



Photos by RENEE HANNANS / Staff

First-grade teacher Melissa Golden reads to (front, from left) Uyen Truong and Gordi Chinchilla-Garcia and (back, from left) Laureano Rojas, Gean Vo and Nathaniel Yorth.

List: Principal finds 'failing' label frustrating

'Failing school' label frustrates principal

By MAE GENTRY
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The state says DeKalb County's Cary Reynolds Elementary is a "failing school."

It's on a list issued last week by the state Department of Education of schools that must offer tutoring and transfers because they didn't meet performance goals under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

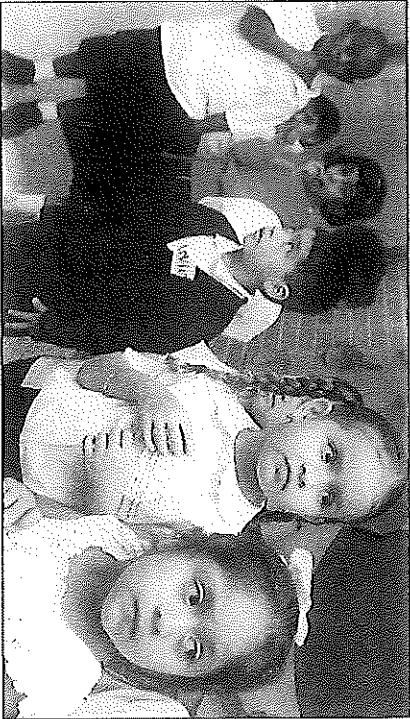
But don't tell that to the folks at Cary Reynolds. "I get depressed when I read we are a so-called

failing school," said principal Melanie Bilda. "What's frustrating about No Child Left Behind [is] we actually improved our overall test scores, incredibly, by about 30 percent."

In one of Georgia's most ethnically diverse school districts, Cary Reynolds stands out. It is almost a mini-United Nations, with more than 40 countries represented among its student body.

The school, located in Doraville, is heavily

> Please see LIST, J10



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Lined up to return to class after lunch are Cary Reynolds Elementary kindergartners (from left) Austin Holt, Shamima Jahhan, Kevin Ramirez, Salma Najera and Dinorah Olwares.

Hispanic and has a high percentage of Asian students, said Bilda. In addition to its immigrant population, it also has a high percentage of transient students.

Those factors make it tougher for Cary Reynolds' students to fare well on performance tests.

Under the federal law, states must set test-score goals every year and release the names of schools that fall short. If they miss those goals for two years in a row, schools must allow parents to transfer their child to another school. Schools that miss their goals for three years in a row must also offer tutoring.

DeKalb sent letters to parents Monday explaining their options for transferring or getting tutoring help.

The elementary schools that will accept transfers are: Allgood, Fernbank, Hightower, Idlewood, Midvale, Laurel Ridge, Montgomery, Nancy Creek and Jolly. The middle schools available for transfer are: Shamrock, Redan Middle and Lithonia Middle.

The school system will provide transportation for transferring students. But if the

student's home school is removed from the "needs improvement" list, he or she can remain at the new school but the parent must provide transportation.

Even though Cary Reynolds is on the list of low-performing schools, parents are generally pleased with the school and the efforts teachers and other staffers make to help their children.

"Our parental involvement has just skyrocketed," Bilda said.

Bilda doesn't anticipate a lot of transfer requests as a result of No Child Left Behind. She said the parents who do choose to transfer their children from Cary Reynolds usually do so because they leave a DeKalb rental apartment to become homeowners in Gwinnett.

"It's frustrating to us," she said. "And it's extremely frustrating to the teachers who make leaps and bound with these children and then they withdraw."

Parents who are interested in more information about the transfer option should call the Title I office at 678-676-0306. The deadline for transfer requests is Sept. 2.



Joseph Reyes and Kelly Nguyen are first-graders at Cary Reynolds. Its students are of more than 40 nationalities.