

# *Washington Update*<sup>8</sup>

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## **New Center on Education Policy Survey Finds Funding and Other Support For Remediation and Exit Exam Test Preparation Increasing With Significant Growth in Use of Online Delivery**

The CEP fourth annual report on the 26 states which currently use or plan to use exit exams has found that 19 states have developed preparation and remedial materials or programs for first-time takers who fail exams --- up from only 10 states last year. Additionally, more states are using computer- or online-based remediation and preparation, growing from six states last year to ten this year, with likely continued growth in the future. The number of first-time test-takers who failed their exit exams ranged from about 10 percent to 50 percent in reading, with even greater failure rates in math, a finding similar to that reported by states last year. The failure rates for English Language Learners continue to be 30-40 percentage points higher in math and, in some states, even worse in reading. Although similar first-time taker failure rates exist for students with certain disabilities, alternative routes and allowable accommodations have been in place longer and implemented more uniformly so that students with disabilities have been able to graduate with a diploma or other certificate even though they may have failed the state

exit exam. CEP reported that, in 19 of the 26 states, exit exams must be passed by students in order to receive a regular diploma. Students who are enrolled in schools are allowed retaking of exit exams between 2 and 11 additional times; and, in 20 states, students who leave high school without receiving a diploma can retake exit exams multiple times and, if they pass the exit exam, they can receive a high school diploma. The TURNKEY survey of state assessment directors in the Fall of 2004 confirmed that online test retaking of exit exams (including alternative tests for some special education students) and test preparation was, at that time, in the process of expanding quickly.

The CEP report found that, while 17 states require districts to provide remediation for students, only seven states require students to attend remedial programs. In three states that do not require students to attend remediation, those who do not attend are ineligible for waivers or alternative "diplomas." While state policies have basically remained stable, nine additional states reported that, this year, they have provided test preparation or remediation support and/or funding at the state level for the first time. As CEP noted "Growth is especially notable in computer-based and online tools; 10 states now provide these resources, compared with 6 states in 2004." Some of the six states which do not have earmarked state funds for remediation,

such as Indiana and North Carolina and possibly others, report additional funding sources which can be used for remediation and intervention.

In Table 8 of the CEP report (see attached), the types of state supports for student preparation and remediation are highlighted. Of the ten states using computer-based or online delivery for test preparation, eight are in the states that release to the public exit exam test items and answers (e.g., practice tests). As reported by CEP, recent state developments related to remediation and test preparation include:

- Nevada recently restructured its exit exam to allow test forms to be released to the public in September 2005 to allow students to practice on prior tests; has begun using a new computer based remediation program in math;
- Texas is providing interactive practice tests with immediate scoring for students;
- Virginia is expanding online exam tutorials that include a pretest, exercises tailored to student needs, and post-test assessment;
- Arizona has implemented a \$10 million one-on-one and small-group tutoring program for students who fail the AIMS test for the first time;
- New Jersey is modifying its math curriculum after reviewing lackluster student results from its summer remediation program last year;
- Maryland and Ohio are “pushing down” course content and are teaching more advanced topics at lower grade levels;
- Maryland is pilot testing an online algebra/data analysis course which will be used by teachers for instruction and remediation during 2005-06;
- Tennessee recently hired consultants who are familiar with the State’s exit exam to develop and provide professional development for teachers;
- North Carolina has been field testing the use of online adaptive tests with some special education students over the last two years and will likely expand the program in the future;
- Shortly after the CEP survey was conducted, the Alabama SEA announced the availability of a free online tutoring program for any student, grades 4-12, under a state grant at no charge to students.

**Table 8 - State Supports for Student Preparation and Remediation**

State	Practice Tests/ Items	Computer-based Program	Study Guide	After-school Tutorial Program	Weekend Tutorial Program	Summer School	Other	None
Alabama								•
Alaska	•							
Arizona	•	•	•				•	
California	•		•					
Florida	•	•						
Georgia	•		•					
Idaho		•						
Indiana		•		•		•		
Louisiana	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
Maryland							•	
Massachusetts								•
Minnesota								•
Mississippi	•	•	•				•	
Nevada	•	•	•				•	
New Jersey						•		
New Mexico								•
New York								•
North Carolina	•		•				•	
Ohio	•							
South Carolina								•
Tennessee	•						•	
Texas	•	•	•				•	
Utah	•	•						
Virginia	•	•		•	•	•	•	
Washington	•						•	
<b>Total for 2005</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>
Total for 2004	*	6	5	1	1	2	5	12

\*The 2004 survey did not include a category for practice tests or items.

