



SUPERINTENDENT'S END-OF-MONTH NOTES

July 2011

OUR MISSION is to provide educational excellence for all students.

IN THIS EDITION:

- Welcome Back! (Note #1)
 - AYP Passing Rates Increase in 2011-12 under NCLB (Note #2)
 - Uncertainty Still as to AYP Method for High Schools in 2011-12 (Note #3)
 - NCLB Philosophy, the Good and Bad (Notes #4, #5, & #6)
 - Parent Involvement (Note #7)
 - Professionalism: Controlling “In-School” Factors (Note #8)
1. I want to take this opportunity to welcome everyone back to this 2011-12 school year! I am **optimistic** as we start this new year given the improvements in student achievement accomplished by our students and staff last year! Faced with the daunting prospect that 19 schools would fail to make AYP as we started last year, it looks as if our improvements in 28 of 37 instances across Georgia’s CRCTs and GHSGTs will result in no more than 7 schools falling short and, perhaps, as few as five. When student retest scores are entered into the data to be reported towards the end of August or the early part of September, we’ll know for sure ... While, naturally, we would like to earn AYP each year, the fact is, NCSS significantly “beat the odds” with last year’s results. Frankly, given the escalating passing standards, per No-Child-Left-Behind, last year’s results were *not* “easy” to come by, *a fact often lost in public discourse*, but well known by those on the frontlines of the classroom. It is evident that we enjoyed quite a positive effort in 2010-11 ... one that paid off in improvements ... In 2011-12, we must “keep on keep’n on!”
 2. 2011-12 will find even tougher passing rates under the federal No-Child-Left-Behind “Adequate Yearly Progress” legislation. More specifically, the passing standard for English/language arts on the CRCTs will increase from 80% to 86.7% of our students needing to pass in each subgroup. On CRCT math, the standard will increase from 75.7% to 83.8%. From my experience with state assessments, and those who study them, Georgia’s expected increase of 6.7% passing in English/language arts and a 8.1% increase in math is a high hurdle to jump in one year. But, give it the “old try” and our best efforts, we will ... (Typically, on large-scale state assessments, an increase in passing rate of just 3% is considered “significant.” Now, in 2011-12, the expectation is 6.7% and 8.1%. (Let’s work towards improvement whatever our final AYP status at the end of 2011-12!)
 3. 2011-12 will also find a change in the method by which Georgia will determine “Adequate Yearly Progress” at the high school level under No-Child-Left-Behind. Until now, AYP has been determined by certain passing percentages on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). But, beginning this school year, that will change. Unfortunately, at this time, there is not much clarity as to how 2011-12 AYP will be determined. We “think” EOCT results will, at least in part, determine the AYP status of high schools. Perhaps, too, other variables will be accounted for in the “new” high school accountability system. Stay tuned as we will share this information once we have a more definitive report from the Georgia Department of Education.



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4. Philosophically, from my perspective, while No-Child-Left-Behind has provided some positive aspects (e.g., the disaggregation of results such that schools and systems can no longer “mask” student achievement by simply reporting an “average” score for the whole school or system), it has now run its course with unrealistic passing rates reaching 100% in 2013-14. It's quite a reach to suggest that all students in NCSS or throughout the USA would pass every state test on a given day of the school year ...
5. Staying with the philosophical for a moment, as I suggested in the *Covington News* on June 24, 2011 (“Reflections on Education”), Harvard educator Tony Wagner has suggested that the emphasis on high stakes multiple choice testing may not be in the country's best interest if we expect students to learn how to think or care about what they read or clearly communicate ideas orally and in writing. I believe Dr. Wagner is correct and, thus, my current concern that NCLB is not only unrealistic as to its 100% passing standard in 2013-14, but also counter-productive to the nation's international standing. Life, and the ability of Americans to compete internationally in the future, is not always a multiple choice menu from which the “correct” answer can be selected. And, until our educational system and its leaders change curriculum [I'm “hopeful” with the new Common Core State Standards], amend assessments to get beyond just multiple choice [though this will be expensive *if* accomplished], and reinvigorate teaching and those to be taught with a more “constructivist” bent in this internet-age 21st century, we will continue to bemoan No-Child-Left-Behind. (As for “constructivist,” the educated student can make or construct new knowledge out of old or at least can account for current knowledge through presentation, be it oral or written or through some other medium that does not require the student to “select” the “right” answer from a menu of choices.) Until then, we're left with the current accountability system that brings both monetary and other sanctions to play when schools fail to make AYP.
6. While we are still in the NCLB mode, NCSS will administer three district benchmark assessments in 2011-12 to help determine mastery of content by our students such that appropriate interventions can be taken by teachers. These benchmarks will, naturally, take a multiple choice form to be consistent with state assessments. Having said this, it is only “smart” work as is teaching that takes our students well beyond just multiple choice. In fact, that teaching which emphasizes oral and written presentation, real world problem solving through team (and individual) actions using technology, deep thinking about text and internet subjects, and the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate or create will, I believe, produce excellent results on state assessments if consistent with the Georgia Performance Standards. Whatever the assessment format (i.e., multiple choice and/or “constructivist”), teaching the intended curriculum is still “a very big deal” ...



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7. As we start this 2011-12 school year, many of our teachers have shared with me that they would ask our parents to:
 - Get involved with their child's education
 - Come to school expecting school personnel to act in the interest of their child
 - Refrain from blaming the school first and the child not at all when problems arise (There was a day when a child was in "double trouble" with mom or dad if in trouble at school. It made a difference in the child's behavior at school and in his or her academic performance.)
8. While parent involvement is key for any child's success, teacher quality and professionalism is also indispensable. And, while schools cannot control "out-of-school" factors such as a child's home and surroundings, we can control "in-school" factors such as genuine care for students, the use of "high probability" instructional strategies, the building of student background knowledge for academic success, and the leveraging of technology to gain increased student engagement and produce a 21st century skill set on the part of students.

Wishing you a great 2011-12 school year! Thank you for what you do for our students every day! See you at school! ☺

"The most effective interventions will always begin at the classroom level with skillful teachers who are clear on the intended outcomes and the progression of learning required to achieve the outcomes, who are constantly gathering evidence of student learning through formative assessment processes, and who use that evidence to address the specific needs of individual students. Effective intervention must, however, include a schoolwide process that can identify students *by name and by need* and then provide them with timely, directive, precise, and systematic support to keep them moving forward with their learning."

- *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement*

by Richard DuFour and Robert J. Marzano, Solution Tree Press, 2011

GSM
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