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# THE ACHIEVER

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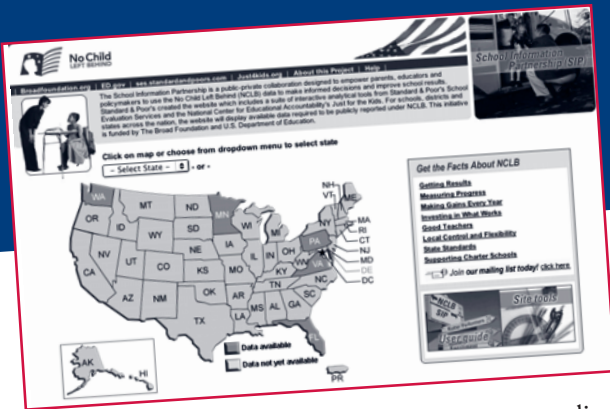
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**FIRST CLASS**



**“When it comes to  
the education of our  
children ... failure is  
not an option.”**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



## **NEW WEB SITE!** **Collecting and Analyzing School Performance Data**

In the quest to find information about the performance of their child's school and district, parents oftentimes have to search multiple Web sites, read numerous written reports and research scattered assessments. The new Web site **www.SchoolResults.org** eliminates such multi-tasking demands. Launched by the School Information

Partnership, a public-private collaborative, this online resource is a one-stop shop of timely and comparable education data on schools, school districts and states nationwide.

The site's data tables display information that is required to be publicly reported under *No Child Left Behind*: adequate yearly progress, reading and math assessments by grade, enrollment and teacher qualifications. A unique feature of this data collection Web site is the suite of interactive analytical tools, which allow users, for example, to create side-by-side comparisons and search higher-performing schools or districts within the state based on selected criteria. The site also includes Web links to getting facts about *No Child Left Behind*.

Data from six states (Virginia, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Washington and Florida) were included in the January 2004 launch. This summer all relevant data for the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia are expected to be available.

The School Information Partnership is designed to give all education stakeholders online resources that will help them make informed decisions about student achievement. Partners include the U.S. Department of Education, Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services, the National Center for Educational Accountability's Just for the Kids, and The Broad Foundation.



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## Reading First Technical Assistance Center Supports States, Districts

To help improve students' reading achievement, the U.S. Department of Education recently introduced the National Center for Reading First Technical Assistance, a new initiative that will offer free training and support to states and districts that have received Reading First grants. Reading First is a key component of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and was designed to improve children's reading skills through scientifically based methods of instruction.

"This new national center," said U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, "... will help ensure that every child learns to read at grade level so none will have to play catch-up later, which is much more difficult."

*"[S]hared decision-making has led to a shared vision," said Dunbar Middle School Principal Lynda Gilkeson, describing the team effort it took to restructure the school.*

*At left, she enjoys a lesson with seventh-grade student Cody.*

*Photography by Damon Moritz*

The national center will include three regional centers that will be operated by Florida State University, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Oregon. The regional centers will provide expertise on improving reading programs using teaching methods proven to be effective.

Administrators and teachers will receive training in scientifically based reading research and instruction; assistance in reviewing reading programs and assessments; critiques of Reading First sub-grant applications and methods of scoring them; and training in using assessment data to improve student reading performance.

Technical assistance will be provided through a range of learning opportunities, including: national and regional conferences, institutes and seminars; training and professional development; on-site, telephone and e-mail consultations; and links to national reading experts.

## Bridging the Gap

By Lynda Gilkeson, Dunbar, W.Va.



I am proud to say that our school has met the adequate yearly progress standards for *No Child Left Behind*. Located 20 minutes outside Charleston, W. Va., Dunbar Middle School has approximately 450 students from highly diverse backgrounds. More than 25 percent are special education students; ethnic minorities represent 32 percent; and 60 percent of the student population receives free or reduced-price meals. Yet, our standardized scores show more than 60 percent of our students above the 50th percentile, with significant increases in the achievement of minority and special education students.

After decades as a traditional junior high, Dunbar recently transitioned to a middle school as part of a countywide restructuring effort. As Dunbar's principal for more than a dozen years, I confess that this total reorganization of program and staff was the most challenging time in my career—and probably in my staff's. We had been a successful school, earning the state's School of Excellence award, with the customary organi-

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Department of Education (ED). Rod Paige, Secretary.

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**For information on ED programs, resources and events,** contact: Information Resource Center, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20202, 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327), usa\_learn@ed.gov.

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zation of English, mathematics and other departments, with which we were all familiar. Needless to say, reorganizing the existing staff and assimilating new teachers into cohesive interdisciplinary teams was difficult.

