing their first-year AYP data for release.)

States that choose to set a higher AYP bar now, many observers say, are not only giving schools early notice that significant improvements are expected, they are also giving schools the 3-5 years that research suggests is necessary to implement effective practices. Put another way, enduring the shock of higher standards now can increase a school's chances of meeting the ultimate goal of universal proficiency a decade from now.

Rewards and sanctions

Much of the federal money flowing into the nation's public schools comes from the Title I program, first established in the late 1960s to advance the education of disadvantaged students. Alabama schools receive many millions of dollars each year through Title I and other programs contained in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Not surprisingly, the Congress and the President targeted Title I schools as the first schools to be held accountable under the NCLB law. In Alabama, state education policymakers made the early decision that the state's revised system of academic standards, assessments, and accountability "will apply to all school systems and all schools, without regard to Title I status." As a result, all schools and systems are subject to the state's definition of Adequate Yearly Progress.

The State Board of Education also decided that all school systems and all schools in Alabama will be identified for rewards and "progressively stringent" sanctions in the same ways. The only exception is that non-Title I schools will not be required (as Title I schools are) to offer outside tutoring and transfers if they fail to meet AYP benchmarks, although they may choose to do so.

Caroline Novak, who served on the Statewide Accountability Committee's sanctions and rewards subcommittee, says the group's first task was to "communicate what Alabama wants to value in its accountability system." The group has recommended these overarching principles:

- The system should value progress.
- The system should recognize and reward progress, even if the progress is not sufficient to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.
- The system of rewards and sanctions should apply to every school *and* to every school district.

"The sense of the committee," Novak says, "is that while the Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks are critically important, it's equally important to recognize genuine effort and substantive change going on in schools, even if they fall short of a particular standard in a particular year. We want to hearten, not dishearten, the principals and teachers and students who are striving to reach proficiency."

This "build-them-up, don't-tear-them-down" approach to accountability is also reflected in the Committee's draft principles for the issuing of rewards and sanctions. For example: "Schools should be rewarded for substantially outperforming other schools with similar demographics," and "Sanctions should result in increased learning opportunities for students. The primary response to schools that are *not* making progress should be intensive support."

Alabama teachers and NCLB

Under NCLB, every elementary classroom teacher and secondary teacher of core subjects (English, math, science, foreign language, social studies and the arts) must be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-06 school year. In general, a teacher deemed highly qualified must hold a bachelor's degree, be fully licensed by a state, and have demonstrated knowledge of the subjects taught. The law leaves it to each state to devise the specific criteria used to determine whether a particular teacher meets the NCLB definition.

When the Alabama "highly qualified" standard is applied, it is estimated that 15 percent of current educators will not meet the standard. This estimated 15 percent falls into two categories: those teachers not certified to teach the subjects they are asked to teach, and those teachers who lack one or more college credits in the field they teach.

Under the Alabama model, educators who do not meet the standard will have three years to complete one of three qualification methods:

Subject-specific test —

Educators can voluntarily take and pass a subject-specific test to demonstrate their knowledge. The Alabama Department of Education is working with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to have subject-matter teacher tests (Praxis II) available soon. The test option will be strictly voluntary and will not be related to the state certification process. The first group of tests should be available in January 2004. They include Early Childhood, Elementary, K-6 Collaborative, Middle Level Generalist, Middle Level English Language Arts, Middle Level Mathematics, Middle Level Science, Middle Level Social Science, and Reading. Other areas will be added as soon as possible.

The HOUSSE model —

The acronym stands for Highly Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation. Under this system, the state will provide a comprehensive review of a teacher's credentials by a trained evaluator, using a portfolio process that Department leaders expect to have in place by November. The HOUSSE option will be available only for teachers who are "not new" to the profession. The areas covered by the HOUSSE option will likely include coursework, experience, performance evaluations, and professional development. Points will be assigned to activities documented in each of the areas and the total will be compared to a cut score.

Additional Coursework —

Teachers can choose to pursue additional content-area coursework on campus or online.

You can keep up to date on "highly qualified teacher" policy developments in Alabama by visiting this special Education Department webpage: <http://tinyurl.com/ottx> ♦

Closing the Achievement Gap for English Language Learners

Using the right strategies, committed educators can help English Language Learners excel.

BY JULI KENDALL

ACROSS THE U.S., backpacks open, papers and pencils fly out, and students from a multitude of countries, speaking as many different languages, sit down in our classrooms to learn. But how can we teach them?

