

"Federation Corner" column
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AYP also means Another Year of Propaganda
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Mid-August is when the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law are met with the release of the findings of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for every school in the U.S. In August 2007 I pointed out the many ways that the Weast PR Machine had misstated and manipulated data on the AYP of middle schools to present a better picture than actually was the case. This year, I'm going to focus on one school, Neelsville Middle School (MS) in Germantown, to help point out what's really happening with AYP and actual student performance. Neelsville MS is 37% African-American, 30% Hispanic, 14% Asian and 19% white. It has failed to make AYP for math for 3 years in a row for Special Education. This year, for the first time, Neelsville MS also failed to make AYP in math for African-American students.

AYP is determined based on student performance on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) tests. Last year, the percentage of African-American students found to be proficient in the Math MSA at Neelsville MS in 6th, 7th and 8th grades were 54.7%, 35.8%, and 33.8%, respectively. This year, the numbers were 48.4%, 50%, and 31.3%. As the 6th and 8th grade results went down rather than up, that led to the finding of no AYP for Neelsville MS for these African-American students. Even if those numbers are turned around next year, I am amazed that AYP was considered to have been met last year when only 33.8% of African-American 8th graders were found to be proficient in math.

When one looks at the Algebra completion rate for the school last year, only 21% of African-American students had completed Algebra by 8th grade, compared to 73% of Asian-American students. The average completion rate for the entire 8th grade was 36%. MCPS Deputy Superintendent of Schools Frieda Lacey told the participants at a June 2008 Harvard conference: "We have a benchmark, by 2010, 80 percent of our kids will be successful in Algebra I at the eighth grade." It would take a miracle for this to happen at Neelsville in the next two years. I'm sure this is true for many other middle schools. However, if Weast can somehow get enough middle school students in certain schools to reach and exceed that benchmark, perhaps the impossible could happen. After all, Lacey did not say "in every middle school" but as a system-wide average. Since I have repeatedly shown that student proficiency in the MSAs goes down most of the time in each succeeding higher grade, meaning that this year's 6th graders will be less proficient next year as 7th graders, even reaching an 8th grade benchmark for Algebra doesn't remotely guarantee that large percentages of students will master higher levels of high school math, score well on the Math HSAs or SATs, or be ready for college math.

In fairness to Neelsville, a number of schools have ongoing problems getting special education, as well as limited English proficiency, and those who qualify for the Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS) program to meet AYP. That's why I've set aside any analysis of those groups to instead look at what happens with students identified by the national and state standards of race. Weast has previously claimed, hiding behind the Simpson's Paradox excuse, that there is a difference in African-American test performance based on the number of years attending MCPS, but he does not back up such claims with any research. His Office of Shared Accountability could look at minority performance based on attendance length as well as by family income and perhaps provide useful insights for MCPS and other school systems with that approach, rather than focusing on achieving short-term propaganda victories that conceal or divert attention from problems.

For more information on AYP and on Neelsville MS and other individual schools, look at the following web sites:

2007 AYP based on MSAs:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/pdf/AYP%20MS-ES%20Chart%202007.pdf>

All county schools needing improvement for 2007-2008:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/press/index.asp>

2008 AYP based on MSAs:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/press/index.aspx>

All county schools needing improvement for 2008-2009:

http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/info/pdf/FinalAYP_Chart_GraceChesney_Revised_%208-11-08.pdf

All county schools for 2008 AYP:

<http://mdk12.org/data/rschool.aspx>

Neelsville MS for 2006-2007:

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/regulatoryaccountability/glance/currentyear/schools/03115.pdf>

Neelsville MS for 2008 AYP:

<http://mdk12.org/data/PerformanceSelectorAYP.aspx>

and,

http://mdk12.org/data/ayp_analyzing/tutorials/7ayptutorial.aspx

The views expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect formal positions adopted by the Federation. To submit an 800-1000 word column for consideration, send as an email attachment to waynemgoldstein@hotmail.com