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No Child LEFT BEHIND

THE ACHIEVER

December 15, 2003 • Vol. 2, No. 18

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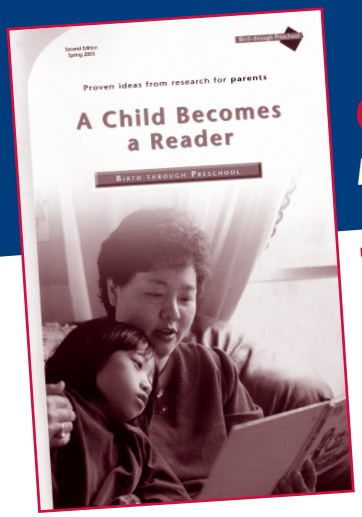
FIRST CLASS

"When it comes to the education of our children ... failure is not an option."

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



GUIDE FOR YOUNG READERS!

Booklet Series Covers Birth to Grade 3

"The road to becoming a reader begins the day a child is born and continues through the end of third grade," writes the authors of two new booklets from the Partnership for Reading. Designed for parents and caregivers to help young children become readers, one publication covers birth to preschool and the other grades K-3.

The booklets, entitled ***A Child Becomes a Reader***, draw from many research studies on early literacy development to reveal how children learn the spoken and written language through common, daily activities. "You don't need special training or expensive materials" in teaching children at home, advise the booklets' authors. The publications offer ideas, which include fun language games along with additional resources, to help parents turn everyday interactions into learning opportunities.

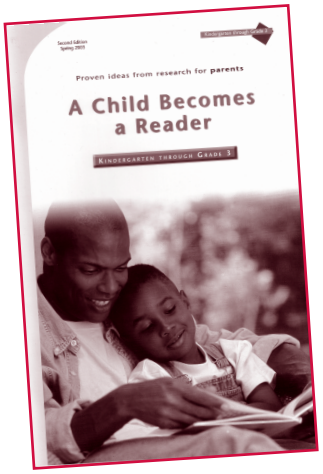
Each booklet of *A Child Becomes a Reader* is age-specific, with the "birth through preschool" edition covering—

- What children should be able to do by age 3 and 5;
- What to look for in day care centers and preschools

The "kindergarten through grade 3" edition examines—

- What children should be able to do by the end of kindergarten and first, second and third grades;
- What to look for in kindergarten and first-, second- and third-grade classrooms.

For an online version of these publications, visit www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading.



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Nation's Report Card Shows Achievement Gap Narrowing

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige said he was encouraged by the latest results in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card, for the performance of the nation's fourth- and eighth-graders in mathematics and reading.

"These results show that the education revolution that *No Child Left Behind* promised has begun," Paige said. "I am particularly pleased to see that the achievement gap is starting to close as African American, Hispanic and low-income students showed some of the most significant improvements."

NAEP is the only ongoing, nationally representative assessment of what American students know and can do in various academic subject areas. This is the first year in which results are provided for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Released last month, the results show significant student progress in mathematics. At the fourth grade, the percentage of students at or above the *basic* level increased from 50 percent in 1990 to 77 percent in 2003, while the percentage at or above the *proficient* mark increased from 13 percent to 32 percent. At the eighth grade, the increases are from 52 percent to 68 percent, and from 15 percent to 29 percent, respectively.

Paige pointed out that the most recent period reveals that the achievement gap in mathematics between white and black students is closing for both fourth- and eighth-graders. He also said the achievement gap between Hispanic fourth-graders and their white peers is narrowing. And with no significant change in the achievement gap at the eighth-grade level for Hispanic students, Paige said "improving scores for these students remains a high priority."

In reading, gains recorded in last year's NAEP results for fourth-graders have held steady. The 2003 scores continue to be well above 2000 and 1998 levels. Some of the most impressive gains were registered by black and Hispanic fourth-graders, whose 2003 scores are also significantly above 2000 and 1998 levels.

Additional information about NAEP is available at http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard.

