

2004 CITIZENS PANEL FOR A COMMUNITY REPORT CARD

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Avi Poster – president/Chi Cuz Music Publishing, educational consultant/EduCharacter (3 years)

PANEL MEMBERS

William Beard – president/B & M Marketing (1 year)

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Debby Gould – executive director/Nashville Public Education Foundation (2 years)

Tahir Hussain – executive director/Nashville Kurdish Forum (1 year)

Elizabeth Knox – senior vice president/Bank of America, N.A. (4 years)

Candy Markman – director of outcome-based investments/United Way of Metro Nashville (3 years)

Rita McDonald – director of information services/Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce (1 year)

Dr. Elisha Richardson – orthodontist/NAACP Education Chair (1 year)

Lynn Stuart – social worker/United Neighborhood Healthcare (1 year)

Norman Tenenbaum – executive director/The Arc of Davidson County (8 years)

METRO NASHVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVISOR

Dr. LaVoneia Steele – assistant superintendent for community resources and strategic planning

NASHVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LIASIANS

Bob Obrohta – vice-president for education

Etta Carson-Bell – education program manager

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PRELUDE

A Message to the Community from the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

This marks the 12th year for the Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card. Both Nashville and its public education system have changed considerably since the inaugural report.

When the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce first convened this panel in 1993, there were few initiatives in place to evaluate the performance and progress of our public school district. Since then, an across-the-board emphasis on measurement means our educational system is judged, ranked and evaluated at every turn. The federal government's No Child Left Behind Act, the state of Tennessee's school report card and Metro Nashville Public Schools' own annual report represent a few of the many additional evaluation measures.

Given the abundance of evaluation programs that exist today, one might question whether the Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card has outlived its usefulness. We think not! Here's why:

- Many evaluations are based solely on test scores. The Citizens Panel evaluation considers test scores, as well as the energy and effort devoted to trying to improve them.
- While some evaluations are conducted by groups with specific political agendas, the Citizens Panel Community Report Card is impartial. It acknowledges strengths and identifies areas for improvement.
- The true strength of the Citizens Panel Community Report Card stems from the diverse thoughts, opinions, backgrounds and perspectives it represents. The Citizens Panel includes parents of children in public school, business leaders, non-profit leaders, and educators; men and women; and black, white, Hispanic, and Kurdish members of our community.

As you can see, the Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card is a valuable resource. It is our sincere hope that this year's report will continue to bring about positive change in Metro Nashville Public Schools by focusing the community on our strengths and areas for improvement.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Sherrard, III
Chairman, Board of Governors



Rev. Sonnye Dixon
Vice Chairman for Education



Michael S. Neal, CCE, CCD
President & CEO

THE CITIZENS PANEL FOR A COMMUNITY REPORT CARD

RATIONALE AND HISTORY

The Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce has long understood that the vitality of our community is largely dependent on our having a quality system of public education in place. A good public education system not only prepares our children to be productive members of our community, it helps to attract relocation to our community. To this end, the Chamber is committed to doing whatever it can to strengthen public education in our city. In 1992, the Chamber formed a task force to develop a mechanism for providing the MNPS School Board and administration with a citizen's perspective of the progress our school district was experiencing. This task force recommended that the Chamber constitute a Citizens Panel to issue an annual Progress Report to the School Board and administration, on behalf of the community. This has been done every year since 1993.

GUIDELINES, CHARGE AND CREDO

The 1992 Chamber task force developed guidelines for the Citizens Panel. These guidelines continue to serve as the foundation for the work that it does today: a) include a broad representation of the community; b) develop a report that is both reflective and constructive; and c) base findings on collected information and data.

The Citizens Panel is charged with generating a credible, comprehensive report that describes the progress our school district is making towards addressing and meeting the expectations of our community. Since its inception, the work of the Citizens Panel has been based on the following credo:

- All children can learn. However, in order to advance the skills of all children, and close the gaps between demographic subgroups, the strategies necessary to ensure success will vary greatly.
- The most important measure of a school system is the degree to which student achievement is occurring.
- Strong and insightful leadership is needed to develop and maintain a plan for improving achievement and overseeing our school district.
- The leadership and skills of principals and teachers is the most critical influence on student achievement and success.
- A variety of indicators must be considered when determining school district success.

CITIZENS PANEL REPORT

The Citizens Panel recognizes that increasing student achievement across a large urban school district is a complex and arduous challenge. Accordingly, we believe that our report should be comprehensive and inclusive and should include both the citizens' perspective of system outcomes and the process in place to reach them. In addition, the Citizens Panel recognizes that there are substantive issues that deserve detailed study, issues that may change from year to year depending on the needs and interests of the District and community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FROM THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chamber extends its sincere appreciation to the 2004 Citizens Panel for the hard work they have done and the outstanding report they have generated. It also extends its appreciation to the MNPS Board of Education for recognizing the importance of hearing from the community.

FROM THE CITIZENS PANEL

The Citizens Panel extends its appreciation to the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce for recognizing the importance of providing our local public school system with a comprehensive report on its progress from a citizen's perspective. The Chamber understands that the success of an organization dependent on leadership understanding the thoughts, concerns, and wishes of those the organization serves.

The Citizens Panel would, also, like to acknowledge the many contributions of Dr. Lavoneia Steele, MNPS Assistant Superintendent. Dr. Steele attended all of our meetings, provided us with the information we needed to complete our work, and made arrangements for us to meet with other District personnel. The work of our Panel was enhanced by her support and encouragement.

Special thanks go out to Bob Obrohta, Chamber vice president for education, and Etta Carson-Bell, Chamber education program manager for their help in facilitating the work of our Panel. Both provided us with considerable and invaluable assistance. The Chamber is fortunate to have a public education champion of Bob's quality on its staff.

The Citizens Panel is indebted to the MNPS School Board and administration for their support of our work and their willingness to be guided by the opinions of our community. We are particularly grateful for the detailed responses we receive from both indicating which of our recommendations they are in agreement with and the plans they expect to make to implement them. The reports the Citizens Panel received back from our school system in large part helps the shape the work of the following year.

Lastly, the Citizens Panel is sincerely grateful to the Board members, administrators, and teachers who took time out of their hectic schedules to meet with us, some on more than one occasion. The following MNPS employees were kind enough to lend us their opinions and provide us with information we needed to complete our report.

MNPS Board of Education

Ms. Pam Garrett, Chair, Board of Education
Mrs. Kathy Nevill, Vice Chairman, Board of Education

MNPS Administration

Ms. Lenna Allen, Director, Professional Development
Ms. Cassandra Biles, Coordinator of Social Work & Attendance
Dr. Terri Breeden, Executive Director 5-12
Dr. Paul Changas, Coordinator of Student Assessment

Mrs. Pat Cole, Coordinator of Guidance
Dr. Bob Crouch, Director of Assessment, Research & Evaluation
Dr. Pedro E. Garcia, Director of Schools
Mrs. Sayra Hughes, Director, Federal & Categorical Programs
Dr. Sandy Johnson, Chief Instructional Officer, Learning Support Services
Dr. Kaye Rackard, Director, Special Education
Dr. Lavoneia Steele, Associate Director of Schools
Mrs. Sandra Tinnon, Executive Tier Director 5-8
Ms. Sharon Wright, Executive Director, Special Education

MNPS Principals

Dr. Margaret Bess, Principal, Antioch High School
Mr. Sam Braden, Principal, Maplewood High School
Mrs. Brenda Elliott-Johnson, Principal, Stratford High School
Mr. Karl Lang, Principal, Hillwood High School
Mr. Darwin Mason, Principal, Gra-Mar Middle School
Mrs. Rise Pope, Principal, Bordeaux Enhanced Option Elementary School
Dr. Robert Sasser, Principal, Donelson Middle School
Mr. Michael Tribue, Principal, McGavock High School

The MNPS Teachers Advisory Group

MNPS Policy Governance Consultants

Mr. Lance Lott, Policy Governance Liaison to the School Board
Ralph Schulz, President and CEO, Adventure Science Center

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2004 CITIZENS PANEL REPORT CARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With steadfast commitment and energy, The Metro Nashville Public School Board of Education, administrators, teachers, and the entire MNPS staff are continuing on the journey towards improved student achievement. The findings of the 2004 Citizens Panel are shared in our full report, in three detailed sections, each with commentary, commendations, and recommendations. These findings are supported by information we received in meetings and conversations with Board members, administrators, teachers, and other community members, and supported by the data included in our full report. Given how difficult it is to adequately summarize a comprehensive report, the Citizens Panel strongly encourages the reader to take the time to review our complete findings. Furthermore, we encourage the reader to not just focus just on the grades we have issued but rather give careful attention to the commentary and data this report offers. The following is a summary of the 2004 Citizens Panel Report.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT (C)

