

**Newport News Public Schools
Supplemental Educational Services Program
Federal Grants Office—Ruth D. Murray, Director
Summary of Testimony before Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary and Secondary Education
April 18, 2007**

Thank you Chairman Kildee and Ranking Member Castle for the opportunity to speak before the Subcommittee. As the Director of Federal Grants in Newport News Public Schools (NNPS), a great deal of my time is spent monitoring and implementing Supplemental Educational Services. As part of the SES Reversal Pilot, during the 2005 and 2006 school years, Newport News Public Schools was allowed to implement SES during the first year of Title I School Improvement instead of Public School Choice. A larger percentage of students, 68% as compared to 5%, have been provided help due to the reversal.

In Newport News Public Schools, we attribute our success with SES to a variety of factors and strategies. We began with the examination of our current attitudes, policies and practices related to school, family and community partnerships. This examination involved teachers, school leadership teams, and members of central office. We approached implementing SES in a systematic way across departments. Working with staff members from academic services, purchasing, public relations, mail services, child nutrition, principals, and federal grants, a SES Plan, master calendar, and implementation timeline were developed. Expectations and responsibilities were clearly defined. We also received a great deal of support from the Virginia Department of Education through numerous training sessions on SES legislation, opportunities to network with school divisions experienced in implementing SES, monitoring

visits, and printed resources for the program such as SES provider contracts, parent agreements and learning plans. Coordinators were readily available for working through problems or issues.

In NNPS, SES facilitators are recruited to manage the SES process in each school. They serve as liaisons among central office, school personnel, SES providers, parents and students. Their responsibilities include scheduling space for providers, maintaining accurate records and reports, recruiting participants, and attending meetings with the Director of Federal Grants to share best practices. Last year, SES facilitators were selected from existing school personnel. Because the added responsibility on existing staff distracted them from their main jobs, part-time facilitators were hired this year for each school. Part-time facilitators were recruited from our retired teacher population, student teachers, and local universities.

Training of our school personnel also is an important ingredient in our recipe for success. The agenda includes an overview of program requirements, Title I regulations and SES non-regulatory guidance, the SES facilitator's role, responsibilities of parents, provider contracts, the availability of supporting funds, a timeline for implementation, and assorted SES forms and documents.

We consider our SES providers partners in our students' success. SES providers are not charged for the use of the school buildings, and they may contract with the school division for transportation services. SES providers must provide criminal background checks, TB tests, and fingerprinting for all tutors. Tutors also receive training with district supervisors on the division's math/reading curriculum and the state standards of learning. Believing there is value in having SES providers and the actual tutors dialoging with parents, teachers, and administrators about academic achievement, SES providers are invited to be on the School Improvement Team in each school. We believe that in order for SES to have a positive impact in the schools and

community, the program can not operate in isolation but must be integrated into the school culture. By bringing providers to the table, school leaders can be sure everyone's goals are aligned.

Rather than rely just on flyers in students' book bags, Newport News uses a variety of strategies to make sure parents are well informed about the SES opportunity. As much as possible we use our existing school culture to support SES participation and recruitment. Open House, Back to School night, parent/teacher conferences, progress reports and report cards, and child study meetings are all used as opportunities to discuss and encourage parents to take advantage of SES. Provider fairs are held in every school and parents are given the tools needed to organize information and examples of important questions to ask providers. The parent application booklet is available as soon as possible after school starts in the fall and contains information needed by parents to contact providers directly. Our SES application is mailed home several times to parents with a stamped, self-addressed envelope; it also is available online and in different languages. A list of parents not returning SES enrollment forms is maintained by each SES facilitator and classroom teacher. The school staff continues to contact parents throughout the year with phone calls, home visits, and/or additional mailings. We encourage participating parents to be "ambassadors" for the SES program and tell their neighbors and other eligible families about the services. Other strategies to support participation are an open enrollment period, SES summer program, assemblies and incentives for students, information displayed on school marquees outside buildings and in newsletters, the superintendent sending letters and meeting with faith community leaders in the community, and an automatic phone dialer system (Parent Link) activated with messages for parents. Regardless of our efforts, some parents are not using SES services. On their children's application forms,

283 parents declined SES services. Reasons included the parent felt the services were not needed, student's schedule would not allow for additional commitments, no transportation, and the family was moving.

The Federal Grants Director meets regularly with SES providers to address problems or discuss issues so the program will operate smoothly. Parents are often good judges of quality. If a SES provider is not providing quality services, not showing up on time for the tutoring, not communicating with the parents, or using inappropriate language or discipline methods, parents will let us know and we will work with the provider to resolve the issues.

Reflecting on our experiences with SES in Newport News, the following changes would, in my opinion, improve the quality and access of SES.

- ✓ Continue to allow schools the flexibility to reverse the order of sanctions in the first two years of school improvement. Supplemental educational services may be offered to eligible students attending Title I schools in improvement in the first year and public school choice in the second year.
- ✓ Target SES funds first to low performing, low income students in Title I schools and then to all economically disadvantaged students.
- ✓ Allow part of the 20% set-aside to be used for administrative costs to implement the programs. The management of the SES and Public School Choice programs is very time consuming and less effective when added to personnel working in existing positions.
- ✓ Continue to allow unused SES set-aside funds to remain in the district for use with Title I schools. Under the best of circumstances all set-aside funds for SES and Public School Choice may not be used.

- ✓ Tutors employed by SES providers who provide direct instruction to students should meet the state definition of highly qualified teachers. This would help to minimize problems which have occurred such as tutors not showing up for sessions, the use of inappropriate language and discipline methods, and only covering homework assignments.

Thank you for your attention. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today.