



LETTERS

Getting the point

Readers say what's getting left behind is a common sense understanding of what constitutes failure and success in schools

Take Closer Look At

Flawed Test System

AS A TEACHER and a parent, the article reporting the Albuquerque Public Schools' test results dismayed me. A cursory reading of the article would give one the clear impression that our schools have "failed." ...

To begin with, most members of the public may not understand the meaning of "Adequate Yearly Progress," which each school must meet under the No Child Left Behind Act. Schools are federally mandated to administer tests in which there are 37 subcategories that the school must pass in order to make AYP. If the school is not proficient in only one of these categories, the whole school does not make AYP.

One of these categories is attendance. For example, if the school has an attendance rate below 95.8 percent, the school does not make AYP and is thus considered a failing school. Does this make sense?

In addition, the percentage of students who need to make a "proficient" level on the test in order to make AYP rises every year. The federal law mandates that by 2014, all students — 100 percent — have to be at the "proficient" level or the school does not make AYP. Think about it — 100 percent proficient. Experience in any field will tell you that this is a statistical impossibility.

Any teacher will tell you that there are many factors that make this impossible. For one thing, students with learning difficulties and those who are intellectually challenged are given the same tests as the students without handicaps. Does this make sense?

The test does not recognize individual student growth — the hallmark of education achievement. For example, if a fourth grade teacher works with a student reading at the first grade level and is able to bring the child up to the third grade level, this would still be considered a "failing" student. Bringing a student up two grade levels in one year should be cause for praise, but under No Child Left Behind that student would be considered failing. Does this make sense?

Another problem with the test is that the student is tested in February for the year's curriculum. Is it realistic to test kids on what they haven't been taught yet? How well do you think they learn if teachers are forced to teach 10 months worth of information in six months? Does this make sense?

I am a teacher at an APS elementary school and I am proud of my school. Students have made huge gains in both reading and math — yet we are still considered "failing." ...

SHARON SHARP

Albuquerque

'No Child' Is Rigged To

Discredit Our Schools

THE LATEST Annual Yearly Progress reports that indicate a failing school system are a fraud and an insult to teaching professionals in our public schools. Anyone who takes a serious look at the structure of No Child Left Behind and AYP will immediately realize that this system was designed to insure the perceived "failure" of the public school system.

Here are a few examples of schools labeled failures and their actual performance according to NCLB standards:

1. Inez Elementary: Met 33 of 37 benchmarks, 89% success rate.

2. Grant Middle: Met 28 of 37 benchmarks, 75% success rate.

3. Highland High: Met 32 of 37 benchmarks, 86% success rate. 4. La Cueva High: Met 35 of 37 benchmarks 94% success rate. 5. Madison Middle: Met 32 of 37 benchmarks 86% success rate. If one looks at the success rate, almost all schools are doing a terrific job! NCLB, as currently structured, is demoralizing and leads to an erosion of public support for our schools.

FRED W. LANCASTER

Albuquerque

'Canned' Teaching Is For Sardines, Not Kids

THE GOAL of reading instruction should be comprehension at increasingly deeper levels of understanding and interpreting text, not to make AYP. Reading First has straightjacketed schools into an assembly-line mentality where "fidelity" to "teacherproof" programs and high test scores take precedence over comprehensive literacy development and true accountability.

Valid assessments use a body of evidence to chart student growth over time and more importantly to demonstrate what students can do with what they've learned. Student involvement in assessment promotes ownership of learning. Nowadays assessments are merely done to students in the name of AYP.

Humans managed to become proficient readers for centuries without Reading First and its sophomoric parent NCLB. It's time to put NCLB and AYP out to pasture and return to studentcentered instruction that is based upon how children actually learn, that honors teachers' expertise, and that uses real literature to teach literacy. Scripts are for actors and canned programs are for sardine factories — they are not for our classrooms.

PRISCILLA GUTIERREZ

Santa Fe

Honeymoon Over For

New Superintendent

OBVIOUSLY SUPERINTENDENT Winston Brooks' honeymoon is over. He is now under attack from Dolores Griego. This suggests that Brooks may be doing something right, which always fires up the school board.

It's a shame that the public schools must follow affirmative action policies, according to Griego, and not hire the most qualified person for each position regardless of the "reflection of the color of people that it serves."

Our school board members would be serving this city more appropriately if they worked within their district encouraging parents to get involved more with the schools. Encourage those parents who need it to meet with teachers, making sure their children go to school, stay in school, do their homework. Just imagine the possibilities if all parents got involved in their children's education. ...

M. ANN LOOK

Albuquerque

College Academy Met

Yearly Progress Goals

I WAS SHOCKED, after seeing the diligence of the staff and students of Early College Academy, to see the front page caption stating "Sandia High School was the only high school in Albuquerque to meet adequate yearly progress this year."

I turned to page D-2 and saw that indeed ECA had met AYP, a reporting error that was not nearly as shocking. The students at ECA sacrifice sports and music programs as well as arts and other common extra curricular activities to work toward their high school diploma and associates degree simultaneously.

Several of the students participate in programs such as the licensed practical nursing program, the pre-med program or

other classes including architecture, computer animation and business law. Omitting the accomplishments of these determined students and the supportive staff at ECA is a grievous error.

NANCY REIMANN

Albuquerque



