Cloquet Independent School District #94
Minnesota

Superintendent: Ken Scarbrough
Primary contact: Randy Thudin, principal, Washington School, and coordinator of federal programs*
Schools studied:
Washington Elementary School
Cloquet Middle School
Cloquet High School
2,263 students, K-12, rural

District and School Descriptions
An Ojibwa reservation (and sovereign Indian nation) lies within the boundaries of the city of Cloquet in northern Minnesota. The city and Cloquet Independent School District #94 have a good working relationship with the Ojibwa tribe and reservation, according to district staff and the Indian education coordinator who works directly with the tribal families. The Ojibwa have their own Fond du Lac School, which enrolls 250 students, but 200 of the reservation students attend Cloquet schools. The Indian education coordinator works with the school district and the reservation to meet the needs of students and their families.

Once a railroad center that served the mining and paper industries, Cloquet has experienced economic ups and downs. The city’s paper mills keep employment constant, at least for now, and many families find work in nearby Duluth, a major shipping center on Lake Superior.

Three of Cloquet’s five schools are included in this study: Washington Elementary School, Cloquet Middle School, and Cloquet High School. All of these schools have made adequate yearly progress, but achievement gaps exist between the white and American Indian students. Even though the gap is narrowing, addressing the performance of Indian students is a major focus for the district.

Key Findings
- Improvement efforts in the Cloquet school district are aimed at addressing the achievement gap between white and American Indian students. The gap narrowed in 2003, became wider in 2004, then narrowed again considerably in 2005. The percentage of students who scored at the proficient level or above on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in reading increased for both groups over a five-year period, but the American Indian student subgroup made the greatest gains. The school district and the Ojibwa tribal governance unit work closely together to meet the needs of American Indian students.

- A huge reduction in federal funds over the past three years, especially for Title I, has caused the district to eliminate Title I services for students in grades 4-8 and target the funds to

* Other contacts for this case study include Karen McKenna, director of elementary curriculum; Warren Peterson, principal, Cloquet High School; Connie Hyde, vice-principal, Cloquet High School; Tom Brenner, principal, Cloquet Middle School; Vern Zacher, Indian education coordinator; and Steve Syrett, principal, Cloquet Area Alternative Education School.
grades K through 3. The changes in funding are due to updates in the Title I formula, which resulted in fewer funds for Minnesota, especially for districts that do not have a high population of low-income students. Because of the decrease in funds, the district has eliminated 12 paraprofessionals in the past two years and replaced them with two resource teachers.

- In 2005 Cloquet had its first experience with a school not making AYP. Staff expected graduation rate to be an issue, but math proficiency was the reason that the Cloquet Area Alternative Education School missed the AYP target.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

Superintendent Ken Scarbrough is new to the Cloquet district, but he is an experienced superintendent who has a strong belief in school site decision making. He is confident that the goals of No Child Left Behind will continue to be met in the district. “Curriculum and instruction are the keys to improving the achievement of all students,” he said, “but we need to expand our vertical articulation—how standards, curriculum, and student learning flow from one grade level to another. That is what we are working on.”

The district continues to focus on reducing the achievement gap between the American Indian subgroup and white students, but other NCLB issues have emerged in 2005-06: the introduction of NCLB testing at additional grade levels and the large cut in Cloquet’s allocation of federal funds.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Cloquet’s elementary schools, Washington and Churchill (both K-5), are rated as 4 STAR schools, the highest ranking in Minnesota’s NCLB school ranking system. Cloquet High School is also rated as 4 STAR in reading and 3 STAR in math. Cloquet Middle School earned 3 STAR ratings in both reading and math. To attain these rankings schools must meet two or more of the following conditions: Fewer than 10% of students must score in the two lowest levels of proficiency, more than 30% of students must score in the highest level of proficiency, or the school’s performance must be outstanding compared to schools of similar size or numbers of low-income students.

In the tested elementary grades (3 and 5 in reading and math), the percentages of Cloquet students scoring at the proficient level or above are somewhat higher than the state average percentages, a pattern that has continued for the past five years. The percentages of Cloquet students in all tested grades who scored proficient are compared with the state average percentages in table 1.

| Table 1. Percentages of Cloquet Students Performing at Proficient Level or Above on State Tests, 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 3/Churchill | 73% | 65% | State Average Reading |
| Grade 3/Washington | 68% | 69% | Math |
| Grade 5/Churchill | 84% | 73% | 71% | State Average Math |
| Grade 5/Washington | 79% | 68% |
| Grade 7/Cloquet | 41% | 41% | 33% | 40% |
| High School/Cloquet | 41% | 44% | 21% | 27% |

As the table shows, achievement begins to decline in grade 7, especially in math, and the decline continues at the high school. Although many school districts exhibit a similar pattern of achievement declines beginning in middle school, Cloquet Middle School principal Tom Brenner is determined to reverse that situation at his school. “I am the instructional leader at this school, and it is my job to make this happen,” he said. “Our teachers have been trained, and people do make the difference, but the test is the key.” He further explained that they all need to work together to “flag the kids that are falling behind” and make sure that “everybody takes testing seriously.”

