

# ADVOCACY

## NCLB, Research, and PDK's Advocacy Efforts

"The purpose of Phi Delta Kappa shall be to promote quality education, in particular publicly supported education, as essential to the development and maintenance of a democratic way of life. This purpose shall be accomplished through research, service, and leadership in education." These words from the *PDK Constitution and Bylaws* govern our approach to advocacy.

In the United States in recent years, a significant factor in public education has been the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Consequently that law has become a focus of attention in PDK's advocacy efforts. Since Congress passed NCLB, PDK and many other professional associations, policy makers, and concerned citizens have advocated reworking some of the law's provisions to ensure that the ideal of leaving no child behind is within reach. The opportunity to effect change will come in 2007 with NCLB's reauthorization.

Our stance on NCLB always has been a direct reflection of what we have learned over several years of polling the American public. In 2005 respondents in the 37th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools ([www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm](http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kpollpdf.htm)) reaffirmed that most Americans agree with the sentiment behind NCLB. But they disagree with the law's method of judging schools based on the percentage of students passing a state-mandated test. The public believes that schools should be judged on how much students improve in a given year, and we agree.

Most standardized tests compare students either to their peers or to an established

benchmark; but value-added assessment, a promising proposed addition to the law's assessment strategies, compares a student's current level of achievement with his or her past achievement. In other words, this type of assessment looks for achievement growth, a focus that many researchers and practitioners consider more meaningful in judging the effectiveness of schools and, ultimately, of individual teachers. PDK has looked at this strategy in a couple of recent publications: Theodore Hershberg's "Value-Added Assessment and Systemic Reform" in the December 2005 *Kappan* and an in-depth article by James Mahoney in the March/April 2006 issue of *Edge*, both available free to members online at [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org).

The U.S. Department of Education took a tentative step last fall toward examining growth-based accountability with a pilot project that is supposed to approve up to 10 high-quality growth models. Unfortunately, some observers worry that the pilot project's prerequisites could be too stringent and likely will limit the project's research value. There also is no added financing for the pilots. When Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced the pilot project on November 18, she said, "We're open to new ideas, but we're not taking our eye off the ball." We believe that all educators should keep their eyes on the ball. But we also believe that ED needs to put resources behind the research and development needed to identify what really works.

As educators and policy makers at all levels work to realize the NCLB ideals, the R&D required to improve the law and to raise student achievement, including pilot projects such as this one, need to be well supported financially as well as philosophically.

## GET TO KNOW JOHN MERROW

John Merrow is a name worth knowing. He'll be moderating the centerpiece panel discussion at PDK's Washington, D.C., **Summit on Public Education** in October (see page 1). His PBS show, *The Merrow Report* ([www.pbs.org/merrow](http://www.pbs.org/merrow)), is called "America's Premier Series on Youth and Learning."

Merrow has reported on education for NPR and *The MacNeill/Lehrer NewsHour* during a career spanning more than 30 years. He also is president of Learning Matters, a non-profit organization he founded in 1995.



## MORE ON VALUE-ADDED ASSESSMENT

**"Value-Added Assessment of Liberal Education"**  
[www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp02/index.cfm](http://www.aacu.org/peerreview/pr-sp02/index.cfm)  
Special issue of *Peer Review*, published by the Association of American Colleges and Universities

**"Value-Added Assessment"**  
[www.weac.org/PDFs/2004-05/ValueAddedAssessment.pdf](http://www.weac.org/PDFs/2004-05/ValueAddedAssessment.pdf)  
Wisconsin Education Association Council Research Brief

**"Value-Added Assessment"**  
[www.cgp.upenn.edu/ope\\_value.html](http://www.cgp.upenn.edu/ope_value.html)  
Web-based publication, part of Operation Public Education by the Center for Greater Philadelphia

**PDK ADVERTORIALS** appeared in two issues of *Education Week* during February and March. If you didn't read them there, take a look at them in the Advocacy section of the PDK website. Just click on the homepage link at [www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org).

**FUN WITH A SERIOUS SIDE:** The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has rolled out an online advocacy campaign featuring a musical cartoon that urges changes in NCLB. While you're online, check it out at [www.letsgetitright.org/cartoon](http://www.letsgetitright.org/cartoon).