

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POLICY AND PROGRAM STUDIES SERVICE
REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

**Evaluation of Title I Accountability Systems
and School Improvement Efforts:
Findings From 2002-03**

BACKGROUND

This report examines the implementation of Title I accountability systems and school improvement efforts at the state, district and school levels. Based on surveys of all states, a nationally representative sample of districts, and a sample of schools,¹ this report presents findings on the implementation of key accountability requirements under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) during the 2002-03 school year. As the first full year that NCLB was in effect, the 2002-03 school year represented a period of transition for state and local educators as they worked to implement accountability systems aligned with NCLB.

FINDINGS

Title I Schools and Districts Identified for Improvement. In 2002-03, 6,000 schools were identified for improvement under Title I, representing 13 percent of all Title I schools nationwide. These identified schools and their districts remain the focus of many of the school improvement requirements under Title I of NCLB.

- **Identified schools.** The Title I schools identified in 2002-03 represent a relatively small proportion of Title I schools (13 percent) and were located in a relatively small proportion of districts (16 percent). Identified schools were more likely to be located in urban and high-poverty districts than in rural and lower-poverty districts. Many were also located in small districts.
- **Districts with identified schools.** Most districts with identified Title I schools had very few identified schools. Over half of districts with identified schools (58 percent) had only one identified school and another 15 percent had only two identified schools.

School Improvement and Assistance for Identified Schools. Efforts to support identified schools, as required by NCLB, were in place in many states, districts and schools. However, not all identified schools received assistance in 2002-03. Thirty-eight percent of schools in the study reported they received assistance from a school support team, principal coach or mentor, or distinguished teacher. In addition, data suggest that factors other than need influenced the assistance schools received.

- **Focus of school improvement efforts.** Many identified schools and their districts reported that they were implementing school improvement strategies consistent with NCLB. Among the study's identified schools:
 - Ninety-three percent reported school planning, as required by NCLB for identified schools.

¹ In 2001-02, the study's sample of identified schools was nationally representative. For 2002-03, the sample is the subset of these schools that continued to be identified in 2002-03.

- Eighty-five percent reported using student achievement data to inform instruction. The percentage of continuously identified schools citing the use of student achievement data as a major focus area for school improvement increased to 86 percent in 2002-03 from 75 percent in 2001-02.
 - Eighty percent reported working to align curricula with standards and assessments.
 - Many also implemented new curricula in reading/language arts and mathematics and/or school reform models (58 percent, 48 percent and 45 percent, respectively). However, these efforts tended to be applied district-wide rather than targeted to identified schools.
- **State and district assistance to identified schools.** Most states and districts reported providing assistance to identified schools, although a third of states did not report having the statewide systems of support defined by NCLB. Many identified schools did not report receiving outside help, which suggests that districts and states may have had limited infrastructure to support identified schools.
- Twenty-eight states organized school support teams, distinguished educators, or both to provide assistance to identified schools. A total of 39 states reported that they also provided other forms of assistance such as professional development and assistance from regional agencies.
 - Nearly two-thirds (61 percent) of districts reported providing support teams, principal coaches or mentors, or distinguished educators to assist identified schools.
 - Nine percent of schools that continued to be identified in 2002-03 were located in districts where neither the state nor the district reported offering any of these forms of on-site assistance.
- **Variation in assistance.** The assistance that identified schools received varied by district characteristics and within districts.
- For example, three-quarters of urban districts (75 percent) provided school support teams, distinguished teachers and/or principal mentors to their identified schools compared to only half (49 percent) of rural districts. Two-thirds (64 percent) of very large districts provided additional full-time staff to support teacher development in identified schools whereas only one-fifth of small districts provided such assistance.
 - Although districts reported providing a range of assistance to identified schools, they seldom reported that they targeted assistance and interventions only to schools identified for improvement, though duration or intensity of types of assistance may have been targeted. Considering 8 technical assistance strategies, including those mandated by NCLB, most districts that provided such assistance to identified schools reported providing the assistance to all of their schools.

Public School Choice and Supplemental Services Under Title I. In many districts where offering Title I school choice and supplemental services to students in identified schools was required in 2002-03, these choices were offered; however, in some of these districts, school choice and supplemental services were not offered for a variety of reasons. Small numbers of eligible students participated in Title I choice and supplemental services in 2002-03, though participation rates were higher for supplemental services.

- **Student participation.** Approximately 1 percent of students eligible for Title I school choice transferred to a different school (18,100 students) and approximately 7 percent of students eligible for supplemental services received services (41,800 students). Seventy-seven percent of districts

offering Title I choice had nine or fewer students transfer. The median number of students receiving supplemental services in the study's schools where supplemental services were offered was 24 per school.

- **District and school implementation.** About two-thirds of districts required to offer Title I choice in some of their schools actually did so. These districts included 84 percent of the 6,000 schools required to offer Title I choice in 2002-03. About half of districts required to offer supplemental services in some of their schools did so. These districts included 58 percent of the 1,300 schools required to offer supplemental services. Districts that did not implement Title I choice and supplemental services as required were predominantly small, rural and poor.
- **Barriers to implementing choice and supplemental services in 2002-03.** For both choice and supplemental services, several factors may have hindered implementation and student participation.
 - For Title I choice, 55 percent of districts required to offer Title I choice notified parents about the choice option after the beginning of the 2002-03 school year. In addition, the numbers of choice options available at the middle and high school levels were more limited (on average, 2 and 1 alternate schools, respectively) compared to elementary schools (with an average of 6 alternate schools available).
 - Limited numbers of supplemental services providers hampered implementation of supplemental services in 2002-03. The median number of providers in districts reported offering supplemental services was 2. Fifty percent of districts required to offer supplemental services cited lack of providers as a challenge to a great extent, and 23 percent reported no approved providers in their area. However, 30 percent of districts said lack of providers was not a challenge.
 - Some factors emerged from parent focus groups that may have contributed to low participation rates, including parents not wanting to transfer their child to another school, concerns about transportation, late and inadequate parent notification and limited choices.

Corrective Actions and Restructuring. Districts have only limited experience implementing the range of corrective actions in NCLB.

- Corrective actions and restructuring were not commonly required in 2002-03. Only 4 percent of districts (about 380) reported having schools identified for improvement for three years or more.
- The most common actions taken by districts were more supportive than punitive, such as extending the school day or year, implementing new curricula and appointing outside experts to advise schools. Less common actions included reassigning or demoting the principal, replacing all or most of the school staff and contracting with a private management company.

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