The achievement data reviewed indicate that, when compared to the 2002-03 school year, Metro achievement scores improved in several targeted areas during the 2003-04 school year. However, given that the scores in 2002-03 were relatively consistent with the year preceding it, the gains made in 2003-04 were not viewed as significant. In addition, achievement results viewed by demographic subgroups indicate that the District is slow in making sufficient gains to meet the needs, and close the achievement gap, for African-American, economically disadvantaged, or Special Education subgroups. As a result, the Citizens Panel has issued a grade of **C** for Student Achievement. As Dr. Garcia has publicly stated, while some progress this past year can be noted, even celebrated, much remains to be accomplished.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING (B)

To improve student achievement, school districts must develop a strong culture for learning supported by an infrastructure that assures learning will occur. The grade we have given for implementation supports our belief that much of this has taken place in our District. The reality is, however, that these actions must ultimately be matched by corresponding positive results, something our Panel will be looking for more specifically in the years to come. The Citizens Panel grade of **B** for the Implementation of Board Ends and Strategic Planning reflects applause for the positive efforts being made by our Board, administration, and teachers to increase achievement and successfully meet the Board's Ends. However, while the Citizens Panel believes MNPS is taking positive and productive steps to ensure that increased teaching and learning occurs (Commendations), and while we believe that MNPS is positioned better today than it was just a few years ago, we join the Board and administration in recognizing that much remains to be done.

FOCUSED AREAS OF STUDY

In addition to issuing our two annual grades for system-wide performance, the Citizens Panel again elected to study several specific issues, each of which are currently of high interest to parents and our community. Detailed studies on the following are found in our report: Closing the Achievement Gap, Policy Governance, Social and Emotional Learning, Middle School Education, and English Language Learning. We encourage the reader to review each of these detailed, focused reports.

2004 CITIZENS PANEL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Journey Continues

The difficult journey towards improved student achievement and school system improvement, on which the Metropolitan Nashville Public School District (MNPS) has embarked, continues with steadfast commitment and much energy. Our hardworking, dedicated School Board has clarified its expectations for student outcomes through its adopted Ends Statements and through the implementation of Policy Governance, a well-defined system of oversight that has resulted in improved monitoring and evaluation of progress. The administration has developed a detailed Strategic Plan that identifies several long-range operational and Strategic Directives along with corresponding, measurable short-range targets and goals. Commendably, the administration has not wavered from its focus on professional development, curriculum revision, the alignment of instruction and assessment with state and local goals, and the implementation of aggressive instructional initiatives. The District has indeed stayed on its course, something last year's Citizens Panel strongly endorsed and continues to support.

Without question, however, while MNPS has continued steadfastly on this ambitious journey, it continues to encounter difficult challenges along the way, a few of which deserve special mention.

The basic mission of American public education has remained the same since the days of Horace Mann: to ready our children for productive and successful lives by preparing them for citizenship, cultivating the skills needed to compete in the marketplace, teaching academic literacy and critical thinking skills; and developing the foundation needed for lifelong learning. However, while this basic tenet has remained constant, the ease at implementing it has been complicated by dramatic environmental factors such as changes in traditional family composition and societal values, increased immigration and changes in community demographics, increased poverty and violence, the negative influence of the mass media, and serious global problems. Our community expects MNPS to carry out the mission of public education in the context of addressing each of these important issues.

There simply is no consensus as to what direction needs to be taken to ensure the improvement of education for our children. Some among us celebrate the rapidly evolving accountability movement, while others decree it as fundamentally flawed and troublesome. Some believe that an increased focus on assessment will ultimately improve academic performance, while others believe that our children are being tested too frequently and that classrooms are becoming testing factories instead of learning laboratories. "Back to basics" advocates believe that curriculum should be standardized and students drilled on its content to ensure a basic level of skill and competence, while the "progressive" side of the educational continuum continues to champion intellectual freedom as the cornerstone of democratic society and believes intellectual autonomy, creativity, and curiosity are the leading forces in a meaningful education. Some parents vehemently argue for rigorous college prep programs, while others promote the importance of character education programs. Opinions vary as to whether or not disparities in learning between demographic subgroups are inevitable, the degree to which parents should be held responsible for sending their children to school equipped to learn, whether schools should be responsible for the social and emotional development of children, whether teaching morality and ethics is the role of the school, etc. In truth, while the debate continues, the best paradigm for public schools likely resides somewhere in the center of all of these positions. The challenge for educators is to find that center.

Without question, Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation (*NCLB*) has had a dramatic impact on the business of educating children. Few question that the heart of this law is to improve achievement, and many among us welcome and celebrate its focus on closing disparate achievement gaps and requiring that school districts disaggregate and report achievement data by subgroups. Unfortunately, several

unintended consequences have resulted from the way in which NCLB was framed and is being implemented. By establishing difficult expectations for performance and corresponding sanctions for not meeting them, NCLB shames some of our hardest-working schools, many of which are faced with the most difficult challenges, by publicly labeling them as failures and placing unreasonable sanctions on them. By establishing difficult-to-reach assessment benchmarks as the sole criteria for defining success, NCLB has negatively impacted the culture and environment of American schools by turning classrooms into testing factories instead of learning laboratories. Additionally, NCLB has placed financial burdens on school districts by making inadequately funded demands on them.

MNPS is faced with serious financial challenges that must be addressed. State funding is unfairly skewed against urban centers faced with the additional challenges of educating a vastly eclectic and rapidly changing student population. Local financing reached a crisis point this past summer resulting in the District having to use traditionally sacred reserve funds to limit necessary budgetary cuts. Unless changes are made in the way MNPS is funded, both by the state and our community, major cuts in programs will inevitably occur. Some argue that school districts do not need increased funding to produce favorable results. The reality is that our District cannot successfully continue on the journey it has embarked on without adequate funding. Fiscal constraints will make it extremely difficult to increase student achievement and provide deserving services to the pluralistic society we serve. Educating children is expensive ... but unskilled, incarcerated, and unemployed adults cost society far more.

The charge the Nashville Chamber of Commerce challenges the Citizens Panel to meet each year is very specific and clear - to provide the School Board and administration with a detailed progress report through the eyes of its citizenry. Our Chamber recognizes that the strength and vitality of a community is largely an outgrowth of its ability to educate and prepare children to become productive members of society and the workforce. To this end, the Chamber challenges our Panel to carefully examine our school district's progress at improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap between learner groups, as well as offer commentary and recommendations that will help our school leaders understand the varied opinions of the community they serve. To meet this charge, this year's Citizens Panel met weekly from late August through mid-December. We studied the District's Strategic Plan, reviewed curricular materials, read education-related literature, interviewed MNPS educators, and poured over statistics and test data. Countless hours were spent in conversations with board members, administrators, and teachers ... and with each other. While Panel members brought varied opinions and experiences to our deliberations, the report that follows is reflective of our consensus agreement.

As it did last year, this year's report includes two grades – one for student achievement and a second for the overall effort being advanced to meet the needs of our children. In addition, as it did last year, this year's report includes additional commentary on several focused issues, identified by our Panel as being important to address in more depth. Commentary supporting each grade, and each of our focused issues, includes a framework for understanding our findings followed by specific commendations worthy of celebration, identified challenges that need to be addressed, and suggested recommendations for addressing them. It is expected that future Citizens Panels will continue to use a similar template, adopting focused issues to study based on what is most relevant at the time.

The 2003-04 Citizens Panel is extremely grateful for the strong support we received from the Chamber of Commerce, the cooperation received from the MNPS administration, and for the encouragement and gratitude expressed by the MNPS Board of Education. We applaud the Board and the administration for recognizing the importance of a community voice and for their willingness to listen to and consider the opinions and recommendations of their constituents.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



The achievement data reviewed indicate that, when compared to the 2002-03 school year, Metro achievement scores improved in some targeted areas during the 2003-04 school year. However, given that the scores in 2002-03 were relatively consistent with the year preceding it, the gains made in 2003-04 were not viewed as significant. In addition, achievement results viewed by demographic subgroups indicate that the District is not making sufficient gains to meet the needs and close the achievement gap for African-American, economically disadvantaged, or Special Education subgroups. As a result, the Citizens Panel has decided to issue a grade of **C** for Student Achievement. As Dr. Garcia has publicly stated, while some progress this past year can be noted, even celebrated, much remains to be accomplished.

