



THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

Report of a Working Conference on

July 21-23, 2002
Washington, DC

Sponsored By



THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS
THE NATIONAL FORUM TO ACCELERATE MIDDLE-GRADES REFORM
THE URBAN MIDDLE-GRADES REFORM NETWORK

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Opportunities and Accountability to Leave No Child Behind in the Middle Grades: An Examination of the No Child Left Behind Act

Cynthia G. Brown (Prepared for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2002)

Preface

On July 21-23, 2002 the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), in partnership with the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (National Forum) and the Urban Middle-Grades Reform Network sponsored a small working conference of about 75 representatives of state departments of education, national education organizations, local school systems, and advocacy groups to consider the opportunities provided by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The conference was held in Washington, DC. It was supported through generous grants to CCSSO from the Edna McConnell Clark, the Bill and Melinda Gates, the W.K. Kellogg and the Ewing Marian Kauffman Foundations.

The goal of the conference was to stimulate renewed and deeper efforts to improve the quality of middle grade education through the use of new federal tools and funds. The three organizations, in consultation with each other, identified for invitation to the conference members of their networks committed to middle grade reform who were located in positions where they could leverage NCLB Act opportunities into action in districts and states in the near future and agreeable to conference follow-up when they returned home. Several invitees were also plenary and workshop presenters. Conference evaluations were overwhelmingly positive about the value of the conference to participants.

Over parts of three days and with the assistance of expert presentations and peer learning discussions, conference participants gained new knowledge and considered strategies to accelerate and sustain improvement in the school learning environments of adolescent students. What follows is an edited summary of the key remarks presented during the conference. Some remarks are more extensive than others. They are all useful and insightful.

Hopeful Once Again

Conference Opening Remarks of Hayes Mizell, Director of the Program for Student Achievement at the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

A few people in this room have hoped since 1965 that high poverty schools would use federal aid to education funds to significantly improve the academic achievement of low-performing students. In some schools this has happened. Determined and entrepreneurial educators have creatively used Federal funds to provide students supplementary, effective educational experiences. There is also no question that during the past 37 years, millions of students, most of them at the elementary level, have benefited from a wide variety of additional services made possible by federal assistance. But for nearly all those years, the primary emphasis was on simply providing more education. There was no imperative for this education to result in major gains in student academic performance.

Hopeful once again, we are here to explore how middle level schools can use the most recent incarnation of federal aid, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB Act), to improve radically the achievement of low-performing students. We might say that this law is not your mother's Elementary and Secondary Education Act. For the first time, the statute establishes the ambitious goal that by the year 2014, all students completing the eighth grade should perform at what their states' define as the "proficient" level. In addition, schools have to demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" towards meeting this goal.

To have any hope of reaching the goal, school systems and schools will have to use the funds available under the NCLB Act in more dramatically effective ways than they have previously used Federal aid to education funds. The NCLB Act is not quite seven months old. There is a lot we do not know about it. Even U.S. Department of Education officials responsible for overseeing the law's implementation have not completely resolved all the complexities of interpretation inherent in the NCLB Act. However, there are some things we do know:

- We know that states, school systems, and schools will not meet the NCLB Act's student performance goal unless the U.S. Department of Education enforces this law more vigorously and consistently than it has previous versions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- We know that school systems will not meet the goal if they use the NCLB Act as a slush fund to reinstate favorite but unproven programs they curtailed because of cuts in state education funding.
- We know that the state and local use of NCLB Act funds will be driven not only by professional judgments about the most effective means to increase student performance, but by personal preferences, wishful thinking, political priorities, and advocacy by many different education related institutions, and non-profit and for-profit vendors.

- We know that states and school systems will not meet the NCLB Act's student performance goal if they do not begin now to devote significantly more attention and resources to the middle grades.
- We know that middle schools will not meet the goal if they take a shotgun approach to using their bounty of NCLB Act funds to, as one principal said, build up his school's ropes course, buy books for every classroom, purchase more computers and pay for the after-school program that just lost its funding.
- Above all, we know that even though the NCLB Act requires unprecedented collaboration, coordination, and public reporting, this will mean very little if advocates for more effective middle level education do not use these provisions to engage state and local education officials in conversations about their use of NCLB funds, and if they do not monitor the results of the decisions these officials make.

For all these reasons, we approach our exploration of the NCLB soberly, as well as hopefully. We are excited by the law's vision of educators enabling all students, across all demographic groupings, to perform proficiently, and we are grateful for the law's provisions that have the potential to spur and support educators to bring that vision to fruition.

Our purpose here is to focus on the opportunities that the NCLB Act provides to improve education in the middle grades. We are not here to flail against what we do not like about the law or to debate controversies about the law's assessment, accountability, or school choice provisions. While you will have the opportunity to learn about some comprehensive school reform designs, this is not a competition among these designs. We are also not here to tout our favorite curricular or instructional interventions. Rather, we are here to learn how we can use the NCLB Act to enable all students, not just some students, to perform proficiently by the end of the eighth grade in 2014.

As we thought about who could help us gain greater insight into the opportunities the NCLB Act provides middle level educators, we had several choices. We could have asked someone who has conducted research demonstrating that high-poverty schools can indeed help all their students perform at high levels. We could have asked someone who understands the challenges and potential of middle level schools. We could have asked someone knowledgeable about the NCLB Act and intimately familiar with the law's requirements and how states will likely administer it. Fortunately, the cards of fate fell our way and we found one person with all these characteristics.

That person is Joe Johnson. Joe has only recently left his position at the U.S. Department of Education where he was Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability Programs (formerly the Office of Compensatory Education Programs) in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Before coming to the Department, Joe was the

Director of District Support and Services at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas. While there, he organized and directed studies of high-performing/high-poverty schools and districts. Prior to his tenure at the Dana Center, Joe was a Senior Director at the Texas Education Agency where he directed state and federal education programs, including Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The Promise and Opportunities Afforded by the *No Child Left Behind Act*, if Taken.

Remarks of Joseph Johnson, Special Assistant to the Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction and former Director of the Office of Compensatory Education, the office administering Title I in the U.S. Department of Education.

[PowerPoint Presentation: The Promise and Opportunities Afforded by the No Child Left Behind Act](#)

While at the University of Texas Dana Center, I studied schools and school districts that were very successful in improving student achievement in the context of Texas's education reform. Many school districts were using the Texas legislation in a way that allowed them to achieve spectacular results. But, in contrast, there were schools in districts just a few miles down the road, which sat in that same policy context, but were doing, generally, nothing.

Some school and district leaders looked at the policy environment and focused on all the problems, issues, and shortcomings. They could cite dissertations full of evidence as to why the legislation was not going to work. In a district next door or a school down the road, however, there was a leader who thought,

Hmmm. . . . I can use this. I can shape one piece in a way that will create a real urgency for improvement within our school. I can take another piece and work it to improve the capacity of folks within my district to improve teaching and learning. I can use a third piece as a catalyst to help us shape one strategy focused on children instead of going in multiple directions.

No matter how much money they are offered, some people will respond with multiple reasons why the NCLB Act will cause pain for them. Others will see the opportunities. It is very wise that your conference organizers chose to shape it around the opportunities within the NCLB Act to substantially improve teaching and learning. This legislation can be a tool to support improved achievement throughout America's middle schools.

I encourage you to read through the paper that Cindy Brown prepared. She examines multiple opportunities associated with this legislation. There is no way today that I can address them all. So please look upon her paper as a reference.

I will discuss six opportunities in the NCLB Act:

1. Continued Emphasis on Academic Standards.

The NCLB Act provides the opportunity to keep focused on standards. Many states have developed challenging academic standards that delineate what

children should know and be able to do in middle schools. But those standards are not necessarily taught. If they are not taught, they are not making any difference. This legislation insists upon doing a better job of teaching standards in ways that result in all students learning them.

There is also a strong focus in the legislation on alignment with the standards. It insists that all elements of the system begin to work in a coherent way aimed at getting students to achieve the standards. For example, professional development and teacher certification should be connected to the standards. Assessment should relate directly to them. There is an opportunity for standards to be the central organizer for the efforts to improve teaching and learning.

In addition to horizontal alignment, there is also the opportunity to focus on vertical alignment and to be sure that middle grade students leave well prepared to go onto high school and succeed. If the attainment of middle grade standards does not prepare students to take courses that allow them continued opportunities in high school and beyond, then there is a problem with middle grade standards.

2. Data

Within this legislation, there are many opportunities to become lovers of data. By delving into their data, school officials can explore their strengths and opportunities to improve.

The NCLB Act requires annual testing of students throughout the middle grades. The previous federal legislation required an assessment at only three points in a student's academic career, which could completely miss middle school years in some states. Consequently, there was not necessarily feedback about opportunities to improve or the need to refocus. Children were falling through the cracks.

There is controversy about this. Some people say the new law requires too much testing. When I am asked if I agree, my response is that if you test a child only once in grades K through 12 and the results are not used to improve instruction, then that is too much testing. The issue is not the frequency of testing. The issue is how regularly is testing data used to improve instruction?

Many states are asking for help since publishers have often controlled test development and result reporting. A publisher might say, "The soonest we can get you your data is December." The state says "okay." But it should not. Publishers need to get creative about how to get business. When one state says okay, the publisher "can play games" among the states.

Some states are currently meeting the NCLB Act testing requirements. This is not impossible. It is essential if we want schools to use these data to improve instruction.

3. Focus on the Achievement of Each and Every Child

This legislation calls for greater focus on the achievement of each and every child. There are no categorical exemptions. When it says that no child should be left behind, it actually means no child. Every child should be moving closer and closer to achieving proficiency on the standards regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, first language, migrant status, disability, or any other demographic variable. The legislation says that systems of education should be getting better and better at ensuring that every child will achieve the standards. If they are not, then they are not living up to their potential.

This is a major change from the past. One Texas superintendent explained how:

Back then, we taught school like we were feeding the chickens. When you feed the chickens, you strap on your bag of feed; you go out into the yard; and you toss some seeds onto the ground. If the chickens get it, fine; if they don't get it, fine. After you've tossed out your seed, you're done for the day. That was the way school was taught. Teachers strapped on their lesson plans, went into the classroom, and tossed out some information. If the kids got it, fine; if they did not get it, fine. After they had tossed out the information, teachers were done for the day!

The superintendent continued that the difference between then and now is that now teachers are not done until they know that each student has learned the lesson and achieved what they wanted them to learn. He said, "If they're not motivated to learn it, then we motivate them. If they don't have all the prerequisite skills to learn it, then we get them the prerequisite skills. But we're not done until they've learned it." The opportunity here is to take that spirit into every middle school across this country with a focus on not just passing out information, but looking for the evidence that says the job is not done if students have not learned.

4. School-wide Reform

Within the NCLB Act, there are important opportunities to pursue school-wide reform. The largest opportunity comes through Title I.

A Title I school can be "a targeted-assistance school," which means that services must be targeted exclusively to those children who are determined eligible for services. Because the targeting is just to eligible students, various "pull-out programs" are used. In contrast, the other option is to create a school-wide program. In a school-wide program, Title I dollars, as well as dollars from almost every other federal education program, may be used in ways that will support comprehensive, school-wide reform.

Under the new legislation, the criteria for becoming a school-wide program is reduced so that any school where at least 40 percent of the students are low-income is eligible. The overwhelming majority of Title I schools may become school-wide programs. This is an important opportunity that, thus far, has been squandered.

I have asked many principals, “What are you doing differently now that you are a school-wide program? They answer, ‘What do you mean?’ You have latitude to use your resources in new and different ways. What are you doing now that you weren’t doing before?” Often, they tell me, “Oh, now we’re serving all of the kids.” They are taking what was ineffective for a small percentage of students and spreading it out to everybody! That’s squandering the opportunity.

This legislation asks educators to think comprehensively about how to change core academic instruction at the school level. This is not about tinkering, “adding a little something” or “prettying up” an activity. It is about how to make substantial improvements in teaching and learning in the classroom so that students meet challenging academic standards.

I visit many schools and look at their improvement plans. Unfortunately, too many are doing nothing that relates to classroom instruction. I have seen entire school plans where I can not find the word “reading” or anything about improving mathematics instruction. It is not because the school is doing so well in mathematics. It is because of a mindset that, “We do reading over here, math over here, and Title I over there.” This is ineffective. The new legislation provides an opportunity to look for approaches with strong evidence of success that is going to help improve poor academic instruction.

The NCLB Act states that schools pursuing the school-wide program opportunity need to engage in one year of planning. This is an important opportunity that also often gets squandered. Too often planning is very superficial:

On September 24th at 3:30 we had a meeting that lasted a half hour, and we looked at the numbers. Then we had a meeting on February 22nd—nope, that was a holiday. February 21st. We had another meeting in May, and boom, we’re done!

That is not the spirit of the school-wide planning requirement. The idea is to look closely at the data on current levels of school performance to understand where strengths are and what the needs are. Then school planners should use this information to look at options by examining reform models, best practices, and other successful schools. They should ask what is out there to help improve substantially teaching and learning within their school.

5. Professional Development

The NCLB Act increases dramatically the emphasis on professional development. The law pushes to get all personnel, especially in Title I schools, to be highly qualified. It provides the opportunity to rethink what highly qualified means. State officials should ask whether their current teacher and administrator certification requirements attest to teachers' ability to get students to achieve the state standards, and if not, what role professional development should play.

The new law requires districts to set aside funds for professional development—under Title I a minimum of five percent and at least 10% for schools identified as in need of improvement. In addition, it dramatically modifies the Eisenhower Professional Development Program. Those funds have been combined with the funds previously allocated for the class size reduction program, and they all can be used to improve teaching and learning through high quality, intensive, professional development—not just for teachers, but also for principals. After at least 20 years of research supporting the importance of school principals, the federal government finally decided it would be a good thing to allow professional development funds to be spent on them.

Importantly, the professional development funds are not limited to traditional notions of professional development. For example, they can be used to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers.

6. Parent engagement

Finally, within this legislation, there are greater opportunities to engage parents. The legislation is pushing much further than the bake sale version of parental involvement.

There are new opportunities for engaging parents. First is this notion of school choice. The legislation says that when children attend a school that has not made adequate progress for two years in a row, it is a school in need of improvement. Parents of children attending the school must have a choice to attend another public school that is not in need of assistance.

Most parents who have children in such schools will probably not choose to send their child to another school. But that is not the point. The point is the opportunity to help parents see that they can use this choice option to be better advocates for improvement within their home schools. They might say,

I know now that I'm not stuck sending my child to Smith Middle School. I can go to Smith Middle School and say to the principal, 'Okay. Tell me again about what we're going to do to help make sure that my child achieves proficiency with these standards next

year because I'm trying to decide whether my child is going to stay here or is going to go to a different school.'

This is an opportunity for a new dialogue. It gives parents a tool to help hold educators accountable for doing well for their children.

