

'No Child Left Behind' brings educational challenges
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WILLIAMSTON—What does it mean when a school does not make Adequate Yearly Progress? According to Superintendent Tom Daly, it doesn't necessarily mean that a school hasn't made progress.

Under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, schools that receive Federal Title I funds are required to meet specified achievement standards, a measure called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This is to make sure that the schools are performing above the state average, said Daly.

AYP is broken down into subgroups of the aggregate of students, race, students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and students with learning disabilities. If any one subgroup fails to make AYP, the school is considered failing.

Daly reported at a recent board meeting that last year, five of the eight Title I schools did not make AYP according to the Act: E.J. Hayes Elementary, East End Elementary, Jamesville Elementary, Williamston Middle and Williamston Primary.

With the schools having not met the AYP last year, there are concerns about the possible implications if any of those schools again fail to meet the standard this year.

If a school fails to meet the AYP standard for two years in a row, parents in the school must be offered the opportunity to transfer their child to a school that has met the AYP standard.

And Martin County must provide the transportation for the switches.

Daly said that just because a school is considered failing, it is not necessarily an accurate report of a school's progress.

For example, the aggregate subgroup of students could have met AYP, but one subgroup may have scored points below, causing the entire school to be considered failing. When in actuality, all of the subgroups could have shown some improvement.

Daly also said that it doesn't make sense to expect children with learning disabilities, for example, to be performing at the same level as their chronological peers.

"You can't argue with the base premise (of the No Child Left Behind Act); we have a moral obligation to get our students up to proficiency. But some parts need to be rethought because the idea that everyone can do it at the same time regardless of situation doesn't make sense."

Daly said that if parents are given the opportunity to transfer their children, they must be given all of the information on AYP status in order to make an informed decision about where to transfer their child if they so choose. It is possible for a parent to elect to transfer his or her child to a school where the progress for the child's particular subgroup is not doing as well, though the school made AYP. Without the numbers, parents could possibly make such mistakes.

According to Daly the schools are currently working hard to make sure all subgroups meet the AYP this year. Tutoring and after school programs are offered. Daly said that schools are also changing instructional methods in reading. And many classrooms have developed "literary circles" to focus on literature analysis.

The test to measure AYP will be given in May, said Daly. It will be mid-June when the schools will know whether or not they have met the AYP standard.

Daly said that this poses a challenge to the state because if parents are going to be making changes about where their children go to school, and Martin County has to provide extra transportation, the board will need enough time to implement the changes.