

## **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAM**

**DR. HENRY JOHNSON:** Hello, I am Henry Johnson, Assistant Secretary for Secondary and Elementary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. I am pleased that you have joined us for this webcast on school improvement. I have worked in the field of education for over 30 years as a Teacher, a Principal, Associate State Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction in North Carolina and a State Superintendent of Education in Mississippi, and now, as Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. As a result of these experiences, I came to the U.S. Department of Education convinced that capacity building to help district and schools improve student achievement is one of the most critical issues facing states.

My experiences also indicate that people in the education community are poised to do whatever is necessary to help their states, districts and schools to be successful. What they are looking for, are the strategies and tools that will help them to reach this goal. The U.S. Department of Education, State Education agencies, local school districts, and schools, all share a common vision of improved student achievement. This vision is founded on the principles of alignment, of standards, resources, assessment, professional development and accountability and with high expectations for student achievement for all students.

We know what makes a difference. Work done by the education trust suggests that a rigorous curriculum combined with excellent teaching and a regular use of challenging tasks with proper assessments and small learning environments truly makes a difference for all students. We know, but we can control as educators. We can control the quality and nature of the curriculum; the quality of teaching, the quality of leadership, the quality and alignment of assessment both summative and formative. We also know that improvement strategies must be tailored to the needs of individual states, school districts, and even schools. One of my top priorities since becoming assistant secretary has been to help make the U.S. Department of Education a more effective partner with States as they work to develop the capacity needed at our levels to meet the needs of their most at risk schools and districts. I hope the information in these webcast reinforces your knowledge about the range of tools available to help you strengthen your own capacity, to improve teaching and learning in your districts and schools.

Now, I would like to introduce you Jacqueline Jackie Jackson, Director of the Student Achievement and School Accountability Program. Dr. Jackson is responsible for the administration of over \$13 billion in Federal Programs designed to promote improved achievement in schools that serve low income children. She will talk more about the work her office does and the focus of this and other webcast in this school improvement series. Thank you.

**DR. JACKIE JACKSON:** Dr. Johnson, thank you for your thoughtful and thought provoking comments. You have provided us with some key ideas and you have also shared with us a vision that can help to focus on efforts to increase student achievement.

My office is responsible for administering several education programs from some of the grant programs that include title one per day even start mechanivental (ph) education for homeless children in youth program, and the Neglected and Delinquent Program. The Student Achievement and School Accountability Program also administer several discretionary grant programs, including the Early Childhood Educator Professional Development Program, the

Early Leading First Program, The Tribal Events Tied Program and The Enhanced Assessment Grant Program. Many other key requirements of “No Child Left Behind” are in Title One including the school improvement requirements that will be discussed today. One of our key school improvement responsibilities is to help States develop and expand their capacity to help districts and schools that are in improvement, corrective action or restructuring.

As I have talked to state title one directors’, parents, state chief school officers and others, it has become clear to me that many states and districts face similar issues. Schools that are not making adequate yearly progress, continue to look for solutions that will lead to improved student performance. All States and Districts are trying to respond to the needs of their schools in improvement, corrective action or restructuring. The webcast you are participating in today is the first of four. The student achievement and school accountability program, we’ll be doing on school improvement.

Through these Web cast, we hope to show that improving student achievement, making AYP and sustaining school improvement efforts are achievable goals.

Our first Web cast provides an overview of school improvement and a discussion of what can be done to make these efforts successful. Today, we will hear from Bill McGrady, Group Leader for the instructional change group in the title one program, about the title one school improvement requirements. He will be joined by two experts, who have been actively involved in school improvement efforts over the past several years and who will share their extensive experiences with us. Future webcast will focus on corrective action and restructuring, the last steps in the school improvement process, parental involvement, one of the keys to success in any school improvement effort and using diagnostic assessments to improve student achievement.

During this and other webcast, you will hear from State and Local personnel who have found success in improving districts and schools and have been able to maintain these successes over time. More than simply implementing critical improvement strategies, these individuals have taken steps to ensure that the strategies they have implemented meet the needs of all students in their districts and schools. Through these Web cast, we hope to show that true school improvement involves a number of people working at different levels over an extended period with a shared purpose.

