

# Bringing Diversity And Academic Achievement Together

*Notes From The Panel  
Discussions, 2005 Blue  
Ribbon Schools  
Ceremony*

The Panel Discussion section of the 2005 No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools' Ceremony was structured as a "professional learning experience" through which both panelists and the audience were invited to discuss the challenges of meeting the educational needs of all students in a diverse and multicultural universe.

The seven panels, grouped into one public school assessment and four elementary, one middle, and one high school panel, each comprised a moderator and three or four panelists. Each panelist spoke briefly about his or her school's approach to high academic achievement for all students. Guided by the moderator, the other two panelists responded to these remarks, after which audience members weighed in. All panelists had a final opportunity to reflect on what he or she had learned or was thinking differently about. Panelists were asked to reflect on these questions:



**Elementary Schools.** What teaching strategies, internal assessments and supports, and integrated curriculum ideas have helped all students (English language learners, special needs students, and those working below grade level) achieve high standards? What are some effective communication strategies with parents?

**Middle Schools.** How do middle schools address the diverse academic, emotional, and social needs of students and integrate them into the middle school culture so all students can achieve to high academic standards? What communications do middle schools have with feeder schools and parents to prepare students academically and emotionally?

**High Schools.** What student supports, interventions, teaching modifications, curricular programs, preparation and planning with teachers, and internal assessments drive educational programs that have successfully met the educational needs of all students?

The discussion generated a range of approaches to meeting different students' different needs. The ideas are arranged thematically.

## **A Sense of Belonging**

Creating a sense of belonging and community was a strong feature in discussions of school culture among representatives of this year's Blue Ribbon Schools. In one school, the principal meets every child; some middle schools bring students together often, in assemblies, in monthly "town hall" meetings where students are encouraged to talk, and in voluntary principal-student forums. "Looping," where a group of students stay with the same teacher two or more years, strengthens students' attachment to school and allows both students and teachers know and accommodate each others' styles. In one middle school, social bonding is seen as empowering; students are allowed to talk in the halls and time is available for students to talk with teachers after class. A panelist from a Blue Ribbon high school emphasized the relationship between a student and teacher has to be "real"—not friends, but a relationship between a caring adult and a young person.



The sense of belonging is important to faculty, too, and panelists cited a number of ways their Blue Ribbon Schools build community among educators. A panelist from a high school asserted that the faculty members need to identify and act as a real team even to maintain status-quo, much less to advance. Another declared that recognition and rewards motivate collaboration and help build constructive teams. One high school panelist described how the school brings teachers together to map out curricula. Through this collaboration, teachers get to know each other and make contacts across departments. One participant raised the important role principals play in forming teams; another suggested that administrators who allow teachers to talk freely without administrators further promote a collaborative school culture.

## **Differentiating Instruction**

Individualized attention, extra time on task, and focused instruction are all hallmarks of Blue Ribbon Schools. Several Blue Ribbon elementary schools are guided by ideas of arts-based education and multiple intelligences. Both give students different ways to learn and present academic material. In most schools, students with special needs are integrated with additional support into regular classes where classroom and special needs teachers frequently team teach.

Many schools, elementary, middle, and high schools, extend the school day with after school, summer, and Saturday classes. Schools may use Title I funds for tutors and summer staff. One school's after school program was so appealing that academically successful students stopped doing their homework in order to qualify for the after school programs; the school now offers after school programs to all students with activities suited to students' academic needs. Recognizing that many struggling readers lose ground over the summer, one elementary school offered twice weekly summer school classes to enable targeted reading students sustain

their school-year gains. Another school set a schoolwide reading goal and changed its schedule to allow more meeting time for teachers; its principal meets with every student to reinforce the importance of reading. Many schools embed reading, particularly nonfiction reading, into all academic areas.

A panelist from a high school observed that students rise to high expectations and proposed increasing curricular rigor by adding expectations. A panelist in the discussion on assessment suggested giving teachers student data from the previous year and encouraged teachers to share these data with students to show their progress and to help excite them about learning.

