

The Public School Forum's Friday Report

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NCLB Approaches Second Anniversary

In preparation for the second anniversary of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, *Education Week* recently completed a policy survey of the 50 states and the District of Columbia for their *Quality Counts* report, which is due out January 7. The survey found that every state and the District of Columbia will rate schools based on if they are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Last year only 29 states and the District of Columbia rated all their school, or at least identified low-performing schools.

States have released their 2002-03 lists of schools that did not make AYP. At least 23,812 schools were identified as not making AYP, and at least 5,200 schools were in need of improvement. Last year 3,826 schools were reported as low-performing. According to *Education Week's* survey, North Carolina must submit additional information to the US Department of Education before it's accountability plan can be fully approved.

The NCLB law could not have come at a worse time, according to Michael Cohen, president of Achieve, a nonprofit that helps states raise academic standards. He said that the demands "came at a time when the federal budget deficit is skyrocketing and state budgets are in terrible shape." According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) thirteen states cut K-12 funding for fiscal year 2003-04.

In 2003 Georgia and Minnesota were penalized for testing mistakes which cost Georgia \$781,000 in federal aid and Minnesota \$113,000. Michigan and Ohio were also threatened with penalties, but both were able to sidestep financial loses. In 2004 schools on the "needs improvement" list for two years in a row will be responsible for funding students who want to transfer to better schools, and by 2005-06 states will have to ensure that all of their teachers are "highly qualified."

According to the National Education Association, about 23,000 schools in 44 states received failing marks, which is about a quarter of U.S. public schools. The NCSL estimates that half of the schools in 25 states were not meeting benchmarks. Many schools have problems meeting the NCLB because of low scores for special education students or English as a Second Language students. Amendments to the requirements for special education students have recently been released.

These budget woes have also impacted colleges and universities. According to NCSL 20 states cut higher education funding. Many states have forced record tuition hikes at public colleges and universities. The College Board reported that tuition increased 14% on average at four-year public institutions in 2003. The Higher Education Act is scheduled to be revamped in 2004, and Congress is watching tuition increases carefully.

For the complete story and access to the data tables, go to <http://www.edweek.com/ew/> and look for the *In ESEA Wake, School Data Flowing Forth* story

Public Agenda Surveys Principals and Superintendents

Public Agenda recently released *Rolling Up Their Sleeves: Superintendents and Principals Talk About What's Needed to Fix Public Schools*, which was funded by the Wallace Foundation. The report is based on a national survey of 1,006 K-12 public school superintendents and 925 K-12 public school principals. The report found that school leaders' largest problems are funding and the time involved in complying with local, state, and federal mandates. The report says, "Give us more freedom, remove some of the hurdles, and we can do the job."

The study reports eight main findings. Insufficient funding was reported as the number one challenge to principals and superintendents. Some reported feeling micromanaged, and many pointed to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and special education as two federal mandates that are particularly frustrating. Ninety-three percent of superintendents and 88% of principals reported that their district has experienced "an enormous increase in responsibilities and mandates without getting the resources necessary to fulfill them." School leaders reported "politics and bureaucracy" as the main reason people leave their field of work, and this frustration is listed as the number two main finding from the survey. Leaders point to the juggling act they perform, including managing parents, laws, threats of litigation, and uninformed press coverage of education as adding to the pressures of their job.

Very few school leaders reported the standards and accountability movement as a fad: 87% of superintendents and 85% of principals reported that they see accountability as here to stay. Most indicated that they have been focusing on teacher quality and accountability and student achievement for a while. Most said that their districts have been working to reduce the achievement gap, improve language skills for non-English speaking students, and improve the impact principals and teachers have on student achievement. The survey found that superintendents in urban districts are especially versed at implementing standards. Ruth Wooden, Public Agenda's president, said, "It is remarkable how deeply standards and accountability are now embedded in the attitudes of school leaders. But it is hard to overestimate the intense frustration these leaders feel about obstacles thrown in front of them from every direction. American principals and superintendents are a 'can do' group. Removing even a few of the most intrusive and annoying obstacles would go a long way."

School leaders report that they believe the NCLB is here to stay, but few think that it will work the way it is currently set up. Most agree with the spirit of the law. Sixty-one percent of superintendents and 65% of principals reported that the law will require some changes before it will work. Many also question the political intentions behind the law. Large district superintendents are more optimistic about NCLB's benefits than small district superintendents. Most school leaders reported that given all of the hurdles they deal with, NCLB is not a major problem.

Public Agenda (cont'd)

While principals and superintendents report concerns about teacher quality, it is not as pressing an issue as other problems: only three percent of superintendents and principals reported poor teacher quality as their most pressing issue. School leaders do, however, identify disparities between the abilities of new teachers and the skills principals and superintendents want in new teachers. Superintendents and teachers see professional development as a way to improve teacher quality, while the report says that teachers have mixed feelings about professional development. Most school leaders reported having issue with teacher tenure; Sixteen percent of superintendents and 30% of principals said that it is “virtually impossible” to remove a “terrible” teacher. They reported that teachers receive tenure without showing enough know-how and that once tenured it is very difficult to remove an ineffective teacher. Most also reported that unions fight to protect ineffective teachers and sometimes work against improving education.

