Escondido Union School District
California

Superintendent: Dr. Mike Caston
Primary contact: Pat Peterson, coordinator, GATE/Title I
18,700 students, K-8, suburban

District Description

Located in the suburbs of San Diego in southern California, the Escondido Union School District is strongly influenced by its proximity to the U.S.-Mexican border. According to Pat Peterson, the district’s Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) and Title I coordinator, Escondido has undergone noticeable changes in the past few years due to the increasing flow of immigrant families from Mexico. Currently, Latino students make up half of the district’s total enrollment and constitute most of the district’s English language learners. Peterson noted that most of the immigrant families come for jobs and the promise of a better life, and that “although many do not appear to have a good economic lifestyle, it is often better than what they had before.”

The district, which serves students in grades K-8, has faced additional challenges, including changes in leadership at the district and site levels. “Times were rough, but are getting better,” explained Peterson. Furthermore, among the 43 districts in San Diego County, Escondido has the second highest poverty rate. Consequently, Escondido is not only working with language barriers, but also with a very impoverished community.

Key Findings

- Escondido Union School District did not make adequate yearly progress in 2004-05 and has entered year 1 of improvement status. The district’s English language learners, students with disabilities, Latino students, and low-income students did not meet state targets in English/language arts. English language learners and students with disabilities also missed state targets in mathematics.

- Although Escondido works very closely with supplemental educational service providers, the services have not been widely used. Of about 1,800 eligible students, only 212 students were using these services as of the winter of 2005-06. The low participation rate in SES programs may be due to a No Child Left Behind 21st Century grant and to Any Time School, both of which fund after-school tutoring programs that allow students to be tutored by their own teachers.
Overall Impact of NCLB

NCLB has had both positive and negative impacts on Escondido, according to district officials. On the positive side, NCLB has helped the district to focus on and address the performance patterns of student subgroups. District officials often talk about problems, Peterson explained, but unless all stakeholders see these problems, it is difficult for the district to commit to redirecting instruction. Data collected to meet NCLB requirements clearly identify the underperformance of some groups, which has led school staff to rethink and redirect teaching strategies, professional development, and other resources.

One negative part of the law, according to Peterson, is its accountability requirements for students with disabilities, who have been identified as disabled in part because of their low academic performance. Requiring 100% of this subgroup to reach proficiency does not make sense, in her view. In addition, said Peterson, the media frequently uses the term “failing” to identify schools, which can confuse parents and community members and demoralize staff in schools that are making academic gains but not rapidly enough to make AYP.

NCLB and Student Achievement

Escondido uses two main tests to calculate adequate yearly progress—the California Standards Tests (CSTs) in grades 2-8 and the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) for students in grades 2-8 who have significant cognitive disabilities. For testing purposes, California identifies ten subgroups, including the two separate subgroups of Filipino students and Pacific Islanders, which most states integrate into the Asian subgroup. In addition to meeting other AYP requirements, schools in California must also meet the standards of the Academic Performance Index (API) to make AYP. API is California’s accountability system, which existed prior to NCLB and continues to exist alongside NCLB.

Table 1 shows the districtwide and subgroup percentages of students scoring at or above the proficient level on the state tests used to determine AYP, as well as the district’s API scores. Over the past three years Escondido schools have generally seen an increase in both their API scores and the percentages of students achieving at or above the proficient level. In English/language arts, all subgroups showed noticeable growth, with gains ranging from a 2 percentage point increase for students with disabilities and English language learners to an 11 percentage point increase for Filipino students. In mathematics, all subgroups except students with disabilities made noticeable progress in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient levels, with gains ranging from a 4 percentage point increase for English language learners to an 11 percentage point increase for Filipino students. Students with disabilities showed a slight decline in the percentage proficient.