In Need, Not in Despair

By Steve Holland, *Raymond, Wash.*

Any school that has been identified as needing improvement knows the cauldron of feelings that are stirred up initially. "Why did this happen? Aren't we working hard enough? It's not us, it's the type of kids we teach."

As the new superintendent, I came into the Raymond School District when the high school was starting its third year of a three-year school improvement process. It was necessary to get on board the moving train and to set up a structure that would maintain the momentum when the improvement funds go away next school year. What follows is not meant to suggest that our junior/senior high school has achieved each of its improvement goals, but rather to proclaim that the path to improvement is fraught with opportunity!

Raymond School District is a small rural district approx-

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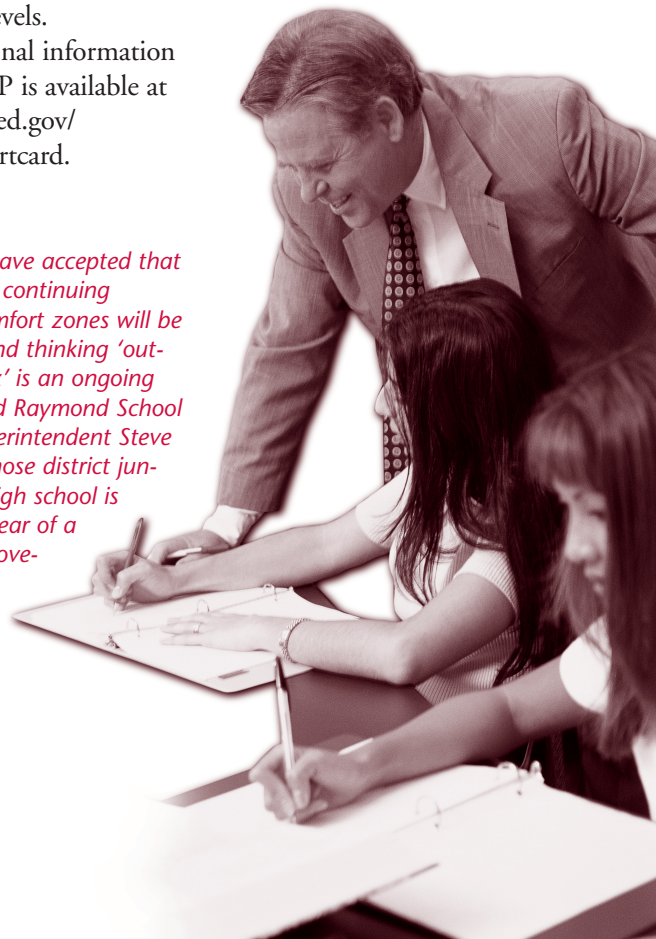

"Teachers have accepted that change is a continuing process, comfort zones will be breached and thinking 'outside the box' is an ongoing reality," said Raymond School District Superintendent Steve Holland, whose district junior/senior high school is in its final year of a school improvement plan.

The Achiever *is published semi-monthly during the school year for parents and community leaders by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs, U.S. Department of Education (ED). Rod Paige, Secretary.*

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For address changes and subscriptions, *contact: ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794, 1-877-4ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827), edpubs@inet.ed.gov.*

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continued from page 1

imately 75 minutes from Olympia, Wash. It serves some 560 students in two schools: a K-6 elementary and a junior/senior high school, grades 7-12. Demographically, 54 percent of its students take part in the free and reduced-price lunch program; approximately one-third of its students are ethnic minorities; and 18 percent of the students receive special education services. The community is very proud of the Raymond tradition and works hard to ensure the schools have what they need. The staff has a high percentage of experienced teachers who grew up in the area and have taught for many years in the Raymond school system.

