



Second testing round in April

Revisions to State NCLB Plan Requested

by Jason B. Keeling

State officials are preparing for the April 2004 second testing round under terms of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. In 2003, 297 state schools fell short of the law's adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirement. Efforts are being made to both assist low-performing schools and modify the state's NCLB accountability plan.

Over 400 West Virginia schools met the AYP requirement this year, and the W.Va. Department of Education has recognized schools throughout the state under the "West Virginia Achieves" program, according to Steve Paine, deputy state schools superintendent.

The state has not only recognized schools that met AYP, but also those that showed at least 5 percent gains within specific subgroups. It's important for schools to be recognized for making progress, even if such progress doesn't necessarily meet NCLB's AYP requirement, according to Paine, who says that it's equally important to encourage low performing schools who make even small amounts of progress. "Contrary to some opinion, we stand by our standards," Paine stated before members of the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability on Nov. 18.

At the request of Rep. Shelly Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), WVDE officials recently met with her to address concerns regarding NCLB's impact on West Virginia, according to Paine. Currently, there are 36 areas in which a school must make AYP. If the school falls short in a single area, it is flagged as needing improvement. The state department would like to see some modification to that standard, in addition to a revision of the standards applied for special education students, he said.

A Nov. 4 letter to U.S. Undersecretary of Education Eugene Hickock from State Schools Superintendent David Stewart requested four modifications to the state's NCLB implementation plan for 2004: 1) state schools be identified for improvement based on failure to meet AYP in the same subgroup on the same indicator for two consecutive years; 2) AYP for kindergarten through second grades be overseen by the W.Va. Office of Education Performance Audits (OEPA); 3) testing levels for special education students be determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team; and 4) the WVDE, in cooperation with county school boards, may determine criteria for testing exemptions when unexpected medical or psychological conditions prohibit participation.

The state currently defines highly qualified teachers as those licensed through the WVDE, which 94 percent of the state's teachers meet. At issue is NCLB's content specialization requirements. "We're not going to budge from our definition [of highly qualified teachers]. We think it's proper, we think it's right," said Paine.

In essence the state now has a dual accountability system, one for all state schools under the W.Va. Board of Education's Policy 2320 (overseen by OEPA), and the other for Title I schools under NCLB, he said.

OEPA Executive Director Kenna Seal said NCLB has strengthened the state's standards, but said the state has made efforts not to go beyond the federal law's requirements.

NCLB's intentions are merited, but the U.S. Department of Education and Bush administration have been reluctant to address components of the law that need to be fixed, said Del. Jerry Mezzatesta (D-Hampshire).

Mezzatesta said the standards being applied to special education students are contradictory, given that IEPs prepare instruction for students below their actual grade levels, while NCLB's standards require them to perform at grade level. "You can't serve two masters," he said of that NCLB standard.

Mezzatesta also urged state public education and higher education officials to work together to improve teacher preparation, specifically in terms of mathematics instruction.

Sen. Steve Harrison (R-Kanawha) requested that the state department estimate by next month the total dollars necessary for the actual services that will be assumed within fiscal 2005 due to NCLB.

Paine said those figures, in addition to the costs of providing NCLB related services to low income students in non-Title I schools and those services required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) would also be calculated.

Sen. Donna Boley (R-Pleasants) thanked the WVDE for recognizing schools within her district and encouraged committee chairmen Mezzatesta and Sen. Robert Plymale (D-Wayne) to request that federal education officials meet with LOCEA members in early December, to which the chairman agreed.

OVERVIEW

STATS

2003 Regular Session: *Adjourned Sine Die*
Days Until 2004 Regular Session: 54
Interim Meetings Remaining: December - January 2004

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QUOTE

"The achievement gap for students in West Virginia must be closed. Period." — *Deputy State Superintendent of Schools Steve Paine.*

Basic Skills and SUCCESS Initiatives Technology Strengthens Education in W.Va.

by Jason B. Keeling

The state Office of Technology has made strides toward enhancing public education in West Virginia, given the W.Va. Legislature's creation of the Basic Skills and SUCCESS initiatives, according to Executive Director Brenda Williams, who presented before an education technology subcommittee (Nov. 18).

