HOPE FOR URBAN EDUCATION:

A Study of

Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty,

Urban Elementary Schools

The Charles A. Dana Center
The University of Texas at Austin

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HOPE FOR URBAN EDUCATION:
A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools

Executive Summary

This report is about nine urban elementary schools that served children of color in poor communities and achieved impressive academic results. These schools have attained higher levels of achievement than most schools in their states or most schools in the nation. They have achieved results in reading and mathematics beyond that achieved in some suburban schools. This report tells the stories of these schools and attempts to explain how these schools changed themselves into high-achieving schools.

All nine of the schools used federal Title I dollars to create Title I schoolwide programs. These schools are a powerful affirmation of the power of Title I to support comprehensive school improvement efforts. In these schools, many important change efforts were enhanced through the use of federal education resources. On the other hand, although Title I supported the change efforts, Title I was not the catalyst of the change effort. The true catalyst was the strong desire of educators to ensure the academic success of the children they served.

Each of the nine public elementary schools selected had the following characteristics:

- The majority of their students met low-income criteria (i.e., they qualified for free or reduced-price lunch). In seven of the schools, at least 80 percent of the students met low-income criteria.
- The school was located in an urban area and did not have selective admission policies.
- Student achievement in mathematics and reading was higher than the average of all schools in the state (or higher than the 50th percentile if a nationally-normed assessment was used). At least three years of assessment data were available to gauge the school's progress.
- There was not evidence that the school exempted large percentages of students from participation in the assessment program because of language proficiency or disabilities.
- The school and district leaders consented to participation in the study in a timely manner.

The high-performing, urban schools selected were Harriet A. Baldwin School, Boston, Mass.; Baskin Elementary School, San Antonio, Texas; Burgess Elementary School, Atlanta, Ga.; Centerville Elementary School, East St. Louis, Ill.; Goodale Elementary School, Detroit, Mich.; Hawley Environmental Elementary School, Milwaukee, Wis.; Lora B. Peck Elementary School, Houston, Texas; Gladys Noon Spellman Elementary School, Cheverly, Md. (in metropolitan Washington, D.C.); and James Ward Elementary School, Chicago, Ill.

Teams of researchers conducted two-day visits to all nine schools. During the visits, the researchers interviewed campus and district administrators, teachers, parents, and other school personnel. They observed classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, and various meetings. Also, they reviewed various school documents and achievement data. From these data, case studies were written for each of the nine schools.

The nine schools were different in important ways. These differences suggest that many urban elementary schools serving poor communities can achieve high levels of student achievement. Also, the differences suggest that schools may be able to achieve academic successes through different means. Some of the differences observed included the following:

- Among the nine schools, there were schools with small and large enrollments. Enrollments ranged from 283 students at Baldwin Elementary to 1,171 students at Goodale Elementary.

- Although all of the schools served elementary grades, they had different grade level configurations, starting as early as pre-kindergarten at Hawley, Peck, and Ward and ending as late as grade eight at Ward.

- Student demographics varied. At six of the nine schools, most students were African American. At one school, most students were Hispanic, and at another most were Asian American.

- Only two of the schools used nationally-known comprehensive school reform models. One used the Accelerated School Program and another used Success for All.

- Even though none of the schools would have been considered high-performing based on achievement data from five years ago, some of the schools made dramatic improvement over a three or four-year period, whereas others took five years or longer before experiencing dramatic gains in student achievement.

- In a few cases, the district office played a major role in the school's improvement efforts. In contrast, there were other cases where the district played a modest role in the improvement process.

- A few of the schools managed to make dramatic improvements without great turnover in teaching personnel. In contrast, some schools experienced substantial teacher turnover during the reform process.

Beyond these differences, there were important similarities in the strategies used to improve academic achievement. The following strategies were used by many of the nine schools:

- School leaders identified and pursued an important, visible, yet attainable first goal. They focused on the attainment of this first goal, achieved success, and then used their success to move toward more ambitious goals.

- School leaders redirected time and energy that was being spent on conflicts between adults in the school toward service to children. Leaders appealed to teachers, support staff, and parents to put aside their own interests and focus on serving children well.

- Educators fostered in students a sense of responsibility for appropriate behavior and they created an environment in which students were likely to behave well. Discipline problems became rare as the schools implemented multi-faceted approaches for helping students learn responsibility for their own behavior.

- School leaders created a collective sense of responsibility for school improvement. The shared sense of responsibility was nurtured by joint planning processes and reinforced by efforts to involve everyone in key components of the school's work.

- The quantity and quality of time spent on instructional leadership activities increased. Principals spent more time helping teachers attend to instructional issues and decreased the time teachers spent on distractions that diverted attention away from teaching and learning. Also, principals put other educators in positions that allowed them to provide instructional leadership. School leaders constantly challenged teachers and students to higher levels of academic attainment. They used data to identify, acknowledge, and celebrate strengths and to focus attention and resources on areas of need.

- Educators aligned instruction to the standards and assessments required by the state or the school district. Teachers and administrators worked together to understand precisely what students were expected to know and be able to do. Then, they planned instruction to ensure that students would have an excellent chance to learn what was expected of them.

- School leaders got the resources and training that teachers perceived they needed to get their students to achieve at high levels. In particular, school leaders made sure that teachers felt like they had adequate materials, equipment, and professional development.

- School leaders created opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together around instructional issues. Time was structured to ensure that collaboration around instructional issues became an important part of the school day and the school week.

- Educators made efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents, primarily by improving the achievement of students. Then educators built strong partnerships with parents in support of student achievement.

- School leaders created additional time for instruction. In some cases, efforts focused on creating additional time for attention to critical instructional issues during the school day. In other cases, efforts focused on creating additional time beyond the regular school day.

- Educators persisted through difficulties, setbacks, and failures. In spite of challenges and frustrations, school leaders did not stop trying to improve their schools.

These findings suggest the following recommendations:

- **Build the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership.** Federal, state, and local education agencies should promote efforts to build the capacity of principals to provide the quality of instructional leadership demonstrated by the principals in the nine schools studied.

- **Channel resources in ways that provide additional instructional leadership to schools.** Federal, state, and local education agencies should consider other ways to increase the quantity of instructional leadership available to schools, such as the development of instructional facilitator or specialist positions within schools.

- **Create clear, measurable, and rigorous school accountability provisions.** The federal government should continue to encourage states and districts to frame rigorous school accountability requirements. However, a focus on adequate yearly progress is insufficient. Many educators will be motivated to higher levels of performance if state and district policies define exemplary academic achievement.

- **Ensure that accountability provisions are accompanied by adequate strategies to build capacity and provide support.** In considering requirements for adequate yearly progress, states and districts should set ambitious requirements but also provide high levels of support. One of the most important supports is time for school personnel to engage in processes that align instruction to standards and assessments.

- **Along with accountability, provide schools adequate flexibility and support to use that flexibility well.** Federal, state, and local education agencies should ensure that accountability provisions are coupled with adequate resources for schools and reasonable flexibility in the use of those resources. Principals and school decision-making committees need high quality training that helps them use data to focus resources on critical areas of instructional need.

- **Infuse the tenets of comprehensive school reform into other federal education programs.** The federal government's focus on comprehensive school reform should be expanded and infused into other federal education programs. However, emphasis does not need to be placed on the adoption of models of reform as much as upon the principles of reform, as defined in the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program legislation.

- **Use legislation, policy, and technical assistance to help educators create regular opportunities for true professional development.** Professional development needs to be completely rethought in a way that results in more effective teaching and improved student achievement. State and federal resources should support the costs associated with the provision of high-quality, school-based professional development that increases the amount of time educators spend working with and learning from each other.

- **Provide resources for increasing the quantity of time made available for instruction.** State and federal resources should support efforts to increase the quantity of time made available for instruction. After-school programs, "Saturday Schools," and extended-year programs are important vehicles for ensuring that students meet challenging standards.

- **Strengthen legislation and provide technical assistance to encourage schools to build the capacity of teachers and parents for increasing parental involvement at school.** Paper compliance with existing federal parental involvement requirements is inadequate to improve schools. The capacity of educators to work with parents must be broadened. Also, educators must work to build the capacity of parents to support the education of their children.

- **Research is needed to better understand how school districts can better support the improvement of teaching and learning in high-poverty schools.** Districts can play important roles in supporting school change efforts. Unfortunately, there has been little research directed to understanding the role of districts in supporting high-performing, high-poverty schools.

HOPE FOR URBAN EDUCATION:
A Study of Nine High-Performing, High-Poverty, Urban Elementary Schools

There is good news for American public education based on the successes of some schools in urban districts that serve families living in poverty. Even though there are far too many well-documented stories of intellectually vapid schools that perpetuate cycles of poverty and further limit the life choices of children, there are some urban schools that are giving new life to their communities and transforming the futures of the children they serve. This report is about nine successful schools: urban elementary schools that served children of color in poor communities and achieved impressive academic results. These schools have, in fact, attained higher levels of achievement than most schools in their states or most schools in the nation. They have achieved results in reading and mathematics beyond those achieved by students in some affluent suburban schools.

This report complements and extends the body of literature that has focused on the study of effective schools (Taylor, 1990) and more recent research on the characteristics of high-performing, high-poverty schools (Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner, 1999; Lein, Johnson, and Ragland, 1996, among others). In particular, this report not only describes the characteristics of these schools but also describes how these schools managed to transform themselves. Instead of focusing on schools that merely did better than other high-poverty schools, this study examined high-poverty schools that performed better than the average for all schools in their states. Instead of focusing on schools in one state or region or on schools serving one ethnic population, this study included schools from different parts of the country and schools that served diverse populations. In addition to reporting descriptions of the current state of these schools, this study attempted to tell the story of the change process so that others might gain a deeper understanding of how a school begins, maintains, and sustains the journey toward excellence for all students.

All nine of the schools used federal Title I dollars to create Title I schoolwide programs. This means they were allowed to pool all of their resources to improve achievement throughout the entire school, instead of targeting federal resources to only those children who met eligibility criteria based on educational need. These schools are a powerful affirmation of the power of Title I to support comprehensive school improvement efforts. In these schools, many of the most important change efforts were enhanced through the use of federal education resources. On the other hand, although Title I supported the change efforts, Title I was not the catalyst of the change effort. The true catalyst was the strong desire of educators to ensure the academic success of the children they served.

BACKGROUND

In this section, the process used to select the schools is described. Also, this section includes a description of the qualitative procedures used to acquire data at each school site. Finally, the section includes a brief description of the organization of each of the nine case study reports.

Selecting the Schools

In the fall of 1998, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a set of case studies of nine high-performing urban, public elementary schools. The researchers identified nine urban elementary schools in which the majority of children met federal free or reduced-price lunch criteria and in which student performance on reading and mathematics assessments exceeded the average for schools in the state (or the average for schools in the nation, when nationally-normed assessments were used). Finding such schools was not easy.

Some states did not have a common statewide assessment system in the fall of 1998. In some states, such systems were under development or were in pilot phases. Some states did not have data about the achievement levels of individual schools (only district-wide data were available). In some cases, individual school data existed but were not easily accessible given the study's short timeline. In some states where school achievement data were accessible, there were no urban schools, serving predominantly poor communities, in which the level of achievement in mathematics and reading exceeded state or national averages. In many such places, improvements in the achievement of some urban schools were noted, but the level of achievement was still substantially below the state or national average. Data collected by the Council of Chief State School Officers were valuable in identifying some schools. State department of education data made available through World Wide Web pages were particularly useful in some states. Also, staff in research and evaluation offices in state and district offices were helpful in making data available.

Fortunately, there were some states where data were available and accessible and in which several schools met all the criteria for inclusion in the study. Additional information was sought about those schools. In particular, an effort was made to remove from consideration any schools that had selective admissions criteria. For example, magnet schools that only admitted students with high academic grades or test scores were removed from the pool of schools under consideration. Also, a school was removed from consideration if it was determined that a large percentage of children had been exempted from the state assessment because of issues of language proficiency or disabilities. Similarly, a school was removed from consideration if there had been a substantial change in the demographics of the school that might explain the improvement in achievement. The researchers sought to be certain that the demographics of the schools included were typical of urban, high-poverty schools in every aspect.

Achievement test data from prior years—at least the last three years— were reviewed to examine trends in academic performance. In a few cases, schools were excluded from consideration because, even though performance was high, the performance had decreased in recent years. Finally, a few schools were removed from consideration if they had already received substantial attention in educational literature. Although the researchers respected the substantial

accomplishments of these schools, this study was perceived as an opportunity to highlight schools that had not yet received substantial national attention.

Among the schools eligible for consideration, the researchers sought a sample that would provide great diversity. As such, the nine schools selected had varying ethnic and racial compositions. Also, the researchers selected some schools that had made dramatic, rapid turnarounds in performance and some that had a longer history of improvement.

Of course, it was necessary to obtain permission to visit and study the selected schools. Both schools and district offices needed to grant permission for the research activities. In a few cities, the school or schools that best met the selection criteria did not choose to participate in the study. In other cities, the researchers were more fortunate and were able to acquire permission to include their first-choice schools. Ultimately, nine high-performing, urban elementary schools were selected. These schools were in Atlanta, Ga.; Boston, Mass.; Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; East St. Louis, Ill.; Houston, Texas; Milwaukee, Wis.; Cheverly, Md. (in metropolitan Washington, D.C.) and San Antonio, Texas. Table 1 provides a list of the nine schools.

Procedures

As described above, a variety of quantitative data were used to identify schools. Once schools were identified, the research team used qualitative data to generate case studies for each school. A team of two or three researchers visited each school. The research visits occurred over a two-day period.

During the visits the researchers interviewed principals, at least one teacher from each grade level, other campus administrators, and parents. In some cases, principals arranged for interviews with parents who played a major role at the school. Often, however, researchers were able to conduct on-the-spot interviews with parents who were picking up their children, volunteering, or otherwise visiting the campus. Often, the researchers used focus groups to gain the perspectives of several teachers or parents. Personnel from the district office were also interviewed. Either the superintendent or the administrator who supervised the principal of the school studied was interviewed. Before the site visits, phone conversations with principals were helpful in identifying important informants and arranging interviews. As well, after the site visits, phone conversations with principals helped provide clarifying information.

Table 1: List of Nine Schools Studied

School	District	City	State
Baldwin Elementary School	Boston Public Schools	Boston	Massachusetts
Baskin Elementary School	San Antonio Independent School District	San Antonio	Texas
Burgess Elementary School	Atlanta Public School District	Atlanta	Georgia
Centerville Elementary School	Cahokia School District #187	East St. Louis	Illinois
Goodale Elementary School	Detroit Public Schools	Detroit	Michigan
Hawley Environmental School	Milwaukee Public Schools	Milwaukee	Wisconsin
Lora B. Peck Elementary School	Houston Independent School District	Houston	Texas
Spellman Elementary School	Prince George's County Public School District	Cheverly*	Maryland
Ward Elementary School	Chicago Public Schools	Chicago	Illinois

* in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area

The research team included 12 individuals with an array of backgrounds and skills. Six of the team members had prior experience as teachers. Three had been school administrators. All had experience as qualitative researchers. Their backgrounds included bilingual education, higher education, psychology, anthropology, policy, and special education.

In addition to interviews, the researchers observed a variety of settings, including classrooms at different grade levels, cafeterias, playgrounds, and hallways. Where possible, researchers observed staff meetings or other professional development activities. As well, a variety of documents were reviewed. Campus planning documents, program descriptions, meeting agendas, school budgets, achievement reports, and other documents were examined.

The phone calls, interviews, observations, and document reviews were structured to acquire a detailed picture of the current status of the school, as well as to acquire an understanding of how the school had improved over time. The researchers sought to understand not only the current status of each school's reform efforts, but also sought to understand how the school transformed itself over the years. Thus, for example, if the current principal of the school had been at the school for only a year or two and important aspects of the school's reform had been initiated three or four years prior, the researchers sought to identify and interview the previous principal. Intensive efforts were made to understand what had changed and how the changes were made. Table 2 summarizes the data collection efforts at each of the nine schools.

Table 2: Data Collection Strategies at Each of the Nine Schools

- Conduct an interview with the superintendent.
- Conduct interviews with the central office staff person who supervises the principal.
- Conduct interviews with the school principal. If the principal was new to the school (came after the current reform efforts began) conduct interviews with the former principal.
- Conduct interviews with at least one teacher at each grade level.
- Conduct an interview with a parent who has been actively involved in the school's improvement (such as a PTA/PTO officer).
- Conduct focus group sessions involving parents.
- Conduct observations of classrooms.
- Review the budget for the school.
- Review student achievement data from the school.
- Review the school's planning documents (e.g., school improvement plans).

The researchers relied heavily on interviews with the various informants to construct a picture of the processes, events, and programs that were influential in bringing about improved academic performance. The researchers probed in response to the issues that emerged through the interviews and looked for confirmation of changes in observations and reviews of documents. What may have been important in the story of change at one school may have been absent or have had only minimal importance in the story of change at another.

The Case Study Reports

The research staff developed a case study report for each of the nine schools. Each report was intended to describe the school, what it had accomplished, and the major changes that led to success. Each case study begins with background information concerning the school. There is a description of the population served and the academic improvement achieved in recent years. In most cases, the reports draw a contrast between the achievement of the school in years prior to recent reform efforts and the current state of the school.

The origins of each school's reform efforts were described in a section of each report entitled, "Starting Points." Then the majority of each case study report was devoted to a description of the major changes —from the perspectives of the people interviewed— that contributed to improved academic achievement. These changes were grouped into the four general areas.

In each of the nine schools there were important efforts to change the way educators related to students and the way students related to other students. Thus, there is a section in each report entitled, "Changing the School Climate." Central to the success of each school were efforts to improve teaching and learning. Therefore, each case report includes a section on "Changing Academic Instruction." Changes in parental and community relations were central to the success of each school; however, there was variation in the manner in which the schools sought to work with parents and community members. As such, there is a section in each report entitled,

"Changing Relationships with Parents and the Community." Finally, a section entitled, "Changing the Organization of Schooling" describes how each school modified organizational structures, the use of personnel, the use of time, or the use of other resources to support the improvement process.

The case study reports do not provide an exhaustive description of the schools. In contrast, the reports are intended to describe key aspects of the process of school reform. The reports describe the difficult work of improving achievement in poor, urban communities. The reports highlight the successes, as well as some of the barriers and frustrations that have slowed or limited successes. Although each school has achieved important successes, each school continues to strive to improve achievement. Although the principals and teachers at the schools were justifiably proud of their achievements, often they were quick to note that there was still room for further improvement.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE NINE SCHOOLS

Although all nine schools served urban, minority, and low-income communities and all nine boasted high levels of academic achievement in reading and mathematics, there were important variations among the schools. They varied in their student enrollments, grade spans, ethnic composition, rate of improvement, and the extent to which they used school reform models. They also varied in their relationship with their district offices and in the extent to which they experienced turnover in teaching staff through the process of reform.

Student Enrollment

The schools had enrollments that ranged from 283 students (at Baldwin Elementary) to 1,171 students (at Goodale Elementary). Six of the schools (Baldwin, Baskin, Burgess, Hawley, Peck, and Ward) had less than 500 students. Three of the schools (Centerville, Goodale, and Spellman) had more than 500 students. Although most of the schools had the advantage of a small enrollment (in contrast with the stereotype of large urban schools), there were large schools that achieved impressive academic results. Though school size may have been an important factor in some of these schools, it probably should also be noted that some of the smaller schools were just as small when they were considered low-performing schools by their districts or states.

Regardless of enrollment, all of the schools managed to create an atmosphere of smallness. Principals, teachers, parents, and students knew each other, cared about each other, and worked together well. Even in the largest schools, there was generally a warm, personal atmosphere enjoyed by all members of the school community.

Grades Covered

Four of the schools (Baldwin, Baskin, Burgess, and Goodale) had kindergarten through grade five. Hawley and Peck were similar; however, they also had pre-kindergarten programs. Centerville and Spellman served students in kindergarten through grade six, while Ward served students from pre-kindergarten through grade eight.

Student Demographics

In six of the nine schools (Burgess, Centerville, Goodale, Hawley, Peck, and Spellman), a majority of the students were African American. However, the size of the majority ranged from 100 percent of the students at Goodale in Detroit to only 56 percent of the students at Hawley in Milwaukee. At Baskin a majority of the students (75 percent) were Hispanic. At Baldwin, a majority of the students (72 percent) were Asian American. Although 47 percent of the students at Ward were Asian American, there was not any racial or ethnic group that comprised a majority of the student population.

In seven of the nine schools, at least 80 percent of the students were designated as low-income through the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. At Hawley, 71 percent of the students and at Spellman 63 percent of the students participated in the free or reduced-price lunch program. These demographics are shown in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Student Demographics

School	City	% African American	% Asian American	% Hisp.	% White	% Low-Income
Baldwin	Boston	17	72	4	7	80
Baskin	San Antonio	6	1	75	18	92
Burgess	Atlanta	99	0	1	0	81
Centerville	East St. Louis	89	0	0	11	86
Goodale	Detroit	100	0	0	0	87
Hawley	Milwaukee	56	2	12	27	71
Peck	Houston	79	0	18	2	94
Spellman	Cheverly	73	1	17	9	63
Ward	Chicago	18	47	16	19	88

Several of the schools had significant populations of students who were learning English as a second language. In particular, at Baldwin, Ward, and Spellman more than one-fourth of the students were learning English as a second language.

The researchers tried to discover which schools experienced substantial student mobility. Baldwin did not report mobility data. The other schools reported mobility rates ranging from 15 percent at Hawley to 49 percent at Baskin. Schools were not always able to explain how their mobility rates were calculated so there may be differences in the meaning of the rates. In general, these mobility rates are low in contrast to the mobility rates of some urban, high-poverty schools. Perhaps, the low mobility rates were low, at least in part, because parents did not want to move away from schools where their children were achieving important academic gains.

Comprehensive School Reform Models

All nine of the schools had engaged in comprehensive efforts to improve academic achievement for all of their students. However, only two of the schools used popular models for comprehensive school reform. Centerville Elementary used the Accelerated Schools Program, developed by Henry Levin at Stanford University. Peck Elementary used the Success for All Program, developed by Robert Slavin at John Hopkins University. In both cases the reform model played a role in the schools' improvement efforts; however, each was only part of the overall story of reform in the school. In each of the schools, there was considerable evidence of the nine components of comprehensive school reform, as described in the federal 1998 Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. For instance, many of the schools sought to use research-based practices, provide intensive professional development, ensure the buy-in and support of teachers and other school staff, and secure the backing of the district administration.

Rate of Improvement

In schools like Baskin and Peck, rapid improvement in academic achievement was shown by sharp rises in student test scores during a three- or four-year period. In contrast, at schools such as Goodale and Centerville, teachers and administrators believed they had been engaged in steady improvement efforts over the past decade. Respondents had varying notions about when the most important changes began. At Burgess, Goodale, Hawley, and Peck most of the respondents connected the beginning of change efforts with the arrival of the current principal. At Centerville, Spellman, and Ward the previous principal was given substantial credit for initiating the reform efforts. At Baldwin respondents perceived the presence of a new principal, as well as a new foundation supported reform initiative, and a new superintendent as converging factors that initiated dramatic improvements in teaching and learning. Similarly, at Baskin changes were attributed to both new campus and district leadership, as well as to the power of a state accountability system.

In some cases, student achievement data did not reflect the timeline of reform efforts suggested by informants. For example, even though Goodale teachers and parents reported that their reform efforts had been ongoing for several years under the leadership of their principal, they also admitted that the fruits of their efforts were not shown in achievement score gains until the last two years.

If the selection criteria used for this study had been applied, none of the nine schools would have been considered high-performing schools five years ago. In fact, in most of the schools, the evidence of academic achievement was dismal before 1994. In most of the schools (specifically, Baldwin, Baskin, Burgess, Peck, and Spellman) educators and parents tended to believe that reform efforts began after 1994. However, the staff and parents at the other schools tended to believe that important improvement efforts were in progress prior to 1994, even though they may not have resulted in improved test scores until after 1994.

District Involvement

Leadership and guidance from the district office played a substantial role in the improvement at Baldwin, Baskin, and Peck. In contrast, the district office played a more modest role in the improvement at Goodale and Hawley. One might note that the schools that made the most rapid gains were the schools with the greatest district involvement.

In the schools in which district involvement was greatest, the district established clear expectations for improvement, delineated a path for improvement, and provided support and technical assistance along the way. For instance, the Houston Independent School District made clear that the new principal at Peck Elementary was expected to substantially improve academic achievement as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, the Texas School Accountability System, and the Houston Independent School District School Accountability System. The principal was given the opportunity to adopt the area district's Project GRAD program and eagerly consented to participate. Project GRAD included the Success for All Program, the Move-It Math Program, a plan for improving consistency in classroom management and discipline, and the Communities in Schools Program, which incorporated dropout prevention and social service agency components. Staff from the area district office provided support along the way, particularly as the school encountered rough beginnings on the path to improvement. Similar direction, guidance, and support were made available to Baldwin Elementary by the Boston Public Schools and to Baskin Elementary by the San Antonio Independent School District.

Even in the places where district involvement was less extensive, the schools were able to access important services from the district. For instance, the Goodale faculty was one of the best consumers of professional development offerings from the district office. Similarly, Hawley could not have been a successful city-wide school without the provision of extensive transportation services from the district office.

Teacher Turnover

At some of the schools such as Ward and Peck, academic improvements have come with few changes in teaching staff. In contrast, at Burgess, only five teachers remained in 1998-99 from the staff the principal, Carter, inherited in 1993-94. At Spellman, one teacher described the early years of their reform effort by saying, "We would have to look up daily to see how much the staff had changed."

None of the schools reported that many teachers had been fired. However, in several of the schools, it was clear that teachers who did not accept the school's goals and vision were encouraged to leave. In some cases, principals began processes of documenting unacceptable behavior. In some cases, principals bluntly invited teachers to seek jobs elsewhere. There were some situations where principals made clear what was expected, invited people to take part, and if staff members chose not to participate, the principal offered to help them find other employment. Still in other cases, teachers began feeling uncomfortable and chose to leave when so many of their peers were trying new approaches and expressing commitment to the school's new vision.

Two factors were important in reducing teacher turnover or in creating situations where turnover was minimal. First, principals tended to be highly selective in hiring new teachers. For instance, at Goodale, candidates were hired only if they demonstrated a passion for excellence and a love for children. The principal would leave a position vacant instead of filling it with a person who would not fit into the school's culture of continuous improvement and concern for children. Second, principals organized fiscal and human resources in a manner that provided substantial support for teachers. Teachers felt supported and perceived that they had a good chance of being successful in their roles. At some of the schools, e.g., Burgess and Spellman, such support was less apparent at the beginning of the reform but has increased substantially in recent years.

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

The primary purpose of this research effort was to generate a deeper understanding of how these nine urban elementary schools changed in a way that resulted in high levels of academic achievement for their students. There were several important change strategies that were used by multiple schools. In this section of the report, these change strategies are described with examples from a few of the schools.

Targeting an Important, Visible, Attainable First Goal

In several of the schools, new principals walked into difficult environments with problems ranging from student discipline, to teacher morale, to parent dissatisfaction, to academic lethargy. In response to what must have felt like overwhelming chaos, principals identified one issue or goal upon which they could focus immediate attention and give an unambiguous

message that the school was changing. They sought to identify an issue where they could make progress quickly. The focus varied in response to the issues that were perceived as important at each school.

At Baldwin and Hawley, the first efforts were to improve student discipline and create a safe and orderly environment. At Spellman, efforts were made to reduce the disruptions to teaching and increase the school's focus on academic instruction. At Peck, the principal disbanded the school's two, ethnically separate parent-teacher organizations and instituted a unified Parent-Teacher Association. At several of the schools, principals tried to make the physical environment more attractive for children and more conducive to learning.

By targeting a visible, attainable goal, principals were able to give students, parents, and teachers clear indicators of change in just a few weeks or months. These early accomplishments helped reduce or eliminate excuses and created a readiness for additional (often more difficult) changes. By focusing on one issue, principals were able to direct their energies in a way that would have a high likelihood of success. This first success became the cornerstone of future successes.

Refocusing Energies on Service to Children

In prior years, teachers, principals, and parents in many of the schools spent considerable time on conflicts among the adults at school. Often these conflicts siphoned away valuable energy that should have been devoted to the improvement of teaching and learning. Principals in most of the nine schools were skillful in redirecting the energy expended on such conflicts. School leaders challenged teachers, paraprofessionals, union leaders, and parents to elevate their focus beyond self-interest to a concern for the well-being of the students. This was not done as a one-time event or an occasional sermon. Instead, principals were constantly reminding the adults about the effect of decisions on students. The principals appealed to teachers, staff, and parents to put aside small differences and unite in service to students.

At Burgess, principal Carter challenged the staff to move from a teacher-focused school to a child-focused school. Often in discussions about important school decisions, the principal would ask the faculty to consider what was in the best interest of students.

At Peck, principal Goodwin asked the faculty to put children first, regardless of disagreements. The staff learned, in part, from the manner in which the principal articulated child-focused rationale for her decisions. Goodwin encouraged teachers to talk about their reasons for entering the teaching profession. She tried to learn about their goals and what she called "the desires of their hearts." Then she appealed to those desires to serve children well as she called upon every staff member to refocus their efforts on the improvement of the school.

In several cases, school leaders helped teachers refocus energies during planning processes. By engaging in such processes and discussing "what we, together, can do for children," principals were able to refocus energies in ways that coincided with improvement plans. Once plans were developed, the message was reinforced often, particularly in times of conflict. As an example, at Baldwin, some teachers resisted changes in curriculum and instruction. One teacher said, "You

have to have a willingness to let them go through their resistance. Then you focus them on the fact that this is for the good of the kids."

At Baskin, when performance data were reviewed, it was done in ways that were not intended to be critical of teachers. In contrast, the review was focused on the academic needs of children. At Goodale, the principal did not allow much energy to be expended on projects, efforts, or discussions that had minimal influence on the personal or academic growth of students. In staff meetings, grade level meetings, or in other gatherings, the principal frequently refocused the staff's energy toward issues that had a substantial influence on the personal or academic success of students.

The result of the refocusing process was not only a decrease in tensions but also an increase in the extent to which students were likely to feel respected, valued, and appreciated. Visitors to these schools quickly sense that teachers and other staff members genuinely love and care for the students.

Building Students' Sense of Responsibility for Appropriate Behavior and Creating an Environment in Which Students Are Likely to Behave Well

In all nine schools, often in dramatic contrast with their environments in past years, discipline problems were rare. The schools used many approaches to improve student behavior, focusing on helping students assume responsibility for their behavior and on creating school environments that made it easy for students to behave appropriately.

At several of the schools, time was set aside to establish clear rules and high expectations for student behavior. Teachers, administrators, parents, and often students worked together to establish simple rules that would help create a much more pleasant environment for teaching and learning. Often, rules were established that would help prevent behavior problems before they started. For instance, at Peck students walked in the hallways with their arms folded. This pattern of behavior helped reduce the possibility of conflicts as students walked throughout the school.

In all of the schools, many efforts were made to acknowledge and even celebrate positive behavior. For instance, the Buddy Reading Program at Ward and the SPARK program (Spellman Acts of Random Kindness) at Spellman helped encourage students to interact with their peers in a supportive manner. At Peck, students earned opportunities to seek positions of responsibility in the classroom. At Spellman, a banner was flown when the school achieved a fight-free day. At Hawley, students earned the chance to participate in intramural sports.

Clear and consistent rules, consequences, and rewards helped students learn to assume responsibility for their own behavior. When consequences were regular and predictable, it was easier for students to behave appropriately. The predictability of these results seemed to be positively associated with the visibility of the principal and other school leaders. The visibility of principals on playgrounds, in hallways, and in classrooms helped underscore that the rules were important and they would be enforced.

At times, rules were eliminated or modified when they were not necessary. For instance, at Peck there were many students (and some teachers) who were frequently late arriving at school in the mornings. Instead of investing a substantial amount of energy into disciplining people for being tardy, the principal instituted "Peck time." The beginning and ending times for the school day were moved back 15 minutes. In other words, children began school fifteen minutes later and ended their school day fifteen minutes later. Parents, teachers, and students saw the change as an effort to help them succeed at being on time. Tardiness was dramatically reduced.

Training for teachers was an important component of efforts to implement discipline plans. At Peck, teachers received training in the district's Consistency Management Discipline Plan. At Goodale, teachers participated in efficacy training that focused on building a sense of efficacy and responsibility in students. At many of the schools, the regular collaboration among teachers included attention to strategies for helping students maintain exemplary behavior.

Student responsibility for their own behavior was also nurtured by the development of student leadership activities. For instance, at Goodale and Hawley, peer mediation programs gave students important opportunities to support each other in working out problems in a constructive manner. As well, extensive uses of cooperative learning strategies at schools such as Peck provided many opportunities for student leadership.

The improvements in student behavior were also influenced by the changes in the extent to which children came to understand that they were valued and respected. At Baldwin, as in all of the nine schools, principal Lee knew all of the students by name and knew many of their families. The personal relationships among students and school staff created a powerful context for good behavior. At Burgess, teachers gave students time to talk about important emotional stresses in their lives. At several of the schools, counselors or social workers helped students know that they had a safe place to talk about personal concerns. Nonetheless, teachers, counselors, social workers, principals, and other support providers emphasized high expectations for student behavior, regardless of the circumstances in children's lives. They listened and provided support that helped students continue to meet behavioral expectations, as well as academic expectations, even when students faced troubling situations.

When behavioral problems emerged, they were dealt with in a prompt, objective manner that demonstrated respect for students and helped them learn responsibility. For instance, at Goodale, students were rarely suspended. Principal Batchelor believed that removing a student from school did nothing to increase the students' sense of responsibility for his or her behavior nor to increase the school's sense of responsibility for educating the student. At many of the schools, the involvement of parents was a key component of their disciplinary efforts. Parents reported that they were supportive because they perceived that school leaders were fair disciplinarians who had the best interest of their children at heart.