A second tool for engaging parents involves supplemental services. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress for three years become eligible for supplemental services. Parents of children attending those schools get the choice of having their children participate in supplemental services—public or private after school or summer programs—that are designed to help increase the likelihood their child will succeed. In other words, the law says that if parents choose to keep their child at a school not making adequate yearly progress, the child has access to other services in the community that can increase the likelihood the child will succeed.

For parents to use these resources well, they must have a good understanding of what is going on. The legislation calls for school report cards to help parents understand the extent to which children attending a school are achieving the standards. But there is no piece of paper that will be adequate in communicating to all parents everything that they need to know in order to adequately engage in these conversations.

Outreach to parents must be rethought. It is important for parents to understand how the whole system works. If they do not know what state and district standards are, they will have a hard time engaging in a conversation about what is being done to help their child achieve the standards. They need to know something about the assessments their child has been given and how assessment results have been used to determine if their school has or has not made adequate yearly progress.

There must to be a sustained, fairly intensive outreach to parents so that they acquire the ability to be strong advocates for improvement within their children's schools. The NCLB Act requires that parents join in school-wide program planning activity. School officials must educate parents so that they can fulfill these roles well.

There are many opportunities within this legislation. If educators take advantage of them with enthusiasm and gusto, the hassles and problems within the legislation will work themselves out. Even if they do not, it is worth it when the children achieve at much higher levels. This is the real goal.

As I approach my new work in Ohio, I am centered on these opportunities as well as looking for other leverage points. I encourage you to do the same.

Questions and Answers

Question: Could you please elaborate on the testing requirements?

Answer: The key testing issue is the NCLB Act requirement that assessments be aligned with the standards. The assessments must give valid and reliable information about the extent to which students have achieved the standards. There are some standards that are easily tested by more conventional assessments. There are others standards where that is difficult but not impossible, and a few where it may be next to impossible. States will have to make trade-offs as they figure out what they can realistically do, especially since assessment results now must be provided before the beginning of the following school year. This is especially challenging with the complex assessment grading of more authentic performance-based assessments. But it is not impossible; some states are doing it now.

As I study successful schools, I find that in the most successful ones, teachers have not focused narrowly on getting a testing outcome. They have focused more squarely on getting students to develop such a deep, thorough, lasting understanding of the standards that it did not matter whether students were tested with multiple choice, constructive response, or open-ended items. Their students did well on all.

Some teachers view testing as an either/or game--either working with students to do well on the test or doing a good job of teaching them the standards. If it is an either/or game, children lose. In one way, children are not learning the standards if teachers are doing a lot of drill and teaching of test strategies. Students miss the desired deep, rich knowledge. In the other way, sight is lost of opportunities to ensure that all children and all demographic groups of children are learning well.

There was no either/or in very successful schools. Teachers looked at the standards embedded in the assessments and asked themselves, "What are the best teaching strategies to ensure that our students will develop a strong understanding of the standard as measured by somebody else's assessment?" When their students benefited from rich instruction, which ended only when a teacher-based assessment demonstrated that the students fully understood the body of information, teachers had confidence that their students would do well on any assessments.

Question: How will the NCLB Act help to lessen tracking and special attention to the brightest and most affluent students?

Answer: The legislation focuses not only on whether individual schools are making adequate yearly progress, but also on whether districts are making adequate yearly progress. Tracking and extra resources for some students is largely a district issue. School boards decide where resources go. District officials have often favored the schools that board members represent rather than all the schools.

Under the new legislation whole school districts will be identified as in need of improvement if they do not educate well all demographic groups of students within their district. Every district, like every school, will receive a rating based on its lowest-performing group. Some districts will probably be slow learners. Others will be faster learners and say,

Hmmm, if we don't want our public, which has traditionally thought of us as a good school district, to get the news that we're a low-performing district, then we're going to have to do a better job with those schools that we have not traditionally served well. So how are we going to do that?

There are other powerful provisions in the legislation that have not yet received much attention. For example, each district must submit to the state a consolidated plan for its federal programs. The plan must explain district action to ensure that its highest poverty schools get high quality teachers in the same proportion as its more affluent schools. This is a huge change. Federal legislation has previously ignored this issue. States can use their monitoring opportunities to highlight such issues. Many districts will be unaware of issues and not address them unless states bring the requirements of the legislation to their attention.

Question: What supplemental services might parents choose?

Answer: Each state will be required to establish a list of eligible service providers. The list must include programs that have demonstrated a level of success in getting students to achieve the standards. Parents whose children attend a school that has not made adequate yearly progress for three years will then have the opportunity to choose from services on the list. A variety of both public and private programs may be on the list.

Question: My question is also about the supplemental services issue. The discussion has been about agencies that tie their work to standards. There are many community agencies that address other developmental assets that kids need to be successful in school. Will there be an opportunity to draw from these funds in order for schools to build better community partnerships with such agencies and to help them define their work and have it supplemented? There are many community agencies that believe they are helping, but they are not helping with what we need. Will it be possible to help these agencies better define their work?

Answer. Yes, but in order to realize this opportunity, people will need to be creative. There are expanded opportunities to support after-school programs through 21st Century Community Learning Center grants. The funds will be state-administered and states will conduct competitions. Community-based organizations are now eligible to be providers of those services. There is nothing to prohibit—and everything to encourage—but nothing to require community-based organizations to take advantage of 21st Century program approaches and apply them as supplemental services providers. Such marriages could create wonderfully powerful programs. The opportunity is there, but there is nothing that is going to require it.

Question: My observation is that as long as a district produces results, bottom line, nobody is going to look at exactly how it spends the dollars. This whole legislation is about results. You have pointed out the wonderful opportunities for professional development. It must be content-specific; it must be research-based and scientifically proven. To do this kind of professional development is very challenging. My assertion is that many districts will opt to use the money for recruitment and retention efforts rather than directing new dollars into professional development. The bottom line is that we could see fewer dollars for professional development than we saw with the old Title II Eisenhower program. What do you think?

Answer: In terms of your first observation, low performing schools and districts will probably absorb all of the states' time. So your first point is probably on target. Schools and districts that are achieving good results are not likely to receive much attention.

I disagree in part with your second point. People will probably use their own lenses to judge what is research-based because I doubt there will be much direction from the federal government about what is and is not allowable. People are not likely to read the legislative language in the restrictive way that you articulated. I agree it will be hard for people to change dramatically how they use these dollars. My real worry is that in many places, officials will use the Title II dollars to do the same thing with math and science that they were doing before because the previous Eisenhower program director will now direct the Title II professional development program. Hopefully, there will be a nice mix of new professional development that moves in appropriate directions.

I hope that educators will be primarily focused on the urgency to improve teaching and learning. They might say, "Wait a minute. We must really do something better in terms of teaching and learning, in order for our school to make the substantial progress that is required. What's going to help us get there?" Then they will logically pursue professional development activities and approaches that will support those reform efforts. If they do not focus in this new direction, it will be an opportunity lost.

Question: How does the NCLB Act affect special education?

Answer: Special education must become "special". In too many places, it has not been. Officials have told parents that their children qualify for assistance and then placed them in programs that they know, or at least should have known, have little likelihood of getting students to achieve state standards. This will need to change. Like everything else about this legislation, to do this well requires learning and applying new strategies and approaches.

Improving Middle Grade Schools with District and State Funds through the *No Child Left Behind Act*

Introduction

Remarks by Cindy Brown, Conference Coordinator and Independent Consultant

Two of the most important elements in the NCLB Act are the emphasis on extra help for struggling students, schools, and districts, and seriousness about spending well the significantly increased federal dollars. In my paper about the opportunities provided by the Act to strengthen schools with middle grades, I listed the specific strategies mentioned throughout the law. It is a long list. Members of Congress were very determined to write into law the strategies that they thought would work to significantly improve low-performing schools. This is very different from the previous 35 years. There is no question that research has identified much more of what works, and that Congress is much more serious about guiding local educators in the directions that do work.

We are fortunate to have with us two leaders who have engaged in major efforts to help low-performing schools and districts. They have used many strategies identified by Congress. Susan Sclafani helped design the NCLB Act in her role as Counselor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. But she has done much prior to this. As the Chief of Staff for Educational Services in the Houston Independent School District, she initiated, together with Rod Paige, and managed numerous, intensive efforts to help low-performing schools. Houston is the biggest school district in Texas, and its gains made with low-income, Latino and African-American youngsters contributed greatly to the state-wide achievement gains the state has realized. Sclafani has much to share about how to do it as well as knowledge of the tools and strategies that the NCLB Act provides.

Marvin Pittman, the Senior Assistant to the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction, also joins us. North Carolina, like Texas, has seen tremendous improvements in African-American and low-income student achievement. It has a very focused program of assistance to struggling schools and districts. Pittman has been leading the major North Carolina effort to close the achievement gap. He has a very sophisticated understanding of its causes and complex characteristics.

Using NCLB Act Funds to Improve Low Performing Middle Grade and Other Schools

Remarks by Susan Sclafani, Counselor to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education and former Chief of Staff for Educational Services in the Houston Independent School District.

The NCLB Act is probably the most fundamental reform of education in the last 40 years. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), first passed in 1965, was very

specific about addressing equity and excellence. Congress created a federal role in education because it believed, particularly in the beginnings of the civil rights movement, that education gaps were unacceptable. It concluded the federal government had a role in closing the gap and provided additional funds for children who were economically and/or educationally disadvantaged. These two conditions too often are still synonymous in this country.

The NCLB Act goes farther than the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA for several reasons. A major one is that its deadlines had been largely ignored. The 1994 reauthorization required states to create rigorous content standards and to establish student performance standards--what students should know and be able to do. It also required states to develop a set of assessments aligned with the standards and an accountability system that included most children in the state. The deadline for all this was June of 2001, but few states met it completely.

Between 1994 and 2001, another generation of children went through elementary school and started middle school, or those who were finishing elementary school went through middle school and high school, without a system that ensured they had an adequate opportunity to learn. With its future society, the nation can not afford to do this to its children. In 1950, professional workers filled 20% of jobs; skilled workers filled 20%; and unskilled workers filled 60%. By 2000, this had changed dramatically. Still 20% of jobs are professional, but 65% are skilled, and 15% unskilled. There are few jobs for young people if they are not educated well. We will not continue to be the America that we want to be—and should be—if we do not prepare our young people for highly skilled positions. We must also prepare young people for citizenship decisions that they will need to make and that are far more sophisticated than ever before.

A moral imperative lies behind the NCLB Act. It is an imperative felt by the President. He sees the Secretary often and regularly asks what is working; what is not working; where are we; what do we need to do? This is a personal commitment on his part. The Secretary of Education came to Washington at half his Houston salary because he too has a personal commitment to work at the national level and ensure that something better happens for 54 million students rather than just the 210,000 in Houston.

There are four big principles in the NCLB Act:

Accountability

When Rod Paige arrived as Secretary of Education, he was told there were only 15 states in compliance—not a sterling rating. Congress had this very much in mind as it wrote the reauthorization. It concluded it could not count on the goodwill of states to implement the law appropriately.

The NCLB Act is very clear about accountability. It goes further than previous legislation. It provides new testing requirements for grades 3 through 8. This will help and challenge middle school educators. The students going into middle grades will be

better educated in future years. Their teachers will have known about their progress because they had assessment results for them. They will have learned their students' strengths and weaknesses and seen what year-to-year achievement gains have been. This will ratchet up the quality of teaching and learning in elementary schools.

The Act is also challenging because now middle grade schools will be accountable for the annual progress of their students. Indeed, people will know where students were when they left fifth grade and what progress they make in each middle grade. They will ask teachers and principals, "What are you going to do if significant numbers of your children are not achieving at the grade level where they ought to be?"

This question will not be asked just about the aggregate. For the first time, the Act says school and district accountability scores are based on the lowest performing subpopulation on the theory that an entity is no stronger than the weakest link in its chain. A school cannot be great unless all student groups are doing well. This is how it should be. Why should anyone get to decide that any children do not count because they are economically disadvantaged; members of a particular minority, ethnic, or racial groups; limited English proficient, or students with disabilities? What educator has a right to tell parents that he or she decided their child was not important enough to educate well?

The NCLB Act says that educators are responsible for the progress, year in and year out, of all subpopulations. Schools will be rated based on the performance of their students. States must establish adequate yearly progress targets for each school that will result in 100% of their students being assessed as proficient in 12 years. There is a safe harbor that was suggested by schools with large numbers of children who come to them well below grade level. They were concerned about being able to meet those targets each and every year. This provision says that if you reduce the number of children in the subpopulation who are not making adequate yearly progress by at least 10 percent, the school will be counted as having made adequate yearly progress. It recognizes that some schools are going to be far more challenged than others. But it does not give up on the idea that all children must be taught to high levels of learning if they are to have a positive future in this country.

The NCLB Act requires that the annual assessments provide credible data about children's achievement. District officials must prepare principals, assistant principals, teachers, and parents to understand and use this rich data. The assessment data ought to guide how schools plan their curriculum and strategies and determine individual professional development needs of teachers. The wonderful part about annual data is that it is longitudinal data. For example, if a math teacher in seventh grade sees that her children are consistently missing specific objectives, it is not because of the weaknesses of the children. It is probably the result of the teaching strategies she used or her knowledge of content objectives.

This happens to wonderful teachers as well as to poorer teachers. In Houston there was a teacher who had every child mastering all objectives but one. All the children had the same wrong answer. When the math supervisor talked with the teacher, and asked,

“What do you think this objective is asking?” she gave the wrong answer. She did not know. She thought it was asking something other than what it was and she taught that very well, as she had everything else, so that every child got the same wrong answer.

Flexibility

The second major change in the NCLB Act is local control of flexibility. The federal government will not tell districts and schools how to meet the law’s objectives. There is no one answer that would be equally appropriate for remote school districts in Alaska and for New York City. This seems like an obvious point. However, in the past Congress and Administrations have sometimes decided that they knew best. The class size reduction program is the best example. Class size reduction works wonderfully when there is space and an abundance of highly qualified teachers. But if both are missing, some children will be in trouble. It is better to have 35 children in the classroom of a highly qualified teacher than to remove half and put them with a substitute teacher because no other highly qualified teacher could be hired. While it sounded like a great idea, and the public resonates to class size reduction, the truth is it does not always work. For example, in California the state put in additional dollars and discovered that Los Angeles Unified lost many of its highly qualified teachers to suburban openings and left urban children with substitutes.

Parental Choice

The third change is parental choice. The new law says parents will play a greater role in education decisions for their children. When a school is identified as in need of improvement because it failed to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, parents have a choice of saying, “My child needs a better school, and I want to opt for another school in the district that is higher performing.” If they so choose, federal funds must pay for the transportation. Many places already offer choice, but without transportation. Choice is not an option for many parents who are lower income, working, and unable to transport their children to another choice location.