Table reads: Arizona currently provides practice tests or items, computer-based programs, and study guides to students for exit exam preparation and remediation purposes.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from state departments of education, July 2005.

As the CEP report notes, 14 states reported state funding earmarks or set-asides for remediation or test preparation related to exit and other state exams. Four states indicated that no state funds were provided but, in most cases, districts in these states are required to earmark funds for remediation. Seven states, including New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York, did not respond to the question; other sources indicate that, in three states, some level of state funding is available for exit exam preparation or remediation. Recent funding allocations include:

- Washington State legislature has appropriated \$25 million for its Learning Assistance Program to increase achievement for at-risk high school students;
- Texas allocated \$30 million last year to low-performing high schools, but funding projections for next year are being held up in the legislature;
- South Carolina appropriated \$120 million for its state's remedial program across all the grade levels last year;
- Florida reported allocating more than \$600 million for remediation for students who fail any state exam at any level;
- Idaho has appropriated \$5 million this coming school year for remediation at all grade levels;
- Massachusetts has appropriated, for next year, \$10 million for MCAS remediation, grades 4-12, and \$5.5 million for "targeted" interventions in low-performing schools and districts;
- California allocated almost \$160 million last year for remediation in grades 7-12;
- Ohio will provide almost \$6 million next school year for interventions and remediation for ninth and tenth grade students;
- Arizona has allocated \$10 million for tutoring programs for students that fail the AIMS exit exam; however, because actual attendance was much lower than expected, the budget for the next school year includes only \$5 million.

The CEP report concludes, "Overall, the amount of remediation support provided by states appears to have increased substantially since our 2004 survey. In the coming years, as more states attach consequences to exams and as achievement gaps persist, cash-strapped states will face mounting pressure to appropriate more funding for effective remediation materials and programs."

A major challenge to expanded use of exit exams is to ensure their use with English Language Learners is valid, reliable, and fair to students, especially as some states raise (or plan to raise)

passing grade cutoffs on exit exams. As reported in Education Daily (August 17), Jack Jennings, President of CEP, said states “are facing an impending disaster because these students are going to fail exit exams at high rates.” By encouraging states to seek innovative solutions to this challenge, the report states, “New strategies, which are mostly in the research stage, could increase the validity of exit exam scores for ELLs. These include reducing the complexity of the language used in the tests and accounting for cultural factors in scoring test items. New support policies and funding are necessary to improve achievement for these students and can lead to positive outcomes for ELLs.” Examples cited in the report are California and New York, where ELL students who became proficient in English and exit ELL status are more likely to pass exit exams and more likely to graduate than students as a whole.

TechMIS subscribers who are interested in discussing the possible strategies for taking advantage of the increased funding and support for test preparation and remediation, particularly related to exit exams, should contact Charles Blaschke directly.

For a copy of the CEP report go to <http://www.ctredpol.org/highschoolexit/reportAug2005/hseeAug2005.pdf>

## **New USED Non-Regulatory Guidance on Alternative Assessments and Achievement Standards for Students With Significant Cognitive Disabilities Not Only Provides Flexibility for Districts in Key Areas But Also Can Create A Demand for Certain Products and Services**

In August, USED issued Non-Regulatory Guidance as a follow-up to Final Regulations published on December 9, 2003, on the use of alternative assessments and achievement standards for severely cognitively impaired students and the up to “one percent cap” of students who achieve proficiency in the calculation of adequate yearly progress (AYP). As the document makes clear, the Guidance does not apply to the new interim policy of counting “up to two percent of gap students” who achieve proficiency on a different alternative state assessment. The NRG attempts to clarify a number of issues addressed in previous TechMIS reports and points to areas in which needs for certain products and services are likely to increase among most states.

