

**Multimedia Schools**  
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**NCLB and Media Programs**

*by Mary Alice Anderson • Lead Media Specialist Winona Area Public Schools*

Attend a conference, read a professional journal, or engage in a conversation with an educator and you are likely to hear mention of No Child Left Behind. What is the impact of NCLB on school media specialists and school media/technology programs? A pattern of general concerns and trends emerged when I informally surveyed media specialists.

**Testing is perhaps the biggest and most noticeable impact of NCLB.** Mary from Illinois explained she "had to administer the test during the 2-day period, plus talk to my group about the tests before the actual testing date. The media secretary has also been put in charge of tests given in hopes of improving reading scores. "This takes her out of the media center 2 days." A Minnesota media director said labs in her district's elementary schools were tied up an entire week for online testing. At my school, we are noticing a slowdown in media center and lab usage while state tests are being given, and we scramble to reschedule postponed activities. Labs are occasionally used so that students can take practice versions of the state tests online. I am concerned about high-end computers being used for activities akin to drill and practice. One media specialist reported that "labs have become totally devoted to [Pearson Digital Learning's] SuccessMaker in order to predict/raise test scores. Other programs are not being used because there is no time in the labs or left in the instructional day."

The emphasis on tests and the fear of a school not making Adequate Yearly Progress are causing a great deal of confusion and stress for many teachers. Charlotte Anderson from Tennessee explained, "Our teachers are under incredible pressure from the state and local hierarchy to remain on the 'good school' list. And we all know that NCLB ratings may be in the hands of a 'few' students' scores. It seems that we (students, teachers, and schools) are being evaluated and 'tagged' by the NCLB decree. We, as educators, have been left with the mechanics of the mandate and not given the means or tools to achieve its goals. At the same time, our schools are being threatened with public humiliation if the goals are not met."

Teachers under stress are often less likely to have the time or mind-set to utilize media/technology resources. A New York third grade teacher who worked closely with her school's media specialist was told by her principal that she couldn't take time to be creative anymore. Situations such as this suggest a shift away from constructivist learning that media programs and media specialists support and encourage. Let's hope that the combination of good teachers and good media specialists will keep constructivist learning alive.

**Are we technology literate yet?** NCLB legislation requires all students to be technology literate by the end of eighth grade. States such as West Virginia and Wisconsin have developed technology content standards and proficiencies based on the national standards. West Virginia's standards provide specific grade-by-grade expectations and performance indicators. Check out the standards at <http://wvde.k12.wv.us/csos/>.

Wisconsin's standards (Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Information & Technology Literacy and the Standards Matrix) offer benchmarks for grades 4, 8, and 12, as well as an implementation framework for the standards. Allene Horton, the technology coordinator at the Gale-Ettrick School District in Wisconsin, described what looks like a good model. The district held meetings with all grade levels and media and technology staff to familiarize everyone with the Wisconsin standards and to

develop four units that integrate the standards. K-4 and 5-8 versions of the Wisconsin standards modified by a southwest Wisconsin education agency are available at <http://www.cesa4.k12.wi.us/programsservices/itech/edtech/index.htm>.

**Good models aside, questions remain.** How many districts are addressing the technology literacy requirement? Will teachers who are facing the demands of high-stakes testing and limited time be committed to information and technology literacy instruction? Will media specialists be involved in facilitating and teaching literacy instruction infused into the curriculum? Or, will technology literacy become a content standard taught out of context so that students can pass a test? One media specialist said she is now expected to teach computer/technology skills to her school's 700 students using a media center that has only five computers. This is difficult enough, but when the instruction is assigned solely to the media specialist, the curriculum has less chance of being integrated and authentic. Will what is *not* being taught—critical uses of technology—be as obvious as what *is* being taught? Will technology teachers or technicians with no training in information literacy continue to replace media specialists and teach what media specialists are uniquely qualified to teach? Let us hope not.

