Title I School Improvement Initiative: 2007-08

At-a-Glance

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires all public schools and school districts to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) by meeting established standards in reading and mathematics performance and participation, as well as in student attendance and high school graduation. Failure to meet AYP for two consecutive years triggers Title I School Improvement Program requirements, implemented in a series of five stages. Each successive stage carries more stringent requirements. In 2007-08, the Dallas Independent School District had 29 schools on Title I improvement stages.

Program Description

AYP standards for 2007-2008 included student passing rates of 60% in reading and 50% in mathematics for all students tested in grades 3-8 and 10, as well as the following student subgroups: African-American, Hispanic, white, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient (LEP), and special education. Other indicators, including testing participation, attendance (elementary and middle schools), and graduation (high schools), also help determine AYP.

Campuses that do not meet AYP for the same indicator for two or more consecutive years are subject to NCLB's Title I school improvement requirements, such as offering school choice and supplemental education services. Title I requires districts and campuses to implement these improvement provisions in progressive stages, based on the number of years a campus does not meet AYP for the same indicator. Improvement campuses must draft a revised campus improvement plan that includes measurable goals and outlines a program of professional development that addresses the areas in which the school missed AYP. They also must receive technical assistance and institute a program of professional development. They also must offer students the opportunity to transfer to a higher performing campus in the district.

In 2007-2008, the district had 29 secondary schools on NCLB improvement stages. No elementary campuses were in Title I improvement status. As shown in Figure 1, 41% of the district's 68 secondary schools were in the Title I School Improvement Program. 8 schools were in Stage 1 improvement, and 7 were in Stage 2. In addition, 8 campuses were in Stage 3, and 6 were in Stage 4. Stage 4 schools must draft a plan to restructure the entire campus. This plan must then be implemented if a school misses AYP again and enters Stage 5.

Stage 4 schools were B. Adams, Adamson, Pinkston, Carter, Samuell, and Spruce high schools. The Stage 3 campuses were Smith, Molina, Roosevelt, Sunset, and N. Dallas high schools, and Hood, Long, and Storey middle schools. Stage 2 schools consisted of Jefferson, Kimball, and Seagoville high schools, as well as Comstock, Florence, Hill, and Hulcy middle schools. The Stage 1 schools were Lincoln and Wilson high schools, and Franklin, Gaston, Marsh, Spence, and Stockard middle schools.

Other Secondary  Stage 1  Stage 2  Stage 3  Stage 4

Figure 1 – NCLB School Improvement Program campuses, compared to other secondary schools, 2007-08.

Implementation

NCLB requires improvement schools to complete a campus improvement plan that includes measurable goals and outlines a program of professional development that addresses the areas in which the school missed AYP. Improvement schools also must receive technical assistance and offer students the opportunity to transfer to higher-performing schools in the district. Campuses at Stage 2 and higher, in addition to these requirements, must offer supplemental educational services (SES).

Because NCLB views the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP) as a first step in the school improvement process, the evaluation team reviewed the CIPs of all 29 NCLB improvement campuses in Dallas ISD. The review found that most campuses examined the issues that caused them to miss AYP and set goals for improvement. Most of them also outlined strategies...
intended to help achieve those goals. However, as in years past, the plans functioned more as compliance documents than as road maps for improvement. Many CIPs overrelied on boilerplate language that was identical across documents in sections related to parent involvement, teacher mentoring, and other areas.

Title I School Improvement Program campuses are required to offer students the opportunity to transfer to better-performing district campuses. Because many of the district's high schools were in Title I improvement status, there were few high school campuses to which students could transfer. At the middle school level, students had broader choice options.

Overall, 342 students transferred to other campuses. More than 300 of the transfers were high school students, and 39 were middle school students. Samuell and Spruce high schools alone accounted for more than 38% of transfers. Skyline High School was the most popular destination for high school transfers, while E.D. Walker was the most popular choice for middle school transfers.

A Stage 4 campus must draft a restructuring plan, which must be implemented if the campus misses AYP again and enters Stage 5. The district made its six Stage 4 campuses the first campuses in its high school redesign initiative. The restructuring plans called for the campuses to adopt a “schools within schools” approach, with each campus offering three or four academies, each focused on a particular career pathway. The pathways included health care, technology, and business/marketing.

The evaluation paid special attention to achievement issues among LEP students. More than 70% of schools that missed AYP in 2007 did so solely or in part because of low performance by this group. The changing nature of this group complicates LEP performance. Because students exit the LEP group once they attain English proficiency, schools with large numbers of continuing LEP students may have difficulty showing improvements on state assessments. Results for 2008 demonstrated improvements by these students in reading and mathematics, but performance remains a concern, especially in high school mathematics.