One major issue raised after publication of the original December 2003 regulations was whether “out-of-grade level” or “adaptive” testing could be used as an alternative assessment for students with severe cognitive disabilities, which had been estimated by USED to be between 9 and 10 percent of the 6.5 million students in special education. As the NRG states, “This new guidance however, recognizes that

out-of-level assessments that are administered to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and that meet the requirements of the regulation (as outlined above) may be considered to be alternative assessments based on alternative achievement standards and proficient scores on these assessments may count for AYP purposes under the one percent cap.” Several new conditions have to be met to take advantage of this flexibility, including:

- the state must use a validated standard-setting process to set alternative achievement standards;
- out-of-level assessments must be aligned with the state’s academic content standards and promote access to the general curriculum; and
- students who take out-of-level alternative assessments must be included within the one percent cap for calculating AYP.

Several states, such as North Carolina and Oregon, currently use out-of-level testing and were told initially that their alternative tests would not be allowed as a valid alternative assessment. At least one state previously adapted an ILS vendor’s embedded mastery item tests which were used as adaptive alternative assessments for certain special education students. Virtually all states will be required to request amendments which will be reviewed by the “peer review process” to determine whether the proposed alternative assessments for

cognitively impaired students meet Title I assessment regulations. The demand for computer-based adaptive testing which could be used as alternative assessments for cognitively impaired students should increase in most states in which such needs have not been met.

Another issue is how to count students with serious cognitive disabilities who achieve proficiency on alternative tests in excess of the one percent cap. The December 9, 2003, regulations did allow some flexibility for states to provide certain districts the opportunities to increase the one percent cap slightly under certain conditions (e.g., if a school district had a hospital which treated children with autism who were overly represented in the district’s enrollment). In other instances, USED officials verbally told districts they could “strategically assign” scores of students above the one percent cap to individual schools which would not cause the school to be identified as failing to meet AYP. The new NRG describes several methods which could be used based upon a report from the Mid-South Regional Resource Center entitled Distribution of Proficient Scores That Exceed the One Percent Cap: Four Possible Approaches. After discussing application of different methods in a hypothetical situation, the NRG states, “Thus, each state defines the general procedures for dealing with scores above the 1.0 percent cap at the local level and may make the LEA responsible for identifying which individual scores are to be treated as non-proficient in AYP calculations.” Hence, unless a state specifies one or more specific methods that all LEAs must use, a district could

have greater flexibility than thought heretofore and, indeed, could “strategically assign” student scores in excess of the one percent cap in such a way to minimize the number of schools that will have been identified because of the special education subgroup failing to meet AYP targets.

The new NRG confirms that the key decisions related to students with severe cognitive disabilities are to be made by the IEP team which includes the special education teacher, the child’s regular education teacher, parents, and other staff, as necessary. The IEP team must decide whether the student has severe cognitive disabilities following state-determined criteria, definitions, and/or guidelines. The team also decides whether the student should take the alternative assessment with alternative proficiency levels or another alternative assessment used with “gap students.” In addition, the team also decides the types of accommodations that should be provided so as not to invalidate the results on the alternative assessment. As noted by GAO, as cited in the last Washington Update, IEP team members in virtually all districts are likely to need training in one or more of the following areas:

- analyzing the initial evaluation data to determine whether the student needs to take the alternative test;
- the types of accommodations which are needed but which will not invalidate results;

- the types of “interventions” to be used, particularly in reading and language arts and mathematics, and shortly in science; and
- administering and scoring alternative tests and reporting results.

The NRG cautions districts to ensure quality control over the district-wide IEP process. For example, the guidance recommends that about nine percent of special education students in a district are likely to be severely cognitively impaired and should be provided the alternative assessment with lower proficiency standards to ensure that the number does not exceed the one percent proficiency cap. Another potential problem area addressed in the NRG is for states to ensure that alternative achievement standards are aligned with state academic content standards. The NRG states “Setting alternative achievement standards is the final step in an assessment development process that includes consideration of the content to be assessed, the manner in which student understanding of that content will be demonstrated, the method for scoring student responses/products, and the manner in which student results will be reported.” Without doubt the demand for tools which can assist in this type of alignment of “adaptive tests” with state content standards, may provide a good starting point for certain states which have yet to meet the new requirements for alternative assessments for cognitively impaired students. For a copy of the NRG go to [www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/altguidance.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/altguidance.pdf).