Measuring school system success on the basis of achievement test results is a daunting challenge, one that was complicated this past year in Tennessee by excessively long tests, a movement from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced testing, and favorable changes in the State's criteria for meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Furthermore, comparing results by grade level from one year to the next does not always paint an accurate picture of progress, given that the grade levels being compared are comprised of entirely different groups of students. In addition, several environmental factors impact the effective evaluation of achievement data.

The State of Tennessee did not release last year's achievement test data until November 2004. In fact, meaningful Value Added test data were not provided until January 2005. Unfortunately, these releases of information come far too late in the school year for the District to effectively use them for diagnostic evaluation or instructional planning and improvement.

The Basic Education Program (BEP), the State of Tennessee's formula for funding education, does not adequately recognize the unique challenges with which urban school systems such as MNPS are faced. Specifically, the BEP does not provide adequate funds to serve large populations of low-income, special education, and ELL students.

Metro schools continues to experience demographic changes that affect its ability to significantly improve achievement scores, e.g. growth in the percentage of students living in poverty, an increasing immigrant population, annual increases in the number of English Language Learners (ELL), etc. In fact, MNPS experienced a 1.4% growth in ELL students in 2003-04, a subgroup that currently represents 7.3% of our student population.

The 2004 Citizens Panel carefully examined and analyzed all of the data to which it had access. We analyzed these data in light of the School Board's Ends Statements and the administration's Strategic Plan. The latter identifies specific targets for improvement in Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) norm- and criterion-referenced tests, writing proficiency assessments, SAT and ACT test scores, and dropout rates. In the years ahead, our Panel looks forward to adding the results of District developed internal curricular assessments currently being developed and implemented.

Given that much of the findings and commentary in this report relates to data disaggregated by subgroups of students, as required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, the Citizens Panel felt it important to frame our report with the following current student subgroup demographic information.

**MNPS Enrollment Data by NCLB Subgroup
Average Daily Membership (“ADM”)**

Group	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Total ADM	68,345	68,016	68,277	68,321	69,445
African-American	30,892	31,355	31,885	31,222	32,014
Asian	2,255	2,244	2,253	2,323	2,361
Hispanic	2,597	3,401	4,164	5,329	6,389
Native American	137	136	136	136	139
Pacific Islander	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
White	32,464	30,811	29,837	29,241	28,750
Misc. Adjustment	-0-	69	-0-	-0-	(208)
ELL	3,212	4,012	4,643	3,825	5,069
Students w/ Disabilities	10,593	5,892	10,583	9,975	10,347
SES	30,960	31,426	33,251	34,638	36,459
Title I	19,683	17,820	21,166	21,179	25,278

COMMENDATIONS

- 80% of MNPS third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students were tested as proficient or advanced in reading/language arts.
- 76% of MNPS third-, fifth-, and eighth-grade students were tested as proficient or advanced in mathematics.
- The State of Tennessee’s TCAP targets for students in grades 3, 5, and 8 were met (77% in reading/language arts, 72% in mathematics).
- In mathematics (grades 3, 5, and 8), excluding the white population, whose scores remained similar to the previous year, every NCLB subgroup made gains ranging from 1% to 9%. Students with disabilities (9%) and Hispanics (6%) made the greatest gains.
- In reading/language arts/writing (grades 3, 5, and 8), excluding the Limited English Proficient populations, where scores declined (-3%), every NCLB subgroup made gains ranging from 1% to 10%. Students with disabilities (10%), Hispanics (4%), and Native Americans (4%), made the greatest gains.

- Hispanic students (grades 3, 5, and 8) made the most significant gains and are beginning to close the achievement gap with white and Asian/Pacific Islander students.
- According to NCLB standards, special education students (grades 3, 5, and 8) earned “safe harbor” status.
- The State of Tennessee’s Gateway target for Algebra I (65%) was met (67%).
- The district should be commended for developing a plan to write its own instructional standards and developing its own internal assessments to measure success at meeting them. Assessments have been written, and baseline data established, for kindergarten and first grade in reading, and grades 4, 7, and 9 in writing. District assessments will be administered three times each year to monitor progress, on an ongoing basis, at meeting and exceeding district standards. Work on creating district standards and assessments in math and science, and other curricular areas, is currently being done.
- The Citizens Panel applauds the offering of honors classes in many middle schools and expanding the International Baccalaureate (IB) program from Hunters Lane High School to include Hillwood and Hillsboro High Schools. Expanding the IB program to other high schools and offering honors classes in middle schools confirms the District’s commitment to establishing high expectations for all students.
- MNPS is to be commended for providing a defined curriculum and purchasing modified academic textbooks for students with disabilities. In addition, commendation is deserved for developing strategies aimed at providing Special Education high school students with access to the general curriculum and better preparing high school Special Education students for Gateway tests. Given the gains (in some cases significant) in TCAP, Gateway and district assessments, it is obvious that these additions are having a positive effect.
- The recently released TVASS (Value Added) scores show the District made a one-year gain in learning in the 2003-2004 school year.

CHALLENGES

- The District’s Strategic Plan establishes specific targets for all students to make significant academic improvement as measured by standardized achievement testing. Although achievement scores for students in grades 3, 5, and 8 were up across most subgroups in 2003-04, the overall test scores for the past three years have remained relatively the same.
- Several subgroups (grades 3, 5, and 8) failed to meet the State of Tennessee’s expectations for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). African-American, economically disadvantaged, and limited English proficient did not make AYP in math. Hispanics, economically disadvantaged, and limited English proficient did not make AYP in reading/language/writing.
- The achievement gap (grades 3, 5, and 8) between whites and minorities remains considerable. While the gap narrowed slightly in math (from 22 to 20%), due in large part to the gains made by Hispanic students, it remained unchanged in reading/language/writing (21%).
- Although students with disabilities in grades 3, 5, and 8 made satisfactory AYP, the need for improvement of achievement for these students remains great.
- The State of Tennessee’s Gateway target for English II (86%) was not met (83%).

- The number of students who test at the Proficient or Advanced levels continues to lag behind the averages in all three Gateway Tests administered by the State of Tennessee. The District has lagged behind the State in Algebra I and in Biology for three consecutive years, and English II for the past two years.
- Although it is a district priority to prepare students for, and encourage them to enroll in, post-high school studies, the success the district is experiencing at accomplishing this remains unclear to our Panel largely due to the minimal information available relative to the post-secondary school enrollment of MNPS students.
- The MNPS dropout rate increased to 17.8% in the 2003-04 school year from 16.2% the prior year. The State of Tennessee dropout goal is 10%. The District's dropout target for 2007 is to be less than 5%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The MNPS Strategic Plan needs to be carefully reviewed each year and adjust annual target goals to reflect achievement test score results from the previous year. Annual targets need to be clearly stated and shared with the community at large and the entire district staff.
- Given that the State of Tennessee has moved from norm-referenced to criterion-referenced tests, it is essential that MNPS adjust its achievement targets accordingly. As recommended in the 2002-03 Citizens Panel Report, this year's Panel once again recommends that the District adjust its Strategic Plan and establish clear performance targets that coincide with the categories for success now being used by the State (Below Proficient, Proficient and Advanced).
- As noted in the 2002-03 report, the Citizens Panel strongly recommends that MNPS make detailed performance/assessment data available for public review. Data should be organized and presented in a manner understandable to parents and the community and should be prominently posted on the District's website, as well as shared in a variety of other ways. Data should be presented in relationship to the District's annual target goals so that progress at meeting them is easily discerned.
- All data collected relative to student achievement should be disaggregated by subgroups so that staff, parents, and the community can more easily understand the degree to which progress is being made by each, and how well the District is doing at closing achievement gaps.
- Commendably, MNPS has implemented a variety of instructional initiatives aimed at increasing student achievement (Avid, Language!, reduced class size, enhanced option schools, credit recovery, etc.). It is vital that each of these efforts be evaluated annually for their effectiveness and that disaggregated data for each initiative be shared with the public.
- MNPS should be commended for the 2003-04 mid-year Special Education high school curricular changes it made (redefined curriculum, improved scheduling, etc.). These changes were designed to better prepare high school Special Education students for Gateway testing, with a promise of expanding this effort as well as replicating it at middle school grade levels. The results of this effort should be clearly shared along with any plans for extending it. It is vital that the public, and our Panel, see additional evidence of the District's measurable plans to close the achievement gap between Special Education students and their regular education peers. Plans for closing the achievement gap should be shared for those students who participate in standardized testing and those students who are given alternative assessments in their place.