If parents choose to keep their child in the same school and the next year the school is still low performing, the Act requires that they have the opportunity to get supplemental services for their child. Local educators need to help their state identify groups within the community that can provide high quality tutorial assistance to children after school, before school, on Saturdays, or whenever there is available time.

The opportunity to provide supplemental services is for organizations that have evidence they can, in fact, provide high quality services for children. It could include local congregations with retired teachers who were very high performing in their own career and now want to offer an after-school program. It could be a for-profit company that advertises regularly. It could be the school system if there are not others. But it cannot be a school or school system that is, itself, in need of improvement.

Research-based Strategies and Programs

The fourth NLCB Act principle is doing what works (i.e., using the research). This is a challenge also. The Act mentions in 111 places the use of scientifically based research. We only have “gold standard” research in reading. It does not exist in other subject areas yet. There are beginnings in mathematics. Over the next several years the Department of Education will fund a rigorous research agenda in partnership with the National Science Foundation, the National Research Council, and others in science, mathematics, social studies and adolescent reading.

The “gold standard” in reading means there are scientifically based models. They were studied with random assignment and replicated. The research has identified five components that are absolutely essential for good reading programs. The Department of Education is telling states that they must choose from programs with those components. States in turn must tell districts to include them in their reading program if they want federal reading funds. Reading First provides almost an extra billion dollars annually to improve the quality of reading instruction in grades one, two, and three.

The same level of research does not exist in other areas. This is true even for the comprehensive school reform models. Some research indicates they are helpful, but there is no random assignment study yet that spells out what specific actions lead to desired results. This is what is needed. There is a lot of qualitative research in education. There are also correlation studies that say, “When this happens, this happens.” But they are not causal. Random assignment studies are needed to show cause.

For example, many career academies were evaluated on the basis of how their students did compared to the other students in the same high school. “Surprise, surprise,” the ones in the career academy did a lot better. Why? They chose the program; they were selected for the program; they had specially selected teachers and curriculum; and they did very well. But MDRC did a random assignment study comparing students who applied divided into two groups of accepted and non-accepted on the basis of space. There was now a control group of students who did not get accepted. They were compared over five years with the students who were accepted and went through the career academy. MDRC found no significant difference between the two groups. At the end of five years, the students who would have been in the academies if there had been space for them did just as well as those students who completed the academies. They were motivated students who together with motivated parents looked for and found other opportunities to do similar things. This is why it is so critical to not just base decisions on correlation studies. It is much harder to demonstrate that A caused B.

The Department will provide a database of what works. It will identify if a study is simply a correlation or is really rigorous research that reached the same conclusions.

What Does This Mean for Middle Grade Educators?

1. A school must focus on its own data. Such data can provide much information about what does and does not work at the school. It indicates what student needs are. Then the principal and teachers should identify the programs that appear to work well with the school's mix of children with particular learning gaps.
2. Teacher quality is also a critical issue. The term "highly qualified teacher" is used throughout the Act. Title IX defines highly qualified primarily as "certified." It will be a challenge for districts to find enough people who meet the qualifications. For example, in middle schools, 40 % of teachers do not have more than 10 or 12 credits in math or science. Many are teaching on a K-8 certification, but are not certified in math or science. They do not have the necessary subject area depth. It will be a challenge between now and 2005 to get them highly qualified. They need to be taught the content so that they can in turn teach it to their students. Experience in Houston showed that it is necessary to provide content knowledge seminars, with university professors, for middle grade math and science teachers in order to increase the quality of student performance.

In Houston the math percentile passing rate increased from the 30s to the 80s in middle school just by teaching teachers mathematics. If teachers are not given math training, they will continue to teach arithmetic. Middle grade math assessments are not based on arithmetic. They expect students to have developed a higher level conceptual understanding of mathematics and to understand some algebra and geometry, as well as arithmetic.

3. Clustering is important. Large middle schools need to be broken into smaller clusters so that children are well known. It is absolutely critical to personalize education for middle grade children. There should also be an advisor/advisee system with ideally one adult who meets regularly, one-on-one, with each student. Often adding a period to the day can do that. Sometimes it is too expensive. Block schedules help free up teacher time for this.
4. Help students make the connections from one subject to another. Do not assume that interdisciplinary units will be any less rigorous in the content than they would have been if they were taught as an individual subject. It is hard to do. It takes teachers who know their content well coming together to plan the interdisciplinary units.

State Use of NCLB Act Funds to Assist Low Performing Schools

Remarks by Marvin Pittman, Senior Assistant to the North Carolina Superintendent for Public Instruction and Elsie Leak, Director of School Improvement, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction assistance program for low-performing schools is very similar to the NCLB Act requirements. North Carolina has a very comprehensive system of accountability.

In the past the state gave students the California Achievement Test and sent a report card on the results to school districts. But a district-level report card lumps everybody together. Consequently, in 1992, the state started to develop its own test. It was called the Inner-grade Testing Program and was used for grades three through eight in mathematics, reading, and writing. End-of-course tests were developed for grades four and seven, and at the high school level.

However, there still was not a good handle on the performance of children in each school. Therefore in 1996, the state adopted the ABC of Public Education program. A stood for accountability; B was the basics; and C was for local control. The state did not tell schools what to do, but did hold them accountable for student progress. Using a sophisticated statistical analysis, the state set a growth goal for every school by which schools could be measured against themselves.

Every school was expected to improve. If a school exceeded its growth goal by ten percent, it was called an exemplary growth school. In schools that met their growth goal, certified teachers received a bonus of \$750 and non-certified staff about half as much. In an exemplary growth school, teachers received \$1,500 and non-certified staff \$750. When a school did not meet its growth goal and more than 50 percent of its children were below grade level, it was called low performing.

The model is built on growth. Some schools left off the growth part and started calling themselves “exemplary.” They did not “get it.” Even if children were still below grade level, but improving, i.e. growing, the school made adequate progress and could be eligible for a reward.

The state also believes that students should have some accountability for how they performed. Low performing students may be held back. If they are, the state provides extra assistance to them. The bottom line is to hold schools *and* students accountable.

State Assistance Teams for Low Performing Schools

By legislation, the lowest of the low-performing schools received state assistance teams. Legislators recognized that you cannot hold schools accountable and tell them to do certain things without giving them support. North Carolina is proud that it gives support to low-performing schools.

The state has assembled assistance teams and assigns them to specific, very low-performing schools. The teams begin with several entry conferences into the school system. The first is with the district superintendent and the next with the principal. Some principals want a conference with the entire faculty.

The first step for a school is to complete a needs assessment. To do this, the assistance team must establish relationships with the staff and the school. A purpose of the needs assessment is to model data-driven decision-making for the school. Too often schools create improvement plans through “guessing” and asking, “What would we like to focus on next year?” The assistance team deeply analyzes all the school data including test data, attendance data, disciplinary referrals, promotions, retentions, etc. It organizes findings about the school based upon the “effective school correlates” and prepares a document which outlines the school’s strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations.

Next the assistance team meets with the school’s own improvement team and reviews the findings and the school’s improvement plan. The school team uses the assistance team findings to identify any gaps. They begin to “buy” into the process. Then the assistance team and the school improvement team reconcile the two reports so that they have one blueprint for the year. The team shares this with the entire faculty.

Once this is done, the assistance team evaluates the school’s certified staff. This is a part of the needs assessment and is required by state statute. The assistance teams can recommend teacher dismissal. But usually such teachers receive additional support and can remain in the classroom. The goal is to help them gain the skills they need. If a teacher is performing below standard in a practice or function on the state teacher performance appraisal instrument, she or he is assigned a coach from the team and put on an action plan. The team coach will no longer be an evaluator of the teacher, but instead a supporter.

After completing the needs assessment process, the assistance team members conduct demonstration lessons, co-teach, convene study groups around a particular skill, and/or teach content to teachers who seem to be weak in an area. They also monitor each teacher’s general knowledge, because in North Carolina, teachers who lack general knowledge can be tested. They do a lot of staff development and follow-up. The state wants its educators to internalize the fact that staff development is not just a one-time workshop. The primary responsibility of the assistance teams is to build capacity in the school staff so that when they leave, the school can sustain the work.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Since the establishment of assistance teams in the school improvement process, overall North Carolina students have made remarkable progress. But despite gains in reading and math, once data is disaggregated it shows that gaps in achievement remain. For example, 70% of all students are above grade level in math and in reading. But disaggregated data indicates that only 58% of Hispanics and 52% of Blacks, in contrast

with 68% of Whites perform at or above grade level in math and reading. In short, there is improvement in North Carolina, but gaps in achievement remain a challenge.

The state has established the North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps. It has submitted a First Report to the State Board of Education. A list of the recommendations and the full report can be viewed at:

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/closingthegap/advcomm.html>.

Comprehensive School Reform

Why Comprehensive School Reform Models?

Remarks of Monica Martinez, Director of Outreach for the National Clearinghouse on Comprehensive School Reform.

The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform is based in Washington, DC. It is a partnership of the Council for Basic Education, George Washington University and the Institute for Educational Leadership. The Clearinghouse began shortly after Congress enacted the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project, which the NCLB Act reauthorized as a part of Title I.

Comprehensive reform models were developed and recommended as ways to improve high-poverty schools because there was evidence that using a reform model could effectively accelerate school reform.

How Must Comprehensive School Reform Models Meet NCLB Act Requirements for Demonstrating Scientifically Based Research on Outcomes

Remarks of Rebecca Herman, Research Associate, American Institutes for Research and author of the 1999 publication the “Educator’s Guide to Comprehensive School Reform.”

[PowerPoint Presentation: Guidelines for Judging Quality of a Study](#)

My focus today is on understanding scientifically based research as it is defined in the NCLB Act and how it might affect comprehensive school reform. I will not be discussing the research on specific models.

I offer one caveat up front. There is much discussion around what is meant by scientifically based research. I will share a common perspective. But do not interpret this as the definitive answer, because no one person or organization has the definitive answer. I will just help to shape an interpretation.

Importance of Research on Comprehensive School Reform

Why would a reforming school care about research on comprehensive school reform, and why would they care whether the research is scientifically based or not? The reason is that it is in its best interest. More specifically:

1. There is a substantial investment of time and money in implementing comprehensive school reform. Much time is spent in planning, professional development, and ongoing communication. It takes three to five years of intensive effort just to get a comprehensive reform working and institutionalized

before a school can settle back and proceed with it. This is a big investment on the part of school staff.

There is also the budget investment. Comprehensive school reform can cost from \$12,000 to \$600,000 per year, which is the range of more popular models. This is a lot to spend unless there is evidence that the reform will work and confidence that it will accomplish school goals.

2. Research shows that the level of implementation affects outcomes. The better a good program is implemented, the better the outcomes will be. The level of implementation depends significantly on how well staff understands the program, the complexity of implementation steps, pitfalls, and goals. Research can document such things and provide a guide for educators.
3. To receive federal comprehensive school reform (CSR) funds, applicants must meet requirements in the NCLB Act for using scientifically based research to justify their reform effort. Two of 11 required CSR components mention scientifically based research. The first requires employing proven strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on scientifically based research. There is more evidence for the proven strategies and methods for teaching than for school management. Each piece of a CSR program proposal, e.g. use of small, homogenous groups for reading instruction or having one teacher stay with her students through the grades, needs evidence to support it.

The second requirement for scientifically based research is that all the CSR pieces taken together provide evidence that they improve student achievement as compared to students in schools not using these sets of practices. There is a “waffle” clause that says if scientifically based research is not available, then “strong evidence” to support it will do. There is a weaker definition for what strong evidence is. However, the stronger the evidence is, the more confidence educators can have that the program and practices are going to have the desired results.

Definition of Scientifically Based Research

What is scientifically based research? Basically, the NCLB Act says it is systemic, uses empirical methods, uses observation, tests hypotheses, uses experimental or quasi-experimental designs, stands up to scrutiny from other professional researchers, and presents the information in a way that is easy to understand. This is not the only definition of scientifically based research, but currently it is probably one of the most prominent.

The most controversial part of the definition is that scientifically based research includes research that is evaluated using experimental or quasi-experimental designs. A key element of an experimental design is that there is random assignment into two groups,

one group that has the treatment or goes through the program, and one that does not. There is no real difference between the people who get the program and the people who do not. Consequently, when they are compared, any difference is in the program.

In quasi experimental designs, a key feature is that the comparison of the group who gets the program is to a group who does not get the program. There is no random assignment, and consequently, no guarantee that the difference is in the program. But the result is promising.

How does the NCLB Act change the standards of evidence for the CSR program? It adds a requirement that instructional practices be proven effective. Before, practices just needed to be innovative. There is also now a requirement that instructional practices be based on scientifically based research as opposed to “reliable research” as before. Both the old and new authorization for the CSR program required that individual instructional practices have some research support. There is also a sense that the whole set of practices needs to have support. In other words, when a CSR model packages up a set of instructional practices, the whole model needs research support as well. This requirement also applies to a school that develops its own model by putting together five or six different practices.

Varieties of Research Evidence

There are various types of research evidence. It is easy to get them mixed up, especially if someone is selling a particular reform and providing evidence. There is a handy trichotomy to help sort out types of evidence that meet the scientifically based research standard. (See PowerPoint for more detailed set of questions.)

1. The theoretical base

The reform idea is built on something that makes sense. There is a logical notion of how and why the program works or should work because it is built on a foundation of good ideas that worked separately in different places. It should work. It does not say that this set of practices did work, which is more like the second type of evidence.

Here is an acid test of theoretical base. Ask if there is a clear, non-technical description of the program including its goals, how it works, the instructional activities involved, and the central idea that ties the practices together? Does the whole staff agree and have that same concept in their heads? Is there some basic psychological research to support the ideas that these practices work?

2. Evidence of effect on student achievement

The practices or model did actually boost student achievement. There are three pieces to evidence of effect.

First, does each instructional practice of the whole comprehensive school reform have evidence that it works? If each of the following questions receives a good answer, educators can be confident the practice works.

- Are there studies that examine the impact of the practice on students? For example, if the practice is small, mixed-age reading groups, are there studies that look at this?
- Are they studies of high quality, low quality, or in between?
- Are there several studies? Is there just one example or is there a lot of evidence that supports the reform's success?
- If there are multiple studies on the instructional practice, are the findings consistently positive? Is there one study that says it works and another that says it does not? Are there four or five studies that all move in the same direction and show the same kind of impact?

Second, does the set of practices together have evidence that it works? Is there evidence based on rigorous research that shows that the program only uses effective instructional practices? Is there research evidence for all four or five different practices that it advocates, or is there research evidence only for the most central one?

Third, if there are plans to adopt an externally developed CSR model, is there evidence that the particular name brand model really does work? There is a fair amount of evidence on various models and publications that discuss it. This evidence should get the same scrutiny as studies of instructional practices. It should be a good study using the same type of criteria. There should be a lot of research supporting the model and there should be consistent findings across these different studies

3. Implementation and replication that shows a model works in different contexts and situations

A model may seem very effective, but work, for example, in only poor, urban schools. It might not operate the same way in poor, rural schools. It is important to understand from the research how widespread the results are. Knowledge of all three types of evidence is important, but the third one is most critical to showing future results in a particular school.