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

The four traditional schools in Cloquet made adequate yearly progress in 2004-05, as they have in previous years. For the first time, though, the Cloquet Area Alternative Education School did not make AYP in math. The alternative school has two sites that serve as halfway settings for potential dropouts, and it is a countywide program that serves students from other districts as well as from Cloquet. About 80% of the students are in grades 9-12, and many are deficient in the number of credits they will need to graduate. The alternative school is not funded by Title I, but it may face some state sanctions if the school does not improve student achievement.

The alternative school enrolls 250 students in its day and evening schedules. The students are in a variety of programs, including home schooling, virtual high school, independent study, and special education. Some students are under the supervision of the Minnesota Department of Corrections. The school staff includes a social worker that provides family and school support, as well as a county social worker. Students often have too few credits in English, although sometimes they are shy of credits in history, according to Steve Syrett, the school’s principal. In math, students usually have the credits, but in state testing, their scores are lower in math than in reading. In the 2005 testing, 5% of the 10th grade students scored at the proficient level in reading, but none of those in 11th grade reached proficiency in math. Students enroll in the alternative school mainly because of behavior problems, lack of achievement, and poor attendance. Sometimes all three of these problems play a role, according to Syrett.

The goal of the school is to improve the high school graduation rate. To achieve this goal, the low math proficiency of individual students is being addressed.

Testing Issues

Minnesota has changed the test it uses for NCLB accountability. “The Profile of Learning was not considered to be rigorous enough,” said Tom Brenner, the middle school principal. “So now we are adjusting to a new kind of test for our students, and here at the middle school, there are lots of adjustments because our kids are also getting used to a different kind of school with more than one teacher.”

Testing at all the grade levels required by NCLB will begin in 2006 in Minnesota. Grades 3, 5, and 7 were already in the testing cycle, but grades 4, 6, and 8 will be added. The writing test in grade 5 will be skipped entirely in 2006, and a writing test for students in grade 6 will be introduced in 2007. Science testing will begin in 2006, which will be the baseline year. At the high school, testing will continue unchanged, with reading tested in grade 10 and math in grade 11.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

GENERAL CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Title I at the elementary schools continues to be a pullout program, whereby small groups of students are pulled out of their regular classroom for additional instruction, but intensive instruction is provided by a certified teacher. The district finds this approach effective, according to
Randy Thudin, principal of Washington School. Selected students who need the extra help receive 25 minutes of small-group or individual tutoring each day for reading. Those who need help in math receive 15 minutes a day.

To make sure that students enter first grade with the skills they need to be successful readers, kindergarten in Cloquet is a full-day program for some students. A half day is funded by the district and a half day is operated by a community-based organization and paid for by parents. Participation in the full-day program is on a first-come, first-served basis. Because of the district’s emphasis on early learning, district officials said that most students can read fluently at grade level and with comprehension by the time they leave the primary grades.

The homework policy of Cloquet schools encourages parents to be involved in the academic achievement of their children. Reading at home every night is an expectation for students, and parents are encouraged to do the reading, too. “This works well,” said Thudin. “The kids and the parents get into the habit. That makes reading a part of everyday living. We hope the parents read with their children at the same time.”

Changes were made to the elementary math curriculum three years ago, including a new math series that is better aligned to state standards. District officials have found that the changes have resulted in better math achievement. Students are coming into the middle school and high school more prepared as a result of the attention given to their overall learning in the elementary grades, according to the administrators of the two secondary schools.

The principals of the four schools work together, and their support personnel for special programs and curriculum are part of the district team. The team tries to find solutions before issues escalate, especially behavior problems that interfere with student learning and the instructional programs at the schools. An example of this teamwork is the district program to stop bullying in the elementary and middle schools. Students are instructed on the various aspects of inappropriate behavior toward others, and they are taught that every student deserves to feel safe at school. “We tackle problems as a group,” said Thudin. “That’s how we help our students learn. We make sure that what we expect for learning and behavior is the same from one grade to the next and from one school to the next.”

**CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUBGROUPS**

The Cloquet school district has four subgroups that count for AYP: white students (82%), low-income students (33%), American Indian students (16%), and students with disabilities (11%). Inclusion programs are the main method of instruction for students with disabilities, with placements determined by child study teams in collaboration with parents. In this way the least restrictive environment is designed for each student and appropriate accommodations made.