- The District conducts pre-and post-assessments of some of its instructional efforts and programs. The Citizens Panel has requested to see these data so it, too, can gain a better understanding of the improvements being made during the school year. The data requested have not been received.
- It is important that the District set and share improvement targets and goals established by subgroups. Data collected to assess subgroup targets and goals should be shared with the community to help the public better understand the degree to which the District is experiencing success at meeting them, as well as help clarify how MNPS is doing at closing the gap between groups.
- The recently developed parent/employee satisfaction survey (which was amended for improvement this past year) was administered last spring. The results of the second administration of this survey have not yet been released to the public. Results of this survey were to be used to measure success at meeting several target goals. It would be helpful to the Panel and the public to view the results of this survey, or other similar instruments, for the purpose of supporting its findings and analysis.

NOTE

The Citizens Panel strongly encourages the reader to carefully examine its detailed analysis of the District's Strategic Plan located in the back of this report. This detailed analysis includes commentary from our Panel regarding the degree of success the District experienced meeting its academic goals during the past school year (Strategic Directives I and II). In addition to this analysis of the Strategic Plan, the reader will also find several detailed tables and charts designed to help the reader better understand how well the District is doing at meeting its student achievement targets and goals.

IMPLEMENTATION OF BOARD ENDS and the DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN



To improve student achievement (described in the preceding section), school districts must develop a strong culture for learning supported by an infrastructure that assures learning will occur. They must be willing to be reflective and constructively critical of their own behavior, as well as willing to make changes and initiate reform as needed, even if what needs to be done is in conflict with past practices. The grade we have given for implementation supports our belief that much of this has taken place in our District. The reality is, however, that these actions must ultimately be matched by corresponding positive results, something our Panel will need to see in order to continue giving the District a positive Implementation grade.

The purpose of this section is to take an in-depth view of the efforts and progress being made at implementing the Board's Ends Statements and the administration's Strategic Plan. However, before doing so, a few observations deserve mention:

While the current national environment frames educational improvement primarily in terms of increased achievement test scores, our School Board wisely understands there are a variety of other important indicators for student success in school that must be considered. These broader considerations are clearly stated in the Board-developed Ends Statements (accomplishments it expects of all students) and the administration's Strategic Plan (the blueprint for implementing the Board's Ends).

It is vital that our Board and administration continue to welcome and listen to the voice of the community. The Citizens Panel and other sources provide valuable feedback that warrants consideration. In order to maintain the support of the broader community, all members have to feel that their voices are of importance.

Significant and meaningful improvements, school reform, and increased student achievement requires nothing less than a Herculean effort from not just those directly involved in public education, but from everyone in the community. As noted in last year's Citizens Panel report, dramatically changing a school system is similar to turning around an aircraft carrier: It requires shared agreements for changing direction coupled with careful planning, strong leadership, the skills of personnel, and a great deal of patience.

Most everyone across the social and political spectrum would agree that the heart of educational reform is the improvement of teaching and learning. Increased academic achievement is the result of a purposeful effort to improve the conditions of learning for all children. Our mission must remain constant and must continue to drive our journey. We must do whatever is required to make certain that every child exits our school system with varied options for continued learning, is equipped to find employment, and is positioned to serve the community as an engaged, productive, and enlightened participant. Regardless of the barriers we face, we must not waver from this mission.

Achievement test score improvement is important; however, it should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather as an indication of what we need to do better. Developing the conditions in which children will best learn is even more important than raising scores. While increased test scores are needed for affirmation of actions taken, they alone do not guarantee that what is taking place in our schools is meeting community expectations for the development of our children.

The Citizens Panel grade of B for the Implementation of Board Ends and Strategic Planning reflects applause for the positive efforts being made by our Board, administration, and teachers to increase achievement and successfully meet the Board's Ends. However, while the Citizens Panel believes MNPS is taking positive and productive steps to ensure that increased teaching and learning occurs (Commendations), and while we believe that MNPS is positioned better today than it was just a few years ago, we join the Board and administration in recognizing that much remains to be done.

COMMENDATIONS

The Board, administration, and teaching staff deserve applause for efforts made during the past and preceding years. While not all-encompassing, the following describes many of the positive steps taken in the last year by our District.

- The current School Board is made up of hardworking, dedicated leaders. The Board has shown leadership through proactive efforts taken to enhance their stewardship of our school district, demand substantive improvement, and address debilitating financial issues. Board members have worked hard at improving the way in which they monitor and guide our district (Policy Governance) and in developing exit goals for students (Ends Statements).
- The administration, as promised, has remained consistent in its commitment to improving student achievement. As noted last year, it has developed a Strategic Plan for meeting Board Ends and its own Strategic Directives, has expended a great deal of effort in developing instructional standards and improving curricula, has implemented a variety of new initiatives aimed at improving achievement, and has been diligent at improving the capacity of teachers to deliver instruction.
- Both the Board and the administration are openly reflective of their success and lack thereof. While they rightfully celebrate the successes they have experienced, they also acknowledge that much remains to be done. This honest admission lends credibility to the difficult journey on which they have embarked.
- Efforts to improve general district management are noteworthy. Significant improvements are in place, e.g. transportation, the opening of school, school registration, managerial technology, the purchase of needed instructional materials, new school construction, etc.
- Work towards improving curriculum and assessment continues. Work at developing specific and appropriate instructional standards has been enhanced through a steadfast effort to create internally designed assessment instruments in all core curriculum areas. This is essential, as improving instruction cannot rely solely on state-developed criterion reference tests. Internal assessments that clearly demonstrate the degree to which individual children are learning during the course of a school year are needed to appropriately monitor and adjust instruction as well as evaluate progress.
- Applause is deserved for maintaining and expanding previous improvement initiatives (reading specialists in elementary schools, Language!, Essential Literature Program, Credit Recovery Program, AVID, etc.) and for new initiatives started in the last year (expansion of the ENCORE Program, Pre-K Special Education Programs, adoption and purchase of Pre-K curriculum, work with the Alignment Nashville Project, etc.).
- Continued emphasis on staff development is laudable. The key factor in improving achievement is the instructional competence of our classroom teachers. A needed new District Staff Development Center is

being developed, as recommended by the Panel last year, and significant efforts continue to be made to advance the instructional capacity of all teachers. Particularly commendable are staff development initiatives related to helping students understand how best to work with children in poverty, and programs aimed at improving classroom management skills.

- The District recognizes that addressing student discipline is of primary concern for teachers and parents. It continues to offer COMP training, an initiative designed to improve teachers' classroom management skills. New Beginnings was developed to address the needs of children with chronic discipline problems. However, while these actions are worthy of celebration, the Citizens Panel believes that the best way to improve student discipline is to increase the degree to which children are positively engaged in learning, and through child-centered interventions designed to develop social skills and prevent future problems.
- The District recognizes the importance of developing future leadership. The Director continues his efforts at personally training potential leadership through his administrative training program. In addition, the District has entered into a new leadership training partnership with Vanderbilt University. Of important note, the Board has asked the administration to develop a plan to train central office administrators to step into vital positions when vacancies occur.
- The District is beginning to address issues related to school choice. While working to improve the quality of neighborhood schools, the Board is committed to studying the effectiveness and efficacy of its school options, and has appointed a Choice Committee to study this issue.
- Much has been done to extend opportunities for advanced learners. The International Baccalaureate Program has been expanded to two new sites, additional honors classes have been established in middle schools, and an increased number of teachers is receiving training in differentiated instruction.
- In order to encourage more children to take part in summer instructional programs, a "no cost" program has been implemented.
- Many physical improvements have been made in school buildings throughout our district. A long-range building plan is in place. Commendably, care is being given to the design of new schools to take into consideration the instructional needs of our children, not only the District's need for more space.
- Technology improvements are noteworthy, including the purchase of improved managerial software (the Chancery system), the purchase of 4,000 new PCs, the computerization of the IEP process, the automation of library technology, upgrading of school telephone systems, etc. These are major undertakings.
- In spite of budget cuts, needed staff was hired in critical areas (e.g. additional middle school teachers to help lower class size and improve elective scheduling, ELL teachers to address our growing immigrant population).
- MNPS has made notable progress with regard to improving the achievement of special education students. It has accomplished this through specific initiatives and thoughtful planning. Required materials for special education children have been purchased, access to the general education curriculum has been increased, mid-year improvements in high school scheduling and curriculum were implemented, early intervention programs have been added, etc.

- The District continues to seek assistance from community partnerships to help deliver its mission. The PENCIL Foundation, Alignment Nashville, Family Resource Centers, and the Nashville Alliance for Public Education are examples of the important support our District receives from the community.