Here are quick questions for judging whether a model is implementable and replicable. (This is very reductionist; there is much more that could be asked.) How many schools have used the practice or the model? What proportion that used it was able to fully implement it? Has student achievement been consistently demonstrated in diverse settings?

Determining the Quality of Research Studies

The definition of scientifically based research in the NCLB Act states that a good study is rigorous and systematic, objective, and empirical; has a strong research design, reports its findings well, and has been subject to expert scrutiny. For example, it might be submitted to a peer review journal where experts look at it and conclude it is strong and worth publishing. As mentioned above, the NCLB Act also advocates certain types of research designs.

There are additional questions to ask about the elements of a quality study. For example, there is a set of questions for “rigorous and systematic.” Did the study plan to be thorough? Did researchers consider and discuss alternative hypotheses. Did they describe the process through which this approach should affect student achievement? There are similar questions for each of eight elements of strong studies.

There is no rubric to add up the points with a point total for “a strong study.” Instead educators should keep these questions in mind when looking at the research. If they conclude that a study does not address these issues, they should take its findings with a “grain of salt” and look for stronger research.

Putting the information together to make a statement about the instructional practices as a whole?

If the research is strong enough, educators may next want to put the findings from all the studies together and make a statement about conclusions. Are the findings strong enough to go forward? Was there consistency of findings across the studies? Is there replicability? Do these studies have the same sort of findings in different grades; in different urban, suburban, rural contexts; with different types of students; in different schools? I have assembled a set of rules into a decision tree. (See Guidelines link.) For example, there should be at least four high quality studies, and there should be at least 80 percent that show cause and effect. This particular formula is not the only formula, but it might provide confidence that there are a fair number of studies with overwhelmingly positive findings.

The decision tree presents a step-by-step process. Are investigators looking at an instructional practice or at a collection of practices? Are they looking at the quality or the findings of the study? There is a lot of jumping around in trying to determine whether there is scientifically based, research evidence for CSR. There are many different levels (e.g., looking at practices and programs, gathering together much information, and critically reviewing a lot of research). This poses a difficult task for educators already committed to a full-time job and who do not have time to do a research review of the substance and intensity that I just presented in this overview. However, there are resources that can be of assistance.

In conclusion, the point of scientifically-based research in the NCLB Act, as I understand it or choose to interpret it, is not to make educators' lives more difficult. It is to help those who are making decisions about comprehensive school reform to become critical consumers of research. As critical consumers they will not have to buy whatever evidence people choose to give them.

What Does the Research Say about Improving Achievement of Students in Low Performing Middle Grade Schools

Remarks of Sam Stringfield, Program Director, Systemic Supports for School Reform at the Center for Research on Students Placed at Risk

The Need for Flexibility in the Implementation of the NCLB Act

I congratulate President Bush and the members of Congress on the NCLB Act, particularly its optimism and idealism. It is tremendously important. I also extend my honest and sincere sympathy to people at both the federal and state level who must interpret this Act and put its abstractions into regulations and rules. My own appreciation of psychometrics, a field in which I have worked for about 30 years, is that the test developers can not live up to the validity and reliability requirements of the law. Some mistakes will be made as we go along.

The fact that mistakes will be made creates an ethical dilemma. Such dilemmas in the medical field occur when new medicines are tried. There are sometimes unattractive side effects. People choose whether or not to take the medicines. A potentially troublesome aspect about federal education legislation is that educators do not always get to choose whether or not to take the medicine. This creates a point of awkwardness. Flexibility will be needed.

Historically, education has been what is called "loosely coupled." The relationship among the teacher, the school, the school system, and the state, has been loose. This law dramatically tightens the coupling. Whenever the coupling is tightened, not only are there gains in efficiencies, but also responsibility is moved. State and federal staff will have tremendous responsibility after they promulgate rules and regulations. Consequently, they need to exhibit flexibility as they proceed.

State staff will be especially challenged. For example, as a school board member in Baltimore, Maryland, my district had three schools taken over by the state, reconstituted, and given over to a for-profit agency to run. The board was displeased and did not agree with the state analysis of shortcomings. What failed, in my judgment, was not the state's attempt to be rigorous, but the inability to negotiate a settlement and agree on the evidence and its reliability. It was very clear to me that the instruments being used were not up to the weight of the eventual determination that was made. Obviously, there were people in the state department who did not agree.

When the system tightens, the requirement at the state and federal levels to exhibit some adjustment to external reality is large. After the U.S. Department of Education staff completes the regulations and guidance, the easy thing to do would be to walk away and say, “We are done.” It is much more important for Department staff to look at data as it arrives. They need to understand that, on occasion, mistakes will be made in this process and that it is not okay to bureaucratically proceed with actions that harm children’s lives and the careers of teachers and principals. It will be a tough call. The way around it is to build flexibility into the system.

The Need for Consumer Guides on Research

Two and a half years ago I assigned a team of four people (two PhDs, another close to a PhD, and our best research assistant) to a task that we thought would last three months. Our task was to go through the existing literature on whole school reform and decide which reforms had credible data. We were prescient, getting out in front of the NCLB Act. We were essentially preparing an updated expansion of the work of Herman and her AIR colleagues. The team found 800 articles that claimed to address comprehensive school reform, of which about 25 percent actually presented data. We went through 800 studies to find 200. We are just now finishing the report. Instead of taking four extremely talented people the three months and a reasonable budget, it took over two years and a blown budget! This is not what local school districts are going to do.

This is an extraordinary effort. As a practical matter, there will have to be consumer’s guides. My two colleagues on this panel are both working on them. There are other consumer’s guides also.

The Implementation Challenge

No matter what Congress legislates, it does not get implemented locally as they intended. For example, the Southwest Lab lists federally funded CSR schools around the country. The majority do not use national designs. Instead they use home-brewed, home-developed programs that may or may not work and may or may not meet any of the CSR criteria. However, they convinced their state governments to fund them.

The reality is that the NCLB Act sets a good direction. But it is not an absolute that will be found on the ground. As a school board member, I am somewhat ambivalent about this. I believe in going in this direction, but how far to go is not quite clear to me.

The Student Performance and Economic Conditions for Change

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows why we are now talking about whole school reform designs. NAEP reports that reading and science scores over time for 17-year olds, 13-year olds, and 9-year olds, have basically remained flat while math scores have increased slightly.

From 1970 until today, there have been tremendous changes in almost every aspect of lives--in the air conditioning and heating in this room, in the lavalier microphone. Yet educational achievement is flat. On the one hand it is frustrating, especially next to the declining average annual income of young, American males, controlling for inflation. Income rose for a whole generation of high school dropouts between 1950 and 1970. Everything got better for everybody and life was basically good. However, from the mid to early 1970s to today, life has gotten rougher for a male high school dropout. Allowing for inflation, young, American, male high school dropouts today are making less money in constant dollars than their grandfathers were making at the end of the 1940s. Most of the industrial jobs and labor jobs for the big muscle guys are gone.

Politicians, whether Democrat or Republican, may not be looking at this data, but they are aware of the situation underneath it. They know there is an increasing percentage of people who are having a very hard time making a living in their jurisdiction, and that they must do something. The something is to change the flat educational achievement performance into gains. They know the United States cannot compete worldwide unless this happens. When the flat achievement line and the declining income line, particularly for high school dropouts, are combined, politicians must react. President Eisenhower used to say that the defense of the nation had become too important to be left to the generals. Today's politicians are saying that education is too important to be left to the educators.

Middle Grade School Comprehensive School Reform Models

Is there a comprehensive school reform just for middle schools with good multi-year, hard outcome data and good clear process data? The answer is that no one program has compelling evidence. There are several with promise and studies indicating some effectiveness. Is it the kind of compelling evidence that the NCLB Act implies is available? No. That quality of research is not yet at that depth. Consequently, what does a state, district, and school do?

First, look at how a state is choosing measures under the NCLB Act for middle schools. Get involved in choosing the most intelligent measures possible. Given the time frame, state officials may select off-the-shelf measures in a hurry. Make sure that they agree to add other measures over time.

Second, after the measures are chosen at the state level, figure out how to align local standards and measures with state standards and measures. Next consider a design whether it is home-brewed or a national model. Educators need to be responsible, responsive, and reliable.

There are several things to do to become or enhance a reliable organization:

1. Get clear on goals. Align state strategies and local strategies.

2. Be alert to surprises or lapses. While heading toward the clear things, a thousand other things will happen. Be aware of them and try to be responsive to them.
3. Build powerful databases. The NCLB Act requires people to be much more sophisticated in analyzing their data. This will require the creation of databases that are much better than current ones, which is good.
4. Extend formal, logical decision analysis, while at the same time honoring “flaw finders” in the logical decision analysis. On the one hand, there will be more rules to follow, but there should also be more flexibility about when to break the rules. Toyota has great examples of doing both when it builds cars in the United States. There are times when something unexpected happens at the classroom or school level. It is the job of the state and federal governments, now and then, to say, “rules are rules, but now we’re going to bend them.” This will be key to watch as the current little recession goes on.
5. Spend on professional development. The United States spends less money on teacher professional development than any other developed nation. It can not reach its educational goals without greater investment in professional development, particularly for middle school teachers. Studies of middle schools in Philadelphia show large numbers of math and science teachers have no preparation to teach math and science. But nobody else was available and these teachers agreed to stand in and do it. Math achievement will not increase if eighth grade math teachers have no training in eighth grade mathematics or have not taken calculus.
6. Take performance evaluations seriously. There is much work to do on this with principals and teachers. Monitoring is then mutual without counterproductive loss of overall autonomy.

This is how to create a more reliable organization regardless of the design that is selected for middle grade schools. Hopefully, five years from now there will be better research on middle grade school models. But regardless of which design educators choose, if they make that design work reliably, they will get the results desired under the NCLB Act. Try to get the benefits out of the Act without being stuck with too many of the potential problems.

How Do You Know A Research-Based Design When You See It?

Remarks of Steve Fleischman, Executive Director, Education Quality Institute

I reaffirm the previous comments and will not cover the same points again. By way of introduction, I want to disclose two things. First, I am not a researcher, so I will not use research terms in this presentation. Second, I am a lapsed middle school teacher. I taught middle grades for eight years and I also taught high school. I taught a course

called Theory of Knowledge, which was part of the International Baccalaureate program. The course centered around a question, “How do you know?”

The topic of how do you know a research-based design when you see it is very important. It is one of two central questions right now, because “how do you know” refers to evidence. The other important question is “So what?” It has to do with significance. Putting these two questions together can get educators a long way making judgments about quality.

Before continuing, it is important to distinguish between a program’s claims to be research-based and/or research-proven. Often when a person says something is research-based, he or she actually means it is supported by research as opposed to it has a research base of effectiveness. To me, research-based means that when developers put a program together, they looked at the research, found out what they thought worked, and then designed a program based on the research.

It is the same principle as designing an airplane. There, a person examines the elements of aerodynamics and other physical characteristics, looks at all the research, and then designs a plane. However, there are also test pilots. That is, there is another step after designing a plane based on sound scientific principles and immediately before putting passengers in it. When the first prototype of the plane rolls out of the hangar, it is “research-based”. Experts *think* it will fly. Then they find out. The “finding out” is the research-proven part.

When education consumers are looking at programs, they are often looking at designs that are research proven, as opposed to merely being research-based. Scientific research can help in this process, but we must keep in mind that it has its limitations as well. All science does is build confidence that one is getting towards the right answer. It does not say definitely that one has the right answer. Science works on probability. When something is research-proven or, to use another term, research-backed, it has an established track record that it does work. That is, we have greater confidence that it is a design that not only might work, but also is likely to work.

In figuring out what works in education this is what most people confront all the time. These are a bunch of statements about math programs, in some cases about the same math program. I clipped several headlines of newspaper articles about one program in the last two months. One evaluation says it works; another says it is the best thing ever designed. But there are parents who say they do not like it and do not think it works. And, there are teachers who say it is the best thing they have ever done. The current education world is one of many claims and counter-claims.

To prove my remarks are a form of double dosing, I answer the question of “How do you make a choice?” by answering, “Listen to Sam Stringfield.” In an article he wrote four years ago about choosing success, he said, “There is no shortage of programs promising to turn around low-performing schools. The key to choosing from among them is to treat the choice as a complicated consumer decision.”

As an analogy, look at consumer decisions on choosing diets or weight reduction approaches. One ad says, “Take some pills and burn some fat.” But the small print says, “Results may vary” in the smallest type-face that can be legally used. In effect, the ad makes a claim, and then adds that it is not really a claim. Another ad provides a weight loss testimonial of a woman along with her picture. At the bottom of the page, in small print again are statements that report her testimonial is “among the best received,” that “results may vary from one individual to another” and that “statements have not been evaluated by the FDA.” These are complex decisions about purchases.

Another example can be found on late-night cable. An ad states, “No time to work out? Use tone-a-matic.” Annually more money is probably spent on buying such things than is spent on comprehensive school reform in America. How effective are these muscle stimulators? A recent study by researchers at the University of Wisconsin reports that they are not effective. But where did this idea come from that people can attach such things to their bodies and thereby lose weight? It came from research! There are people, for example, with a disability or who have been temporarily incapacitated, for whom muscle tone is maintained in certain clinical circumstances by the use of these special medical devices. However, this research has been inappropriately transferred to the statements about “working out” and “losing weight.” The statement that these devices build muscle tone is indeed research-based, but the claim that these devices help one get in shape and lose weight is not research-proven.

What does work to lose weight? Here is the bad news—only a good diet, and exercise. There are no miracle cures. For chronic diseases like diabetes, most risk factors cannot be controlled. The two factors that can be controlled are diet and exercise. The same happens in education. Most of the conditions in middle schools may not be under our control. But, some can be such as the type of instructional program we choose and implement.

The Food and Drug Agency (FDA) helps consumers determine when they are being defrauded by diet claims. It produces a brochure that warns consumers to watch out when words like “easy, effortless, magical, new discovery,” appear. The FDA provides clues to fraud.

There is no FDA in education, but there is a need for it. For example, the promotional literature on one of America’s leading math programs claims that it gained a “top ten” rating in a recent study. However, it fails to note that this rating was the controversial U.S. Department of Education study that many people rejected. I am not claiming that it is right to reject the study, but merely pointing out that the controversy is not mentioned. And, of course, the ad claims that the program is “backed by research.”