Despite noticeable gains, achievement gaps persist. Generally, the Asian and white student subgroups have posted the highest percentages of students scoring proficient in both English/language arts and mathematics. At the other end of the scale, students with disabilities and English language learners continue to struggle, with the lowest percentages of students scoring at or above proficient. Although Latino students, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities have made gains in the percentages of students scoring at or above state targets, these percentages have remained lower than the districtwide percentages each year for the past three years in both English/language arts and mathematics.
### Table 1. Percentage of Escondido Union Elementary Students Scoring at or above Proficiency on State Tests Used for AYP

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<td>State AYP target</td>
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<td>13.6%</td>
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<td>Districtwide</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
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<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Mathematics**        |      |      |      |
| State AYP target       | 16.0%| 16.0%| 26.5%|
| Districtwide           | 34%  | 35%  | 39%  |
| African American       | 29%  | 33%  | 38%  |
| Asian                  | 64%  | 69%  | 70%  |
| Filipino               | 48%  | 51%  | 59%  |
| Latino                 | 23%  | 23%  | 28%  |
| White                  | 52%  | 53%  | 57%  |
| Low income             | 22%  | 24%  | 28%  |
| English language learners | 20% | 18%  | 24%  |
| Students with disabilities | 20% | 17%  | 19%  |

| **Academic Performance Index** |      |      |      |
|                                | 681  | 696  | 703  |

Table reads: In 2005, 38% of African American students scored at or above proficient in English/language arts, compared with 34% in 2004 and 32% in 2003.

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP
Escondido Union School District did not make AYP in 2004-05 and has entered year 1 of improvement. Not all subgroups in the district met the state proficiency targets in English/language arts or in mathematics. However, these targets increased for the 2004-05 school year, a change that resulted in English language learners, students with disabilities, Latino students, and low-income students missing the targets in English/language arts. Two of these subgroups, English language learners and students with disabilities, also missed state targets in mathematics.

Eleven of the district's 17 elementary schools did not make AYP in 2004-05, and 5 of the 11 are in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Three of these schools entered improvement in fall 2005 because they had not made AYP for two consecutive years. A fourth school, Central Elementary, made AYP through the NCLB safe harbor provision, due to the school's noticeable gains in student performance. But Central Elementary will remain in year 1 of improvement until it makes AYP for two consecutive years. Two more schools entered the later stages of NCLB sanctions in fall 2005: Glen View Elementary went into corrective action, and Grant Middle School went into restructuring.

District officials expressed particular pride about the tremendous progress made by Central Elementary, a school that serves about 813 students, of which 90% are students of color, 67% are English language learners, and 85% are from low-income families. In 2005, the API for Central Elementary improved by 78 points, Peterson said. Last year, only the English language learner subgroup did not make AYP. This year, 42% of the school's ELL students scored at or above the proficient level in the English/language arts tests, and 26% scored proficient or better in math. Peterson said that two key factors contributing to this improvement are the principal's leadership skills and the staff's willingness to work as a team. Furthermore, she explained, although the school is not a Reading First school, it is implementing the Reading First strategies, and all of its teachers have participated in the state-mandated training for Reading First schools.

Glen View Elementary—a school with 79% students of color, 54% English language learners, and 67% low-income children—is in corrective action because it has not made AYP for three consecutive years. In each of these years, the percentage of English language learners achieving academic proficiency fell short of state targets. Peterson explained that although the school gained 13 points in its API, students' test performance was not high enough to make AYP.

Grant Middle School, like Central and Glen View, also has higher than average percentages of students of color (91%), English language learners (55%), and low-income students (82%). The school is in restructuring. In 2004-05, its English language learners and low-income students did not make AYP in English/language arts or mathematics. Although the school had tremendous growth in its API, the academic improvement was not enough to meet AYP standards, Peterson said. She explained that the continuing failure is partially due to the staff not embracing the school improvement plan, which she described as excellent. “It is not about coming up with a plan,” she said, “it’s about implementing it.”

DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
As an important step in its school improvement planning process, the Escondido district is using student performance data to make decisions to help prevent its schools from continuing to miss AYP targets. The district is also implementing a site-based staff development model that takes place during the teachers’ work hours and provides training to all district teachers on how to teach vocabulary, with a special focus on teaching vocabulary to English language learners. Another strategy involves the continued use of what the district calls “collegial conversations.” In these conversations, which occur every 12 weeks between individual teachers and their principal, teachers discuss the action plans they have developed to address problems with their students’ performance. The teacher’s knowledge of their students’ performance is based on the
district’s 12-week benchmark assessments and on student data found in Edusoft, a Web-based student assessment data program that allows teachers to study their students’ performance for current and past years individually or by subgroup. Benchmark assessments are used by teachers to determine whether students have met standards-based targets for what they should know at the end of each 12-week period during the school year.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
All four of the Escondido elementary schools in year 1 of improvement are implementing Reading First strategies, even though only three of these schools actually receive Reading First grants. The schools are in their second year of participating in Reading First, said Peterson, and it takes time to see results. The district expects to see improvement in student performance as the impact of Reading First begins to materialize. Additionally, all four schools participate in a structured after-school tutoring program sponsored by an NCLB 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant. Through this program, teachers are allowed to tutor their own students throughout the year.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES
Three general strategies are being used at Glen View and Grant. At both schools, the district is closely observing staff to ensure that they are truly committed to their students and that they are the right match for the needs of students at those particular schools. At both schools, all teachers participate in site-based professional development. And the district employed an external consultant/coach to assist the schools in developing a plan to increase student performance. Furthermore, the district is considering additional learning time through before- and after-school programs.

