

**Report to the
Joint Legislative Education
Oversight Committee on**
*Revising the School Accountability Model
for the ABCs to Include a Closing the
Achievement Gap Component*

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Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

Revising the School Accountability Model for the ABCs to Include A Closing the Achievement Gap Component

Background

State Department of Public Instruction

Over the last two years the state of North Carolina has aggressively tackled the long-standing issue of closing the achievement gap. The State Superintendent, Mike Ward, said the state has ethical and economic reasons for closing the gap. "The gaps are persistent, and it's our moral obligation to do all that we can to close them."

The state superintendent issued a call to school administrators, parents, and communities across the state to find the will to close the achievement gaps between students and to challenge all students to reach higher expectations set under the ABCs of Public Education and by the new Student Accountability Standards. With the support of the State Board of Education (SBE), he unveiled his Ten-Point Plan for Closing the Minority Achievement Gap at the April, 2000 "Closing the Achievement Gap: Improving Minority and At-Risk Student Achievement Conference."

In May of 2000, the State Board of Education (SBE) approved/endorsed recommendations to close the achievement gap and challenge all students to higher levels of performance. At the recommendation of the State Superintendent, the SBE

- adopted a policy statement that supported setting growth goals across all levels to assure that children at every performance level improve academically and that all students experiencing difficulty get help to reach proficiency and beyond;
- endorsed the creation of a permanent advisory committee to address the issues of higher standards and closing performance gaps by race, gender, certain disabilities, and socio-economic status (North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps); and
- endorsed establishing a section within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to provide technical assistance to schools and school systems to help close the gaps and assure progress at all levels of performance (Closing the Achievement Gap Section at DPI).

General Assembly

The General Assembly has provided key legislation in the past two years to address the closing the gap issue as well. In 1999-2000, Section 8.28.(c) of House Bill 1840 required the SBE to produce an annual Minority Achievement Report Card based on data the SBE collects from local school administrative units and individual schools. Also, Section 8.28.(d) required the SBE to develop guidelines to enable the formation of a local task force in each local school administrative unit. The purpose of this task force is to advise and work with the local board of education and administration on closing the gap in academic achievement and on developing a collaborative plan for achieving the goal.

Special provisions in the 1999 budget of the North Carolina General Assembly established legislation to provide for a pilot program to test and evaluate a revised school accountability model for the ABCs to explore ways of going beyond existing standards for school growth and status. Section 8.36 of the special provisions required that the SBE establish a pilot program in up to five LEAs “for the purpose of determining whether revisions in the present accountability model... are likely to result in more students demonstrating mastery of grade level subject matter and skills... For purposes of the pilot program, the State Board shall disaggregate student performance within designated demographic groups or designated student performance level groups or both.”

During its last session, the General Assembly established legislation to include a “closing the achievement gap” component in its measurement of educational growth in student performance for each school (Senate Bill 1005 Section 28.30.(a). “The ‘closing the achievement gap’ component shall measure and compare the performance of each subgroup in a school’s population to ensure that all subgroups as identified by the State Board are meeting State standards.” Section 28.30.(b) “required that the State Board shall report its plan to include measurement of ‘closing the achievement gap’ in educational growth in student performance for each school to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee by January 15, 2002.”

United States Congress

In December 2001, members of the House and Senate reached agreement resulting in reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). One such reform effort pertained to closing the achievement gap. “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic standards and state academic assessments. This purpose can be accomplished by... *Closing the achievement gap between high and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers...*”¹

Results of Previous Reports

Two reports were presented to the SBE in December 2001 addressing the issue of closing the gap. The North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps appointed in the summer of 2000 was charged with advising the SBE, the State Superintendent, and local school systems on “ways to close the number of gaps that exist in student achievement outcomes and student participation rates in advanced classes.” The Commission recommended that the SBE adopt a closing the gap component to the accountability model that sets a universal standard and sets measures and incentives at the school district level. In terms of closing the gap, the Commission encouraged the SBE to look beyond the ABCs model to other approaches that may be better suited to meeting the goal of closing the gap (e.g., California and Texas).