Whenever claims are made about diets, health, hair, or education programs, they need to be credible, have representative results, and follow standard research rules. The following are some straightforward guidelines to judge research reports. Consumers will have greatest confidence in studies that:

- Use legitimate “pre” and “post” tests
- Use appropriate “control” groups
- Distinguish correlation vs. causation
- Rely on the evidence presented, not on claims of authority or celebrity
- Specify the conditions under which the treatment works (or doesn’t work)
- Are conducted or replicated independently, and/or reviewed externally

The value of someone else doing diet or education reviews is in the use of comparable and well-applied criteria to make judgments. There are now several efforts to do this in education. The Education Quality Institute is one. We are now working with Becki Herman to produce a follow-up to the “Educators’ Guide,” produced by the American Institutes for Research. The National Clearinghouse on Comprehensive School Reform along with the Northwest Lab have produced a catalogue. Geoffrey Boorman and Sam Stringfield have published helpful assistance. Resources are now being made available to help educators because the work of actually sifting through all the evidence oneself is so daunting.

Questions and Answers

Question: Please comment on the debate among researchers about whether or not scientifically based research on educational programs is possible, or at least under what conditions it is possible? What will the implications be for the consumers of such research and the consumers of programs?

Answer from Stringfield: This is a tremendously important question. I work for a university that gets a lot of money for its medical institutions. I believe that Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions receive more money to do medical research annually than the federal government spends on all combined education research funding. The optimism about research is well placed. Eventually education research will produce more and better answers. It has told us a lot over the last 20 or 30 years.

I intended my presentation today to stimulate thinking about that question. In my judgment, a local school or state will have to co-construct a better reform with research. It will not be possible to take Success for All, which is a wonderful program, plug it in mindlessly, and get effect. The best thing research says now is that if educators pick a reform that is reasonably well matched to their desired results, they should assume they will have to co-construct it as they implement it. In other words, there is no reform that will work without a good principal, a willing faculty, and in the case of middle schools, investment in training of faculty members to do math, let alone teach it.

Assuming co-construction in implementation is not that different from medicine. In truth, when doctors look at patients, they do not do only mechanical things. They consider the intersection of what research says and what they know about the patient. Then they try to pick the intervention that works best. I am always amused by examples

of diet. My doctor can prescribe wonderful things to help me, but if I am not willing to get exercise and eat fewer calories, I am not going to lose weight.

Assume the need to co-construct a school reform. Research can point in a general direction. For example, research shows that if a school chooses the Talent Development model for a middle school and “goes at it hard,” test scores will rise. This is true for other models as well. But buying the flag and books does not guarantee test score gains.

Answer from Herman: This issue is raised frequently. There are many concerns about conducting scientifically based research in schools. There are two key points. First, the medical model, which relies heavily on randomized, controlled experiments, has not always been the case. The research in medicine went through an evolution to where now this is the standard. The medical model is often used as the example for scientifically based research in education. If it can be done in medicine, why can it not be done in education?

The second point is that there are answers to almost all concerns about scientifically-based research in education. I will provide examples of answers, but there are always counter-answers as well.

One concern is cost. It is very expensive to conduct a controlled, random experiment. Consequently, there are questions about feasibility and whether instead money should be spent on kids in schools? But there are randomized experiments conducted in education that were not substantially more expensive than other types of studies. It is a question of figuring out how to keep costs down.

Another concern is the ethics. Is it ethical to take a program that might work and deny it to some people? The same question can be asked about medical research. Or is it ethical to take a program that might work and give it to many people without having a foundation for that decision?

Scientifically based research, which the NCLB Act defines with the emphasis on random, controlled experiments, also opens the door for quasi-experimental research with the caveat that it might not be as strong as random experiments. There is a lot of good, quasi-experimental research that is less costly and has no ethical risk. It can be used in weighing the evidence of a program. Scientifically based research is not the only way to go, but I have yet to hear an argument against it that cannot be countered in some way.

Answer from Fleischman: I will make three quick points. First, we must be modest about applying better evidence to decision-making in education. My example for this is hormone-replacement therapy. Its claim of benefits has been modified and will continue to be modified. Research does not provide an end point. There is a process of further refinement. The point is not to criticize the original work, but to understand that science is a process and that we never get to “proven.”

Second, the push toward scientifically- based research is the correct push. The question is: how does this push/play out over time? It is necessary to be modest, and over time produce the evidence necessary, create capacity to make judgments about the evidence, and foster an environment that welcomes the evidence.

Third we should adopt a philosophical stance that “evidence” means the “best-available” evidence, not the “best” evidence. For example, the Education Quality Institute, starting in 2003, will publish reviews on the effectiveness and quality of about 45 comprehensive school reform programs. We are trying to balance rigor, which is the “how do you know” question, with utility, which is the “so what” or “why does it matter” question. Conceivably, we could produce reviews that would say that we have a high degree of certainty that nothing works if we apply the highest level of rigor. Instead, we produce reports that show that there is a greater range of things about which slightly less is known, but on which it is probably worth taking a calculated risk. We believe that this “best-available” evidence approach provides consumers the information they need to take calculated risks based on their needs.

Question: Do you believe there will be more funding from the government or the philanthropic community to do research? How can people working “on the ground,” many of them with models, partner with researchers like yourselves with excellent credentials for doing good research?

Answer from Stringfield: At the federal level, there is probably more money for educational research than ever before. Hopefully, there will be more money yet. The philanthropic community has ramped up its support for education research over the last two years. But it is a changing environment and most of their money is in the stock market. There is gradually a little more confidence in research. The NCLB Act is a vote of confidence in educational research. It may have overstepped the mark, but I hope that five years from now it is justified. The business of education research will have to be funded at a higher level than it is today.

Answer from Fleischman: It is very important to gain more acceptance for rigorous research out in the field. Part of the reason that there are not more studies with strong conclusions and evidence about results is the reluctance to have anybody in the comparison group or control group. Districts need to allow comparisons where there are several school reform models in the same district. Schools need to be willing to go on a waiting list for a year before they start a program, even once they have signed up, so that they can be a comparison data site for a year before they actually start a treatment.

Such choices can make a huge difference in the kind of evidence that can be available down the road to help in judgments about what is working and what is not. But it takes courage to make these choices such as delaying a year’s implementation by being a comparison group so there can be comparative data.

Question: My name is Karen Map of the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston.

We are being asked to provide research not quite yet available. Ann Henderson and I have looked recently at the research on parent involvement and its effects on student achievement. I am concerned that research done at the beginning of conversations is getting tossed because of the perception that it is not good research anymore. Where is this going? How do we support those early studies that give us ideas and components about future quasi-experimental and experimental studies?

Answer from Herman: What you said is very accurate. There are very broad generalizations being made about the world of educational research. Certain topics are richer than others. The building of a research base is evolutionary. A recent National Academy of Sciences' report discusses the building of a research base. It starts with case studies. Richer areas to pursue emerge. Start to notice patterns; look at correlational studies; and start building up.

Currently in the evolution of comprehensive school reform research, there are many case studies, a fair amount of scientifically based research, some quasi-experimental research, and very few randomized controlled studies. By always setting the bar a tiny bit higher, people are encouraged to the next level of research. There are beginning statements about effect, but push farther to making stronger statements about effect using randomized experiments.

The parent involvement field may be following a similar path. Set the bar a little bit higher and make statements that are based on the quality of current research. When there are a lot of case studies and nothing else, be a little cautious about making a conclusive statement about effect.

Question: If scientifically-based research requirements are taken too seriously, will not schools and educators opt for, and almost be required to use, only the isolated, scientifically-based, proven strategies like the Department of Education is now requiring with the Reading First grants? As a result, the commitment and understanding about the need for systemic reform will be compromised for what is proven, what is approved, or what is funded. A lot may be lost in that mix. How will you help us in seeing both sides?

Answer from Fleischman: I have discussed this very issue with many people. We are providing consumer information, not taking anybody's decision-making authority or judgment away. Publishing the "best-available" evidence does not reduce options, but actually improves decision-making. The federal government may have something else in mind and may push policy in another direction. However, I cannot speak for the government, and I don't believe that it is their intent to mandate the adoption of particular programs. Those of us outside of government working on this issue are certainly not trying to reduce the number of options, but rather to help people better understand what those options are so that they make the best possible choices.

Answer from Martinez: The onus of responsibility is on organizations and researchers to make sure they synthesize and disseminate information. Otherwise state departments of

education may issue lists of approved programs. We need to challenge the researchers, foundations, state departments, and model developers to raise the bar on research. The federal government has certainly provided the opportunity. As Stringfield said, let us all engage in a co-construction process. Scientifically based research will raise the level of research, will evolve, and will help us hold our programs and ourselves accountable. If we make it a co-construction process, then we will not end up with only three approved programs, but instead with people participating as critical consumers.

Reporting of Data and Public Engagement

Public Engagement: Understanding the NCLB Act

Remarks of Arnold Fege, Director of Public Engagement, Public Education Network

The Public Education Network (PEN) represents over 80 local education funds (LEFs) around the country, primarily in large and middle-sized school districts. The first LEFs were created 20 years ago with funding from the Ford Foundation, to provide support and services to public schools with high concentration of poor and disadvantaged students.

Over the years, the LEFs have been focusing more of its work on policy change with the premise that if the public and the community are not involved in policy, demanding quality schools, and engaged in the electoral process, education goals will not be reached. PEN is starting to expand its focus to include rural areas and rural states. Clearly, rural schools have many assets, but the resources and attention given them has not matched their problems and challenges.

The NCLB Act may be the last opportunity that public school advocates have in assuring that all children receive a quality education, before the demands for vouchers and privatization change face of public education. I have just returned from visiting four states where I worked primarily with school administrators around low-performing schools. Several observations emerged from those discussions. Many local school district professionals are not only paying more attention to their low performing schools and students; but they are much better making recommendations for change. There is considerably more intellectual capacity about how to tackle some very difficult problems, than in the past. Many schools leaders are moving from being the “warrior” leaders who thought they could resolve problems unilaterally without the help of the community. Many of those leaders were literally consumed by the responsibility of the battle. Many are becoming “adaptive” leaders, as Harvard Professor Ron Heifetz calls them, who are giving the community back the responsibility of finding the solutions while framing the discussions, enabling political action and providing data and information on which to act.

I also found on my visits a scarcity of resources. At the same time that accountability, capacity, and interest in raising achievement levels have been raised, many school districts are experiencing a decline in resources. Child and family social services have also laid-off staff and increased caseloads. The link between community and school is weakening as a result of resource shortages. Communities need to be involved not only in the educational process, but also in the political process to demand more resources for public school students, to go along with the demands for accountability. The two are inextricably linked.

It is my premise that whatever the issue—whether it is teaching and instruction, resources, technology, rural or urban education, high-achieving or low-achieving schools, or providing a responsive middle school—there cannot be effective change and implementation without public engagement and building community ownership. This is

the lynch pin, the vortex of school change and leadership. The NCLB Act provides a strategy to advance engagement beyond the bake sale and volunteerism and beyond just reading to children. While all of these may be important, it is the collective movement and common interest that will ensure that every middle school child gets a quality education. In essence, it moves public engagement from the education department to the political science department, from the public relations department to the public interest domain.

Here is a story about a parent member of a local, school-based council. Because of her intense and aggressive behavior, she was forced to resign from the team. True to her character, however, the now-disenfranchised parent insisted on attending the team meetings so she could have her say. The principal tried her best to escort the woman out of a particular meeting, claiming that it was a closed-door session. The woman refused to leave. Completely exasperated, the principal finally called the police to have the parent removed. The police arrested the woman and when she asked with what crime she was being charged, the officer said, “Attempted parental involvement.”

This is an extreme case, but attempted parental involvement describes the varied efforts of the 20th century to bring schools and communities closer together. In general, most of those initiatives were piecemeal. They were designed to address an immediate need or a legal requirement rather than fostering long-term school and community partnership. They were also designed to include the supportive and more pliant parent, rather than to provide the critical parent a place at the table.

Under federal law, especially Title I, parental involvement has usually meant compliance with multiple requirements—Title I or Bilingual Advisory Committees, parental verification, site-based management documentation, principals and teachers completing tally sheets and sign-in folders as evidence of participation, and identifying the number of parents in a community who attended a meeting rather than assessing the quality of the meeting or the outcome of that participation. At the end of the day, parents and educators often left those sessions frustrated by the waste of time and the useless interaction. Many education dialogues and community conversations around the country happen without much outcome. Ultimately, little, if anything, changes for students.

The NCLB Act can mean more than this. Educators must find a way to engage parents and the community first, rather than last. Reform should start with the community, rather than using the community to validate it. For example, schools could decide to do nothing with their data before bringing the community together. Together they could analyze the data and consider how to improve their schools based upon the data. They might determine who needs before and after school care, who needs individualized instruction, who needs summer school programs, and who needs preschool. There may not be adequate resources, but the case for action can be made with the community’s help.

This is not easy and takes skill and capacity that heretofore has been rare. If these conversations with the community are not done correctly, they can result in more difficulty than if they had not occurred. But there is no choice. If educators do not bring

their communities with them, especially around low-performing schools, the demands for good schools coming from people with more social and political capital in affluent school districts will overwhelm disadvantaged communities.

Building community engagement requires partnerships of equals. The 20th century schools were designed for professionals. There is a legal place in the school for everyone except parents and the community. Families and communities have restructured, but in most cases, schools are structured as they were in the early part of the century to meet the needs of an entirely different citizen and customer. They must open up and change to allow a legal place for parents. Strategies could include parent centers and parent and community meetings at the beginning of the school year. The idea is to engage the community before and first, rather than after. This requires school restructuring. The NCLB Act offers positive tools for this, including the requirement that one percent of local Title I dollars be spent on parental involvement programs. Parent involvement now becomes part of the instructional program rather than part of the public relations program. Without the family and community, schools probably will not make the adequate yearly progress that most states establish as a goal.

I recommend three public engagement goals:

- Reduce the social and educational gaps between the haves and have-nots;
- Contribute more strongly to making multicultural and multiracial society work in the interest of a more equitable, productive, and democratic society; and
- Get a substantial majority of Americans on board in support of strengthening the public education system, including significantly increasing public investments in education.

The public should resist privatization as a strategy of choice to solve education problems. If they do not, the privatization of the education system will be no worse for poor and disadvantaged kids than the privatization of our health care system is for 40 million people around the country who do not have health insurance.

Public engagement in the NCLB Act can be approached on two major levels. One is the technical or compliance aspects. They are important because they give parents access. However, forcing compliance through top-down requirements is usually not as effective as inducing change at the local level. The second is that the law codifies what schools should already be doing. Who can argue with having qualified teachers in classrooms by the year 2005, especially in low-performing schools? Who can argue about developing parent involvement policies that are meaningful and that engage and empower parents in their own school and district? Who can argue against parents being involved in the development of the report card, both at the state and local levels? Who can argue with raising achievement for the most difficult kids in the most difficult schools?