## **New USED Guidance Is More Prescriptive on Allowable Uses of Title II A Teacher Quality Than Earlier Guidance**

Title II A, Improving Teacher Quality, continues to be funded at about \$2.8-\$3.0 billion annually. An earlier Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that approximately two-thirds of the state set-aside funds (about five percent) are spent on one or more types of professional development. Of the remaining funds allocated to districts, about one-third is spent on professional development while the remainder is spent on hiring bonuses, incentive pay, and other means to attract and retain highly qualified teachers, particularly in low achieving schools. The revised NRG appears to be more prescriptive than earlier guidance as stated in the preamble, “This Guidance does not impose any requirements beyond those the law specifies and, where possible, it encourages varying approaches and focuses on what can be done rather than on what cannot be done.”

Reflecting the Administration’s priorities, the new guidance identifies specific activities which can be funded using Title II A funds in the area of professional development. At the state level, the new guidance emphasizes the “significant discretion and authority” which the SEA has to ensure that LEAs improve the overall quality of their teachers. For example, the NRG reminds SEAs to take seriously their “review and approve function” to ensure LEAs meet their goals of having all

teachers highly qualified by 2006. The NRG states that this is a much higher priority than, for example, using II A funds to hire more teachers to reduce class size.

Several allowable SEA activities relate to the use of technology, directly or indirectly. For example, two of the eighteen allowable activities include “developing or assisting LEAs in the development of proven, innovative strategies to deliver intensive professional development activities that are both cost-effective and easily accessible, such as strategies that involve delivery through the use of technology, peer networks, and distance learning” and “supporting the training of teachers and administrators in effectively integrating technology into curricula and instruction.” Activities which technology applications can facilitate include “developing systems to measure the effectiveness of specific professional development programs and activities in order to document gains in student academic achievement or increases in teacher mastery of academic subjects teachers teach.”

While LEA use of technology in teacher training is not explicit in the new guidance, several allowable activities in which technology can play a new facilitating role include: “provide training in improving student behavior in the classroom and identifying early and appropriate interventions to help students with special needs” and “provide training on how to use data and assessments to improve classroom practice and student learning.” The guidance does provide an example of an



activity which is designed to improve the quality of the teaching force as “innovative professional development programs that focus on technology literacy, tenure reform, testing teachers in the academic subject in which teachers teach, and merit pay programs.” In a question related to challenges confronting rural districts in meeting the high-quality teacher requirements, the NRG points to professional development through distance learning, citing as an example the Western Governors University teacher training and certification course which has been partially subsidized by USED grants.

While a district is required to conduct a needs assessment to determine which teachers in which schools should receive priority Title II A funding, the NRG explicitly states that the type of professional development need not address all of the “needs,” but rather should be targeted to those activities most likely to produce positive results in teaching practices and in student achievement. A policy letter sent to the Chief State School Officers by USED in October 2004 which indicated that the ten percent set-aside for schools identified for improvement for the first time need not focus only on teachers in the schools needing improvement. Rather, earmarked funds can be reallocated from such schools to other purposes which have “the greatest need.”

The NRG also confirms that the ten states (Colorado, Delaware, Kansas, Massachusetts, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Vermont) which have EdFlex status have greater flexibility in the use of Title

II A funds, suggesting that such states could transfer Title II A funds to other Titles -- such as Title I -- beyond the up-to-50 percent transferability provision. In its earlier guidance, USED prohibited Title II A funds from being used to provide professional development to “teachers of pullout programs” such as in Title I Targeted Assistance Schools. This revision does not address this issue which suggests such teachers could receive training under Title II A funding.

