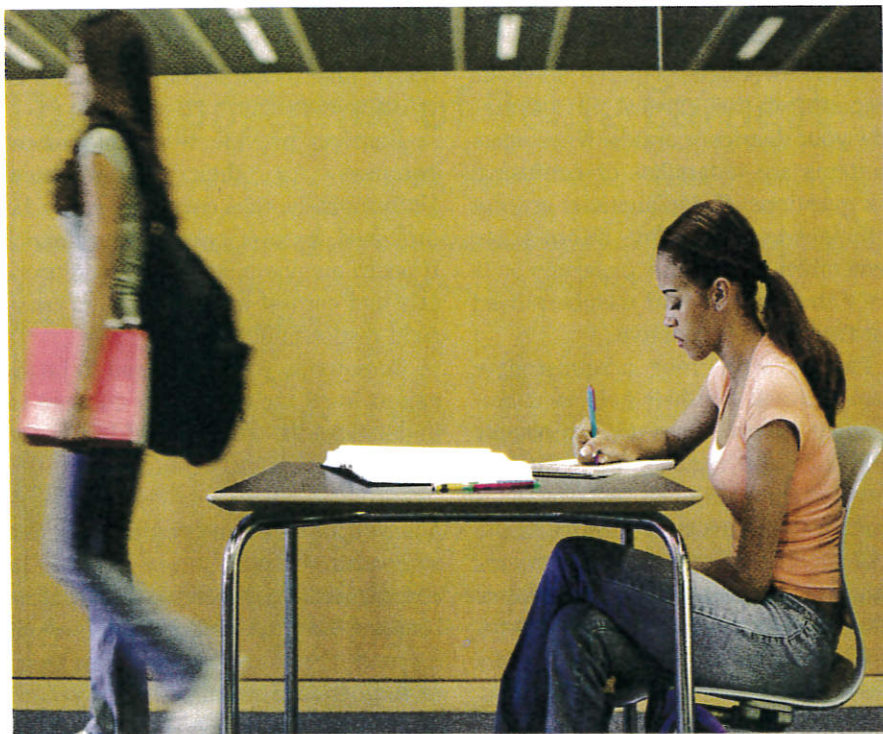


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LIFE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

Complying with compassion

Dan Schlafer

School board members need to have a strong command of the alphabet. Daily, we are faced with a myriad of initialized challenges—aka “acronyms”—that can easily confuse and befuddle the brightest mind.

Here are just a few: ESEA, which gave birth to NCLB and AYP. The IDEA and the ADA gave us ADHD, IEPs, FBAs, FERPA, and HIPPA. We have recently become familiar with the ADP, ARRA, RTI, and RTTT.

But for school board members, the

biggest elephant in the room has nothing to do with letters. Roman numerals, please take center stage!

Title VI compliance lurks in and around everything we do in America's public schools. A single glimpse of NSBA's weekly *Legal Clips*, however, confirms that many districts have little to no understanding of this vitally important federal statute. Or worse, they think the law doesn't apply to them and are choosing to ignore it.

It's past time for school boards to

step up to the plate and ensure that racial discrimination becomes a relic of the past. Worse yet, it's hard to believe we still need to have this conversation.

“Simple justice requires that public funds, to which all taxpayers of all races contribute, not be spent in any fashion which encourages, entrenches, subsidizes or results in racial discrimination,” President Kennedy said in 1963 in a statement that clearly was the precursor to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Title VI mandates that discrimination “on the ground of race, color, or national origin shall not occur in connection with programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.” It also “authorizes and directs the appropriate federal departments and agencies to take action to carry out this policy.” Simply stated, every district that receives a penny from our friends in D.C. must comply with this law—period.

Title VI caveats include: preventing or postponing enrollment; intentionally separating students; setting higher standards for one group over another; unequally applying disciplinary action; failing to provide necessary language assistance; administering assessments that don't allow minority students the opportunity to present a true measure of their abilities; providing advice with the intent of directing minorities away from schools, classes, or programs; and providing inferior instructional services based on race, color, or national origin.

For school boards, the larger concern is that any person who violates Title VI and prevents a protected class from enjoying the programs and activities of the local education agency could violate the statute on the district's behalf. “Any person” refers to students, teachers, teacher aides, parents, community members, volunteers, coaches, administrators, counselors, cafeteria employees, custodians, and bus drivers. In short, that's everyone connected in

any way with your schools.

Do I have your attention yet?

What activities are covered under Title VI? Athletic programs, special education programs, school transfers, school support services, discipline, student assignments, field trips, student organizations, classroom instruction, before- and after-school programs, ability grouping, seat assignments, water breaks, and hall passes. Anything else that occurs in a public school that I neglected to mention is covered as well.

What should you do to ensure Title VI compliance in your district? First, lead by example by knowing and following

the law. Provide to administrators, teachers, parents, and students regular, expert training that you document and regularly revisit. When complaints are filed, deliberate indifference from administrators must not be tolerated.

When all else fails, "Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you" provides a golden opportunity to settle this issue, once and for all.

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READINGS AND REPORTS

From early education to teen birth rate

Early education

<http://earlyed.newamerica.net>

The age of children entering public education should drop from 5 to 3, according to a new report from the New America Foundation. The report says that research shows as much as one-third to one-half of the achievement gap between black and white students exists before first grade. It recommends universal access to pre-kindergarten programs, universal full-day kindergarten, and a curriculum and standards aligned from pre-K through third grade to help close the gap.

ESEA primer

www.americanprogress.org

The Obama administration's "Blueprint for Reform" outlines its proposal for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind Act). A new primer from the Center for American Progress makes it easy to compare the Blueprint's proposed revisions to state standards, mea-

surements of student progress, school accountability, and teacher quality with the act's current provisions.

Families

<http://pewsocialtrends.org>

A record number of Americans live in multigenerational families, according to a new Pew research study. Fully 16 percent of the population now lives in a household containing at least two adult generations, the greatest number to lives in such households since 1940, when 25 percent of the population lived in extended family households. The study attributes the trend to the effects of the recession and to demographic changes such as delayed marriage, immigration, and greater longevity.

Federal food programs

www.americanprogress.org

Federal school meals programs could be run even more efficiently if combined with 15 other federal nutrition assistance programs into one stream-



Yonkers Public Schools' 25,000 students speak 50 languages. More than 75 percent are minorities and about 73 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. A high number of Yonkers students would be the first in their families to attend college—only 16.4 percent of parents in the district have earned a bachelor's degree.

Yonker's solution to get more students to attend college won the district a 2010 Magna Award in the over 20,000 enrollment category. Project A+ is an intensive, systemic plan for instilling a college-going culture in each school. It has non-negotiable goals of score improvements on the New York State Assessments and Regents tests. To help achieve those goals, the program offers after-school and Saturday academic enrichment classes, college workshops for parents, an Early College high school, and other initiatives.

For more information, contact Fern Eisgrub, executive director of curriculum and instruction, at feisgrub@yonkerspublicschools.org. The district's website is at www.yonkerspublicschools.org.

To read about other district best practices and find out how to nominate your school board and district for a Magna Award, visit www.asbj.com/magna.

Magna Best Practices: Creating a college-going culture