

New USED Report Identifies Numbers of Low-Performing Schools by State and Characteristics of Low vs. High-Performing Schools, Both of Which Can Be Useful in Targeting States and Schools and Positioning Products and Services©

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In May 2000, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13153 which directed USED to report on initiatives to improve low-performing schools. Some of the findings and data from this report (First Annual School Improvement Report, January 2001) could assist TechMIS subscribers in identifying what states, and in turn what schools, to target, and how to position products and services.

As reported over the last year, most states are having moderate to great problems in getting into compliance with the Title I assessment and accountability mandates in the 1994 reauthorization. Moreover, only about half of the states currently provide external assistance and extra funds to help schools that have been “identified for improvement” in spite of new mandates to do so in Title I legislation using new earmarked funds under “Choice/Improvement” initiatives. The USED report also found that, in 1997-98, only 30% of principals of schools that had been “identified for improvement” for three years said they were provided any extra assistance. Of those schools reporting some assistance, 84% indicated assistance was provided by their school district and 65% reported assistance was provided by the SEA. Only 18% and 14% reported assistance from Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers or Regional Education Laboratories respectively. As noted below, external assistance and expertise is a critical element in turning around a poor-performing school. Perhaps this represents a new service opportunity for firms having such expertise beyond selling products.

The report indicates that, in approximately half the states, there exist two accountability systems --- one to meet state accountability mandates for all students and one to meet the unique Title I assessment mandates --- which continues to create confusion. More confusion would be the case if additional tests were required, such as the NAEP (see related Washington Update story). Interestingly, the report also notes that while all state accountability assessments include reading and mathematics, approximately 23 states in 1999-2000 included assessment in other subjects -- such as history, social studies, and science -- which Title I students must take. Other states are planning to add assessments in these subject areas over the next year. The following states include history, science, and social studies in their state assessments: Alabama, Georgia, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Louisiana, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Virginia. In these states, Title I schools -- particularly schoolwide programs -- should have a need for effective supplemental instructional materials in science, history, and social studies which could help boost Title I student scores on state writing assessments.

The number of schools needing improvement under Title I has risen from 7,600 in 1996-97 to over 8,800 in 1998-99. The variation, however, among the states is considerable from 1% of the schools in Texas to 76% of the schools in Michigan. Moreover, within a state over time, the number of such schools varies significantly as definitions of “adequate yearly progress” change or states’ assessments are used for the first time. Title I schools are “identified for improvement” if, for two continuous years, they fail to meet the “adequate yearly progress” criteria which is defined and/or selected by the state. In Table 2 of the report (see attached), the categories by state for defining Title I “adequate yearly progress” in 1999-2000 are listed. In most states, “adequate yearly progress” includes the criterion of meeting “an absolute target,” usually on a norm-referenced test or making “relative growth.” The report also identifies states in which the primary responsibility for identifying schools needing improvement is at the district level vs. the state level. These include Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington. In these states, the most current list of schools entering low-performance status for the first time, are more likely to be at the district level than at the state level, which usually compiles such lists of schools 8-12 months after they have been identified. While only

30% of all Title I schools have 70% or more poverty, about half of all schools targeted for improvement have 70% or more poverty, which means they are likely to be schoolwide programs. Hence, in these states, sales staff should target large districts with large numbers of schoolwide programs.

In Table 4 from the report (see attached), the number of schools “targeted for improvement” between 1996 and 1998 is listed on a state-by-state basis. In deciding which states to target, one should not only consider the absolute number or percentage of schools “targeted for improvement,” but also: (a) the rigor and number of measures used by the state in defining “adequate yearly progress”; (b) the degree of accountability “teeth,” particularly sanctions, in the state law; (c) the type of test used (e.g., a norm-referenced standardized test for which the firm’s products have been aligned); and last, (d) whether state funds are appropriated to help low-performing schools turn around. Much of this information was reported on a state by state basis in the January TechMIS state profile updates and/or can be found in Quality Counts, January 2001.

Included in the report are seven characteristics of high-performing schools. Citing almost two decades of research, the report states, “if low-performing schools were to emulate these characteristics of high-performing schools, performance would improve.” Several of the seven characteristics could be facilitated or supported by technology-based instructional and administrative solutions, including:

- setting high standards for student achievement and planning and aligning curricula and assessments to those standards;
- creating a safe, orderly environment that allows students to concentrate on academics;
- maximizing time spent on instruction;
- encouraging high levels of parent and community involvement;
- providing flexibility in curriculum design, as well as personnel and finance decisions.

