



Education Struggles

MEWG impacts accountability law to require parent and community involvement to hold MS education dept. and school districts accountable

Jackson, MS -- For the first time in Mississippi history, black working class parents and students, organized under the banner of the **Mississippi Education Working Group (MEWG)**, provided the leadership, *at the request* of state education officials and state legislators, that crafted significant portions of a major new public education accountability law adopted in 2000. This integrated parents and community people into the process for holding education officials accountable for delivering an effective educational opportunity to children in previously low performing schools.

Sen. Alice Harden, chair of the Senate Education Committee, and Judy Rhodes, a top official at the State Dept. of Education and legislative liaison, each asked members of MEWG to draft provisions designed to provide effective parental and community involvement and input in the new process to hold local school districts accountable for providing a meaningful educational opportunity to students.

State ignores parents in 1999

In the 1999 legislative session efforts by parents and students, working through MEWG, to impact the views of state education officials and their legislative representatives were largely ignored. In 1999 the legislature first defined the extensive use of *long-term substitutes* -- without license or qualifications in the subject areas in which they teach -- as a primary factor in the critical teacher shortage that plagues primarily majority black public schools in the economically poorest areas of the state. Then, the legislature passed a law to create *high stakes testing* as a basis for retaining students in the 3rd and 9th grades, and for denying graduation. Finally, in legislation aimed only for schools in the critical teacher shortage areas, state lawmakers, supported by the state's education leadership, *reduced the qualifications* for classroom teachers by providing incentives to employ the very *long-term substitutes* defined as a major cause of the critical teacher shortage.

Through the collaboration of MEWG, parents and students had expressed their strenuous opposition during the 1999 session to this framework in which students, who are without qualified teachers to teach the subjects on which students will be tested, can be held back or denied graduation. Fortunately, the 1999 legislation required the State Department of Education to come

back to the legislature in the 2000 session to present a comprehensive plan for implementation of the accountability provisions aimed at school boards, administrators, teachers and students.

Throughout the spring, summer and fall of 1999, with technical and legal assistance from *Southern Echo*, the *Harvard Civil Rights Project*, the *Advancement Project*, the *Rural Education and Community Trust*, and armed with information on high stakes testing and accountability laws from groups working on similar issues in other states, such as North Carolina, MEWG held workshops and meetings with its constituent groups across the state to educate community people on the issues and to develop strategies and a program of work to become effective players in the formation of public education policy in 2000.

MEWG brings community to capital

In 2000 MEWG brought parents and students to the state capital in Jackson to participate in a series of meetings with most of the department heads and other officials at the State Department of Education to press the importance of parents to the accountability process. At the same time, MEWG held meetings with many state legislators and testified at committee hearings, often at the express request of committee chairs and members.

Legislators noted that parental participation in the legislative process could have a significant impact on whether new accountability laws would create opportunities for parental and community impact on the implementation process. Near the end of the legislative session high state education officials asked MEWG to send a draft of MEWG's proposed amendments to the legislation to the state department to consider for inclusion in the department's proposals to the Senate and House education panels. MEWG was given only 36 hours to produce its draft. In a dramatic late night session, parents from across the state met in a Jackson hotel conference room to negotiate the language of the draft sent to department officials and legislators.

Most of the MEWG amendments proposed were adopted first by the legislature during the 2000 session as House Bill 1134, after a huge teacher pay provision was attached. However, the efforts of MEWG had such impact that the Senate education committee chair convened a conference committee to adopt even more MEWG proposals through Senate Bill 2488. For the first time in history, the conference committee on a major piece of legislation had 4 blacks and 2 whites. The report of the conference committee was adopted unanimously by both houses.

**For the amendments to the bill that became law and MEWG
Comments on how communities can use them as access points
to build parental participation to improve the quality of our
schools, SEE BELOW:**

Sen. Bill 2488 Amendments -- Comments.

Notes from across Mississippi and the Southern region



Montgomery County, MS --

Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County scored a major victory for residents of the rural *county school district* in the US federal district court during the winter and spring, 2000, when the court ruled that it is unconstitutional for the residents of the *city of Winona* to vote in the election for the county school superintendent. The court made its finding under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution.