### **Integrating New Teachers**

In Blue Ribbon schools, new teachers are often assigned mentors and buddy teachers. In one elementary school, the principal guides the new teachers' orientation and offers personal support, and new teachers meet after school biweekly for ongoing orientation. Another elementary school holds formal, monthly support meetings to help new teachers acclimate. Panelists from elementary schools described frequent staff meetings—one faculty meets four times a month—to build the school culture. One elementary school holds grade-level meetings after school; another circulates meetings of all grade-level meetings to all teachers via email.



### **Professional Development**

In one elementary school, teachers are encouraged to share what they learn in external professional development experiences with their colleagues at school. Typically, teachers are compensated for delivering these professional development sessions to other teachers. Another elementary school offers incentive money for teachers to take part in professional development; teachers are also motivated by state requirements for teacher recertification. Other elementary schools have weekly faculty meetings or lunchtime professional development sessions with a specific professional focus.

### **Involving Parents**

Parent involvement is typically stronger in elementary than in secondary schools. All the comments on parent involvement are from panels of Blue Ribbon elementary schools. Among the ways that schools involve parents in their children's school work are having students write letters to their parents explaining their current class work, organizing goal-setting sessions with students and parents, hosting special parents' nights inviting families to look at math literacy, and holding parent conferences that

show examples of what different levels of student work look like. Such steps, as one panelist explained, help parents develop habits of mind similar to those schools are developing in students.

A number of schools include translators in parents' nights and host multicultural events. One school representative stressed the need for school staff members to "look like" students' parents; another pointed to the need for school leadership to reflect student populations. In order to embrace their students' home cultures, one school hires parents to act as liaisons; another school hires parents to teach other parents, and dedicates a classroom to parents' use. Staff members at one school make home visits.

### **Teaching English to Student Speakers of Other Languages**

Some points raised in the context of parental involvement, such as discussion about the need for school staff to resemble their students' parents, also emerged in discussions of English Language Learning (ELL). Beyond such affirmations of identity, Blue Ribbon Schools strive to infuse ELL strategies into all subjects—including science and gym. Multi-lingual vocabulary lists grace the walls of some Blue Ribbon elementary schools, and Blue Ribbon Schools are using summer programs and English-speaking buddies to help students who are native speakers of other languages integrate into an English language environment.

### **Community as a Resource**

Schools, like other institutions, are embedded in a local context. Blue Ribbon Schools are turning to their communities both as supports and subject matters. Many elementary schools tap local colleges for teaching interns (one school follows up internships with job offers); one elementary school invites local university professors to use its classrooms as practice sites. Other community-school partnerships include using local science centers and museums for out-of-school learning and enrichment.

## Challenge Questions

*Despite their evident successes, Blue Ribbon Schools continue struggle with challenges. Each panelist offered an example of a challenge his or her school was grappling with. Challenges are arranged thematically.*

### *Meeting the Needs of ESOL students*

- How can we maintain the course with an increase in enrollment that will include an increase in ESOL students? **Woodruff High School**
- How can districts and schools address the transient multilingual ELL learners since these children arrive in our community with very little academic knowledge and skills, and they still must pass the NYS tests? **Port Chester Middle School**

### *Working with Limited Resources*

- Schools that succeed in meeting the academic needs of students seem to be penalized by not qualify for different grant monies. What needs to happen and who can make it happen so that our schools may qualify for these monies? **The Science Academy of South Texas**
- Given no more financial resources, how do we include more students in our summer school? **Sunrise Elementary School**
- How can we stimulate more public/ private funds to educate disadvantaged students? **Yonkers PS 29 Elementary School**

### *Developing Teachers' Professional Skills*

- How do we meet the differing professional development needs of our teachers using embedded professional development? **Brown Street Elementary**
- How do you find the time for teachers to collaborate on instruction and help them develop as a community of learners? Especially, how do you help them integrate and become comfortable with new strategies and instructional tools? **Long Neck Elementary School**

### *Involving Parents*

- What strategies can we implement to better educate our parents about what their children should know and be able to do? **Brodhead Elementary School**
- I know that parent involvement is essential to student success. However, all schools have parents with whom it is difficult to communicate. How do schools reach all parents and leave no parents behind? **Chase City Elementary School**