Given that research says it takes four to nine years to acquire high enough levels of English proficiency to master academic content, it looks like an impossible task. Except that *it's our job*. We're the ones who must find ways to help them close the achievement gap, whether we teach in southern California or southern Alabama.

There are two direct avenues to improving the education of English Language Learners. The first is through our schools. In *Educating Language-Minority Children*, researchers found "Thirteen Attributes of Effective Schools and Classrooms for English Language Learners" (pp. 75-82). All of these are doable.

- Supportive school-wide climate
- School leadership
- Customized learning environment
- Articulation and coordination within and between schools
- Use of language and culture
- Balanced curriculum
- Explicit skills instruction
- Opportunities for student directed activities
- Instructional strategies that enhance understanding

- Opportunities for practice
- Systematic student assessment
- Staff development
- Home and parent involvement

The second avenue of improvement for English Language Learners is through the instructional context. As students take on the demands of learning a second language while learning to read, write, and study content, they need a learning environment that provides the scaffolding that is critical for success.

Reading Workshop and Writing Workshop provide such a setting. By engaging students with authentic tasks such as reading literature, book discussions, responding to texts, using Writer's Notebooks, working through the writing process, and reading the works of writers to study the craft of writing, students participate in challenging learning. By using leveled books, Read Alouds, Shared Reading, books on tape, book clubs, peer editors, and touchstone texts for reading and writing, students' literacy work is supported.

The thinking about ELL instruction has changed

Pauline Gibbons explains how the thinking about instruction for English Language Learners has changed:

"In terms of ESL students, it suggests a somewhat different orientation to learning tasks than has often been the case in the past. Rather than simplifying the task (and

ultimately risking a reductionist curriculum), we should instead reflect on the nature of the *scaffolding* that is being provided for learners to carry out that task." (p. 10)

It's the kids who really tell the story, of course. These are all stories about ELL students in my own classrooms.

Ramon was retained in 5th grade as a result of not passing the required reading benchmarks. In November of his retention year, he took an end-of-3rd benchmark test and failed. During our follow-up conference, he had his a-ha moment: "So that's why I didn't pass. I didn't understand what I was reading!" From that moment, his work improved. By the end of the school year, he was passing 6th grade level reading benchmarks with excellent comprehension.

Leti fell in love with the California Gold Rush. Everything about the subject fascinated her. During Reading Workshop, she read every book she could find on the topic. She wrote about it in her Writer's Notebook during Writing Workshop. At the end of the year, although she started in 5th grade reading at the middle-of-2nd-grade level, she passed a middle-of-4th-grade benchmark. She improved because of her interests and her love of reading nonfiction content.

As for Sophanna, she loved writing. She read all of the books used in Writing Workshop over and over to look at the writer's craft. Learning to read like a writer, she made significant improvement in her end of the year writing assessment for the district. She showed growth in her understanding of ideas and content, her choice of words, the organization she used, and her "writer's" voice. As an ELL, she continues to work on her use of conventions and sentence fluency.

What made the difference for these students? Our school's commitment to them and the instructional context they encountered. And that's how we must teach these students who come to us from around the world and enrich our schools. We give them our best.

Juli Kendall is a veteran ELL teacher and literacy coach in the Long Beach (CA) school system. The district's students and their families speak over 50 different languages. Read her online workshop journals at: <http://tinyurl.com/njo9>. You'll find Juli's references for this article at: <http://tinyurl.com/oni0>. ❖

TRANSFORMING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Continued from page 7.

provisions are helpful, they are no substitute for educators *demanding* high quality professional development. It is in their self-interest to do so because it is teachers who will bear the brunt of NCLB's requirements for accountability. If teachers do not get the staff development they need to become highly qualified, and to help *all* their students perform proficiently, they and their schools will ultimately experience the full range of NCLB's sanctions.

The quality of professional development is beginning to improve in many school systems and schools, but in others it continues to be inappropriate and ineffective. As Alabama teachers and principals press for staff development that will help them meet the challenges of NCLB, they should school themselves in the state's recently adopted staff development standards, which are modeled on national standards developed by the National Staff Development Council.

These practical standards provide specific descriptions of benchmarks for high quality professional development. No school system or school is likely to meet them all in the short term, but they provide research-based guidance for educators who want to put their staff development on a more productive course. The Alabama Best Practices Center even provides a self-assessment tool educators can use to determine how near or far their current professional development is from the standards. (See the Summer 2003 issue of *Working Toward Excellence*).