CHALLENGES

In addition to raising achievement, urban school districts face numerous challenges. Given the diverse makeup of our community, it should be expected that opinions vary as to how best to address these challenges. However, if consensus and understanding are to be reached, and cooperative support garnered, broad and inclusive dialogue, centered on the vital issues and challenges our system faces, is needed. A few examples deserve specific mention:

- It is difficult for educators to walk in the shoes of all of the children they serve, especially when their own life experiences often differ greatly from those of their students. One of the most significant challenges for educators is to gain a true appreciation for the children they serve based on a clear understanding of their environment and culture, the values they hold, and the varied skills they bring to the classroom. A school system's success is directly linked with its ability to empathize, understand, and embrace diversity.
- Student discipline remains a primary concern of parents and teachers. The Citizens Panel recognizes how difficult it is to maintain discipline and order. However, we believe that efforts to address discipline would better be framed as preventive and instructional than punitive, and should include efforts to help children acquire a positive self-image, the ability to maintain self-discipline, and the confidence to succeed.
- Our Panel agrees that the primary factor in increasing achievement is the hiring of quality teachers who utilize sound educational practices. However, there is also evidence to support the premise that lowering class size, particularly for those who are struggling learners, will glean improved achievement. The District has a sizeable percentage of challenged students who would benefit greatly from being in classes of reduced size. Not only do smaller class sizes afford teachers increased opportunities to individualize instruction and close the gap between learner subgroups, they also afford teachers an opportunity to better address the emotional and social needs of children. We realize that cost is a factor in doing this, but strongly encourage the District to make the lowering of class size a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While the District deserves commendation for developing Ends Statements and a Strategic Plan that includes target goals for improvement, it is difficult for the community to get a clear sense of the progress being made, or if specific annual targets are being met. We suggest that the administration summarize in a single document, written clearly for the general public, a list of all of the significant and reasonable annual targets it hopes to address in a given year, particularly those related to student achievement. This list should be shared with the community at the start of the school year and posted on the District website. At the end of the year, it is our hope that the administration will communicate to the Board and the community the degree of success it experienced meeting these targets.
- While many positive improvements have taken place in special education this past year, we remain concerned that too many special needs children are placed in restrictive classroom settings and are not included frequently enough in mainstream programming. It is our hope that the District will expand its commitment to inclusion.

- While we are pleased that the Board’s Ends Statements for children include a focus on the development of the whole child, it is vital that the District develop initiatives designed to help children navigate the minefield of growing up (more attention to this issue can be found in the section in this report on Social and Emotional Learning).
- It is important that the Board administrators hear the voice of parents more often. While parent advisories for the Director of Schools, ESL, and Special Education have been established, and are very important, it is crucial that these advisories communicate with parents about the work they are doing (e.g. through periodic newsletters) as well as provide parents with a variety of forums through which they can share their input with their advisory representatives. While the Board has had conversations with a variety of Linkage Groups, it is important that the District develop strategies and mechanisms for engaging a wider audience of parents. Open and topic-specific meetings should be considered, district-wide or by school clusters. Parents are hungry for information and even hungrier for opportunities to share their opinions and concerns.
- A dedicated public relations effort needs to be made to celebrate the many positive things going on in the District. Results of the survey administered last spring need to be shared with the community. The District newsletter should be reinstated and rededicated to focus more on substantive issues, rather than anecdotal successes. As recommended last year, the District website needs to be updated. It can be made easier to access and updated to include information about pertinent issues, student assessment, etc. A model website to emulate would be that of Charlotte-Mecklenburg (<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us>), a district with similar demographics, which is supported by a daily e-newsletter that parents can sign up to receive.
- Increased efforts need to be made to reduce the number of students who drop out of school. Toward this goal, alternative classroom instructional models should be considered for children who experience failure in traditional classroom learning environments.

2004 FOCUSED AREAS OF STUDY

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Since the inception of the Citizens Panel, improving the performance of struggling learners and closing the gap between demographic subgroups has consistently remained one of the central focuses of our annual report. Clearly, administration and teachers have worked vigorously to help all students excel. Unfortunately, the District has yet to experience the progress hoped for with regard to increasing the academic performance of African-American and low-income children. The gap in performance between white students and non-whites has not closed significantly, nor has the gap between high-and low-income students.

Without question, raising achievement is an extremely difficult and complex challenge, made even more difficult by the changing demographic makeup of our community and the District's student population. In fact, during the past five years:

- 4,000 fewer white students enrolled;
- 5,000 more low-income students enrolled;
- 4,000 more Hispanic students enrolled;
- 1,900 additional English Language Learners (ELL) enrolled;
- 1,100 additional African-American students enrolled; and
- African-Americans are now the majority of the District's student population (46.1%).

It has been suggested that the achievement gap is more a reflection of income than it is of race. However, while test scores for African-Americans and other children from diverse backgrounds may generally mirror scores for low-income students, the factors as to why their scores are similar are not necessarily the same. Accordingly, addressing academic issues only through a poverty framework excludes important historical, social, and cultural factors that influence student success as much as poverty-related factors. These social and cultural factors should not be overlooked.

While we are not making excuses for underperformance, the Citizens Panel recognizes that the achievement gap can only be closed if social and economic reforms take place in conjunction with education reform. The achievement gap is a community issue, not only an educational issue. If this gap is to close, a community-wide effort is needed.

COMMENDATIONS

- The school district is to be commended for gaining ground in closing the math achievement gap. TCAP math scores show gains for all subgroups. Of significant note, compared to the previous year, Hispanic math scores increased 6% and special education math scores increased by 9%.
- The District's Credit Recovery Program is an exceptional example of what our district can do to combat the achievement gap. Due to its implementation, 300 students who would not have otherwise graduated from high school this past year did in fact graduate.
- The District is to be commended for introducing the Ruby Payne Professional Development Training program to assist teachers with understanding the unique issues and needs of low-income students. As stated in the MNPS Annual Report, "Thirteen teachers were selected and trained by the State Department as district leaders to provide *Ruby Payne: Frameworks for Understanding Poverty Training*. Subsequently, approximately 360 classroom teachers participated in 13 hours of training this summer. These district trainers will be available to provide training for teachers, parents and administrators during the 2004-2005 school year."

- The District is to be commended for its participation and leadership in the Alignment Nashville Project. While it has yet to show results, Alignment Nashville has the potential to provide MNPS with a coordinated community-wide effort in addressing some of the key achievement gap issues identified by the Citizens Panel. We applaud this effort and remain hopeful that the hard work being done to link community agencies around issues related to children will yield significant results.
- The district is to be commended for pursuing funds to bring AVID to three of our high schools. AVID is a successful national program designed to help under-represented students get into college.
- Commendations are also in order for the aggressive and focused efforts made to help high school special education students access the general education curriculum and receive preparation for passing the three Gateway exams, a prerequisite to receiving a regular diploma in Tennessee. This effort required significant mid-year high school scheduling changes, the purchase of materials, and intensive training for teachers.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is important that the community and the District engage in an open, honest, and respectful discussion about issues surrounding education, poverty, and race. It is our hope that the Board will take the lead in facilitating, the purpose being to develop a cohesive plan to identify, implement, and measure initiatives that address the institutional, socio-economic, and cultural barriers contributing to the achievement gap.
- Pre-K education is an essential element in the closing the achievement gap. Given the emphasis placed on Pre-K education by Governor Bredesen, we hope that the District will be at the forefront in developing Pre-K education and the model of Pre-K education in the State of Tennessee.
- The Panel remains deeply concerned that a disproportionately high number of African-American males are placed in special education MIP Conduct classes. In fact, African-Americans make up 77% of MIP enrollment, a situation of which the District is aware. The majority of these students have the cognitive ability to be successful in a general education classroom. Unfortunately, the District does not have a formal plan for returning these children to the mainstream environment once their behavioral issues have been addressed. We strongly encourage the District to develop specific criteria for placement in MIP classrooms, concrete plans for helping students exit from them, and a variety of related strategies aimed at preventing initial placement. As part of exit planning, the Citizens Panel recommends that a variety of supports be available to both the students and classroom teachers, including support from counselors and training for staff. In addition, we also encourage the District to develop early intervention and prevention initiatives in grades Pre K–3 aimed at identifying and addressing behaviorally at-risk students before the early adolescent years.
- Developmentally appropriate educational standards must be established for children with severe disabilities such as Autism and conditions related to mental retardation (Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy). Doing so will increase the likelihood that this vulnerable minority will acquire the skills they need for self-sufficiency after graduation. To this end, our system may need to examine its own beliefs regarding the potential achievement of students with severe disabilities, as well as provide training for teachers and administrators that will lead to an increased commitment to educate this population in an inclusive environment.
- It is a challenge for teachers to work with children whose life experiences are distinctly different from their own. This challenge was reinforced during conversations we had with administrators and teachers. There is a need for required cross-cultural training for all staff that will help them better understand, and

be more responsive to, the socio-economic environmental conditions in which their students live. Commendably, the District has moved in this direction by implementing Ruby Payne training.