**Several media specialists said they are asked to do more teaching.** Georgia media specialist Pam Nutt reports she is "teaching classes now as part of the accountability. That's fine with me because I love to teach, but it seems that some teachers find it an inconvenience and don't come. I was surprised at just how many kids did not know what a reference book was and how to use the Internet." A New Jersey media specialist said, "I have been told to coordinate my library lessons, including choice of read-aloud, with the topic of the week being covered in the classroom literacy curriculum. I like to coordinate, too, and have been trying for years to do it with social studies and science. Now I'm expected to do it for all grades, every week, for literacy." In one school, NCLB is changing how resource teachers and extra time are used, and any extra time is dedicated to literacy. The media specialist and her secretary are asked to "close the library at 2:30 every day and tutor low-level kindergarten kids in literacy issues." Are isolated instruction and closed media centers the intent of NCLB? Or is this a chance to be more visible and really make a difference?

**Literacy in its traditional sense of being able to read and write is having another kind of impact on what we do.** Several media specialists mentioned a stronger emphasis on recording reading levels in online catalogs and identifying all materials properly. I'm noticing more requests for information about reading levels of specific items and more attention being paid to ability-appropriate materials.

The Lexile scale has especially acquired increased importance. Some media specialists are asked to identify the Lexile level for all books. Some districts are purchasing Lexile rating tools and stickers in addition to Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts markings for books. A Texan explained, "We already have AR stickers and labels on the spines of our library books. Since there is no other place to attach the Lexile sticker, we have chosen to place the sticker on the inside front cover of each library book that has a Lexile range. My principal, the county reading director, and others agree that Lexile measurements are here to stay. Since Lexile will be the instrument to measure reading growth, we had best be on the bandwagon."

The emphasis on reading scores and phonics is a concern to those who support the value of voluntary free reading and reading for enjoyment. Ninety-minute blocks of instructional time with the basal reading series leave little time for self-selected reading and sustained silent reading. My district is using a new reading series that includes an excellent list of supplemental readings. Unfortunately, many teachers are too busy getting through the series and the assessments to direct the students towards the suggested readings. We expect this to change as teachers become more familiar with the series.

**Shifted or expanded roles.** Media specialists involved in staff development may have opportunities to help teachers become "highly qualified" as required by NCLB. In support of the dual need for accountability and assessment, our district has purchased software to help teachers manage and report student reading assessments. I work with our curriculum director to schedule in-services and am one of several tech coaches who help teachers learn how to use the software. In some situations, the emphasis on NCLB may mean less time for technology-related staff development, as Mary from Illinois explained: "The problem this year is the 'No Child Left Behind' mandate, which requires that our 'school improvement days' be spent focusing on the same topic throughout the school year. This year it is 'Curriculum Mapping,' so the technology in-service has not happened on those days this year." Whatever form staff development takes, it's worth our while to be involved. If we help teachers, their stress will be less.

**Funding for NCLB can mean less money for media programs,** as reflected in these angry comments:

- \* We're spending buckets of money on management software and equipment.
- \* We're adding courses in math, writing, and reading to meet the standards, sucking the money from the general curriculum and media centers for two basic tests.
- \* Our school is ready to restructure; the libraries are going to be staffed only part-time by certified LMSs.
- \* Our reading teachers were given tens of thousands of dollars to buy materials, yet library media centers were not seen as being vital to reading
- \* Our allocation was about 40 percent less than in prior years, and the district severely limited spending, eliminating technology and replacement of technology.

**Fewer states mandate media specialists,** and it is ironic that a program emphasizing reading and "highly qualified" has no requirements for "highly qualified media specialists." However, some districts are taking notice and asking more of their media specialists. A Minnesota media specialist said, "Administration has decided (based on the requirements for NCLB) that the teacher who was my supervisor should become a licensed technology teacher and if I want to keep my job, I must return to school to get a media specialist license." Although Minnesota does not mandate media specialists, our state's school report cards do report on the number of media specialists in each school, a piece of trivia worth noting.

**What's NCLB?** Surprisingly, in some districts, NCLB appears to not even ripple the waters. Are these schools already complying? Are high standards and testing already so common that it doesn't matter? Many "survey" participants noted that NCLB has made no impact yet on the library media program or on their schools as a whole.

Like it or love it, NCLB is probably here to stay. For those who say it's a trend, it's a trend worthy of learning more about. It may be another opportunity to become involved and add value to what we do.