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# THE ACHIEVER

December 1, 2002 • Vol. 1, No. 6

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**FIRST CLASS**

## Archived Information



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

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

## THE RESULTS ARE IN!

### Reading Scores from The Nation's Report Card



Average scores based on NAEP reading scale, which ranges from 0 to 500.  
Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Results for the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment of the nation's fourth-graders are in—and they show a relatively stable pattern in students' average reading scores during the last decade.

Highlights of *The Nation's Report Card: Fourth-Grade Reading 2000* are available in a full-color publication—replete with graphs—that describes the assessment content, presents major findings and provides information about students' school and home experiences related to literacy. This publication also includes sample test questions and examples of student responses. For a copy, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading>, or call 1-877-4ED-PUBS, while supplies last.

Since 1992, the current NAEP reading assessment has been given in four different years (in 1992, 1994, 1998 and 2000) to a nationally representative sample of fourth-grade students. The most recent sample includes approximately 9,000 students in 433 schools across the country.

NAEP is a project of the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education and is overseen by the National Assessment Governing Board. The results of the reading assessment administered this year to students in grades 4, 8 and 12 will be available in the spring of 2003.



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www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov • December 1, 2002 • Vol. 1, No. 6

## Improving College Programs for Disadvantaged Students

**T**he U.S. Department of Education has announced that 81 colleges and universities that serve a significant number of disadvantaged and minority students will receive \$19.2 million to improve academic programs, facilities, administration and student services.

The grants are awarded under two programs authorized by the *Higher Education Act*: the Strengthening Institutions Program under Title III, Part A; and the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program under Part E.

The Strengthening Institutions Program aims to help eligible schools attract and retain more students by helping the institutions improve their programs and facilities, update technology, increase student achievement and offer faculty devel-

opment opportunities. An eligible school must have a sufficient percentage of financially needy students and have lower budgets than other comparable schools.

The Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program supports long-range improvements in engineering and science disciplines at predominantly minority institutions, which are defined as schools with more than 50 percent minority enrollment. The goal is to increase the number of qualified ethnic minorities, especially minority women, who enroll in school and pursue careers in science and engineering.

For a list of grantees, visit [www.ed.gov/PressReleases/11-2002/11072002a.html](http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/11-2002/11072002a.html).

*“Unless all of us believe that all children can learn, we chart our future tethered to an anchor of mediocrity,” said Simon, quoting the manifesto of Arkansas’ school improvement initiative “Smart Start.”*

## Anchors Aweigh! for a Smart Start

By Raymond Simon, Little Rock, Ark.

**T**he most valuable fringe benefit of my job as Arkansas’ chief state school officer is being able to witness excellence on a daily basis in our state’s schools.

Typical of these successes is Boone Park Elementary School in the North Little Rock School District. Beginning in the fall of 1999, Boone Park, a high-poverty urban school, became a pilot site for a model classroom designed around a school-based literacy coach. The coach was a teacher, trained specifically to work with other teachers on reading and writing instruction, and was present in the classroom every day.

The model targeted first-grade students and followed them over three years keeping them together from the second through fourth grades. Something else followed them as well: an insatiable hunger for reading. When children were asked about their favorite subject, typical answers such as “recess” and “lunch” were replaced by the exuberant

*continued on page 2*



Photography by Karen E. Segrave

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responses of “reading” and “writing”!

Other evidence of the model's success were dramatic gains on both standardized and performance-based measures. By the spring of 2000, the average reading score of these first-graders on the Stanford Achievement Test was 79 percent. “We've never seen test scores at Boone Park like this before!” said Esther Crawford, director of elementary education in the North Little Rock District. On performance-based reading assessments, all children from the model classrooms were reading at second-grade level or above.

What we saw at Boone Park was duplicated in 21 other pilot sites, where student achievement increased 20 percent or higher over previous years. From a total of 988 first-graders, 80 percent approached, met or exceeded the standard in reading during the 2000–01 school year. By second grade, these same students continued to make gains, increasing to 87 percent those who were at or above proficient reading levels. For three continuous years, all sampled schools, where the average poverty rate was 80 percent, had 84 percent of their first-grade children meeting or exceeding proficiency levels in reading.