- The teachers' union (MNEA) needs to step up to the plate as well. It is our understanding that reimbursement is a contractual condition for required training outside of the school day. The reality is that, given the amount of training necessary, it is important that the union works closely with administrators to encourage cost-effective teacher participation. While we recognize that teachers deserve to be reasonably reimbursed for the time they put in beyond contractual workdays, the expectation of teacher reimbursement should not dissuade the District from requiring needed training for all professionals.
- One challenge for urban school districts is the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers, particularly those willing to make a professional commitment to serve in struggling schools. It is recommended that stronger linkages be developed with local universities, and that the District consider new and revitalized ways to induct, train, support, and reward teachers, particularly those assigned to our most challenging situations. The District has already embarked on a stronger effort to recruit minorities to the teaching ranks, which we support and encourage. This effort could be complemented by returning to the Future Teachers of America model that could encourage some of our most talented high school students to consider education as their career path.
- There is an identified need for a more diverse teaching staff. There are too few minority counselors and social workers employed by the District, and there is a need for more minority teachers, particularly African-American males. We understand that the District is working to address this issue and that there are positions that are particularly difficult to fill, given that the pool of available teachers in several critical areas is small. Consideration may need to be given to adopting more aggressive strategies, such as offering incentives for difficult-to-fill assignments.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) PROGRAM

The English Language Learners (ELL) Program, as the name implies, focuses on the necessary English language proficiency that all non-English speaking students need to acquire. Given the growing immigrant population in Nashville, and given the growing number of children entering Nashville schools without prerequisite English language skills, the Citizens Panel elected to highlight the ELL Program in its report this year.

ELL students pose a variety of challenges for MNPS. On the one hand, students need to have a reasonable mastery of English in order to succeed in school and make reasonable academic gains. On the other hand, teaching ELL students English while at the same time progressing through our expected curricula poses serious problems to our system. MNPS currently has approximately 5,000 students enrolled in ELL, necessitating the hiring and training of a large staff of trained teachers. Even after learning enough English to earn placement in regular education classrooms, new English learners require continued support and attention. In addition, our rapidly growing immigrant population provides additional challenges including, but not limited to, understanding different cultures, parents with limited English skills, social integration issues, etc. Not only is addressing these issues a challenge, but funding them is as well.

COMMENDATIONS

- MNPS is well aware of the existing and emerging issues related to establishing and implementing an effective ELL Program. To this end, it continues to look at different instructional paradigms, has set up ELL Centers, and hired additional staff.
- There are approximately 5,000 students currently enrolled in ELL, with students entering and exiting on a daily basis. While this program represents a significant challenge, one that the system is committed to address, it also brings many opportunities from which all of our children can learn. By embracing diversity, we can be positioned to prepare all of the children in the District for the future.
- ELL students are placed in self-contained classrooms with teachers certified in teaching English as a second language and remain in the program until they can demonstrate English proficiency.
- The average ELL student completes the program in three years. We commend Metro Schools for dramatically accelerating the speed at which ELL students are developing English language skills sufficient to test out of the ELL Program. We also commend the schools for providing adapted textbooks and certified teachers for “sheltered” classes in math, science, and social studies for students who are enrolled in ELL.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Citizens Panel is concerned that ELL services, as currently constituted, may have too narrow a focus. In addition to language skills, immigrant students need to acquire a host of social skills and cultural knowledge in order to be fully included in the school community and to excel academically. Even after graduating from the ELL Program, immigrant children continue to struggle with language related issues, particularly with the vocabulary often used in our classrooms and found in our curricular materials. Based on comments from parents, students, and teachers, it appears that the school district is not addressing, in a systemic way, these additional needs of ELL students.

- Increase the opportunities for faculty and staff to learn more about the cultural background of ethnic groups in the Nashville community. Utilize cultural organizations, such as Conexión Américas, to help increase understanding of diverse cultures.
- It is important that we increase opportunities for immigrant families to learn English. However, this is not solely a function of the District, but rather a responsibility of the entire community.
- Provide sustained support services for immigrant students beyond the time they are enrolled in the ELL Program. National data suggest that it takes 7-8 years for students to acquire the vocabulary and technical writing skills need to be completely fluent in English, even if their conversational English is excellent.
- Because Metro Schools has dramatically accelerated English language learning for immigrant students, it is easy to forget that some parents have not accelerated their own learning at the same pace. Translation and support services may need to be continued for families, even when students have mastered English.
- We commend the school system for utilizing an ELL Parent Advisory Group. However, its usefulness would be increased if there were a more systemic way to identify the Advisory Group representatives for the immigrant community so that representatives can serve as a conduit for community feedback and the school system's response to identified needs. In addition, it is recommended that the Board, ELL Department, and other school officials organize frequent and convenient opportunities to converse with Nashville's immigrant population to get more feedback from parents, in particular, about how their needs are being met.
- Currently, the school system has 43 schools designated as ELL Centers. Each of these schools has certified ELL teachers. Committee members were concerned about the availability of support services for immigrant students attending neighborhood schools that were not one of the ELL Centers.
- Given their own limited experiences and difficulty with the English language, immigrant parents need to be made to feel more welcome and comfortable in the schools in which their children attend. Strategies need to be developed to help immigrant parents feel more comfortable in our schools. Many immigrants are self-conscious about their limited language skills and unaccustomed to the customs we take for granted. The more involved they are in our school communities, the more likely they will be able to provide their children with the support they need.

MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION

Middle school education continues to be an area of interest for the Citizens Panel, particularly as it relates to Social and Emotional Learning. As does our school board, our Panel believes there is a need for the District to frame a child-centered middle school vision and philosophy around which systemic practices will center. While there are varying frameworks, philosophic viewpoints, and organizational alternatives around which middle schools can be viewed, the fact remains that there are research-grounded practices that deserve consideration. In last year's report, the Citizens Panel included focused commentary and recommendations on middle schools' instructional practices. This year, we elected to include commentary about the important relationship between middle schools and Social and Emotional Learning.

As educators know only too well, middle school can be a very difficult transitional time for children and their parents, as well as for classroom teachers. Early adolescence is a time when many children are caught between their desire to end childhood and their fear of entering adolescence. It is a time in maturation characterized by rapid physical growth, emerging moral reasoning, emotional uncertainty, and the onset of abstract thinking. In addition, middle school years typically include the introduction to a wide range of social variables (drugs, sex, alcohol, peer influence, etc.). It is a time when children strive for independence, yet clamor to belong; question their connections with parents, yet seek alliances with peers and understanding teachers; struggle to deal with their own personal conflicts, but are willing to seek solutions to community and world problems.

One of the most widely accepted approaches at working with middle school children is to design what we do in school around the unique characteristics of the middle school learner. This translates into a school delivery paradigm centered on school being both child-centered and academically challenging, nurturing while holding children accountable for the poor decisions they are bound to make. For this reason, Social and Emotional Learning is critical during the middle school years, and for this reason we offer some thoughts for further consideration.

COMMENDATIONS

- We thank the Board and the administration for their thoughtful responses to the middle school commentary and recommendations included in last year's report. We recognize that there are different opinions about how best to organize middle schools, and that much of this conversation is impacted by financial constraints and influenced by the current high-stakes testing environment.
- We commend the Board for taking leadership in this conversation by asking the administration to clearly frame the District's philosophy and vision for middle school education.
- We applaud the many positive instructional improvements made at the middle school level, including, but not limited to, vast improvements in scheduling and curriculum design and attention given to improving instructional delivery through staff development.
- The District's focus on middle school reading is particularly noteworthy. Classroom libraries were purchased for every Title I teacher and needed materials purchased for all teachers. The Essential Literature program raises expectations about how much and what students are expected to read. The Language! initiative addresses the remedial needs of students.
- Seventeen middle schools currently have after-school programs designed to strengthen instructional skills as well as keep the early adolescent involved in constructive after-school activities.

