

THE



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Study Yields First-Ever Data on K–12 Distance Education

Eighty percent of public school districts said that offering courses that are not currently available at their schools is one of the most important reasons for having distance education, according to a new report that provides the first national data on distance learning in public K-12 schools.

Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students: 2002–03, released this month by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), showed that approximately one-third of public school districts—an estimated 5,500—had students enrolled in distance education courses in 2002–03.

In this study, “distance education” refers to courses taken for credit and offered to elementary and secondary school students in a school district where the teachers and students are in different locations.

Other key findings from the survey include:

—A greater proportion of districts with students enrolled in distance education courses are located in rural areas than in suburban or urban areas (46 percent compared with 28 and

23 percent, respectively).

—Among all public schools with students enrolled in distance education, 76 percent were high schools; 15 percent were combined or ungraded schools; 7 percent were middle or junior high schools; and 2 percent were elementary schools.

—There were an estimated 45,300 enrollments in Advanced Placement or college-level courses offered through distance education. This represents 14 percent of the total enrollments in distance education.

For a copy of the report, visit www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005010, or call the Department's publications center toll-free at (877) 433-7827, while supplies last.

“Assessments are a guide for instruction,” said Pisgah Forest Elementary's lead teacher Sharon Hooper, pictured below helping fifth-grader Gavin Bingham prepare for a reading test.

Putting Its Mark on the Community

North Carolina School Uses Assessments to Bridge Achievement, Communication Gaps

Tough economic times have had an impact on Pisgah Forest Elementary School and its home town of Brevard, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina. The closure of two major industries in the past several years has increased to 45 percent the number of students in the school who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

So it's no surprise that the school, one of only four elementary schools in the state to be named a 2004 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon School, is a focus of the community. The Ranger Organization of Parents and Educators and area businesses recently raised funds for a new quarter-mile track. Also, each year, they contribute funds to classroom teachers for supplies and additional materials.