One continuing issue is whether an LEA can use Title II A funds to purchase supplies or instructional materials that are to be used as part of the professional development teachers receive. The official response now is “Yes, but only if the expenditures, like any cost paid by the Federal program, are reasonable and necessary to carry out these activities.” Title II A funds may be used to purchase materials and supplies used in professional development activities including the materials (such as graphing calculators) that a teacher will need in order to apply the professional development in a classroom setting. On the other hand, if the graphing calculators are being used primarily by students, they are not an allowable cost under Title II A.

One of the problems confronting many districts in states which have state-initiated class size reductions is the limited availability of substitute teachers to cover classrooms while regular teachers are being trained off site. The question is: what happens to unspent Title II A funds? As noted earlier, one option for districts would be to transfer Title II A funds to other programs under

the 50-percent transferability provision; or for districts in EdFlex status greater flexibility exists. On another point about which confusion has arisen, the revised guidance makes clear that Title II A funds fall under the so-called “Tydings Amendment,” which allows a district up to 27 months after receipt of Title II A funding to obligate such funds for allowable activities. An additional 90 days is provided to liquidate all funds from previous obligations.

As reflected in requests for proposals (RFPs) from districts in some states (e.g., Georgia) the NRG merely recites the definition of scientifically-based research as stated in the law as “research that involves the application of rigorous systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs.” SBR requirements also apply to SEA activities which must be supported by documentation which explains why the SEA expects such training to improve student achievement. The question which will increasingly confront professional development providers will be whether the SBR requirements will apply to the content/training approach or to the delivery method (on site vs. online)? In situations where districts have already developed the content and approach, the question then relates only to the nature of online delivery.

For a copy of the revised Non-Regulatory Guidance go to [www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf).

## **New First-of-its-Kind Study Finds SES Afterschool Programs in Chicago Increased Reading Scores Beyond Expectations for Lower Achieving Students and That the CPS-Operated Afterschool Program Was the Most Cost-Effective, Providing a Justification for CPS Once Again to Request that USED Allow the CPS-Operated Program to be Continued Using Title I Funds**

According to an August 2005 draft report, prepared by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Research Office, students who received tutoring in 2004-05 increased their reading scores by slightly more than one grade equivalent, compared to only .8 grade equivalent gain the previous year. Students who were eligible for, but did not receive, tutoring in 2004-05, had previously shown reading gains in 2003-04 significantly higher than those who received tutoring in 2004-05. In 2004-05, students who received tutoring had slightly higher reading gains than did the students who were eligible for, but did not receive, tutoring. Differences between the two groups of students in math over a two-year period were not significant. Of the 60,000+ students receiving tutoring services from 30 outside companies and agencies, almost half (30,000) participated in the CPS-operated afterschool program. Student gains in this program were slightly more than one grade level equivalent, with the cost calculated at slightly over \$6 per

hour. Some of the third-party SES provider gains, which were slightly more than those reading gains in the CPS program, ranged between \$15 and \$20 per hour. A recent discussion with Dr. Steven Ross, a national leader in SES evaluation designs and implementation, confirmed that some of the comparisons between groups, whose composition changed over the two years, could be called into question. However, he concluded that the first-of-its-kind evaluation, which called for a quick turnaround in findings, was indeed “a very good study.” He also agreed that one can question the degree to which reading achievement gains can be attributed only to participation in SES programs.

Beyond the apparent positive results, the Chicago study is important for other reasons. First, the study was conducted by the CPS and not the Illinois SEA. During Congressional hearings in April, CPS officials stated that they plan to conduct their own evaluations of SES providers, partially as a result of having terminated the availability of one SES service provider in seven schools. The new SES guidance (see July TechMIS Special Report) reiterates that the primary responsibility for assessing test scores of students participating in SES programs rests with the SEA. On the other point, the new guidance indicates that the LEA has the right to terminate an agreement between a specific service provider and a parent whose child may not be performing adequately, but not to disqualify the service provider from serving other eligible students in the school. CPS conducted its own evaluation of SES providers to

determine if students were benefiting from the various programs, a critical part of LEA governance responsibility as chartered by the state.