- The District is to be commended for expanding honors classes at middle school. Appropriately, however, they also recognize that with more specialized classes come tracking-related issues that need to be addressed.
- The District recognizes that there is a need for more advisory/counseling time at the middle school level. This recognition is a needed first step to finding ways to incorporate more opportunities for Social and Emotional Learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Citizens Panel agrees with the Board that there is a need for District to develop and articulate a clear framework and philosophy for middle school education. We encourage the Board and administration to consider appointing a task force to study middle school-related issues, similar to the Discipline Task Force formed last year. A Middle School Task Force could study the available research in terms of what is applicable and affordable in our community and what might work best in an urban community such as ours. The work of the National and Tennessee Middle School Associations can be reviewed, as can important bodies of work on middle schools such as Turning Points 2000, the most recent Carnegie Report on the subject.
- The Panel is eager to examine and assess middle school initiatives that are in place and are being developed. To do this, however, we would like to see more clear indicators of success developed for both the academic and social needs of middle school children, as well as data and evidence that demonstrate the degree to which the District is experiencing success at addressing these needs.
- Finances permitting, we encourage the District to reinstate the middle school counseling positions that had to be cut from the budget as well as to train counselors to, in turn, train teachers to work as counselors-in-the-classroom. With ample counselors on site, students exiting from special programs (e.g. New Beginnings, MIP classes, etc.) can be given ample, individual support during their transition back to a general education setting.
- The National Middle School Association will be holding its annual national conference in Nashville in November 2006. This is an incredible opportunity we encourage the District to take advantage of, as the nation's foremost experts in middle school education will be in town. We encourage the District to arrange the 2006 District calendar around this opportunity so as to free as many administrators and teachers as possible to attend, as well as to take advantage of the expertise that will be here to work in dedicated sessions with our staff.
- We encourage the District to continue its efforts at developing effective transition experiences for children moving from elementary school to middle school, and from middle school to high school.
- We encourage the District to address the unique social and emotional needs of middle school children by examining how best to incorporate advisory time for middle school students in the school day, and how best to incorporate the recommendations our Panel made in the preceding section on Social and Emotional Learning.

POLICY GOVERNANCE

During the latter part of the 2002-03 school year, our School Board adopted Policy Governance, a new system of school system oversight that allows board members to focus on student achievement and the vision needed to improve achievement in Nashville schools. Although it was a challenging operational transition to make, school board members agreed to move in this direction to create a more appropriate and effective system of district oversight.

Under Policy Governance, the School Board determines the needs and interests of the community, based upon community input, and governs the district through broadly stated policy as opposed to directing specific actions. Policy Governance limits the Board's role to creating the District's budget, developing a vision, setting district policy, hiring and evaluating the Director, and, with senior leadership, evaluating the progress the district is making at meeting the Board's goals. These goals are framed as Ends Statements, and clearly define what is expected of students. The administration's responsibility is to use their expertise to do everything possible to meet these goals. The Board evaluates the success of the administration at doing this through data-driven results that substantiate whether or not progress at reaching its goals is being made.

Given this dramatic change in board operation, the Citizens Panel elected to study Policy Governance and its impact on our District.

COMMENDATIONS

- The Board should be commended for recognizing the need for creating and adopting a more appropriate and effective system of oversight. While implementing Policy Governance requires a great deal of time, effort, and attention, it is likely to create a more direct and positive relationship between what happens at the board table and what happens in the classroom.
- Policy Governance helps the School Board develop a clear relationship with its Director of Schools. In addition, it keeps the Board from focusing on operational detail and helps it focus instead on identifying what needs to be accomplished. The Board now charges staff with the responsibility to explain, through hard data and evidence, how well the District is doing at meeting the Board's goals.
- Policy Governance requires the Board to better understand what the community wants and expects from its schools, translate those expectations into policy, assign clear expectations for implementing policy to the Director of Schools, then assess the degree to which he has met these expectations.
- The shift to Policy Governance has been extremely taxing, as it has involved a significant shift in past practice, including new procedures, terminology, and work assignments. The anticipated results, however, seem well worth this effort. The Board is now able to clearly discern its role and its boundaries with administrative staff, is able to address important issues in a timely and efficient way, and is positioned to gather and assess important data. While extricating the Board from the management of the school system, Policy Governance provides more room for administrators to do what they are hired to do and are expert in. The Director is charged with creating and monitoring personnel who execute the will of the Board.
- The Board's evaluation of the Director of Schools is much better defined. It is based on specific performance targets and the data that define his success at meeting them.

- Commendably, the Board has begun to develop a set of goals (Ends Statements) that clearly define what children will be able to accomplish when they exit our school system. The Board has made a sincere effort to enlist feedback from Linkage Groups in the community in their formation.
- Policy Governance is a complex system of oversight that takes years to master. As a result of the Board taking several proactive steps to aid in the implementation of Policy Governance, it is well ahead of the learning curve. The Board designated a central office administrator to serve as the Policy Governance coordinator, created a Policy Governance Committee that meets regularly to review how effectively it is doing, has consulted with several Policy Governance experts, and has made appropriate modifications to the governance process to make it compatible with the needs of our District.
- Although Policy Governance is only in its second year, several positive outcomes have already resulted. The Board is doing a better job at focusing on policy and leaving implementation to our administrators. Important decisions are being made in a timely and efficient manner, and clearer performance goals are being set. The Director's annual evaluation is more thoughtful and thorough, as is the evaluation of system-wide performance. New initiatives are implemented in a timely fashion, and the Board's vision is more inclusive.
- The Citizens Panel is confident that, within a reasonable period of time, Policy Governance will become embedded in the MNPS culture.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The community as a whole is not familiar with the changes the Board has made with regard to governance, nor does it understand the new terminology being used. While we understand the need to experience some success with Policy Governance before unveiling it officially to the public, we believe the time has come for the Board to familiarize the community with the rationale and operation of Policy Governance and the terminology it is now using.
- It would be advisable for the Board to dedicate a portion of each meeting to explain to the public how it conducts oversight, the nuances of Policy Governance, and the definitions of terminology used. Brochures and other forms of information that define and explain the importance of Policy Governance, define terminology, explain the differences between the new and old paradigms of oversight, etc. should be developed and disseminated, as well as included on the District's website. Local newspapers should be encouraged to explain the same to their readers.
- Board Linkage meetings with the public can be enormously instructive. While we commend the Board for holding them, we also recommend that more are held, at a variety of times and in a variety of locations, centered on specific topics of current importance, e.g. middle school, discipline, school climate, etc. Such meetings will help Board members better understand the thinking of the community they serve.
- The Board embarked on Policy Governance after the administration developed its original Strategic Plan. Whereas there is much congruence between the Strategic Plan and the Board's goals (Ends), both needed to come into alignment by the start of the school year. Unfortunately, the restructuring of the Strategic Plan has just recently been completed and has not yet been shared with building administrators, the teaching staff, and the general public.

- The Citizens Panel believes the Board’s Ends should be linked directly to key indicators in the administration’s Strategic Plan so that the Board and the community can more easily monitor the District’s progress in meeting them.
- We assume that the teaching staff is well aware of the importance of the Board’s focus on achievement-related Ends. The same, however, may not be true of the Board’s commitment to “soft” Ends related to such things as character development, school climate, and student discipline. The relative importance of all Ends Statements needs to be shared with principals and teachers if indeed they are going to be systemically addressed.
- Global mission statements and goal statements (e.g. becoming the best school district in the nation, dramatically raising test scores, etc.) are important, certainly wishful and encouraging, but are not immediately attainable. The Board’s Ends Statements, however, clarify what exactly the District believes is important. It is our understanding that strategic directives and annual targets are designed to address these Ends. It would be helpful if, at the start of each year, the Board and administration synthesize, in easy-to-understand terms, a summary of the target goals for the year. An explanation of how well the District does at meeting these targets could then be included in the administration’s annual report to the Board and shared with the community, using assessment data and other benchmarks to measure success.
- Because the Board now centers on policymaking, citizens need a better understanding of how they can have their concerns and complaints registered and addressed. A clear process for redress needs to be established with immediate follow-up communication. Information on how citizens can appropriately address concerns should be included on the District website, as well as shared through other means of written explanation.
- Policy Governance is meritorious; however, it will take years of hard work, coupled with patience, to master. It is our hope that the Board will stay its course. The merits of Policy Governance are well worth the effort.
- One of the features of Policy Governance is the Board’s use of “Executive Expectations.” to define the responsibilities of the Director of Schools. These expectations are currently stated using negative language, e.g. that which the Director “may not fail to do.” While we understand that the use of negative stated expectations adheres to the literal implementation of Policy Governance, the Citizens Panel finds its use to be misleading and uncomfortable. We are also concerned that the use of negative language by the Board does not model the way in which monitoring should occur with other district personnel. It is our recommendation that the Board recast Executive Expectations using positive language.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to increasing the capacity of children to recognize and manage their emotions as well as effectively solve problems, make good decisions, and establish and maintain positive relationships with peers and adults. Increasingly, educators and policymakers have discovered the important relationship between Social and Emotional Learning and the improvement of academic performance and achievement.