Ultimately, student behavior was also improved by the improvement of academic instruction in classrooms. Students were more likely to be actively engaged in learning. They were more likely to be excited about the level of challenge and rigor in their curriculum. They were more likely to be positive about their chances to succeed academically. Thus, there was less of a need

for students to seek attention through negative behavior. Improved instruction led to improved discipline, which led to even better instruction.

Creating a Collective Sense of Responsibility for Improvement

An important improvement strategy at each of the nine schools centered on creating an environment in which all educators shared a sense of responsibility for school improvement and the attainment of the school's goals. At several of the schools, this joint sense of responsibility was modeled by the principal, nurtured by joint planning processes, and reinforced by efforts to involve everyone in key components of the school's work.

Principals at these schools emphasized the importance of each individual's contribution to the work of the school. Principals modeled their commitment to collective responsibility by including the input of various staff members in decisions. Often teachers were given the responsibility of making important decisions. In other cases, principals made key decisions but they gave teachers and other staff substantial opportunities to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

Planning processes provided avenues for the involvement of many staff and faculty. For instance, the Accelerated Schools Program provided opportunities for many Centerville staff members to get involved in identifying school needs and establishing a vision for the school's future. At Hawley, staff members participated on committees established in response to critical issue areas identified by the staff. These structured opportunities for involvement helped emphasize that staff members shared responsibility for school improvement. The principal refused to allow teachers to think that he would 'fix' all of the school's problems. The staff learned that they all shared responsibility for getting all children to achieve at high levels.

Collective responsibility became a part of the common language of the school. At Centerville, Peck, and Ward everyone talked about teamwork and the extent to which they were working as a team. At Goodale and Burgess educators talked about themselves as part of a "family" of adults responsible for the well-being of "their" children. At Baskin, principal Payne said, "No one can do it alone." At Ward, principal Wilcher emphasized the importance of getting the staff to feel that they were working *with* her and not *for* her.

The sense of collective responsibility resulted in staff members taking on new and different roles. At Spellman, the institution of the Canady block-scheduling approach resulted in almost all of the school's ancillary personnel participating in the teaching of reading. Similarly, at Peck many staff members helped support the Success for All reading program. At Hawley, the school social worker sponsored the after-school math club. At many of the schools, teachers voluntarily exceeded expectations.

The involvement of staff members in a variety of activities central to the success of the school helped create a deeper sense of professional responsibility among them. As professionals, teachers and other staff were expected to contribute to an understanding of the school's problems, the analysis of possible solutions, and the implementation of commonly agreed-upon approaches to improvement.

Increasing Instructional Leadership

At all nine schools, the amount and quality of time spent on instructional leadership activities was substantially increased. First, principals spent a substantial amount of time engaged in instructional leadership activities. Second, other school faculty were positioned in ways that allowed them to provide instructional leadership at the school.

Principals tended to spend a large percentage of their time in classrooms. For instance, at Burgess, Carter reported that she spent 40 percent of her time in classrooms, observing teaching and helping improve instruction.

At Centerville, principal Butler was described as a teacher of teachers. As one teacher explained, "She gets in there with you and shows you. She teaches and shows you to make sure that you understand."

Similarly, teachers at Peck and Goodale reported that their principals were frequently in classrooms watching, reacting to and reinforcing good teaching techniques and providing helpful suggestions.

In addition to the leadership provided by principals, almost all of the schools asked other educators to provide instructional leadership to the school staff. For instance, Warren, the former principal at Baskin, created an instructional guide position from another administrative position. This person, Payne, coached teachers on instructional strategies and later became the school principal. At Burgess and Spellman, there were instructional specialists who provided instructional assistance and support to teachers. At Goodale, Title I resource teachers assumed instructional leadership functions as they helped teachers address instructional improvement issues. At Peck, a master teacher was hired to help teachers with writing instruction while the Success for All Coordinator supported teachers in improving reading instruction. At Ward, an assistant principal was responsible for helping the principal improve instruction in classrooms and head teachers provided additional assistance to their peers in improving daily classroom instruction. By encouraging and training multiple instructional leaders, former principal Breen at Ward helped prepare his successor, Wilcher, and other leaders who have become administrators in other Chicago schools.

As another example of instructional leadership among the nine schools, principals kept teachers and other school personnel focused on improving instruction. At Goodale, when school planning efforts veered to a discussion of improving the parking lot, principal Batchelor, helped refocus the group on improving instruction. At Hawley, Principal Helminiak supported the School Beautification Committee, but made it clear that the priority had to be on improving student achievement. Often, principals kept the faculty focused on instruction by removing distractions. At Spellman, Liebes insisted that the 90-minute reading block was "sacred" and would not be interrupted. Even on days shortened because of snow, everyone would have 90 minutes for reading and language arts.

One way principals and other school leaders demonstrated instructional leadership was by getting teachers to use achievement data to improve instruction. For example, at Baldwin, Lee helped teachers use data on student literacy levels to improve reading instruction. Additionally, the principal helped teachers use disaggregated Stanford 9 test scores to identify students in need of additional academic support. At Goodale, Batchelor helped ensure that the school's professional development plans, as well as other important plans were based, at least in part, on student results from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). At Hawley, principal Helminiak helped teachers use student assessment data to identify areas of strength and weakness and use such data in planning improvement strategies. At Baskin, the instructional guide helped teachers use data to understand specific objectives in mathematics that needed extra attention. At Centerville, the principal used the Accelerated Schools Program to help teachers understand and use data to improve teaching.

Principals constantly challenged the school staff to higher levels of achievement. They highlighted and celebrated the successes of students and teachers in a way that reinforced exemplary efforts and gave a message of hope. The walls of classrooms and hallways were visual celebrations of the achievement of students. Regularly, school leaders took the time to acknowledge the successes and special efforts of students, parents, teachers, and other staff members. As goals were achieved, school leaders generously praised the efforts of all contributors, and then artfully redirected the entire school toward even higher goals for the achievement of their students.

Aligning Instruction to Standards and Assessments

At the nine schools, students performed well on assessments because they were taught what the district or the state expected them to learn. Principals and teachers did not leave student performance to chance. They meticulously ensured that children were being taught the knowledge, concepts, and skills articulated in state or district standards and measured in annual assessments.

At Burgess and Centerville, curriculum alignment processes helped teachers understand the relationship between what they taught and how students performed on standardized tests. The curriculum alignment processes were important opportunities for teachers to talk about expectations, teaching, and student work. Furthermore, the alignment processes gave teachers a chance to understand precisely what students were expected to know and the extent to which students would be expected to demonstrate mastery. At Spellman, instructional specialists and teachers worked together to create performance-based practice assessments. Teachers used the data from those assessments to improve instruction. For many of the teachers, the process gave them a much deeper understanding of what instruction was needed for students to perform well on the assessment.

Alignment processes also helped ensure that teachers would be able to teach all of the knowledge and skills expected to be learned during the school year. For instance, at Baskin, the principal and the instructional guide led teachers in curriculum alignment projects in science and mathematics that gave teachers a "road map for student improvement." Teachers no longer had

to guess if they were covering all the content tested by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. They worked together to develop a plan that would ensure adequate coverage of all important content by testing time each spring.

Getting Teachers the Resources and Training Perceived Necessary to Teach

At several of the schools, substantial energy was devoted to making sure that teachers felt like they had all of the resources they considered necessary in order to get students to reach the school's academic goals. In particular, principals and other school leaders made sure that teachers felt like they had adequate materials, equipment, and professional development.

At Baldwin, teachers reported that the principal "went to the nth degree" to get needed instructional materials. At Goodale, teachers who had transferred from other Detroit schools were astonished at the manner in which the principal and the Title I resource teachers were able to get teachers the materials they requested in a timely manner. At Ward, teachers reported, "If teachers need it, Wilcher [the principal] gets it."

When assessment data, principal observations, or analyses of student work suggested that students were not learning an important concept or skill, the principal or school planning teams made sure that resources were allocated to help teachers learn better strategies for teaching the skill. Teachers, principals, and instructional specialists from within the school often provided this training; however, there were times when training from outside sources was needed. In such cases, principals either arranged for experts to come to the school and provide training to the staff or arranged opportunities for staff persons to attend workshops, seminars, or conferences where they could access the appropriate training. When necessary, the school provided substitute teachers so that faculty could attend training sessions. Often such training was attended by groups of teachers and administrators. Therefore, when the group returned to school, they could support each other in carrying out the practices learned. Also, they could assist other staff in learning the new strategies, concepts, or techniques.

For instance during one semester, at Ward, a group of teachers participated in weekly math and science classes held at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Teachers attended classes during the school day and substitute teachers were provided. Then, experts from the institute visited the teachers in their classrooms and provided coaching. Teachers learned new skills that they were able to apply in their classrooms and practice with the support of their school administrators and fellow teachers.

Often, teachers perceived that the support provided through access to materials, equipment, and training was critical to their success. They tended to see the school's investment as a tangible indicator of support. As a result, teachers responded with a greater willingness to support school initiatives. Perhaps, teachers felt more effective as a result of this support and were more willing to exert maximum effort. Perhaps, when teachers perceived that they had been given what they deemed necessary to teach well, there were fewer excuses for poor performance. Whatever the reason, this support was extremely important to teachers and was an important part of the success at several of the schools.

Often the schools used Title I funds to provide materials, instructional equipment, and professional development. These schools used the flexibility provided by the Title I schoolwide program option to improve services to all students. In some cases, (e.g., at Goodale) Title I teachers still saw some students on a pull-out basis, yet the majority of the Title I funds were used to support the improvement of the entire school.

When Title I funds ran short, some of the schools (e.g., Centerville, Baldwin, and Goodale) acquired resources from other grants to help meet these needs or combined Title I dollars with other resources. At Baskin, money from an unused professional position was diverted to purchase additional instructional materials. At Hawley, Title I and technology resources were combined to get computers into classrooms and provide associated professional development for teachers.

Creating Opportunities for Teachers to Work, Plan, and Learn Together

At all nine schools, leaders created regular opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and learn together around instructional issues. Without time for collaboration on instruction, many improvements would have never been conceived or implemented.

Many of the schools created blocks of time during which teachers met and planned together. At Baldwin, a primary team (kindergarten through second-grade teachers) and an elementary team (third through fifth-grade teachers) each met twice a month. At Baskin, a 90-minute block of uninterrupted planning time was created for each grade level twice a week. At Hawley, the principal arranged the schedule in a way that used “banked” time (additional minutes at the beginning or end of each day) to carve out time for professional development. At Peck, the principal rearranged the schedule to provide common planning times for the staff to engage in horizontal (same grade level) and vertical (different grade levels) planning. Twice a week the entire staff came together to share experiences and strategies that achieved positive results.

Often planning times focused on important instructional issues. For instance, at Baldwin, teachers carefully reviewed student work in comparison with academic standards and discussed opportunities for improving instruction. At Spellman, this time was used to create practice performance assessments, score the assessments, and identify common areas of academic strength and need.

Often these planning times became opportunities for teachers to share and learn from each other. For instance, at Burgess teachers gave reports on what objectives were being taught and how they were getting students to learn the objectives. Time was set aside for classroom visits and sharing. At Hawley, many of the professional development activities were organized and presented by teachers to their colleagues, based on the school improvement plan. In other cases, collaboration times were sometimes used as opportunities for teachers to study and research options for instructional improvement. For instance, at Baldwin teachers researched options for literacy programs before choosing one that felt appropriate for their students.

Although these collaborations generally had an academic focus, they did not always start as such. For instance, at Baskin collaboration was established when teachers started going out to lunch together once a week. At Burgess, collaborations began with staff dinners, social gatherings, and team-building sessions. Building a comfort level was sometimes an important precursor to getting teachers to discuss their teaching practices openly.

In some cases, school leaders set aside space for teachers to plan and work together. The new kind of "teacher workroom" helped teachers collaborate. At Baskin a special workroom was established that allowed teachers the space to meet, work together, and learn from each other. Similarly, Peck Elementary is in the process of developing such a space.

Mentoring programs provided another vehicle for teachers to work and plan together. Specifically, Centerville and Ward had established mentor programs that were particularly designed to support new teachers. Team teaching at Spellman (as part of the Canady model) required teachers to work with one of the school's specialists during a 90-minute block. At Goodale, shared professional development experiences often became a starting point for collaborations among teachers. Teachers would return from such events and work together toward implementation of strategies learned.

Teachers at these nine schools were constantly learning about academic content and academic instruction. Often, they learned as much from each other as they learned from any other source. Their planning efforts were central to the improvements in instruction at the schools.

Winning the Confidence and Respect of Parents and Building Partnerships with Them

At all nine schools, educators engaged in a wide variety of efforts to win the confidence and respect of parents. Educators did not simply seek to involve parents in token activities. Instead, educators sought a meaningful partnership with parents.

Successful partnerships would never have been established if parents did not see tangible evidence of the school's concern for their children. As the school made efforts to adapt to the needs of children, parents were willing to exert greater effort to support the school. The teachers and principals of the nine schools helped parents believe that the school could provide great opportunities for their children. Parents responded positively to those efforts with an outpouring of support in various forms. Parents talked about what teachers had done for their children and the kind of place the school had become. They articulated a confidence that the school staff had their children's best interests at heart.

The conventional wisdom suggests that parental involvement leads to improved achievement; however, in these schools, there was also evidence that the reverse was true—improved school achievement led to increased parental involvement. Parents were more willing to be supportive because they saw evidence that educators cared about their children and worked hard to improve achievement. Of course, this increased parental involvement then became an important tool for generating further improvements in academic learning.

An important step in building partnerships with parents was making them feel like they were welcome as equals at school. Educators at Baldwin, Centerville, Spellman, and Ward described "open-door policies" that encouraged parents to visit the school and visit their child's classroom. At Baskin, teachers and administrators stood outside the school in the morning as parents dropped off their children. They invited parents to come in and have coffee and doughnuts and chat about their child's progress. Similarly, at Goodale, parents were invited to attend "Snack and Chat" sessions with teachers during lunch. At Centerville and Peck, parent centers were established that gave parents a place to meet, organize activities, and participate in enrichment classes. At Peck, the principal showed the school office staff how to greet and work with parents in a way that made them feel welcome.

Often educators made small but significant extra steps that helped parents feel welcome. For instance, at Baskin, child care was provided during parent-teacher conferences. At Spellman, the school's automated phone service was used to remind every parent about PTA meetings. At Peck, the principal made personal phone calls to parents to encourage them to attend planning meetings.

School personnel helped build partnerships by giving parents important ways to contribute and by acknowledging the important ways in which parents already contributed to the school's success. At Baskin, many parents were involved in planning activities. Furthermore, those parents were encouraged to express their opinions and share their ideas. At Hawley, parents were invited to attend family nights with food and fun, but also, at these events, parents were asked to share their opinions, ideas, and desires for their children. At Peck, parents were asked, "What do you think we need to do to help make Peck a better school?" At these schools, parents were treated as if they were highly valued consultants with important ideas and insights.

Parents were also given important ways to contribute to their own child's academic success. At Baskin, videotapes were used to inform parents about activities in their child's classroom and to help parents understand what children were learning and how they could help at home. At Burgess, parents participated in the Saturday school program. Parental participation was encouraged and structured so parents could learn strategies they could use with their children at home. Similarly, Burgess parents got training in how to help their children prepare for the science and social science fair. At Centerville, parents participated in family science nights and family math nights that provided many ideas that could be replicated easily at home. PTA meetings at Centerville were used to teach parents strategies for assisting their children with schoolwork.

Of course, parents were also given important opportunities to volunteer at school. However, the schools made important efforts to make sure that parents felt their time was well spent. At Burgess, teachers participated in workshops designed to help them learn how to plan for the use of volunteers in their classrooms. At Centerville, the school developed volunteer job descriptions based upon needs identified by staff. Parents were given the opportunity to fill those jobs that best matched their talents and available time.

Parents became important contributors to the success of these schools. Parents contributed ideas, time, and assistance that helped make the schools more responsive to the needs and strengths of

children. By helping at home, helping at school, or helping in the community, parents helped the schools improve the academic success as well as the personal success of students.

Creating Additional Time for Instruction

Each of the nine schools created additional time for academic instruction. In some cases, efforts focused on creating additional time for attention to critical instructional issues during the school day. In other cases, efforts focused on creating additional time beyond the regular school day.

At Baskin, Baldwin, Peck, and Spellman, school leaders created additional time during the school day for attention to reading. In each school, there was a 90-minute period devoted to literacy. Furthermore, at each school, almost all staff were involved in teaching reading during this period, thereby reducing adult-to-child ratios. At Baskin, teachers used assessment data to change instructional groupings that provided more intensive instructional time (three-to-one groupings twice a week) for students in need of additional assistance.

At Burgess, Baldwin, Hawley, Peck, and Ward there were after-school programs intended to create additional opportunities for students to learn important content and skills. At Centerville, teachers provided valuable tutoring for students during lunch periods.

Educators at the schools assumed that they could get their students to reach high academic standards; however, they recognized that additional time was often necessary to ensure student success.

Persisting through Difficulties, Setbacks, and Failures

None of the principals and none of the teachers interviewed reported that the transformation of their school was easy. In fact, there were many reports of difficulties, challenges, and frustrations. Perhaps, a key difference between these schools and other less successful schools is that educators in these schools persisted. They refused to give up the dream of academic success.

Initially, at Spellman, some of the staff did not like the idea of having instructional specialists and rebelled against using them. At Baldwin, some teachers perceived that the mandate to improve learning was an affront to them. At Peck, parents circulated a petition and demanded that the school board remove the new principal. In Wilcher's second year as principal at Ward, teachers had to deal with a district reorganization and a slow building rehabilitation project that hampered preparation for the beginning of the school year. These difficulties and others might have been sufficient to derail improvement efforts; however, the school leaders persisted.

At Peck, the principal kept asking herself if her actions were in the best interest of children. When she answered affirmatively, she knew she should continue. Also, at Peck, as was the case at Burgess, the support of district office administrators was sometimes crucial in helping the principals hold the course.

On the other hand, there were times when principals felt the need to fend off district office directives that threatened their reform efforts. Some principals described efforts to resist district pressure and avoid hiring teachers who had been removed from positions in other schools. Some principals told how they preserved the teachers' time for collaboration and resisted district efforts to involve their staff in district-wide professional development activities that did not address the needs of their students or teachers. Some principals described other district policies that could have diffused their school's focus on academic improvement. Often those principals either negotiated compromises or found ways to comply that were minimally disruptive to the school's improvement efforts.

Perhaps, the persistence of school leaders was influenced primarily by their deep commitment to the students and families they served. They perceived their work, less as a job, more as a mission. They persisted because they believed in themselves, they believed in their school staffs, and they believed in the ability of the children to succeed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build the capacity of principals to provide instructional leadership.**[1] For over 20 years, educational literature has described the importance of instructional leadership in improving academic achievement; however, federal education legislation has virtually ignored the importance of principals. Federal, state, and local education agencies should promote strategies for building the capacity of principals to provide the quality of instructional leadership demonstrated by the principals in the nine schools studied. Strategies that built the capacity of principals in the schools studied included the following:
  - providing opportunities for principals to visit and learn from other schools with similar demographics that achieved higher levels of success,
  - assisting principals in accessing, understanding, and using achievement data to guide decision-making processes,
  - ensuring that principals have adequate time to engage in instructional support efforts on a daily basis,
  - giving principals easy and regular access to central office personnel who could help principals overcome barriers or respond constructively to problems,
  - giving principals time for their own professional development around promising instructional practices, and
  - mentoring principals through processes for identifying, supporting, and, if necessary, firing personnel performing below expectations.

- **Channel resources in ways that provide additional instructional leadership to schools.** Federal, state, and local education agencies should consider other ways to increase the quantity and quality of instructional leadership available to schools. One of the most

[1]Research is needed to further clarify the types of professional development and technical assistance that are most effective in building the capacity of principals to provide high quality instructional leadership.

powerful uses of Title I resources at the nine schools was the development of instructional facilitator or specialist positions within schools. These specialists worked with teachers on a daily basis in improving classroom instruction. Efforts should be made to increase the extent to which Title I dollars support these and similar efforts to increase the quality of teaching in all classrooms in high-poverty schools.

- **Create clear, measurable, and rigorous school accountability provisions.** In all nine schools, educators exhibited a deep sense of responsibility for improving the achievement of the children they served. Often, state and district accountability policies helped frame and focus the responsibility felt by educators. Therefore, the federal government should continue to encourage states and districts to frame rigorous school accountability requirements. However, it is important to note, that educators in the nine schools were motivated primarily by a commitment to service to children, not by a need to comply with minimal district or state requirements. Generally, these schools went far beyond the minimum expectations of their states and districts. So, states and districts should consider ways to frame accountability provisions in a way that exceeds minimum progress expectations and encourages educators to focus on goals that exemplify quality educational service to children. In other words, defining adequate yearly progress expectations is insufficient. Many educators will be motivated to higher levels of performance by policies that define exemplary academic achievement and excellent service to students.

- **Ensure that accountability provisions are accompanied by adequate strategies to build capacity and provide support.** Some of the nine schools were able to make dramatic gains in only three to five years. Improvement does not need to take decades before results are visible. However, results are most likely to come quickly if there are a few clear, consistent, measurable achievement goals and strong support from the district office to help schools achieve those goals. Accountability without capacity to succeed is only an exercise in frustration. In considering requirements for adequate yearly progress, states and districts should set ambitious requirements, but also provide high levels of support. One of the most important supports is time for school personnel to engage in processes that align instruction to standards and assessments. In the nine schools, much of the value of such processes came as teachers developed a deep understanding of what their students were expected to know and be able to do. Another important value of the processes came as teachers learned that they could be a source of ideas, support, and encouragement to each other as they considered how to teach students the expected knowledge and skills.

- **Along with accountability, provide schools adequate flexibility, and support to use that flexibility well.** The nine schools had the capacity to meet and exceed accountability expectations because they had reasonable fiscal resources. In particular, they had sufficient resources to provide teachers with the materials, equipment, training, and support that was perceived necessary for students to succeed. Also, the schools had the flexibility to use those resources in a manner that was tailored to the unique strengths and needs of students. Just as importantly, the nine schools demonstrated the capacity to make good decisions about the use of their resources in a way that would result in improved student achievement. Therefore, federal, state, and local education agencies should ensure that accountability provisions are coupled with adequate resources for schools and reasonable flexibility in the use of those

resources. Also, policy makers should not assume that educators know how to use resources and decision-making opportunities well. Principals and school decision-making committees may need high quality training that helps them use data to focus resources on critical areas of instructional need. In some of the schools studied, central office personnel provided this support. In one school, such support was provided through coaching associated with their adoption of a comprehensive school reform model. In other cases, principals learned these skills through years of trial and error.

- **Infuse the tenets of comprehensive school reform into other federal education programs.** The federal government's focus on comprehensive school reform should be expanded and infused into other federal education programs. There was nothing piecemeal about the reform efforts of the nine schools. They did not seek to reform one aspect of the curriculum or a few supplemental programs. Instead, they sought to improve every facet of the school in a manner that would lead to the academic success of each student. Most of the schools did not use nationally known models of comprehensive reform; however, they emphasized many of the components of comprehensive reform, as defined in the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program legislation. Other federal education programs should be examined to determine how they might be strengthened through an emphasis on the principles of comprehensive school reform.

- **Use legislation, policy, and technical assistance to help educators create regular opportunities for true professional development.** Educators in the nine schools exhibited a true sense of professionalism. They worked together (often on a daily basis) to improve their teaching and enhance student learning. Professional development needs to be completely reconceptualized. In the nine schools, professionalism was developed as teachers spent time regularly planning, working, and learning with each other. Traditional notions of conferences and workshops have their place; however, they are poor substitutes for the time spent by teachers, working collaboratively, around instructional improvement issues. State and federal resources should support the costs associated with the provision of high-quality, school-based professional development that dramatically increases the amount of time educators spend working with and learning from each other.

- **Provide resources for increasing the quantity of time made available for instruction.** Although the nine schools made excellent use of the school day, they increased the likelihood that all students would achieve state standards by increasing the amount of instructional time available to students. State and federal resources should support efforts to increase the quantity of time made available for instruction. After-school programs, "Saturday Schools," and extended-year programs are important vehicles for ensuring that students have opportunities to meet challenging academic standards.

- **Strengthen legislation and provide technical assistance to encourage schools to build the capacity of teachers and parents for increasing parental involvement at school.** At the nine schools, educators worked hard to improve achievement and show parents that there really was hope for their children. They worked hard to reach out to parents and build relationships where relationships might have been poor for many years. Furthermore, they

worked to help parents understand that there were many ways in which they could contribute to their child's academic success.

In the current Title I legislation, schools are required to build the capacity of parents to support the education of their children. Similarly, schools are required to build the capacity of school personnel to work effectively with parents. These nine schools seemed to understand these concepts and use them in powerful ways. Much more needs to be done to emphasize these requirements in federal, state, and local policy. Furthermore, schools need high quality, sustained technical assistance that will help them go beyond paper compliance and reap the benefits of a strong partnership with parents.

- **Research is needed to better understand how school districts can better support the improvement of teaching and learning in high-poverty schools.** Among the nine schools studied, the ones that made the most rapid gains had the strongest support from their district office. Research has focused largely on the school as the unit of change. There has not been adequate attention given to the role of the district in providing support to school reform efforts.

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Harriet A. Baldwin Elementary School

Boston Public Schools

Boston, Mass.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 283

Attendance Rate 96%

Grades Served K-5

Demographics

African American..... 17%

Asian American 72%

Hispanic 4%

Other 0%

White..... 7%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 80%

Key Programs: Chinese Bilingual Program, grades K-5; whole-school change effort, supported by the Boston Plan for Excellence; focus on schoolwide literacy; in-school and after-school tutoring provided by Boston College students

Harriet A. Baldwin Elementary School
Boston Public Schools
Boston, Mass.

Background

A stately two-story brick building, with large windows, wooden double doors framed in white stone, and large bay windows filled with flowers at each end of the building, Baldwin Elementary looks like the classic picture of a New England school. At 8 a.m., children are running around the paved schoolyard, playing tag, chasing each other, moving in and out of a pick-up game of dodge ball, and yelling exuberantly. Children carrying books and bag lunches are dropped off by school buses or by parents. The students pass through the black iron gates as principals and several teachers circulate and talk with parents, grandparents, and students.

At 8:30 a.m., a teacher rings an old-fashioned hand bell and the noise and exuberance turn into order. Children line up by grade and class, with the younger grades closer to the door. In unison, the whole school says the Pledge of Allegiance and sings *America the Beautiful*. Then, in one voice, the school community greets the principal, "Good morning, Ms. Lee." Each grade, in an orderly fashion, files into the school. Each morning without snow, this ritual begins the school day.

Five years ago, Baldwin Elementary did not feel like this. Parents, teachers, and district administrators described Baldwin at that time as chaotic and disorganized. For example, because supplies were limited, teachers hoarded them in their rooms. There was little communication within the school, with other schools, or with the district office. In a setting with a lack of clear messages and no established means of communication, rumors and suspicion arose easily. In describing Baldwin in the fall of 1994 when she was named acting principal, Suzanne Lee, now principal, explained, "Literally, there was fighting in the hall. There was constant turmoil among both kids and adults."

Teachers, parents, administrators, and visitors to Baldwin today describe it as a safe, welcoming, and academically focused school**.** A principal from another school who had visited on a professional "walk-through" described Baldwin as "a school that feels intimate, where everyone knows everyone. The staff seemed organized around teaching and learning. When you go into classrooms they're happy to see visitors, and students are active and asking questions."

One parent told of a time when she was recovering from surgery. The principal and teachers took turns picking up her children to take them to school and bring them home. Another parent who lived across town had an older son who graduated from Baldwin, but she started her younger daughter in an elementary school closer to home. An incident happened at the other school and a teacher acted unconcerned. The mother immediately enrolled her daughter in Baldwin, even though it meant arranging transport every day, because, she said, "Here teachers will notice if something is happening, and they will let you know."

Teachers feel that they are able to pay attention to all their students, and this is a source of satisfaction and pride. As one teacher explained:

> These kids don't get lost in the shuffle. We follow the kids who are struggling. We know them. We know their families. No one can hide. I hear about children that I have taught previously and I'll go in and say, 'I heard you wrote a really beautiful essay.' I check in on them. There is a sense of continuity.

Population Served

In academic year 1996-97, Baldwin served a total student population of 283 students, 72 percent of whom were Asian American; 17 percent, African American; seven percent, white; and four percent, Hispanic. More than 80 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Seventy-eight percent of the students come from families speaking a language other than English at home. Baldwin is one of the Boston schools that offers a Chinese bilingual program. At each grade level from kindergarten to fifth grade, there is a class in which students are taught in English and a class in which they are taught in both English and Chinese.

Academic Improvement

Baldwin's academic achievement is noteworthy. From 1996 to 1998, their Stanford 9 mathematics and reading scores have improved substantially. Their scores are currently well above the national median and are substantially higher than the district scores. There is a trend in the Baldwin Stanford 9 data that shows achievement shifting from Levels 1&2 (little or no mastery of basic knowledge and skills and partial mastery) to Levels 3&4 (solid academic performance and superior performance beyond grade-level mastery). For example, in 1996, 66 percent of the third-grade students scored in math Levels 1&2; in 1998, 100 percent of the students scored at Levels 3&4. In 1997, 75 percent of fourth-grade students were at Level 1&2 in reading, and only 25 percent at higher levels of proficiency. In 1998, no fourth-grade students were at Level 1 in reading, 44 percent of the students were at Level 2, and 56 percent were at Levels 3&4.

Similar improvement has been shown by increases in median percentile scores on the Stanford 9 mathematics and reading tests. As Table 4 illustrates, students at Baldwin are performing substantially above the 50th percentile. Furthermore, the trend shows improvement beyond the overall improvement in the Boston Public School District.

Table 4: Stanford 9 Achievement at Baldwin Elementary Versus Scores for Boston Public Schools, Percentile Scores

	Grade	Read 96	Read 97	Read 98	Math 96	Math 97	Math 98
Baldwin	3	57	N/A	N/A	61	74	94
Boston PS	3	52	N/A	N/A	50	48	55
Baldwin	4	N/A	42	64	N/A	62	74
Boston PS	4	N/A	42	42	N/A	45	48
Baldwin	5	52	52	61	78	65	84
Boston PS	5	45	45	47	47	45	50

Starting Points

In describing the changes at Baldwin, it is important to note that the school-level changes have been made in the context of changes in the district, in the city, and in the state that have all encouraged, supported, and reinforced the concept of whole-school change. In the year after Principal Lee came to Baldwin, a number of major district-level changes were put in place. The Boston Foundation, a local foundation supporting public education, shifted its funding priorities from mini-grants to whole-school reform. The foundation established a competitive process for becoming one of the Boston Plan for Excellence's Schools for the 21st Century. This grant included resources to support professional development.

That same year, 1995, Thomas Payzant, who had been assistant secretary of elementary and secondary education at the U. S. Department of Education, was hired as superintendent of the Boston Public Schools. His efforts focused on reorganization within the district. Boston Public Schools did not have feeder patterns. Part of the superintendent's program was to reorganize schools into regional clusters that met regularly. This new structure provided principals with professional development and a professional group for support. In addition, city-wide learning standards were developed and adopted by the school committee in math, science, English language arts, and social studies in the summer of 1996 and the arts, health, physical education and world languages in the summer of 1997.

In academic years 1993-94 and 1994-95, the district office began to examine schools that were not performing well. They created intervention teams of teachers, administrators, and central office staff that visited the under-performing schools. Baldwin was targeted for intervention. The former principal, who had been at the school for 15 years, had at one time been well respected, but he had experienced health problems, and the school had gone downhill. In 1994, Suzanne Lee, who had taught bilingual classes, and was the district coordinator for bilingual education, was named acting principal, and two years later, officially hired as principal. She was chosen for this position because of her background in curriculum and instruction and her ability to relate to the community.

Changing the School Climate

When Lee came to Baldwin, her first order of business was to create order and safety in the school and to let students and teachers know that there was someone in charge. Lee described arriving at Baldwin:

> I actually came on Halloween. The second-grade teacher puts on a Halloween play every year. So the first day I was here I went to see the play. The very next day I started this tradition of a daily memo to staff. I wrote in it how nice it was to have that kind of play for kids, for them to have a safe place to enjoy Halloween. [Later,] I overheard teachers as they were signing in say, 'This is a breath of fresh air that somebody even recognizes the work that we do.' I tried to start looking at the positive things people were doing in a very difficult situation.

That first year, Lee, who has 20 years' experience in community organizing, said "I wanted to establish more of a culture in the school, also to give the message to teachers that I'm here for the long haul, with them, to support them." She intentionally set about creating a safe, comfortable, predictable environment for the children. The school was small, but it was crowded, and that added to the tension. Because there was an extra classroom in the basement, the student assignment office had added an extra class, without regard for how that would affect the next year's distribution of students. One of Lee's first moves was to wrangle with the central office to reduce enrollment to a manageable number and maintain a grade-level pattern that allowed her to plan effectively, even though decreasing the student population meant the loss of one full-time teaching position. Lee reported:

> I said, 'This building is too small for the number of kids that they stuffed in here.' We had 350 that first year. The cafeteria is very small. So if you have 120 kids down there, it's ridiculous. Of course they get into fights. You don't even have any elbow room. I said, 'You can't just stuff every single room.'