continued on page 2

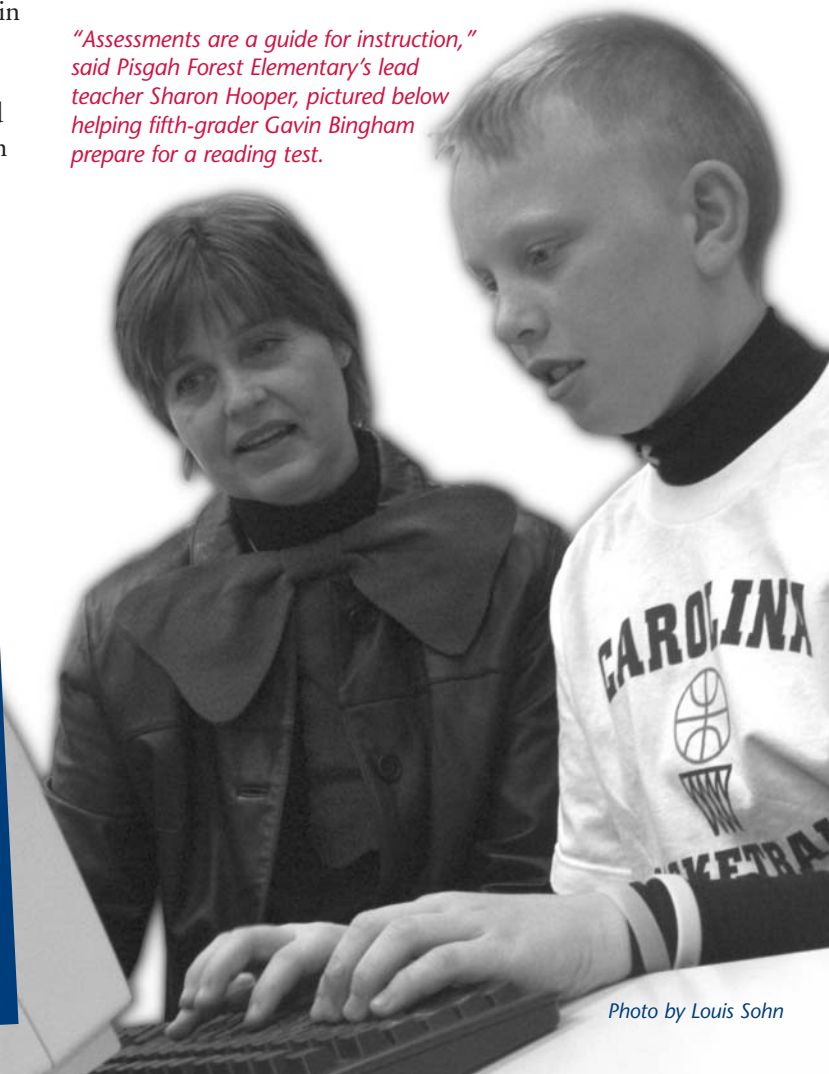


Photo by Louis Sohn



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continued from page 1

"We are known for our outstanding community support," said Principal Ron Kiviniemi. "In return, we are pleased to give the community something to feel good about."

Indeed, Pisgah Forest's third-, fourth- and fifth-graders' impressive performances on the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests in reading and mathematics is just one of the measurements community members point to when describing the successes of the school's 500 students.

For the 2003-04 school year, more than 95 percent of students in all three grades scored at or above grade level in both subjects. This is the second year in a row that the school has achieved these proficiency levels and met each of its 13 adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals.

More significantly, the school's

students show increasing proficiency in subsequent grades. The 2000-01 third-grade class began with an 88.9 percent proficiency rating in reading. The following year, as fourth-graders, their proficiency rating increased to 96.7 percent, and as graduating fifth-graders, 100 percent of the students had attained proficiency. The same progression is being seen in math. For the same class, 48.9 percent of the students scored at the advanced level in third grade; 69.5 percent in fourth grade; and 94.3 percent in fifth grade.

Principal Kiviniemi attributes these increases to teachers who are challenged to help all students reach their full potential. "Teaching is as much an art as it is a science," he noted, but added the caveat that numbers from assessments don't tell the whole story about a student's progress. "A low score on an assessment alone isn't enough to justify intervention," he said. Instead, teacher recommendations often determine when a student receives additional help. The school has at-risk funds available for after-school tutoring, as well as a summer school program. Kiviniemi also has money available for incentives to reward students' progress.

The school uses the results from continuous improvement instruments to identify academic goals from top to bottom—at the school, grade, classroom and student levels—as well as to identify trends that indicate strengths and weaknesses in instruction.

Students are assessed quarterly. Third- through fifth-graders take formal tests with questions similar to those on the state test, while students in kindergarten through second grade are assessed using one-on-one and informal assessment methods. The results of these

tests, along with teacher observations and anecdotal information, are used to guide instruction at all grade levels, said Sharon Hooper, the lead teacher in charge of the curriculum.

"Assessments are a guide for instruction," she explained. "The quarterly assessments identify gaps in learning with respect to our pacing guide, giving teachers the opportunity to spend more time on a skill to help students achieve mastery."

Communication is a key component of Pisgah Forest's success. Weekly planning time is set aside for grade-level teachers to confer among themselves. While all teachers follow the pacing guide, they develop their own daily schedules and may use whatever supplemental materials they wish, thereby enabling them to tailor instruction to the students in their classrooms.

Teachers regularly confer with individual students. "We chart progress and give students feedback on how they are doing and how much growth they have made," said Hooper. "Students are aware of their tasks and what is expected."

