

Iowa Education Leader #15 * August 15, 2003

A policy and advocacy update from the Iowa Department of Education * Ted Stilwill, Director

Yesterday we made available Iowa's first NCLB report card as required by that legislation. It is a lengthy document that you will find online at www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/nclb/reportcard.html. You may be interested in some of the statewide achievement information that previously has not been available until the release of the Condition of Education Report in November. The Condition of Education report will continue to be your best resource for comprehensive information on schools, but you will find much of the information about student performance in this NCLB report as well.

For a very brief summary of the highlights of the report, talking points and background information, you can link to our news release and additional supporting information at the web link above.

Iowa's NCLB report card also is gaining attention because it includes the new list of schools identified as "Schools in Need of Assistance." Because it is this feature of the federal law and the state implementation that usually draws the greatest interest, releasing this report provides an opportunity to share some additional perspectives beyond a simple straightforward distribution of data. In doing so, I would like to begin to anticipate the next round of questions about implementation, and also emphasize what we can learn from what has happened so far.

Last year, 26 schools were identified as SINA; this year we have only 12. It may be confusing to many that this number declined or appears smaller, even proportionately, compared to some other states. Here are some considerations in that regard.

- It is our goal to clearly identify only those schools most in need of assistance. This does not mean that all the other schools are doing exceptionally well or don't need assistance, only that our data and the parameters given to us allow us to most securely identify these schools.
- This number will likely grow substantially in future years. While we should all be pleased with the areas where we have seen growth the past few years, both the modest rate of growth and the lack of growth in some subgroups would indicate that, if these trends continue, many more schools will be identified in the future.
- The identification of these 12 schools was based on their operation and data for two years, but using two different types of analysis for identification for each of those years. The first year was governed by our original state improvement plan; the second by the subsequent federal criteria approved this June by USDE. The new plan provides more opportunities for identification and increasing expectations for increased performance. It also will apply to schools that do not receive Title I funding. Next year, the two years of operation and data will be analyzed under the same (new) plan. Unless we see more rapid, positive changes in student performance for all subgroups, the number of schools identified will increase.
- Larger schools, larger school districts and more diverse schools and districts will tend to be identified more quickly because smaller schools may not have enough students in some subgroups to be subject to NCLB accountability requirements under this plan. This does not mean that smaller schools are any less accountable to their students or to the state; but their accountability may not fall under the mandatory reporting formula of NCLB.
- Within the next two to three years the affects of collapsing grade levels will also bring subgroup accountability to more schools and districts.
- Next year we will likely begin to see non-Title I schools, including secondary schools, identified - although the non-Title I schools may not be subject to federally mandated

sanctions. However, since most Iowa school districts have only one attendance center at secondary levels, if a non-Title I secondary school is identified as a School in Need of Assistance, then the district will be identified as well as the school and the district is then subject to sanctions.

For all of us in the education community, there may be a more important story than who is on "The List." It is certainly noteworthy that 15 schools from last year's SINA list were removed. There are some tremendous stories among some of the schools who were removed because they made dramatic increases in performance. They took the challenge seriously, aligned instructional efforts, improved scrutiny of assessments, provided support to teachers in more effective new practices, and reached out to parents for help. Conversations that might have begun with a negative event have resulted in a pride of accomplishment not from "surviving compliance" but from making an important difference for many more children in those schools. In what can appear to be a bureaucratic, negative, seemingly impossible jumble of requirements, we can also see what committed teachers, parents and school leaders can accomplish. In a place like Iowa, it is that success that sets the bar for the rest of us. In Iowa, it is success that will pave the way to improvement, not sanctions.

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