

Wolf D. P. (2002). When Raising Isn't Rising. *The School Administrator*, (20-23).

In recent years, American policy makers have attempted to improve our educational system by raising the standards by which students' grades are measured. This type of standards-based reform has not only led to higher expectations, but to higher stakes as well, for both students and educators. This type of reform was the basis for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002, which is commonly referred to as NCLB. Under this law, standardized tests measure student achievement which ultimately drives accountability. Using this accountability system, school districts across the nation are clearly able to measure how many students reach a certain set standard, and then blame can be placed accordingly for failure to do so. Unfortunately, what is overlooked is the failure of this accountability system to measure student growth over time, which should be the ultimate goal of every educational system, but is not.

In the article "When Raising Isn't Rising", Dennie Palmer Wolf argues that legislation such as No Child Left Behind is quite capable of measuring how many students reach a certain standard, but what it fails to do is ensure that kids are meeting such standards over an extended period of time. Wolf suggests conducting longitudinal studies of student performance rather than comparing specific years of performance. For example, instead of comparing the fourth grade test scores from this year with the fourth grade test scores from last year, it is more constructive to compare last year's fourth grade scores with this year's fifth grade score to see whether students improved or not. Studying the test grades of successive years of a group of students is productive because it actually tracks student progress and provides educators with a clearer understanding of when students begin to falter. If a pattern of a decrease in grades is noticed, educators

can then intervene accordingly and provide students with the appropriate help.

Wolf insists that using a longitudinal model of accountability “will have to take root at the local level. It will be forward-looking school administrators, teachers and community leaders who will play the major roles in beginning a conversation about achievement that focuses on continuous growth”. This type of model can easily be taken on in a school such as Saint Demetrios where the student population is small enough to track its progress over time. In order to institute this type of accountability system, educators at our school would have to examine student work across all grades. They would have to take note of rising performances, plateaus, and even sharp declines in performance. After doing so, teachers would be able to isolate the years in which students have difficulties in developing or transitioning which is reflected in performance. Teachers would then have to focus on correcting the issues that are causing the difficulties.

The hardest challenge in this type of model is organizing student samples in a way to locate the problem areas. Once the problems are located, however, teachers can easily promote positive changes by working together. Teachers across grade levels should communicate with one another to find out exactly what benchmarks have been reached by the end of each grade, and to learn what the expectations are for the following grade so that there is an ultimate goal in mind. If this type of model is put into place, student progress can be tracked, problems can be corrected through early interventions, and students can ultimately be helped to meet and exceed the higher federal standards that are at the heart of the issue.