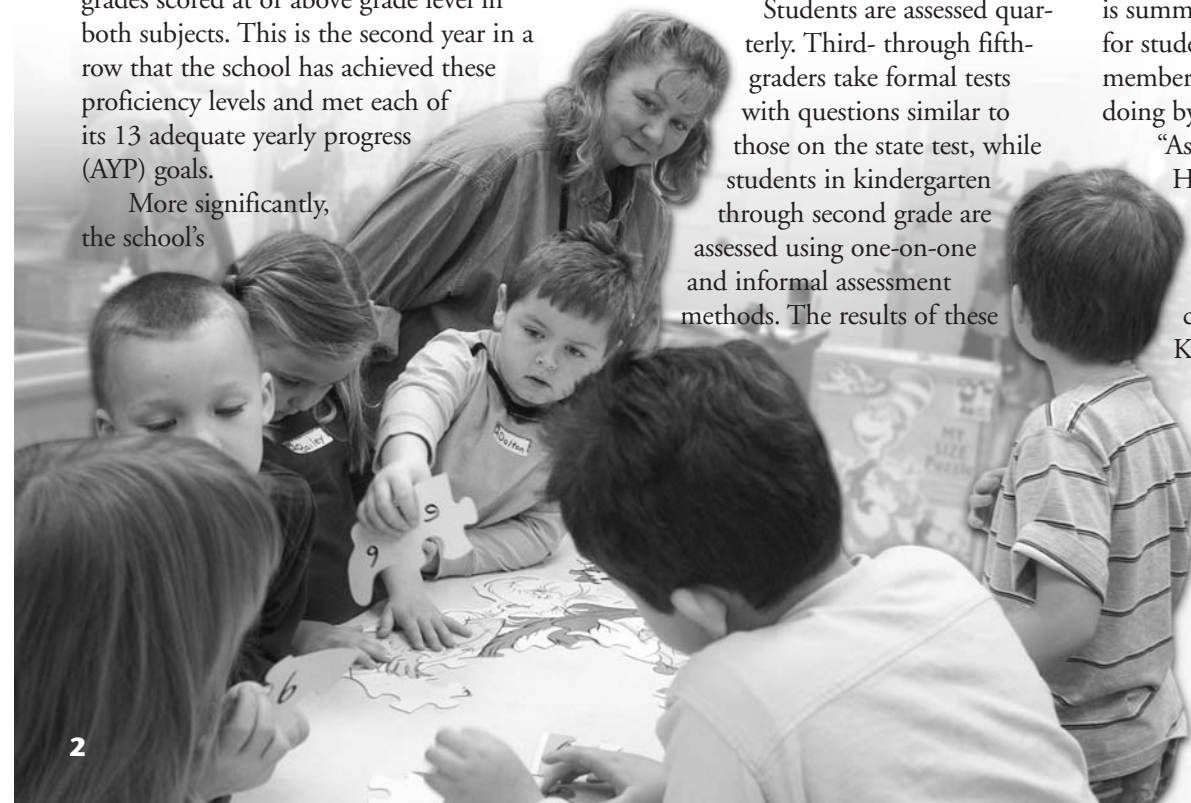
Parents are also kept well informed. Each fall teachers explain their expectations for students' behavior and academic progress. Weekly newsletters and parent conferences scheduled during the first and third quarters keep parents updated. Parents of students in grades 3-5 receive a summary of assessment results, while data is summarized quarterly on report cards for students in grades K-2. Community members can track how well the school is doing by visiting its Web site.

"As an Honor School of Excellence, High Growth—a designation given to only 37 percent of the schools in the state—we are pleased to share our Ranger pride with the community that supports us," Kiviniemi said.

For more information about Pisgah Forest Elementary School, visit www.transylvania.k12.nc.us/schools/pfel/pfeindex.htm or call (828) 877-4481.

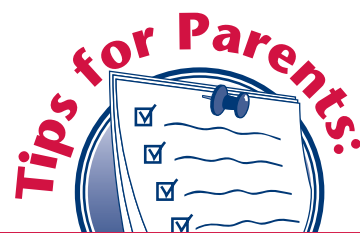
Pisgah Forest parent Rhonda Barner helps son Dalton (center) and other kindergarteners assemble a puzzle.

Photo by Louis Sohn



“Education and literacy are necessities in a world devoid of certainty but abundant with opportunity. Lives can be transformed—lifted over time from poverty and chaos to dignity and independence. Education offers a ladder on which to climb and a foundation upon which to stand.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, in her remarks at the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] Conference, Feb. 28, 2005, in Washington, D.C.



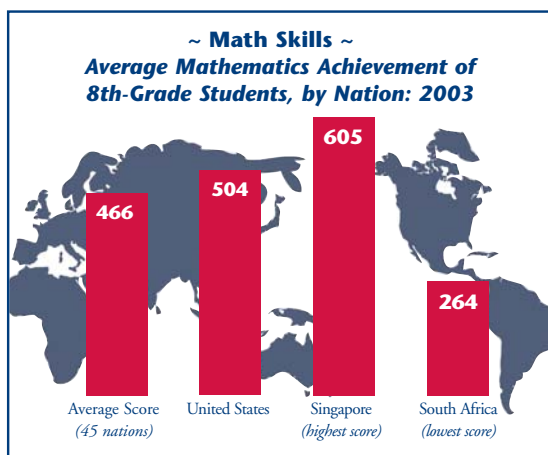
Close-Up: No Child Left Behind

Mathematics and Science Partnership Program

The Mathematics and Science Partnership program under the *No Child Left Behind Act* seeks to increase the academic achievement of students in mathematics and science by enhancing the content knowledge and teaching skills of classroom teachers. At the core of these efforts are partnerships between faculty in high-poverty school districts and those in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics at higher education institutions. Other partners may include state education agencies, public schools, businesses and nonprofit organizations concerned with mathematics and science education.

