

ConVal Corner

by Dr. Richard A. Bergeron

The ConVal Corner is a monthly column that affords me, the District Superintendent, the opportunity to focus and expand on major issues, as well as spread the news of student achievement and District success.

The focus for this month's column is the recent release of our District's New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) results. I am very concerned with the lack of progress noted by these scores. I also find the low percentages of students performing in the proficient range unacceptable. I would entitle this article, "Developing a Strong Sense of Urgency."

In terms of background information, the NECAP is the selected assessment tool that New Hampshire uses to determine progress toward performance proficiency mandated in the federal legislature entitled "No Child Left Behind."

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has recently been reissued. The law has strong bi-partisan support and is built on four baseline principles: accountability, greater choice for parents, increased local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on educational results based on scientific research. The most publicized component of this law is that it holds school districts accountable for student achievement with the goal of 100% student proficiency in mathematics and literacy by the year 2014.

Each state sets annual benchmarks or improvement goals for the school district to achieve in order to be found to be making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). These benchmarks are tied to two-year improvement trajectory data points called Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO). If a school or district misses their AYP targets for two consecutive years, they are considered to be a school or district in need of improvement. The federal government has structured a continuum of consequences and corrective actions for schools and districts found to be in need of improvement.

No Child Left Behind required all states to create curriculum frameworks for all core subjects that include grade level instructional standards. States also were given the autonomy to select the assessment tool to measure student progress, as well as establishing annual proficiency cut scores. New Hampshire currently uses four performance categories:

- 4 – Proficient with Distinction
- 3 – Proficient
- 2 – Partially Proficient
- 1 – Substantially Below Proficient

ConVal's NECAP performance is detailed in this table (scores are expressed as percentages):

Program/ Grade	05/06 District	06/07 District	07/08 District	Delta District 06/07- 07/08	06/07 State	07/08 State	Delta State 06/07- 07/08	Delta State to District 07/08
% Prof.								
Reading	67	73	73	0	71	72	+1	+1
3	68	78	76	-2	75	77	+2	-1
4	70	74	80	+6	72	74	+2	+6
5	64	76	73	-3	72	71	-1	+2
6	62	69	81	+12	72	73	+1	+8
7	73	67	67	0	67	75	+8	-8
8	63	73	63	-10	66	67	+1	-4
11	-	-	60			67		-7
Math	59	63	62	-1	65	61	-4	+1
3	54	61	67	+6	69	73	+4	-6
4	59	50	57	+7	66	68	+2	-11
5	58	72	60	-12	67	69	+2	-9
6	57	70	68	-2	67	68	+1	-
7	59	64	61	-3	62	63	+1	-2
8	60	65	59	-6	57	58	+1	+1
11	-	-	24			28		-4
Writing	42	48	32	-16	46	43	-3	-11
5	41	54	44	-10	50	52	+2	-8
8	42	42	24	-18	42	43	+1	-19
11	-	-	28			33		-5

Clearly, as a new District Administrator, I am distraught by these scores. They require an immediate plan of response, hence my sense of urgency! I will share my proposed curriculum development model that will address these issues with the ConVal School Board. I shared this planning model previously with the Board's Education Subcommittee.

This plan of improvement includes a number of sequential actions. First, our staff needs training, which will raise the awareness and practice levels of instructional alignment between State standards and classroom instruction. Second, our District needs to revisit all forms of evaluation, both formative and summative, to link our performance measurements with standards found in State Frameworks documents. Third, our staff needs to tie together current and future lesson and unit planning with our content standards. Our District's standing Curriculum Committees, consisting of representatives from all grades and all schools, serve as the benchmark leaders in this effort.

Lastly, as a professional learning community, we need to continue to explore and apply best practice, research based instruction in all of our classrooms. To summarize, collaborative teacher planning in a standards-based educational environment begins with determining what students know and should be able to do (standards). Next, teachers need to be able to assess when students are successful (evaluation). Our staff needs to be encouraged to co-plan when revising or creating new curricula units. Then, based on assessment data, teachers will invest in ongoing evaluation to refine their instruction.

Commissioner Lyonel Tracy's remarks made at the recent release of the Grade 11 NECAP results echo my sense of urgency. The Department of Education will not lower accepted proficiency standards. He is quoted as saying "our standards include what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in the 21st century." I enthusiastically agree. The State's curriculum standards can be viewed at www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/curriculum/curriculum.htm

Our District should not aspire to meet State proficiency averages. We should strive for performance scores well above state averages. We all need to work together to raise our expectations for student achievement and I plan for this effort to be a top District-wide priority.