The apparent gains achieved by students participating in afterschool programs, particularly those operated by the CPS, provide an order of magnitude of evidence on the cost-effectiveness of the CPS-operated program. In January 2005, USED formally notified CPS that it could no longer use Title I funds to pay for its SES afterschool program because CPS had been “identified” for improvement, based upon USED Non-Regulatory Guidance developed under the previous Secretary. As noted in the Chicago Tribune, Superintendent Arne Duncan, “has been lobbying for a change because the system’s program is cheaper and allows it to serve far more students.” If USED allows CPS, which is second only to New York City in terms of the number of students participating in SES programs, once again to use part of its 20 percent earmark of Title I funds to continue its afterschool tutoring program, it could establish a precedent for other large urban districts which have been identified for improvement, such as Los Angeles. During the Council of Great City Schools Legislative Conference in March, Secretary Spellings indicated that USED would review district situations on a “case by case” basis taking into account the effects upon student performance.

As a final comment, relations between Federal education agencies and the Chicago Public Schools have a history of being somewhat tense and testy going

back to the creation of Office of Education. During the late 1960s, Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, who was also Assistant Secretary of HEW for Education, threatened to cut off education funding for Chicago Public Schools because of civil rights law violations. As a result of political pressures from current Mayor Richard Daley's father, who was mayor at that time, President Lyndon Johnson convinced Commissioner Keppel to "step down." Depending upon the resolution being negotiated with Chicago, the implications for various firms could be significant, beyond just Chicago.

### **Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Finds Increased Parent Resistance to NCLB Generally and Specific Components Involving Them Directly**

Last year's 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools concluded, "The public disagrees with the major strategies NCLB uses to determine whether a school is or is not in need of improvement. Unless these strategies are modified, there is little reason to change last year's conclusion that greater familiarity with NCLB is unlikely to bring approval." PDK's new report -- the 37<sup>th</sup> -- goes even further stating, "There is also a message in the conclusions related to NCLB in that they note the public's disagreement with the law's strategies and, at the same time, suggest that there is still time for midcourse corrections. Again, we feel

that policy makers would do well to heed the message." Among public school parents, 45 percent feel they knew a "great deal" or "fair amount" about NCLB, up from 37 percent last year. However, among those school parents who know a "great deal" about NCLB, 57 percent give it a "somewhat" or "very" unfavorable rating, up from 20 percent nationally last year. This finding strongly suggests that, as more individuals -- and particularly public school parents -- know about NCLB workings, the more they will view certain NCLB provisions as "unfavorable."

Among all respondents, 79 percent prefer to have additional efforts made in the child's present school to improve student performance, while only 16 percent prefer to have the child transferred to another school. Last year, 14 percent preferred the transportation option. A large percentage of school parents appear to be supporting efforts to improve school performance or provide supplemental education services over parent choice transportation. And, where tutoring is concerned, last year's poll found 60 percent of public school parents preferred tutoring provided by teachers in the child's school vs. 34 percent who preferred tutoring provided by outside agencies. Support for teacher-provided tutoring increased more than five percentage points over the previous year.

In something of an anomaly, the public opposes reporting test scores separately by students' race and ethnicity and other subgroups, but at the same time feels that public schools should be responsible

for reducing the achievement gap between whites and other subgroups. Forty-eight percent of all respondents oppose separate reporting of test scores by subgroups. On the other hand, among those respondents with a “great deal” of NCLB knowledge, two out of three favor separate reporting. Slightly more than two-thirds of respondents believe special education students should not be required to meet the same standards as all other students, and a slightly lower percentage -- 62 percent -- believe these students’ test scores should not be used in determining whether a school is in need of improvement. The respondents are pretty much evenly split about whether a school should be identified for improvement if the only subgroup that fails to meet AYP targets is students with disabilities. On the other hand, respondents with a “great deal” of NCLB knowledge believe that principals and teachers are less willing to have special education students assigned to their schools.