The ABCs Pilot program report showed the program stimulated some improvement in students’ mastery of grade level subject matter and skills. However, because it was not a randomized research study, the Pilot study did not provide strong proof that revisions in the current accountability model would necessarily result in more students demonstrating academic improvement in the future. Nor did the study address whether the Pilot Program model revisions would be the best revisions to include in a future modified accountability model.

¹ H.R. 1, *No Child Left Behind Act*: Title I-Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged (2001, p.18). President Bush was expected to sign H.R. 1 during the week of December 17, 2001.

Recommendations in the report were to discontinue the ABCs Pilot Program at the conclusion of the 2001-2002 school year, and use the results of this report in combination with the above mentioned report to formulate a method to include a closing the gap component into the ABCs for the 2002-2003 school year.

Plan of Action

Staff at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will explore the ways of including a closing the gap component in the current ABCs model and/or develop a closing the gap model based on models that have proven successful in other states and input from various groups reflecting the diversity of the state. (See Appendix for list of groups involved in the process). DPI will utilize information from past and present reports on the issue of closing the gap. (These reports are included in the appendix).

Opportunities for input will be made periodically through SBE meetings and other public meetings. In addition, public input on developing the model for including the closing the gap component will take place at both the 2002 Accountability Conference in February, and the 2002 Improving Minority and At-Risk Students Achievement Conference in March.

Issues

The ABCs pilot program implemented in five LEAs geographically representative of the state, used school-based growth standards in each of ten subgroups of students defined by ethnicity, socioeconomic status or prior achievement level. Awards were provided to schools that met growth standards in all applicable subgroups. However, the results of the pilot study were inconclusive in terms of how effective this strategy would be to raise achievement and close gaps. In addition, the report by the North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps recommended that *the SBE adopt a closing the gap component to the accountability system that sets a universal standard and sets measures and incentives at the school district level. In terms of closing the gap, the Commission encourages the SBE to look beyond the ABCs model to other approaches that may be better suited to meeting the goal of closing the gap.*² Both of these reports bring to bare additional issues to address in developing a closing the gap the component for the state's accountability program. These issues are:

1. How should school-based accountability standards be revised?
2. How will the subgroups be defined?
3. Will some or all of the same subgroups used in the Pilot program be included, and/or other subgroups added?
4. Should other measures be added (i.e., participation rates in advanced classes and suspension rates)?
5. What will be the significant number of students needed in each subgroup?

² The North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps (2001 p.15).

6. How will weighting be used for each subgroup so that schools will not be penalized for not having student representation in a particular group?
7. Will the focus be on K-8, as was the case with the Pilot Schools, or will high schools be included? Depending on the model design, some performance indicators may be appropriate for K-8, while others would be more specific to high schools. Current ABCs model in high schools is not readily adapted to subgroups.
8. How will growth for the subgroups be defined? For example, the North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps recommended that 95% of all ethnic/racial and socioeconomic groups reach grade level proficiency by the year 2010. However, the current ABCs model defines growth as changes in average scale scores.
9. Will a school have to meet or exceed its growth **and** meet or exceed each subgroup's growth to be eligible for incentive awards? Will expected growth be set the same or differently for both schools and subgroups of students?
10. Will it be necessary to include the 'closing the gap' component in the Administrative Procedures Act (APA) prior to implementation in the 2002-2003 school year? The APA requires approximately six months for approval in writing the new policy, which means the process will not be completed prior to the start of the 2002-2003 school year.

Closing the achievement gap is a complex undertaking requiring numerous technical decisions, as well as substantive policy decisions. These questions illustrate the challenge it will be to include a closing the gap component in the state's accountability model by 2002-2003.

Timeline

A tentative timeline has been established for the 2001-2002 school year to schedule meetings and discussions with various groups on how to develop a model that includes a closing the gap component. The timeline also shows other events related to model development and refinement. The revised accountability model will be presented to the SBE and the Joint Education Oversight Committee consistent with the requirements set forth in the legislation.