The city of Winona has its own *municipal separate school district* and no connection to the county school district. In past years the white voters of Winona held the balance of power when they voted in the county election for superintendent and ensured that a white superintendent, indifferent to the needs and interests of the majority black community in the county, kept control of the education policies of the Montgomery County School District.

The court also ruled that the county school district will have to hold a special superintendent election in November, 2000 in which registered voters from Winona will be excluded. In response, **Concerned Citizens of Montgomery County** has undertaken a community education process to develop an understanding among parents and students as to the qualifications an accountable superintendent should possess to meet the needs and interests of the black community in the county, and what policies a superintendent should support to build a quality educational opportunity for the children in the county.

As part of this process, **Concerned Citizens**, with technical assistance from *Southern Echo*, will be holding community workshops on how to use a unity caucus process to enable the community to identify qualified candidates, and at the same time, avoid splitting the votes of the black community on multiple candidates for superintendent, which would enable the white community to take the advantage by running a single candidate to control the outcome of the election.

Education Struggles 2001 Update:

As the result of the ensuing regular election, and a special election to fill a vacancy, the African American community elected its choice for school superintendent, now has a majority on the county school board, Concerned Citizens leader Alfonso White was named chair of the school board, and the first black attorney, a woman, was appointed to represent the county school district.

Concerned Citizens received legal assistance from Atty. Maha Zaki of the *Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (DC)*, Atty. Rob McDuff of Jackson, MS, and *Southern Echo*.

Concerned Citizens had another major legal success when Atty. Rob McDuff, with assistance from *Southern Echo*, negotiated the dismissal of felony assault charges against five 17-year old high school students who were accused of throwing peanuts on the school bus.

During May, 2000 **Concerned Citizens** celebrated these victories at a special banquet held in Winona, at which awards were given by the organization to community members and others who had assisted in the work during the past year.

Drew, MS --

The **Drew Community Voters League** is completing its draft of a comprehensive complaint against the Drew School District, which is still controlled by school board members who fought against school desegregation in the 1960s. The complaint will document the physical, verbal and emotional abuse of students and parents by the school board, superintendent, administrators and teachers in 43 separate issue areas, set forth the legal and educational reasons why the abuses are wrong-headed and often illegal, and propose specific remedies to end the patterns of abuse. The abuses include the wanton beating of children as young as five years old, and systematic racial and class motivated terror against the black children, and their parents, by both white and black administrators and teachers.

The **Voters League** is assisting parents with disciplinary hearings, obtaining student records, enabling parents to visit the schools from which they are systematically barred, and assisting with enforcing parental and students rights in appearances before administrators and the school board.

School principals repeatedly call parents on the phone, or tell them when they come to the school, that they should *not* have anything to do with the Voters League, or the leadership of the Voters League. The problems faced by the parents and students are compounded by the indifference of state education officials to whom the complaints have been brought in the past, and the refusal of attorneys in Mississippi, white and black, to represent the children and their parents who cannot afford substantial attorney fees.

Education Struggles 2001 Update:

In 2000 - 2001 the Voters League, with the assistance of *the Advancement Project*, and *Southern Echo*, has expanded its work to include support of the rights of students to assessments and supportive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504. As part of this process, the League has successfully interposed these rights to protect students from prosecution in the county Youth Court for conduct which is rooted in the failure of the school district to provide required assessments and supportive services.

The **Voters League** is receiving technical and legal assistance from the *Harvard Civil Rights Project (Cambridge, MA)*, the *Advancement Project (DC)* and *Southern Echo*.

Tunica, MS --

Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County continues to monitor the enforcement of the US federal court settlement orders in December, 1999, that required the Tunica School District to move the location of the proposed new elementary school more than two miles to ensure that it will be near enough to where black children live that they can be a significant part of the new

student body at the as-yet-unbuilt school.

Concerned Citizens held a series of workshops in the winter and spring of 2000 to enable parents, students, and teachers to work together to develop a vision, strategies and a program of work to improve the quality of education in the Tunica schools. The performance of students on standardized tests has *fallen dramatically* since the state appointed conservator took control of the school district in March, 1997.

This is the first time that a significant number of teachers have been willing to sit with parents to talk frankly about conditions which are adversely impacting the delivery of education in the school district. However, when the school district found out that teachers were meeting with parents to discuss how to improve education in the public schools, teachers reported to **Concerned Citizens** that they were being subjected to threats from the state appointed conservator and principals, and that some of them were being terminated. Teacher participation fell off dramatically when the retaliation began.