Without reservation, the Citizens Panel supports and encourages the journey the District has embarked on towards increasing academic achievement. Given that we recognize how important it is, in this day of high-stakes testing, for educators to develop and implement policies, instructional methods, and educational practices that will result in increased academic performance; we thought it important to weigh in on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).

Educators around the country have discovered that there is a positive correlation between Social and Emotional Learning and positive school/classroom climate, student satisfaction and performance, and parental confidence in, and support of, public school education. The Panel, and the Board, as evidenced by their Ends Statements, believe that increased attention to Social and Emotional Learning will aid in the quest for increased learning. However, while acknowledging the importance of Social and Emotional Learning is an important first step, developing policies, strategies, and programs to integrate Social and Emotional Learning in classroom instruction and school management is a critical second step. Teaching SEL is integral, rather than incidental, to learning. It will result in children better managing emotions that interfere with concentration and learning; developing motivation and the ability to persevere even in the face of academic setbacks and challenges; working cooperatively and effectively in the classroom and in peer learning groups; setting, and working toward, academic goals; and respecting adults and conducting themselves positively and constructively in school.

Early in this year's Citizens Panel meetings, a keen interest in the overall climate in our schools surfaced, as did other related issues, including student discipline and the personal development of children. Realizing that academic success for all students is the primary goal of our District, the Citizens Panel sought understanding about the strategies, practices, and procedures currently in place to ensure that the overall school climate is conducive to learning and the developmental growth of our children. To this end, the Panel sought clarification of the roles and responsibilities of school counselors, social workers and other support personnel and the degree to which Social and Emotional Learning is considered a District priority. We asked questions such as:

- Is Social and Emotional Learning important to our District? If so, how well are we doing at teaching it?
- Where have we been most successful at teaching SEL and what could we do more effectively?
- Can more time during the day be carved out to effectively address SEL?
- What impact does No Child Left Behind have on the climate and culture of schools, given the increase in expectations on staff to achieve and the placement of schools on "failing" lists?

COMMENDATIONS

- The Panel applauds the Board for responding to the community and for empowering the administration to establish the Disciplinary Task Force during the summer of 2004. This effort included broad representation of our community. We believe that this was a step in the right direction.
- We applaud MNPS for following the Disciplinary Task Force’s recommendation to establish the New Beginnings Program for students unable to practice appropriate behavior in their zoned school. We also commend the District for making certain that programming for New Beginnings included a strong emphasis on SEL and a commitment to return students to their home schools as expediently as possible.
- We applaud the Board for establishing Ends Statements regarding the issues of personal and life skills development and citizenship.
- We applaud MNPS’ efforts at focusing professional development around better understanding the children we serve through efforts such as training staff to understand and use Ruby Payne’s “A Framework for Understanding Poverty.”
- We also commend MNPS for providing staff development and summer in-service training for teachers, counselors, and administrators in school climate and safety initiatives.
- We commend MNPS for utilizing resources to secure research-based materials and training to assist schools in establishing a positive climate. We commend the administration for purchasing curricular materials and adopting strategies designed to teach personal safety, violence prevention, anger management, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills at specific grade levels.
- We applaud MNPS for articulating the school guidance plan, which includes individual, small group and classroom guidance activities.
- We applaud MNPS’ efforts in responding to the recommendations regarding middle schools’ social development that were included in last year’s Citizens Panel Report Card.
- We applaud the numerous school principals and staffs who work hard at creating a positive climate in their schools for their students and recognize the importance of Social and Emotional Learning by making teaching it a priority in their schools.
- Of particular importance, we commend the District for its work with Alignment Nashville. To do many of the things that need to be done, strong community alliances and support are needed. The District cannot, by itself, accomplish everything the community would like to see done. Coordination with supportive agencies throughout the community around District goals and imperatives is essential.
- The Panel commends those administrators and teachers who are committed to special education inclusion. Not only is this an academically sound approach, it results in the advancement of Social and Emotional Learning for both children with disabilities and their peers.

CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Citizens Panel believes sustained improvement in student achievement will be advanced through a commitment to Social and Emotional Learning. To this end, we encourage the District to think expansively about how best to address the Board’s Ends Statements related to personal development,

life skills and citizenship. While we commend the District for the steps taken to date, we encourage the District to take a more proactive approach to developing a systemic commitment to SEL by embracing their own “soft ends” through the development of clear vision, philosophy, and framework, coupled with strategies and measurable outcomes at all grade levels. Such an effort would clearly establish SEL as a priority and would encourage and guide further programmatic and strategic prevention and intervention initiatives.

- SEL-related staff development opportunities should be systemic rather than optional. The training offered should be research-based, uniform and consistently implemented across the District.
- The Panel understands that the adoption and implementation of a commitment to Social and Emotional Learning will require an expenditure of time and resources, a challenge given the fiscal restraints of the District. For example, it will require an appropriate level of funding for social workers. It is our hope that reinstating positions cut this past year will be considered.
- While we applaud the New Beginning concept and the establishment of two program sites for the 2004-05 school year, we believe that this initiative, in and of itself, is only a starting point. As stated in the previous recommendation, we believe that comprehensive strategies, focused on preventive and positive disciplinary interventions for all students, are the appropriate next steps to take. To this end, we encourage MNPS to reconvene the Discipline Task Force, and perhaps rename it to charge it to address school improvement through community building and Social and Emotional Learning. This task force could examine proactive approaches designed to promote improved behavior among all students and develop pro-social cultures in all schools that would be inviting to students, parents/family members, and staff.
- As noted above, we applaud the MNPS commitment to Ruby Payne’s “Framework for Understanding Poverty” and encourage the District to ensure that this initiative is implemented Pre-K -12. This effort will help all adults working with students to better understand the background and culture of all of its students and their families. Parents of minority subgroups, in particular, consider it essential that teachers and administrators intimately understand their history, culture, and values. Our Panel agrees that it is essential that administrators and teachers be knowledgeable and sensitive of the various cultures that comprise our diverse student population. While implementing this training, however, we agree with the administration that our system must never lose sight that educating students successfully requires high expectations for all students, coupled with the belief that all students can achieve and will learn.
- We realize that parents send children to school with varying degrees of readiness, both academically and socially. We encourage the District to adopt parent education programs to help parents master positive parenting skills, particularly during the early years when behavioral patterns are formed and during the onset of adolescence in middle school.
- The Citizens Panel recommends that strategies for implementing Social and Emotional Learning and pro-social behavioral interventions become part of School Improvement Plans (SIP).
- Nashville is blessed with numerous nonprofit agencies willing and able to support the mission of our school district. We commend the District for its leadership and involvement in Alignment Nashville and recommend that as SEL and middle school visions are developed, they be shared with all of the social service agencies providing supports for our children.
- Given that most of our schools are at the center of our neighborhoods, it would serve our community well if our schools were used for evening, weekend, and summer family activities, including recreational

and educational opportunities. We realize that the District makes our schools available to the community and would encourage any community-wide effort to work with MNPS in making our schools year-round community centers. Perhaps this is a project best addressed by Alignment Nashville.

- A reduction in class size, mentioned earlier in this report, would help teachers establish a classroom environment more conducive to addressing Social and Emotional Learning, especially in the elementary and middle school years.

POSTLUDE

NEXT STEPS

“It is important that the conversation begins, not ends, with our report.”

The 2004 Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card

The 2004 Citizens Panel for a Community Report Card is grateful for the opportunity to share our findings with the School Board, administration, teachers, parents, and community. We applaud the Board and administration for their support and encouragement, as well as their willingness to receive feedback from the community. It is our sincere hope that the 2004 Citizens Panel Report will not only be of utility to our Board and administrators but will serve as a catalyst for continued conversation and reflection between the School Board and administration and the community. To this end, we hope to do the following:

Meet with the School Board to discuss our report and answer any questions Board members might have.

Use the feedback we receive from the Board, administration, and community to help shape the work our Panel does next year. As we did last year, we look forward to receiving the Board’s and the administration’s thoughtful written response to, and analysis of, our report.

Present our report to the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, as well as to any interested civic group.

Invite various groups involved with MNPS (the District Advisory Council, individual Cluster Parent Groups, PTAs, etc.) to review our report and invite Panel members to join them for continued conversation about our findings.

Make our report available to the community on both the Nashville Area Chamber and the MNPS websites and invite community members to share their responses to our report with our Panel. In addition to encouraging feedback from the community, we are interested in receiving recommendations for focused areas of study for next year’s Panel to consider.

The Citizens Panel will begin working on its 2005 report by summer’s end. Before beginning, it will hold several organization and planning meetings, at which time 2005 Citizens Panel members will be identified. We strongly encourage community members interested in joining next year’s Panel to contact Bob Obrohta, vice president for education, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce at 743-3150.