The Basic Skills program, mandated by the Legislature in 1989, was designed by a group of educators, technicians, and other stakeholders for kindergarten through sixth grade classes, providing schools throughout the state with computer hardware and software, and professional development in the usage of such. The manner in which contracts were awarded and volume of products purchased allowed the state to realize significant savings, according to Williams.

Each county designated an existing staff person as a technology coordinator under the program. Those coordinators oversee implementation timelines, leverage federal E-rate dollars, schedule necessary local professional development, and receive training from the Office of Technology bi-yearly, said Williams.

The SUCCESS Initiative, or "Student Utilization of Computers in Curriculum for the Enhancement of Scholastic Skills," is a grades seven through 12 program launched in 1997, modeled after the Basic Skills program.

The primary difference between Basic Skills and SUCCESS are their curricula, which are designed for their respective grade levels. Basic Skills includes areas such as reading, composition, mathematics, and computer literacy, while SUCCESS offers instruction in

core subject items and items such as word processing, spreadsheet usage, and career development. SUCCESS also provides Internet-based courses for schools that have difficulty offering courses in foreign language and the sciences.

Both programs have been particularly valuable given that program instruction was aligned with the state's content standards and objectives (CSOs).

Each of the programs have been independently evaluated and recommended to continue, and received high marks for improving student and teacher technology competencies. However, the evaluations did suggest that the state ensure that all students have access to and awareness of the programs, according to Williams. The Southern Region Education Board and George Lucas Foundation would soon be featuring the state's technology efforts, she said.

The programs also open the door to online professional development, end-of-course tests, videoconferencing, and may help the state in terms of accountability issues brought about by the federal No Child Left Behind Act; another accomplishment has been that teachers who haven't traditionally used technology in the classroom often begin to see the value of such, according to Williams. Every county also has an online technology plan, she said.

Sen. Larry Edgell (D-Wetzel), a teacher, said technology improvements at the classroom level have been "amazing," and were a major improvement from the "dinosaurs" that were used before.

Del. Stanley Shaver (D-Preston), encouraged Williams to continue focusing on technology improvements for administrators. She said the Gates Foundation had provided a great deal of assistance in doing such.

Del. Donna Renner (D-Marion) also praised the programs, saying the main improvement that needed focus was promoting their successes more.

In response to a delegate's question, Williams said she believed the state should take a look at funding dedicated technology coordinator positions at the school level, which she said wasn't originally sought, but given increasing system complexity, may be merited.

— Keeling is WVSBA executive assistant, a position held since July 2001.

The Legislature provides county board of education members, state policymakers, school administrators, and others information, opinion and commentary regarding West Virginia legislative issues. This publication does not necessarily reflect the official views, opinions or policies of the WVSBA, unless specifically stated.

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NSBA Responds to Paige

For "Selling Blood to Pay for Books," National School Boards Association President Carol Brown's Nov. 2 response to Secretary Paige's opinion piece (*reprinted on page 3*), see www.wvsba.org.

On the Web at:

WVSBA.ORG



It's Not About the Money

by Rod Paige

A new semantic game is being played out in the corridors of the Capitol — one that has been echoed in media outlets across America, thanks to a campaign by special interests and their allies in the Democratic Party. Typical of Washington's Beltwayspeak, a cry has gone up, saying that the No Child Left Behind education reform bill is “underfunded.” Nothing could be further from the truth. President Bush has increased K-12 education spending by 40% since he took office. That's more in two years than it increased during the eight previous years under President Clinton. In raw terms, this president has increased education spending by \$11 billion. As a nation, we now spend \$470 billion dollars a year on K-12 education locally and federally — more than on national defense.

What is “underfunded” about that?

But in Washington, the land of meaningless jargon, the educational establishment in favor of the status quo says that the law is underfunded because it was appropriated at a level below what was “authorized.” As someone who is not a creature of Washington politics, let me translate this into plain English: An authorization is usually a “limiting” number — the legal maximum level of funding. To use a highway metaphor, it is a guardrail that keeps wildly spending appropriators from driving the federal budget over the cliff. Only those reckless enough to grind against the guardrail would want to reach those levels. The appropriation is usually a number that is closer to the median of the road, the realistic figure needed to do the job. Appropriations are rarely anywhere close to authorization levels, and that is true across the entire federal government.

For example, back in 1994 (the last time the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was up for renewal), the bill had a fiscal-year 1995 authorization level of \$7.4 billion for Title I (for economically disadvantaged students). The Democrat-controlled Congress appropriated just under \$6.7 billion. Where was the Greek chorus of “underfunders” back then?