School improvement must also be seen as more than simply raising test scores. It means changing the culture and climate of schools. It means, providing a rigorous curriculum that is aligned to a State’s assessment program. It means providing meaningful, ongoing professional development that ensures that teachers and other staff have the necessary tools to improve student learning. It means using all the data that is available in a meaningful way to inform classroom instruction. It means actively involving parents in the planning and operation of the schools’ activities. It means ensuring that leadership is clearly focused on the school’s mission of improving achievement and preparing students for the future. It means ensuring that schools are staffed by qualified, committed and caring teachers and staff. It means not making excuses, but rather finding solutions. It means ultimately, that it is really all about improving teaching and learning.

And lastly, it means a shared commitment at all levels, school, district, state and federal to strive for excellence and equity. I hope you find that this and subsequent webcast helpful as you plan and implement school improvement plans wherever you might be.

With that, I'd like to turn it over to our Panel for their comments and discussion on school improvement.

**BILL MCGRADY:** Hello and welcome to the student achievement and school accountability webcast on school improvement. My name is Bill McGrady and I'll be the moderator for this segment of the webcast. I'm a group leader for instructional change, with the student achievement and school accountability program at the U.S. Department of Education.

Today we're going to talk about the school improvement requirements of "No Child Left Behind," and how some states and districts are responding to the needs of their schools, their own improvement, corrective action, and restructuring.

I am joined today by Dr. Joseph Johnson Junior, Executive Director for the National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University and Dr. Elise Leak, Social State Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform Services with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

This segment of the webcast will include a brief overview of Title One school improvement requirements and timelines, some tools that are available to assist in school improvement efforts and an informal conversation that addresses key issues on this topic in a question and answer format.

I will begin by briefly reviewing the key elements of the school improvement timeline. I'll highlight a key point for each year of improvement to set the stage for a later question and answer segment, Title One schools that do not make Adequate Year Progress or AYP, for 2 consecutive years and an improvement at the beginning of the third year. These schools must offer public school shows to all students. They must revise their school's improvement plan and the district must offer technical assistance. Schools that do not make AYP for a third year, they went to year two of school improvement. Schools in year two of improvement must offer additional tutoring referring to in "No Child Left Behind" is supplemental educational services to all students.

Schools that do not make AYP for a fourth year and enter corrective action, and are required to implement one or more of the required corrective actions in "No Child Left Behind." Schools that do not make AYP for a fifth year must begin planning for restructuring. And finally, schools that do not make AYP for a sixth year must implement the Alternative Governance Plan that is developed during the previous year. And there are some tools that are available to States, districts and schools to assist in improvement efforts.

There are the revised school improvement plans that schools in improvement must develop, including the required 10% professional development set aside. Schools choosing to be designated as "School Ward Rights (ph)" Programs have the additional flexibility available to them as school wards. Any schools use the "School Ward" plans they have developed, to guide activities used to upgrade the entire operation of those school. Schools -- usually they are poverty schools -- choose to focus their Title One dollars on meeting the educational needs of the most "at risk" students and these students are referred to as "Target of Assistance" schools.

Schools also rely on scientifically based research that guides curriculum and instruction, as well as using comprehensive school reform strategies that have an impact on the entire operation of the school. Each State also has in place a statewide system of support and distinguished educators to assist districts and schools with their improvement efforts. Keeping

these tools in mind, I'd now like to ask Dr. Johnson to share his observations regarding the school improvement process that's based on his extensive work in the area of school improvement.

**DR. JOSEPH JOHNSON:** Good Morning. It's a pleasure to have this opportunity to be a part of this discussion about the school improvement process. So often, our schools engage in school improvement; there is a consideration of how do you make this work? How do you make it such that school improvement becomes a real improvement? Because so often, school improvement doesn't result in better achievements for students -- and we see that happen in particular when the goals are vague, when there isn't a sense of why we're doing this. So often, schools enter into the school improvement process simply as a matter of compliance. The goal for them is to do school improvement as opposed to improving academic achievement.