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Tentative Timeline

Date	Activity/Event
January 9, 2002	Submit report to the SBE for approval
January 15, 2002	Report sent to Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee (JLEOC)
January, 2002	Meet with groups within DPI, NC Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps, and various advisory groups for input on model development
February, 2002	Gather research from consortiums within the state and states that have successfully implemented a closing the gap component in their accountability model
February, 2002	Hold a panel discussion on "closing the gap" at the 2002 Accountability Conference.
February, 2002	Provide information on model development to the North Carolina Education Research Council of the Education Cabinet
March, 2002	Follow-up meeting with groups identified at the January 2002 meeting
March 15, 2002	Utilize information presented by the North Carolina Education Research Council of the Education Cabinet to the JLEOC on its review of findings and reports to close the achievement gap
April 8-10, 2002	Present an overview of the model at the 2002 Improving Minority and At-Risk Students Achievement Conference for feedback
April, 2002	Meet with DPI and consortium groups to finalize the model
May 1, 2002	Submit draft of including the closing the gap component in the state's accountability model to the SBE
June 5, 2002	SBE approves model for including a closing the gap component in the state's accountability program
June 15, 2002	SBE reports to the JLEOC regarding the model for including a closing the gap component starting with the 2002-2003 school year
August, 2002	Closing the Gap component is implemented statewide for 2002-2003
September, 2003	Subgroup Performance on end-of-grade and end-of-course tests are analyzed to assist policymakers in gauging the progress and status of minority achievement in North Carolina's public schools, and to measure the effectiveness of the model.
October, 2003	Findings of the analysis are presented to the SBE.
November, 2003	SBE reports to the JLEOC in regard to the progress made during the first year of implementing the 'closing the gap' component in the state's accountability model. ³

³ Reading equating study of old and new tests from July through August will cause a delay in reporting ABCs of Public Education results for 2003.

Appendix

Listing of Organizations Involved with Revising the School Accountability Model for the ABCs to Include a Closing the Achievement Gap Component

Division of School Improvement staff at DPI

Closing the Achievement Gap Section staff at DPI

The Division of Accountability Services/Reporting Section staff at DPI

The North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps appointed in the summer of 2000 and charged with advising the SBE, the State Superintendent, and local school systems on ways to close the number of gaps that exist in student achievement outcomes and student participation rates in advanced classes.

North Carolina Education Research Council of the Education Cabinet report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee on its review and findings of studies and reports to close the achievement gap (Section 8.28.(i) HB 1840).

Historically Minority Colleges and Universities Consortium was formed, in partnership with DPI, to expand partnerships among public school systems, families, businesses, community-based organizations, and the faith community to identify resources and strategies to close the achievement gap of minority students.

A Research Consortium composed of The Center for Child and Family Policy, Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy Duke University and General Administration of the University of North Carolina Researchers from East Carolina University, North Carolina Central University, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Reports on Minority Achievement Gaps

The North Carolina Commission on Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps first report to the State Board of Education on December 5th, 2001.

Results of the 2000-01 ABCs Pilot Program to Test and Evaluate Revised School Accountability Model for the ABCs Plan on December 5, 2001.

Minority Achievement Gaps in North Carolina, the Southeast, and the Nation. Research provides understanding of the achievement gap (April, 2000).

Minority Achievement Report: Trends in Subgroup Performance aims to assist policymakers in gauging the progress and status of minority achievement in North Carolina's public schools, facilitate the comparison of the academic achievement of racial/ethnic students in North Carolina with that of peer groups in the nation, and apprise the public of the status of academic achievement among various racial/ethnic subgroups in North Carolina (August, 2001).

Closing the Achievement Gap: Views from Nine Schools. A research unit at DPI identified a set of relatively high performing high minority schools, and their preliminary investigations have highlighted the role of district officials and policies played in the success of the schools (August, 2000).