The NCLB Act evolved partially as an act of Congressional desperation. The desperation came from policymakers who were trying to find the right formula raising the performance levels of a group of children who have been historically underserved and undereducated. There were 40 years to get this straight; now there are five more. If achievement levels do not rise appreciatively, next may come the federalization of 10- to 15,000 low-performing schools. Many states are concerned about too much federal involvement in this Act already. My challenge to them is that if you do not like the federal involvement today, you will not like it five years from now if, somehow, achievement scores are not raised, and the Congress finds it necessary to impose even stronger federal strictures on schools.

The bottom line around public engagement and parental involvement is not holding only kids accountable, but also holding the public responsible for quality schools. In five years there should be an increase in people's understanding that they have a responsibility not only for their kids, but also for other kids and not only for their school, but other schools in the district and the state. If there is not this understanding, then an opportunity has been lost to advance many schools.

The NCLB Act requires parental involvement in several places:

- Involvement in the development and preparation of both state and local Title I applications, including community discussion of such issues as what is a quality teacher and how to ensure that quality teachers are in the classrooms
- State dissemination of effective parental involvement practices
- State and local dissemination through public report cards of disaggregated student achievement and other data
- State and parental involvement policies and capacity building activities
- Coordination with Head Start, IDEA, Perkins, Even Start, and migrant programs and
- Engagement of parents in instructional compacts

I have five recommendations:

1. Consider parent and community involvement as an educational reform tool that should not be last, but first in the process.
2. Do not back off from seeking increased responsibility from families and the community as well as from the schools for academic performance. The community must be given the responsibility of assuring that there are good schools. Members of the public need to know that they play a role and should not

give all responsibility over to the professionals, because they are unable to do it alone.

3. Link school reform and community development because educational progress for the most difficult schools requires access to affordable housing, good health care, safe streets, transportation, and the reduction of alcohol and drug abuse.
4. Make community and family involvement programs an integral part of a school's instructional strategy and operating plan. This happens when they are not an appendage but become a core piece that is the first to be funded and the last to be de-funded when money runs out.
5. Honor and encourage both individualized and collective action, both partnership and power, and try to figure out how to balance the issues of choice, on one hand, with the issues of public responsibility and collective engagement on the other.

There is a need for professional development programs at the pre-service level that present the value, substance, and purpose of community and parental engagement programs. In-service professional development is also needed because there are many principals and teachers who are fearful of parental involvement and/or have no idea where to start, how to learn, or where to develop. Engagement skills and activities need to be added to training efforts.

Finally, it is important to educate every community about the NCLB Act. According to a Washington Post poll of last March, only four percent of the American public knew a new federal education law was passed, and far fewer knew its name. Parents and the community need to know that this law can provide empowerment opportunities for them and that the consequent conversations, dialogues, and discussions will lead to raised achievement, not only for their kids, but for all other kids as well.

The NCLB Act and How to Use State Data

Remarks of Jeanne Brennan, Communications Manager, Education Trust

The focus of this meeting on the opportunities provided by the NCLB Act and immediate action in districts and states is important. There is something for everyone not to like in the NCLB Act. It is not perfect. But it can help students by providing tools to raise achievement and close gaps among groups of students. I am going to address improving the quality of teaching, helping low-performing middle grades, and the reporting of data and public engagement.

What does data have to do with raising the quality of teaching and helping the middle grade schools? Data can tell incredibly powerful stories about what is going on in schools. There are three ways to look at it.

Achievement Gap Data

The NCLB Act has reporting and accountability requirements at the state, district, and school level that include disaggregated data. Some states will be disaggregating data for the first time. The Education Trust staff has been watching how these states are responding. It is a mini-physics lesson. An Education Trust summer intern, who is an astro-physicist, explained it with an analogy to the centripetal and centrifugal forces of a string with a rock on the end. As a person starts spinning the rock around, in order to build up momentum toward the goal, he or she must build up centripetal force. There is also centrifugal force of the rock that is going away from the goal.

How people talk about disaggregated data, the NCLB Act, and “annual yearly progress” is very similar. In some states the quotes, sound bites, messages, and attitudes expressed are taking people away from the goal of raising achievement and closing gaps. But in other states and communities, educators are making statements that will help build momentum.

It is important for educators to consider carefully how they explain to their colleagues and parents what accountability is and what data shows. It can be scary when parents and communities see, for the first time, huge gaps in achievement. In some instances minority students and parents initially have said, “Why are you making our kids look bad?” It seemed very punitive. The focus needs to be instead on what is going on in the system that is resulting in these big gaps. This leads to the question of teacher quality.

How educators report and discuss data has a profound impact on communities and on building momentum in states. It also has a profound and direct impact on student achievement. A Texas study showed that when the accountability system was implemented in 1993, it was those districts that immediately talked to parents and got the community involved and on board with accountability that made the greatest gains in raising achievement and closing gaps. These districts openly looked at their system to see where they could make changes and improve. There was an absolute, direct relationship between how they talked about this and what happened with student achievement.

How can you leverage the reporting and data requirements in the NCLB Act to raise achievement, especially in middle schools? A few years ago educators in Pueblo, Colorado, a low-income, heavily Hispanic community, started looking at their achievement levels. They were doing terribly and had some of the lowest performing schools in the state. The K-12 educators, representatives of higher education, parents groups, and the business community came together to report this data to the community. They immediately took ownership of it and promised action. Since then they have made tremendous gains. They made politically tough choices, but they now see some of their Title I schools among the top-performing schools in the state. In fact, five of the 20 top-performing schools are Title I schools from Pueblo.

The Opportunity Gap

Opportunity gap data illuminates the differences in teacher quality (i.e., who is getting which teachers, and other matters). The Education Trust staff looks at achievement gap data combined with opportunity gap data. The NCLB Act requires reporting on teacher quality.

There are other opportunities to also examine and talk about in communities. One is access to high-level curriculum. This data is very compelling, especially for the middle grades, where some of the most important math classes are taking place and decisions are made about who gets placed in higher level classes. In one southern California school district, educators looked at 8th grade student achievement levels by race on the state test. Then they looked at what percentages of students were placed into ninth grade algebra. Of all students in the top quartile on the test, 100 percent of the Asian students were placed in Algebra; 88 percent of the white students were placed in algebra; and only 51 percent of the African-American students and 42 percent of the Latino students were placed in algebra. Yet all of these students scored in the top quartile.

For students in the second quartile, the results were even more drastic. Eighty-three (83) percent of the Asians were still placed in algebra; 50 percent of the white students were placed in algebra, but only 16 percent of the African-American students and 11 percent of Latino students were placed in algebra. A white student scoring in the second quartile had a better chance of being placed in algebra than a Latino student scoring in the top quartile. Very important decisions are being made without looking at the relevant data. This happens all the time.

Recently a deputy district superintendent in a southern state told Education Trust staff about how focused officials were in making decisions about student course placement based on their data. The superintendent asked the same question about eighth graders placed in algebra for the next year. He saw there were still huge gaps. He called in all the principals of the middle schools and said, “You are supposed to be looking at the data and placing your kids accordingly, and I’m not seeing that happen. You have to reschedule all of your classes.” This was two weeks before classes began. In fact, the district got rid of all the low-level math classes.

Possibility Data

Achievement gap data, opportunity gap data, and possibility data together provide a much more complete picture of what is happening in states and communities. All three are vitally important.

Possibility data shows what is possible. Ohio did this last spring when it released its report cards for the first time with data disaggregated by race. It also highlighted high-poverty, high-minority schools that were performing among the best in the state. The Commissioner said publicly that her goal is to make these schools the norm and not the exception.

Possibility data is very helpful for educators and community members alike. When Education Trust released *Dispelling the Myth*, it developed an interactive web site. Anyone can go to a state and select certain indicators such as schools with 50 percent African-American or 50 percent Latino, or 50 percent minority enrollment also scoring in the top half, top third, or top quarter of all schools in the state. It will instantly generate lists of these schools. It is a good way to find out how schools in a community are doing.

The Ed Trust heard immediately from many principals, superintendents, and teachers. One principal called saying, “There’s a school right down the street just like mine, same neighborhood, same group of kids that is doing much better than I am. And I’m so excited to know that now. I’ve already set up meetings to go talk to the principal and teachers to find out what it is that they’re doing so we can start to do it with our own kids.” Possibility data helps build a sense of hope.

In Kentucky, when faced with superintendents who said, “It’s crazy. We can’t possibly make these gains in adequate yearly progress; we can’t get all kids proficient in 12 years,” officials did a great “gains” tour. They took the superintendents and other people to 11 schools in eight different Kentucky regions that were making huge gains in a short amount of time.

There are four essential elements when using the NCLB Act and data:

1. Take ownership of the challenge and what’s ahead.
2. Monitor and report data on both the achievement gaps and the opportunity gaps.
3. Highlight the successes, the possibility data. Find out who they are; what they are doing; talk about them. This builds a sense of hope and possibility.
4. Keep the focus on the solution and on the system.

Last weekend, as I worked with communications people in two states, we examined a newspaper quote from an educator that said, “Asking all kids to be proficient in 12 years is like asking them to jump the Grand Canyon.” This sends a very different message than saying the challenge is about adults in the system building bridges to help the kids across the Grand Canyon. Instead, it said, “Okay, kids, leap, go, good luck, hopefully we’ll see you on the other end.” That’s not what this Act is about. It is about looking at the data, looking at the system, seeing where it is falling short, and building those bridges to help kids get across.

Involving Parents in Student Improvement

Remarks of Karen Mapp, President, Institute for Responsive Education

Increasingly, research on high-performing schools and comprehensive school reform is discussing family and community partnerships as a very important component in reaching school goals. Those studies include a 1999 research report, “Hope for Urban Education: A Study of Nine High-Performing, High Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools,” from the Dana Center at the University of Texas. The study identified characteristics of these effective schools. They had:

- A clear and shared focus
- High standards and expectations for all students
- Effective school leadership
- High levels of collaboration and communication
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessments aligned with state standards
- Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning
- Focus on professional development
- A supportive learning environment, and
- High levels of parent and community involvement.

The Institute for Responsive Education has been receiving calls from schools nationwide country asking two questions. First, how does parent involvement and community involvement affect student achievement; and second, how can it be done better? What factors lead to increased involvement? What are effective strategies?

I suggested to Anne Henderson, a pioneer in examining research on school/family/community partnerships that it was time to update her 1994 publication on how parent involvement impacts student achievement. She agreed and we joined in partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Texas, which has a Center for Family and Community Connections. Over the past year, Anne and I have reviewed 50-55 studies on the impact of parent and community engagement on student achievement. Our book will be published in early 2003.

Most studies were correlational studies and case studies. There were only a few that were quasi-experimental and experimental. More are needed. But many of the correlational and case studies were quite good in their design. They fell into three categories: the impact of parent and community involvement on student achievement; effective strategies to connect schools, families, and community; and parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools. The last two categories had no research at the time of Anne’s previous search.

Here are the key findings:

1. With regard to the impact on student achievement, the studies showed a consistent, positive, and convincing relationship between many forms of family involvement and improved student achievement at all ages.

This relationship holds across families of all economic, racial, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. It is not true that “those families...fill in the blank--

minority families, low-income families, families who have just recently come to the United States, our immigrant population--don't care about their student's education or aren't involved in their student's education." There is less research on the effects of community involvement, but it suggests a positive effect on academic achievement and behavior.

The studies also suggest that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits. These students attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, adapt well to school, graduate, and go on to post-secondary education. Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning will usually result in improved student achievement. They assist in meeting student outcome goals required under the NCLB Act.

My own research on the O'Hearn Elementary School in Boston demonstrates this. The O'Hearn School has a family outreach program where parents of students attending O'Hearn engage parents of new students in the summer. One woman told me that when she got the call she thought, "It's August, what did my kid do already?" But instead it was a parent actually coming to introduce herself and to ask what questions she had about O'Hearn? Next O'Hearn leaders decided to link this outreach effort to reading. They did this by having the visiting parent bring a book to the new parent. In addition, she talked about the O'Hearn reading program in which parents read to kids 20 minutes, three times a week. As a result, participation in the reading program went up to 97% of the school population.

Many times school officials involve parents so parents will be happy with them. They hold social events, but they usually forget to link those social events back to student achievement.

2. Research data show that parent involvement actually does not dissipate but changes as children get older.

It changes in nature and focus. Parents become cheerleaders as students get older. They may not come to the school as much because often their children say they do not want them there. At this stage parents need more information from school officials about how to encourage their children. They especially need information about how important it is for students to take certain courses in middle school and high school. Then they can help their children prepare.

Families of all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels can encourage their children, talk with them about school, help them plan for higher education, and keep them focused on higher learning and homework. All parents want to be involved in their children's education. Educators need to help them build their capacity to do this.

3. Programs and initiatives that focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members are effective in creating and sustaining family and community connections with schools.

In the past the “relationship” part has been ignored. Schools have called to say, “Please give me a list of programs that we can do at our schools to connect with families.” I then ask questions like, “What is the culture of your school around family involvement? Is it welcoming? What kind of relationship do you have with families?” Sometimes I get silence on the other end of the phone or a response like, “What do you mean, relationships? Aren’t you just going to give us a list of things that we’re supposed to do?” Research studies on effective programs show that these programs spend considerable time developing trusting and caring relationships with parents.

A study by Charles Payne and Maryann Caba entitled “So Much Reform, So Little Change” discovered that a predictive factor of effectiveness was the level of social trust in the school building. By social trust they mean do the teachers trust each other, do they trust the administration, and do the parents and the school staff trust each other?

4. Research says that effective programs address the needs of the community first.

Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parental and community needs. Too often school officials plan programs, but do not talk first to families and communities about what they need.

5. Effective parent involvement programs engage diverse families and recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.

Programs that took on the diversity aspect openly were very effective. These programs learned how parents from different cultural backgrounds get involved in their children’s education and enhanced that involvement. A study by Geraldo Lopez found that migrant families in Texas involved themselves in their children’s education by bringing their children with them to do field work on the weekends. The reason why they did this was to teach their children the value of hard work, but also to tell their children, “This is what you will be doing if you don’t do well in school.” Is that parent involvement? Yes it is. Were those parents involved at the school level? No, they were not. Such studies show that schools must be aware of the ways that parents are involved with their children based on their own cultural norms and values.

6. Effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership.

Partnership means that power is shared. School officials and families work together as a team. Several families have told me that the reason they are involved with a particular school is because they are listened to and have voice. They are not just present to be “rubber stamps” for whatever the principals and teachers want to do.

The NCLB Act contains much language about parental and community engagement. It is a tool to push educators to include parents and community in school improvement discussions. This language needs to be used or it may be lost. Research can help to focus efforts on family and community engagement activities that support student achievement.

The Use of Middle Grade Self-Studies and the NCLB Act

Remarks of [Steve Mertens](#), Senior Research Scientist, Center for Prevention Research and Development, University of Illinois

[PowerPoint Presentation: Self Studies and the No Child Left Behind Act](#)

Today I will discuss these major topics: Why would a school or a school district want to conduct a self-study? What are the things to consider and evaluate once that choice is made? What are the opportunities and accountability with regard to the NCLB Act? I will discuss self-studies and self-study data within that context of the NCLB Act and why they can be beneficial to schools and school districts.