American Indian students make up a sizable percentage of almost every class from kindergarten through grade 12. In a class of 22 students, for example, it is likely that 3 or 4 children will be American Indian. The district director of Indian education serves as the home and school liaison, and the district also has an Indian parent committee that serves as an advisory group. A member of the Cloquet Board of Education is an American Indian who is active in the Fond du Lac tribe.

“Things have changed dramatically over past years,” said Vern Zacher about the local Indian population. “The immense growth of the casino and its related businesses, such as the hotel and restaurant, have brought greater economic stability into the city and kept our young people living among us.” Still, said Zacher, “discipline is always a sensitive issue because some Indian parents have not had productive experiences with schools in past years.” This is an area that the district has set as a focus, and the results have been positive. Both the Cloquet district and the Fond du Lac tribe received a commendation from the Office of Civil Rights two years ago for what the reviewers saw as a model of how tribal and district members should work together.

The achievement gaps in reading and math with American Indian students are being addressed throughout the grades, and additional help is available for American Indian students who are lagging in achievement, funded through a combination of tribal and district funds.
Special tutors have been hired at all the schools to work with the students in 30-minute time periods before school, pull-out sessions during the school day, and after school. The reservation pays for the buses that take students home after the extended-day session.

High school graduation is a major goal for the American Indian community, the school, and the students. “We are truly proud of our kids when they graduate from high school,” said Zacher, “and we encourage parents to celebrate the occasion. With a high school diploma, these kids are able to face the world.” The students want to stay in the area, Zacher explained, and since they “get their tribal money when they turn 18, most do stay.” Students go on to college at the community college in Cloquet or in nearby Duluth.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

All of the Cloquet teachers in the four traditional schools meet the qualifications of NCLB. However, in the alternative school, a teacher may be assigned to teach multiple subjects to a small group of students in a self-contained setting. In addition to providing instruction, the teacher serves as a combination social worker, counselor, mentor, and parent liaison to keep the students in school. This situation creates a problem for meeting the NCLB requirements for teacher qualifications because the teacher is usually not credentialed for all content areas. “It is impossible for us to do this in any other way,” said Syrett, the school’s principal. “There is no way we can solve this problem.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Cloquet district schedules five non-teaching days for professional development. One day is before the start of the school year, and the rest are during the year. There are two late starts for students, and teachers also receive training during this time. Half of the training time is used for technology; during the rest of the time, teachers learn how to develop diagnostic assessments for the classroom and how to use them effectively. The initial training for the elementary schools is done by Karen McKenna, director of curriculum, and is continued by the grade-level chairs. Efforts are made to look closely at the math test with evaluation and standards in mind.

At the middle school and high school, all teachers in grades 6-12 must take four hours of reading instruction every five years to assure that reading is addressed across the curriculum.

PARAPROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND SUPPORT

Paraprofessionals have been eliminated from Cloquet’s Title I program this year due to budget cuts. The elementary schools had 12 paraprofessionals two years ago, 6 last year, and none in 2005-06. Teachers have adjusted to the loss of paraprofessionals, according to the principals interviewed. VISTA volunteers are used, but the volunteers only listen to children read.

Funding and Costs

Between 2003 and 2005, the Cloquet school district lost $119,000 in Title I funds, a total cut of 30% over three years. In addition, the district lost $24,000 in the federal Title II program for teacher training and $11,000 in the federal Title V program for innovations in education. Although the enrollment in the district did not change much in that two-year period, what has changed is the amount of federal funds received by the state of Minnesota and the amounts allocated to districts that do not have large numbers of low-income students.

As a result of these funding cuts, Cloquet has eliminated many services to students. As mentioned above, paraprofessionals were eliminated. Grades 6 through 8 at the middle school were discontinued from Title I service last year, and assistance for students in grades 4 and 5 was dropped in 2005-06. Brenner, principal of the middle school that is no longer a Title I-funded
school, has no problem with the shift of Title I funds to the elementary grades. He believes that focusing on younger students will improve achievement, and that it will “help in the long run because students will come to the middle school better prepared.”

Title I funds now cover the cost of two resource teachers at each of the elementary schools who provide extra instruction for students who need it.

Data File—Cloquet Independent School District # 94

Location: Northern Minnesota
Type: Rural

Number of Schools
- Total: 5
  - Elementary: 2
  - Middle/junior high: 1
  - High schools: 1
  - Other: 1

Number of Title I schools: 2

Student Enrollment and Demographics
- Total enrollment: 2,263
  - White: 82%
  - American Indian: 16%
  - Other: 2%
  - Low-income students: 33%
  - Students with disabilities: 11%

Teachers
- Total number of teachers: 174
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 100%

Paraprofessionals
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 0
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: NA

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: 1
### 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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