Superintendents and principals’ views on the responsibilities of principals also vary. Superintendents see a good principal as the key to a successful school, while principals are less likely to report that a principal alone can make a major difference in a school. Superintendents are also more likely than principals to think that principals should be accountable for student achievement. Superintendents, in general, gave principals mediocre performance reviews and report concerns about principals’ ability to determine teacher quality. Both principals and superintendents reported feeling unimpressed with formal administrator training programs and few reported principal certifications as evidence of quality skills. Superintendents report positive superintendent-board relations, and on six of six measures many principals reported that their own superintendent is excellent. Most superintendents (72%) reported thinking that it is a good idea for them to be held accountable for their schools districts performance.

For more information about this report go to
<http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/rollingup/rollingup.cfm>

Arkansas Governor’s Plan to Improve Education

Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee is working with state legislators to develop a plan to better educate Arkansas’ children. They are working under a January 1 deadline, which was set by the Arkansas Supreme Court last November when the Lake View decision declaring Arkansas’ school system unconstitutional because it does not provide an adequate and equal education for every child was determined.

If passed, Huckabee’s plan will increase the state sales tax by 1-cent and will consolidate every district that has less than 500 students. Huckabee explained that consolidation is necessary because the state cannot afford to raise teacher salaries and supply specialized coursework to all 308 districts. Consolidation would allow the state to take advantage of economies of scale. Huckabee’s plan will consolidate 100 districts. Many rural legislators and small-school administrators are opposing the consolidation portion of the Governor’s plan. Janine Parry, a professor of political science at the University of Arkansas, said, “His legacy, and he’s struggling very diligently to make this legacy, will be about improving Arkansas’ education system.”

Maryland Adopts Graduation Exams

The Maryland state Board of Education recently voted to pass a plan so that will mean that starting in 2009 high school seniors will have to pass a standardized test to receive a diploma. There are concerns about how the plan will affect the dropout rate. State Schools Superintendent Nancy Grasmick's plan will allow students to receive one of five diplomas based on how many of the state's four High School Assessments they pass. If the student has a disability is also factored into what type of diploma they receive under Grasmick's plan. Board members have expressed concern that the alternative diplomas might become a "dumping ground." Kati Haycock, director of Education Trust, said that states normally see an increase in their dropout rate the first year an exit exam is put in place, but there is no long-term link between dropout rates and exit exams. Grasmick explained that her plan is a starting point, and the final plan will be given to the board in May. She explained that the important part is that after almost a decade of debate and delays students and teachers will know that high-stakes are coming to Maryland. Grasmick said, "We just couldn't speak esoterically anymore because we weren't making any progress."

Maryland first considered the idea of graduation exams in 1993. About two years later a state task force recommended creating standardized tests that students would be required to take in order to graduate. This plan was supposed to take effect in 2005, but Maryland has delayed the implementation because of concerns over cost, controversy, and the timeline. Grasmick said that the state has reached a "tipping point." The state has promised that an extra \$1.3 billion will be spent on education by 2008.

There are 19 states that have adopted exams to improve the worth of a high school diploma and better prepare students for the workforce. Education Trust reported that by 2009 about 30 states will use high-stakes exams. At the same time some states are considering moving away from high-stakes tests. In Nevada 12% of seniors who finished all of their coursework did not receive diplomas because they did not pass the math exit exam. About 13,000 Florida students did not graduate after the state's exam became a mandatory graduation requirement. About 3,000 of more than 20,000 Virginia high school seniors have not passed Virginia's exam, which is required for graduation. Virginia's students have several more chances to take the test.

Presently, Maryland's students have to pass three exams to graduate, but they are so basic that most students take them in middle school. The new plan will mean that students have to pass the High School Assessment in algebra, English, government, and biology to receive the full Maryland diploma. These tests will be given at the end of the course, and students who fail can get tutoring and remediation help. Students will be given about 10 chances to pass the tests. Students who pass three of the four tests will receive a local diploma. Special education students must also pass the tests, and those who do not pass at least three exams would receive another type of alternative diploma. Severely disabled students, who are exempt from the tests, could receive a certificate of completion, and a final diploma will be available for students who drop out but get their GED.

Census Bureau Releases New Ho! Ho! Ho! Data

In preparation for the upcoming holiday and shopping season, the Census Bureau recently released information about the impact of the holiday season.

- **\$466 million**...Amount Christmas tree sales accounted for in 2002. North Carolina ranked second behind Oregon in sales.
- **\$30.6 billion**...Toy industry retail sales for 2002. Approximately one-third was spent on video games.
- **\$32.4 billion**...Department store retail sales for December 2002.
- **\$13.5 billion**...Electronic shopping and mail-order sales for December 2002.
- **46,438**...Number of malls and shopping centers.

Forum News . . .

Forum Holiday Schedule



The Forum office will close on Tuesday, December 22 at 2:00 pm and reopen Monday, January 5, 2004. We hope everyone has a safe and happy holiday season.

The *Friday Report* will resume publication on January 9, 2004.

The *Friday Report* is published weekly by the Public School Forum of NC and is distributed to Forum Board members, legislators active in educational policy, the press, and Forum subscribers. Archived editions can be found at www.ncforum.org/archives.htm