The new poll addressed the current USED policy consideration of using some type of “growth model,” rather than the fixed targets currently used to determine whether subgroups meet AYP. When asked whether student improvement or “fixed-goal” was preferred, the report notes, “eighty-five percent prefer the improvement approach and reject the fixed-goal approach NCLB uses.” A second question sought to find out if the amount of improvement required should vary for schools starting far from the goals and schools starting close to the goals. “Sixty-three percent say that the improvement required should vary. It

does not under NCLB.” Another question addressed who should be blamed, the schools or the NCLB Law, as the number of schools identified for improvement increases. Forty-five percent would blame the schools while 43 percent would blame the Law. However, those respondents who know “a great deal about NCLB” are more likely blame the Law in about two out of three cases. A new question asked whether local high schools should require every student to take at least one course online while in high school to better prepare them for post-secondary education where there is much greater use of online courses. A slight majority of all respondents believe the local high schools should not be required to do so, but public school parents feel even more strongly, with 64 percent preferring no such requirement.

About three-quarters of the respondents feel that the achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students relate mostly to factors other than the quality of schooling received. Yet 58 percent of all respondents, up from 56 percent last year, believe that closing the achievement gap is the responsibility of public schools. In last year’s poll regarding preferred ways of reducing the achievement gap, more than 90 percent of respondents preferred encouraging more parent involvement, providing more instructional time for low-performing students, and strengthening remedial programs for low-performing students.

Following a tradition over the last several years, upon the release of the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll

findings regarding No Child Left Behind, House Education and Workforce Committee Chairman, John Boehner, stated on August 23, “It is disappointing, yet not surprising, that education reform opponents continue to seek justification for the status quo and erect road blocks to reform under the guise of public opinion. Defenders of the status quo are manufacturing excuses to avoid accountability....No Child Left Behind is grounded in solid principles...principles strongly supported by the American public.” Congressman Boehner will step down as Chairman of the Education and Workforce Committee after the next Congressional session. For a copy of the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll go to <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0509pol.htm>.

### **NCES Analysis Describes Characteristics of Public School Teachers’ Professional Development Activities**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has recently released its analysis of the types of professional development activities in which public elementary and secondary school teachers regularly participate. Education researchers have identified a number of features of professional development that correlate with changes in teacher knowledge and classroom practices:

1. focus on teachers’ subject matter content or teaching methods;
2. duration of training;

3. an activity format that is integrated into the teachers’ daily work;
4. collective participation of teachers’ peers;
5. alignment with local standards and teachers’ professional goals; and
6. opportunities for active learning (e.g., observation, planning, practicing, and presenting).

In terms of *focus*, NCES found that elementary teachers (69 percent) were more likely to report professional development focused on content than were teachers with main assignments in English (60 percent), mathematics (53 percent), science (47 percent), or social studies (46 percent). Also newer teachers (i.e., those with three or fewer years of teaching) were less likely than more experienced teachers to report content-focused professional development. Teachers in schools with high (75 percent or more) enrollments of economically disadvantaged students reported more professional development in both content and teaching methods than did other teachers.

NCES also found significant differences in terms of the *duration* of the professional development, although a majority of teachers reported receiving eight or fewer hours of professional development in the previous year. Eighteen percent of teachers reported at least 33 hours of professional development on content compared with ten percent who reported at least 33

hours focused on teaching methods. Elementary (22 percent) and English (20 percent) teachers were more likely to report at least 33 hours of professional development in content than were teachers of mathematics (15 percent), science (16 percent), and social studies (14 percent). More experienced teachers were also more likely than newer teachers to report at least 33 hours of professional development.

With respect to *format*, 95 percent of teachers reported participating in workshop or conference type professional development, compared with 42 percent who reported mentoring, peer observation, or coaching. However, more teachers in high-poverty schools reported participating in mentoring, peer observation, or coaching than did teachers in other schools.

Seventy-four percent of teachers reported collaborating regularly with other teachers on instructional matters. Newer teachers (i.e., three years or less of experience) and secondary teachers were less likely to participate in such *collective participation* activities than more experienced and elementary teachers.

In terms of *alignment* with standards, more than half of public school principals reported that a school improvement plan (59 percent) or state/local academic standards were “very important” influences on the content of teacher professional development activities. On the other hand, only 26 percent of principals said teacher preferences were a “very important” influence.

Although the NCES analysis used data from the 1999-2000 school year, many of the conclusions are still applicable. An Issue Brief on the analysis (NCES 2005-030) is available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005030>.