Education should not be a spending race. Clearly, just throwing money into the educational system — the modus operandi for three decades — has left us with a legacy of public school systems where some children get a great education while others, mostly from poor neighborhoods, are being left behind. A recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development shows that the U.S. is one of the top spenders in the world in education, yet our 15-year-olds rate merely average versus their peers on tests of reading, math and science.

If money spent were the main indicator of a good education, we would see areas with the highest per-pupil expenditures record the highest test scores. The Jersey City school district (which overspends the U.S. average by \$5,000 and the New Jersey state average by \$2,000) participated in a Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study benchmarking study recently that compared eighth-graders across the world in a number of subjects. Jersey City students' scores in science, for example, are close to the bottom — comparable to students in Iran, Indonesia, Jordan,

Turkey and Tunisia. Jersey City kids also have double the dropout rate compared to kids in the rest of New Jersey.

Looking closer to home in terms of comparisons, the District of Columbia, which spends near the top on its K-12 students, has the dubious distinction of having the lowest scores in the nation — including U.S. territories like Guam and Puerto Rico — in reading and math. Thus, if money were the answer to getting a solid education, most students in Jersey City and D.C. would all be admitted to Harvard or Stanford. Don't be duped; it's not that we don't spend enough. We spend enough for better results. We spend more than virtually all other nations, and still get poor results.

So now, for the first time, the federal government is doing something that is standard operating procedure for most private businesses and even non-profit grant-making institutions: holding recipients (here, public schools) of money — taxpayer money — accountable for their results. In other words, the money is coming with strings attached. As well it should. The days of money for nothing in education are over. But this new accountability isn't meant to be punitive — it's meant to improve the prospects of our children.

For the first time in our history, thanks to No Child Left Behind, every state has an accountability plan that holds all schools and students to high standards. Schools and teachers now have detailed information about their students' achievement so that they can adapt their lessons and better serve all their students. Parents are also getting information about how well their school is performing and about their teacher's qualifications. And parents of students attending high-need schools will receive a letter telling them they have options if their child's school hasn't made sufficient progress over the last couple years. Armed with information and options, parents are forcing change in the schools, just as schools will be forced to change by law.

But the defenders of the mediocre status quo — who are using the funding argument like a wolf in sheep's clothing as a way to attack the law when what they really don't like is that there will be accountability in education — continue to use the typical refrain from the left on spending and “underfunding.” But no matter how much we spend, it will never be enough for them. This law is a tough law, but it's a good law and it will work.

This is a time to join together, not play semantic games for political posturing. We should all work to solve the educational inequities in this country. Education should not fall prey to partisan bickering and diversionary gamesmanship. The future of our children and our nation is too important for division and sparring by policy makers. Thanks to the president and the Congress we have the right tools for the job. Now, let's replace vitriol with vision, and wisecracks with wisdom — for the sake of the children.

— Paige is U.S. Secretary of Education. Reprinted with permission from Oct. 30 Wall Street Journal © 2003 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All rights reserved. For the National Schools Boards Association's response to this commentary see WWSBA.ORG's front page.

BRIEFLY

- Education Subcommittee B: Public Education, charged to study six public school issues including the school calendar, compulsory attendance, and transportation issues, will wait until December to list its recommendations for legislative consideration during the 2004 regular session, according to subcommittee co-chairman Del. Larry A. Williams (D-Preston). At the Sunday, Nov. 16 subcommittee meeting, members agreed to also review matters concerning graduation rates, especially as impacted by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, and to explore how greater community use of public school libraries might be established.
- The W.Va. Board of Education has approved all 55 county school boards' early childhood education plans, according to Karen Davies of the W.Va. Department of Education, who told members of the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability (Nov. 18) that the plans are designed to maximize federal dollars before using state and local funds. Federal Head Start funding increased from \$32.9 million in fiscal year 2003 to \$45 million in FY04, according to information provided by Davies. County school boards must submit more detailed plans by Feb. 27, 2004.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Committee on Legislation
December 6, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Flatwoods, Days Inn

Executive Board Meeting
December 6, 2:00 p.m.
Flatwoods, Days Inn

Winter Conference
February 13/14, 2004
Charleston, Marriott Hotel

The Legislature

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