



NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals
Published by the NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

Topic Highlighted in this Issue:

Goal 3: Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools

In this Issue:

With demographics that mirror that of many large urban districts, the Department of Defense schools, both overseas and domestic, produce high student achievement and are especially successful with minority students. A new NEGP-commissioned study finds many lessons in DoD for policymakers wanting to improve achievement in minority-student-impacted schools.

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DOD SCHOOLS PROVIDE ANSWERS TO VEXING ISSUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Half of the students qualify as low income, most of their parents have no more than a high school education, and the schools' enrollments turn over frequently. These are factors that have come to characterize the most troubled and lowest achieving schools in the United States. The same descriptions are found in Department of Defense (DoD) schools, but there the similarity ends. Student performance in DoD schools ranks among the highest in the country, and the black-white achievement gap has been significantly narrowed in their far-flung schools.

DoD schools are addressing Goal 3 - that all students will leave grades 4,8, and 12, having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter. In particular, their results meet objective 1, that minority students' performance in each quartile will more closely reflect the student population as a whole.

NEGP commissioned the Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University to study the organization and record of DoD schools. Media coverage earlier this year pointed out that the DoD schools attain higher student performance despite familiar odds.

The 227 schools operated by the Department of Defense Education Activity serve 112,000 students, about the size of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) school district or the total enrollment in Vermont or Wyoming. They are everywhere there is a concentration of military forces, including Europe, the Pacific, and on bases within the United States, and there is even one school in Cuba. Another 600,000 school-age children of active military personnel attend school in public school districts near military installations.

Deputy directors for each of the three geographic areas (Eu-



What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publication requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

rope, Pacific, and domestic) serve under a director. In addition the areas are divided into districts with their own superintendents. There are eight districts in Europe, for example, and 12 districts in the domestic system. The Advisory Council on Dependents' Education, jointly appointed by the Secretaries of Defense and Education, advises the Secretary of Defense and the director. It consists of educators, parents, a DoD student, and members of professional associations and unions.

On average, student enrollment in DoD schools shows the same patterns as many non-military, public schools on the edge. Minority students account for 40 percent of the enrollment, and half of all students qualify for free/reduced price meals. Just as in the public schools, housing patterns determine demographics. On base, families are assigned housing according to rank, and the schools their children attend vary within the same military base on the percentage of low-income children. A school with only a third of students from low-income families may be a neighboring school to one with 80 percent or more low-income students. About 80 percent of the students have a parent who is enlisted, most of whom have only a high school diploma and who live at or near the poverty line.

As can be expected, mobility rates among military families are high. The transiency rate in DoD schools averages 35 percent. On one aspect - single-family households - the DoD schools are at an advantage. These households account for only about 6 percent of all military families, compared to a national rate of 27 percent.

If the DoD school system were a state, its 1998 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) scores on reading and writing would rank it number one in the nation for minority students. The average academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students in DoD schools, according to the 1998 NAEP test scores, is impressive. In 8th-grade reading and writing, these students ranked first or second in the nation. Overall, all DoD students ranked second or third on the average of students scoring proficient or higher in 8th-grade writing and reading.

The DoD schools administer annual Terra Nova tests to all students in grades 3-11; these are norm-referenced achievement tests. A greater percentage of the students score in the top quarter than the nation as a whole; only 7-8 percent score in the lowest quartile. On the DoD writing assessment, a hand-scored essay patterned after the National Writing Project, almost three-fourths of 8th grade students scored distinguished or



The National Education Goals Panel

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Mexico

U.S. Representative George Miller of
California

State Representative G. Spencer Coggs
of Wisconsin

State Representative Mary Lou
Cowlshaw of Illinois

State Representative Douglas R. Jones
of Idaho

State Senator Stephen Stoll of Missouri

proficient (2000 scores). Achievement gaps are evident, but minority student performance is close (67 percent of African American and 71 percent of Hispanic students were proficient or above, compared to 77 percent of white students).

The various assessments are linked with strategic interventions intended to improve schools and stimulate system-wide reform. The assessment systems, according to the study, "are embedded within a coherent policy structure that links instructional goals with accountability systems, supported by professional training and development programs."

The researchers looked at the governance structures, in-school and out-of-school conditions, instructional policies, and administrative practices to form a picture of how the DoD schools operate. They did not draw causal relationships or make comparisons with non-military public schools. They do find, however, certain practices that regular public schools ought to consider emulating if they want to close the achievement gap.

Characteristics of DoD Schools

The DoD schools have a mission. The DoD Education Activity set a goal for 2001-2006 that "all students will meet or exceed challenging standards in academic content so that they are prepared for continuous learning and productive citizenship." To achieve this, it is aligning four functions: promoting quality instruction; supervising and evaluating this instruction; monitoring student performance; and coordinating school and community resources.

The overall environment for this world-wide system of education is a blend of both "top down" and "bottom up" management. The "top" provides a mission, sufficient resources, and regular performance measurements. At the "bottom," local school districts and schools manage their own operations and teachers have the flexibility to create their own strategies to fulfill the mission. This blend embodies the best of what is known about productive school management and operation.

In addition, the DoD schools have:

* Sufficient resources. In the phrasing of the study, "they appear to be adequately but not lavishly financed." In 1999, the schools spent about \$8,900 per pupil, or \$1,600 higher than the national average. This amount is less, however, than is typically spent per pupil in large school systems with high proportions of minority students. DoD schools do not receive monies from federal pro-



grams such as Title I or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Neither do they receive services of a state department of education, as do most domestic public schools. The latter do not include these in their per pupil expenditure, while administrative costs of DoD central management similar to state department services are included in DoD per pupil expenditures.