Under recent amendments to state law, the conservator has been given extraordinary powers to control the school district without consideration of the views of the elected school board or the elected school superintendent.

Holmes County, MS --

During the 2000 legislative session in Mississippi, **Citizens for Quality Education (CQE)** provided exceptional leadership in the analysis of proposed educational legislation, and in assisting local community organizations, *MEWG* and *Southern Echo* to understand the *high stakes testing* and *accountability process*, and to develop proposed amendments to improve legislation which was clearly slated for passage.

The work of **CQE**, which included community volunteers and students, enabled *MEWG* to develop an effective

Education Struggles 2001 Update:

In the 2000 school board elections, candidates working with and supported by Concerned Citizens were elected, giving the activist community a majority on the school board. Concerned Citizens member Larry Braziel was elected chair of the school board. The white attorney who had represented the school board for a long time resigned in anticipation that he would soon be removed. This past year he was a key leader, on behalf of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, in the fight to preserve the Confederate battle symbol in the present Mississippi flag. The board is conducting a search for new counsel. The State Dept. of Education has indicated that it

Education Struggles 2001 Update:

CQE is training community about curriculum, testing and legal tools to support a student's right to a free and appropriate education, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title I and Childfind. CQE's Youth Governance Initiative has developed "School house to Jail house", a project to examine the correlation between the building of new prisons in the Delta, the high rate of suspensions, expulsions and drop outs, and the use of high stakes testing.

CQE co-coordinator Helen Johnson was elected in 2000 to the Holmes County School Board and appointed by the Governor as a member of the Practitioner's Committee of the State Dept. of Education. The committee advises the State Supt. of Education on the development and implementation of the new assessment and accountability system.

strategy to educate state education officials and legislators as to the choices that would address the needs and interests of parents and students to be able to impact the formation of education policy at the state and local school district levels. The process was especially important because it demonstrated conclusively that community people, including parents and students, when working together in a systematic way, have the capacity to understand and challenge complex education policy, and propose meaningful adjustments in policy to address the needs and interests of the grassroots community.

Indianola, MS --

The **Indianola Parent Student Group** (IPSG) continues to work on issues concerning children with special needs and children in special education.

The skills and tools which these parents and students are learning are being shared with the other groups in *MEWG* to ensure that organizations in other communities are enabled to protect children with special needs, and their parents, whose rights are systematically ignored or deliberately violated in many of the school districts around the state.

Education Struggles 2001 Update:

In October, 2000 IPSG, with assistance from Echo, helped students and parents force the Indianola high school principal and staff secretary to end the practice of causing the arrest by police of students for talking during the morning assembly, and to end the practice of making students choose between a beating with a wooden paddle or 3 days suspension if they exercised their right to go to the bathroom during the school day. IPSG, with assistance from Echo, drafted an 18 page complaint to the superintendent and school board document these incidents as violations of local school policies, state and federal law.

Birmingham, AL --

The **Rural Education Working Group** came together for the first time on March 13-15, 2000, as a collaboration of four organizations from Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina, all of which are being funded by the *Rural Education and Community Trust*.

REWG is an experiment modeled on the *MEWG*, to enable grassroots community organizations in *different states*, using the skills and tools of community organizing, to impact the formation of education at the state and local levels through the pooling of their strengths and resources across traditional political and geographic barriers. This effort is especially significant since education problems are usually regarded as a matter of local politics, and state specific, because of the great variation in state laws, taxation methods to fund education and educational goals, and the programs and policies to achieve those goals. As a result, community groups usually do not collaborate on strategies across state lines.

The Birmingham conference was designed to introduce the groups to each other and to explore, through substantive discussions, how to share organizing skills to impact the formation of education policy. In addition, participants learned that they had many common issues and obstacles to the creation of a quality educational opportunity for children of color. Therefore, the question arose as to how these organizations, and others, can collaborate to attack common educational issues which stem from the policies which are shared by those who now control the public education systems in the several southern states.