When the junior high school was identified for school improvement, the principal at the time, Mark Jones, started the process of involving staff in the plan. The entire staff, including teachers, custodians and paraprofessionals, agreed to focus on the mission of the school throughout the development of the school improvement plan. A state team of experts came in to examine the facilities, teaching methods, demographics, learning challenges and every possible item that could impact learning. The team consisted of five people who worked five 16-hour days to gather data through interviews of parents, staff, administrators and students. These interviews led to the gathering of 150 problem areas that were eventually boiled down to four broad areas of focus. Meetings were then held to solicit ideas from students, parents and the community, as well as staff. The goal was to develop a process that allowed us to focus on the following four identified areas: (1) reading, writing and math (required by the state); (2) school safety and climate; (3) increased parent/community involvement in the education process; and (4) raising expectations for students and staff.

With the help of a data expert from one of the state's educational support services, the team created a plan that brought in subject-matter experts and process experts; this help was invaluable. They helped the staff map the curriculum, learn how to teach appropriately to the state standards and adopt a K-12 perspective.

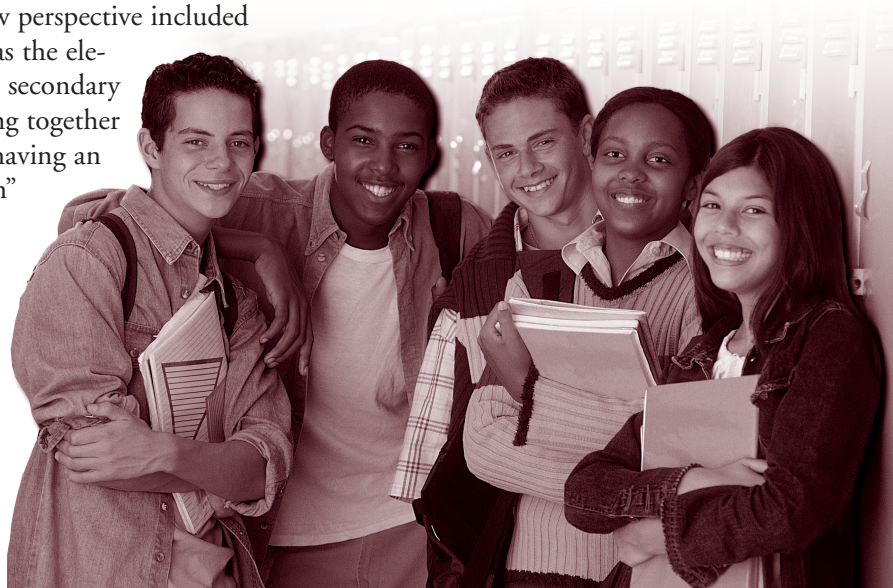
Focusing on the four areas of improvement led to unexpected synergies and positive movement. We received an after-school grant that allowed our students to gain the needed credits for graduation. The subject matter experts taught workshops to the entire staff, whom they continue to mentor. The principal was trained in how to observe new behaviors and how to support staff in the implementation of new ways to conduct business. Marginal teachers improved and excellent teachers became even more enthusiastic. All of these things and more began to slowly change the way everyone looked at the system.

This new perspective included such things as the elementary and secondary people pulling together rather than having an "us and them" attitude. Secondary teachers began to develop an appreciation for what elementary teachers were faced with. Teachers have accepted that change is a continuing process, comfort zones will be breached and thinking "outside the box" is an ongoing reality. Our educators understand that they have taken the first step on a long journey to change the culture, and they are committed to continuing the adventure.

In order to maintain this momentum, we have organized parents, staff, business people, community people and government agencies into a group called the Vision Alive Team. The purpose of this team is to advocate for and ensure continual improvement that will build on what has been accomplished so we hold ourselves accountable for the goals our strategic plan and school improvement process have set. By keeping these key stakeholders involved and informed, we believe the school climate, staff morale and parent support can only continue to improve.

Steve Holland is superintendent of the Raymond School District in the state of Washington. He accepted the position this past July following six years as superintendent of a nearby school district. Formerly, Holland taught high school Russian, English and technology classes.

Raymond staff, parents and other community stakeholders assembled a group called the Vision Alive Team to ensure that the strategies outlined in the school's improvement process will be ongoing.