Over a two-year period of attending classes together for restructuring the school, we slowly committed to a school-within-a-school structure. We revised every element of our program—from mission statement to daily procedures—and physically moved every classroom into grade-level clusters. Our new middle school emerged in 2001 as three self-contained grade-level “schools.” Each has its own area of the building and a

distinctly separate daily schedule. This school-within-a-school structure is critical to Dunbar’s success, providing small, close-knit learning communities and personal working relationships among students, parents and staff.

Each grade-level team is given a certain level of autonomy in developing and implementing its own procedures. Teachers elect their team leaders, who serve as part of the administrative team. With the exception of designated times for meals and arts instruction, they can adjust their daily schedules as needed. Giving up total control was my hardest—but best—decision: shared decision-making has led to a shared vision. It also has developed a new generation of leaders and allowed me to focus more on curriculum.

The academic success of the teams lies within their interdisciplinary focus in which learning is guided by a common theme as opposed to a sequence of seemingly unrelated subjects. The teams meet daily to plan instruction according to the state’s standards, address discipline and confer with parents and students.

Our special education students are also included in the grade-level teams, receiving the same curriculum as their peers. Students are involved, not artificially included, in the total school program, developing lifelong bonds with their classmates. For example, regular

education students are involved daily with special needs students as peer tutors and lunch buddies. They often return during their high school years to work as volunteers with the special education students; one high school junior recently took her profoundly disabled friend as her prom date.

For our African American students, achievement is boosted by uniform and high expectations and by a school climate that celebrates diversity and stresses zero tolerance for inequality. At Dunbar, our minority students are well represented on honor roll and VIP rosters, and in extracurricular activities and student government. Another indicator of success is the ACT scores of African American females, which for one year were higher than for any other group.

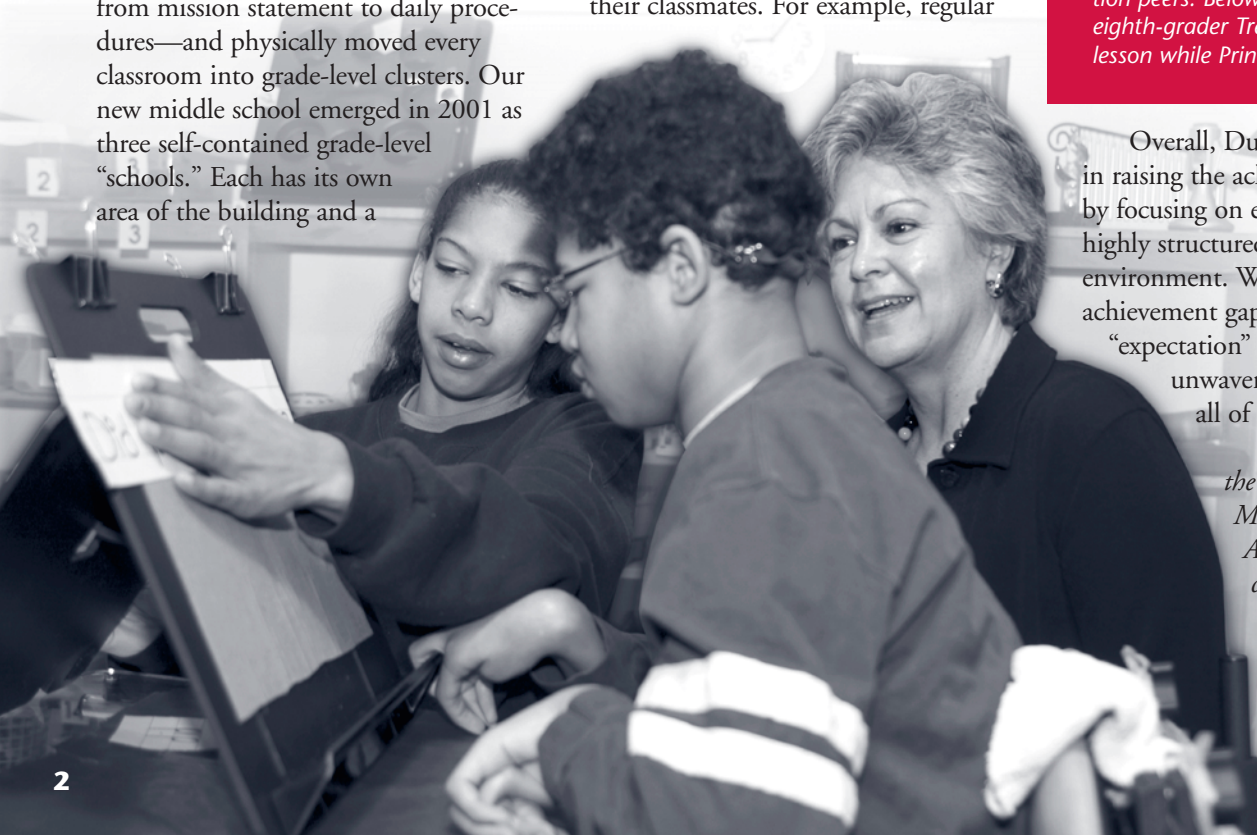
Additional factors in narrowing the gap and raising the achievement of all students are good nutrition and a pleasant learning environment. Our fifty-year-old former high school building defies its age and is generally recognized as the cleanest in our county. Our cafeteria serves an average of 360 breakfasts and 440 lunches daily, which represent the highest participation in the county.