Representatives from the organizations in *Tunica County, Drew, Holmes County* and the

Southern Echo staff attended the conference on behalf of *MEWG*. The information shared among the groups had an immediate impact on the work in Mississippi. The participants from North Carolina shared information on their experiences in challenging their state's *high stakes testing* programs, which were introduced into North Carolina's education system by Mississippi's present state superintendent of education before he came to Mississippi. *MEWG* had already been using information from North Carolina in negotiations with the MS Senate Education Committee regarding the implementation of Mississippi's high stakes testing program.

The participants from Georgia shared information about legislative proposals which enhanced parental participation in the policy formation process at the state and local school district levels. This information helped propel confidence that such proposals could prevail in Mississippi, which they did in the 2000 session.

Jackson, MS --

Southern Echo prepared and conducted several training programs for *MEWG* groups during 2000:

* March 18-19 -- This 2 day residential training school focused on the fundamentals of community organizing, with an emphasis on the use of tools and skills to broaden the base of support.

* May 6-7, 16-17 -- This 4 day residential training school focused on understanding a model for strategic thinking and strategic organizational planning, and its application to the work of the *MEWG*.

* See below for information on some of the scheduled training in 2000 in Mississippi for *MEWG* groups, and others.

Mississippi Delta --

Many of the students and parents from Tunica, Drew, Holmes, Indianola and Montgomery who are participating in *MEWG*, are also participating in an experimental program, **Lifting New Voices**, funded by the *Center for Community Change (DC)*, designed to enhance the leadership development skills and tools of young people who are engaged in work with grassroots community organizations.

Southern Echo is hosting the process, while the young people will have primary responsibility for designing the program. The work will include training and active participation with local organizations, aimed at strengthening the participation and leadership by young people in an inter-generational model.

**Training Schools for MEWG
Participants
for remainder of 2000**

**School #4. Summer Political Institute (limited enrollment)
at Tougaloo College
Intensified training for experienced younger and older activists**

**Week 1: Sunday, June 4 -- Thursday, June 8, 2000
*Advancing Community Organizing Skills, Part 10A:
The Mechanics of Community Organizing --
Broadening the Base of Support as a Foundation for
Impacting the Formation of Public Policy at All Levels
of Government***

**Week 2: Monday, July 24 -- Friday, July 28, 2000
*Advancing Community Organizing Skills, Part 10B:
The Mechanics of Policy Formation -- Moving from
Identification of the Problem to the Formulation of
Remedies
with a Focus on Transforming the Culture that Moves
Black Children from the Schoolhouse to the Jailhouse***

**School #5. Residential Training School
at Tougaloo College
Friday, September 8 -- Sunday, September 10, 2000
*Advancing Community Organizing Skills, Part 5:
Organizing the Community to Stop the use of the
Public Education System as the Keystone in
Suppressing the African American Community in
Mississippi***

**School #6. Residential Training School
at Tougaloo College
Friday, November 17 -- Sunday, November 19, 2000
*Advancing Community Organizing Skills, Part 9:
Understanding the Connection between the
Widespread Application of Agricultural Chemicals in
the Mississippi Delta, Poor Health and the Impairment***

**EDUCATION
STRUGGLES**

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EDUCATION STRUGGLES is a publication of the
**Mississippi Education Working Group
(MEWG).**

Mississippi Education Working Group is a
collaboration of African American community groups
across the State of Mississippi pooling their
strengths and resources across traditional political
and geographic barriers to impact the formation of
public education policy at the local school district
level and at the state level in support of their work at
the local school district level.

To further these goals, MEWG works to empower
the African American community by enabling
parents, students and other community people to
develop the tools and skills of community organizing
needed to impact the formation of public policy at all
levels of government and to hold public officials and
community organizations accountable to the needs
and interests of grassroots, working class
communities.

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SB 2488 Amendments: Set forth below are the amendments proposed by MEWG to the State Dept. of Education and adopted by the Mississippi Legislature in Senate Bill 2488 on May 2, 2000. The underlined portions of text were proposed by MEWG. For each amendment MEWG provides a *Comment* about its importance to parents, students and community.

Note: Throughout Senate Bill 2488, at the recommendation of MEWG, the reference to low performing schools was changed from “Schools at Risk” to “Priority Schools”.

