Avon Public School District
Massachusetts

Superintendent: Margaret Frieswyk
Primary contact: Paul Zinni, director, pupil services
728 students, K-12, suburban

District Description

Just four square miles in area, the suburban Avon Public School District manages to maintain an identity quite separate from the large district of the Boston Public Schools to the north. Students and their families get to know Avon’s two schools as their neighborhood schools, since most of the students attend Avon from pre-kindergarten until they graduate from the 12th grade.

Avon’s student population has been declining for several years, but because Massachusetts allows public school choice between districts, Avon is able to keep its enrollment fairly stable. The choice option has benefited Avon by adding students from neighboring suburban districts to its rolls. Students provide their own transportation, but the Avon schools are on a major bus route, making it easy for families to transfer their children to the district. The elementary school serves grades K-6 plus preschool; the secondary school serves grades 7-12.

Key Findings

• African American students in the Avon School District did not make adequate yearly progress in math in 2004-05. Some of the students in this subgroup are transfer students from neighboring districts, so district and school staff members are making efforts to carefully identify the needs of these students and monitor how well they are adjusting to their new school.

• Although all Avon teachers are considered “highly qualified” according to No Child Left Behind criteria, district officials anticipate that they may have difficulty filling the positions of teachers who retire in the coming years.

• Avon is finding it difficult to meet the accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind and maintain its high-quality program due to budget restraints and reductions in its state and federal funding.

Overall Impact of NCLB

The full impact of NCLB has not been felt yet in Avon because not all grades have been tested in Massachusetts. This will take place in 2006 when grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 will join the tested grades for English/language arts, and students in grades 3, 5, and 7 will take the math test for the first time. Another impact of NCLB has been the challenge of finding highly qualified teachers. Avon has had a very difficult time attracting math teachers, but since the African
American subgroup did not make adequate yearly progress in this subject, Avon staff acknowledges that the district will need to step up its efforts to improve math instruction.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Student achievement in Avon schools has stayed at fairly stable levels for the past three years. In some grade levels and/or content areas, the district scores have exceeded the state averages.

For the past three years, the percentage of grade 3 students who scored at the proficient level on state tests in reading (between 70% and 75%) was higher than the state average of 62-63%. In grade 10, the percentage of students scoring proficient improved over the past three years from 49% to 59% in English language arts and from 23% to 46% in math. However, the percentage of proficient students in grade 4 during that same time period declined from 41% (above the state average) to 31% (below the state average). In 2005 testing, the percentage of grade 5 students scoring proficient in science and technology was 56%, higher than the state average of 51%.

Although the minimum subgroup size in Massachusetts for AYP purposes is 40 students, the state breaks down test score data for subgroups larger than 10 students, so Avon received disaggregated test data in 2004 for its African American students in grade 10. These data reveal an achievement gap: 57% of African American students scored at the proficient level in English language arts, compared with 64% of white students. In math, the achievement gap was greater—38% proficient for African American students, compared with 51% for white students.

**Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement**

**DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS**

Both Avon schools have consistently maintained high levels of student achievement, and the district made adequate yearly progress in previous years. But based on the test results of 2004-05, the Avon district did not reach the proficiency target in math for the subgroup of African American students. Most of these students are secondary-level transfer students, and they fell slightly short of the AYP math target. When only three grade levels were tested, the subgroups of low-income students, African American students, and students with disabilities were too small to count for AYP at the school level (although the African American subgroup has been large enough to count at the district level). For example, the number of African American students in most grades ranges between 5 and 11. But with more students tested in 2005-06, it is likely that the minimum subgroup size of 40 will be reached at both the elementary and secondary schools.

**DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

According to Paul Zinni, the director of pupil services, teachers carefully review the academic progress of all students, including the subgroups. With additional grade levels being tested in 2005-06, there will be greater opportunities for data analysis of all grades in both content areas. Teachers will be able to track individual student progress across the grades and from year to year.