Together, NCLB and the Alabama/NSDC standards are beginning to influence the thinking and decisions of persons in local school systems responsible for professional development. Many of them seem to be finally turning away from long discredited practices in favor of those

that will actually help educators become more effective in the classroom. This is a welcome and long overdue change, but there is deeper problem.

In many school systems there is a culture of front-line educators waiting for others to trigger and provide their staff development. Teachers have often depended on their principal or someone in the central office to tell them when and what they need to learn. But there is now emerging transparent data about the performance levels of both educators and students, and it is becoming more apparent to everyone where teachers need to focus their professional development.

NCLB represents a commitment to the ideal

No Child Left Behind creates the need and opportunity for teachers to assume greater professional responsibility for identifying and acknowledging their limitations, and for insisting on the quality of staff development that will enable them to increase their performance and that of their students.

This will require more initiative, reflection, candor, and collaboration among teachers and leadership teams at each school. It is a tall order given how most schools choose to operate, but buried within the challenges of NCLB is the potential for educators and their schools to make wiser choices and achieve more impressive results.

Some people mock the words "No Child Left Behind" as empty political rhetoric, but as far as I can recall this is the first time the United States has ever made even a rhetorical, much less a legislative commitment to the ideal that public schools should educate *every single child to perform proficiently*.

The words and concept of "No Child Left Behind" do not belong to one ideology or one political party. Educators should not, by default, let

any one person or group expropriate that language and concept for their own purposes. It is entirely possible to take those words and corrupt them through duplicity and hollow implementation. It is also possible to seize the fundamental principles of NCLB and in the crucible of local education practice grind out more effective behaviors, knowledge, and skills to realize the law's *legitimate* goals.

Every educator is now deciding how to respond to NCLB. Some see it as a conspiracy and use that as an excuse for resistance. Others worry about compliance and act out of fear rather than hope. I encourage Alabama educators to choose the third, more difficult way. Put your intellect to work. Unfetter your imagination. Muster your courage to creatively shape NCLB in whatever ways are necessary to raise the authentic performance of students, teachers, and administrators. Reject "No Child Left Behind" as a slogan, but transform it into reality.

Hayes Mizell, who lives in Columbia, SC, began his public school education in Birmingham. He is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the National Staff Development Council.



ON THE WEB

The Burr Under the Saddle

Many educators go through the motions of evaluating staff development, but they have focused more on the delivery than on the results. Hayes Mizell shares his own thoughts about appropriate ways to evaluate professional learning programs in the age of No Child Left Behind.

<http://tinyurl.com/njoh>

need to meet their responsibilities — teachers need professional development. Whetstone says that “ongoing training determines effectiveness of teachers, and it is the teacher that makes the difference in the classroom.” If the state expects to meet the proficiency requirements of NCLB, “Alabama’s schools must have highly qualified teachers to teach *all* children.”

Whetstone points out that the more comfortable teachers are teaching students with disabilities, the more comfortable they will be in their instruction of all children. Learning to meet the needs of one group of students, he contends, deepens the skills of teachers to help every student. He offers as an example the instruction of gifted students, which focuses primarily on developing higher level thinking skills. “This kind of instruction is greatly beneficial for all students.”

“Good teaching is good teaching,” he says. “Teachers who are committed to continuing education and have a desire to teach all children effectively will rise to the challenge of incorporating students with disabilities into the general education classroom.”

Oxford City: Adapting to meet student needs

A perfect example of teachers adapting to meet the needs of students with disabilities can be found in the Oxford City Schools. The district is meeting the challenge of making adequate yearly progress with special education students by including them in all core academic classes at the high school level.

This strategy, says special education coordinator Khristie Goodwin, called for a complete redesign of the special education department for the system. While this may sound daunting, Goodwin acknowledges, the plan

is having a dramatic effect on the students and teachers throughout the system.

“We began by reassigning our special education teachers to the academic departments,” Goodwin explains. “Now every core content area — math, science, English, and history — has its own special education instructor. These instructors have developed visual prompts, auditory aids, intervention methods, and other strategies for each specific content area.”

Students with disabilities are clustered in regular classrooms throughout the school system. Special education instructors co-teach with general education “content specialists” in four content areas in grades 9 and 10, and in 11th grade science. The school system will phase in additional grades and content areas until 2005, when there will be 100 percent co-teaching in every class that includes special education students.