Sometimes, the problem is that there's insufficient attention on improving the core of curriculum instruction, relationships and learning. Sometimes it's as if the school improvement is all about other aspects of the educational system that may be important, but are peripheral to the real issues of improving teaching and learning. As well, sometimes school improvement fails when insufficient attention is focused on motivating people to really engage in the hard work that's required to implement improvements. And sometimes, even though we might have wonderful ideas about how to improve achievement within our schools, sometimes we get insufficient attention to building the capacity of everyone involved; leaders, teachers, parents and students. But when it works, we see those four issues addressed splendidly.

So for instance, when it comes to goals, we see that in schools that use the school improvement process exceptionally well, they articulate goals that generate excitement and energy. It's not about compliance. It's about having a positive, powerful impact on the lives of students. The goal is not simply to implement a program, to implement a reform, to implement a process "x". The goal is always focused on attaining better results for students. And the goals are not just talked about at the beginning of the process and forgotten.

In essence, we see in very successful schools that goals are made concrete by monitoring progress all throughout the school improvement process. As well, we see that school improvement works, and works spectacularly well when there's a lot of attention given to helping make sure that people are going to put forth the effort that's required to make the school improvement process work.

And so, motivation is generated by lots of discussion of the evidence that the goal is really attainable, that this is possible that it's possible to get our students to learn these challenging standards and achieve at very high levels. And so, there's discussion about the evidence that might be out there from other schools that are doing similar work with similar populations of students. Sometimes that motivation might be generated by looking at internal data, that looks to see that there are classrooms of students or maybe small groups of students that are demonstrating that yes, it can be done. Also, motivation is sustained by frequent recognition of the progress that's being made by individuals, by groups, or by the whole school. In schools that use this school improvement process well, they're constantly acknowledging the progress -- little progress that might be happening throughout the school. As well, motivation is sustained by climate that makes everybody feel valued. Great leaders in successful schools understand that ours is a people business and if we're going to get the best out of our students, then we have to have a climate in which our students feel valued. If we're going to get the best out of our staff, then we need to make sure that our staff feels valued.

Also, we find that school improvement is most likely to work when there's a real focus on the core work of schools. In great school improvement efforts, they keep the main thing, the main thing. So, leaders are relentless pursuing the real changes in curriculum instruction relationships and learning. We see in very successful schools, structures being changed to ensure that students are getting access to more rigorous curriculum. As well, we see professional development opportunities that don't just present an idea and throw it out there to see if people will pick it up or not instead you see professional development opportunities in which people are coming together. They're discussing innovations. They're asking challenging questions. They're having opportunities to see the innovation in action. And then, they're getting opportunities to try these changes for themselves and to give feedback and to try again.

As well, in those very successful school improvement efforts, we see leaders in classrooms a lot, reinforcing attention to key issues. As former Secretary Page would say, "It's not just what you expect, it's what you inspect." Leaders are, in classrooms, often that attention is being paid to those key elements of the school improvement process.

Finally, we know that school improvement requires efforts to deliberately build capacity. Teachers in very successful schools are constantly working on building the capacity of their students to become better learners. Similarly, schools are deliberately building the capacity of parents to support their children's learning. There's an acknowledgement that parents can be such important partners in efforts to achieve school improvement goals.

As well, leaders are deliberately building the capacity of teachers to improve instruction. There's intensive collaboration. There's job and better professional development and skillful use of data that helps teachers figure out how to improve instruction in powerful ways. And finally, districts and states are deliberately building the capacity of school leaders to guide reform toward the goals. We know that leadership is such an important variable and so, our school improvement efforts are much more likely to succeed when we give deliberate attention to building the capacity of leaders to guide those school reform efforts.

School improvement can be more than just an exercise in compliance. It can be a process through which we generate great results for our students.

**BILL MCGRADY:** Dr. Johnson, thank you very much for your informative and enlightening comments. Dr. Leak, can you talk about the importance of providing technical assistance and the use of school support teams in this effort based on your extensive experiences in North Carolina?

**DR. ELISE LEAK:** School improvement is an important part of helping with student achievement. And schools really are units of change. As we think about school improvement and the State helping with this initiative, North Carolina used assistance teams to go out and assist certain schools. And the fact there was that not only do you want to identify schools, but you want to provide support to them. And so, I'll want to share just briefly, North Carolina's process that's used with the assistance teams. Is very important that the teams enter school systems in such a way that they will be seeing as a support and a help to that system.