MEWG Comment: *The reference to low performing schools as “At Risk” would further stigmatize the schools, the students who attend and graduate from them, and the teachers who work there. It would make it harder to keep good students and teachers and attract and keep the best teachers. At the same time, the designation of “Priority” is a policy statement that the low performing schools ought to be the focus for the use of the state’s educational resources and energies. The state should rectify past injustices and create a quality educational opportunity where, historically, the state minimized the use of its resources, the intent and effect of which was to provide a second-rate education for black and working class white students.*

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Section 1(1)(b) A determination will be made as to the percentage of students proficient in each school. This measurement will define what a student must know in order to be deemed proficient at each grade level and will clearly show how well a student is performing. The definition of proficiency shall be developed for each grade, based on a demonstrated range of performance in relation to content as reflected in the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks. This range of performance must be established through a formal procedure including educators, parents, community leaders and other stakeholders.

MEWG Comment: *As originally proposed by the State Dept. of Education, the determination of the proficiency standard would have been made by state dept. officials with input only from teachers at each grade level. This amendment requires the creation of a formal decision-making process in which educators (a concept more inclusive of the field than just teachers) must collaborate with parents, community leaders and other stakeholders (read “students”, for example, and others who have a stake in the impact which education has on the community) in the decision-making process.*

This amendment “opens the door”, for the first time, to parents, students and community having serious representation in the formulation of standards used to assess the performance of students. Local community organizations can work to ensure that the selection of parent, community and other stakeholders appointed to the formal process are appropriate and accountable, and that local community organizations can work to hold them accountable.

Accountability in this context means that representatives to the process listen to understand parents, students and community, and share information about the process, to enable parents, students and community to understand the issues and choices and to assist them to have an impact on the decision-making process.

The legislature did not adopt the MEWG amendment that students not be retained or denied graduation on the basis of a single test, or where they are being tested on subjects in which they

have not been provided with a teacher qualified to teach the subject matter (such as long term substitutes, in critical teacher shortage areas, who do not have a certified teaching license or certification in the subject area).

Whether high stakes testing is an effective means to increase learning in the classroom, or is an effective means to develop critical thinking skills, remains a key issue for community people across the country who are concerned about the delivery of a quality education.. There is much evidence that, in the long term, it does not achieve either purpose .

The use by local school districts of unqualified teachers in the very schools which most need qualified teachers, when combined with high stakes testing, creates enormous risks for students in the state who should have priority access to qualified teachers!

The combination of high stakes testing, unqualified teachers, extensive student retention and denial of graduations, will increase the push of young black children from the schoolhouse to the jailhouse.

These issues can continue to be pursued by the parent, community and other stakeholder organizations and representatives inside the formal process for setting the proficiency standards, as well as in the next legislative session.

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Section 1(2) Superior-Performing and Exemplary Schools may apply to the State Board of Education for monetary incentives to be used for selected school needs, as identified by a vote of all licensed and instructional personnel employed at the school. These incentive funds may be used for specific school needs, including, but not limited to:

(e) Training for parents, including, but not limited to, the following:

(i) Curriculum;

(ii) Chapter 1;

(iii) Special need students;

(iv) Student rights and responsibility;

(v) School and community relations;

(vi) Effective parenting.

MEWG Comment: *This amendment advances the policy that the school district should provide training for parents in particular subject areas that parents need to understand to improve and enhance their ability to understand these issues, to support their children and to become an confident, effective and knowledgeable voice in the formation of education policy at the local school district level.*

However, the legislature did not adopt that portion of MEWG's amendment which would have changed the focus from the better performing schools to the Priority Schools. There is no understandable reason to deny this process to Priority Schools.

In addition, the provision of this training is optional (see the word "may"), rather than mandatory (the legislature should have used the word "shall") and is determined by the teachers, without participation by the parents and community.

The amendment is a good start because it established the concept of parent training at the expense of the state. More work needs to be done to extend this opportunity to the Priority Schools, where it is most needed. Also, parents and community should have a meaningful voice in this decision and it should be mandatory.

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Section 2(3) Within fifteen (15) days after a Priority School has been identified, written notice shall be sent by the State Board of Education by certified mail to both the school principal and the local board of education. Within fifteen (15) days after notification the State Board of Education shall assign an evaluation team to the school. The evaluation team shall consist of a minimum of seven (7) trained members appointed by the State Superintendent of Education and approved by the State Board of Education from the following categories: (a) school superintendents; (b) school principals; (c) curriculum coordinators; (d) at least two (2) teachers; (e) local school board members; (f) community leaders; (g) parents; and (h) institutions of higher learning personnel.