For Grant, the district developed a restructuring committee of 12 people who meet twice a month to discuss restructuring strategies. Among others, this committee includes the deputy assistant superintendent, the language acquisition coordinator, the extended learning coordinator, the GATE/Title I coordinator, and the principals of the four schools in improvement status. These principals are included so they can participate in discussions of strategies to improve student performance and to identify strategies that may be useful for their own schools. The principal of Central Elementary also participates in the committee by identifying what Central has done to improve student performance sufficiently to make AYP.

The committee has visited high-performing schools, and committee members have read and shared research articles to inform their decisions and to identify programs that work. Peterson said that none of the staff members at Grant have a secure position. The committee is currently drafting “student learning assurances,” guidelines by which the school will operate during the next school year. Current staff members who agree to abide by the guidelines will be re-interviewed for their position, Peterson explained. District officials anticipate that most of the staff will choose to stay.

Testing Issues
As previously mentioned, Escondido schools not only must meet the AYP test score targets, they also must meet the API targets in order to make AYP. In 2003-04, the state AYP targets for the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level were 13.6% in English/language arts and 16% in mathematics. In 2004-05, the targets rose to 24.4% in English/language arts and 26.5% in mathematics. Also in 2004-05, a school or district had to attain a minimum API of 590 or acquire at least one-point growth, in addition to meeting other AYP requirements. As permitted by federal law, the district uses CAPA as an alternative assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities.
Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

GENERAL CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
Peterson said that NCLB has led the district to focus more on standards. Prior to NCLB teachers would, at times, choose to not use standards-based materials, focus on topics in which they were personally interested, or run out of time to teach all of the required material. NCLB has standardized teaching, she explained. Teachers are now mandated to cover all of the tested standards, and the district has pacing guides for math and reading that aid teachers by outlining what material they should be covering as the year progresses. This is good, according to Peterson, because it standardizes the curriculum and ensures that students are taught the material before they are tested. However, this leaves less classroom time for non-tested activities such as music, art, and social studies.

Escondido has added several intervention programs for reading and mathematics. The district uses a program called High Point as an intervention program for students in grades 4-8 who are two or more years behind in reading. The program is based on a leveled reading curriculum with several entry points to allow students to work at their own reading level. The district also uses math support classes as an intervention program for students in grades 6-8 who are two or more years behind in math. Students take this math class instead of an elective and in addition to their regular math course, so they are actually taking two math classes. In their regular math class, they are introduced to new math concepts. And in their math support class, they receive additional support to help them understand previously introduced concepts they have not yet grasped. The district also uses the Voyager passport, developed by Voyager Expanded Learners, Inc., in grades K-8. This program is based on scientific reading research and is designed to identify struggling readers, intervene with targeted instruction, and monitor student progress. Furthermore, Escondido uses Houghton Mifflin leveled reading textbooks designed to cover the full range of students’ reading readiness levels. Most Title I schools have used their Title I money to purchase these books because they were not part of the district’s core textbook adoptions.

CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUBGROUPS
As explained by Peterson, it is difficult to identify what changes have been made to assist specific subgroups when most of the district’s students are children of color, low-income students, and/or English language learners. Although Escondido has not made any changes in curriculum to affect any particular subgroup, the majority of students who benefit from the High Point program, the math support classes, the Voyager passport, and the Houghton Mifflin leveled readers are English language learners and low-income students.