As part of building a safe environment, Lee made herself visible, moving around in the schoolyard when students arrived, in and out of classrooms during the day, and in the halls. She knew every one of nearly 300 students by name, and in many cases, she knew their families. Especially during the first two years, when she was getting to know the community, Lee made a concerted effort to meet and talk with parents. If there were difficulties reaching a parent, she would take the child home after school. She made these home visits on an average of once or twice a week. In addition, a small and diverse group of parents became and remain active in the site council and in school governance.

Lee's presence and her authority helped shape the feeling of stability and predictability at Baldwin. She encouraged children to allow her to help solve problems that they might be tempted to resolve through fighting. As she explained:

> The turning point was about a year or so after being here, [some fifth-grade] kids got off their bus, rushed into my office, and said, 'Ms. Lee you better take care of what happened!' They described what had happened at the bus stop. I said, 'Well, I'm glad you guys came to me. Let's see what we can do.' I'm trying to instill in them, that the rule of the school has to be the rule at the bus stop. You cannot take things into your own hands and start beating on everybody on the school bus. They believed, 'If adults won't take care of it, we will.' It was important that they would come to me and say, 'We'll let you take care of it and see what happens.' So I took care of it. That constant open door policy and that one-on-one [working] with kids took a whole year.

Changing Academic Instruction

Even in the first year, while building the safe environment in the school, Lee focused upon improving academic instruction. The changes in instruction were influenced by a common focus on instructional strategies that would better serve the large population of students who were learning English as a second language. Also, the manner in which teachers collaborated with each other around instructional issues helped improve instruction.

Focusing on a Common Academic Need

The district had small professional development grants for which schools could apply. Lee saw this as an opportunity to acquire resources to address an issue that was important to teachers and students. Teachers clearly identified English as a Second Language (ESL) as a common major need. The bilingual classes might have students speaking two or three dialects of Chinese, whereas the regular classes could have immigrant children speaking six or seven different languages. Teachers reported, "We have so many kids in the classroom that are second language learners that we don't necessarily know what to do. Are we doing the right thing?" The school applied for and received a $5,000 grant that provided materials and workshops on ESL strategies.

The principal explained that not every teacher participated in the Saturday and after-school workshops, but many did. More than 70 percent of the teachers came on their own time to work on instructional strategies to help students who were learning English. In explaining why teachers were willing to participate, Lee underscored both the dedication of the staff and her strategy of supporting the positive as a resource for change:

> I think underneath, people really wanted to do a good job. I recognized that and tapped into it. The message I constantly give out is not to work harder; instead, it's about being more effective. How can we be more effective? They had to form a team and share a lot more. Intellectually people can hear that, but it takes a lot longer to go into action like that.

Consolidating Staff

The Baldwin teaching staff was experienced and dedicated, but in the disrupted school environment, teachers had, in the classic description of teacher isolation, shut themselves in their classrooms and taught what they wanted. Breaking the pattern of isolation was not easy. For some of the teachers, the changing environment and expectations at Baldwin were welcome. Other teachers, however, were resistant. A central office administrator described Principal Lee:

> …[She is] a principal who, when she encountered a number of veteran teachers, some of whom were set in their ways, didn't back off and say 'I can't do anything because there are some folks that have been doing their own thing for a number of years and they don't want to be players.' She's made some staffing changes and she's brought some folks around and as a result, she has been pretty focused around teacher improvement, which has gotten some good results.

Five or six staff positions had to be removed or redefined. In some cases people left through retirement, though others had to be removed more aggressively. For example, one teacher who had been at the school a long time did not want to give up "pull-out" remedial reading instruction, which did not fit with a whole-school literacy orientation. That teacher is no longer there.

On the other hand, some new positions were created, and new staff added. Changes in Title I funding allowed the school to purchase computers and stock a computer lab as well as put a networked computer in every third, fourth, and fifth-grade classroom. In the second year, Lee hired a computer teacher who worked with all students and teachers. And because the computer teacher did not have previous history with the school, she was in a position to build new connections. When the principal recruited for this position, she looked for someone who had not only technical skills, but also a capacity to draw people together.

Some teachers liked the way the school was before. One teacher described it as "relaxed," another as a place where "everybody did whatever they did." But even some staff members who were initially hesitant or resistant to collaboration could see the writing on the wall. Major changes were happening in the district and in the state. Thomas Payzant, the superintendent who came to Boston Public Schools in 1995, established new policies. He brought to the district more focus on student achievement, on accountability, and on using data for decisions. Thus a few teachers recognized that change was inevitable, and leaving Baldwin to go to another school would not be a way to avoid it.

Yet others in the school found the changes and challenges exciting. The special education resource room teacher described how this move towards teams and collaboration had benefited her work, benefited other teachers, and most of all, benefited the students:

> Five years ago I was down here in my little room [in the basement], pulling the students away from class, working on different materials for their IEPs [individual education plans]. Now I'm working with them on their class materials. And

> teachers are coming and asking me, "What do I do about this student?" I can see that in the future I could be working with them in the classrooms.

The same teacher explained further by saying, "The principal paved the way, saying 'it's alright to ask for help. I'm going to give you time to meet together. The first-grade teacher may have skills that you can use.' It's a sharing of ideas. We're all valuable."

In a move that was both symbolic and substantive, supplies, which were scarce in the past, have been made available. Teachers were aware of this, and expressed their appreciation for the principal's support.

> She's gone to the nth degree to get more than enough supplies. Not just basal readers, but extras. In a community where kids don't necessarily get to go to the library this enrichment is very important. Before we wouldn't even have had supplies, even regular supplies. The supplies door was locked. Ms. Lee has made it so that I can go to her and ask her to buy things we need. And she has encouraged us to do that.

In the emerging environment that fostered collaboration, two teachers worked together so that both of their classes benefited from cross-age tutoring. Four years ago, the fifth-grade teacher and the kindergarten bilingual teacher proposed and implemented a cross-grade program. Once a week fifth graders come and work with the bilingual kindergarten students. The younger children get extra attention and the older children gain a sense of responsibility.

One teacher commented on the overall differences in the school from five years before. Teaching staff now is more informed about expectations based on standards and curriculum. She explained:

> We are getting more information about what they want us to teach — a whole curriculum. And we've been taking more courses. I've got my master's degree. Communication is greatly improved. We get notices. We know what is going on. Lee has a notice she writes every morning. There's a sense we are connected. Before we were disconnected. Now we are a unified body.

Changing Relationships with Parents and the Community

Boston Public Schools has controlled-choice student assignment —parents submit an application with a list of their top three schools for their children. School assignments are made on a combination of space available and student diversity in the school. Several of the parents interviewed chose Baldwin for their children because of the atmosphere. Many parents have chosen Baldwin for the bilingual program, others chose it because it is a school that will look after their children and give them a good academic base. One parent said that the former principal had referred to them as "just parents." But this has shifted, "Now we are people, we are equals." Parents say that they love to come to the school; "It's like a community." Parents know there is an open-door policy and that they are welcome in the classroom anytime.

Parents were on the site council and played an active role in the interviewing and hiring process for the principal. Parents were also instrumental in 1997 in identifying the need for and —with the YWCA— starting up an after school enrichment program that goes until 6 p.m.

The concept of whole school does not stop at the boundaries of the campus. Lee looks for opportunities to bring community resources to Baldwin. These partnerships afford more students one-on-one attention and help give all members of the school community a sense of connection to the school. Lee initiated a partnership with Boston College. The first activity was a Junior Olympics Day on the college campus, organized by the Asian Student Association.

The relationship with Boston College has grown. Now more than 40 college students tutor and mentor Baldwin students during the school day and after school. Some of the college students are volunteer tutors. Others are paid through the America Reads Challenge. The tutoring is specifically targeted for Baldwin students who are identified as needing more academic support. Tutoring during the extended academic time, until 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon, was first made available to children who walk to school. Then Title I money was used to provide transportation so that students who live farther away could also take part in the after-school tutoring. One of the teachers commented on the value of Boston College tutors:

> The college students help open up our students' vision so that they know what they should do in the future. Especially [it is helpful] for our students, given their background. They're still below middle class, if not poor. For the immigrants, for the parents, they don't know that much about local society or the future. This has definitely helped our students enlarge their vision.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

Before coming to Baldwin, Lee had been enrolled in a Harvard University leadership program and then worked in the central office. She came to the campus with a view of the system as a whole. Her strategic moves in her first year at Baldwin were all aimed toward whole-school change. In her second year as principal, a new superintendent was hired for Boston Public Schools, and the Boston Plan for Excellence (a local public education fund) put out applications for schools to be part of a whole-school change process called Schools for the 21st Century.

These district and community initiatives supported Lee's vision of a whole-school effort and she took advantage of the opportunity. As she explained:

> When Payzant came, he really pushed hard for whole-school change and using Title I money differently to look at what your whole school needs. That was also the first year that Ellen Guiney came back from Washington. She was hired as the director for the Boston Plan for Excellence, part of the Boston Foundation, which is the largest private foundation to give money to Boston schools. She had known Payzant in Washington. At the end of the 1995-96 year, the Boston Plan for Excellence put out this call for whole-school change projects. They were looking for the school to make a commitment to four or five years to change their

> whole school— to re-look at everything they do, and to involve everybody. So when that call came out for Schools for the 21st Century, that was my chance to jump at it.

Baldwin was part of the first cohort of the Schools for the 21st Century program, which began in academic year 1996-97. The program has mandated components that all participating schools must implement. Under the aegis of the 21st Century program, many of the significant structural changes— a coordinated curriculum, primary and elementary instructional leadership teams, and regularly scheduled meetings—have been established at Baldwin.

The first step in the program was to identify an instructional focus to meet students' needs. The program provided resources for teachers' professional development and external coaches for technical support. The faculty at Baldwin, as a group, identified literacy as their focus. Interestingly, the majority of schools in their cluster have also chosen literacy as a focus. Schools that joined later cohorts of the Boston Plan for Excellence have been told that literacy will be the curricular focus, so Baldwin has identified a need that was widely shared in the district.

The literacy program is one of the areas for critical use of data. This focus on data coincided with a district priority to have more instructional decisions based on data analysis. The district central office made student achievement data (e.g., the Stanford 9 test scores, student attendance rates) available to campuses, disaggregated in various ways. At Baldwin, the principal and teachers formally and informally reviewed the data to identify students who were struggling or were in danger of falling through the cracks. The principal explained the challenge that necessitated a focus on data:

> How far do we have to go to catch up? In Boston, we are trying to have every kid read on grade level by grade three. But if kids are at level one, if they are already three years behind, how do we do this? Those are the challenges. We try to work with them in smaller groups and hook them into supportive services to help academically and socially.

When students were identified at Level 1 (little or no mastery of basic knowledge and skills) they were specifically linked to extra resources such as foster grandparents and one-on-one tutoring during and after school.

With the help of the external coach assigned by the 21st Century project, the Baldwin faculty researched a wide range of literacy programs and chose First Steps for their school. They have been implementing this literacy program for more than two years. One of the practices that Baldwin has established is that all students have a 90-minute period of literacy every day. The first and second-grade teachers first instituted it, and now it is a school-wide practice. In addition, all teaching staff, the art teacher, the resource room teacher, and the coach, work with students during the literacy period. Moreover, the new Boston curricular guidelines stress writing in all content areas.

Several teachers described their responses to the coordinated literacy effort, and their sense of the effect on students:

> We decided literacy was our focus around the middle of 1997, second semester. We started bringing in the training for it and getting ready. We already had some excellent reading teachers here anyway, but with this as a focus, it really helped them flourish, too. They [the teachers] have become more involved now.
>
> The terms and the strategies used for literacy, reading, and writing are consistent from kindergarten through fifth grade. The students hear the same language, the same approaches. The school has really unified. Instead of every teacher just doing their own curriculum, even though they did it well, there is now a school-wide focus and consistency which tends to have the students do a better job of things.

However, there are costs. Other teachers have found this focus on literacy to be stressful and frustrating. As one teacher stated:

> Now the bottom line for us is to prepare the students to pass the test. Just work them hard. There's a test; you've got to pass. The literacy focus, especially when there are students who are slower learners, is very demanding. It's also demanding on teachers. Then, that might be the reason for these changes — to force teachers to work harder. I don't know how much harder we can go.

Another major difference in the last few years is that teachers meet together regularly. There is a primary team (kindergarten through second grade) and an elementary team (third through fifth grades) and they meet twice a month. Among the teachers, there is a strong sense that these meetings are valuable. As one teacher reported:

> I think the biggest change is that the staff meets regularly. It is mandatory. Before this, there were few teacher meetings where the entire staff met. But now, there are regularly scheduled meetings. So just by being there and listening, you get to know somebody and know their ideas and how they approach things. So people know each other better and therefore can be more comfortable with each other.

Another teacher noted more subtle change in the meetings:

> We have come a long way. People are now more comfortable talking at meetings. Before there was silence and then after the meetings they would talk. Discussion is more positive, not putting each other down. The coaches gave us mini-trainings. They set up ground rules for the meetings. That helped.

One teacher noted that the meetings were a move in the right direction. "The meetings are helpful, but the agendas are totally scheduled, there is no informal time for teachers to get together and talk about issues of the moment." The same teacher also mused that it is difficult to

make whole-school changes when the whole school does not have the opportunity to meet together.

As a part of Schools for the 21st Century, one mandated activity is reviewing student work and data in relation to the city-wide learning standards. The external coach leads this activity and uses the protocol and rubrics developed by the Education Trust. This activity has been both useful and stressful for teachers. As teachers explained:

> There was a lot of negative feeling about it. Teachers are their own worst critics and many teachers feel inadequate. But most are doing really good work. At first, I thought it was a huge waste of time. But with this focus I've learned to ask, "Did I get them ready for it? Did I give them enough direction?" It makes you look at the way you prepare them for the assignment and the actual instrumentation. I see it now as an asset.

Moreover, another major district initiative, the establishment of school clusters, supported the whole-school change process at Baldwin. The school cluster of which Baldwin is a part consists of two high schools, two middle schools, seven elementary schools, the school for the deaf, and an early learning center. The principals meet monthly and have other activities, including visits to each other's schools. In the first year, each principal conducted a local needs assessment and wrote a comprehensive school plan. Other cluster principals reviewed the plan, using a protocol similar to the one teachers used to examine student work. The cohort of cluster principals has grown into a strong network of professional support and advice. For Lee at Baldwin, this structure has provided a valued source of support.

Conclusions

The story of whole-school change at Baldwin Elementary School is evolving. In the last four years, the school has grappled with multiple changes: a new district curriculum, a new principal, computers, and a commitment to whole-school change. And a state assessment system is looming on the horizon. With dynamic leadership, vision, prodding, external encouragement, and increased resources, Baldwin Elementary School has shifted from a place where individual teachers worked in their classrooms with their students to a school with a common curricular focus, organized faculty teams, and pathways for communication. This process is not complete, nor has it always been easy up to this point.

Many of the successes to date are evident. Most strikingly, the school is a safe and welcoming place and the students are achieving academically. Structures are in place for professional development and teacher collaboration. However, even with these structures, a quiet struggle continues. There is, for example, some tension between the bilingual and regular programs within the school. Both programs are grappling with different pressures that can obstruct perception of their common needs and goals.

Not surprisingly, there has been resistance to change at Baldwin. For some of the teachers, the mandate to change challenged their view of themselves as teachers, and as good teachers. In one teacher's words, "People feel comfortable with what they know, what they used in the past, rather than trying something new. People felt that what they did in the past wasn't valued; that if something new was going to be tried, then what they had done was not valued."

One of the teachers, who was someone others came and talked with, explained how she responds to teachers' reluctance. "You have to have a willingness to let them go through their resistance. Then you focus on the fact that this is for the good of the kids."

A quote from the evaluation of the Boston Plan for Excellence's 21st Century School Program captures a dilemma surrounding whole-school change. "Progress seems to be too slow for those in leadership positions, and too fast and intense for those at the schools." The cluster leader echoes this from conversations with the cluster principals, "It's a concern, how hard and how time consuming this work is, how many years it takes for a school to move forward."

Principal Lee thoughtfully reflects on the challenges inherent in her position as principal of a small elementary school in the midst of whole-school change. As principal she is responsible for both instructional leadership and management. She questioned if this is sustainable:

> How long can anyone do this? Are there that many people that are skilled to do all these things, all rolled into one? In a small elementary school where you don't have other administrators, you are it. [There is] no assistant principal. I do discipline, planning, the instructional support, the budget, supplies, everything.

Lee can see the changes and successes that have occurred so far, but she can also see challenges still to come. Teachers at the school are working hard and are tired. One teacher, for example, mentioned that for two years she had not slept well because she was so anxious about meeting the increased performance expectations. The teachers are still conscious of the school's history. They sometimes retreat into familiar ways. But there is progress: where before teachers did not talk together, they are now talking, and building relationships and building trust. The reality, hope, and optimism are wrapped into one teacher's comment; "I can see where we are going as a school. Are we there yet? No. Are we moving in the right direction? Yes."

Baskin Elementary School

San Antonio Independent School District

San Antonio, Texas

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 419

Attendance Rate 96%

Grades Served K-5

Demographics

African American..... 6%

Asian American 1%

Hispanic 75%

Other 0%

White..... 18%

Limited English Proficiency 4.2%

Mobility: 49%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 92%

Key Programs: Everyday Math, Balanced Literacy, Waterford Early Literacy Intervention Program (kindergarten)

Baskin Elementary School
San Antonio Independent School District
San Antonio, Texas

Background

Baskin Elementary School, in San Antonio, Texas, with 419 students from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, looks like thousands of schools across the country. It is a one-level red brick building flanked on one side by portable buildings and on the other by the faculty parking lot. The flag pole and school sign stand on opposite sides of the school's front yard. Upon entering the school one sees that the inside is as typical as the outside: the cafeteria is to the right and the library (two converted classrooms) is to the left. A long hallway divides two rows of classrooms. A brightly colored mural adorns the wall next to the main office.

Population Served

Baskin Elementary School is typical of many schools in at least one other respect: the student population has dramatically changed during the last decade. In the early 1980s the student population was predominantly white and middle class. By the early 1990s, however, it was predominantly minority and economically disadvantaged. Many of the students and their families live in the 28 "Section 8" (federally subsidized) apartment complexes located throughout the school's attendance area. Ninety-two percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches in the federal school lunch program.

Although the population changed in the early 1990s, the school's organizational norms and practices remained similar to those found in many schools throughout the country. Teachers worked diligently, but they were isolated in their classrooms, receiving little direction for focusing their work and even less support for doing it. There was no forum for teachers to engage in serious discussions about their work or to talk about their struggle for accountability with a changing student population. As one teacher recalled, "We considered ourselves a good school, yet we knew we weren't being successful with the children. We didn't know what to do. So we stayed in our classrooms and worked really hard. We didn't talk about it."

Another teacher referred to the tone and focus of the school in years past by commenting, "We had good teachers who taught the children but there was no real accountability. Once the state started making us accountable, we were lost as to what our focus was going to be. We had no idea about what we should be emphasizing and what should be taught at which grade level."

Even though many things remained the same, there was one important change as the population shifted: many of the teachers lowered their expectations for student learning to minimal levels. For example, teachers reported that they stopped assigning homework and sending books home because they said, "[We] did not trust the students to return them." They rationalized that education was not a priority for the students and their families because they were more

concerned about where they were going to get their next meal or the money to pay the phone bill. The school personnel distanced themselves from any collective responsibility for creating a school life that was meaningful, challenging, and fulfilling to students.

Academic Improvement

Student academic performance and behavior tended to confirm the teachers' perceptions. In 1994, student scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the statewide criterion-referenced test, reflected a huge gap in the performance of white and non-white students. For example, 81.3 percent of white students achieved the passing standard on the reading assessment, while the percentage of African American students reaching the same standard was 56.3 percentage points lower. Similar gaps existed among other groups of students in reading, mathematics, and writing. There were other indicators of problems. For example, one teacher recalled, "There were major discipline problems and students cursed at the teachers."

By contrast, four years later, in 1998, the school received an exemplary school accountability rating from the Texas Education Agency. This meant that at least 90 percent of all students, at least 90 percent of the African American students, at least 90 percent of the Hispanic students, and at least 90 percent of the low-income students passed the reading section, the writing section, and the mathematics section of the test. Only 15 percent of all schools in Texas received the exemplary rating in 1998.

Even though TAAS scores evidence improvement throughout the San Antonio School District and throughout Texas, the increase in achievement at Baskin Elementary was far greater than district or statewide changes. (See Table 5 below.) The increase in scores is even more compelling when one considers that the percentage of economically disadvantaged students at Baskin increased from 88.7 percent in 1994 to 92.0 percent in 1998 and the mobility rate increased from 35 to 49 percent.

Table 5: Percentage of Baskin Elementary Students Passing All Three Sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Campus Chg: 94-98	District Chg: 94-98	State Chg: 94-98
All Students	44.4	53.3	73.9	86.9	94.2	49.8	26.5	22.1
African American	12.5	37.5	66.7	66.7	80.0[2]	67.5	25.5	29.3
Hispanic	44.3	53.2	74.2	87.8	94.6	50.3	27.0	27.0
White	62.5	58.8	75.0	89.5	100.0	37.5	20.6	18.5
Economically Disadvantaged	36.9	47.1	69.5	88.1	93.6	56.7	27.9	27.4

Along with an increase in academic achievement, positive student behavior increased as well. According to teachers, "Behavior problems became almost non-existent."

One teacher said, "It is amazing how when you focus on something different, the behavior problems become so minute. Once the focus of the school changed, the focus of the students changed."

Organizational norms and practices have also changed dramatically during the past four years. Teachers and administrators engage in regular and public conversations about classroom practice and student performance. They plan together and share ideas and resources. They visit each other's classrooms, observe, ask questions, and advise one another about their teaching practices. When there are problems in student performance, they individually and collectively work to understand why and to find solutions. For example, when male students were consistently performing at higher levels in mathematics than the female students, teachers immediately began studying research articles on the subject and working together to develop strategies, including team teaching and peer mentoring, to ensure that all students excelled in mathematics.

Starting Points

In 1994, Baskin Elementary received an acceptable accreditation rating; however, the school was perilously close to a low-performing rating. The poor performance of African American students would have warranted the lower rating, except the state policy allowed exceptions for situations in which the number of students tested in a population group was fewer than 30. Only four years later, the school was among the elite of schools in Texas earning an exemplary rating. The

[2] Although only 80 percent of African American students passed all sections of TAAS in 1998, more than 90 percent of African American students passed the reading section, more than 90 percent passed the mathematics section, and more than 90 percent passed the writing section. Thus, the school earned the exemplary accountability rating.

transformation of Baskin Elementary School to an exemplary school occurred through the convergence of three levels of reform: (1) state-level initiatives, (2) district-level initiatives, and (3) campus-level initiatives.

State-Level Initiatives

During the last decade, Texas has shifted its education policy from a focus on regulation to one of flexibility and accountability. Undergirding this shift in policy is the assumption that all students can achieve the state's academic standards, and all schools should be held accountable for the academic performance of every student.

In Texas, schools and districts are given one of four ratings ranging from low-performing to exemplary based largely on student performance on the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills), the state's criterion-referenced assessment. Dropout data and attendance data contribute to the determination of school and district ratings. School TAAS data are reported for all students and separately for four population groups: African American, Hispanic, white, and economically disadvantaged students. To achieve a given rating, the percentage of students in general and the percentage of students in every population group must exceed a passing standard determined by the state. The criteria for achieving acceptable and recognized ratings have increased annually during the past four years, requiring a larger percentage of students to pass. Sanctions for low performance include public notice and hearings and a possible loss of governance to the state. In short, positive school and district ratings depend upon the extent to which every child in the school and district achieves academic success.

The state's accountability system has served as a powerful motivator for change at Baskin Elementary. More specifically, it has served as a camera. Initially, it provided school staff members with a picture of student performance that, in the words of two teachers, "made us uncomfortable and determined to change. [The accountability system] made us see that we were not serving our entire student population."

As the school began to change, the state accountability system provided a frame that helped the school create a clear image of what the school wanted to achieve in the future. School personnel noted, "It wasn't only the gap between white and non-white students, but all of our students were not where we wanted them to be." Thus, the state accountability system provided an image of the goal: a school in which virtually all students, regardless of race or socio-economic status, achieved high academic standards.

District-Level Initiatives

In 1994, the newly appointed superintendent, Diana Lam, launched a series of reforms designed to "transform the San Antonio Independent School District into a learning organization." Several of these initiatives greatly influenced the direction Baskin took, particularly during the first years of reform. The first of these initiatives was the organization of the district's schools into four learning communities (as opposed to sub-districts), each with an instructional steward

(as opposed to area superintendents) and staff to lead and support schools in instruction, curriculum, and professional development. The administration building became the "learning community center."

The metaphors of community and stewardship were not merely figures of speech but were intended to launch changes in how educators viewed themselves and their work and how they interacted with one another. For example, Robert Alfaro, Sr., the instructional steward of the Brackenbridge/Edison/Jefferson Learning Community (of which Baskin Elementary School is a member) described his role as that of a teacher and mentor. During the weekly meetings with the principals, only 30 minutes would be spent on administrative issues and the remainder of the time would be devoted to working together on curriculum and instruction. In addition, books on a variety of topics such as leadership, school reform, and educational trends were shared and discussed.

Specifically, the instructional steward saw his role as one of helping, teaching, and guiding principals to find new ways of seeing, understanding, and acting. He stated:

> One of the most important aspects of my work is to build the capacity of the principals to constantly question what they are doing and how their actions affect children and teachers. I try to help and to teach them to make instructional decisions instead of operational decisions and to recognize the difference between them. I also try to guide them through different ways of presenting data that are non-threatening to teachers but that still provide a way of looking critically at what is and what is not happening at their school. My job is also to help them build strong networks within their schools, to build the kind of support structures that you need in order to teach and reach every child.

Three other initiatives also played important roles in the transformation of the school:

- a district directive that all schools engage in an intensive self-reflective process and choose a comprehensive reform model that would best meet the needs of their students;
- an extensive district-wide professional development program for the implementation of comprehensive school-reform efforts; and
- the assignment of an instructional coordinator at each school.

These initiatives will be discussed in greater detail in later sections.

Both teachers and administrators at Baskin Elementary School recognized the critical role that the district has played in the transformation of their school. One teacher explained:

> The transformation of our school just didn't start here. It started with the new superintendent. When she first became superintendent, she had this meeting with all of the teachers and she told us that we could become the first urban district where all students achieve above the state and national standards and that in order

> to do so would require making some major changes. She is the one that put the fire underneath us. Her mantra that year was, 'Whatever it takes.' We took that to heart.

Campus-Level Initiatives

In 1994 Baskin Elementary received a new principal, Nancy Warren, along with a new part-time administrative aide, Carmen Payne (who became principal in 1996). The administrative aide position was intended to assist the principal with various management and administrative tasks. At the direction of the superintendent, the new principal, administrative aide, and the teachers at Baskin Elementary School engaged in a comprehensive needs assessment and thoroughly investigated several comprehensive school reform models but did not find one that specifically met their needs.

Rather, the administrative staff and several teachers had a vision of the school becoming, they said, "a center where adults as well as children are active participants in a learning community." Moreover, they said they wanted, "[to create a] learning environment in which both students and teachers experience and build on success," they would have to find ways for teachers to focus on their own learning as well as student learning. They developed a simple plan to provide support to teachers as they began the process of transforming their classroom practice and their relationships to each other and to the students.

This plan has evolved into the school's unofficial model of comprehensive school reform. Principal Payne explained, "We don't have a particular model but we have pieces of different designs." The key components of this framework are: (1) distributed expertise and leadership; (2) curriculum organization, alignment, and assessment; (3) collective responsibility for student learning; (4) reflective dialogue; and (5) increased teacher efficacy.

Changing the Organization of Schooling: Distributed Expertise and Leadership

During their first year together, Principal Warren recognized that Payne had a strong instructional and curriculum background. Warren asked her to focus on providing instructional support to teachers. The principal then assumed most of the managerial and administrative duties of the position, including conducting teacher evaluations so that Payne could develop a "non-threatening, trusting relationship with the teachers," Warren said.

Payne's role became that of an instructional peer coach, mentor, and collaborative colleague for the teachers. She spent most of her time training, coaching, and offering technical assistance to teachers. She supported the teachers use of quality instructional strategies and she often demonstrated or modeled effective teaching practices.

The following year the district created the position of instructional guide and the school was then entitled to a full-time instructional guide and a part-time administrative aide. After discussing it

with the faculty, Warren and Payne requested and received permission from the district to combine the two roles, thus saving approximately $30,000 each year to purchase additional instructional materials and provide substitutes so that teachers could engage in joint planning. The division of labor, however, was essentially the same. Although the two focused on different tasks, they worked as a "unit and took time every day to confer and debrief with each other," they said. Both Warren and Payne reported that they learned a great deal with this arrangement.

This simple division of labor provided a powerful example to staff members. Teachers and other school members frequently referred to how Warren and Payne complemented each other's strengths and worked as a team. This notion of "distributed expertise and leadership" soon became one of the most powerful norms in the school. For example, the fifth-grade teacher who excels in math took the lead in helping her colleagues with mathematics instruction. The school secretary, considered a resident expert in technology, helped by using the Internet to find information for teachers about subjects they were teaching. The physical education teacher worked closely with the grade level teachers in identifying areas in reading that students were having difficulty mastering and incorporated those skills during health and physical education classes. Numerous other examples could be cited but the point to be made is that teachers and administrators believed that everyone has something significant to contribute and that everyone can provide instructional leadership.

The administrators converted a large classroom in the center of the school into a teacher workroom. The workroom provided a space for teachers to come together, share ideas, and learn from each other. This was not a typical teacher workroom with a copier and worktables but one that was more like a library or conference room. A number of tables had been grouped together to form a large square table where 30 or so individuals could sit comfortably around it. Shelves had been installed around the room and filled with a large number of books and journals; some of the books and journal were from the instructional guide's personal collection and others were bought with the $30,000 saved from combining the administrative positions.

Teachers were especially proud of this room and described it as being "even better than Brighter Child (a local favorite teachers' bookstore)." They also appreciated being able to check out the books and journals by simply signing their name on a sheet of paper.

With the distribution of expertise and leadership came long hours of hard work. Indeed, many of the teachers routinely worked a couple of hours after school, and they often worked during the weekend. Despite the long hours, not a single teacher complained of "burn-out." When asked about the absence of burn-out, teachers said they knew they were making a difference in the lives of the students. By seeing students change and grow as a result of their efforts, the long hours were bearable. Also, both teachers and administrators drew strength from each other to withstand the frustrations and disappointments that so often accompany school reform. Hard work became easier because it was a part of a team effort. Everyone worked hard to support each other, to support the team. Importantly, the school administrators modeled a strong work ethic and evidenced a willingness to go beyond what was required to support teachers and serve students well. As one teacher explained:

> Ms. Warren and Ms. Payne set the example for us. Many evenings they are here until ten o'clock and they work long hours on weekends. Although they expect a great deal from us, they go out of they way to support us when we have to conduct personal business. If I tell them that I have to go to a doctor's appointment they find someone to take care of my class or many times, they cover my class for me.

Many long hours were spent in the teacher workroom. In time, the room became one of the most important spaces in the school. It was in this room that school members met to celebrate successes, examine failures, analyze data, and invent new approaches to supporting each other and their students. It was also in this room that the alignment of the curriculum began.

Changing Academic Instruction: Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Both administrators recognized that the traditional school schedule constrained teachers from engaging in meaningful conversations and collaboration about curriculum and instruction. The first step in fostering collaboration required developing a weekly schedule that ensured a block of uninterrupted planning time for each grade level with the instructional guide. These bi-weekly 90-minute sessions became known as Collaborative Planning and focused on "compacting the curriculum around themes at each grade level." The collaborative sessions began to change and reflect issues and concerns beyond determining the weekly curriculum such as curriculum alignment and assessment.

The process of curriculum alignment began gradually with teacher representatives from each grade level identifying science topics that could be integrated into thematic units. As teachers reviewed the curriculum, they realized that certain objectives were taught at every grade level while others were totally ignored. In some cases, the expected level of understanding of a specific science concept looked virtually the same at two or more grade levels**.** This discovery raised serious concerns and had a significant impact on the way teachers thought about the curriculum that was being taught across grade levels. As a result, teachers began professional conversations around such issues as standards, spiraling science strands, and the extension of specific topics. The teacher representatives learned to see beyond their own grade-level curriculum and work toward an aligned schoolwide science curriculum. In the process of creating an aligned science curriculum, teachers learned to work together and to make research-based instructional decisions. This process was replicated to align and evaluate the curriculum in other subjects.

Shortly after aligning the science curriculum, the district provided a half-day "brainstorming session" for all administrators and third through fifth-grade teachers for the purpose of developing a "road map for student improvement in mathematics." The Baskin staff was well prepared to take advantage of the brainstorming session, perhaps because of their successful experience in aligning the science curriculum and because of a useful mathematics seminar teachers had recently attended. Armed with new math strategies and a common focus, the teacher representatives identified gaps in the current mathematics curriculum, "problem-solved

obstacles that would hinder implementation," and developed an assessment tool that teachers could use to monitor student growth. As teachers began to analyze student test data and identified mathematics objectives that students failed, an additional step was added, fine-tuning the curriculum. Grade-level teams now began to closely examine the mathematics curriculum and make adjustments that addressed the needs of their students**.** The needs of students began to direct the decisions made by the teachers about curricular and instructional strategies**.** As Payne explained:

> The results were phenomenal. Student performance increased steadily as teachers continued to "fine-tune" the curriculum. In half a year teachers had increased student math performance significantly. By the end of the year, student performance in mathematics had increased over twenty percent. Teachers were now convinced that their students could attain academic success.

The following year, teachers set higher expectations for the students in mathematics and once again students met their expectations. Today, teachers continue to maintain high expectations for all of their students and to work toward finding a way to ensure that success is possible for every child. Other curricular areas were examined and school-wide approaches were developed, using student performance data (annual and longitudinal) and researched-based models in literacy and mathematics.