"Technology … is part of all aspects of education. It helps reach students with reading. It is a tool to provide professional development opportunities for teachers. It is a tool for parents to stay active and be participating partners with teachers. It is not a separate topic or subject area, it is part of how we deliver education."

John Bailey, U.S. Department of Education's director of educational technology, in his remarks during the June 15 broadcast of *Education News Parents Can Use.*

Tips for Parents:

Following are suggestions of what parents should look for in a first-grade classroom. In an effective classroom, literacy instruction should focus on such things as—

Teaching about books and print

The teacher reads aloud to the children often, sharing many different types of books and other print materials. She shows her enthusiasm for reading and her eagerness for the children to learn to read. As she reads, she shows the parts of print such as the beginnings and endings of sentences, new paragraphs and different punctuation marks.

The children are excited about being read to and about learning to read. They recognize the titles of books and ask the teacher to read their favorites. They spend part of the day looking at books or pretending to read books of their choice.

Teaching phonemic awareness

The teacher provides explicit instruction in phonemic awareness. He shows the children how to do phonemic awareness activities and helps them with feedback. The activities are short and fun.

The children practice a lot with phonemes. For example, they clap out the sounds they hear in words (segmentation), put sounds together to make words (blending), add or drop sounds from words (phoneme addition and deletion), and replace sounds in words (phoneme substitution).

Source: Adapted from *A Child Becomes a Reader: Kindergarten Through Grade 3*, Partnership for Reading, 2003.

Close-Up:

No Child Left Behind

Enhancing Education Through Technology

The Educational Technology State Grants Program under *No Child Left Behind* seeks to improve academic achievement through the use of technology in elementary and secondary schools. It is also designed to assist every student in becoming technologically literate by the end of eighth grade and to encourage the effective integration of technology resources and systems with teacher training and curriculum development. The program targets funds primarily to school districts that serve concentrations of economically disadvantaged students; approximately $700 million was appropriated in 2002 and 2003.

While public schools have made huge improvements in providing computer and Internet access, minority and poor students often lack computer access outside of regular school hours, according to two new reports recently released by the National Center for Education Statistics, a component of the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences.

The first report, *Internet Access in U.S. Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994-2002*, which is an annual Department survey, found:

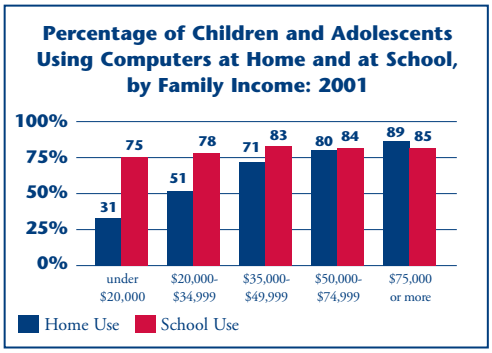
- In 1994, 3 percent of classrooms in U.S. public schools had access to the Internet; in the fall of 2002, 92 percent had access.
- In 2002, the ratio of students to instructional computers with Internet access in public schools was 4.8 to 1, an improvement from the 12 to 1 ratio in 1998 when it was first measured.
- In 2002, 86 percent of public schools reported that they had a Web site or Web page, from 75 percent in 2001.
- Eighty-seven percent of public schools with Internet access indicated that their school or school district offered professional development to teachers in the schools to help them integrate the use of the Internet into the curriculum.

To access the report, visit http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004011.

The second report, *Computer and Internet Use by Children and Adolescents in 2001: Statistical Analysis Report*, shows that although computer and Internet access has become an important component of schoolwork, there are still some gaps:

- Forty-four percent of children and adolescents overall use computers and 42 percent use the Internet to complete their assignments.
- Forty-one percent of blacks and Hispanics use a computer at home, compared to 77 percent of whites.
- Only 31 percent of students from families earning less than $20,000 use computers at home, compared to 89 percent of those from families earning more than $75,000 (see chart for details).

This report can be downloaded at http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2004014.



Source: *Computer and Internet Use by Children and Adolescents in 2001*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003.