MEWG Comment: *This amendment creates the opportunity to include community leaders and parents in the school evaluation team process. There is considerable knowledge and expertise within the community that is often untapped and underutilized. In addition, these representatives, if accountable, can be helpful to keep the community informed and enable the community to impact the evaluation process.*

However, the minimum number of persons on the team is less than the number of categories from which team members can be chosen. The parents and community will have to be diligent and persistent to ensure that representatives of parents and community are selected to participate on the team, even if the size of the team has to be increased.

In addition, the need to select parents and community leaders to represent the needs and interests of their community in the evaluation process “opens the door” to the creation of a community election process to unify around specific candidates as nominees of the community to the evaluation team. This would help to minimize the perception that the persons selected either were not familiar with the community or too closely aligned with the state or local education officials.

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Section 3(1) Based on the findings of the evaluation report and the results of the public meeting, the State Department of Education and the evaluation team leader shall assist the school principal and other local school officials in the development of a school improvement plan to improve its deficiencies. A local parents/citizens advisory council shall be established by the evaluation team at the school in order to provide input and guidance into the development of the school improvement plan and its evaluation during the implementation period. Local parent-teacher associations and other community-based organizations shall have input in the selection of the parents/citizens advisory council. Where no active local parent-teacher group exists, the State Department of Education may request assistance from the Mississippi Parent-Teacher Association and other community-based organizations in the selection of the local parents/citizens advisory council. The local parents/citizens advisory council shall consist of representatives from each of the following local groups: (a) five (5) representatives of the local PTA, PTSA or other parent organization, (b) two (2) local elected officials or community activist, (c) two (2) students, (d) two (2) local business leaders. Persons who are employed by the local school district are not eligible for membership on the parents/citizens advisory council.

MEWG Comment: *This amendment places community based organizations in the decision-making*

process concerning the selection of a local parents/citizens advisory council to provide input and guidance into the development of the school improvement plan and its evaluation during the implementation period. As originally proposed, only local PTA organizations, or the state PTA, would have had input into the selection process.

In addition, the participation in the advisory council was expanded from PTA members only to include other parent organizations, elected officials, community activists, students and local business leaders, none of whom may be employed by the local school district in any capacity.

The advisory council, if accountable, can be an important vehicle for parents, students and community to work together to impact the creation and implementation of a school improvement plan. This “opens the door” to the development of a comprehensive assessment of the problems in the school district, the sources of the problems, and the remedies needed to create a first-rate, quality public education which addresses the needs and interests of the African American and working class white communities.

The advisory council members can keep community informed and ensure that their collective views are effectively expressed within the work of the advisory council. They can also make sure that the meetings and deliberations of the advisory council are publicly held.

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Section (7) The State Department of Education shall make a semiannual report to the State Board of Education identifying the number and names of schools classified as a Priority Schools, which shall include a description of the deficiencies identified and the actions recommended and implemented. The department shall also notify the State Board of Education of any Priority School which has successfully completed their improvement plans and shall notify the Governor and the Legislature of such school's progress.

MEWG Comment: *This amendment ensures that the public, including parents and community organizations concerned with these issues, have an analytical basis for tracking the implementation of this accountability law, by school district. It will assist the public in making an analysis as to where resources are being applied, degrees of success in achieving the goals of the statute, and to determine where needed resources are not being supplied. Further, it will provide a basis for parents and community organizations to provide their assessment to the State Dept. of Education and the legislature as to the effectiveness of the accountability framework and what policy changes may be needed.*

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Section (9) No later than July 1 of each year the State Board of Education shall report to the state Legislature and the public at large:

(a) An itemized accounting of the use of state funds to provide technical, legal and financial assistance to each Priority School, and to such schools which had been designated as Priority Schools within the previous three (3) years, if such schools received such assistance at any time during the previous three (3) years;

(b) An explanation of the problems sought to be addressed in each such school receiving this assistance and for which such expenditure of funds was undertaken;

(c) The actions taken in each school district to utilize the funds to address the problems identified in paragraph (b) immediately above;

(d) An evaluation of the impact of the effort to address the problems identified;

(e) An assessment of what further actions need to be undertaken to address these problems, if such problems have not been entirely alleviated; an

(f) An assessment of the impact which Senate Bill No. 2156, 1999 Regular Session, and Senate Bill No. 2488, 2000 Regular Session are having on the educational goals which these statutes sought to address.

