

Notes from the NCLB Commission and Panel Discussion with Public Commentary

Governor Barnes stated that the goal of the commission and the hearing was to gather information that would allow lawmakers to build upon the successes of NCLB and to repair shortcomings.

Georgia: State School Superintendent Kathy Cox felt that Georgia was ahead of the curve on NCLB and AYP because Georgia had already implemented accountability measures tied to state testing and had developed both system and state reports cards for school performance. In addition, Georgia merged state and federal accountability systems and applied them to all schools rather than limiting accountability to Title I schools. Since its implementation of accountability, Georgia has been able to reduce the number of schools on the Needs Improvement list by one-third. The sub-group improving faster than any other sub-group is the Students with Disabilities (SWD).

Florida: State Commissioner of Education John Winn recommended that AYP ratings be converted to a graduated rating system of A through F rather than a Pass/Fail rating. This would be less negative and also be more of a growth indicator of current status and status over time. Mr. Winn suggested that assessment of progress include learning gains that reflected student performance as compared to previous progress and school performance as compared to previous performance. He reminded the panel that current practice is three to four years behind the science of assessing learning. Another concern was the amount of flexibility provided to states in creating their own standards rather than the use of a national measure like NAEP to set the definition of proficiency. He called for an adjustment in the participation rate and for the implementation of a lowest percentile approach rather than the use of sub-groups. He felt that by targeting the lowest 25% Florida was catching all low performers regardless of subgroup.

Gwinnett County, Georgia: Superintendent Alvin Banks leads the largest school system in Georgia. He indicated that NCLB has had a positive impact in that state assessments were being aligned to curriculum and being used to assess student progress. The development of a single statewide accountability system has increased student achievement at all grade levels, graduation rates, and student performance in all sub-groups. Suggested changes addressed the inclusion of the Special Education diploma in the accountability system, requiring interventions for Special Education students to be in place for at least one year prior to assessment, state adjustment to expectations for Special Education students as a sub-group, and adding gifted students as a sub-group to ensure that NCLB addresses all levels of performance.

Atlanta Public Schools: Mr. Lester McKee represented the Atlanta Public Schools. He stated that NCLB had enhanced the on-going, research-based reforms that Superintendent Beverly Hall had instituted several years ago. He recommended monitoring and adjusting sub-group performance, greater flexibility with Special Education students, and including the gains as an indicator to counteract the negative impact of the Pass/Fail rating system.

He expressed concern over the requirement that merging schools take on the rating of the lower performing school.

Georgia Association of Educators: Dr. Mercuria Chase Williams serves as the current president of the Georgia Association of Educators. She recommended that accountability and assessments not be punitive and that the use of paper and pencil assessments be reduced while authentic, alternative assessments be used to supplement current assessments of student progress. She indicated that growth over time is a better measure of student and school success. Other suggestions included the following: not labeling schools and students, eliminating unrealistic timelines and punitive measures for students and school not making adequate progress, the development and implementation of fair valid assessments for students with disabilities and ESOL students, the use of multiple measures in determining progress, teacher accountability based on success in moving students ahead rather than percentage on grade level, and financial and technical support to reach and maintain progress.

Items of Interest from Panel Responses to Questions from the Commission Members

- Florida's FCAT assesses annual learning progress of each student.
- Florida's success comes from teacher quality, leadership, and research-based curriculum.
- Florida schools receive financial incentives.
- Georgia's CRCT had three categories of student performance while the NAEP had four categories. Comparisons are skewed.
- Georgia revised curriculum and aligned CRCT tests are not a basic curriculum.
- The achievement gap is closing across Georgia.
- Florida changed its end size from 30 to 15% because of discrepancy between large school size and cell size representing sub-group size.
- Local school system superintendent Alvin Wilbanks stated that content certification for special education teachers needs to be addressed. Teachers are trained to develop and implement IEP and content specialization is not included in teacher preparation programs for Special Education teachers.
- Successful veteran teachers of Special Education students do not see the relevance of content specialization in meeting the needs of the student.
- Content consultation with content area specialist combined with knowledge of strategies could be considered.
- Alternate assessment for teacher quality is needed for Special Education teachers.
- Florida changed its target group in 1999 to focus on the lowest 25% and capture all sub-groups. This net caught all low performers.
- Florida crafted instruction around ESOL, SWD group achievement rather than sub-groups like race and gender and focused on instructional needs.
- An issue in using NAEP as a national test or measure is student motivation and stress. NAEP is also not tied to a meaningful element for students.