English Language Learners
According to the district reports of 2004-05 from the California Department of Education, English language learners make up about 43% of the Escondido district’s total enrollment. About 97% of ELL students are native Spanish speakers. The district uses the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to determine students’ English language proficiency level, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. English language learners will be kept in the ELL subgroup for two years after they achieve proficiency in English, or level 5 on CELDT. According to Peterson, this subgroup has to be the “linchpin” of all school improvement efforts, because it is the group that is not improving quickly enough to make AYP. In addition, most ELLs are also in two other subgroups, Latino and low-income students. Although Escondido’s proximity to the border lends itself to high student mobility, some cohorts of English language learners have been with the district for several years and are still not making enough progress in the academic content areas. Consequently, Escondido has made English language learners a focus of its improvement plans.
District officials have made the academic improvement of ELLs a district goal, said Peterson. Escondido schools use several methods for teaching these students English, including mainstreaming, structured English immersion, and two-way immersion, but no method has been identified as being more successful than others. Regardless of the strategies used to teach English, said Peterson, English language development must be part of the instruction these students receive in all their courses.

English language learners have lagged well behind other subgroups on the California standards tests in English/language arts and mathematics. In 2004-05 only 16.4% of students in this subgroup scored at or above state targets for proficiency in English/language arts and 24.2% did so in math—in both cases, below the state AYP targets. This has directly impacted the district’s ability to make AYP for two consecutive years.

English language learners were among the subgroups that did not make AYP at both Glen View Elementary and Grant Middle School, yet they made tremendous progress at Central Elementary. One strategy used by Central was to adjust the reading/language arts curriculum for English language learners. Since the school is implementing the Reading First strategies even though it is not a Reading First school, it has the freedom to make changes in the strategies, whereas Reading First schools must abide by explicit and systematic instructional strategies. Consequently, when Charlene Zawacki, the district’s language acquisition coordinator, felt that the strategies in the district-selected Houghton Mifflin reading series were not appropriate for early English language learners (those at levels 1, 2, and 3 of the CELDT), her department revised and adjusted the curriculum. The revised lessons are used to help emerging readers access the core curriculum and receive appropriate English language development instruction.

**NCLB School Choice**

According to Peterson, the Escondido district has a limited number of schools available to receive choice students because so many of its schools have not made AYP and because the district’s transportation options are limited. In some cases, for students to take advantage of choice, parents would have to drive them to school, which many parents have chosen not to do. At the elementary level, choice was offered for students to transfer to two newly opened elementary schools. Between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 school years, 10 students transferred out of Central Elementary and 33 transferred out of Glen View Elementary. Middle school students have taken the most advantage of choice. Many students continue to leave Grant Middle School, which has resulted in noticeably higher enrollments at the district’s other middle schools. Fifty-one students transferred out of Grant in 2004-05, and 53 more students transferred out in 2005-06. Transportation costs for students who chose to transfer have amounted to just $20,000 because most parents drive their children to school and do not claim reimbursement.

**Supplemental Educational Services**

Although the district works very closely with supplemental educational service providers and does not charge them to use district facilities, supplemental educational services have not been used by all eligible students in Escondido. According to Peterson, only 212 of the 1,800 students who qualify for these services participate. This year about 17 SES providers applied to offer services for the district; 13 of these were selected by parents of eligible students.
Peterson explained that one reason why so few students use these services is because the district provides its own tutoring services through an NCLB Title IV 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, a program in which the district has participated for several years. Through the grant, the district offers several tutoring programs as part of its after-school child care. Additionally, Escondido receives state funds that are used to hire district teachers to provide after-school tutoring as part of the district’s Any Time Learning program. Both the 21st Century program and Any Time Learning allow many students to be tutored by their own teachers. Consequently, said Peterson, parents often do not feel a need to enroll their children in other tutoring programs.

**Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development**

**HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS**
In the Escondido district, most teachers who are not highly qualified according to NCLB are in the middle schools. Most of these are teachers teaching outside their content area. The district used the state’s high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) to increase the percentage of highly qualified teachers. As explained by Bob Leon, the assistant superintendent for human resources (HR), HR first identified all teachers who met the criteria for being highly qualified and completed their paperwork. For those teachers who did not clearly meet the criteria, HR worked with principals, who in turn worked with teachers to identify any coursework or exams the teachers had taken or other experience they had gained for which they might receive credit toward meeting the highly qualified criteria. For teachers who needed to pass the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET), HR offered two test preparation trainings through California State University San Marcos, funded with NCLB Title II funds. Using a survey to gather information about where teachers stand in meeting the highly qualified criteria, HR continues to refine its list of teachers that have not yet met the criteria.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
In keeping with Escondido’s commitment to improve the performance of English language learners, this year the district implemented a site-based staff development model. The focus of the model is to teach vocabulary. Through this program, teachers from each school are selected to serve as the school’s staff development facilitators. At schools with high ELL enrollment, one or more of the facilitators is bilingual or an expert in language development. The district trains the facilitators, and the facilitators organize one full-staff training session at their respective schools.
followed by two training sessions in which teachers from the same grade level or department work together to design action plans for using the newly presented strategies in their classrooms. Topics covered in these trainings include strategies on how to teach vocabulary in general and specifically to English language learners. After coordinating with the teachers’ union, the district can make this training part of the teachers’ work day. Schools have a choice of having a short work day once a week or conducting the trainings as part of a faculty meeting after school. All district teachers participate in this training. Only facilitators receive extra pay for their work through NCLB Title II funds. Next year some Title I and Title II money will be used for this purpose.