MEWG Comment: *Same as the Comment immediately above.*

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Section 6 (11)(e) Not later than July 1 of each year, the State Department of Education shall develop an itemized accounting of the expenditures associated with the management of the conservator process with regard to each school district in which a conservator has been appointed, and an assessment as to the extent to which the conservator has achieved, or failed to achieve, the goals for which the conservator was appointed to guide the local school district.

MEWG Comment: *This amendment ensures that parents, students and community organizations have an analytical basis for tracking the work of the conservator and holding him accountable to the goals for which the conservator was appointed. This is especially important since the conservator has been given by the legislature total power over the school district. In the words of Thomas Hobbes, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely!"*

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Section 14 (a)(viii) Appointing a parent advisory committee, comprised of parents of students in the school district, which may make recommendations to the conservator concerning the administration, management and operation of the school district.

[This provision was adopted in 1999 as an amendment to SB 2156.]

MEWG Comment: *Same as the Comment immediately above.*

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Please Note: A key amendment recommended by MEWG that was *not* adopted would have created a systematic process of election of parent and community representatives to ensure that the needs and interests of the local African American community are included in the evaluation process, the development of the implementation plan, and the process for monitoring the implementation of the plan to ensure accountability to the community.

Although the election process is not required to be used under the SB 2488, community groups can still use it to establish a *model* for the selection of community, student and parent representatives to the various committees established to support the accountability process.

The *model* election process, which was *not* adopted by the legislature, could look like this:

The community leader, parents and student shall be selected to serve on the evaluation team through the following process:

Members of four categories of persons, as set forth immediately below, may participate in a community caucus meeting to undertake the selection process –

A. members of local community based organizations working on public education issues within the local school district;

B. members of local school district Parent Teacher Associations or Organizations and professional and non- professional personnel of the local school district;

C. local community-based and local school-based student councils and local student government associations; and

D. community leaders, public officials and members of the business community, all within the local school district.

Persons who are employed by the local school district at the time of these proceedings are expressly excluded from the definition of membership in each of the four categories.

The community caucus meeting shall be held at a local community center, religious center, or other suitable non-school building. The date, time, place and purpose of the meeting shall be advertised to the community including, but not limited to, each of the following ways:

A. At least once per week for each of two weeks prior to the week in which the meeting is held, notice of the meeting shall be published in the newspaper with the highest circulation in the county in which the school district is located;

B. Through public service announcements on two of the local radio stations which broadcast in the local school district on each day of the week for each of the two weeks preceding the week in which the meeting is held;

C. Once each week during each of the two weeks preceding the week in which the meeting is held, the local school district shall be responsible for sending a notice of the meeting home to the parents of each of the children in the local school district; and

D. Once each week during each of the two weeks preceding the week in which the meeting is held, the local school district shall be responsible to send an announcement to each of the churches located in the local school district, and ask that it be read to the congregation.

The members of each of the four categories in attendance at the community caucus meeting may put forth in nomination up to three (3) persons for each of the four positions which are to be selected: community leader, two parents and a student. Candidates for these positions shall have the opportunity to address the assemblage, if they so desire, as to why they should be elected to serve on the evaluation team.

The election shall be conducted by secret ballot under the supervision of the other members of the evaluation team. The electors shall consist of those persons in attendance at the community caucus meeting who are legitimate members of any one of the four designated categories of persons that have been invited to the community caucus meeting. The electors shall have the right to vote for candidates in each of the four categories: community leader, two parents and a student.

In the event that an elector shall request assistance to cast a ballot, the elector shall have the right to assistance for the same reasons and be entitled to assistance in the same manner, as is permitted under the statutes in general elections.

The candidate in each category who polls the highest number of votes shall be declared the winner and become a member of the evaluation team. In the event of a tie for any of the positions, a runoff election shall be held immediately on the same occasion to determine who shall be elected.

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