- In Georgia, merging the state and federal accountability systems was facilitated by the fact that Georgia had already implemented a statewide student information system and a student testing program. This merger also resolved the social promotion issues.
- In Georgia, all rewards and consequences applied to all schools rather than creating a dual accountability system – one the *haves* and one for the *have nots*.
- Georgia Association of Educators does not oppose testing and NCLB. It opposes high stakes testing and labeling students rather than assessment.
- There is a need for flexibility in assessing low ability special education students and non-special education students who are not on grade level and not receiving the grade level curriculum. The required % of special education students taking the alternate assessment is unrealistic. It is also harmful to SWD student motivation.
- Schools in Florida that do not make AYP but have a grade of A or B under FCAT system are classified as provisional AYP status.
- Some student count in more than one category and carried an extremely high weight in assessing AYP for sub-groups. Florida's 25% ile counts each student once and catches all sub-group members.
- The only reason given for not using a growth model was that parents might not be able to interpret the data.
- NCLB hindered progress by making some states stop and reduce efforts, but it enhanced state and local impetus to move forward and to target resources toward school improvement efforts.
- The Special Education diploma should be accepted by NCLB because the IEP drives the curriculum and assessment for the SWD student and the exit credential.
- Time periods for interventions need to be reasonable and respectful of schools' ability to implement change.
- Interventions should reverse choice with other options since parents favor local schools and the sense of urgency to implement change will be heightened. School leadership will be more proactive if leadership is changed and interventions are tried before student choice is implemented.

Comments from Public

1. Special Education Parent - Need highly qualified teachers for Special Education students
2. Council of Special Education Administrators - Unintended consequences of NCLB for special education students. Include measure or growth model rather than status model; calculate AYP with student in the smallest sub-group rather than multiple times; review consequences for failure to meet AYP.
3. Georgia Blind Voters for Change – Consider flexibility for the way students learn; monitoring increased the number of blind children in Georgia who received certificates of completion.
4. LEA Special Education Coordinator – Graduation rate of special education students is not reflected in state rate because they get a certificate of attendance.

- Consider portfolio assessment for students. Special education needs highly qualified teachers, but Georgia does not train teachers as content specialists.
5. GCASE – Debbie Gay – Schools need flexibility for Special Education teachers to meet highly qualified status; consider consultative model; use growth model; consider highly skilled teachers and time for students to complete program requirements.
 6. PDK, International (Chris Cherau) Implementation of NCLB demonstrates that public prefers LEA to fix schools rather than offer choice. Schools that use a National Reform Model are successful. Consider growth model over status model.
 7. Local School Principal – Need consistent standards to measure all students; need consistent measurements to measure students grade to grade and school to school; eliminate negative labels i.e. failing school; consider NI in Math achievement to identify area of weakness rather than fail entire program; need appropriate assessments and scoring for ESL and SWD.
 8. National Center for the Learning Disabled – Roberta Malavinda – Ensure that every student is supported and counted. Special Education has benefited from NCLB.
 9. Special Education Parent – Fifth grade student on second grade level is being tested on grade level on a curriculum that is not being taught and that the student is not capable of learning. This has had a major impact on child self-esteem and motivation. Consider changing the criteria for allowing students to take an alternate assessment.

Submitted by
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