In positioning a variety of products, these characteristics should be carefully considered. For example, an instructional management system which assists in planning and aligning curriculum assessment and standards and in monitoring progress students make toward meeting such high standards should be well received. A school/student management information system which can be used to identify and then prevent harmful activities, and one which monitors student instructional time after school, would also be well received. Classroom and instructional management systems, as well as professional development, which can “free up” teacher time from administrative duties, instructional planning, etc., should be in high demand. For example, the average special education teacher spends only two hours a week instructing students on a one-to-one basis, while spending more than eight hours per week in planning and conducting IEP meetings. On the other hand, two-thirds of a Title I teacher’s time is spent on instruction with the remainder used to coordinate instruction, develop lesson plans, and grade student tests. As noted in the report, one of the major problems in turning around low-performing schools is that they do not have the “capacity to change” even if they have the will. Hence, technology-based solutions which can enhance capacity should be promoted to board members as well as high-level district officials as a critical element in turning around low-performing schools.

In the context of the Bush blueprint reported in the February TechMIS, the report makes several recommendations, one of which is to reduce the number of states with dual accountability systems (which currently exist in about 25 states) which create considerable confusion. The Bush proposal, by adding a sample of students having to take the NAEP, could exacerbate that problem. It also recommends that states be required to submit plans on how they will improve schools identified as low-performing, including the levels of technical assistance and funding, if any; this is one of the key pillars of the Bush proposal. The amount of Federal funding implied in his policy blueprint will have to be increased beyond the proposed FY 2002 budget.

A copy of the report is available at www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/lpschools.pdf.

Table 2

Categories of Defining Title I Adequate Yearly Progress, 1999-2000					
State	Meeting an Absolute Target	and/or	Making Relative Growth	and/or	Narrowing the Achievement Gap
Alabama	x				
Alaska	x				
Arizona *	x	or	x		
Arkansas	x				
California			x		
Colorado					x
Connecticut	x				
Delaware ¹	x	and	x	and	x
Florida	x				
Georgia ³	x			and	x
Hawaii	x	or	x		
Idaho			x		
Illinois *	x			and	x
Indiana	x	or	x		
Iowa	n/a		n/a		n/a
Kansas ³	x	or	x		
Kentucky			x	and	x
Louisiana	x	or	x		
Maine ²					x
Maryland			x		
Massachusetts * ¹	x	and	x		
Michigan					x
Minnesota			x		
Missouri					x
Mississippi *	x	and	x		
Montana	x				
Nebraska					x
Nevada					x
New Hampshire * ²	x	and	x		
New Jersey	x				
New Mexico ³	x				
New York ³	x	or	x		
North Carolina	x	or	x		
North Dakota			x		
Ohio	x	or	x		
Oklahoma	x	or	x		
Oregon * ²	x				
Pennsylvania					x
Rhode Island			x	and	x
South Carolina *	x	or	x		
South Dakota					x
Tennessee *			x		
Texas	x				
Utah	x	or	x		
Vermont ¹			x		
Virginia *	x				
Washington					x
West Virginia	x				
Wisconsin*	x	or	x	and	x
Wyoming ¹			x		

¹ To be implemented 2000-2001.

² To be implemented 2000-2001, pending Federal approval.

³ To be implemented 2000-2001, pending State Board approval.

*Profiles on these states have not yet been fully verified by the state's department of education.

Table 4

Title I Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement, by State						
State	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99	
	Number in Improvement	% in Improvement	Number in Improvement	% in Improvement	Number in Improvement	% in Improvement
Alabama	248	31	26	3	60	7
Alaska	24	12	11	5	8	2
Arizona	42	5	107	15		
Arkansas	101	13	53	7	499	64
California	330	8	1,307	34	1,307	34
Colorado	15	3	13	2	91	15
Connecticut	95	24	102	24	26	6
Delaware	29	26	39	36	32	32
District of Columbia	82	85	60	59	100	80
Florida	29	3	3	0	73	7
Georgia	236	24	537	52	603	59
Hawaii	37	32	77	60	91	66
Idaho	45	12	44	11	14	4
Illinois	93	4	62	2	727	32
Indiana	242	29	257	31	98	12
Iowa	28	4	28	4	148	17
Kansas	147	22	144	21	171	22
Kentucky	356	40	634	73	615	71
Louisiana	30	4	162	19	162	19
Maine	127	31	307	72	†	†
Maryland	59	22	31	8	18	6
Massachusetts	97	12	422	47		
Michigan	641	33	1,048	57	1,523	76
Minnesota	98	11	103	12	*	*
Mississippi	129	19	108	16	100	15
Missouri	551	44	551	44		
Montana	53	9	63	10	62	10
Nebraska	102	21	80	16	204	41
Nevada	64	70	62	69	35	36
New Hampshire	1	0	2	1	4	2
New Jersey	185	16	#	#	#	#
New Mexico	394	81	182	41	149	33
New York	410	16	410	15		
North Carolina	74	8	76	7	46	4
North Dakota	16	6	16	6	20	7
Ohio	680	38	450	22	508	25
Oklahoma	37	3	81	7	31	3
Oregon	29	4	9	1		
Pennsylvania	215	12	204	12	215	12
Rhode Island	23	17	1	1	34	25
South Carolina	88	18	97	20	75	15
South Dakota	10	3	8	2	0	0
Tennessee	118	16	118	16	17	2