In addition, teachers are compensated well. Beginning DoD teacher salaries are slightly higher than in regular public schools; compensation for other teachers is on a par for teachers in large school systems. Also, DoD teachers say they have sufficient resources, and school facilities are ample and well maintained.

* Powerful and systematic measurement. Curriculum standards are specified by grade and subject area, and every school and each district receives detailed results from the various assessments. The test results are analyzed in several ways including performance by grade level, gender, and race.

* Targeted, consistent professional development. Staff development primarily reflects school goals and occurs over extended periods of time. According to the study, "when the school, district or DoDEA places a priority on a certain area, well organized training activities are routinely made available to staff." Collaboration among teacher teams and grade levels is a common activity.

* Rich and varied methods. There is no mandated method of instruction, but the high-quality professional development and accountability measures create high expectations for all students. Most schools have limited or no ability grouping or tracking, routinely including special education and lower achieving students in regular classes with extra teacher support. Only a few schools offer honors and advanced classes. The environment seems to be, as one staff member told the researchers, to "expose all of our kids to rigorous courses."

* Small schools. In the researchers' sample, two-thirds of the DoD middle schools were small. The average enrollment of overseas middle schools is 489 and of domestic DoD schools, 489. This compares to a national average for middle school enrollment of 595, but the average for minority students in urban areas certainly is higher.

* Strong student support. DoD schools offer after-school homework programs, tutorial periods, special education, and block scheduling. They are linked to pre-school programs. Moreover, some of the instructional boosts have been in place for a long time, such as writing across the curriculum and a rich literacy environment in middle grades.

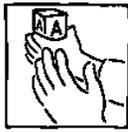
* A strong sense of community. Base neighborhoods tend to have a "village" environment in which there is a culture of wanting to move ahead and to collectively support children's safety and well being. Military commanders expect their personnel to attend every parent-teacher conference, but even more of a factor is the military's emphasis upon education. The more education credits and degrees earned, the more points a person receives toward rank promotion, so children often see their parents as students themselves.

But What About....?

Despite a high mobility rate, children do not get lost in the DoD schools. There is a constancy in their school lives because the education program is consistent and DoD teachers tend to



THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



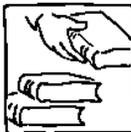
Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



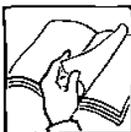
Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

be career teachers who stay in one place 20 or more years, giving stability to the goals and experiences of the students.

Moreover, DoD schools “reflect the critical elements of social capital that include shared values, norms, and attitudes that help promote trust, facilitate open and fluid communication, and produce purposeful and meaningful activities that benefit students and adults alike in schools,” according to the study. Enlisted personnel housing is considered just a cut above project housing, but the students’ out-of-school experiences in military communities are relatively safe and supportive.

Lessons for State and Local Public Education Policymakers

Despite some obvious advantages, the DoD schools’ success in educating students to high standards, especially minority students, includes some lessons for schools and districts across the country. The researchers drew these from their research:

- * Centralized direction-setting balanced with local decisionmaking. State and local policymakers should utilize a management structure that functions as a “headquarters” for created a blueprint for expected student learning and academic performance. Clear directions, goals, and targets are set without dictating methods for achieving results, which creates local capacity and professional confidence. There also is clear accountability. Principals and teachers know what they are expected to do and are held responsible for achieving those goals.
- * Policy coherence, structural alignment, and efficient flow of data. State and local policymakers can begin by adopting a performance-oriented information exchange that is systematic, clear, and comprehensive. States should provide every school and each district with detailed student performance assessment results that are the basis for a school improvement process. The process then coordinates staff development and curricular intervention to the improvement plan.
- * Sufficient financial resources. State and local public education officials must acknowledge the crucial importance of sufficient resources, including competitive salaries, well-maintained facilities, and resources needed to promote school improvement.
- * Staff development. Professional development activities should be job-embedded; consistent with an individual school’s improvement goals; based upon student needs and teacher interests; and modeled, repeated and practiced over a long period of time. It



RESOURCES

“March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools,” Claire Smrekar, James W. Guthrie, Debra E. Owens, Pearl G. Sims, Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University, for the National Education Goals Panel, <http://www.negp.gov>.

For information on the standards, purposes of testing, curriculum and other facets of DoD schools, see <http://www.odeododea.edu>

should be regularly monitored by peers or supervisors and include consistent feedback.

* Small schools. Policymakers should work toward providing students the personalized environments that come from small schools. Ideally, the goals are no more than 350 students in elementary schools, fewer than 600 in middle schools, and fewer than 900 in high schools.

* Academic focus and high expectations for all. States should adopt strategies recommended by researchers, including: a common planning time at each school to cooperatively develop curriculum; a reduced number of specialized programs replaced by an integrated plan to serve students in regular classrooms; targeted student grouping designed to meet individual needs and enable personal relationships; modified school schedules to permit more varied and longer blocks of instruction time; and creatively redesigned roles and work hours for staff to help meet goals.

* Continuity of care for children. State and local policymakers should model standards for pre-schools and youth services after the DoD programs.

* “Corporate” commitment to public education. State and local policymakers should fashion their structures to accommodate working families, and employers also should re-evaluate workplace policies which hinder parent involvement.