

OUR GRADE FOR 2001-2002

Assigning a grade presented a very difficult challenge for this year's Citizens Panel. Past practice has dictated that the final grade be based largely, if not exclusively, on national and state normed achievement scores. Last year, however, was unique as it was the first in a multi-year journey on which our Board of Education and school district has embarked. It began with the hiring of Dr. Pedro Garcia as the new Director of Schools who, in turn, brought together a talented and capable administrative support team. Dr. Garcia and his team enthusiastically accepted the challenge of revitalizing our school system with the expressed expectation of improving achievement. With the strength of their shared conviction that increased achievement was indeed possible through vociferous and thoughtful planning, professional development, realigned and redefined curricula, and extraordinary effort, our administrators linked hands with our school board and the large majority of our professional staff to embark on a journey, at the end of which, positive results were guaranteed. This journey is being supported by the encouraging mantra *that all kids can, and deserve to, learn.*

Our panel has been impressed and encouraged by what took place this past year - the first leg of the journey. The year was highlighted by strong leadership, a commitment to vision and mission, thoughtful planning, new initiatives, high expectations, redefined standards curriculum alignment, and adjustments of policies and practices. These combined efforts have led to renewed hope in the community for sustained change and improvement. Administrators and teachers put forth heroic effort, and some test scores did indeed increase. However, significant improvement in numbers across the board in year one could not be expected. Much of what was done during this first year was purposive and designed specifically to lay the groundwork needed to facilitate the improvement expected to occur in the years that follow.

Our panel decided to issue a grade of "C" due to the lack of significantly improved achievement scores. This grade is also being issued because there is insufficient evidence to indicate that we are closing the gap between learner groups, a problem that will take considerable resources and effort to address. It should be noted, however, that we are issuing our grade with the confidence and anticipation that the foundation laid this past year will, indeed, lead to an improved grade in the near future. We realize that not all concerns and issues can be addressed simultaneously with equal vigor. Our panel and the public have to wait patiently for results to occur. However, until more significant test score growth is noted, and until individual schools show evidence of large-scale commitment to change, our panel does not yet feel comfortable issuing a higher grade.

Our panel is pleased with the direction our district is moving. However, while we understand that this first year was largely devoted to laying the foundation for improvement, we have raised issues and made recommendations that we hope our Board of Education and administrative leadership team will give careful consideration and attention in the months ahead. We have confidence that achievement scores in Metro schools will increase over time, and we feel good about the journey on which we have all embarked.

The 2002 Citizens Panel