

# **March Toward Excellence**

## **A REPORT TO THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL**

(Selected Excerpts)

**September 2001**

### **Factors Accounting for High Academic Achievement**

- Centralized direction-setting with local decision-making.
- Policy coherence and regular data flow regarding instructional goals, assessments, accountability, and professional training and development.
- Sufficient financial resources linked to instructionally relevant strategic goals.
- Staff development that is job-embedded, intensive, sustained over time, relevant to school improvement goals and linked to student performance.
- Small school size, conducive to trust, communication and sense of community.
- Academic focus and high expectations for all students.
- Continuity of care for children in high quality pre-schools and after-school programs.
- A "corporate commitment" to public education that is material and symbolic and that is visible and responsive to parents within the school community.

### **Finding Highlights**

- DoDEA employs a Community Strategic Plan to set objectives for the system.
- DoDEA assesses every student with a standardized test. Educators use results to identify instructional strategies and to monitor and document changes in student performance.
- There are high expectations throughout the system.
- Competitive pay scales and access to integrated, extensive professional development opportunities have helped DoDEA to attract and retain high quality teachers.
- DoDEA schools are linked to an array of nationally recognized pre-school programs and after-school youth centers.
- Overall a larger proportion of middle and high schools in DoDEA are small compared to most state systems. This leads to more productive relationship between teachers and students and a greater focus on achievement and development.
- The "corporate commitment" of the military is both material and symbolic. There is a commitment to promoting a parental role in their children's' education surpasses the level of investment or involvement found in most mentoring/tutoring models.

### **Two Principal Findings**

- DoDEA schools combine in-school instruction with out-of-school activities and community conditions to construct an unusually productive set of educational opportunities for students, particularly minority students.
- DoDEA schools embrace "productive educational opportunities" that are within the grasp of public school systems to emulate.

## **Minority Student Achievement**

- Students report that teachers have high expectations of all students. As an example, 85% of African-American and 93% of Hispanic students in DDESS report that their teachers have high expectations of them compared to 52% for African-American and 53% for Hispanics nationwide.
- There is a sense of urgency among staff. With a mobility index of 35% and a normal tour of three years, teachers know that their time is short with each individual student. High mobility is not used as an excuse within DoDEA
- Controlled discipline, appropriate schedules, heterogeneous grouping, student support, assessment, and academic rigor contribute to the high academic performance of DoDEA students.

## **Notable Statistics**

- There is the perception that DoDEA has a higher average per pupil expenditure than the national average. DoDEA spends \$8,908 while the national average is \$7,290. However, DoDEA is not eligible for supplemental federal or state funding that is usually not part of the \$7,290 national average.
- In terms of pay grades, 60% of DoDEA elementary and middle school students have their military sponsor being either an E5 (Sergeant) or E6 (Staff Sergeant). Another 30% hold the rank of Sergeant First Class (E7), First Sergeant (E8) or Sergeant Major (E9). When high school students are included, 80% of the students have the military sponsor being an enlisted person.
- 80% of enlisted personnel have a high school diploma as their highest degree earned.
- Although there is the perception that the students are middle class, approximately 50% of the students in DoDEA qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Prepared by Joe Tafoya, Director, DoDEA