**Technical Assistance and Supplemental Services**

NCLB requires that all improvement schools receive technical assistance. Stage 1 campuses received campus administrator mentors, who worked to improve instructional leadership in principals. Technical assistance providers (TAPs) brought a schoolwide approach to school improvement worked with campuses at Stage 2 and higher. Surveys of TAPs and CAMs revealed that they provided a wide range of services and assistance, including coaching and mentoring for teachers and principals. Many TAPs and CAMs reported seeing improved leadership and school climate at the campuses with which they worked. Some expressed concern, however, about staff turnover. Others were concerned about low morale.

The law requires that schools at Stage 2 and higher provide Supplemental Educational Services (SES), which includes tutoring and other services provided outside the regular school day. In 2007-2008, eligible students (those identified as eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches) could choose from a wide array of private SES providers. The district itself was not an SES provider as it had been in previous years. The district’s AYP compliance office described this change as a positive step that allowed the district to focus more on school-day instruction. Overall, 6,247 students participated in SES, representing 26% of eligible students. On the TAKS tests, SES participants slightly outperformed their peers in mathematics, but slightly underperformed in reading.

**Outcomes**

Figure 2 below displays passing rates in TAKS reading and mathematics, aggregated by improvement stage. This figure does not reflect the passing rates for individual improvement schools. In reading, all four improvement stages showed passing rates that were well above the 60% passing rate required for AYP. Only a few campuses and/or student groups had passing rates in reading that were below 60%. In mathematics, however, many individual campuses and/or student groups had passing rates below the 50% level.

The state is scheduled to release preliminary AYP results in October 2008. AYP standards for 2008-2009 will increase to 67% in reading and 58% in mathematics, and are scheduled to increase annually in subsequent years, reaching 100% by 2013.
Recommendations

- **Improve Graduation Rates** – The high school graduation rate is one of the measures for determining if a high school meets AYP. The district missed AYP for graduation for a second consecutive year, and many of its high schools in Title I school improvement fell short of the 70% standard. The graduation rate declined among many high schools, as well as for the district as a whole (see Table 60 on page 140). In the 2008-09 school year, Dallas ISD is scheduled to begin implementing its high school redesign initiative, starting with six high schools that were in Stage 4 improvement in 2007-08. It is recommended that the district include specific strategies to improve graduation rates as part of this high school initiative.

- **Focus on High School Mathematics** – Past evaluations have noted a need for improved student achievement in mathematics. Most of the schools in the Title I School Improvement Program met or exceeded the AYP standard for reading (60% for all students tested and all applicable student groups). Most of the high schools on improvement stages fell short of the AYP standard for mathematics (50%), and many even showed declines from the previous year. Mathematics continues to be the primary factor in many schools missing AYP. The higher AYP standard for mathematics (58% in 2008-09) makes improved achievement in this subject even more imperative. At the same time, schools must remain mindful of the need for continued improvement in reading. Past research by the Department of Evaluation and Accountability demonstrates a need for strong reading skills to succeed on the TAKS mathematics test.

- **Provide CIP Training That Targets NCLB Schools** – The district should provide Campus Improvement Plan training that is specifically designed for administrators in Title I improvement schools, especially Stage 1 schools. The training should familiarize them with NCLB requirements in order to develop CIPs that articulate a clear blueprint for continuous school improvement. It is further recommended that the district completely overhaul the CIP template used by all Dallas ISD schools. This template should be designed in such a way that the documents will function as guides for improvement rather than merely as compliance documents. The new template should highlight sections that are applicable only to Title I School Improvement Program campuses.

- **Provide More Comprehensive SES Attendance Data** – Despite a dramatic increase in SES enrollment and improved implementation at the district and campus levels, the real impact of SES on participating students’ academic performance could not be fully assessed until the late summer of 2008 due to the unavailability of SES attendance data prior to that time. Moreover, the data received lacked any measure of the level of tutoring received by individual students. This made it impossible to determine in any meaningful way, any correlation between SES participation and student achievement. These data should be more complete and made available in a more timely manner.

- **Enlarge the AYP Compliance Department** – A major factor hampering the delivery of SES attendance data was the limited staffing level of the district’s AYP compliance office. The compliance office made commendable efforts to implement SES at the district level, as well as ensure compliance with other Title I School Improvement Program provisions. However, the department has been expected to perform these tasks with limited staff. The higher AYP standards raise the possibility of even more campuses entering Title I school improvement status. The AYP Compliance Department badly needs additional staff in order to implement this program.

- **Further Improve Performance of High School LEP Students** – LEP performance improved among many Title I improvement campuses in 2007-08, but these students continue to trail other student groups, especially in high school. Spring 2008 performance data suggest that TAKS mathematics is a particular area of concern. The higher AYP standards for reading and math to be implemented for the 2008-09 school year will pose greater challenges for all schools and student groups. Recognizing the complex compositions of high school LEP groups, there is a need for an improved curriculum and diversified instructional
strategies aimed students at this population but with different needs. Specialists at the Multi-Language Enrichment Program (M-LEP) should work with high school ESL departments to help affected campuses identify the profiles of these students and the reasons for their low performance.

For more information, see EA08-189-2, available at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/, or contact Shane Hall at 972-925-6473.