Changing the School Climate

The climate at Baskin was influenced through the development of a collective responsibility for student learning. Teachers came to feel a sense of responsibility for the academic success of all of the students. Also, the climate was influenced by the development of a reflective dialogue among the faculty around instructional issues. As trust increased, teachers were more willing to share instructional issues and reflect on how they might improve their practice. Additionally, the climate was influenced by the development of a greater sense of effectiveness among teachers. Through professional development, time spent together, and the support of school leaders, teachers came to believe that, together, they could dramatically improve the achievement of Baskin students.

Collective Responsibility for Student Learning

Significant gains in student achievement continued and in 1996 the school advanced to the state's recognized rating which meant that 80 percent of the students had passed each of the TAAS sub-tests. Teachers were convinced that their efforts made a difference in the lives of their students. They set a new goal: exemplary status. Numerous meetings were held during which student performance data were discussed openly and honestly. Teachers reported that they did not feel "threatened by these discussions" because of the norms of collaboration that had been established early on. For example, administrators always began the meetings by asking permission to share the data across grade levels and stating:

> We are going to look at the data, not to make or pass judgment on the individual teacher but to help each other with the areas where we are having difficulty. Those of us who can share some insight about how to help each other can help everyone grow and all the students will be more successful.

The following year the school again received a recognized rating and did not meet its goal of achieving exemplary status. School members decided to meet over the spring break at the home of the instructional guide for a "no fault-finding, problem-solving session." Almost everyone on the staff, including the school secretary, attended the meeting. As they carefully analyzed student performance data once again, they identified a small group of students across grade levels that was not performing at the expected levels in some or all of the sub-tests. They developed a number of strategies to create more learning opportunities for both teachers and students. Everyone at the meeting volunteered and accepted additional assignments for the remainder of the semester. At the end of the meeting teachers recalled, "We were laughing and crying and hugging one another. We even high-fived each other. We realized we could all be winners. We didn't have to blame anyone but simply work smarter."

This meeting was important not only in developing a plan for raising achievement, but also for increasing the level of collective responsibility for student learning and the level of trust that existed among school members. At the meeting, the school personnel had once again publicly acknowledged and assumed responsibility for the learning of all the children in the school. As one teacher explained, "We truly care about the success of each child, and a student who is not learning is everybody's problem. We feel we are a team and we are going to do whatever it takes."

The sense of collective responsibility meant that every teacher had a stake in each child's success, but also, they had a stake in every other teacher's success. As another teacher explained:

> The other day we had a networking meeting and some of the teachers said that they were having trouble teaching context clues. Later that day I was reading one of those teacher magazines and I found a whole section on teaching context clues so I made a copy for everyone in the school, including the principal. I think all of us do things like that. We don't think of it as our classroom and our own personal problem. We share information and we help each other.

The meeting was also instrumental in generating a new level of trust among school members. Although teachers had been told numerous times by the administrators, "TAAS is a measurement of the school's programs, not the individual teacher's abilities" some of the teachers said they felt a sense of "silent peer pressure" to perform at certain levels. A few of the teachers wondered what would happen to them or to other teachers if they were not able to maintain the high standards set by the school. They were somewhat apprehensive about attending the meeting. At the meeting, however, as the teachers and administrators pored over student performance data, no mention was made of individual teacher performance but instead the discussion centered on ways to help one another and the students. In fact, the meeting started with a celebration of the hard work that had been done the previous year.

The norms of collegiality and collaboration in the school were now stronger than before. Teachers understood that giving and receiving help was not a sign of failure or incompetence but simply part of the school's quest for continuous improvement. As one teacher explained:

> Maybe at another school a teacher will be afraid to say she doesn't know something for fear that she is going to be perceived as incompetent. We don't have that barrier here. We all help each other. After teaching the upper grades for a long time, I was really struggling when I started to teach second grade. The other teachers offered to tutor me. We did team teaching and they actually tutored me.

Teachers reported that they were "closer than ever before" and found themselves being more open and honest with one another. One teacher described an incident in which she disagreed with and inadvertently offended another teacher during one of the networking meetings. She said, "The teacher came up to me after the meeting and told me she was really angry about what I had said and that she wanted to talk with me. We did and that was the end of that. And that's the way we deal with disagreements. We talk about it and continue working together."

At the end of that year the school achieved its goal of exemplary status. The deepening levels of mutual support, respect, and trust that developed among the school members have led to conversations that have played and continue to play a critical role in the transformation of the school. Initially, discussions among school members centered around grade-level issues and concerns but as teachers came to view themselves as part of the same endeavor, the conversations broadened to include school-wide organizational teaching practices and their impact on student learning and performance. The principal said, "Eventually it became necessary to create a second opportunity where teachers could discuss and problem-solve instructional issues across grade levels. We created networking sessions held after school on a regular basis." It was during the networking sessions that teachers began to engage in reflective dialogue on a consistent basis.

Reflective Dialogue

The principal, during the initial interview, frequently and consistently used the term "conversation." When asked about the use of this term instead of other commonly used terms such as "communication" or "discussion" she began by explaining that she wanted to engage and treat the teachers the way that she hoped teachers would engage and treat their students. She wanted the teachers to treat their students with the utmost respect and to encourage and support them in their learning. She did not want to simply give information to teachers or to tell them what to do, but to engage with them in a reciprocal exchange of ideas, debate, and compromise.

During a follow-up interview, the principal indicated that three years of training in cognitive coaching had influenced and shaped many of her views about leadership and professional development. She explained that cognitive coaching is organized around three major goals: (1) establishing and maintaining trust, (2) encouraging mutual learning, and (3) enhancing growth

toward "holonomy" (holonomy is used to represent the twin goals of individual autonomy and collaboration). The role of the coach in cognitive coaching is helping individuals thrive, not only on their own terms but also as members of the school community.

The influence of this training is most evident in the way that the principal conducted the networking sessions. During these sessions, teachers were encouraged to frame problems, examine existing practices critically, and decide whether to keep or adapt elements that met the needs of their students or to reject those that did not. Teachers were also encouraged to think creatively and experiment with new ideas. One teacher said, "One of the things that we don't do at this school is to think that we can be more successful by simply adding programs. We are constantly looking at what we are already doing and refining it and thinking of ways to make it better."

According to the teachers, the principal models this reflective behavior. When the school receives a district directive, she will talk with the teachers and ask, "Will this [directive] help us or hinder our progress?" Invariably the discussion will focus on students. If the directive does not meet student needs, the principal finds a way to negotiate an alternative with district leaders. The district applauds this type of reflection and questioning. The instructional steward asserted, "My role is to push the principals to question. I want them to understand that every decision and every choice they make affects student learning. That is what accountability is all about."

As the teachers continued to engage in reflective dialogue, they changed the way they related to students and how they taught. They no longer viewed themselves as "dispensers of information." One teacher said:

> After I tried some of the teaching strategies we talked about during our planning, collaborative, and networking sessions, I realized that the children were learning better. They were being challenged and I didn't give them the answers for everything. They were giving me the answers and were beginning to think on their own. I noticed it was a much better way of teaching.

Teachers also changed the way they grouped students for instruction; using assessment strategies to determine which instructional group best met the academic needs of their students. Students moved in and out of flexible groups as their achievement levels changed. For example, students who were in at-risk situations received small group instruction (three-to-one ratio) after school twice a week. Teachers used weekly assessments to determine the focus of these sessions.

Students at each grade level who scored 79 percent or less on the math and reading portion of the TAAS were grouped together for daily instruction. One grade-level teacher and a supporting professional member worked closely with these students for a set period of time. In addition, reading and math events were held for students who scored 80 percent or above on the TAAS. During these sessions, students were encouraged to do collaborative problem solving with their teachers or with other students.

These flexible-grouping strategies provided multiple benefits for both teachers and students. Teachers had additional opportunities to observe each other teach and to consult with one

another. Similarly, students were able to develop close relationships with more than one teacher and to interact with other students in the school. In addition, students were provided with multiple opportunities to learn at their own pace. As a result, many students were able to increase their level of academic achievement and there were many "student success stories." One of the teachers related a story that had special meaning for her:

> When Andy came to my room he did not care what happened to him. Andy started attending the Aim High tutoring [small group tutoring] held after school and he was always the first one there; he also came early every morning. On the day of TAAS testing [math portion], he was really nervous but after a while he calmed down. I later noticed he was writing a lot so I glanced at his work and saw he was writing a paragraph for each problem he was solving. He was providing a rationale for each of the steps he was using in solving the problems. At the end of school year, Andy and his parents came to see me. They wanted to thank me because for the first time he had received the support and the opportunities needed to be successful.

Increased Teacher Efficacy

When the two new administrators arrived at the school they found hard-working teachers who felt overwhelmed by the problems children were bringing to school. Many of the teachers perceived they were working alone and felt uncertain about their ability to teach the children. The administrators said that during the first year they engaged in numerous conversations with teachers "to convince them to focus on what they could control and to ignore what they could not."

A turning point was the viewing of a video on paradigm shifts and the conversations that followed. The teachers realized that, in many ways, they could create their own future at the school. They slowly stopped seeing obstacles and instead saw challenges and opportunities to learn to work more effectively. Indeed, during a meeting with all school staff members, one of the teachers said, "We are like a good athletic team. When we step out onto the field, we know we are going to win. Whatever challenges come our way, we know we are going to be successful." After the teacher made this comment, the teachers spontaneously burst into applause, cheering, and laughter.

How was this sense of efficacy and commitment developed at the school? The district-wide and on-site professional development activities coupled with the collaborative and network sessions and the recognized and the exemplary ratings certainly all played important roles in creating the individual and collective sense of efficacy one finds at the school. The teachers, however, identified other factors that led to change and improvement.

The new administrators, upon their arrival at the school, initiated a practice of going out to eat once a week with school staff members. As one teacher explained, "This was a time when we began to see and know each other as individuals and to trust each other. We began to feel safe with one another and so it made it easier to learn from and with each other."

This time spent together helped build a sense of trust and unity that led teachers to believe they were not alone. As another teacher explained, "By doing things outside of school we learned to trust each other. I know I am not alone and that if I need help or support everyone in the school is there for me. This sense of togetherness gives me a strong sense of security to try new things… to take risks."

As the teachers changed the way they related to each other and to students, the students changed, as well. For example, students no longer went to the adults in the school to announce that they "had been good" but instead now shared their test scores and grades with each other and talked about what they were learning. Students were not only proud of their own accomplishments but also those of their peers.

Other factors contributed to this sense of efficacy throughout the school. Staff members believed that Payne and Warren provided leadership in a manner that helped them to understand their students and embrace the changes that were necessary to transform their school. According to teachers, their leadership "was not the charismatic type of leadership one is always reading about," rather it was a type of quiet and subtle leadership that gently reminded them of the mission of their school and helped them to re-connect to one another and to their students.

Both principals downplayed their roles in the transformation of Baskin Elementary School; instead they credited the teachers, parents, staff, students, and district leadership for the school's success. However, both principals had well-defined notions of leadership and acted accordingly. They both felt strongly that they had a moral obligation to see that children were well served and that teachers were supported in their efforts on behalf of the children. Specifically, Payne said:

> Leadership involves trusting the people who work with you, honoring their strengths, providing them opportunities to grow in new areas without the fear of failing, and including them in the decisions that affect them and their students. I believe that every individual has within him or her the potential to make a significant contribution to others and as a principal, I strive to create opportunities for all staff members to develop and share their talents.

Indeed, both leaders created a critical set of supportive conditions where both children and adults could grow, create, and take risks in an environment of safety. As has been mentioned, they created the role of instructional guide (before the district did) so teachers could have support and learning opportunities at the school. They also provided space, time, and opportunities for teachers to engage in collaborative planning, reflective dialogue, and team teaching. Teachers were also given numerous opportunities to attend district-wide "content-deepening" sessions and other professional development activities.

Both principals described their primary role as that of teacher and learner. They led largely by example. They taught the skills needed to build a learning community and tried to model trust, authenticity, commitment, and partnership. Through both words and actions, Payne and Warren conveyed to the teachers that they trusted and respected their abilities to teach the students. One

teacher, in particular, noted that her sense of efficacy was strongly influenced by this assumption of competence. She related:

> During the first week of my first year of teaching I learned that 85 percent of my students had never passed the TAAS. I felt so overwhelmed that when I arrived home that evening I cried. I wanted my students to be successful but I didn't know if I could help them. The next morning I told Carmen Payne that I wanted to resign. She listened attentively to my fears and concerns and then she gently reminded me that I was not working alone at Baskin and that she and others would help and support me. After I calmed down, she suggested that we review the data and we discovered that the students were weakest in the areas of measurement and geometry. We worked together and generated a number of strategies to help the students. She never told me what to do but instead encouraged me to find my own solutions. I didn't quit and today 100 percent of my students pass the TAAS.

Changing Relationships with Parents and the Community

The learning community concept at Baskin involved students, teachers, and administrators, but also extended to parents and community members as well. Indeed, both the administrators and teachers were working to form partnerships with parents and transform the school into a "learning center" that fostered the well being of the community and its people. Teachers and administrators envisioned the school becoming a place that would be open during the evenings and on weekends with many opportunities for faculty, parents, and students to learn and work together.

From the beginning, however, the new administrators knew they would have to win the confidence and respect of a group of parents who had long been displeased with the school. In the early 1990s this group of parents recognized that many of their children were not receiving a quality education. The parents were concerned that some of the teachers did not seem to know how to relate to the children and often seemed to come to class unprepared to teach the children.

Some of the parents withdrew their children from the school and enrolled them in private schools, but many others chose to continue sending their children to Baskin. The new administrators reached out to these parents. They made the school more welcoming to parents and more accessible by scheduling meetings when it was most convenient to parents. For example, early morning meetings were held in the library and teachers and administrators stood outside the school and invited parents to come in and have coffee and doughnuts as they dropped off the children in the morning. Videotapes were shown of classes, new instructional programs, and strategies so parents could be more informed about the school's instructional program. At these early morning meetings administrators and teachers were also available to answer questions or listen to concerns. Parents also knew that they were welcome to observe classes. Several times during the year parent-teacher conferences were scheduled in the evenings and childcare services were provided.

At Baskin, parents are not viewed simply as supporters, but also as planners and partners in the instructional process. Several parents are members of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). At first, parents were reluctant to express opinions and to participate in making decisions, but as trust was established, parents grew more confident. One of the parents on the ILT said:

> At first I didn't say much during these meetings but the other team members made me feel that what I said was important. Whenever I didn't understand an issue or instructional strategy they would explain it to me. I now feel more confident in expressing my views and I know what I say is taken seriously. I have gained enormous respect for the work of the teachers and the principal. I see how they struggle to make the right and best decisions for the children.

Although the school still has not become the learning center that the administrators, teachers, and parents envision, it has made tremendous progress in connecting to the community. Parents and community members are proud of the progress the school has made. One of the parents said:

> I deliver computer equipment to all the districts in the San Antonio area. Several years ago I delivered about thirty or so computers to a school in a northeast district and I saw the difference in their school and our school. Our school had a few computers and they had so many more computers. I began to feel really bad because I saw I wasn't providing for my children the way I should. You see, I thought if I made more money we could live in Alamo Heights and my children could go to that school and get a really good education. But now that Baskin is an exemplary school I feel so proud and happy. My children are getting a good education even though we live in a poor neighborhood.

Conclusions

In sum, both administrators and teachers at Baskin Elementary School exemplify what Burns (1974) refers to as "transforming leadership." They engage with one another in such a way that they raise one another to higher levels of personal and professional development and accountability. Their separate dreams and aspirations of making a difference in the lives of their students have become fused and it is this common purpose that gives heart and meaning to their work. Moreover, both teachers and administrators recognize that they must keep learning and changing so that they can continue to provide a quality education for their students and it is this commitment to mutual learning that binds the group together.

Burgess Elementary School

Atlanta Public School District

Atlanta, Ga.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 430

Attendance Rate 95%

Grades Served K-5

Demographics

African American..... 99%

Asian American 0%

Hispanic 1%

Other 0%

White..... 0%

Limited English Proficiency 0%

Mobility..... 32%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 81%

Key Programs: Saturday School; an after-school program; and a preschool program

Burgess Elementary School
Atlanta Public School District
Atlanta, Ga.

Background

The Burgess Elementary School, a one-story modern brick structure with an attached annex and additional portable buildings, is located near a major highway on the southeast side of downtown Atlanta. Upon entering Burgess one finds the clean and well-lit halls amply decorated with student work. Students are engaged in their classrooms. Pictures of parents, framed in gold construction paper stars, hang outside the door of each classroom. The Burgess T-shirt, with the school motto, "Taking a Step Beyond to a New Level of Excellence," is displayed outside the front office. Inside, several African American women, each one a school parent, are busy; one sits behind the desk and works the phone, another helps a child with a Band-Aid, while a third prepares the public address system for the morning message. The smell of fresh-brewed coffee adds another dimension of warmth and comfort to this busy hub of the school community.

Burgess is a remarkably warm and welcoming environment. It is a place where students, parents, teachers and staff want to be, and where people are willing to work long and hard to help students succeed. Almost paradoxically, the long hours and extra work are a source of laughter, pride, and energy.

Population Served

The campus is bordered on one side by modest single family homes that are typical of this low-income, working class, African American community. The majority of the 430 students that attend Burgess live in the surrounding neighborhood. Most of the children walk to school or are dropped off by parents or grandparents. Ninety-nine percent of the students are African American and more than 80 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. The neighborhood, described as a "revolving-door community," is characterized by a high rate of mobility as people move in and out depending on economic opportunities. As a result, approximately 30 percent of Burgess students were new to the school and the school system in the 1998-99 school year.

Academic Improvement

Data indicate that Burgess has indeed been taking impressive steps toward excellence. Student performance in reading and mathematics has improved markedly as reflected by results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Data for 1998 show that 64 percent of the students in grades 1-5 performed above the national norm in reading, while 72 percent of the students scored above the national norm in mathematics. Burgess students are also performing above the average for the

Atlanta school system in both subjects. School-wide achievement at Burgess has risen steadily during the last three years. (See Table 6.) In 1995 only 29 percent of the students were scoring above the national norm in reading and only 34 percent were above the national norm in mathematics. District data show other improvements as well. Student and staff attendance has risen during the last three years. Moreover, 90 percent of Burgess parents feel the principal is doing a good job running the school and 92 percent report that they feel welcome when they come to the school.

Table 6: Percent of Burgess Elementary Students Scoring At or Above National Average on Iowa Test of Basic Skills

	1995	1996	1997	1998	Improvement
Reading	29	50	56	64	+35
Mathematics	34	46	46	72	+38

Starting Points

Burgess Elementary arrived at its current level of success under the leadership of Gwendolyn Carter. A veteran teacher with a background in special education, Carter sought a position as principal after spending four years as an instructional specialist (with duties similar to a vice-principal) at two elementary schools. Prior to becoming a principal she had also participated in a district-sponsored internship program for administrators. Carter was assigned to Burgess in the school year of 1993-94 to fill a vacancy left by the retirement of a popular principal.

From Teacher-Focused to Student-Focused

Upon arriving at Burgess, Carter found a school that was much different than it is today. The school's enrollment was significantly lower with a student body of about 200 students. As noted above, most of these students were performing below national norms in reading and mathematics. Carter described the school she inherited as teacher-focused. She said, "It was known as an excellent place for teachers to work. It was a nice, quiet environment, nice community and everything. The environment was very drab." Many of the teachers focused solely on delivering their lessons and were reluctant to take on the extra work that Carter felt was necessary to meet students' personal needs, and to develop enrichment activities, academic supports, and parental involvement. In 1993-94, only one or two parents participated actively at the school, and there were no community partnerships.

During her six years as principal at Burgess, Carter has persistently, and at times forcefully, guided the school and community in becoming a "child-centered school," responsive to all the needs of each student. This commitment to the whole child, combined with a focus on building relationships within the school and community, and the implementation of well-targeted

strategies to enhance instruction have all been critical components of the change process at Burgess.

Improving the Physical Environment

Carter's first step was to enliven the physical appearance of the school. She took a risk by disregarding what she had learned about never making dramatic changes to a school when you follow a well-liked principal and forged ahead and got rid of well-worn displays. She said, "I couldn't help myself. I came in tearing things off walls. I took down displays that had been up for years. My idea was to take everything down at the end of the year. Now we change displays monthly or every two weeks."

The physical environment at Burgess got another boost when the school was renovated by the district three years ago. Today teachers and parents alike report that the clean, attractive, and stimulating environment at Burgess supports student learning. A veteran teacher explained, "The school is pretty and clean. That's part of our mission statement. If you keep a clean room and a safe room, the children don't want to leave."

A parent commented on the positive impact of the constantly changing displays of student work. She explained, "The bulletin boards aren't always the same. It helps the kids. They know their work will be on display, so they try to do their best. They know that if they're good, their pictures will be up on the board."

Changing the School Climate

Principal Carter has worked hard to foster the development of a learning community in which all students are provided opportunities to develop and succeed. In her view this shift in orientation is the most pervasive change at Burgess. As she said, "We are making sure we address the needs of every child. [We try] not just to get 90 percent [of the students to achieve], but [we also seek to reach] those other 10 percent that need something different."

A teacher spoke of how Carter instilled this commitment, "I think she has contributed a great deal to the success at Burgess. She is for each child. She feels that each child should benefit from whatever he is. She feels that no child should be excluded from anything." This teacher went on to explain how Carter's use of incentives and her daily expression of this message reinforced this commitment among staff:

> During the year, Dr. Carter gives incentives to the teachers and all kinds of incentives to the kids. We have pizza parties, skating parties, little greetings in the morning on the intercom, just little things to let the kids keep abreast and let them know she appreciates them and that we appreciate them also. It makes a difference, even with the teachers, to know that she has that concern. It carries over and leads us to be even more concerned about every child. It just makes it a little more noticeable that we're here for every child.

A parent also remarked that Burgess is a school where every child feels important, "Carter likes programs where all kids are involved. In the classroom it's not the teacher's pet [who gets selected]. All children help the teacher out. One day it is one child and the next day it is another."

At Burgess, this child-centered orientation is demonstrated through efforts that attend to the material, emotional, and developmental needs of all students. First, administrators, staff, and parents do what it takes to provide the extra material resources that children need to participate and succeed. For example, one faculty member bought glasses for a child. Also, all staff members "adopt a child" and help by purchasing extras the child may need. One parent said:

> Just because you don't have money to get clothes to participate, you can still participate. If a child says, 'I can't be in this because my mom doesn't have the money to buy this or that,' Dr. Carter will see to it. Last year we had some parents who wanted to buy pants and dresses for kindergarten graduation. And teachers helped. No child is to feel out of place at graduation. Everybody had proper clothes. If you need something you can ask.

This sensitivity to the students' material needs extends to the classroom as well. Thompkins, an instructional specialist at Burgess and one of the few African American men on the faculty, was vigilant about exposing students to objects and materials with which they need to be familiar to succeed academically. He said:

> We use a pitcher sometimes. You ask why a pitcher? The point is, we put it on the table and sometimes in social studies class we pretend to have a little dinner, or a little breakfast. We use it because sometimes on the test the kids have to identify that item and they have never seen it because they generally drink out of cups or glasses or cans. I can give you examples and examples of that.

Thompkins, also affectionately nicknamed the "grand networker" by staff, makes it a priority to keep his office stocked with a wide range of materials — microscopes, calculators, CD-ROMs on the rainforest — so that teachers can enhance their lessons and provide the children with a "tangible experience." Glancing around his office Thompkins explained, "That's why this is the junk room. Because everything in here goes out so the kids can see it. We have to order things to help them see and touch things. I have no problem getting what they need."

Principal Carter believes that a student's emotional well-being is essential for successful learning and she has promoted a vision of teaching that reflects this perspective. She explained, "Some schools don't want to deal with that [emotional needs] because it is very time consuming. But you have to deal with that. If a child comes needing to talk, you have to deal with that before you can teach."

Burgess staff actively work with the school social worker and take advantage of collaborations with local agencies and university services to address many of these concerns. Moreover, Carter,

teachers, and parents, all expressed a readiness to listen to children and respond to their emotional needs. Carter provided an example of her approach with students:

> The children know they are special, too. As an example, one little boy came in and said, 'I need a Band-Aid.' I said, 'Come here,' and, 'I have some candy. You want one?' He said, 'Thanks,' and left right away. He was cured. So they just want attention. We give them lots of attention.

Teachers give high priority to the children's emotional well-being. For example, one teacher begins every school day by providing her students with the time to share whatever is on their minds. She referred to this as a "time for them to talk it out." She guides the children in making choices about what to share with the whole class and what to share with her privately.

Burgess has instituted a number of programs to enhance student self-esteem and values. Four years ago, as a result of a teacher initiative, Burgess began the practice of broadcasting a schoolwide inspirational message and student pledge each morning. Every day, students in each classroom recite, "I am somebody. I am happy, I am beautiful. I am hopeful. Everyday, in every way I am getting better. Respect me: never reject me. I am somebody. I will always believe in myself, my parents, and my teacher… ." The students conclude the pledge by promising to work hard and behave well so that they can learn. Teachers remarked on the students' enthusiasm for this ritual and noted, "I don't think they just say it anymore; I think they believe it now."

Burgess staff saw values education as central to their success. At the suggestion of a teacher, Burgess recently initiated a schoolwide "character value of the month" program. Each month the school focuses on a specific value, which every teacher reinforces in the classroom. For example, to highlight December's value, "caring," the music teacher wrote an original composition that celebrated the spirit of this value. The 70-plus children who participate in the popular choir program later performed this piece in the community.

Sensitive to the lack of community-based programming available in the surrounding neighborhood, Carter also felt it was essential to provide after school enrichment activities on campus. As she explained, "Extra programs are really critical, especially in this community. It's [the community] not situated near a Boys and Girls Club. It's not close to anything that's in walking distance, not even a park. So the school is very central. So we needed to do some things after school."

As a result of Carter's leadership and the dedication of staff, students can now elect to participate in a host of different clubs and activities each week. Some student favorites are the Tumbling Team, Cooking, Boy Scouts, and the Computer Club. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents direct all of these activities. It is important to note that every teacher at Burgess volunteers time on a weekly basis to lead an after-school activity. Such volunteerism on the part of staff and parents alike is thought of as part of one's "civic duty." Carter uses Title I funds to buy occasional refreshments and treats in appreciation of this civic spirit.

Several factors worked together to contribute to the current cohesion at Burgess. Carter "forced" staff dinners and other social get-togethers in an effort to build relationships among staff. Although some staff were initially resistant to this approach, they now laugh about it and say that it worked. Teachers noted that special staff development sessions on team building were also helpful. The effort of working together to define and realize a common goal further solidified the staff. A teacher described this process, "I think that's one step that really gets a group going; when you [the principal] are concerned about the whole group, the total group. Dr. Carter is not only concerned about the kids, she's concerned about the faculty and she lets us know."

This same teacher pointed out how, paradoxically, the challenges of trying to make changes can, in and of themselves, bring people together. She explained, "A lot of times, we've had to just pull together as individuals and share. That was a big part of trying to make changes." Teachers recognized that, as individuals, they were less likely to have all of the resources, knowledge, or experience needed to be successful. Instead, they realized that they were more likely to succeed if they pooled materials, information, and effort.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

Whereas many schools are organized to provide instruction five days a week between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m., Burgess staff have shifted resources in ways that have allowed them to extend the time available for instruction. This extended instructional time has influenced the achievement results of many Burgess students.

Burgess staff have implemented numerous after-school activities to promote Burgess students' academic success. For the past four years, tutoring has been available for each grade level once a week. In addition, a special after-school program called "Whiz Kids" helped students who were performing slightly below average to master critical skills. During this bi-weekly program, made possible by the flexible use of Title I schoolwide funding, students work in pairs on areas of difficulty in math and reading. A veteran teacher responsible for this program explained the rationale and approach, "The middle kids never have anything special. They aren't slow. I noticed it's often one thing they are having trouble with. So I figured, let's find out what they don't know and work on that." Although extra instructional time is made available to all children who are experiencing academic difficulty, Carter noted that the most significant gains on standardized tests have been with the large group of students who were performing slightly below average.

Two years ago, Burgess began conducting a "Saturday School" from January through March. The primary purpose of this program was to help prepare students and their parents for the standardized testing administered each spring. Each Saturday morning, the school staff provided test-taking and educational workshops for students and parents. Each year, more than 100 students and at least 30 parents participated. Students reviewed material and practiced test-taking strategies while parents learned how to help their children prepare for the test. Title I and other funds were used to pay teachers who worked at Saturday School and many volunteers provided additional support.

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

Principal Carter, teachers, and parents highlighted the increase in parent involvement as one of the most noteworthy changes at Burgess. Six years prior, only one or two parents would help out regularly at the school; now, in contrast, ten or fifteen parents are generally at school on any given day. Likewise, attendance at the PTA meetings has grown tremendously. In the past, only 10 or so parents would attend sporadically held meetings. Currently, PTA meetings are held monthly without fail and attendance has soared. More than 100 parents attended the last meeting.

At Burgess, efforts to increase parent involvement are primarily aimed at enhancing parents' ability to support their children's schooling. Carter, for example, constantly spoke of "raising parents' awareness" so that they would push their children to perform and be better able to help their children with schoolwork. Toward that end, Burgess staff have worked hard to incorporate parents in the classroom and include them in special academic programs.

All Burgess teachers attend workshops where they learn how to work with parents in their classrooms. The key is preparation and planning. As Carter emphasized:

> You have to plan, just as if you have an assistant teacher in the room. It takes a lot of work to plan what that person needs to be doing. Parents work with small groups, sometimes read to the whole class, hand out papers, monitor the halls and cafeteria and assist with field trips.

The potential benefits of thoughtful preparation for parent involvement are highlighted in a story of a mother who worked with her son in kindergarten and then taught all the material to her younger, preschool child at home. This child entered kindergarten well prepared and is now excelling in school.

As mentioned above, the Saturday School was designed to help students and their parents. It included parallel student and parent sessions. Each year more than 30 parents have attended, participating in fun activities and educational sessions where they hone their own skills and knowledge. Carter described their approach:

> We wanted parents to come too because part of the task is getting the parents' level of awareness raised so that they know it is important to start pushing their children at school. So we did everything to get the parents in. We held breakfasts and the volunteers would cook pancakes, eggs, grits, and cheese. When that got old we changed and had lunch. We did several kinds of fun sessions because some people just dread anything having to do with pencil and paper because their experiences with school just may not have been that great. We have educational sessions too. We have quiz bowls, vocabulary, and math. We provide a chance to be competitive and at the same time learn something and enhance your skills.

A parent who participated explained, "I think it helped improve the test scores when we had the Saturday School. I think it made a world of difference. A lot of parents don't understand things the kids have for homework, so it really helps them to go over what their child is going through."

Burgess has been successful in creating attractive incentives for parents. These have included everything from TV give-aways, half-price meals, and mothers' makeover days. Making a concerted effort to involve fathers at the school, Burgess staff offer extra incentives for them such as free meals and entertainment. But, it is important to emphasize that parents have been especially appreciative and enthusiastic about the educational and academically oriented sessions. One long-time parent volunteer, who now has grandchildren at the school, explained that the school's focus on parents learning how to be effective is what makes the Burgess approach to parents special. As she said:

> Dr. Carter has classes and workshops to tell parents how important it is for them to interact with their children. That has made a big difference. A lot of schools don't invite parents to come in to workshops. Once they [parents] get here, they find out some things they can do to be effective.

Encouraged by the parent interest at Saturday School, teachers decided to include parents in preparations for the annual Science and Social Science Fair. The faculty provided special training for parents after school and parents then worked alongside their children in designing and creating projects. As a result, Burgess had their highest number of projects ever. A parent who participated described this experience:

> This year we had the Science and Social Science Fair. The parents were given a workshop for it. They were really involved with it. If you didn't know how to do a project when you came, you did when you left. It was a great experience.

Parents were similarly enthusiastic about a series of computer classes that were offered at the school. More than 20 parents turned out for the first session. As one explained, "Dr. Carter is seeing that parents can learn computers. Not every school is doing that for parents. I know my daughter knows more about computers than I do right now. I feel intimidated by that. I want to know something about computers too."

The school's commitment to building parents' capacity is perhaps most clearly reflected in the growing numbers of parents who have made the transition from a volunteer position to employment at Burgess. Carter has used the school's financial resources to make a number of full and part-time positions available to parents. Four parents have moved from volunteer roles to fill key positions in the administrative office and classrooms. The members of this strong and mutually supportive cadre of school mothers also provide crucial links to the wider community of parents, responding to concerns about attendance and drawing on their knowledge of the school to provide needed advice and support in negotiating school issues.

During the past several years Carter, staff, and Burgess parents have invested time and energy in developing and nurturing relationships with community businesses and institutions. As a result, the school has two major partners - one a local hotel, the other a local real estate agency - that

provide substantial resources to the school. For example, the hotel has taken a major role in supporting the school's incentive program, making its splendid downtown facility available for monthly "citizen of the month" luncheons and the annual whole-school "Honor Day" celebration. The real estate agency's contribution of copying services and a cash grant extend the teachers' resources. Most recently the school has succeeded in solidifying a partnership with the neighborhood church. Last year the church purchased a new dictionary for each student and provided the use of the church as a site for the graduation ceremony. These community resources enhance Carter's ability to provide what her teachers need to do their job.

Changing Academic Instruction

While Carter has made it a top priority to ensure that her staff is responsive to the material, emotional, and developmental needs of Burgess students, she has at the same time directed interventions to improve classroom teaching and teacher effectiveness. Michael Cooper, executive director of 23 of the elementary schools in the district, highlighted Carter's instructional leadership:

> Carter is an instructional leader in the true sense. She trained under an excellent principal. She's a continuous learner. She studies a lot and keeps abreast of new ideas. That's been significant in terms of resources and time to do staff development.