Reasons to conduct a Self-Study

There are many reasons to conduct a self-study. One should not be what this cartoon says, “Ah, the intoxicating smell of freshly photocopied educational surveys, ready to be collected, distributed, and discarded.” Schools are inundated with people who want to conduct surveys and do educational research. Why would a school want to do a self-study and how might that differ from other kinds of educational surveys?

First a school might want to look generally at school improvement. It would begin by posing questions such as: What issues do we need to address? What do we hope to answer? To get the answers, a school needs to go through the process of conducting a self-study—design a survey, collect the data, analyze the data, and make decisions based on the data.

Self-studies also provide the opportunity for schools or school districts to focus on specific areas of school improvement. Under the NCLB Act, there are several data collection requirements. But this data—student test data, attendance, grades, and discipline—may not focus specifically on all areas the school wants to concentrate on. School officials may also want information about school safety, parent involvement, and community involvement.

The opportunity to collect and analyze data that might otherwise not be collected could be another reason to do a self-study. This is an opportunity for schools to consider other types of data that they have access to collecting in school.

Finally, a most important reason is that self-studies are usually self-imposed. They are rarely mandated by the school district or the state. Schools come up with this on their own. They see it as an opportunity. Many schools develop their own studies, conduct them, analyze the data, and use that information for school improvement.

Consequently, the perception, level of involvement, and the level of buy-in with regard to a self-study is often very different from other educational surveys or data collection efforts. Schools have constant access to their data. This often is not the case with outside researchers. A benefit of a self-study is that if a school collects the data or contracts with someone to do the data collection, it knows it will have access to the data and can do with it as it pleases.

Accountability and the NCLB Act

For the last 10-12 years, much of the focus for the Center for Prevention Research and Development has been on middle grade schools and middle grade school reform. As a middle school advocate and researcher, I see benefits in the NCLB Act as the opportunities for funding sources to which middle grade schools never had or had limited access. Especially important ones are improving the quality of teaching and professional development; mentoring of students, including teacher-led advisories and the opportunity for middle grade students to have at least one adult advocate who knows them very well; employing high quality teachers, improving the use of technology; and finally, extending learning programs. Schools are not particularly savvy about how to use data to obtain such resources. The National Forum and others need to take on the responsibility of helping schools learn how to do this or the funds will go unused and untapped.

I have become more optimistic about the NCLB Act and accountability. In the past I used a slide on standards-based educational reform entitled “Mission Impossible” with a principal saying to a teacher, “Your assignment, should you accept, is to increase educational standards while support services decline.” This was the pattern in the past, particularly for middle grade schools. Middle grades schools—sandwiched between elementary and secondary—have had the smallest piece of the pie for a long time. The NCLB Act provides an opportunity for those schools to get their fair share of the pie.

Both Brown’s paper and Stringfield’s earlier remarks outline the opportunities in the NCLB Act accountability requirements. But there are other areas of accountability that are not, per se, mandated in the new Act but for which schools are likely to be held accountable. They include the mentoring of students and teachers and the use of student achievement data and assessments to improve classroom practice and student learning. Self-studies can identify the perceptual steps such as the context in which those outcomes occurred and what is happening in the classroom that affects various outcomes.

An example is accountability for professional development through networks, coaches, and technology. Technology has now afforded us the opportunity to provide professional development at a low cost through computers via the Internet. But what is the trade-off of this versus face-to-face professional development with coaches and through networks? Self-study data can be used to document progress for accountability purposes, especially if there is the opportunity to collect self-study data over multiple time points. Progress can be examined in combination with student achievement data.

Self-study data can be disaggregated as well. An example is self-study inquiries of teachers about their types of classroom practices. Questions may include the frequency with which they engaged in certain classroom practices that are specific to middle grades—like authentic instruction, integration of topic areas, interdisciplinary approaches—disaggregated by grade level. The self-study might show that the frequency of those practices decreases as students move from sixth to eighth grade. Why is that? Do the eighth graders not need the same level of classroom practices that the sixth graders need? Such questions can arise from self-study trend data.

Another example concerns professional development. A self-study might ask principals and teachers to list what types of professional development they find most useful. Usually school administrators think about professional development for the entire staff of a school. However, in middle grade schools when half the staff is elementary certified and the other half is secondary certified, are professional development needs going to be the same across the board? No. Then why would a school pick one set of professional development opportunities for everybody, across the board? Through self-studies responses can be disaggregated so that data shows what the elementary certified teachers feel they need versus what the secondary certified teachers feel they need. I guarantee there will be differences.

Another example relates to student expectations. A self-study might ask students about their expectations. Questions might include: “Do you think you’re going to make the honor roll; do you think you will graduate from high school; what are your parents and teachers’ expectations for you? In our data over the past ten years, students generally report that their parents have higher expectations for them than their teachers do. How can all children learn, if expectations of their teachers are not as high as that of their parents or of the students themselves?

Finally, self studies can be useful in obtaining additional funding. In order to capitalize on new opportunities, schools will need data to write good grant proposals that specify their needs. The studies can provide information about needs for an after-school program or professional development and many others.

There are additional matters to consider when initiating self studies:

- If schools decide to purchase self-studies from third-party vendors, they need to be savvy shoppers. School officials should read the consumer reports version of educational literature and learn what products are best suited for them. They need

to know how the data will be presented back to them and decide if it will be useful.

- Confidentiality is a critical issue in self-studies. If teachers do not believe that data is confidential, and often anonymous, their responses will not be very reliable.
- The most important aspect of collecting self-study data is what schools do with it. What is the action plan? In too many principals' offices I have seen self study data notebooks holding the window or door open or be misplaced. If there is no action plan for how self-study results will be used, it will be a waste of time to conduct it.

In summary, self-studies are a great way to gather much additional data about schools. They can be specific or broad. A school defines the perimeters. The data from self-studies can also be linked with other data collected under the NCLB Act and student outcome data. Self-study data can be used to identify challenging areas to focus on.

The data also can be used as a resource to provide additional evidence of success. School officials are rarely good at public relations. They often take a lot of hits when achievement data appears in the newspaper because they are not pro-active in thinking about how to use data and do not go on the offensive.

Questions and Answers

Question: Where are the “teeth” in the NCLB Act that will ensure the expectation of parent involvement? There is one percent of money for parent involvement in Title I. My question is: How do you get districts and schools to focus on using this money or other resources to ensure that people know how to use the data when they get it?

Answer from Mapp: This concerns many of us. While there is language in the Act around parent and community involvement and getting report cards to families, we in this room will have to be the “teeth.” We must be very active in disseminating information about these requirements. Recent research on new parent organizing groups around the country shows they are doing just that. They get key information to families so that they can hold their district’s “feet to the fire.” It is incumbent to get this information into the hands of community activists so that they can then use it at school board meetings and start asking questions about “Where are our report cards?”

Response from Audience: The real challenge is getting the resources to run with it. The Pritchard Committee in Kentucky has done this for 20 years. It is very hard work. Educators are going to be very busy implementing the NCLB Act. Informing the public and involving parents is often an after-thought. It will remain an after-thought unless there are some kinds of “teeth.”

Response from Fege: The Pritchard Committee is a beacon, not only of hope, but also of a process of how to go about doing this. The Act is still evolving. The parent involvement pieces are works in progress. The Congress held back on parent involvement. Some of us asked for an enforcement mechanism, either at the state or federal level, similar to what parents have in the confidentiality and privacy act, FERPA, but they held off. They added more parental involvement opportunities.

Only a third of the school districts implemented the parental involvement provisions of the 1994 Title I law. So the answer to your question is: There is not any enforcement mechanism. There may be enforcement down the line. In low-performing schools parents have public school choice for their children to attend other public schools that are not low-performing. Parents also have an opportunity to select supplementary service providers paid for by the school district. If districts do not take the parental involvement provisions seriously, for the next reauthorization Congress may set up something like a compliance office.

From State Middle Grade Program Director to State Superintendent: What I Have Learned About Using Federal Resources to Accelerate Middle Grade Reform

Remarks of Susan Tave Zelman, Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction

I am very appreciative of people who are committed to middle grades education. Working with middle school children is not particularly popular with many people. In fact, many teachers and administrator would like to sprint from them.

As a mother of three kids, not only did I want to sprint, sometimes I wanted to take a hike from dealing with them as adolescents. My children are very closely spaced together. They provided perfect training for being a state superintendent in this era because I can take abuse. I've heard everything. I doesn't matter what you say or do to me!

My family experience helped give me a passion for middle grades reform. I became director, along with Dan French, of the Turning Points middle school initiative in the Massachusetts Department of Education. In a sense I was living Turning Points both personally as a mother and professionally as a state associate commissioner and a bureaucrat.

During this period, my three kids all went through middle schools. My first child was the most academic and most compliant. She went through 7th and 8th grades in a very traditional high school setting. It was not inspiring or great, but she was a good student. It was okay.

I was really anxious about my second child who was a classic middle kid and never liked school. It got much worse when she went to middle school. By this time our town had reorganized into the middle school framework. Teachers were in teams and there was collaboration. The state had established Middle School Regional Alliances, so I knew that these teachers were going through high-quality, state-supported, professional development. I hoped these schools would engage my kid.

No such luck. Teachers were now in teams. But when I observed what went on between a child and the teacher in the classroom, I saw that nothing had changed. My son, who followed two years later, had the same experience. It was disappointing.

Education is a continuum for children from birth to three, early childhood from three to eight, middle grades, and then high school. In current discussions about where to put the emphasis in a time of shrinking state resources, the focus is on early childhood education. Research shows early investments make a large difference. This is a good investment.

However, if the most vulnerable children do not have the support in the middle school and an engaging high school experience, they too will be lost. Or they will lose some of the gains that were made by investing early. Politicians and community leaders need to consider a larger system and be advocates for state investments on all aspects of the

system. For example, if middle schools are improved, but high schools not reformed, some students will be lost. It is an incredible disservice to children not to change the mental model of schooling. This is more important than ever because today absolutely all children need to go on to post-secondary education.

Preparing this talk made me very nostalgic. I went back to the 1989 document, “Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century.” Its recommendations are:

- Divide large middle schools into smaller, learning communities.
- Transmit a core of common knowledge to middle grade students.
- Give teachers and principals the major responsibility and power to transform middle grades.
- Prepare teachers of middle grades to teach young adolescents.
- Promote in schools good health of adolescents
- Align families with school staff through mutual communication, respect, and trust.
- Form partnerships among schools and communities in educating young adults.

All these recommendations are about process not results. No one was more important than another. Now after 10 or 15 years, educators are much smarter and realize a focus on process alone is insufficient. There must be focus on results as well. Process and results should be linked in ways that re-invent the way schools look for the 21st century.

The NCLB provides a new vision for schools and builds on the work of the middle school movement. It says success is when disaggregated data finds no relationship between educational achievement, race, socioeconomic class, gender, and geography.

Schools for the 21st century should challenge all students to meet rigorous and reasonable academic content standards linked to engaging curriculum with embedded assessments. These assessments should be used for what Dick Elmore calls “internal and external accountability.”

Schools should:

- Be designed around the needs of children, not the needs of adults
- Emphasize results, not just process.
- Be places where both children and teachers receive the interventions they need to be successful.
- Support teachers rely on their skills, and reward good teaching based upon student achievement.
- Not tolerate persistently low performance by anyone—students, teachers, and administrators.
- Give information to teachers and parents about where students are progressing and where they need special, customized, individualized instruction to improve achievement.

- Operate under an accountability system that is non-punitive and drives improvement and where students, teachers, and administrators hold themselves responsible for achievement.
- Never give up on any child nor let one fall through the cracks and, instead, “do whatever it takes.”

The NCLB Act allows educators to marry process with results and hold themselves accountable for the results. States are trying to reconcile state accountability systems with the federal accountability system in an effective way that supports the success of public schools and teachers.

Ohio educators are also trying to align resources, hold districts and schools accountable, and provide districts and schools with the tools they need to be successful. Such tools include academic content standards broken down grade-by-grade, model curriculum that is engaging, and a state-wide curriculum with embedded assessments that teaches teachers how to evaluate the quality of students work so that they understand the relationship between their own professional practice and student work.

Ohio is developing a regional service delivery and support system. It is working regionally with people who are invested in curriculum or redesign models to develop the high-quality professional development that is needed to implement some comprehensive school improvement models.

There is also state responsibility with regards to the achievement gap. The NCLB Act requires disaggregation of achievement data. Educators must look closely at the data, be honest and frank about it, and discuss strategies about how to close the gap.

State leaders also need to talk about the “opportunity gap”. How do they create and promote learning environments? In most places in the United States, where students live determines what they get in terms of quality teachers, safe schools, or the quality of the school buildings. Ohio is 50th nationally on that measure. How do leaders close the opportunity gap?

Below is a short review of the recommendations in “Turning Points,” their impact after 10 or 15 years of experience, and their relationship to the NCLB Act:

1. Divide schools into smaller learning communities

Ohio, with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is developing a network of urban high schools that are redesigning. But middle schools are not being ignored. Because foundations are working together, Ford Foundation funds are being leveraged with the Gates money to implement Project Grad. Project Grad attends to the redesign of related elementary schools and middle schools feeding into a high school.

Ohio also has invested state and federal money in technology. This is especially important for small, rural communities. Distance learning can provide quality, engaging instruction and helps to reinvent rural schools.

2. Transmit a core of common knowledge to all students.

Standards and curriculum are key. Education is the only institution in our society that has responsibility for developing a cognitive program in a developmentally rational way. Districts and schools need tools to do this well. If I could rewrite the “Turning Points” report, I would emphasize this as the heart and soul of the reform mission.

Some discussions about small schools redesign issues have lost focus. There is more talk about processes and organizations than about alignment among what is taught, expected, and assessed.

3. Transform middle schools through teachers and principal leadership

Educators have learned there must be alignment of state, district, and school action. This includes data analysis and use. It is an acculturation process for people to understand why they are analyzing data. Historically, educators have isolated themselves in little teams or classrooms and never had a school-wide focus. In Ohio, we are using federal, state, and foundation funds to deploy the Baldrige Education Initiative. The seven quality principals of this Initiative help districts, schools, and classrooms look at data and provide a frame.

4. Be prepared to teach

Middle grade teacher certification is a major issue. Ohio revised its middle school licensing requirements in 1996 to require subject matter competency. There are two certifications: in social studies and English or in math and science. While the law was effective for the class of 1998, superintendents are just now realizing that the law has been changed. They are complaining and requesting changes. State officials are using the NCLB Act to show them what is required in terms of teacher competency and teacher qualifications.