All low-performing Avon students, including those in the African American subgroup, are targeted for extra help, and one way this is done is through small-group tutorials. The sessions are scheduled during the school day and before and after school when college students are available to work with the students who need assistance.
Testing Issues

Testing in the past in Massachusetts schools has consisted of reading at grade 3; English, language arts at grades 4, 7, and 10; math at grades 4, 6, and 10; and science and technology at grades 5 and 8. The testing changed in 2005-06 to include all grades 3-8 plus 10 for math and English/language arts.

Concerns exist among Avon teachers and the administration about the additional time needed for testing in the new grade levels. “Teaching time is sacred,” said Zinni, “and we have to be sure that we provide students with high-quality instruction all day long. Most teachers will be testing their students now in both content areas, and that will take time away from instruction.”

Portfolio assessments are used in Massachusetts as an accountability measure for students with serious disabilities who have been identified as needing an alternate assessment. Standards are selected at grade levels and the portfolios are created to support progress toward those goals. The assessments are aligned to the curriculum framework and state standards.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Avon teachers have had extensive training in test data analysis over the past two years. The intent of the training is to help teachers understand which areas of curriculum need attention to help all students meet standards, how their instructional strategies can be changed or modified to reach the desired results, and which students need additional support and assistance in specific areas.

Because of the shift to testing in all grade levels from 3-8, the elementary and middle school teachers will now be even more involved in the analysis of student academic data and the resulting adjustments to classroom instruction.

Avon’s grade-level teams do an item analysis of all state and district test results in all content areas. The teams have done this for the past three years to determine which content areas need a stronger focus and which grade levels need more emphasis on specific skills. Based on the results of this analysis, changes are made to better align curriculum and instruction to state standards.

One issue that Avon staff will be addressing is how to work more closely with the entering transfer students, particularly at the secondary level. Overall, the students who attend Avon schools throughout the grades perform better than those who enter due to choice or family moves, so this emphasis will bring about ideas for changes to either curriculum or instruction for certain groups of students.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

All of Avon’s teachers meet the Massachusetts standard for being highly qualified. If teachers leave or retire in the coming years, some positions will be difficult to fill, particularly those for high school math teachers. It is anticipated that there will be a few retirements each year, and although some positions will be easily filled, the district continues to search for qualified math teachers because there is a shortage throughout the state.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One key area of focus for professional development in Avon is improving instruction in writing. The Avon staff determined that an emphasis on writing across grade levels and in all content areas would raise student achievement. Teachers look at all types of student writing, such as writing about cause and effect, writing with detail, and comparing and contrasting, to identify weaknesses and strengths.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Only three paraprofessionals are paid with Title I funds, and all three have met NCLB qualifications.
Funding and Costs

The Avon district has lost state and federal funds for the past three years. Though many cuts have already been made, budget concerns continue in the district. Title I allocations have declined in Avon, as they have throughout Massachusetts, due to reductions in the state’s Title I allocation, which is based on poverty rates. Avon received $88,000 in Title I funds a year ago, but that amount decreased to $80,000 in 2005-06, a drop of 9%. The percentage of low-income students in the district has declined from 16% two years ago to the present 12%.

In addition, some state programs target funds to low-income or low-achieving districts, so districts like Avon do not receive these state allocations either. Zinni said that the district must find resources to meet the needs of low-performing students. “Our energy costs are huge, especially with last year’s cold winter, and health benefits are skyrocketing, so we have to be more creative when we don’t have the money to do what we would like to do.” One approach, he explained, has been to work with local colleges and universities, using undergraduates to work with low-performing students in homework tutorials.

Data File—Avon Public School District

Location: South Boston area
Type: Suburban

Number of Schools
Total: 2
Elementary: 1
Middle/junior high/high school: 1

Number of Title I schools: 1

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total enrollment: 728
White: 82%
African American: 14%
Latino: 3%
Asian: 1%
Students with disabilities: 14%
Low-income students: 12%

Teachers
Total number of teachers: 78
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 100%

Paraprofessionals
Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 3
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 100%

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: 0
### 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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