Both Carter and Instructional Specialist Thompkins have emphasized the importance of aligning classroom activities with the objectives of the standardized test. Carter said, "Sometimes teachers can be teaching wonderful, interesting activities, but if it's something that is not going to be tested then, from a testing standpoint, it's a waste of time." Thompkins concurred by explaining, "You have the opportunity to be creative, but you shouldn't spend a lot of time on longitude and latitude if it's not on the test."

Carter has always provided her teachers with test objectives and required that these objectives guide lesson planning. However, she recognized that this was not adequate. Often teachers were not teaching the objectives. She discovered that teachers needed to work more actively with the objectives and lesson planning and that teachers needed to be more closely monitored. Toward this end, she and Thompkins both review each teacher's lesson plan on a weekly basis. The forms used for this process require that the teachers consciously identify which objectives are being met by specific activities. Thompkins uses this form to talk with the teachers. Thompkins then meets with teachers to provide guidance and materials.

The principal also added time for teachers to work actively with the objectives during staff planning time. As she explained, "I have scheduled collaboration and planning time so teachers have time to give little reports on what they have done and what objectives they are teaching."

Carter has also made use of an outside consultant to provide professional development on how to best work with test objectives. According to Carter this session was extremely helpful in demystifying the objectives:

> One of the most valuable professional development sessions was a math consultant who helped the teachers really look at the objectives. For example, they [the district] might give you two or three pages of objectives for a grade level and say, 'Here, go teach this.' That's kind of overwhelming. So she [the consultant] helped them collapse the objectives into five or six different areas and as a result they saw they were really just teaching certain things about money, addition, and subtraction.

Carter feels that classroom monitoring is the other essential ingredient to ensure that teachers are focusing on the test objectives. As she explained, "Just checking on them more has made a tremendous difference, especially with some of the drastic gains that we've had." Carter invests approximately 40 percent of her time in classroom observations. She has also drawn on the outside consultant to supplement her own work in this area.

Both Carter and Thompkins encourage professional development through formal and informal channels. For example, at Burgess all paraprofessionals are required to participate in content-focused workshops so that they are better prepared to assist the classroom teacher. Thompkins is relentless in conveying his belief that everyone is a lifelong learner, "I've taken the position that we all need to go back to school." He demonstrates this through his own willingness to learn. He participates in all the professional development sessions alongside the teachers:

> I always come with my teachers and participate. If we have a math workshop, I'm not here in this office. If they are showing how to cut out rectangles, I'm out there cutting out rectangles with them. My philosophy is I always want the staff to feel as though I'm learning with them. We can learn together.

In addition to participating in formal training sessions provided through Title I funding, teachers at Burgess learn from each other. Burgess is an environment where staff feel comfortable asking their instructional leaders and each other for help. As Thompkins said, "They don't have any problem with me coming in to work with them." Nor do teachers have difficulty seeking help from each other. Recently, for example, one teacher had visited another classroom to learn how to better teach the mathematical concept of place value. Another teacher reported how Carter encouraged teachers to visit each other's classrooms and share ideas. Teachers enjoyed this sharing and were openly supportive of each other.

Conclusions

How was Burgess able to carry out the many changes described above? How did it shift from being a "teacher-focused" school to a "child-centered" institution? How was it transformed from a school where staff were once reluctant to go beyond the requirements of the standard nine-to-five day, to one where teachers and parents alike pride themselves on their extra work hours and willingly don multiple hats to support student gains in achievement?

None of these changes were quick or easy. In fact, both the school's achievement data and qualitative accounts by members of the Burgess community indicate that reform efforts began to come together and show results only about three years ago.

Although Carter arrived at Burgess with a vision of reform, it took her several years to identify and consolidate a staff around her goals. During the first few years of her tenure she was not hesitant to confront teachers who were unwilling to make the necessary changes in their teaching or orientation to children. For Carter, putting children before teachers was non-negotiable. As she said, "There has been a tremendous staff turnover because some people were not willing to change. They wanted to teach the subject and not really address the individual needs of the children. Those people left voluntarily or not voluntarily."

In fact, only five teachers remain from the staff that Carter originally inherited when she became principal in the 1993-94 school year. Carter estimated that about three or four people left each year. Cooper, the executive director at the district office, supported Carter's personnel decisions at critical moments. He described his role in this process; "I can think of one example where Carter was having real concerns with respect to staff. So I came in and involved myself with that process to the extent that I could. I gave her my support in terms of working with that person to either 'put up or shut up.'" However, Cooper also commended Carter's skills in developing and re-training staff, noting that she has done an excellent job of recognizing and maximizing teacher potential.

Carter learned with time and experience that she had to become more directive in order to realize her vision. This required personal flexibility in experimenting with a more "autocratic" style of leadership. Carter recalled the process that led to this insight:

> Some of the problem was that teachers didn't want to lead some of the clubs or participate in some of the parent involvement activities. In the school where I came from, people would volunteer, but that wasn't working here. So finally one of the teachers said, 'We would prefer if you just give us assignments.' They wanted more structure.

Carter quickly reinforced that message the next day. As she explained, "I called a leadership meeting. I just reiterated, 'This is the way it is going to be. If you are going to be a part of this team, then this is what you are going to do.' That's not exactly my style, but it was a turning point." Since then, Carter has often combined more directive leadership with her preferred "persuasive and persistent" style when necessary.

Another important turning point came as result of a district reorganization. Four years ago a neighboring school closed and 70 of the students and eight teachers came to Burgess. This group of teachers was open to participating with Carter in the change process. One of the eight teachers, who has since assumed a staff leadership role said, "Dr. Carter had a plan. She knew what she wanted, but I don't think she was getting what she actually wanted before. The district reorganization was a good opportunity for her to reorganize and get some of her ideas in place."

These teachers who came to Burgess as a result of the reorganization experienced Carter as open to their ideas and they thrived on the chance to provide input. A teacher explained, "It kind of worked out well. Everybody started off from the bottom and worked up. It made a difference. We didn't just come into something that was totally organized. We came in with her, with the idea of reconstructing and reorganizing what she had and making it better."

Following the reorganization, the Burgess staff had yet to become the unified, mutually supportive group that it is today. According to one teacher:

> Three years ago if you were to go to a faculty meeting, the group that had just come from the other school would sit together. Then the former faculty would sit together. Then maybe the parents would sit together. Over the years it seems as though we've fused, so it doesn't matter who sits where. They've all gotten to know each other.

Carter has modeled an ethic of giving that has created an environment in which people feel that they too have plenty to give. She draws on her personal resources to provide incentives. She consistently demonstrates her appreciation for her staff through thoughtful and generous gestures. For example, last year Carter selected personal Christmas gifts for each one of her staff. This spirit of giving has become part of the school culture. Staff routinely volunteer their time or reach into their own pockets to provide what their students need. One teacher worked overtime and shared her pay with her paraprofessional who volunteered to work extra hours. Faithful parent volunteers playfully brag about how late they stay at school working on special projects. It is with such energy and commitment that the Burgess community continues to step toward its goal of student excellence and achievement.

Centerville Elementary School

Cahokia School District #187

East St. Louis, Ill.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 514

Attendance Rate 95%

Grades Served K-6

Demographics

African American..... 89%

Asian American 0%

Hispanic 0%

Other 0%

White..... 11%

Limited English Proficiency 0%

Mobility..... 56%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 86%

Key Programs: Accelerated Schools

Centerville Elementary School
Cahokia School District #187
East St. Louis, Ill.

Background

A one-story brick school building is surrounded on three sides by a wide expanse of undeveloped land. A playground area and a baseball field are enclosed by a tall fence adjacent to the back of the school. The main entrance to the school faces a busy thoroughfare that is traveled by owners of a few family businesses and residents of the modest frame homes located to the south of the school. Centerville Elementary School is a safe haven to the many children who enter its doors.

At 8 a.m., in front of the main entrance, the driveway is busy with school buses and vehicles delivering energetic children arriving early to school. Most students are neatly dressed in blue and white uniforms and laden with backpacks bulging with books and homework. Amid sounds of laughter, children are playing, hugging, and eagerly anticipating the start of the school day. Teachers and parents mingle in the front entry and hallways smiling and greeting each student as they enter the building. Accustomed to the routine, the children quietly enter the library, find a place to rest their belongings and await instructions from the teacher who greets each child with a hug.

At 8:30 a.m., the children are quietly escorted from the library and are met by the principal, teachers, and parent volunteers who await them with smiles and hugs in the hallways and outside each classroom door. Children walk quietly and orderly to their respective classrooms, organize their belongings, and move quickly to their desks to await the morning greeting. The warm and pleasant voice of Principal Butler invades the silence while children listen attentively. Following numerous acknowledgments of special awards, birthdays, and the announcements for the day, everyone says the Pledge of Allegiance. Without hesitation, everyone proudly exclaims the following pledge that has become central to life at the school:

> I am a winner. I behave like a winner. I treat others like winners. I will rise to the challenge. The tools for rising to the challenge lie within me. We testify that all I have to do is believe that I can. [*Look at your neighbor and say]:* Keep striving for success. Don't ever give up!… Centerville School is a safe place where **T**ogether, we **E**xcel, **A**chieve and **M**ature. We are a **TEAM**!

Visitors are quickly engaged in the enthusiasm that is observed in all interactions between the staff, students, parents, and community. Throughout every aspect of the school day, there is evidence of the values and sentiments expressed in the daily pledge demonstrated by the students and staff.

Population Served

Centerville Elementary School was erected in 1969 in the city of East St. Louis, Illinois. The school encompasses the Centerville Township, part of the Village of Cahokia, and two unincorporated areas. It is one of 12 schools in the Cahokia School District, #187. The city of St. Louis, with its impressive skyline, is located less than a two-mile drive across the Mississippi River. In contrast, the East St. Louis community is challenged by unemployment and poverty. The perils of the city government have attracted national attention and the residents of East St. Louis have been the topic of news reports from *60 Minutes*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*. Historians of the community recall that the township of Centerville is "centrally" located in the Cahokia community, thus the name of Centerville was adopted.

Centerville Elementary School, represented by a staff that is 50 percent African American and 50 percent white, currently serves a population of 514 students in grades kindergarten through six. The student population — 89 percent African American, and 11 percent white — is primarily from low-income families, given that 86 percent of the students are eligible to participate in the federal free or reduced-priced lunch program.

Academic Improvement

While some schools might consider the high percentage of minority and low-income students a predictor of poor student achievement, this is not the case at Centerville Elementary. In spite of poverty and long, crowded bus rides to and from the school, the student attendance rate is 95 percent. At the third-grade level, a greater percentage of Centerville students meet or exceed the state's performance goals for reading and mathematics (as measured by the IGAP: Illinois Goal Assessment Program) than do students throughout Illinois. (See Table 7.) In fact, 100 percent of the third graders tested met or exceeded state goals in mathematics. In addition, the percentage of Centerville students who took the IGAP was substantially higher than district or state averages.

Table 7: Percentage of Centerville Elementary Students Meeting or Exceeding State's IGAP Goals

	Centerville	District	State
Grade 3 Reading	77%	60%	72%
Grade 3 Math	100%	92%	92%
Grade 3 Writing	85%	83%	87%

Starting Points

Nine years ago, Centerville School did not exhibit many of the successes apparent today. The transformation of Centerville Elementary School from low to high performance took almost a decade. Negative stories plagued the community and school. Parents, teachers, staff, and

district administrators described Centerville as a school that had earned a poor reputation within the community. Unfortunately, those negative attributes were applied not only to the school, but also to the staff and to the children that attended.

In 1989, Robert Bresnahan, the current superintendent of the Cahokia School District, was asked by the person who was then superintendent to assume the principal's role at Centerville. He was told that the school had both "the lowest test scores and the lowest morale" in the district. Most district staff regarded the school as "the place where teachers went to die."

When he entered the school the first day, Bresnahan remembered that the building looked dreary and that paint was beginning to peel after years of wear and inadequate maintenance. The classrooms were void of colorful bulletin boards. There was little evidence of student work. The students were unmotivated, showed little self-control, and lacked a sense of responsibility for keeping the building and school grounds clean. He became immediately aware of a continuous flow of parents and strangers throughout the school day who "walked in off the street," entering and exiting all doors of the school building. He was concerned about the safety of students and staff. Parents would often enter the building and go directly to the classrooms to retrieve their children or to confront teachers about a concern. There appeared to be no rules or procedures.

Bresnahan was, however, pleased to discover that the majority of the staff were good teachers. There was a vibrant but subdued air of excitement. He sensed that many of the teachers were committed, but that they felt isolated and were simply not getting any recognition for their efforts. He was pleased to report that he did not regard Centerville School as "the bad place" that the staff and community members had portrayed.

Centerville staff recalled that the building was dismal and the environment was not conducive to learning. Students were undisciplined, were unsure of their abilities, and lacked self-esteem. New teachers were discouraged to find that students were performing well below those students attending other district schools. The teachers were challenged by many issues: the lack of teaching materials and resources, the feeling of being unprepared to handle the problems experienced by students who were living in poverty, and the frustration of trying to maintain high standards and expectations. The significant lack of resources was cited as the most common reason programs did not succeed. Parent and community involvement were virtually nonexistent and the staff seldom sought or encouraged those relationships. The lack of camaraderie and cohesiveness further contributed to the problems experienced by the staff and parents.

During his early tenure as principal at Centerville, Bresnahan learned of an urban grant that had funded several schools in the Chicago area. Interested in pursuing additional funds for Centerville, he researched the details of the grants, talked with staff in Chicago schools, enlisted the help of district personnel in writing a proposal, and submitted an application. Centerville was awarded a $25,000 grant that Bresnahan attributed as the beginning of the school change. The funds were used to purchase classroom supplies, increase professional development opportunities and establish a parent resource center staffed by a full-time parent paid with grant funds.

In 1990, Bresnahan left Centerville to take a position in the district office. He has fond memories of a dedicated Centerville staff and community and remained optimistic in his goals for the continued success of the school. At Bresnahan's recommendation, the superintendent selected Burnett Butler, the former assistant director of special education in the district, as the new principal at Centerville Elementary. Butler had an extensive background in working with children requiring special accommodations. Bresnahan recommended Butler because of her commitment to setting high standards and her ability to meet the needs of all students. He cited her capacity to work with diverse communities and her skills in working with teachers as important attributes for the position. He viewed Butler's appointment as a positive one for the Centerville community for two reasons. He explained, "She was a tough person who was very easy to get along with and she was born and educated in the East St. Louis community. She had a vested interest in the children."

In 1994, Bresnahan was appointed to the position of superintendent for the Cahokia School District, #187. He credited Butler with changing the climate at Centerville. He said that she brought rationality, continuity, consistency, and a clear vision at a time when teachers needed guidance and direction.

Changing the School Climate

Principal Butler described the first changes she made when she came to Centerville School. She felt it was crucial for the staff to be united in their expectations and standards for all students. She also knew it was important for the staff to work collaboratively toward the creation of a unified vision. She experienced conflicts with those staff who did not want to be a part of the process. A few felt so strongly that they decided to leave the school. Confounded by the constant turnaround in staff, the school was always in a mode of re-training or re-acclimating.

Steadfast in her plan to consolidate the staff, Butler initiated a process to engage all staff in determining the direction for the school. She actively sought input from students, parents, and community partners in the creation of a unified vision. She said:

> The staff became more positive and optimistic when they realized that the decisions they made were valued and taken seriously. They were pleased to discover that they played a significant role in changing the direction of the school, and that their participation was crucial in the process. The staff assumed ownership for the school's success and were willing to work hard to achieve positive results.

The collaborative efforts of the Centerville staff, students, parents, and community resulted in a unified commitment to high standards and high expectations for all Centerville students. The school pledged to exhaust all resources and opportunities to ensure that all students not only reached, but also exceeded district and state expectations. As one veteran teacher explained:

> We had low test scores. Student morale was not what it should be. We needed to determine right away our expectations for these children. It was at that point that we started to look at all the information we had: demographics, test scores, etc.

> We looked at ways we could improve our school. We thought about the latest trends and what other people were doing to improve their schools. We visited other schools; we looked at their test scores. We analyzed the performance of our students. We participated in a lot of staff development, attended meetings and reading and math workshops. Our goal was to improve the staff's ability to address the needs of each student. We knew that we had to take the students from where they were to where we knew they could be.

Another teacher summarized the process at Centerville:

> I believe the most significant changes began with our taking a good look at where we were, then coming up with a consensus of where we wanted to go (our vision statement), and then setting out to accomplish it. Our vision has been accomplished with dedicated work on the part of the principal and the teachers. Mrs. Butler has such high standards and high expectations for all of our boys and girls. She'll do anything and everything to make sure that our goals are accomplished.

In modeling high standards and high expectation, Butler reiterated the belief that "all" includes the large population of students served in special education programs on the campus. Neither the staff nor students label them as special education students. Instead, the students are referred to as "Fogel's class" or "Richard's class." Although she admitted that team teaching and the integration of special education teachers into regular classroom instruction were not at the level she would like, Butler was diligent in her efforts to include the students in regular class instruction. The students in special education programs were included as recipients of school awards and as participants in district-wide programs, recognition assemblies, and the campus DARE program.

Centerville teachers worked long hours that extended beyond the school day to devote additional time to help students who were falling behind. One teacher explained:

> I have lunch from 12 to 1 p.m. The students eat lunch in the cafeteria with their friends from noon to 12:30 p.m. If a student needs a little extra help, I give them a pass and they know to come back to the classroom at 12:30.

Often, during the tutorial time, teachers used peer tutoring as a strategy to help students with comprehension. Lunchtime, however, was not the only opportunity to get extra help. After-school programs also enhanced student learning opportunities. The objective of the after-school program was to target those students who were not performing on grade level and to try everything to pull them up to grade level. As one teacher said:

> Last year I had a student who entered my room and could not read at all. He was having a difficult time and missed a lot of school. I worked with him whenever we had extra time, before, during, and after school. This year he believes there is nothing too hard for him to accomplish. He's making Cs and Bs. That's pretty good for someone who was reading at a first-grade level in the third grade.

Butler emphasized the dedication and commitment of her teachers and staff. She stressed that the teachers do not hesitate to come in early or stay late for a meeting. They "give up their lunch period to tutor children, go the extra mile, or do whatever it takes to help our students." She added, "They are truly professional people who love children."

Another teacher described the commitment of Centerville teachers,

> When we first came, we didn't have resources. Teachers were going out buying a lot of things themselves to encourage their students. You have to know where your students are, meet them there and take them higher. We don't use excuses like, 'Oh well, their parents don't do this or that.' We take the responsibility. It becomes overwhelming at times, but the rewards are great. We love it here.

Parents were optimistic in their reports of the school. They saw the care for the children exhibited by the principal and staff, the high expectations of school staff, and their children's academic progress as evidence of new strength and improvement.

A family atmosphere is shown at Centerville by the relationships among adults at the school. The staff is cohesive and works well together. The Centerville mission, Together We Can Excel, Achieve, and Mature, is reflective of the TEAM effort and the care and concern exhibited by all the staff toward each other. A collegial environment has been created that encourages and supports risk-taking. Teachers appreciated the freedom to exchange ideas, offer support to fellow colleagues, and to seek help when needed. New teachers reported that a mentoring program designed to support them was meaningful and worthwhile.

A variety of classroom management techniques were used effectively which resulted in a positive effect on the learning environment. Positive reinforcement strategies were observed throughout the school. As principal, Butler modeled a positive, caring approach as she worked with students. For example, she described her role in helping a child who was experiencing difficulty:

> A sixth grader, whose father was killed in an automobile accident, had internalized that anger and hostility. He became volatile and was explosive at the slightest provocation. We told him how much we loved him and how much his life meant to us. We told him everyday, 'You can do it. We are here for you. You can talk to us anytime.' We let him know that he was important. We saw a dramatic change in his attitude in a short time.

Butler displayed a genuine concern for not only the children but for her staff as well. According to the staff, she would do "anything and everything" to make sure things were accomplished. The staff credited Butler for nurturing the family-oriented team environment.

Changing Academic Instruction

As one passes classrooms from the hallways, students can be observed raising their hands eagerly, working in cooperative groups, and presenting reports to the class. Kindergartners can be seen completing assignments on the computer and students are seen tutoring peers. The students appear energetic about learning, they care about the school, and they assume ownership for their success. They work hard and they feel important. Student work is proudly displayed. Many of these changes resulted from a focus on meeting the academic needs of individual students.

Meeting the Academic Needs of Individual Students

When students experience difficulties in the classroom, there is a comprehensive effort to assist the student. The speech therapist cited an example of such an effort:

> I recall a student who has a problem with stuttering. We knew that his grades were not a reflection of his abilities. His classroom teacher and I began communicating about the best strategies for him. We provided tutoring in a couple of subject areas. We talked with his parents and gained their help. With additional assistance from the paraprofessionals, his grades began to improve, his stuttering began to decrease, and his self-esteem improved tremendously.

Teachers were excited about learning teaching techniques that addressed the individual needs of their students, while increasing their students' levels of performance. A primary teacher recalled the first time that Title I teachers came into the first-grade classrooms during the language arts block. The additional help lessened the noise level, allowed the students to receive more individual assistance, and created a more manageable instructional time. Although that arrangement is not currently used, the teacher explained that it gave her the confidence to try new strategies.

To assist teachers in meeting the academic needs of their students, teachers were provided extensive opportunities to engage in professional development. Teachers were expected to share new strategies and techniques with other members of the staff. Also, Butler spent considerable time assisting teachers in addressing the academic needs of students. Butler was described as a teacher of the teachers at the school. One new teacher explained:

> If she sees the need to offer guidance or if she wants to suggest an alternative strategy, she's doesn't approach you in a negative way. Instead, she'll get in there with you and show you. She teaches and models for you to make sure that you understand.

Teachers changed how they taught as a result of professional development experiences, the principal's support, and their classroom experiences. One teacher described an experience that led her to change her approach to teaching:

> When I first came here, I had expectations of what the children could do. After a few weeks, I learned I should have known better. I recall asking my kindergarten children to color their bananas yellow. One student asked, "What do you mean color?" I responded, "This is the third week of school. You know what I mean." I looked at his little face and I realized that he did not know. I sat down beside him and I said, "This is what I mean." I took his hand in mine and I taught him how to color the banana. I learned that you can never assume anything; I had never seen him color. He had not learned how to color, but I knew he could. My job is not to embarrass him or to become impatient. My job is to teach him.

Aligning the Curriculum

Centerville staff described their curriculum alignment effort as one of the major turning points for the school. These efforts were initiated by the district office and implemented district-wide. The district organized teams of campus and district staff that were charged with the responsibility of aligning the curriculum and allocated the time and funds necessary to support the process.

Curriculum committees composed of two staff members from each building and representing grades K–12 were organized. The teams were divided by subject areas and charged with the responsibility of aligning all subject area objectives with the district-adopted curriculum and the state objectives. The final step of the process was to include a consensus of all the teams in the alignment of K–12 curriculum. A teacher who served on a committee explained:

> A major change at Centerville has been our taking a look at our curriculum to determine if we were aligned with the state goals. We also asked ourselves if what we were teaching and requiring our students to learn was what was being assessed by the state. The whole process made us more aware of the changes that we needed to implement in our program. It has made me more conscientious.

Teachers were excited about the curriculum and instructional strategies they adopted at Centerville. A kindergarten teacher shared her excitement about the new math program. She stated:

> We do so much more in math now than ever before… Things that I never touched until I was in third or fourth grade like greater-than and less-than symbols and vocabulary like "area" and "perimeter." I now teach in kindergarten. I use every teachable moment. When I want students to sit on the rug, I will say, "Please sit on the perimeter of the rug." They understand.

The staff's commitment to setting high expectations and high standards was evident in their instructional strategies. One teacher shared a personal experience:

> I know what it feels like to be at the bottom of the barrel. I was raised in a rural area. I didn't have much. Just looking at where I have come from gives me the knowledge that if I can do it, my students can do it. We just need to level the

> playing field for them. I am a visual learner, so I make sure that I use whatever learning styles work best for each student. I always say, "You can do it. Nothing is too hard for you." We just keep working at it until we get it right.

Changing the Organization of Schooling:

Becoming an Accelerated School

At the end of Principal Butler's first year at Centerville, the staff voted to adopt the Accelerated Schools Program. The program engaged the staff in a learning process that transformed the way teachers had previously thought about teaching. This learning process was a shared experience involving the principal, teachers, staff, and parents. The school used "test coaches" to arm teachers with innovative teaching strategies. The training provided by the test coaches revamped the way teachers thought about teaching and resulted in dramatically improved test scores. The school staff analyzed all available data and spent several months reviewing test scores. Time was spent identifying weaknesses and strengths and making determinations about where improvements were needed. They discussed the strengths of the staff and made note of where additional professional development was needed. In addition, they studied the curriculum and assessment instruments, and they reported their findings to the group. They were comprehensive in their analysis of their programs. Staff members were convinced that this shared learning experience made a difference in both the performances of the students and their teachers. One teacher reflected on the experience:

> The whole staff gets together and learns together. We all get packets and we look at each grade level. We've spent several months looking over the IGAP [Illinois Goal Assessment Program] scores and the school data. We saw specifically what the problems were and what needed to be improved. Then we divided into our grade levels and we looked at the test scores and we realized where our students were functioning at low levels. We asked ourselves how we could improve in those areas. We spent time in our groups writing out suggestions and making recommendations.

Acquiring and Managing Resources

The Centerville staff was skilled at acquiring and managing resources. Butler was complimentary of the support she received from the central office staff, beginning with the superintendent. She recalled being told by Bresnahan that she and her staff "were working hard to make a difference with the students, parents, and community and that we [superintendent and district staff] have made the commitment to support your efforts in any way possible." Butler added that such flexibility and unconditional support were crucial to her ability to reinforce her teachers and staff.

According to the staff, the allocation of Title I funds, which had previously been confined to a few schools, has had a great impact on the school. As a result of Centerville becoming a Title I

schoolwide program, the staff feels that they now have the resources and the flexibility to make decisions about working with all children with less emphasis on eligibility requirements and far less paperwork. Paraprofessionals are now fully integrated into the classroom versus working with a few students in a “pull-out” program. The site-based decision-making committee has identified teacher training and classroom materials as school priorities and the Title I funds have provided the means to address those needs. The library was upgraded. Computer equipment and other technology were purchased and installed to enable students to move into the next century.

Centerville has effectively used competent grant writers to acquire additional resources. Staff reiterated that knowing where to find available money and how to apply for those grants that respond to specific school needs were the important skills of their grant writer. Project Success, for example, is a grant awarded to Centerville by the governor's office. The grant is designed to initiate the organization of a governing board composed of school staff, parents, community members, and city agencies to support the improvement of the neighborhood community.

At Centerville, teachers communicate constantly and share ideas, materials, and resources. The sharing of resources among teachers has been helpful in managing limited resources effectively. Teachers do not seem to hoard or withhold resources or expertise from their colleagues. The spirit of sharing has helped the school gain maximum value from their resources.

A considerable amount of resources have gone directly into major efforts to improve mathematics and reading instruction. Centerville has invested human and material resources into math and reading enrichment and the training necessary to implement programs that produce positive results.

Centerville has adopted a new math program, a new reading series (adopted last year), and recently added an accelerated reading program.

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

Parents have become more involved in the Centerville School programs. Almost 97 percent of the parents were involved in some activity at the school last year. Staff members try different strategies to involve the parents. Many teachers require homework every school night. Parents are asked to sign the work students are assigned to complete; thus, parents are encouraged to be more accountable for their child’s learning. A group of parents volunteer daily in the classrooms and in the cafeteria. Many of them no longer have children attending the school. The school organizes curriculum nights and family fun nights with science and math. PTA meetings are used to teach the parents strategies for working with their children, health and nutrition, home management, and banking. The staff sent surveys to each parent requesting their thoughts on the adoption of school uniforms and more than 90 percent of the parents attended the meeting to discuss the results. The PIPS, Parents Involved in Programs at School, meet at least once a month and discuss various strategies to help their children at home.

Staff acknowledged that they are continually seeking ways to increase parent involvement. Teachers encourage parents to come to the school anytime, to sit in the classrooms and observe, or to call any time they need help. On a regular basis, teachers send information home to make

sure that parents know what their children are learning at school. To ensure that parents are receiving the information sent home, parents are expected to sign and return the documents to school.

A parent of a former student and grandparent of two current Centerville students was excited about the opportunity to volunteer at the school every day. She shared:

> I love Centerville school. I wanted to give back because they have given so much to my children and my family. They supported me. They supported my kids when they were here. Today my children and grandchildren are confident and educated. They are proud that they attended this school. We just don't see all the hardships. If we do, we're not going to focus on them. We're going to focus on all the positive things that we can do for our children because they are our future.

Community involvement has been critical to the success of Centerville. The philosophy of Centerville staff is that the entire community needs to become involved to ensure the success of the school. The school has organized a subcommittee of the Steering Committee, called the Partnership Cadre, whose main focus is to identify areas of need at the school and to link the school with those organizations that can provide support.

Many of the staff were raised in the community or are current residents of the East St. Louis area. They have a strong connection and commitment to the community. Butler, for example, was born in the community and educated in the school district. She has established a connection with the community and has been instrumental in increasing family and community involvement. Butler capitalizes on every opportunity to engage community support. She recently met with a coordinator with the YWCA, who was interested in initiating a pilot after-school program. The YWCA Coordinator understood about the economic struggles of the community and was aware of the strong efforts at Centerville School. Similarly, Butler reported relationships with McDonald's Restaurant, Junior Achievement, the East Side Health District, the Southern Health Care Foundation, and Touche Regional Hospital.

A grant received from the governor's office enabled Centerville to organize a partnership with Parkfield Terrace, a housing development located in the school community. The governing board of Project Success conducted an initial survey of the needs of the community and established goals. The school played a significant role in organizing a neighborhood association that includes the residents, police, and community leaders committed to ensure the safety of the children on their way to and from school. Members of the association reported that the school is committed to helping the residents restore pride in their neighborhood. One parent who served on the committee reported three different events involving the school and the community:

> [First,] we had a barbecue two months ago. Everybody came. [Secondly,] when school first started, the school identified children who couldn't afford school supplies. They bought everything they needed. [Finally,] the last two Saturdays, everyone came out to work: the superintendent, board members, high school and middle school students, Centerville kids [more than 50], the residents, with and without children, and teachers. We had our trash bags and we spent the entire day cleaning up and trying to make it beautiful again, the way it used to be.

Centerville parents and staff reported that they are now focusing on piloting new programs to get more parents and community members to volunteer in the school. One teacher reported:

> We created a list of volunteer job descriptions. We realized that in the past, we would send out a list and ask parents to sign up. We'd end up with a list of names and numbers that were never called. We decided we needed to get more specific and ask our staff, "What needs do we have that we could really use volunteers?" We created a list and we sent it to parents and handed it out at parent conferences. The response was great. This Thursday night we're having a family reading night with "celebrity readers," all volunteers from our list.

Conclusions

Centerville Elementary School is heralded as one of the best schools in the district and in the state. Although it may be evident to visitors that the East St. Louis community has experienced economic challenges, there is seemingly no challenge that could overcome the spirit at Centerville Elementary. Students, staff, parents, and the community share in the enthusiasm. Each interviewee voiced a strong sense of pride in their school, the staff, and in the story of their success.

One teacher, who described the school six years ago as depressing, dreary, and desolate, cried when she was told that she had been assigned to Centerville. Having prior experience in a school located in a middle class community, she humbly recalled the perceptions that she held regarding the potential of minority children who were living in poverty. Her statement today is strong evidence of the dramatic change at Centerville:

> The success of our school has become a personal commitment for all of us. There is not a teacher in this school to whom I could not say, 'You can have my own child in your class.' I would trust them because I know that every teacher would give every child the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Goodale Elementary School

Detroit Public Schools

Detroit, Mich.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 1,171

Attendance Rate 94%

Grades Served K-5

Demographics

African American..... 100%

Limited English Proficiency 0%

Mobility..... 37%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 87%

Key Programs: Sylvan Reading Program, Peer Mediation, Efficacy Program, After-School Tutoring Program

Goodale Elementary School
Detroit Public Schools
Detroit, Mich.

Background

An air of excitement and activity greets regulars and visitors alike at the school. Students and their parents walk to school sporting bright blue windbreakers with the school name emblazoned on the back. A cadre of parent volunteers staff a school store where youngsters line up to purchase school supplies. Another group of parents copies materials for teachers at a machine in the main hall while welcoming everyone who enters the building. Students enthusiastically recite chants about the importance of positive self-image and hard work, replete with accompanying stomps, claps, and hand motions ("Think you can! Work hard! Get smart!"). Teachers gather on their break periods to discuss how they might use ideas and materials just pulled from the World Wide Web in the day's lessons. Support teachers wheel carts filled with math manipulatives into classrooms to model lessons for teachers and to work with students in hands-on activities. The building's interior is bright and cheery, with bulletin boards announcing various school programs such as peer mediation. After the dismissal bell, the building teems with Girl and Boy Scout troop activities, a tutoring program, and school site-based management committee meetings. One might easily imagine such a scenario in school in an affluent, suburban community, but this is Goodale Elementary in a low-income area just east of downtown Detroit.

Population Served

Goodale's neighborhood is comprised of aging but tidy single-family homes, run-down liquor stores, and dilapidated motels. All of the students are African American and in 1998, 87 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Even with 1,171 students, more than 50 faculty members and three administrators, the atmosphere is one of a small, familiar learning community.