*At Dunbar, special education students receive the same curriculum as their regular education peers. Below, Tia, a peer tutor, helps eighth-grader Trenton with his language arts lesson while Principal Gilkeson observes.*

Overall, Dunbar has been successful in raising the achievement of all students by focusing on essential skills within a highly structured school-within-a-school environment. We are narrowing the achievement gap by eliminating the “expectation” gap and maintaining unwaveringly high standards for all of our students.

*Lynda Gilkeson has been the principal of Dunbar Middle School for 15 years. A former coordinator of community education and teacher of English and art, Gilkeson holds masters of arts degrees in administration and in special education.*



"Educational choice is important for two reasons. First, it extends civil rights and social justice. Second, it enhances school effectiveness. ... Opportunity scholarships help remove the chains of bureaucracy. They free low-income students to obtain a better education in a school of their choosing."

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, in his remarks on the recently funded D.C. School Choice Program, Jan. 28, 2004.



**March 10-12**  
**St. Louis, Mo.**

No Child Left Behind *Leadership Summit*, with keynote address by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, will focus on using technology to empower accountability and assessment. For more information, visit [www.NCLBTechSummits.org](http://www.NCLBTechSummits.org).

**March 16**  
**8:00-9:00 p.m. E.T.**

*Education News Parents Can Use* monthly broadcast will focus on preparing students for the future by improving mathematics and science education. Visit [www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv](http://www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv) or call 1-800-USA-LEARN for details.



## No Child Left Behind Standards and Assessments

Under *No Child Left Behind*, by the 2005-06 school year, states must develop and implement annual assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in grades 10-12. These assessments must be aligned with the states' academic content and student achievement standards in reading and mathematics. States must also develop science standards by 2005-06, and by 2007-08 develop and administer annual science assessments at least once in grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12. These achievement standards and assessments vary from state to state.

At the high school level, for example, some states—including **Tennessee, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Arkansas** and **Virginia**—have designed their standards and assessment systems around particular courses that all students must take (e.g., course-by-course standards for algebra and biology and end-of-course assessments).

Additionally, states have the flexibility to add student "stakes" to their standards and assessment systems. **Massachusetts** requires students to pass the high school assessments as a condition of receiving a diploma. **Colorado** requires students to achieve at certain levels to be promoted to subsequent grades. Student stakes, however, are not a requirement of the law.

Finally, states have the flexibility in the naming of their achievement levels (e.g., basic, proficient, advanced) and the number of these levels. For example, **Kentucky** likely has the most achievement levels, with four general categories—Novice, Apprentice, Proficient and Distinguished—and additional levels within the Novice and Apprentice rankings for a total of eight achievement levels.

## Did You Know?

Since the 1980s, when states began to make the requirements for a diploma more demanding, the percentage of high school graduates completing some advanced coursework in science and mathematics has increased. From 1982 to 1998, high school graduates who had completed advanced science coursework increased from 35 percent to 62 percent, and those who had completed advanced mathematics courses increased from 26 percent to 41 percent.

SOURCE: *The Condition of Education*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002.

educators throughout the country in Washington, D.C. The summit will feature Nobel Laureate Carl Wieman and an exposition of teaching and learning tools.

### Celebrating Science, Math

The Education Department is partnering with the National Science Foundation and other federal agencies and scientific societies to sponsor activities for this year's Excellence in Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (ESTME) Week, March 15-20. The week's celebration is designed to ignite student interest in mathematics and science. Participants are encouraged to partner with local businesses and libraries, for example, or sponsor contests and career programs that draw community attention toward the critical

need of improving student performance in these subjects.

The Web site [www.ESME.org](http://www.ESME.org) includes a variety of promotional materials and ideas for celebrating ESTME week. It also offers an online chat forum, called "Ask a Scientist," in which students can submit questions and receive answers from a host of scientists and engineers.

On March 16, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige will host a Science Summit for mathematics and science