### *Instruction*

- As we look to add rigor to the high school curriculum, how do we provide a curriculum for students functioning at three or more grade levels below grade nine in reading or math? **Dyersburg High School**
- How can our accountability be seamless, that is, clear communication and responsiveness at all levels? **Gautier High School**
- How do high expectations create a positive school environment? **Howard T. Herber Middle School**
- Students still have difficulty making inferences, especially in nonfiction selections. What are some successful strategies that you have used to teach students how to make inferences from fiction and nonfiction texts? **Newton D. Baker School of Arts**
- What strategies can we use to improve our students' science knowledge? **Stono Park Elementary**
- How do we manage scheduling as society requires schools to increase teaching loads? **Delano Elementary School**
- Is it possible to provide rubrics and anchor papers for nationally-designated writing goals and assessments? Could grade-level articulated writing goals and multiple daily content area writing practices be the "magic bullet" for reinforcement of national reading comprehension improvement? **Portola Elementary School**
- How do principals utilize data to inspire and motivate their teachers to modify and employ different instructional strategies that better meet the needs of their students? **Stevens Elementary School**

### ***Reaching All Students***

- Although we have substantial academic gains and have focused on small group and individual instruction, we still do not have 100% of students on grade level. **Sampit Elementary School**
- We feel we have quality instructional materials, highly qualified teachers, and strong intervention plans for struggling students. All students have access to the same interventions, yet we consistently see our Hispanic sub-group fall behind all others across the district. What other strategies might we use to assist this specific population?  
**Hayden Elementary School**

### ***Reaching the Whole Child***

- How can we develop systems for filing information, performing data analysis, and aligning curriculum without losing touch with the total child and his or her emotional needs? **Edna Karr Secondary School**
- Middle school students are faced with turbulent times of academic, emotional, and social growth. What can we do to ease students' transitions into, throughout, and beyond the middle school experience? **Zionsville Middle School**

## Participating Schools



### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PANEL I

Caroline Graves, Brodhead Elementary School, Brodhead, KY  
Hilda Puryear, Chase City Elementary School, Chase City, VA  
Margaret Hapeshis, Sampit Elementary School, Georgetown, SC  
Moderator: Orene Lea, Chesbrough Elementary School, Kentwood, LA

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PANEL II

Jennifer Boettcher, Brown Street Academy, Milwaukee, WI  
Charlynn Hopkins, Long Neck Elementary School, Millsboro, DE  
Patrice Shipp, Delano Elementary School, Memphis, TN  
Moderator: Barbara Clark, St. Mark's Lutheran School, Hacienda Heights, CA

### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PANEL III

Connie Welle, Stono Park Elementary School, Charleston, SC  
Rosemary Schultz, Sunrise Elementary School, Amarillo, TX  
Marilyn Walder, Westchester Hills-Yonkers Public School Twenty-nine, Yonkers, NY  
Moderator: Kathleen Wright, St. Simon the Apostle School, Indianapolis, IN



### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PANEL IV

Linda Reed, Dr. Jesse Hayden Elementary School, Midway City, CA  
Juliane Fouse-Shepard, Newton D. Baker School of Arts, Cleveland, OH  
Susan Freiman, Viers Mill Elementary School, Silver Spring, MD  
Moderator: Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat, Whittier Primary School, Peoria, IL,

### MIDDLE SCHOOL PANEL

Moderator: John Pons, Deerlake Middle School, Tallahassee, FL  
David Zimble, Howard T. Herber Middle School, Malverne, NY  
Michael DeVito, Port Chester Middle School, Port Chester, NY  
Kristy Eisenman, Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville, IN

### HIGH SCHOOL PANEL

James Miles, Dyersburg High School, Dyersburg, TN  
Carmel Grantham, Gautier High School, Gautier, MS  
Karen Neal, Woodruff High School, Woodruff, SC  
Edward Argueta, The Science Academy of South Texas, Mercedes, TX  
Moderator: Dora Kontogiannis, Tenafly High School, Tenafly, NJ



### PUBLIC SCHOOL ASSESSMENT PANEL

Teresa Johnson, Portola Elementary School, Ventura, CA  
John Hiser, Edna Karr Secondary School, New Orleans, LA  
Valorie Tuff, Stevens Elementary School, Dawson, MN  
Moderator: Gretchen Schaefer, Northshore Junior High School, Bothell, WA