Academic Improvement

Tables 8 and 9 illustrate how Goodale's students once performed below state averages and now score above on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). Table 8 indicates the percentages of students achieving proficiency in reading and mathematics at a satisfactory (highest), moderate, or low level. Table 9 indicates the percentages of students achieving or not achieving proficiency in writing and the percentages of students at the proficient, novice, and not yet novice (lowest level) in science.

Parents, teachers, and administrators explained that the growth in test scores during the past three years, while seemingly explosive, is actually the fruit of a decade of vision and hard work. The school community has worked at a steady, measured pace improved academic performance and development for all students. Indeed, when asked what has happened in the past three years to increase student achievement so dramatically, many school community members look puzzled and responded (in the words of a parent), "It's more like in the last 10 years. It all runs together. This has been a long haul." Nonetheless, there were several factors that were widely touted as influential in the development of improved teaching and learning at Goodale.

Table 8: MEAP Reading and Mathematics Performance at Goodale Elementary

Year		Grade 4 Reading			Grade 4 Mathematics		
		% Sat.	% Mod.	% Low	% Sat.	% Mod.	% Low
1993-94	Goodale	22.4	28.0	49.6	23.8	26.2	50.0
	State	43.6	29.0	27.4	48.9	26.4	24.6
1994-95	Goodale	18.5	26.8	54.8	37.6	20.4	42.0
	State	43.6	30.5	26.0	61.6	21.1	17.3
1995-96	Goodale	31.7	32.4	36.0	28.1	37.4	34.5
	State	49.9	30.9	19.1	63.1	22.4	14.5
1996-97	Goodale	22.3	36.0	41.7	39.1	27.0	33.9
	State	49.0	28.8	22.2	60.5	21.4	18.1
1997-98	Goodale	65.0	22.5	12.5	75.8	13.3	10.8
	State	58.6	26.0	15.4	74.1	17.7	8.2

Table 9: MEAP Science and Writing Performance at Goodale Elementary

Year		Grade 5 Science			Grade 5 Writing	
		% Prof.	% Novice	% Not Yet Novice	% Prof.	% Not Yet Prof.
1995-96	Goodale	13.6	79.5	6.8	29.3	70.7
	State	26.9	62.0	11.2	55.6	44.4
1996-97	Goodale	78.4	20.9	0.7	49.3	50.7
	State	36.8	54.3	8.9	73.4	26.6
1997-98	Goodale	52.8	42.4	4.9	84.6	15.4
	State	40.4	52.7	6.8	64.3	35.7

Starting Points:
The Careful Selection of New Faculty

The principal at Goodale, William Batchelor, believed that the school's improvement was rooted largely in the hiring of devoted teachers. He explained that during his 10 years as an administrator at Goodale, most of his hiring decisions have been influenced by the extent to which candidates exhibited a commitment and passion to improving achievement and the well-rounded development of all students. He commented:

> I know very quickly if I'm going to hire a teacher. I ask them about themselves, how they feel about children, and how they are outside of school. 'What is important to you? What interests and accomplishments do you bring to us?' If they are a passionate, driven person they will make a good teacher, because I can train them in instruction and curriculum.

It has not been easy building a staff with these characteristics, however. Batchelor explained, "Not everyone has embraced where we want to go. Some have retired and some have transferred. And that's okay. We need people who share our vision." Occasionally, vacancies have been left open longer than technically necessary, to ensure that those finally hired share the Goodale vision. Batchelor explained that he would prefer to leave a position vacant than to fill it with someone who would not help the school accomplish its goals. He stated:

> I want the best. And I know my subs [substitute teachers]. My subs are really quite good. [In some cases] I felt more confident about having them as subs than some applicants who were completely certified. I ask myself, 'Would I want my child in that class?' If I cannot answer, 'Yes,' then I will not hire that applicant.

Changing the School Climate:
Dedication to Children's Academic and Personal Growth

The Goodale staff and community have focused both on improving the academic skills of students and facilitating their personal growth and development. As Batchelor, the school's principal explained, "Our big thing is, the MEAP [Michigan Educational Assessment Program]. Test scores are important. I make no bones about that, but we want to develop the whole child, as a person, a citizen. We want our children to dream." This belief in the interdependence of academic and personal growth, and the dedication to simultaneously develop both, has led to the inclusion of a variety of activities and programs at Goodale. Most recently, a peer mediation program was established. A participating teacher explained:

> We have 40 students who were trained last year. The students mediate during lunchtime. They work with students who have disagreements or fights. We thought this would help reduce trouble on the playground and we had some classes that needed mediators. The children filled out an application and then they were selected. They are proud to be mediators. They are handling a lot of

> problems. And the assistant principal loves this. She said it takes a lot of petty problems away from her. We want the kids to become problem solvers. This develops their critical thinking skills and responsibility. And it has cut down on suspensions.

Batchelor added, "When you suspend a kid, you kick them out of school for a day. But you're looking at him as an eight-year-old. I'm looking at him as an 18-year-old adult. He needs to learn responsibility along the way. We have to prepare them. We have to keep them in school." With suspensions down and, hence, attendance up, Goodale students have more opportunities to take part in this and other challenging extracurricular activities. (As mentioned, Goodale also hosts vibrant Brownie, Girl Scout and Boy Scout programs.) In these extracurricular activities, students hone communication skills, develop personal interests and talents, and benefit from a sense of group belonging. In turn, many Goodale staff members reported that participating students show a greater interest in the challenging instructional activities going on in their regular classrooms.

The concern for both personal and academic growth has guided many instructional decisions. For example, a few years ago staff found a way to provide certain upper-grade students with remedial reading help without making them feel inferior to their peers who were on grade level. Batchelor explained:

> With some of our fourth and fifth graders who are having trouble reading, they are not going to read in a second-grade book. They just won't do that. But if we have them work as cross-age tutors, they'll read in a first-grade book to help a first grader. They will feel empowered to help someone else, and learn along the way. We have to be sensitive to that and allow them opportunities to shine.

The Efficacy Program perhaps best exemplifies Goodale's vision and how the staff created it. The program aims to raise academic achievement by guiding students through a process of developing self-awareness, confidence, and the ability to set and achieve personal and academic goals. Many staff members saw the effort as more than just a program but rather, as an all-encompassing attitude and approach. It took several years to get the majority of the staff trained in efficacy procedures and expectations. A recently-trained teacher described the program:

> Efficacy training helped make an atmosphere that is positive and conducive to learning. It emphasizes building students' 'self-concept.' If you don't build self-concept, if they're not comfortable with themselves, then they may not be apt to try anything you present. But if you lay the foundation where students feel like they are valued, then they'll try anything. If you think you can, you work hard, and you get smart. If you think you can and the teacher believes in you, you'll try it.

Unlike programs that address self-esteem as a separate issue, the Efficacy Program has influenced the way teachers teach the entire curriculum. It has changed teacher behavior, as much as it has changed student behavior. One veteran teacher in the program said:

> It made a big difference in how I've taught, in how I address my students, and what I expected from them. I had to re-evaluate my whole approach. It helped me to be more positive and to express respect for and belief in my students. And it opened my eyes to be more accepting of some other things that came along down the road: new ideas and techniques that I might not have wanted to try before, but that have helped me be a better teacher.

The Goodale teachers and administrators are committed to the personal and academic growth of every student. This commitment was evidenced in the oft-repeated explanation for Goodale's success: "We see the kids as ours, like our own kids in our families. We want them to grow and develop. And we will not leave anyone behind." The commitment was apparent not only in words but also in the actions and decisions of the staff. If an issue or project was not believed to improve instruction and student learning, it became a low priority. For example, one teacher recalled:

> Recently in our site-based management meeting, Mr. Batchelor asked about concerns. One teacher brought up the idea of re-doing the parking lot so that we could get in and out without disturbing neighborhood traffic so much. Now, Mr. Batchelor acknowledged that as important, but he re-routed our discussion back to issues that directly affect the academic growth of our students. We have to work on what's most important.

In long-range planning processes, this focus on student achievement determined the outcome of many difficult decisions. For instance, Goodale recently had the opportunity to participate in a reform project funded by a large foundation. After researching the project, the principal decided that even given the benefits of participation (e.g., access to increased funding), the program "had us doing too many things that kept us away from working with our kids and doing things for our kids. It didn't allow us to keep our focus. So we decided not to participate."

Th goal of improving the academic success and personal development of all students has become a pervasive, motivating force among the staff at Goodale. When asked how decisions about a variety of school issues have been made for many years, teachers, parents, and administrators alike often began their responses with, "We thought what was best for the students was. . . " or "Looking at student achievement data, we found we needed to…." It was not always like this, however. While long-term school community members have cultivated this vision over the years, the administration has been vigilant in selecting new faculty who exemplify this attitude.

Changing Academic Instruction

A variety of factors, including those described in the previous sections, have influenced changes in academic instruction. However, certain processes stood out as having substantially influenced improvements in instruction. First, teachers were held to high professional standards related to academic instruction and they were given support in attaining those standards. Second, there were many examples of collaboration among the faculty around the improvement of instruction. Teachers worked together to help each other meet high professional standards. Also, the leaders

of the school managed to create an atmosphere in which teachers were willing to experiment carefully with ideas that might increase the academic achievement of Goodale students.

Supporting Teachers in Meeting High Professional Standards

Students are not the only ones expected to achieve and develop personally at Goodale. Teachers are also held to high standards. To ensure that teachers meet high expectations and their students achieve academically and personally, teachers are provided evaluations of their performance, necessary materials in a timely manner, and opportunities and encouragement to pursue further professional development.

When he began as an administrator at Goodale, Batchelor said, "The focus was not as academic as we would have liked." To remedy this, he became highly visible throughout the school in order to build an active working relationship with teachers and students. Then he began regular evaluations of teacher lesson plans and worked to establish curricular timelines aligned to state accountability measures. "I am in the classrooms all the time. I am most concerned with lesson objectives and assessments. Teachers have flexibility with how they get there. But if you're not where you need to be, we need to talk."

Teachers also shared that the administration's presence and support in their classrooms and throughout the building were main components of Goodale's recipe for success. They described their relationships with administrators as supportive and constructive. As one explained:

> Batchelor comes in my room all the time. Often, on those days I will find a note telling what he liked about what he saw. Sometimes he will offer suggestions, too. It makes me feel really good. I know he cares. He gives us the freedom to be independent, to do many things our way. It makes working here fun.

Another way in which the school leadership has helped teachers feel supported is by ensuring that teachers have the instructional materials and equipment they need in order to be effective. One teacher exclaimed while others nodded in agreement:

> It is wonderful to ask for something and get it. If I need something, they tell me where I can go get it or if they need to order it, how long it will take. Then, it doesn't take until April to get it. Sometimes you don't even have to ask. All of the sudden something will appear. Someone will come to the room and say, ‘Hey, do you need this?’

In their role as support persons, the Title I resource teachers helped identify teacher needs for materials and various resources. They saw that items were ordered and delivered promptly. Teachers who had taught previously at other schools thought this was one of the most profound differences between Goodale and other schools. They perceived that school leaders truly cared about the teachers’ ability to succeed with their students. Teachers reported that they felt much more willing to do extra things for the school (e.g., spend more time working on curriculum,

participate in extra activities) because they perceived that the school was so eager to expend resources to address their needs.

Just as support was shown through the availability of materials, it was shown through the availability of professional development opportunities. Each year teachers were asked to identify areas in which they would like professional development and administrators actively sought training for the staff in these areas. Many teachers shared that after applying what they learned in professional development activities in their classrooms, and seeing positive results, they became even more enthusiastic about increasing their professional skills. As one teacher reported, “Now we go to as many workshops as we can, in groups when we can. But it took us a long time to get where we are. It was a lot of in-service training and trial and error and a lot of hard work. It has been a growth process over the years.”

Juanita Clay-Chambers, assistant superintendent for curriculum services for the Detroit Public Schools, confirmed that teachers at Goodale were well-supported in their efforts to seek professional development, and that this support contributed to their enthusiasm for learning: "They attend in droves." At Batchelor's request, she said, "We have made accommodations because of the large size of their group. This past year, we allowed a Goodale team of about 20 teachers to attend a workshop where normally we have teams of 5 to 7 people." “Goodale teachers do not necessarily have more professional development opportunities than teachers at other schools in Detroit,” she continued, "They have just become more adept at taking advantage of the opportunities offered." Teachers overwhelmingly indicated these professional development opportunities have been key sources of support that have helped them to sharpen their ability to provide the kind of instruction that has nurtured Goodale student's improving Michigan Educational Assessment Program scores.

Increasing Communication and Collaboration

Another key factor in creating high levels of academic achievement at Goodale has been the close collaborative relationships and communication among school community members. Asked how this collaboration and communication was cultivated, one teacher explained that, "Projects come up that have to be done. That will throw a group of teachers together. It might be out of necessity, or something they want to do in their own classrooms. We have learned to work together." Another reflected that shared professional development experiences have helped build this camaraderie:

> We had to work hard this summer at the district's professional development institute. We planned together the things we want to achieve and then we have to present our results at next summer's institute. It's created a system of communication between all of us. If we're doing something, we'll say, ‘That will be good for our presentation files. Let's keep that.’

While close collaboration and communication may have come about in response to particular challenges and activities, the relationships that have been built bear fruit in a variety of contexts. For example, the science teacher's position required her to work with rotating groups of students.

She took it a step further and worked with the students' teachers as well. She shared with the teachers the science lessons she covered with their students, and also incorporated into her science lessons things the teachers were doing in regular classroom instruction. As such, a wide range of content area learning was addressed in science lessons. Further, she provided the teachers with written follow-up lessons to do in their classrooms, even printing out the lesson plans on pieces of paper just the right size so teachers could paste them into the appropriate place in their lesson plan books. This way, classroom teachers became more likely to allow their students extended opportunities to learn science and its application in various areas of learning and life.

Goodale's Title I lab teachers were important contributors to communication and collaboration at the school. There were five lab teachers, one for each grade level. These teachers worked with teachers and students in a variety of ways. They conducted "pull-out" programs, instructing small groups of students on computers and working with certain individuals who needed extra help in content areas such as math and language arts. During these periods teachers had time to work with the small groups of students left in their classrooms in a more intense manner. The lab teachers also did "push-in" lessons, where they went into classrooms and conducted lessons. Most commonly these lessons were to introduce new materials or methodologies to teachers and students; to model a certain instructional technique for a teacher who requested help in that area; or to provide intensive help to students in areas where state assessment scores were low. “Three years ago our MEAP scores in math were so low,” one of the lab teachers explained. “So, we did a lot of push-in lessons in math, bringing in manipulatives and things we learned at in-service training. I think it really helped. Our scores went up and teachers seemed to get a lot out of it.”

Grant writing was a major endeavor of the lab teachers, and was also a context in which lab teachers and classroom teachers communicate and collaborate. Explained another lab teacher:

> We talk to the teachers and see what they need, what they want to learn. Then we write grants to get money to do these things. A lot of it is done after school hours, because we have so much to do during the day. But it's worth it, because we get a lot of money that way and teachers get what they need to teach the kids.

Batchelor explained that the lab teachers worked as both instructional leaders and instructional support staff, adding that, "The lab teachers go after what the teachers and students need, lending a hand in any way." Such close and productive coordination may have been prompted by adverse situations. Recently the district was reorganized and area administrative clusters were disbanded in favor of a centralized administration. A lab teacher reflected:

> We used to get a lot of training through our area office. We always learned so much that we were then able to share with the teachers. Now we don't get as much. So it's been harder. We've had to rely more on each other and the Title I office, and be even more aggressive to learn and get new things ourselves. We're okay, though. We make it work together.

Additionally, Goodale participated enthusiastically in the district's new site-based management organizational model. The committees and activities in the site-based management model

seemed, in many ways, to put a name and a structure on top of collaboration and communication that was already happening at Goodale. As Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Juanita Clay-Chambers said regarding site based management, "Schools now have to deal with their own situations, sharing decision-making and participation. Goodale is already very adept at that."

Developing a Willingness to Experiment

Goodale staff members evidenced a willingness to experiment with new ideas, techniques, and procedures. They were willing to try approaches that were likely to result in improved student achievement. "We owe it to the students," stated one teacher. Many teachers pointed out that frequent, conscientious experimentation with new techniques and ideas in their classrooms has contributed to increased student success. One teacher explained that she is willing to experiment because teachers are given both the opportunities to learn new techniques and ideas, and the freedom to try them. “Administrators treat us like real professionals,” she said. “They let us push the envelope and try things we think might work. If it doesn't work; however, we know we have to bag it and try something else until we find what does."

Teachers used daily classroom lessons to try novel approaches that engaged students in learning. For instance, in a third-grade classroom, the teacher was about to engage the students in a journal writing activity but pretended to not be able to think of an appropriate writing prompt. While he was discussing possible writing prompts with his class, a student from another class ran into the classroom, took a candy bar off of the teacher’s desk and ran out quickly. The teacher claimed to have not seen what transpired and asked students to tell him. Just as students were about to burst with eagerness to tell their version of the story of the heist, the teacher said, “Wait a minute. Get out your journals. Write down what you saw.” Students wrote furiously as the teacher encouraged them to not leave out details and get the sequence of events correct.

When students finished writing their explanations of the event, the teacher allowed students to read their writing. Of course, eventually, students began to suspect that the theft was not truly a theft, but instead an act created to provide another writing prompt. When student accusations and excitement mounted, the teacher again stopped the discussion by declaring, “Wait a minute! You think there was a conspiracy. Write down your conspiracy theory. Explain your reasoning.” The lesson was a successful, creative attempt to engage students in thoughtful and purposeful writing.

Another, example of this willingness to experiment is Goodale's use of the Sylvan Reading Program. The school uses some of its funding to contract for auxiliary tutoring services with a private organization. Services are provided in a room on the campus; however, the services are provided by Sylvan personnel in a manner consistent with the Sylvan program. While the program is still too new to determine it’s influence on Goodale's MEAP scores (last year was the first year), many school staff members expressed a belief that it is helping. Expressing the school's true dedication to finding what works for children, Batchelor said that if they find the program does not have a significant effect on future test scores, "We'll try something else."

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

As part of efforts to increase collaboration and communication at Goodale, much has been done to make parents and surrounding community members an integral part of school processes. Many staff members feel the “Snack and Chat” activities have been successful in encouraging productive relationships between staff and parents. One teacher explained, "We do Snack and Chat. We invite parents to come sit with the teacher during lunch and just talk, get to know the teacher's program and the teacher as a person and not just 'The Teacher.' It helps to build comfort levels and to build our credibility."

A parent reflected that the school’s targeted outreach to parents stimulated her to get more involved in her child's education and in the school community:

> A few years ago they had some computers that they loaned for a few weeks at a time to students and their families. They had a workshop where the parent had to attend with the kid to get the computer, so we could learn how to use it. It was wonderful. I learned so much. It helped me decide to buy a computer for our house. Now I've become more involved in the other programs the school offers.

Goodale faculty have also increased the business community's involvement in the school. A few years ago, having built a relationship through the district with a local company, Electronic Data Systems, Batchelor was able to secure enough free paint to paint the walls of the entire school a bright, cheery blue. Parents and school staff then worked together one weekend to paint. Also, at the beginning of this school year the Ameritech Company donated 30 backpacks filled with supplies for needy students. One teacher remembered:

> Right there you see the connection between Ameritech helping us and the children achieving. As soon as the kids got this, their self-esteem rose, they felt equal with the other students who have pencils, packs, and all kinds of nice things. They wanted to write in this nice, new notebook. And even there, that was a lesson because the teachers had them write thank-you notes and they edited them. We saw a lot of good things come out of that donation.

A parent explained that current levels of trust and collaboration between parents and teachers have also come in part as a result of past conflicts. She stated:

> As members of the parent club, we sell school supplies to children and in turn that money is fed back into the school to help out with some things. Well at one point we had some teachers questioning what we did with the money we made. They didn't ask us, we just heard rumors. Then it was brought up at our meetings, and we talked about it. They learned that none of our decisions are made in private, that everyone has opportunity to say what money goes where. We just had to talk about it. Now we have a more coordinated effort.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

Goodale has changed through the creative involvement of a variety of school personnel. The school has been reorganized in ways that involve almost every staff person in improving learning. Also, the school administration now uses more data before making organizational decisions.

Changing the Involvement of Support Staff

School leaders at Goodale have tapped into the talents and dedication of all school community members and empowered them to be active participants in school processes. This often entails redefining or broadening the way job descriptions and roles are envisioned. For example, in regards to the cafeteria coordinator, Batchelor said:

> I know the main job of our lunchroom coordinator is to prepare and serve food. But we also get our extra money based on her lunch counts [counts of children who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and generate Title I dollars], so her monitoring is critical. Therefore her *instructional* role is critical, so we involve her. She got a phone back there [in the cafeteria] so she can call homes and keep counts accurate. Then when she came to me and said, 'That's a nice desk,' she was really making a request. When I realized that what she wanted was a desk and a chair I provided those things, so she can get more done.

Without the extra efforts of the lunchroom coordinator, some of the families who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch might not have submitted the necessary paperwork and the school would have received a smaller share of the district's Title I dollars. The principal recognized the important contribution this staff person made and helped her feel supported and respected, thus increasing her motivation to serve the school well.

Similarly, in regards to the site engineer, Batchelor said, "I don't make any physical plant decisions unless he's here. I don't pretend to know. He brings a perspective that I don't have and he is included in everything." One outcome of this involvement is that the engineer contributes more to school life. Many teachers described (in the words of one), "Our engineer not only keeps the building going physically but he does anything that will enhance the environment for learning. He goes beyond the call of duty. He helps the teachers in all kinds of ways."

Even the role of noon-time aides has been expanded creatively to offer them greater opportunities to support student achievement goals. Originally hired to help with school lunch programs, the noon-time aides became extra "people power" when they began working one-on-one, at the end of their daily shift, with students needing extra help. Indeed, aides were seen in the afternoon working with students one-on-one with math manipulatives, reading books, and using other materials.

Some unexpected things have contributed to increased communication and collaboration in the school community. One outstanding example is the recent purchase of laptop computers. In

addition to helping teachers and students use technology to improve teaching and learning, the laptops have helped increased communication throughout the school. Batchelor said:

> I bought laptops last year for all the teachers, even the engineer and the paraprofessionals. Some teachers were angry because they wanted desk models. I explained that there were two reasons for laptops: One is security. You can store laptops easier. Two, many teachers don't know how to work the computer yet. It's hard to learn at school. But if you take it home, you will learn. Now I've gotten a little extra bonus I didn't expect. People are building relationships among themselves about 'Can you do this on the computer? Did you know it does this?' In addition to building up their knowledge they're beginning to interact more. Now, people who never talked to one another are talking, certified personnel and non-certified personnel, because we all have a lot to learn in this area.

Using Data for Organizational Decisions

The analysis of student assessment data has been key in the planning of instruction at Goodale. For example, in analyzing the last few years of MEAP data, staff noticed that a large percentage of students were scoring lower on certain sections of the test than on others. So, when the school purchased the Sylvan Reading Program (as described above), the program was tailored to focus on those sections where improvement was needed. Said Batchelor:

> We wanted MEAP improvement. But I had to be selective. I have 1,200 kids, and the Sylvan program can only serve 150 at a time. So what do I do? I looked at the test results and one of the things I noticed was the expository and narrative writing section. The kids were doing well on the narrative but not on the expository. So I told the Sylvan staff to work on expository writing skills. Then I gave Sylvan instruction to my fourth graders for a year until they took the test, to get them ready. Then my third graders came in to prepare them for the test when they get to the fourth grade.

In several ways, data on MEAP performance influenced the daily work of teachers. One teacher stated, "Each year we know what we need to work extra on by looking at last year's MEAP results. It's up to us to give the students what they're missing." The analysis of MEAP data also drove the planning of teacher professional development. Another teacher said, "We request professional development activities from the district, and we seek them out on our own, according to areas where we see our kids are having trouble on the MEAP."

Batchelor explained that teacher and student placement decisions were driven by the analysis of assessment data. A few years ago a group of teachers volunteered to "loop" (move with their students from one grade to the next). "We were trying to build a sense of community and continuity, to allow students to settle in and be able to show what they know and increase scores" the principal said. Additionally, "We decided to try passing the classes on intact. Why spend a whole school year to get the kids used to a teacher and a routine and then go and have to do it all

again [the next year]? Teachers this way could also have extended time with certain students to see what kind of special services might be necessary to help them achieve."

Though he felt these efforts were achieving success, Batchelor promised, "I'm going to look at test results when they come in, to see if we think we should continue." It is through such close attention to assessment data and the relationship of the data to practices and programs that Goodale has become increasingly successful in making decisions that boost student achievement.

Conclusions

While many would find it difficult to criticize a school with Goodale's improving achievement record, Goodale school community members are as quick to point out things they need to work on as they are to express pride in all they and their students have accomplished. The most commonly voiced concerns were centered on continuing to improve student scores on standardized achievement tests. This includes the MEAP scores as well as the results on the Metropolitan Achievement Test 7. Also, teachers expressed concern about empowering all children to master their grade level's list of exit skills (a new set of district performance standards now necessary for grade promotion). Through this decade of hard work, dedication, difficulties, and triumphs the factors mentioned above have fueled in parents, teachers, administrators, and other school community members a passion for continuous growth. In the words of one teacher (and echoed by many others), "We've gotten this far, we can go much higher. We're striving for more."

Hawley Environmental Elementary School

Milwaukee Public Schools

Milwaukee, Wis.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 330

Attendance Rate 94%

Grades Served Pre-K-5

Demographics

African American..... 56%

Asian American 2%

Hispanic 12%

Other 2%

White..... 27%

Limited English Proficiency 0%

Mobility..... 15%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 71%

Key Programs: City-wide Environmental School

Hawley Environmental Elementary School
Milwaukee Public Schools
Milwaukee, Wis.

Background

Hawley Environmental School in Milwaukee is a small, rectangular two-story brick building, bordered on three sides by streets and on the fourth by a paved playground with playground equipment dominated by a low wooden bridge. Strips of "prairie" (narrow beds between the sidewalk and the building) must have been a riot of color before a recent freeze turned the many flowers dry and brown. The surrounding neighborhood consists of well-kept, two-story brick and frame houses typical of the middle-class areas of Milwaukee. The majority of the 330 students who attend Hawley ride buses from all parts of the city. Under Milwaukee's School Choice Program, their parents had the opportunity to indicate their first, second, and third choice of district schools and have their child's name entered into a lottery to determine which of those schools they could attend.

The entrance to the school is guarded by a security system that requires visitors to push a button and identify themselves. The drab brown exterior of the building, the frozen flower beds, and the concrete sidewalks and streets are in sharp contrast to the inside of the building. Brightly colored exuberant flowers, drawn and painted by children in the style of Georgia O'Keefe, hang in the halls. Bright child-made drawings fired on tiles surround the door to the school office. Student work and colorful murals and maps grace every available vertical surface. It is only on closer examination that the age of the building is revealed. Highly polished wooden stairs are worn by the footsteps of thousands of children. On the walls of the stair landings are hung framed poster-sized prints of Van Gogh, Renoir, Monet, and O'Keefe. Children and adults move purposefully between rooms and the buzz of children learning can be heard from the open classroom doors.

A greenhouse has been added to the outside wall of one of the classrooms designated as the Environmental Education Resource Room. Although a cool wind was blowing outside and children were wearing their coats as they played on the playground, the greenhouse was blooming with flowers and plants. Potting soil and equipment were ready to begin growing the seeds for transplanting into the prairie strips next spring.

Population Served

Among the 330 students at Hawley, 56 percent are African American, two percent are Asian American, 12 percent are Hispanic, 27 percent are white, and two percent are from other racial or ethnic groups. Seventy-one percent of the students come from families that meet free or reduced-price lunch criteria. The students come from homes in many Milwaukee neighborhoods that are challenged by poverty. Some of the students ride a bus for as long as two hours to

and from school. Because it is not a neighborhood, but a city-wide school (like 19 other Milwaukee public schools), it is especially difficult for parents of children from the many neighborhoods in the city to be present in the school on a daily or a weekly basis.

Academic Improvement

In 1998, student achievement at Hawley exceeded the state average on both state tests and nationally-normed assessments. In addition, 100 percent of students in third grade passed the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test in 1998 (See Table 10) compared with only 25 percent passing throughout the Milwaukee Public Schools. Fifth-grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills (a nationally-normed achievement test) math scores have shown steady upward movement for the past 10 years, now with 89 percent scoring at or above the national average. Fourth and fifth-grade scores on the state writing assessment were near 100 percent passing until the assessment was changed in 1995, and are now hovering near the state average as teachers align curriculum and instruction to the new assessment. These results were in dramatic contrast to the level of achievement when Robert Helminiak became the principal at Hawley in 1989. The use of different standards and assessments make comparisons difficult; however, teachers report that student achievement was low and discipline problems were substantial.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction reported that in 1997-98, the reading performance of students at Hawley Environmental School exceeded all other schools in Wisconsin with similar levels of poverty. In fact, the school's performance in reading exceeded the statewide average. The school's performance in mathematics was similarly impressive. (See Table 11)

Table 10: Percent Proficient on Wisconsin Reading Comp. Test at Hawley Environmental School

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Hawley Environmental School	94%	98%	96%	94%	100%

Table 11: Hawley Environmental School Students at or Above Proficiency Level in Reading and Math

	Percent at or above Proficient Level in Reading*	Percent at or above Proficient Level in Mathematics*
Hawley Environmental School	83	48
Wisconsin. Schools w/75-100% poverty	38	15
All Wisconsin Schools	69	52

* Based on CTB Terra Nova Multiple Assessments and Wisconsin proficiency standards

Starting Points

Robert Helminiak, the current principal, told of his first visit to the school after he was appointed principal nine years ago in 1989. The gym was idle outside of regular physical education activities. Children were not allowed to use the mini park on the playground because they were jumping off the low wooden bridge, risking injury to themselves or others.

There were frequent complaints from bus drivers about the behavior of students on the buses. Children entered the school after long bus rides that may have been chaotic and possibly even dangerous. Teachers then had to try to restore order and teach children who were still caught up in the incidents that had occurred on the bus coming to school.

One of Helminiak's first actions as principal was to ask the teachers to list three things they liked about the school and three things that needed improvement. The teachers responded that they liked the environmental studies, the smallness of the school, and the location of the school. Several of the teachers listed "discipline, discipline, discipline" as the areas needing improvement. Also listed by others was the "atrocious look of the school." Because so many teachers were concerned about student discipline, Helminiak asked for volunteers to serve with him on a Discipline Committee. The committee developed some simple guidelines that, at first, were top-heavy with adult control. Initially, Helminiak took responsibility for making the discipline plan work; however, as described in the next section, roles changed with time.

A School Beautification Committee also began work at the same time as the Discipline Committee. While the committee had the support of Helminiak, he was clear about his priorities. He said, "You're not going to like what I say, but I'm more concerned with what's going on with the kids. If you can do something about this building to make it look more attractive, I can talk with the engineers, I can talk with the custodians and get them to clean this building up." The Beautification Committee had many discussions, but the school chose to invest their resources in ways that would directly affect student achievement. Nevertheless, the building is neat and clean, with flower beds all around the outside, fresh white paint, and colorful murals and maps.

Changing the School Climate

The school staff at Hawley worked well together as a professional team focused clearly on improving student achievement. This culture has evolved during the past 10 years. Helminiak explained that when he arrived, a fourth of the teachers had just retired. Helminiak seized this opportunity to start anew and the entire staff started working toward becoming a cohesive unit that functioned with the clear purpose of making Hawley a successful school. This was not a quick and easy process. Helminiak related that at first many teachers did not feel comfortable letting their opinions be heard, but he expressed to them his philosophy, "No one person knows all the answers." He demonstrated that he valued everyone's ideas and expertise.

Helminiak's easy-going personality inspired confidence in his staff and students that the thorniest problems could be corrected through dedication and collaboration around the issue. In

this way he encouraged the staff to bring out ideas and take initiative for their implementation. School personnel have responded positively.

For instance, five years ago, when a full-time position became a possibility for the part-time reading resource teacher, Helminiak challenged the reading teacher to take the initiative. "I told him, 'If you want to become full-time, it's not up to me, it's up to all of us. It's a committee decision. You have to sell yourself. What are you going to do to show them that this school will not be successful if you're not here full-time?' He [the reading teacher] accepted the challenge."

Helminiak described his leadership style in a colorful manner:

> I will not succumb to the goose theory of taking care of programs. The goose theory is that you come in with an idea, you poop it out on my desk, you fluff your feathers, and you walk out, and you leave me there to carry it out. I don't do that — not anymore. I can't. I just can't. So if a person comes in with an idea, I say, "How are you going to solve that? What are you going to do to market it? What are you going to do to get support from other people? Are there other people already that support this idea? How come they're not here with you? Let's talk about that. What can we do?"

One of the ways in which Helminiak helped staff focus on student achievement was by taking responsibility for student discipline. As mentioned above, the Discipline Committee established guidelines that were top-heavy with control from the principal. When the guidelines were in place, Helminiak said to the teachers, "If you want me to do this, I will do it, because I want you to teach." He explained that he ended up becoming a very gruff individual, so he began the process of helping students learn to follow the simple guidelines that had been collaboratively developed.

At the same time the principal was helping children learn the new behavior guidelines, he was also developing an intramural program for fourth and fifth graders that takes place before lunch every day. This program became a venue for developing leadership and teamwork among the oldest students in the school, as well as a privilege that they had to give up as a consequence of disruptive classroom behavior. Helminiak related:

> We were able to reach the fourth and fifth graders who are the leaders in this school. And the kids found out they didn't have to be streetwise to be here. It wasn't necessary. They could be themselves. They found that this was truly a safe place even though they might be coming from one of the toughest neighborhoods in the city. They didn't have to act that way here. It was really comfortable for them.