The reality is that in most schools teachers beyond the fourth grade do not know the math that they need to teach. Too few understand algebra or science in the upper elementary and middle grades as well as in the high schools. Uncertified teachers or poorly trained teachers are concentrated in urban districts. Unless this problem is solved, the opportunity gap will always exist.

There is also the challenge of inadequate teaching of reading in elementary and middle schools. There is little training for teachers around middle school reading. It is very difficult to teach middle school students to read who never learned how to read in elementary school.

Ohio is using Title II and foundation dollars to initiate pilots of the teacher advancement program (TAP) from the Milliken Foundation. It is a good, professional development career ladder for teachers related to performance. If Ohio can do this, it can be done anywhere because Ohio unions are so strong.

5. Promote good health for adolescents.

Federal safe and drug-free schools money has been very helpful in Ohio. A concern with flexibility under the NCLB Act is that funds can be pulled out of safe and drug-free schools program and put into Title I programs. Ohio supports a network of people through these funds. More than half of the schools have received training in conflict management resolution, and Ohio has good safe school statistics. While flexibility is important, the state does not want to lose very good programs that are in place because of those funding streams.

6. Align school staff with families

Much has been learned about working with families through mutual respect, trust, and communication. With the NCLB Act accountability framework, officials need to educate parents about how to look at school, district and state report cards and how to ask about what they mean for their child and school.

Parents also need help in understanding their rights around school choice. Students should not transfer from one poor-performing school to another poor-performing school. Educators need to engage parents in discussions about quality education in ways that make sense to them and are sensitive to how their culture helps them support their children. Ohio is establishing parent academies, developing parent training materials, and producing information about the academic content standards and NCLB Act requirements.

7. Partner schools and communities in educating young adults.

Many Ohio schools have opened the schoolhouse door and invited in parents and community organizations. Research has demonstrated the importance of mentoring and service learning. Ohio has required for some time that every school have a business advisory council. The state has done a fairly good job in linking school districts with health and human services and the justice system. Some services providers operate in schools.

Schools for the 21st century need to be customized, differentiated, and staffed with caring adults who will make sure that all children succeed. Today's students are saying to us, "challenge me, teach me, care about me, and I will be successful, and I will take care of you in your old age."

National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform

Remarks of Deborah Kasak, Executive Director

The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform is one of the partners sponsoring this conference. The National Forum is a group of educators, researchers, states and regional school leaders, national education associations, and foundation members that are dedicated to improving middle grade education.

Origins of the National Forum began in the 1990s when a group of foundation officials active in supporting middle grade reform started meeting on a regular basis. They decided to broaden their conversation and make it more powerful. The Forum convened for the first time in 1997.

The first meeting was about getting to know each other and the exploration of collective work together. There was agreement about an important message that it was time to up the stakes, work together, and speak with urgency and in one voice about learning what successful middle grade schools are like and what needs to get done. The word “accelerate” was key and appears in the National Forum title.

Some National Forum principles and recommendations have been around for decades. Others push the agenda differently. We concluded that as a group we could move things along faster. Acceleration is very important. Group members have many different organizational affiliations. They are educational leaders very concerned about the academic and intellectual growth of students, improved academics, and the developmental outcomes for students.

The National Forum meets twice a year. Much of its activity rests upon the members’ good will and commitment to work in between meetings through e-mails and subcommittee meetings. One reason for this commitment is the belief that middle grades education is at a significant crossroads. There are still too many schools that say the words “middle school,” or “middle grades education,” but do not exhibit the program, philosophy, or ideas.

Conditions for Middle Grade Results

Early in its discussions, the National Forum identified three conditions for strong middle grades school results:

- Consistency over time. Research has shown that when a school follows middle grade education principles well over time, there is a significant impact on student academic outcomes, as well as other aspects of learning.

- Structural changes are critical, but not sufficient. The structural elements provide opportunities for discussions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are not likely to occur without them.
- Rigorous curriculum, effective instruction, multiple forms of assessment, and targeted, ongoing professional development and pre-service.

The National Forum wants to have an impact upon these important conditions. The challenge around the NCLB Act is to maintain the balance of schools being academically rigorous and excellent, developmentally responsive, and socially equitable for adolescents' learning. The National Forum has explored each of these elements deeply. For example, what does it mean to be academically excellent? The National Forum concluded it means challenging students to use their minds well; providing them with instruction, assessment, and support; and giving them the time they need to meet the academic standards. Academic focus must be balanced with developmental responsiveness. Social equity has been a tougher area for some National Forum members to come to grips with and to figure out how to make it happen in schools.

Action Agenda

The National Forum is designing a common agenda for action. It does not want to replicate what other groups are doing, especially the education associations. Instead of competing, it wants to work together collectively to make its message more powerful. It wants to cut across institutional boundaries and build collaboration. To have a group of such distinguished people agree to this shows that the National Forum members' goal is to mobilize others to take action.

What has the National Forum done that begins to impact middle grade students and schools? It has worked to reshape the national discourse about what makes effective schools by "putting feet" on its vision statement and ideas about academic excellence developmental responsiveness, and social equity. It has built capacity of its members and other people around the country. It is also very concerned about improving practices in schools and classrooms across the country, particularly in schools in urban and rural settings. It wants to tackle tough policy issues and leverage the scarce resources. With the NCLB Act there are more resources available than before and we need to learn how to use them more productively.

Policy Statements

The National Forum has developed three policy statements. The first is a rigorous discussion about grouping of students and the National Forum conclusion that homogeneous grouping of students has a detrimental effect, particularly for students who are in most need? The concise policy statement talks about not being locked into practices and groupings that are so structured that students never have a way to move out and beyond. Another policy statement addresses teacher preparation, licensure, and recruitment. It can help with discussions about what is a highly qualified middle grades

teacher? A third is on high-stakes testing. It says that one single test should not determine a child's future.

How might these policy statements have an impact? For example, in states now looking at teacher preparation issues, National Forum members have distributed the policy statement to State Board of Education members. Other times, district and school officials have accessed information from the National Forum web site. There are other plans as well.

Mini-Forums

To help build capacity, the National Forum may sponsor mini-Forums. The Southern Forum was created and designed to replicate the idea of bringing groups together around a region to become active advocates for their states. The Southern Forum has been in existence three years and its members have thought politically and strategically about how they can impact middle grades in their region. New York City has also started a forum. The National Forum hopes to replicate such regional and local advocacy-building groups across the country.

Training

The National Forum has also produced leadership development training modules. Five modules will be marketed through its member major education organizations. All the training modules have been pilot tested. They are very good at building the capacity of educators to think about leadership and developing strong schools for young adolescents.

Schools to Watch

The National Forum is trying to influence practice by identifying schools that live up to its vision. It identified criteria around the three primary areas. Then through a process of referrals and site visits, it found schools that were on an upward trajectory of fulfilling the mission of the National Forum. These schools are not perfect places, but ones that have made good progress in the three areas. Two years ago the National Forum selected four schools to watch. It is focusing quite intensely on urban and on rural education, believing, quite firmly, that if we can show that the National Forum principles work in those schools, it can happen in any school as well.

The schools to watch can be visited on the National Forum web site. They are Barren County Middle School in rural Kentucky; Jefferson Middle School in Champaign, IL which we classified as a small urban school; Freeport Intermediate School in Freeport, Texas, which was another small urban setting; and Thurgood Marshall Middle School in Chicago. Each of these schools had distinctive strengths. They also had weaknesses, but they had the opportunity to be recognized and investigated more deeply. On the website is a portion of each case study showing how these schools have addressed the National Forum criteria. A more expansive description of the schools will be coming out soon. These schools have gotten much attention from other schools, either in their region or

across the country. The principals often report about the magnitude of calls they receive and requests for visits.

These schools provide good guidance about helping low-performing schools and stand out as schools that made big turnarounds. They refocused attention on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment; strengthened their teams; looked at different ways of governing themselves, and began to look at data at much deeper levels than they had ever done before. They are excellent models of the kind of work that the National Forum advocates for schools across the country.

States to Watch

The next step for the National Forum is to select states that want to replicate the schools to watch process in their states. Seven states applied and three—North Carolina, Georgia, and California—were selected to replicate the process. Recently the leader teams from each state coalition went through an intensive, three-day training about redoing the process in their states. The National Forum hopes to learn enough lessons from them as they select their schools and build capacity in their states to replicate this again in other states. In this way the impact is spread.

Comprehensive Reform Models

At the National Forum's last meeting, there was a discussion about the six comprehensive school reform models that participate in the Forum. It explored what is being learned from each separate model and how the Forum might help the process of working with low-performing schools by promoting social equity in schools. The model providers set aside any competitiveness about the different models, looked for commonalities, and explored ways to work jointly to help the whole movement. It was a beginning conversation.

The National Forum is at the beginning stages of its work. Through the collective actions of all its groups it wants to push the middle grades agenda faster, further, farther, stronger, and better than ever have before. It will advocate changing convention when it needs to be changed, taking on contentious issues, setting the vision for what strong middle grades schools should be, and articulating that pathway to performance.

Summaries of Topic Workshops

Using NCLB Act requirements and Middle Grade Data Artifacts to Refocus Instruction and Improve Achievement

Paul Ruiz, Chief Academic Officer, District of Columbia Public Schools (Former Principal Partner, Education Trust)

[Ruiz' presentation came from the PowerPoint Presentation: Using Artifact Analyses in Middle School to Prepare All Students for a College Ready Curriculum](#)

Using NCLB Act Requirements, Guidance, and Funding to Support High Quality Professional Development in the Middle Grades

Stephanie Hirsh, Deputy Executive Director, National Staff Development Council

Often professional development is more about teacher certification. Educators put resources and funding into recruitment, retention and certification. But this is not professional development.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) has shifted its language. It now refers to professional development as professional learning. Professional learning needs to be made part of the daily professional development plan. It is important to use team time in the professional development process. Successful programs use daily team learning.

Good professional development, as defined in the NCLB Act, must be based on scientifically-based research. Scientifically-based research involves data analysis, sound methodology, reliance on measurements, emphasis on replication, and wide peer acceptance. A NSDC National Advisory Panel has recommended the following criteria when evaluating professional development programs:

- 1) Results measured in terms of student performance
- 2) Well-defined program
- 3) Content specific staff development designed to improve middle grade teachers' content knowledge and/or content-specific pedagogical skills.
- 4) Program replication across schools or within state, district, or regional areas

Most professional development programs do not contain all four elements. When NSDC examined over 500 programs these criteria, only 26 supplied data on all four criteria.

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School and District Leadership for Reform and the Use of NCLB Act Funds

Mary Louise Martin, Principal Mentor, San Diego Public Schools and Former Principal, Wilson Middle School

Wilson Middle School students, despite coming from the highest poverty and crime area in San Diego, California, have made dramatic progress. About 1300 of the 1500 students speak a primary language other than English. Many of the families are recent immigrants to the United States, and are not familiar with the community resources available to them. In such cases, the school acts as the vehicle for parental health care and advice. Wilson is, and has been for 20 years, a Title I school. Two of its four feeder schools are the lowest performing schools in the district.

Wilson Middle School exemplifies the meaning of cultural change, innovation, and commitment to all students becoming successful readers, writers, and mathematicians. The leadership team organizes stage development based on a site designed teacher rubric for instructional improvement. The master schedule reflects a commitment to core academic content and literacy. All operations of the school, from the counseling center to custodial operations, support teaching and learning. Wilson does not have separate special education classrooms or a separate bilingual education department.

Because of its innovative efforts with staff development, assessments, accountability and the master schedule, Wilson has become a demonstration school for superior instructional practices. Literacy has been embedded in every subject and the entire culture of the school reflects a commitment to the highest quality instruction for every student, every period, every day.

This workshop included the staff development model, the teacher rubric for improved instruction, a video presentation on literacy-based classrooms, a discussion of the innovative master schedule, the assessment binder for monitoring students’ progress and teachers’ decisions about instruction, and the organization of support services to keep students in class. A school continuum of the process required to make such changes demonstrates how other middle schools can replicate the success of Wilson’s programs.

The biggest change at Wilson was to put a literacy focus in every classroom, which included leveled libraries, word walls, talking the “talk.” Student participation in classroom discussion was vital to their performance. All teachers are teachers of reading

and writing even in math, science, or social studies classes. The job of teachers is to define the “purpose” of reading for kids.

Research shows that if programs are organized around the following strategies, then all students can become successful readers:

- Read Aloud and Shared Reading in which a teacher models good reading rather than just have students “read aloud;”
- Guided Reading with small-group instruction in which students are divided into similar levels for shared reading/learning;
- Independent Reading which allows for individual assessment of students;
- Learning, Total Group Participation, Practicing Independent Work that involves a mosaic of thought or a variety of skills that teachers can use to access content.

These strategies are about teaching more effectively and delivering content and knowledge as efficiently as possible. Such reading strategies can be used in any classroom and with any content.

The Wilson staff development process evolved out of a need for a global vision. It involves monthly meetings and consultations. The instruction team decided the focus for the year of each staff conference. The staff conferences and meetings are not just about instruction but also about the operation of the school. Staff meets in small groups by subject area and does classroom visits/observations. This allows them to assess what teachers need, where the gaps in teaching are and in what areas, and what strategies seem to be working.

The Wilson Leadership Team includes staff developers in math, science, and genre. They meet at weekly off-campus sites so as not to disrupt teaching. They discuss classroom scenarios and teacher practice and instruction in classrooms, among other things.

Middle School Comprehensive Reform Models That Are Members of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grade Reform Meet

The conference held six workshops on how specific comprehensive middle school reform models meet the NCLB Act requirements. Information on each is available from the models' web sites. The names of the conference presenters and model web site addresses are below.

Atlas in the Middle (AIM)

Nancy Ames, Vice President, Education Development Center, Inc; and Janet Henderson, Assistant Superintendent, Starkville School District, Mississippi
Find Atlas In the Middle at: www.edc.org.

Different Ways of Knowing

Susan Galletti, Vice President, Galef Institute and Rose Molinelli, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, New York City Board of Education

Find Different Ways of Knowing at: www.dwoknet.galef.org.

Making Middle Grades Work

Sondra Cooney, Southern Regional Education Board and Susan Cassidy, Principal, Marley Middle School

Find Making Middle Grades Work at:
<http://www.sreb.org/programs/MiddleGrades/MiddleGradesindex.asp>.

Middle Start

Patrick Montesano, Vice President, Academy for Educational Development and Teri West, Program Officer Academy for Educational Development

Find Middle Start at www.middlestart.org.

Turning Points

Ellyn Feerick, Marketing/Communications Associate, Turning Points National Center and Tim Mattson, Principal, Eastgate Middle School

Find Turning Points at www.turningpts.org.

Talent Development Middle School

*Douglas MacIver and Principal, Senior Research Scientist
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Find Talent Development at <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/>.

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Appendix

Opportunities and Accountability to Leave No Child Behind in the Middle Grades: An Examination of the No Child Left Behind Act

Cynthia G. Brown (Prepared for the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, 2002)