So they go through a process of intrigue (ph) conferences with individuals with whom they will work, and it's important that they establish a good relationship with these individuals. So the Superintendent, the Principal, the school improvement team, school staff and finance officer -- all these five will have a session with the assistance teams.

The most important part of what the assistance teams do is to really get to know the school community and its culture. When they arrive at the school, they've already been trained. They have four weeks of training to make sure that all the team members are on the same page, that they understand the process that they are to follow, and an emphasis always is in honoring the skills and talents that they found in teachers in the buildings and to establish positive relationships -- because they will have to make some tough calls, but if you earn the respect and you establish your credibility, then schools usually are willing to work with you.

A part of their early work is completed observations of all the certified people in the school building. This includes the Principal and their completing a news assessment. Now this is very important, because they will locate the strengths of the school, they'll be able to identify those areas that need improvement. And then they'll be able to establish with the school, a plan that will guide the work for that year. And this collaboration is very important because the school feels that it is a part of establishing this plan of work then the buy-in and the cooperation would be very, very important.

Once the work of the team begins and it really begins when they arrive, because they are immediate things that team members can see and begin to work on such as the alignment of instruction in the classroom with the State's curriculum. And sometimes, that's very noticeable that that's not in place and they begin immediately to address that.

Sometimes a faculty may have a large number of beginning teachers and moderate entry teachers. Some managing student behavior may be obviously maybe noted early on, and they begin to work with this process. I think one of the most helpful phases is that the teams spend an entire school year with a school and they are constantly in and out of the classrooms. They will team-teach or co-teach with the teacher; they will conduct demonstration lessons and as a result of the evaluation process, any teachers who are identified as needing additional support will be assigned a mentor from the team. This mentor, then no longer evaluates that teacher but stay with that teacher in terms of providing support the teacher needs.

As the teams continue to do this, they continue to work with the students, the teachers, and to keep everything moving through the school year. So, this is a series of activities that maybe small group professional development, it may be professional development that the whole faculty participates in or maybe one-on-one coaching in classrooms to be sure that things move along well. All along, they are continuing to keep the interpersonal relationships going, keeping their credibility in place, and also, treating this faculty with professionalism and a certain respect. And when all of this comes together and the team leader is in collaboration with the Principal, and the teachers respect the teams, then we see a very vital process moving in that school and it continues.

We often have to remind the teams though that there have to be a capacity in the stay so that when they leave, their skills and knowledge remain. And sometimes we have to urge them a little bit to move in this direction quickly because teachers like to serve. So they continually want to keep doing things. So we constantly prod them to be sure that they are developing their skills and knowledge and the faculty at that school.

As the school year comes to an end, and the teams have a chance to look at what they've done, they meet with the school staff, they make sure that the staff lays preliminary results -- if they have any recommendations that they would leave with that school, they would do that as well. The teams themselves would do exit conferences with those same group of individuals they met with when they arrived. They also have an exit conference with their

supervisor to talk about what went well that year, what they wish they had done differently, and how the process can be improved the next time around. The other thing we do as a part of reflecting and evaluating, is to make sure that we get input from the school and the school district because if, whatever changes are made, if they are going to be sustained, the central office has to be a part of that process. They are the first line of support for these schools once the team leaves. And so, it's always a desire for the central office -- for the team to kind of hand the school after that central office so that they can work with the school to sustain the progress that's made.

So we find, in the summer that the teams then get some additional training, they get a little time off and then they get prepared for the next school year and then this process begins again with a new set of schools usually.

**BILL MCGRADY:** I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Johnson and Dr. Elise Leak for participating in this, the first of four webcast on school improvement, and for sharing their wisdom and insight. It is called that both of these ladies have had a significant impact on school improvement efforts wherever they have worked and we appreciate their sharing their expertise with us. I would also like to thank Dr. Henry Johnson and Dr. Jackie Jackson for their comments that have set the stage for this and future Web cast.

Future Web cast will focus on other important issues related to school improvement. We look forward to your participation in these Web cast.