Our literacy coach model is just one component in a series of efforts to support Arkansas' comprehensive school reform plan. With a laser-like focus on high standards in reading, writing, mathematics and character-centered teaching, we launched the Smart Start Literacy Initiative in May 1998 to give unprecedented support to our teachers and administrators.

The initiative involved 10,000 K–4 educators and 60 full-time school-based literacy coaches statewide. Activities focused on the needs of class-

room teachers, specialized training and support for schools in implementing comprehensive literacy services, including Reading Recovery and early literacy groups for struggling readers in kindergarten through third grade.

The Smart Start initiative, statewide staff development and literacy coach training—coupled with a persistent search for excellence among our teachers and principals—have resulted in the highest level of performance ever by Arkansas fourth-graders on reading and writing exams, according to spring 2002 scores.

Our work has truly been a collaborative effort among literacy specialists at the Arkansas Department of Education, the state's 15 education service cooperatives, and the Early Literacy Training Center at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Smart Start was launched with the following admonition: “Teaching is more for tomorrow than today. Unless all of us believe that all children can learn, we chart our future tethered to an anchor of mediocrity.” Today, however, we can truly say, “Anchors aweigh!”

*Raymond Simon is the director of the Arkansas Department of Education, a position he has held since September 1997. In his 37 years in education, Simon has served as a mathematics teacher, food service administrator, technology administrator and superintendent. He currently serves on the National Assessment Governing Board, which sets policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress.*

*Simon instructs a class of first-graders at Boone Park Elementary, one of 22 pilot sites for the state's literacy coach model, which has led to an increase in student achievement.*



“Those who play semantic games or try to tinker with state numbers to lock out parents and the public stand in the way of progress and reform. They are the enemies of equal justice and equal opportunity. They are apologists for failure.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, in an October 23 letter to state school chiefs on implementing *No Child Left Behind*.

Close-Up:



## No Child Left Behind Teacher Training

Under Title II, Part A, of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program aims to increase student achievement by elevating teacher and principal quality through recruitment, hiring and retention strategies.

Under the law, each state education agency must have developed a plan to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year. The plan must establish annual, measurable objectives for each local school district and school to ensure that they meet the “highly qualified” requirement. In general, a highly qualified teacher has a bachelor’s degree, demonstrated competence in the subject matter and teaching skills, and full certification or a passing grade on state teaching exams and a license to teach. As Secretary Paige suggested in his annual report on teacher quality ([www.title2.org](http://www.title2.org)), states should work to raise their academic standards for teachers while removing barriers that are keeping talented people out of the classroom.

Focusing on what works, the teacher quality program also requires that teacher training activities be based on scientific research, and states must explain how such training activities are expected to improve student achievement. For example, if a state decides to fund interventions such as professional development in math, it must be able to show how those activities are correlated with increases in student achievement.

To help parents make good decisions about their children’s schools, every year principals must attest to whether a school is in compliance with the “highly qualified” teacher requirement, and this information must be maintained at the school and district offices where it must be made available to the public upon request. This information also must be included on the state report cards required under Title I guidelines.

Beginning in the 2002–03 school year, the state must report each year on performance measures that indicate the percentage of teachers who are highly qualified and the percentage of teachers who are participating in high-quality professional development in order to become highly qualified. These reporting requirements include measures such as changes in the percentage of students who are proficient in reading by the end of the third grade and changes in the percentage of students who graduate from high school.

On the Horizon:



January 13  
Denver, Colo.

*White House Regional Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives*. Information on federal funding opportunities, grant-writing techniques and promising practices will be offered. The conference is free but preregistration is required. Visit [www.fbc.gov](http://www.fbc.gov) or call 202-456-6718.

Please Note



For the next few weeks, *The Achiever* will take a break for the holidays. We will resume publication with our January 15, 2003, issue. Happy Holidays to all of our readers!