The program provides funds to states based on student population and poverty rates. States, in turn, make competitive awards available to those partnerships that they determine are most likely to be the most effective in increasing the knowledge and quality of mathematics and science teachers. Since its first year of funding in 2004, the program has supported over 300 projects. According to a recent Brookings Institution report, the majority of these projects favored the middle grades, and an overwhelming number provided professional development through summer institutes. These institutes, on average, offered 64 hours of instruction and 48 hours of follow-up service during the academic year.

This July, the Department will award a third cycle of grants to states. To continue these efforts for improving math and science instruction, President Bush's 2006 budget request increases funding for the Mathematics and Science Partnership program to \$269 million, a 51-percent increase over the Fiscal Year 2005 level. For more information about the program, visit www.ed.gov/programs/mathsci/index.html.



SOURCE: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, 2003.

In today's technological world, helping children to master mathematics is more important than ever. Parents can use everyday routines to enable children to develop the problem-solving skills needed for more advanced studies. Below is a sample activity for learning fractions for students in the second and third grades.

What You Need

- Large clear container (2-cup capacity)
- Masking tape
- Marker
- Measuring cups (1/2, 1/3 or 1/4 cup measure)
- Unpopped popcorn

What to Do

Invite your child to help you make popcorn for the family. Begin by having him or her place a piece of masking tape from top to bottom on one side of the large container.

For younger children, use a 1/2 cup measure. For older children, use a 1/3 or 1/4 cup measure. Choose the appropriate unit of measure and fill the measuring cup with popcorn. Give the cup to your child and ask him or her questions such as the following:

—How many whole cups do you think the container will hold?

—How many 1/2 cups (or 1/3 cups or 1/4 cups) do you think it will hold?

Let your child pour the measured popcorn into the clear container. Have him or her continue to pour the same amount into the container until it is full. As each equal amount is poured, have your child mark the level on the container by drawing a line on the tape. Then have him or her write the fraction that corresponds to the unit of measure on the line. After the container is full, have your child count up the total number of cup increments (1/2, 1/3 or 1/4) and compare it to his or her estimate from above.

As you measure out the popcorn to pop, ask your child to answer questions such as the following:

—How many 1/2 cups equal a cup?

Two cups?

—How many 1/4 cups equal a 1/2 cup?

A whole cup?

Note that children may reasonably want to say, for example, that 1/4 cup plus 1/4 cup makes 2/4 cups. Keep in mind that by letting them work with measuring cups or other measuring devices, they will eventually see that 2/4 is the same as 1/2.

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**PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS**



**“When it comes to
the education of our
children ... failure is
not an option.”**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



ATTENTION TEACHERS! **Training, Recognition for America's Educators**

Due to the high turnout of educators at last year's summer workshops, the U.S. Department of Education will offer this summer another series of workshops for K-12 teachers and principals as part of its Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative. The Teacher-to-Teacher Summer Workshops will bring together some of the nation's most effective teachers and education experts to share with their colleagues strategies for successful teaching and learning. The workshops highlight the latest effective practices for raising student achievement, making data-driven decisions and working with special populations. This year, breakout sessions for the workshops will explore the teaching of reading, mathematics, science and history, and will cover topics such as school leadership, the *No Child Left*

Behind Act (NCLB), and instructional strategies for improving learning for students with various skill levels. The 2005 summer workshops will be held June 20-22 in Cincinnati, Ohio; June 27-29 in Phoenix, Ariz.; July 11-13 in Minneapolis, Minn.; July 18-20 in Tampa, Fla.; July 25-27 in Bethesda, Md.; and August 1-3 in San Jose, Calif. Applications to attend or present at these workshops are now being accepted at www.ed.gov/teacherinitiative. Registration and attendance are both free of charge.

To honor those teachers who are fulfilling the promise of NCLB, the Department of Education is also calling for nominations for its 2005 American Stars of Teaching program. The program recognizes teachers' efforts in raising student achievement, making a significant impact in their students' lives, or using innovative approaches to close the achievement gap. Applications are now being accepted via the abovementioned Web site.