The discipline plan initiated nine years ago has evolved into a much different form of student self-responsibility over the years, made possible by the relationships that have developed among the students, and between students and staff. Helminiak pointed out, "That strict discipline only works so long, then the kids say, 'I've had enough.'" Six years ago Hawley took advantage of a

program, "Prevention is Kid Stuff," offered by the Milwaukee Drug and Alcohol Council which provided a social worker to the school for one year. Then Hawley used their own funds to keep her another half year. Among other activities, the social worker engaged the children in developing 10 simple school rules that are still part of the school culture. Now each year the teachers meet with the students to update and create a sense of ownership of the rules. Closely associated with the student rules is a program of peer mediation that the current social worker has continued. One of the members of the school steering committee said:

> I think we're looking at kids who are coming from some really tough, tough neighborhoods and some very dysfunctional [homes]. These kids come here and know that this is their safe haven. It's more than just a school; it is their family. They get support from the reading resource teacher, the social worker, from paraprofessionals, through peer mediation, and through their teacher. There's always a support system built for these kids.

Changing Academic Instruction

Although Hawley had been identified as an environmental school for some time before Helminiak arrived, the curriculum had not reflected a consistent focus on the environment. Helminiak had applied for a transfer from another Milwaukee elementary school to Hawley, citing his background and interest in wildlife preservation. Prior to Helminiak's arrival at Hawley, new teachers were assigned to the school based on a seniority system, with no requirement for expertise in science or environmental studies. The school staff, led by the principal, set about incorporating environmental studies into the curriculum, but there was concern about how to do that. As Helminiak said:

> So I said, 'We need to be patient. Make it a mind set. You can involve environmental issues with everything you're teaching. We can write a curriculum that is user-friendly to you and that will help you.' We broke it into the four units of study. But rather than making it so involved, we just list the instructional activities that complement the objective and where we can find the resources. This way, we have a skeletal structure and which page in the science text complements it, and so on. So we did that for each grade level.

Later, the Milwaukee school district required that curriculum be integrated with the School-to-Work Program. All of the staff members worked on the plan to integrate environmental education with School-to-Work. Discussing this adjustment to their plans, Helminiak said, "If we already have our focus on environmental studies, what types of workforce complements that? So we lean more toward city government, environmental engineers, engineers of all types, and different horticulturists…. We started expanding our vision into the arena of environmental careers."

Hawley has incorporated their focus on the environment and environmental careers into an educational plan to address student achievement. The current educational plan is constantly reviewed and revised. According to a member of the campus steering committee:

> On certain staff planning days we sit down with the staff and go over it line by line. We used to do an awful lot more when we were creating the plan. We would break the staff into smaller groups and each one of us [steering committee members] would take a group and discuss each of those issues and develop the plan. But now, we're looking at lines and we're saying, 'Yes we do that. No, we don't do that. Why aren't we doing that? Does this still belong in there? Is it a valid statement to have in our plan?'

The process of incorporating environmental education into the curriculum, then expanding that into environmental careers, then including these activities into an educational plan for student achievement on state and district assessments, has served to strongly focus the attention of the whole school staff on teaching and learning. A Milwaukee Public Schools central office administrator, referring to the success at Hawley, observed:

> I happen to believe that most schools that excel have a very strong focus. And in the ones that don't, people spend their time fighting over what they should be doing, whether it's environmental education, or the arts, or Montessori, or language immersion, or whatever. Schools that excel have a culture that says, 'This is what we do.' They don't spend a lot of time arguing over what they're going to do. They spend their time instead trying to improve their craft.

The staff at Hawley has developed systems of support to ensure that students who come to the school lacking skills or who are struggling to master the curriculum get the assistance they need. A Comprehensive Support Team (CST) -- consisting of the principal, reading resource teacher, social worker, school psychologist, speech therapist, and two classroom teachers -- meets with the parents and the referring teacher to determine how to support a referred child's learning. The team discusses how to support the classroom teacher in addressing the child's educational needs. According to Helminiak, the key component is having regular education teachers on the team. The school social worker pointed out that support is provided before the child is referred.

> But you know, in a school like Hawley, there are a lot of interventions normally in place before the kid comes to the CST. They work one-on-one with volunteers or paraprofessionals in small groups. We have a reading resource teacher. Sometimes they have been to see the psychologist or me. So there are a lot of things tried before a kid comes to CST. Then there is always a review date. We come back together to see how these interventions have progressed.

All of the staff interviewed acknowledged the support provided by the reading resource teacher, including small group instruction, assistance with data analysis and interpretation, and support as teachers implement a new reading series. A third-grade teacher said:

> We had some other reading resource teachers who never mentioned it [ideas about improving classroom reading instruction] to us. But with the reading resource teacher we have now, we talk more, get together more, and talk about strategies and things we can do to improve achievement.

The teachers also discussed the importance of the support they received from paraprofessionals and teacher aides who were hired in response to teacher's request for classroom help. The main purpose has been to give the teachers the extra help that they need in the classroom so they can fully dedicate themselves to student learning. Helminiak said:

> We have one classroom that is always a four-five split [a class composed of both fourth and fifth-grade students.] We couldn't eliminate the split class. So, we decided to get a paraprofessional to work with and help that teacher, because there are such varied learning styles. That worked out really well.

It is important to point out that according to a central district administrator, Hawley does not have nearly as many educational assistants as most Milwaukee Public Schools. They have focused on carefully selecting individuals who are well qualified, and who could fit in with the school's culture of teamwork and focus on student achievement.

Hawley has developed an extended-time program to address student needs. The Hawley After-School Math Club for fourth and fifth-grade students was organized because of the low achievement of some students. The group meets weekly, with the busing schedule adjusted to allow this extra time at school. The school social worker is an integral part of the club. He said:

> As a social worker… it is nice to know that I can have some impact upon academics. Not only do I do the after school math block, [but] when kids are in need of homework help, I am the liaison between the school, the home, and the community, finding programs where they can [get help] in their immediate neighborhood. He [Helminiak] knew that it was an interest of mine, and he said, 'Hey, why don't you try something in the after school program?' A lot of principals won't allow you to do something different, so this is unique.

The extended-day program is not only a Hawley initiative, but also a part of a district-wide effort to increase the time students spend learning. Alan Brown, the Milwaukee Public Schools superintendent, explained, "One of the things we are working on is extended school day programs. We think that's really important and we are out raising the dollars through our foundation and through federal dollars to put more extended school day programs in place."

Similarly, the district is attempting to increase the time students spend learning by providing summer school. The superintendent stated:

> We've brought summer school back. They dropped summer school for financial reasons. Last year, we had a remedial summer school program for the first time in about six or seven years. The program has really made a difference in the district. People are already looking forward to it next year

> because we are going to add enrichment programs. Our funding has not improved, but we just renewed that commitment and restructured the budget to find the money.

Data-Driven Instruction

By working together to integrate the curriculum and develop the educational plan, the staff at Hawley became a team of professionals who were confident in their ability to bring students to high levels of academic achievement. This confidence grew as the principal and steering committee continued to encourage innovative thinking, facilitate collaboration among the staff, and ensure that the staff was keeping abreast of current educational research and teaching methods. At the same time, the Milwaukee school district has provided time for professional development through an optional system they call "banking," where students come to school 10 minutes earlier on a daily basis and the extra time is "banked" to provide five professional development days per year. A central office administrator elaborated, "If you're going to do any of these things that really improve quality of instruction, you can't do it after school or on the weekends."

Hawley opted to participate in this system, and used the "banked" time for planning and professional development, in addition to their use of after-school times and some Saturdays. A member of the Hawley steering committee took responsibility for conducting an annual comprehensive needs assessment for professional development. The Milwaukee Public Schools provided some professional development activities that responded to identified needs. Teachers could either earn in-service credit that would result in a move up the pay scale or apply for graduate credit from one of the local universities. However, as related by the central office administrator:

> They [Hawley staff] have really done a lot of professional development themselves. They bring people from other schools, they use the talents of their own people, and he [Helminiak] has brought in some people from the Department of Natural Resources, and different outside groups that are into environmental education. Heavily, they've used their own and other teachers.

As the Hawley staff participated in professional development, they learned about the national shift to the use of standards to drive instruction and assessments to measure the attainment of those standards. A member of the steering committee said:

> We had been doing the third-grade state reading test for Wisconsin and it became very evident that children had to have specific skills if they were going to succeed at that test. The Milwaukee school district contracted with a group to assure that the curriculum being taught in classrooms was aligned with state assessments. I think we were just ahead of the game because we took a look at where we were and would always examine the results of our tests. We were asking, 'Where are we strong, and why? Where are we weak, and why?' We

> started to look and talk with staff and say, 'What can you do in your room? Or, how can first grade support this [concept]?'

The state assessments required adjustments to the environmental curriculum, also. The environmental education instructor pointed out:

> When I started four years ago, we were focused on an environmental education curriculum that was broad and not necessarily concept-driven. Once we started getting tested for many of these concepts, we took a look at what we were doing in the school. We said, 'Hey, in order to do these environmental projects, such as talking about land and wetlands and going camping, the kids really need to know the basics of science, including physical science, earth science, and especially the biological sciences we stress here.

The staff also took responsibility for assuring that students were able to demonstrate their knowledge on different types of assessments. The Wisconsin science assessment is a performance-based test, requiring students to apply science concepts to real problems. As related by the environmental education instructor:

> Last year during a bank day [one of the professional development days] we actually had the teachers take the [fifth-grade] science assessment. It was so different from what we were used to. It wasn't multiple choice, fill in the blank, or matching. There was a prompt at the beginning, and they had to walk through either the whole experiment or part of the experiment. Because I had helped score these, I knew what they were looking for. It was really hard to explain to the teachers. But once all the teachers took a look at the test the fifth graders had to take, everybody came up with their own ideas, such as, 'Well, maybe I could do graphing in first grade.'

Indeed, examples of this graphing were seen posted in the hallways outside the first-grade classrooms.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

In the past, Hawley had used their Chapter 1 [now Title I] federal education funds to provide pull-out remedial programs for reading and math. Then for a two-year period, Hawley received no Chapter I funding. In 1994 the Milwaukee school district began allocating the federal Title I funds to more of the district schools, and Hawley became a Title I schoolwide program. The Hawley staff took advantage of the increased flexibility that federal regulations granted to schoolwide programs and used their Title I funds to improve the whole school, incorporating their Title I plans in their educational plan for the whole school. A year earlier, the district had "decentralized," giving schools more authority over their budgets. Helminiak discussed decentralization as one of the key influences upon the school's success. He said:

> …[Decentralization is] allowing us to have a little bit more say about what goes on in our building. We don't have enough yet, but decentralization is allowing us to be able to use the people in our building to develop our own budget. If it weren't for that, we would have never gotten the reading resource teacher in here full time. He was only half time our first three years. That was a very major issue.… Currently, the reading teacher is also the part-time librarian and part-time Title I coordinator. Decentralization allowed for that flexibility in the use of resources.

Alan Brown, the district superintendent, pointed out that all schools had not responded to decentralization as constructively as Hawley:

> Some schools elected to hire more security, not realizing that the better performing your children are, the more well-behaved they will be. Some schools just completely missed the boat on that and that's where we are backing them up a little bit and saying, "You've got it all wrong." So Hawley was one of them who saw the big picture and the long term and hired a reading resource person.

The staff at Hawley has also chosen to combine their Title I federal education funds with local funds to incorporate technology into classroom instruction. There was no room in the building for a computer lab, so the school is in the process of installing computers in every classroom and providing the necessary professional development for teachers to integrate technology into their curriculum and instruction. A third-grade teacher, who has taught at Hawley for 21 years, said:

> One thing I can say about my principal, he does not mind spending money for the kids to support good achievement. When they mentioned computers in the classroom, he was all for it. Now we have them in third, fourth, and fifth grade. You don't see that in a lot of schools. Teachers here were willing to do what was necessary to become computer literate, too. We are getting ready to put the Internet in all of our classrooms, too. We had to take an Internet class.

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

With such a large percentage of students riding buses from all over the city of Milwaukee to attend Hawley, there are challenges to parent involvement that neighborhood schools don't face. Hawley incorporated their own philosophy of parent involvement into their program. As recalled by one of the Steering Committee members, "We always say, 'you don't have to be here to be supportive; all you have to do is support the things that we try to do here.' It's really amazing. I can't begin to tell you how many times—I'd say 95 percent of the time—there's a problem, the parent will tell me, 'Thank you. Thank you for telling me about this.'"

This kind of relationship with parents does not happen accidentally, however. The staff and the Parent Council, worked as a team to bring parents together to develop this supportive relationship and to get to know each other. To improve attendance at parent meetings, they initiated the "Hawley Family Nights." As recalled by one of the Steering Committee members:

> The biggest problem we had was not being able to have parents here. They were trying to get some supper, then get here in time for the meeting, and so they just didn't make it. So we said, 'Let's just eliminate that part by feeding everybody first.' We took it out of Title I money. What happens is, we meet, we eat, kids get a chance to go outside or to the gym and watch a quality movie and the parents have a chance to share. We ask them, 'This is what is happening at our school. What do you think? What do you want?' If we can't solve a problem or an issue that a parent might bring up at those meetings, they can take it to our council. They are invited to our council meetings to see if we can get their idea implemented.

An aide who started her association with Hawley nine years ago, after working as a parent volunteer in another school, described a parent involvement project that she produced annually:

> My project every year is an all-school skating party. The school sponsors everyone at a roller-skating rink and we have great family participation. We'd have upwards of 300 people come, which is a really nice turnout. It shows the grownups that you can make time to spend with your kids and not have it be painful.… Sometimes being a parent walking into a school can be really intimidating, and to put the parents and the staff together in that sort of environment helps to break down those feelings really fast. When you're falling down in that roller rink side by side, there are no walls at the end of that evening.

In order to assure parent participation in schools and school policy decisions, the Milwaukee School District now requires that schools have a Parent Council. At Hawley the transition from Parent-Teachers Association, to Parent Advisory Council, and then to Parent Council, as it is now called, has been a smooth one. Describing that transition, a parent said:

> One of the main things that the PTA did was fund-raisers. Certainly that's still something that we're involved with as a council, but it is much more than that. We're taking a look at the hard issues for parents and some of the hard issues for kids. The question has come up about uniforms. Do we want a uniform policy here? How do we involve parents and kids to get feedback for that? One of the things that the district said it wants to do is reward schools that are successful by allowing them to expand. That's one thing that we'd like to do, but there's no room, you can see. How do we communicate with the administration to say, 'We're not going to stop pushing for expansion… because we think it is something that's good for our kids?'

The parent who chaired the Parent Council said:

> Those are some of the things that we are looking at doing, and part of it has to be redefining how we want to work. What kind of relationship do we want to have with other parents, from other schools as well as from here? We have about 50 parents that voted and we have 300 families. How do we make sure that parents see that the council really is designed to reflect not just what I think or what somebody else thinks, but what direction the parents want to go?

Conclusions

Every staff member and parent interviewed mentioned that Hawley is a city-wide school and that children come to the school in the early grades and stay there through fifth grade. Regardless of where a family moves within the district, busing is still available to bring them to Hawley. The district's commitment to busing Milwaukee students to a city-wide school requires considerable resources. The staff emphasized that this stability has a lot to do with the success of the school. The staff members know the students well; they know their students' older brothers and sisters and they know their families. Teachers have many opportunities to talk with each other about learning styles of students, what interventions have been tried, and what next steps to take with students who are struggling. Parents have at least taken the steps to select Hawley as one of three choices for their child, representing an investment in a partnership with the school in their child's education.

Lora B. Peck Elementary School

Houston Independent School District

Houston, Texas

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 325

Attendance Rate 96%

Grades Served Pre-K-5

Demographics

African American..... 79%

Asian American 0%

Hispanic 18%

Other 1%

White..... 2%

Limited English Proficiency 18%

Mobility..... 25%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 94%

Key Programs: Project GRAD: Success for All, Move-it Math, Consistency Management Discipline Plan, Communities in Schools, and Family Support Team, Head Start, Bilingual Program (pre-kindergarten through fifth grade), Voyager After-School Program, Project Reconnect Parent Center, Home-School Connection

Lora B. Peck Elementary School
Houston Independent School District
Houston, Texas

Background

A manicured lawn, a colorful array of fall flowers encircling the base of every tree, and brightly painted red doors greet visitors to Lora B. Peck Elementary in the southeast area of the Houston Independent School District. A warm and welcoming foyer adorned with soft, off-white leather sofas, fluffy pillows, end tables, green plants, collector's items, and various trinkets immediately entice guests to find refuge in one of the sitting areas lining the main entry. One cannot help noticing the greetings, smiles, and hugs exchanged between the principal, staff, students, and parents who are hurriedly and purposefully moving about.

Visitors entering the Peck campus are immediately engrossed in the level of excitement and enthusiasm throughout the school. It is a school in which the staff, students, and school community work together and take pride in the school's appearance. Peck is orderly, clean, and well maintained. The school maintains a surprisingly quiet atmosphere. As a general school rule, the children, wearing uniforms of red shirts and blue pants, walk to their next destination with crossed arms and closed mouths. As there are no indoor wings or hallways, the classroom doors open to outside courtyard areas. Some classrooms have the walls covered with lessons, rules, and schedules; all are vibrant and print rich with numerous displays of student work. In all classrooms, at every grade level, there is posted a "classroom managers" plan. One kindergarten class has a schedule that accounts for every minute of the day. The schedule contains more than six reading-related activities such as phonemic awareness, a language program, and letter investigation.

Glass cases display pictures of many parents and school partners in attendance at PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) meetings and more than 200 volunteers working during the "Peck Beautification Day" activities. The "Wall of Fame," a collection of the school's honors and achievements, contains more than 15 trophies and 9 medals, all earned since 1996. Once vibrant with red, white, and blue school colors, a large bulletin board, now noticeably old and faded displays the word "Teamwork" to symbolize the mission of the staff to reach 100 percent collaboration. Although the staff acknowledges that the bulletin board has been in place for several years, they are unanimous in their decision that the board will remain until *all* the staff agree, without hesitation, that the goal has been reached. "TAASmometers," attractively displayed on the cafeteria walls, generate competitive discussions among the students during lunch as to the percentages of students at each grade level who passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The entire school is neat and free of clutter, an indication of the strong sense of pride and personal ownership that resonates from everyone involved. The multitude of multicolored walls and doors donned with slogans of celebration and aspirations, resoundingly proclaim that Peck is a school bound for long-term success.

Population Served

Peck Elementary School serves a population of 325 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. In 1998, the student population included an enrollment that was 79 percent African American, 18 percent Hispanic, 2 percent white and 1 percent from other racial or ethnic groups. Ninety-four percent of the students participated in the free or reduced-price lunch program.

Academic Improvement

Between 1995 and 1998, Peck made a dramatic transformation from a school with the state's lowest accreditation rating (low-performing) to one with the highest (exemplary). The low-performing rating was earned because only 15 percent of Peck students passed the writing section of TAAS and only 30.3 percent passed the mathematics section. None of the Hispanic students and fewer than one in five African American students passed the writing assessment. Although performance in reading was better, fewer than half of Peck students passed the reading test.

In contrast, in 1998, the exemplary rating was earned because at least 90 percent of all students passed the reading, writing, and mathematics sections of the TAAS. Moreover, at least 90 percent of the African American, Hispanic, white, and economically disadvantaged students passed each section of the TAAS. (This means that 90 percent of each population group passed each test. It does not mean that 90 percent of each population group passed all three sections of the test). Only 15 percent of all schools in Texas received the exemplary rating in 1998. The rate of improvement at Peck has exceeded the improvement throughout the district and throughout Texas. (See Table 12.)

Table 12: Percentage of Peck Elementary Students Passing All Three Sections of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Campus Chg: 94-98	District Chg: 94-98	State Chg: 94-98
All Students	23.4	23.3	34.8	55.6	90.6	67.2	25.8	22.1
African American	23.0	26.6	37.0	56.9	93.1	70.1	31.0	29.3
Hispanic	26.3	8.0	23.1	37.5	----	----	26.9	27.0
White	----	----	0.0	100.0	----	----	15.0	18.5

Starting Points:
Building a Team, Creating a Family

Peck has not always enjoyed an inviting atmosphere. Less than four years ago, riddled with discord and conflict among parents, teachers, and staff, the school climate was not conducive to student achievement. District administrators described Peck in 1994 as a school that was dreary and academically uninspiring. Students were seen as undisciplined, disrespectful, and unmotivated. The lack of clearly defined disciplinary procedures was a source of parent complaints to campus and district administrators. One Houston School District board member said:

> It seemed obvious to parents and outsiders that the staff had serious problems controlling the behavior of the students. Teachers were ill at ease and not able to manage children, which sabotaged their ability to deliver instructional programs. There was fighting in the classrooms and hallways, resulting in students being removed from classroom instruction and sent to the office for disciplinary measures. Staff and student morale was low. No one felt pride in their work.

Teachers recalled that the classrooms were uninviting and void of excitement. Classrooms rarely displayed colorful bulletin boards and student work was seldom posted. Classroom activities most commonly included non-directed drill and worksheets. Students were not learning. The staff lacked a clear understanding of the instructional goals expected by the district and the state or the strategies that might be implemented to improve student performance. They felt a lack of instructional leadership or support. Teachers were left alone in their classrooms to develop their own instructional plan. An eight-year teacher at Peck recalled:

> I felt that every teacher was doing whatever he or she wanted to do. No one was monitored, nor were there any checks to see that the objectives were being taught. I never felt the students were being motivated the way they should have been. We had nothing unusual going on in the classrooms unless individual teachers had taken it upon themselves to make a difference.

In 1994, the involvement of parents at Peck was limited and wrought with conflict. Parent visits to the school were minimal. Frequent complaints from parents focused on what their children were learning, the extent to which teachers lacked control in the classroom, and the poor manner in which their children were being treated. Protests often went unsolved, which incited frustrated parents to resolve their concerns by confronting the teachers in the classroom, often during instruction and in front of the students. Parents did not feel welcome and were not encouraged to participate in activities at the school.

Relationships with community business partners resulted most often, in one-way involvement. One business partner described what it was like to mentor students in 1994:

> Mentors would arrive at the school eager to tutor students or to provide whatever services were needed, but find the staff unprepared and appearing to

> be somewhat irritated by the inconvenience of organizing packets of student work. You could sense that something wasn't right.

The changes at Peck started in the office of the general superintendent of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), Rod Paige. He set the course by determining that Peck and other low-performing schools in Houston would be expected to improve. He also determined that if Peck was to meet high expectations, it would require excellent instructional leadership.

Superintendent Paige began the process of changing campus leadership by organizing administrative teams assigned to look closely at all HISD schools, with an emphasis on schools that had received a low-performing rating. These teams visited low-performing schools, conducted extensive assessments of each school, and engaged in discussions of their observations. The results provided a better understanding of the challenges affecting the schools and the types of district support that would be necessary to ensure successful change. Additionally, the teams determined the leadership qualities and skills crucial to ensuring improvement at each of the low-performing schools. They were careful to match principals with the communities they would serve. As a result of this process, LaWanna Goodwin, who had been the principal at Anderson Elementary in Houston, was appointed to serve as principal at Peck. She brought to this position a reputation as a proven instructional leader, experience in working in minority communities, and the ability to work with a diverse group of parents.

In 1995, when Goodwin arrived as the new principal at Peck she explained that her day began each morning by greeting a line of angry, complaining parents. Her most difficult challenges involved the negative attitudes that were exhibited by the staff toward students, parents, visitors, and each other. Goodwin observed that parents and visitors were often ignored or spoken to in an abrupt, non-friendly manner by the office staff. Teachers would pass each other and not speak or smile. It was difficult to know where to start. Goodwin said, "I felt the pressure to race to Peck every morning to make sure nothing drastic happened!"

Goodwin explained that when she first came to Peck, teamwork was virtually non-existent. There were various opposing factions at the school. Most noticeably, there were two separate, racially divided parent-teacher organizations (PTOs). Both had been organized as a result of the opposing agendas of the African American and Hispanic parents. To move toward a more cohesive school environment, Goodwin dismantled both parent organizations instead of endorsing one or the other. This resulted in the development of a new group, the Peck Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). The new president of the PTA was not involved with either of the previous PTOs. This new alliance provided opportunities for Goodwin to interact positively with parents and engage parents in creating constructive changes at Peck.

Goodwin's efforts to create a spirit of teamwork were not universally appreciated. In fact, many of her decisions were met with opposition. Subsequent to the disbanding of the parent-teacher organizations, a group of parents appeared before the school district's board of trustees and presented petitions signed by 200 parents demanding Goodwin's removal from Peck. The conflict gained city-wide attention when the events leading to the signed petitions were highlighted in a *Houston Chronicle* article entitled, "*Group of parents ask HISD* [the Houston

Independent School District] *to remove Peck principal."* Goodwin was surprised by the action but planned to take the criticism constructively. She said:

> I accepted it in a positive way. I looked at the criticism in terms of areas that we needed to concentrate on this year…. Any time change comes to a school, disagreements can arise. I just feel when parents learn that I have the kid's best interest at heart; everything is going to be fine…. People are resistant to change because of the unknown. Once the people know you and know where your interests lie and where your heart is, you usually don't have any problems….

The support of the district administration was crucial during this ordeal. The South Central Area District Superintendent [one of 12 in the district] helped parents know that Goodwin was not only aware of their concerns, but also that she had implemented strategies to alleviate them. He explained that their concerns regarding communication had been incorporated into Peck's current campus improvement plan. He shared data to help parents see that the school was improving. He said, "Peck's scores on the TAAS have risen by double digits in the last year, from a school that was rated by the state as low-performing to one that is now rated acceptable." When some parents complained about the practice of having children fold their arms as they walk between classrooms, district administrators pointed out the reduction in the number of altercations at the school and attributed the reduction to the new policy. The support of district leaders helped teachers and parents see that Goodwin's leadership was getting good results. Also, the strong support of district administrators helped parents and teachers accept that Goodwin was not going to be removed.

Before, during, and after parents presented the petition, teamwork was the foundation of the plan to improve Peck Elementary. In working with parents, teachers, and the community, Goodwin continuously reminded everyone that their goals could not be achieved if they worked in isolation or in opposition to each other. As disagreements occurred, she tried to remind the staff that they could have differences of opinion, yet still respect each other.

By focusing on teamwork, Goodwin gave everyone a sense of responsibility for improving the school. Everyone had an important way of contributing to the school's success; thus, everyone could feel ownership in the school's improvement. Teamwork improved as the teachers and principal did many things to help each other feel valued and appreciated. For instance, one teacher talked about the importance of little things done to celebrate birthdays of staff members. She said, "When anyone has a birthday, we meet in one of the rooms and we sing and share birthday cake. It makes everybody feel good. Things like that that make everybody feel special."

Goodwin, noted, "When I first came, I saw Peck more as their school. I now see Peck more as our school. I feel that everybody here, professional and non-professional staff members see it as our school. We worked hard to make everyone feel that he or she has value. Everybody has to treat everybody with the same dignity and respect. We just work together now. We're a family."

Teachers often described the Peck community as a family. Many of the teachers have remained at Peck for more than ten years, so they interact not only on a professional level but on a personal one as well. The Peck teachers also participated in a project called Project Reach. As a faculty, they go to a local church and provide outreach services to the community. A new teacher to the school described the collegial atmosphere as the key to his success this year:

> I work very closely with the teachers and they help me. Everyone has the same commitment to teach kids. Everybody is focused on the same goals. I feel supported by the principal and the teachers. I am always thinking about the ways that I can go an extra mile. Everybody here is a working team. It feels good. I look forward to coming to school each day.

In contrasting how Peck was the year she came, Goodwin acknowledged that the quantity and quality of teamwork had improved substantially. However, she also believed that the school had not yet mastered the goal of teamwork. She still perceived opportunities to improve teamwork; yet, she was pleased with the family that Peck had become. She stated, "We worked hard to make everyone feel that he or she has a lot of self-worth. No matter what job you do on campus, if there wasn't a need for it, it wouldn't be here. Everybody has to treat everybody with the same dignity and respect."

Changing the School Climate

Peck underwent many changes in the weeks and months following the school's designation as a low-performing school in 1995. As described above, many of those changes related to the manner in which adults interacted with each other. Creating a team, however, did not occur through a few simple steps. It involved many deliberate efforts to build trust among all participants in the school community. It required skillful efforts to elevate the discussion beyond individual concerns in a way that clearly put children first. Also, it required the establishment of a higher level of expectation for the behavior of students.

Building Trust

Goodwin acknowledged that there was little trust when she first came to Peck. Teachers did not trust her and she did not always trust them. To the principal, it felt like she was in one camp and everyone else was in another. She determined that her job was to bridge the gap. She spent a lot of time observing staff and visiting classrooms. She looked for strengths as well as weaknesses. She asked teachers to share their concerns. She tried to determine which were the best placements for teachers in consideration of their personality, knowledge, and experience. She asked questions. She listened to their goals, and what she called, "the desires of their heart." She conveyed in her discussions with everyone, that their help and expertise was needed. In addition, she encouraged, supported, and provided opportunities for each staff member to feel successful.

Goodwin stated that she does not promise anything she cannot deliver. She believed her honesty helped build her credibility. She openly shared information with teachers and parents in a way

that helped them understand key issues in the school. Parent grade-level meetings were used to share instructional information with the parents and the Peck staff used transparencies, newsletters, flyers, and discussions to share the math and reading objectives with the parents.

With honesty and credibility, Goodwin set out to influence attitudes. She spent time visiting classrooms and programs, not only to identify areas of need, but also areas of strength. Goodwin gave many pats on the back as she acknowledged the good work of teachers, students, and other school staff. She spent time writing notes, commenting on positive efforts, and letting people know that they were appreciated for their contributions. Although the relationships among teachers, parents, and principal were riddled with conflict and mistrust, after awhile the listening, consistency, honesty, and sincerity helped establish trust.

Putting Children First

As principal at Peck, Goodwin responded to the discord, distrust, and anxiety at the school by encouraging all staff at the school to put students first regardless of any disagreements that might occur. She encouraged all staff to consider the needs of the students foremost in any decisions. When conflicts emerged, she reminded teachers, support staff, and parents that their focus should be on doing what was best for the students at Peck.

The commitment to put students first was modeled repeatedly by Goodwin through many administrative decisions. For instance, one of her early decisions was to reorganize the placement of classrooms so that Head Start classes (serving preschool-age children) were located in the main wing of the building, in response to concerns about their safety .

Every major decision and many minor decisions were made based on the needs of the students at Peck. Changes in the organization of programs, school procedures, and even the school schedule were made to adapt better to the needs of children. For example, staff observed that students were frequently late to school and often missed the opportunity to eat breakfast provided by the school. In response, Goodwin initiated “Peck time,” which meant that the school day began and ended fifteen minutes after the official time. Parents saw the school’s willingness to accommodate their needs and were, therefore, more committed to getting their children to school on time. Goodwin attributed those changes to Peck students achieving a 96 percent attendance rate.

All decisions centered on enhancing the development of the student as a whole. Goodwin refused to accept excuses for any student failing to excel. As needs were identified that influenced the well-being and academic achievement of children, the school applied its resources and school personnel used their time, personal resources, and connections to various community entities to ensure that children acquired whatever was needed to ensure their success in school.

In spite of the multitude of challenges, barriers, and obstacles endured during the initial stages of the change process, the Peck staff said Goodwin never wavered in her commitment to do what was best for the students. Goodwin admitted that she had moments when she wondered if she

would survive, but she countered her fears by remaining steadfast in her belief that if she did what was best for the students, her efforts would be valued and supported.

Expecting and Teaching Good Student Behavior

The climate at Peck was not going to change measurably unless there was substantial improvement in student behavior. Goodwin spoke proudly of the growth and maturity that Peck students now exhibit in the classroom and in other settings. She explained that the process began by raising expectations to higher levels and changing the perceptions of the students, parents, staff, and the community of what the students could accomplish. She insisted that students could demonstrate exemplary social skills and behavior. She provided support, encouragement, and training to assist the staff in changing student attitudes and behaviors until ultimately everyone (students, teachers, support staff, and parents) accepted the responsibility.

A school-wide discipline program emphasized both positive reinforcement and behavior management. Students were given the opportunity to apply for positions of responsibility within their classrooms. Students were interviewed and asked why they would be suitable candidates for the job. Also, the discipline program reinforced simple behaviors that reduced the likelihood of problems. For instance, the staff noticed that many of the altercations occurred as students walked between classrooms. Thus, teachers began having students walk between classes with their arms folded. This greatly reduced the number of fights.

An exciting instructional program has also helped decrease discipline problems. Teachers have learned to use cooperative learning strategies to help students work well in groups. Students are excited about learning challenging content and are eager to get to class. As one teacher explained, “The children work cooperatively in their groups. They help each other and they give you whatever you ask for. They’ll do whatever you expect them to do. It’s just a whole new spirit… positive attitudes and positive atmosphere.”

Similarly, another teacher said, “Our children are eager to learn. I can tell when new children come from other schools. You can tell the difference. After a while they catch on and fall in line because they know our expectations. That goes for all of us. We’re a good staff and we believe that good work can happen if we all work together.”

Changing Academic Instruction

The changes in school climate helped improve academic instruction, perhaps just as much as the changes in instruction helped improve the school climate. As adults worked more cooperatively, they shared ideas and learned to build upon each other's successes. As students received more effective instruction, they felt more competent and successful and were less likely to be disruptive in the classroom. In addition to the effect of these dynamics, academic instruction was improved through several other strategies. The principal altered some teaching assignments to give teachers responsibilities that better aligned with their strengths and interests. Also, the principal and teachers regularly used assessment data to maximize the effectiveness of classroom instruction. With district support, the school began research-based academic programs, particularly in reading. In addition, a pattern of regular monitoring of classroom instruction was initiated.