Additionally, Escondido provides state-mandated Reading First training as part of the professional development opportunities funded through NCLB. All teachers at Reading First schools participated in this training (known as AB466 training), which consists of five days of training in language arts and math to help teachers learn how to adopt the Reading First curriculum and books.

**Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support**

Escondido purposely moved away from using paraprofessionals in Title I schools, decreasing from 123 paraprofessionals in 2003 to 7 in 2004. Currently the district has 7 paraprofessionals in Title I schools, of which 86% meet the NCLB standards for being highly qualified. Instead of paraprofessionals, Escondido now employs highly qualified part-time teachers for reading instruction. Peterson explained that part-time teachers are not hard to find, are more qualified than paraprofessionals, and are more cost effective than full-time teachers because they do not receive benefits.

**Funding and Costs**

Due to a decline in student enrollment, Escondido received less Title I funding in 2005-06 than in prior years. This year the district lost about 600 students after numerous families left the San Diego area in part due to rising housing costs. Peterson explained that other districts in San Diego County also received less funding because they had lower poverty rates than Escondido. This decline in funds has led Escondido to rethink its formula for distributing funds. Currently, said Peterson, all schools with poverty rates higher than the district average receive Title I funds. However, unless other changes are implemented, the schools with poverty rates closer to the district average will have to be dropped from the Title I program. In the 2005-06 school year, 10 elementary schools receive Title I money, but if 2 of these schools are cut out of Title I, about $300,000 would be retrieved for use in the remaining Title I schools.

**Capacity Issues**

Escondido currently has the capacity to carry out all requirements of NCLB, Peterson said.

**Reading First**

Six of the district’s elementary schools receive Reading First grants; these schools have participated in the program for two years. To meet the requirements of the grant, Reading First schools in Escondido use the state-approved Houghton Mifflin reading series. According to California’s Reading First plan, this program meets the criteria of research-based instruction and incorporates proven instructional strategies. Reading First schools are required to abide by the program’s explicit and systematic instructional strategies. As previously noted, Central Elementary has adopted Reading First strategies and curriculum, although it does not receive Reading First funds.
The Reading First grant has funded additional professional development opportunities and the implementation of new teaching strategies in Escondido. The professional development opportunities have been made available through reading coaches at each of the six school sites. These coaches demonstrate effective delivery of core English/language arts materials and intervention strategies. Teachers in grades K-3 in Reading First schools also have the opportunity to receive an additional 40 weeks of professional development on state-adopted core English/language arts materials for the classroom.

Reading First funds also support grade-level planning that guides teachers in differentiating instruction based on student needs, including increasing task complexity for GATE students. Teachers have been able to maximize peer interaction by facilitating structured dialogues for ELL students. Reading First has also allowed teachers to teach in small group settings for a longer time.

Although Reading First has not yet affected the AYP status of participating schools, Peterson said she anticipates that these schools will make AYP as the program begins to affect student performance.

Data File—Escondido Union School District

Location: San Diego, California
Type: Suburban

Number of Schools:
Total: 22
Elementary: 17
Middle schools: 5

Number of Title I schools: 5

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total enrollment: 18,700

Latino: 65%
White: 26%
Asian/Filipino: 5%
African American: 3%
Other: 1%

Low-income students: 61%
English language learners: 49%
Students with disabilities: 10%

Teachers
Total number of teachers: 1,153
Percentage meeting NCLB "highly qualified" requirements: 92%

Paraprofessionals
Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 7
Percentage meeting NCLB "highly qualified" requirements: 86%

Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing
Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP, including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 17
### Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

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### Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

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