“Quite frankly,” Goodwin admits, “many of our general education teachers were apprehensive about having high school students with disabilities join their classes after being educated primarily in resource rooms. That is why we adopted the co-teaching method.”

The strategy is working because the special education teachers “are committed to providing resources and support to the general education teachers. This, in turn, benefits the students in the form of increased student achievement.”

An added bonus: the four special education instructors “cross-plan,” using many of the same prompts and aids in all four content areas. Goodwin says the students greatly benefit from the repetition. And their test scores show the increased comprehension and learning: Students with disabilities had a 95 percent pass rate in 9th grade Physical Science and in 10th grade Biology during the 2002-2003 school year.

“This hasn’t come easy,” says Goodwin. “We’ve learned from our mistakes and we are still honing the process. But we are encouraged by the results.” So encouraged, in fact, that the co-teaching teams are now engaged in peer coaching and modeling for the elementary and middle schools in the system in an effort to spread the success.

A possible dream

“Many people have always said this is an impossible dream — that students with disabilities cannot be as successful as those in general education,” says Whetstone. “But there are too many instances in Alabama where students with disabilities have been successful for educators to discount them. We must believe in the dream and put resources behind it.

“There will be some students who will have a hard time,” Whetstone concedes. “There will be some who will not make progress rapidly. But they all will learn at much higher levels with the proper resources.”

Is your school changing its practices regarding students with disabilities? If so, we’d like to hear from you. Please share your stories with us by sending email to comments@best-practices.org. We’ll be in touch! ❖

ON THE WEB

A Culture of Results

“A New Era,” the final report report to the President on “Revitalizing Special Education for Children and their Families,” lays out an agenda for the reform of special education programs that urges the transition from a “culture of compliance” to a culture of results. (250k PDF file)

<http://tinyurl.com/n4ac>

See our complete list of NCLB resources at: <http://www.bestpracticescenter.org/publ/wte3-4-res.html>

The NCLB Database at ECS

The Education Commission of the States web database offers a "real-time" snapshot of how individual states are doing in meeting goals of the No Child Left Behind Act. For Alabama, you'll find details of state requirements, state accountability and consolidated plans, the state's current status, and comparisons with other states, as well as background information on the law itself.

<http://tinyurl.com/m0g1>

Why Alabama's Accountability System Is Changing

The September 2003 issue of *Alabama Education News*, published by the State Department of Education, offers a brief, clear explanation of the evolving school accountability system and progress to date. The changes, as the article notes, are influenced by the federal No Child Left Behind law. (950k PDF file)

<http://tinyurl.com/mx8p>

NCLB – The Parent Perspective

In this special issue of *Parent Press*, the national group Parents for Public Schools explores the expectations, options and opportunities of No Child Left Behind from a parent involvement point of view. Parent advocates and schools committed to parent partnerships will find this plain-English discussion a useful tool. Principals may also want to use the overview story as an introduction to NCLB for teachers. Includes many resources for additional information. (400k PDF file)

<http://tinyurl.com/djs1>

A Study of Alabama's HQT Requirements

Alabama is part of a four-state study of implementation of NCLB's "highly qualified teacher" provisions. The study, conducted by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, is gathering data from schools and districts about teacher qualifications, educators' capacities to meet ESEA requirements, the use and impact of federal dollars for new policies and programs, and the impact of the HQT requirements on student achievement and staffing. This PDF file includes the Center's analysis of Alabama's HQT status (as of 7/31/03).

<http://tinyurl.com/n43m>

Alabama School Accountability Database

The Alabama Department of Education's online accountability database is one of the best in the nation — simple to understand and easy to use. At this database homepage, visitors can see results from the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing Exam, and the Alabama Alternate Assessment Exam for the state, a school district or an individual school — by grade and subject — and by subgroup (gender, race, free/reduced lunch, etc.)

<http://www.alsde.edu/Accountability/Accountability.asp>

Large Collection of Web-Based NCLB Resources

This page of NCLB resources, developed by an organization of parents with LD/ADHD students, is exhaustive and of interest to anyone doing NCLB research.

<http://pages.zdnet.com/ourorhskids/id61.html>

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THE ALABAMA
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A+ Education Foundation
P. O. Box 4433
Montgomery, AL 36103

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