Matching Assignments to Strengths

In her initial assessment of the school, Goodwin discovered that many teachers had been assigned to classrooms that may not have been the best match for their personality, knowledge, background, skills, or desires. In the past, teachers had been moved, often without discussion, to teach subjects and grade levels in which they had little experience or training. The teachers felt frustrated, abandoned, and unprepared. As a result of the changes, students suffered, discipline problems increased and test scores dropped dramatically.

Early in her tenure at Peck, Goodwin spent considerable time visiting with teachers to learn about their skills, interests, frustrations, and desires. She also spent considerable time visiting classrooms to observe both strengths and weaknesses. She used this information to help generate a plan for moving people to assignments that resulted in a better fit between the skills and interests of the teacher and the needs of the students. These changes gave many staff members a sense that they had a greater chance of being successful in their professional roles and a greater chance of contributing to the success of the school.

Using Student Assessment Results to Improve Teaching

Goodwin insisted that student data be analyzed to determine the appropriate instructional focus of lessons. She scheduled weekly grade-level meetings to provide the staff an opportunity to discuss the difficulties their students were experiencing and to encourage collaborative goal setting. During those meetings, Goodwin helped teachers understand the prior year's results from the TAAS. She helped them understand which objectives students mastered and failed to master. She led the staff in discussions about the specific skills students would need to possess in order to pass the test and the specific instructional strategies that might help students acquire those skills. Collectively, the staff determined a plan for accelerating student performance.

Teachers at Peck have come to see themselves as educational decision-makers. They recognize that they make many important pedagogical decisions each day. At Peck, teachers have learned

to make better decisions with more data. For instance, Peck teachers carefully review daily reading performance data to determine when it is appropriate to move a student to a higher level reading group in the Success for All program. Teachers use data to determine the type of additional assistance to provide students in the after-school tutorial program. The campus uses Heartbeeps, a computer software program that is aligned with the objectives assessed in the TAAS. The program provides pre and post tests, practice tests in each objective, and a process for assessing individual student strengths and weaknesses. Teachers have learned to use these data to hone in on specific academic skills that may be inhibiting student success.

For example, the school used data to improve writing skills. In 1994-95 only 15 percent of Peck students passed the writing section of TAAS. The staff conducted an extensive evaluation of student writing and identified the specific concepts and skills that students had not yet mastered. Funds were budgeted and a master teacher was employed to assist teachers and students with writing strategies. In addition, Goodwin developed and started the Writing Camp, which occurred on Friday afternoons for all fourth grade students. Goodwin provided the weekly writing prompts, with emphasis on addressing deficits that had been identified through the careful examination of student writing. The teachers at Peck believed that the writing camp and other improvements in teaching writing contributed to an amazing increase in the percentage of students passing the TAAS writing test. A year later (1995-96), 82 percent of the students passed the same assessment.

The staff at Peck has developed a whatever-it-takes philosophy of promoting student achievement. In order to measure the academic growth of the students, a variety of assessments are used with the students. Not only are all students expected to pass the state's assessment of academic skills, but they are also expected to evidence advanced skills in reading, mathematics, and writing that exceed the TAAS expectations. The teachers use data to help them establish challenging goals and then determine what needs to be done in order to achieve those goals.

Adopting Effective Programs

The district administration played an important role in leading the school to the adoption of effective programs for improving student achievement. The South Central Area District initiated Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) to increase achievement and promote high school graduation. The goal of the program was to find and use cost-effective, research-based prescriptions that addressed the needs of schools in large urban school districts. Project GRAD sought to prove that the challenges and barriers experienced by urban schools could be overcome with the appropriate use of resources, strategies, and school-community collaboration. Through Project GRAD, models that had been widely piloted and validated were carefully reviewed and selected.

Goodwin responded eagerly when offered the opportunity to adopt Project GRAD at Peck. Project GRAD included the Success for All reading program (a comprehensive school reform model with a strong reading curriculum), the Move-It math program, a plan for improving consistency in classroom management and discipline, and the Communities in Schools program, which incorporates dropout prevention and social service agency components. District staff

provided training to all teachers at Peck and attempted to clarify the teachers' understanding of the objectives. This effort was designed to support students with consistent cross-district instruction in all content areas should the student move from one school to another.

Improving Skills in Teaching Reading

Peck teachers participated in the HISD Balanced Approach to Reading training in which teachers learned research-based strategies for developing literacy. This training was a supplement to the substantial professional development provided through the Success for All program. Campus funds were earmarked to hire a full-time Success for All coordinator, who worked closely with the classroom teachers, modeled effective teaching strategies in classrooms and assisted the teachers in developing their instructional plans. In addition, Goodwin reorganized the master school schedule to provide common planning times for the staff to engage in horizontal and vertical collaboration and planning. The staff used these planning sessions as opportunities to collaborate twice a week and to share experiences and teaching strategies that achieved positive results. Thus, teachers were learning to improve reading instruction as a result of district in-service training, the support of a trained Success For All coordinator, and the support of their fellow teachers as they met twice a week to discuss reading objectives, strategies, and results.

Improving reading instruction became everybody's job at Peck. All teachers taught reading objectives during the daily 90-minute period devoted to Success for All reading. The school nurse was the only certified staff person not assigned to teach a reading class; however, she incorporated the Success for All reading goals in her classroom health instruction activities.

Monitoring and Supporting Improved Instruction

Superintendent Rod Paige reminded principals, "It's not just what you expect, it's what you inspect." Goodwin and the instructional facilitator spent considerable time in classrooms monitoring instruction. Observations were conducted to identify teaching strengths and areas of need. Subsequent to the observations, meetings were scheduled to share with individual teachers the strengths and areas in need of improvement observed. When weaknesses were noted, suggestions were made and resources were provided. For example, in situations where classroom control was limited, appropriate in-service training was identified and provided to enhance the teacher's ability to manage classroom behavior.

Unfortunately, improvements in instruction were not always easy. Although most teachers responded positively to the higher expectations, there were some teachers who resisted change. Goodwin had to document the actions of those teachers who were not willing to work to improve instruction and ensure a safe and productive environment for the children.

Changing the Relationship with Parents and Community

In much the same way that Goodwin established trust with the Peck faculty, she established trust with parents and community members. She asked parents, "What do you think we need to do to help make Peck a better school?" She arranged schoolwide planning meetings after school, called and personally invited parents, community and business partners, school board members, and central office staff, and provided them dinner. She asked the custodian to explain ways in which she, the students, and staff could help to make "our home" more welcoming. She listened and took action in ways that were responsive to the needs of parents and the needs of children.

For example, "Peck time" (as described above) was a creative and positive response to the nagging problem of student tardiness. By slightly altering the school schedule, parents realized that the school was attuned to their needs.

All of the school staff, including the secretaries and clerks in the school office, got involved in helping make Peck a more welcoming place for parents. Goodwin recalled a meeting she had with the office staff. She asked them to come early a few mornings and she surprised them with coffee and donuts. Being respectful of their time, she offered to cover their office duties at the end of the day so that they could be released early. In her meeting with them, she told them:

> We must have this meeting because we must change the way in which we greet our visitors. I try to smile at everyone, including you. I smile everyday and if I can do it, you can do it. If you're having a bad day and you don't want to smile at someone then let that person be me. But to everyone else, you will smile. Let's practice how we will greet visitors to our office.

Through a variety of means, parents were helped to understand their importance as a part of the team at Peck. A classroom was designated for the Project Reconnect Parent Center, a place for parents to meet and to participate in enrichment classes. Parent training in computer literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes were provided in the center. The Home-School Connection and Family Support Teams offered support to families and encouraged active parent involvement. The Communities in School Program provided family support through the services of the school social worker. All of these efforts, combined with the daily efforts of the principal and teachers, helped parents know that they were valued as members of the Peck family.

Goodwin scheduled periodic brainstorming sessions to involve parents, community, and business partners. She began the Peck newsletter to inform the community of school events and to encourage support in the activities planned for the school. One of the 12 business partners described the changes in the school:

> On a scale from one to five, Peck is a ten. When Mrs. Goodwin first came to Peck, she enlisted the help of everyone in the community. We used to have brainstorming meetings focused on how we could encourage parents to become more actively involved. We knew that we had to get to the root of the problem. We would meet after school sometimes past 7 p.m.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

An important change at Peck Elementary centered upon creating opportunities for various staff persons to assume leadership roles. Another key change centered upon the provision of additional time for instruction.

Opportunities for Instructional Leadership and Development

Although Goodwin has been the key instructional leader at Peck, part of her strategy was the development of instructional leadership among all of the staff at the school. As the attitudes of staff changed and as the teachers developed their skills, new leadership roles emerged. Team leaders were selected for all grade levels to improve communication between the teaching staff and administration. The new leadership roles created a sense of ownership and accountability for the achievement of children. Faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, and other collaborative activities have created opportunities for leadership to emerge.

Instructional leadership has also emerged through the establishment of mentor relationships. Formally, there were mentors for all staff, especially first-year teachers. Informally, teachers were expected to seek assistance from their peers as well as administrative staff. The mentoring included not only instructional support, but emotional support as well. This mentoring and support role was relatively new at Peck. In the past, teachers perceived that their only responsibility was for their classroom; however, more recently, teachers have accepted and appreciated the additional responsibility of supporting each other.

A teacher new to Peck this year, expressed excitement when discussing the relationship he has developed with his mentor, “Everyone is allowed to select an area of responsibility, which gives each person an opportunity to learn information, to build his or her own skills, and to report to the staff. Everyone feels like a leader.”

According to some of the teachers, there was more in-service training offered to the staff in recent years than ever before. Professional development opportunities were provided both in-house and through the district. A schedule of district in-service training offerings was provided to the teachers for them to use throughout the school year and Goodwin encouraged teachers to participate. She helped them determine the staff development activities that would be most helpful to the instruction of their students.

Peck began the creation of a new teacher resource center in 1998. This spacious room has a copy machine, instructional materials, and space to relax and hold grade-level meetings. In another portable building, the Success for All coordinator has a large library of reading materials available for the teachers to check out.

Providing Additional Instructional Time

Peck adopted a number of programs that had the net effect of increasing the amount of instructional time available to students. For instance the Head Start and state-funded preschool programs provide opportunities for young children to ensure their academic success in future years.

Another way in which time was added was through after-school programs. Peck has used the Voyager program, which provided tutorials, mental math enrichment classes, and a wide range of fun activities that reinforced many of the challenging academic skills learned during the regular school day. Students also received additional instruction during weekend tutoring sessions.

Conclusions

Peck is an extraordinary example of dramatic, whole-school change. Much of the change process at Peck Elementary was done in such strategic, smooth increments that the staff failed to grasp that the changes were taking place. Interestingly, major events such as those involving conflict and discord were recalled more easily. Often those recollections were painful and embarrassing.

Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and community members share a tremendous sense of pride in the accomplishments of the Peck students. They recognize that their teamwork has made an important difference in the lives of children. At the same time, however, they recognize that there is still room to grow. They continue to see opportunities to improve their teamwork as they work toward maintaining and improving student achievement.

Gladys Noon Spellman Elementary School

Prince George's County Public School District

Cheverly, Md.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 755

Attendance Rate 96%

Grades Served K-6

Demographics

African American/African 73%

Asian American 1%

Hispanic 17%

Other 0%

White..... 9%

Limited English Proficiency 28%

Mobility..... 27%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 63%

Key Programs: Canady Scheduling (90-minute school-wide block scheduling for language arts); ESOL Center (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

Gladys Noon Spellman Elementary School
Prince George's County Public School District
Cheverly, Md.

Background

The Spellman school day officially opens at 8:55 a.m. with quiet time followed by the student-produced and hosted morning broadcast of WGNS. In the minutes before, children with backpacks and book-bags walk purposefully through the halls to their classrooms. Student safety patrols stand at regular intervals in the middle of the well-lit yellow brick corridors. Their presence silently establishes two lanes in the hallway. Older students flow by, while the patrols and adults gently guide younger ones, still unsure of their steps and the school.

Observing the children's well-choreographed arrival, one would never guess that Spellman is extremely overcrowded, serving 200 students more than the building's stated capacity, or that just last year discipline was the primary concern of teachers. Now administrators, staff, and parents describe Spellman as an organized, calm, and academically focused environment. An innovative scheduling system, small group teaching, authentic task instruction, and authentic assessment practices have all become hallmarks of the academic program at Spellman and defining elements of the culture of the school. A commitment to teaching all children is demonstrated through inclusive approaches to special education and the teaching of students who are English language learners. At Spellman every minute and every bit of space are dedicated to instruction. For instance, storage rooms have been converted to a Spanish classroom and science lab. Even part of the teachers' lounge is used on a daily basis for student instruction.

Population Served

Gladys Noon Spellman Elementary School is located about five miles from Washington, D.C., in the socio-economically and racially diverse community of Cheverly in Prince George's County, Md. The recently renovated split-level stucco and brick building is nestled into the crest of a hill. Single-family homes and high-rise, low-income apartments surround the sparsely wooded campus. Spellman served a multi-cultural student body of more than 750 students in kindergarten through grade six. The school reflects the diversity of the neighborhood and includes many immigrant children who are bused from all parts of the county to the school's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Center. Three out of four of the students are black (African American and African immigrants) and one in seven is Hispanic. The remaining population includes children who are white (Euro-American and Russian immigrants) and a small number of Asian American and Native American students. More than 60 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

Academic Improvement

The performance of Spellman students on the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) has improved considerably since 1994. The improvement is apparent in all six of the areas included in the assessment program. (See Table 13.) As well, the performance of Spellman students on the MSPAP exceeds the performance of students throughout the state in all areas at the third-grade level and in most areas at the fifth-grade level. (See Table 14.)

Table 13: Percent Spellman Elementary Students at or Above Satisfactory Level

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Gr. 3 Reading	17.0	26.0	49.3	41.1	69.0
Gr. 3 Writing	21.3	36.0	49.3	42.5	69.2
Gr. 3 Lang. Usage	25.5	44.6	60.5	58.4	65.2
Gr. 3 Mathematics	18.1	37.3	69.0	64.9	75.0
Gr. 3 Science	10.6	40.0	57.7	62.5	80.2
Gr. 3 Soc. Studies	17.0	37.3	40.8	48.8	74.4
Gr. 5 Reading	15.3	21.4	19.4	18.4	35.3
Gr. 5 Writing	21.2	21.4	46.2	36.6	47.6
Gr. 5 Lang. Usage	21.2	25.7	29.0	44.6	39.2
Gr. 5 Mathematics	27.1	44.3	73.1	78.5	72.0
Gr. 5 Science	22.4	27.1	48.4	63.4	74.4
Gr. 5 Soc. Studies	9.4	20.0	54.8	46.2	62.2

Table 14: State vs. Percent Spellman Elementary Students at or Above Satisfactory Level

	Spellman Elementary 1998	Maryland Statewide 1998
Gr. 3 Reading	69.0	41.6
Gr. 3 Writing	69.2	47.6
Gr. 3 Lang. Usage	65.2	49.4
Gr. 3 Mathematics	75.0	41.6
Gr. 3 Science	80.2	39.4
Gr. 3 Soc. Studies	74.4	41.0
Gr. 5 Reading	35.3	40.5
Gr. 5 Writing	47.6	42.0
Gr. 5 Lang. Usage	39.2	51.4
Gr. 5 Mathematics	72.0	47.9
Gr. 5 Science	74.4	51.6
Gr. 5 Soc. Studies	62.2	43.8

Spellman's story began with a single-minded focus on instruction. This approach resulted in many important improvements; however, it also had its costs. Many teachers believed that greater gains could be achieved with a broader focus on issues that influenced the school climate. During the 1998-99 school year, with the direction of a new principal, Spellman increased its efforts to fill these gaps.

Starting Points

Spellman has been going through a change process for more than five years. There is wide consensus in the school and district that the instructional reforms that began in 1994, under the administration of former principal, Sherry Liebes, have led to the constantly increasing performance of Spellman students. Liebes, who has a background in special education, was previously the principal of a national Blue Ribbon school. She came to Spellman in 1994 one year after the new and rigorous Maryland state assessment (the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program or MSPAP) had first been piloted.

When Liebes arrived, Spellman was a relatively large, multicultural elementary school. Teachers recalled that discipline was an issue; "There were kids running in the halls. Kids that were sent to the office got candy before they came back." Staff felt a lack of leadership. As one teacher explained, "We weren't getting too much focus from the helm."

Instruction at Spellman was delivered in a traditional style in self-contained classrooms at all times. The chief educational administrator responsible for overseeing the group of elementary, middle, and high schools, of which Spellman is a part recalled, "It was just operating as a traditional elementary school, using traditional methods with low expectations for teaching children."

There were, and still are, a large number of staff and specialists at Spellman. This high level of staffing is the result of Title I funding and money from the Prince George's County District for being a Model Comprehensive School. Many of these staff members did not have their own classrooms because Spellman's hilly terrain could not accommodate portable buildings. Classroom teachers expressed frustration that they could not teach because students were constantly being pulled from class for special services provided by the additional staff. As Liebes explained, "What teachers said to me was, 'Every time I try to teach, somebody's at my door taking my kids.'"

These scheduling difficulties also seemed to reinforce a sense among teachers that academics were not a high priority. One teacher complained, "P.E. [physical education] and music set the schedule and we worked around that. Academics were not as important as frills."

Changing the Organization of Schooling: Innovative Scheduling

In response to the disruptions, Principal Liebes implemented a system of block scheduling, which she had used successfully to cope with similar issues at her previous school. Spellman adapted this block-scheduling model (based on the work of Robert Lynn Canady, and referred to by staff as "Canady") to provide small group instruction in reading and language arts during a 90-minute block every morning. Each classroom teacher was paired with a specialist, who served as an instructional partner for a 10-day rotation. These two partners split the homeroom class in half; one delivered the main reading lesson for 45 minutes while the other reinforced the lesson through his or her specialty. During the second half of the period, students worked with the other instructor. The end result was that all students and instructors worked on reading and language arts in small groups for 90 minutes every school day.

Liebes was adamant that this time had no interruptions. Expressing her commitment to the model she said, "It was sacred time. We did no announcements. We had no field trips. We had no assemblies. We didn't do anything, except Canady! On early dismissal days or late arrival days because of snow, everything else would be cut out, but you would have that hour and a half of reading and language arts instruction."

Teachers confirmed this sense of focus by explaining, "Liebes always used to say, 'time on task!' In her four years [at Spellman] reading was never, ever, ever disturbed. You did reading every day. From 9:20 to 11 a.m. this school shut down. You did reading."

Liebes made strategic decisions as she introduced the block-scheduling model. First, in an effort to cultivate faculty ownership for the proposal, she asked teachers to voluntarily attend a local presentation by Canady. But, Liebes said, "I made sure there were some kingpins on the staff that went with me to that first in-service." After interest had been generated among the wider staff, the initial team worked out a plan for pilot implementation. Dr Liebes described her strategy for introducing innovations; "I always call things like this a pilot, because in fact they are. Plus if you call it a pilot, people are more apt to respond and say, 'I'll try it.' It makes it sound like if it doesn't work it's okay. It's nobody's fault."

This voluntary and gradual approach eased the change process. As Liebes said:

> I felt like we had the luxury to take that time, because at that point, test scores were an issue, achievement was an issue, but our school was not one of the reconstituted schools. So, we were able to take time. I felt like it was important to make it voluntary originally because I wanted people to own the process and feel like they had a part of it and were going to make it work.

Not only did this approach promote ownership, but also it gave "reluctant" teachers time to wait and see. Grade levels could elect to use the block schedule: in the first year (1995) grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 used the new system, the next year kindergarten joined, and by the third year first and

sixth grades had joined. As Liebes remembered, "The first grade had to sit back and watch it happen. Once they saw it work, then they clamored for it too."

However, Liebes was not hesitant to encourage those teachers who ultimately did not want to participate in her vision of reform to find employment elsewhere. Staff turnover was high during her tenure as she built a cohesive team around her notion of reform. As one teacher explained:

> She was nice, but stern. All she ever really said was 'These are the expectations at Gladys Noon Spellman. This is what we do and this is how we teach. If this isn't something you're interested in doing, then let me know and I'll write you a wonderful evaluation and you can help yourself.'

The new scheduling system provided a unified focus for the whole school. Liebes underscored this benefit by stating, "The beauty of it for me is that you have the whole school focused on the same thing at the same time. The kids know what is going on. They meet the same thing in the morning. Everybody is teaching the same objectives, the same goal."

Staff also described a variety of benefits of the scheduling model. First, teachers experienced support and validation in their role as educators with the new emphasis on academics. According to one teacher, "It gave us the opportunity to teach. After all, that's why we're all here." The small group instruction made it easier for teachers to do their job successfully especially given the overcrowded conditions at Spellman. Another teacher explained:

> The Canady situation makes things much better because, normally, you're dealing with a class of 30. With the Canady program you're teaching a class of half that size during your reading instruction and you don't have the interruptions that distract both the teacher and the students during primary reading instruction.

Teachers attributed their improved collaboration to the experience of working as instructional partners on a daily basis. As one specialist explained:

> I think the Canady program fosters a lot of this [collaboration] because every single person in this school is responsible for instruction. Therefore, everybody's paired up with someone. Sometimes we change grade levels. So we have to interact with other people. It's almost forced. You have to talk to those people because you're working with them and you're working with everybody.

The pragmatics of shared responsibility has led to a strongly voiced ethos that all staff are responsible for the academic success of all children. A teacher affirmed this by saying, "Everybody's involved in language arts instruction, everybody is responsible for the increase in the scores because of what we do. It's not just the classroom teachers."

Changing Academic Instruction

During her first years at Spellman, Liebes sought to shift the mode of classroom instruction to the "performance-based" or "authentic-task" based instruction that characterizes Spellman classrooms today. Teachers defined authentic-task instruction as instruction that emphasized real-life problems in a manner that integrated multiple skills. As an example, an experienced teacher described a lesson she taught earlier that day:

> We've been studying forests. So I did a task on conserving paper. We had to do some math; they had to choose the appropriate operation to find out how much the paper cost in different years. We had to create a graph. Then we had to do writing, because they have to know how to restate and pull apart information from the graph and write the answers. After that we had to write a proposal as to how the school system could deal with the rising cost of paper. When they're writing that, they're going to go into some science, conservation, recycling. That's an example of authentic-task instruction.

Staff asserted that this method of teaching better prepared the students for the state assessment. A teacher explained:

> We began authentic-task instruction because that's how the state assessment is structured. On the test they are not going to say this page is math and that page is science. It's always going to be integrated. The task is going to draw from their knowledge of all these different concepts. It's more like application. So we started teaching the way the test is structured.

Achieving this shift in teaching methods was neither quick nor simple. Indeed, Liebes recalled it as the greatest challenge that she encountered in the change process. As she said, "People bought into the Canady model pretty easily. But it was a little harder to change the instructional activities that happened once people were in that small group setting."

To support this reform, Liebes hired instructional specialists (also referred to as "performance-task" teachers by Spellman staff) who were able to model performance-based teaching (teaching that focused on helping students perform authentic tasks). Describing this strategy, which was the core of her approach to professional development, Liebes explained, "A very important part was the development of in-house master teachers, for lack of a better word. We had people in an instructional support role, in-house consultants. They support the instructional program, but live in the building, rather than provide out-of-building support."

Liebes used these instructional specialists both to introduce new methods and to provide intensive training and development when needed. She described a time when she used the specialists to train a relatively inexperienced teacher who was hired to fill a mid-year vacancy:

> I took the science teacher, the math specialist, and our reading specialist and said, 'Get into that classroom and get that classroom going.' Either through Canady

> assignments or in the afternoon through flexible scheduling, they were able to work intensively with that teacher, helping her plan, choose materials, and pace instruction. They did model lessons and then they would sit in the back of the room, watch her teach, and give her a critique.

Teachers and district officers gave credit to Liebes for selecting talented, effective instructional specialists. Their willingness to help was noted as a key part of their effectiveness. The current principal, Janet Lopez, who had spent many hours at Spellman in her previous district-level position, emphasized this point when speaking about one particularly valuable instructional specialist. "She had the kind of personality that made her easy to accept because she helped," Lopez said. "That is something very critical with all these performance-task teachers. They are perfectly willing to help the classroom teacher and offer their assistance."

Nonetheless, it took time for the instructional specialists to gain acceptance. For example, one encountered resistance as she began to model hands-on teaching in her science lab five years ago. Teachers had poor experiences with science lab in previous years and were skeptical about this new and relatively young teacher's ability to offer them anything of value. The principal provided concrete guidance and tacit support, which helped the new teacher weather criticism. She recalled, "Liebes told me, 'Please let me know if there is anybody who doesn't sign up.' I am sure she was going to speak with them."

The instructional specialists also reinforced the change process by doing additional work. As one of them recalled:

> In the beginning, at my principal's request, I did extra work. I gave the teachers the whole unit I was doing with their kids. I gave them two or three follow-up activities they could do each day to reinforce what we did in the lab. So I did a lot of extra things to show them that this really was a good program and they were really going to get something out of me. It wasn't just fluff and show.

Assessment Practice

At Spellman, there were regular and intensive assessment practices in preparation for the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). These practice sessions, conducted bi-weekly in grades three, four, and five, and monthly in grade two, are another central element of Spellman's instruction. Teachers and parents believed these practices contributed to the success and uniqueness of Spellman's program. Without hesitation a teacher described the school as "MSPAP driven." She went on to add:

> I'm comfortable with that because it is good teaching. If good teaching is going to serve two purposes, then it's a good situation. How can we lose? Not only that, I'm of the opinion that we are going to have MSPAP around for a long time and you might as well get on the bandwagon. You would be doing the students a disservice to not instruct that way if that's how they are going to be assessed.

A parent concurred:

> It surprises me that other schools don't do this. In middle school, the teacher told me that the kids from Spellman have skills that kids from other schools don't have. They have been prepared. They know these terms. They know how to write and how to read a map. They have skills you need for MSPAP and you need for life.

Every other week, beginning in October and continuing throughout the year, third, fourth, and fifth-grade teachers used the 90-minute morning period to present their students with practice tasks that were similar to those they faced on the assessment in the spring. The practice tasks were designed to incorporate and reinforce the curriculum. The administration and timing of test practice sessions reflected the conditions the students would experience in the actual testing situation.

A teacher described a practice test that she just conducted with the fifth grade:

> I try to make [the practice tests] as real as possible…. I told the students there was an empty tank at the Baltimore aquarium and a deep sea fishing boat had gone out to find a new creature to put in the aquarium but they found two. So the students had to read these two short pieces, one about an archer fish that squirts water and another about a unicorn whale. They had to read them and highlight important information. Then they had to fill in a chart of basic information: how long they were, where they came from, and what they eat. Then they did a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two creatures to help them decide which one might be easiest to keep. Finally, they wrote a letter to the aquarium staff making their recommendation.

An important didactic feature of the practice task sessions is that students are provided the scoring tool (rubric) when they review the practice test results. Later in the school year, closer to test time, students construct their own scoring tools by breaking down the questions. A teacher who had assumed the role of testing coordinator explained:

> We teach them how to break down the prompt and how to use that as a scoring tool. This is where some of the test-taking skills come in. For instance, they highlight all the verbs. I think some of these real easy test-taking skills have improved the test scores as well.

Teachers also emphasized the benefits of using scores from these practice tests to inform their instruction. After students took the practice tests, each teacher met with his or her instructional partner to score the tests. Through this process, the instructors gained a detailed picture of their students' strengths and weaknesses. Then, teachers held grade-level meetings in which they debriefed as a group, identifying the common areas in which their students still needed help. These insights were used to guide and refine instruction during the next weeks.

As was true of many other innovations at Spellman, the assessment practices were developed gradually. In this case, two instructional specialists came up with the idea of developing some of their tasks into a format that more closely resembled the state assessment tasks. They tried this out first with one grade and then through the years expanded the test practices to other grade levels. Again, success was achieved because the instructional specialists initially did extra work. One of the instructional specialists explained, "There were those of us who did the bulk of the planning or organizing. So, the teachers felt they could come to us. In the beginning we really handled everything and it was just a matter of them implementing it with their students." Today all classroom teachers work along with the specialists and the in-house testing coordinator to develop the practice tasks and scoring tools.

Inclusion

Teachers recounted a shift in their attitudes toward students; contrasting the predominant past belief that "only certain children were important," to the current feeling that "all children are important." The word "inclusion" peppers the speech of Spellman faculty. This orientation is demonstrated in Spellman policies and practices regarding students identified for special education and foreign language speakers. First, teachers and specialists emphasized their shared responsibility in teaching all students. The special education teacher said:

> This is the first school where I have had 'performance task' people and that makes a lot of difference. In other schools once teachers know a child requires special education services, they just leave it to the special education teachers. Over here, everybody works with that child.

Another added, "From my perspective as a Spanish teacher, I know that special education students have various skill problems and I try to work with the special education teachers as well as the classroom teacher. I'm not unusual in this. Everybody does this."

During Liebes' tenure the time required to identify and refer students for special education services decreased from "years" to four or five months. Teachers attributed this improvement to Liebes' background in special education and her ability to "work the system." But here again, the benefits of small group teaching and team instruction were cited as critical factors in this change. A teacher reported:

> Dr. Liebes really encouraged people to look at their population and to start getting them into small groups. A lot of times, we did a lot with the special education teachers, or they would get to work during the Canady time with the children we had questions about. So when the children came up for evaluation, the special education teacher knew exactly what we were talking about. We didn't have to take 90 days playing games.

Teachers and parents described excellent outcomes with special education students. A new special education teacher recalled her impressions upon arriving at the school three years ago. She stated, "I've seen the difference in how the students in special education perform compared

to my other school. When I got here I saw some of the students' work. I thought, 'Why are you here? You're supposed to be in a regular classroom.'"

Staff also praised Liebes for her sound, research-based approach to students who were English language learners:

> She insisted that the ESOL children [children in the English for Speakers of Other Languages Program] work with high reading rather than low reading groups. This way they would get role models. Twenty percent of our population is ESOL. They're now taking the MSPAP and their scores keep going up.

A teacher explained how she worked with speakers of other languages in her classroom:

> We sit in what we call cooperative learning groups, so they are never by themselves, feeling like an oddball all day. As much as possible I try to group my students so those that have very limited English are in a group with someone of the same ethnicity, but who might be in his second or third year here at this school.

Building Upon Successes

A number of factors have helped Spellman sustain and build upon its achievements. First, the school found that its students had made dramatic improvement in their state assessment results in 1995. This news came only one year after the school began many of the instructional reform strategies described above. This news was motivating and validating for the administration and staff. Teachers began to see themselves as successful and unique in their approach to instruction. Janet Lopez, the current principal, explained, "Teachers felt they were doing something that was successful and that was different than other schools, and to me that was one of the keys in them getting better and better at what they're doing."

For Liebes, a main component of professional development was to encourage and support staff in making presentations at state and district conferences as well as to their colleagues within Spellman. Such experiences served to build staff capacity and fostered the establishment of a wide base of instructional leadership within the school. Indeed, Liebes asserted that her goal was to create a school where the success of the instructional program did not depend on any one individual or leader. As she said:

> We did have some key turnover of staff along the way. But things still continued to move along. That was my test. My test was that people could come and go, and even I could come and go, but that things would continue to improve and the school would remain strong. I wanted to create a process and a structure in an instructional program that was people-proof in a way. You had good people, but if one cog left, it was okay. It would continue to roll along.

Now, with a change of principals this year and continued success at Spellman, there was even more evidence that Spellman had achieved its goal of building a broad base of leadership. In fact, when Lopez arrived at Spellman last summer she found a faculty that was remarkably self-sufficient and reflective. She underscored this by describing a letter that staff had written to her:

> On my desk was a letter that started, 'Dear Principal of Gladys Noon Spellman…' On the last day of school the teachers knew Dr. Liebes wasn't coming back. They met and they made a list for whoever the principal would be. The list said these are the things we do very well, and these are the things that we need to work on. That is the nature of this staff. They consistently look for better ways to do things.

Lopez felt comfortable giving the staff the directive to "go ahead and keep on doing what you've been doing" because she had seen and recognized their ability to maintain and develop the instructional program. As a result, Lopez was able to devote extra attention to concerns about the school climate and community relations.

Changing the School Climate

While student achievement has continued to improve each year since Liebes became principal at Spellman, there have been costs associated with what was perceived as her single-minded focus on academics. A parent shared this perspective, stating, "Liebes' whole agenda was to get test scores up. It was all she was about. And whatever it took to do that, she was going to get it done. And she did. Of course, many people were very unhappy about how that was accomplished."

Voices from many corners of the school community expressed the concern that high test scores were not enough; some important things had been lost or left out of the mix. Discipline, although slightly improved during Liebes's tenure, was still a problem and was cited by teachers as their primary concern at the end of the 1997-98 school year. There was tension in the school. Faculty turnover was high. As one staff person explained, "We would have to look up daily to see how much the staff had changed." The once sizable and historically active group of school parents had dwindled significantly. For example, participation at PTA meetings had dropped to five members and no parents served on the School-Based Management Team last year.

In addition, some staff members noted that while gains had been made in the academic arena, more could be done to support students' emotional and character development. One staff member explained, "The 'please,' the 'thank you,' that's what we're missing. Our test scores are wonderful… but if one can't deal with their own emotions about their day to day struggle, test scores don't mean a thing."

Principal Lopez, came to Spellman in the fall of 1998 bringing a knowledge of Spellman's success and history due to her work in the school as a district-level community instructional specialist. Upon arriving at the school, she made it a priority to bring more calm and order to the campus and responded immediately to teachers' primary concern about discipline.

Lopez intentionally made herself visible in the halls and established a clear system for teacher duty stations during morning entry and afternoon dismissal. The school discipline plan, which had been developed several years ago, was re-established at the beginning of the school year and reinforced more consistently with a system of student tickets, fines, and incentives. Teachers, who were also involved in "reviving" the system, felt that the administrators supported them in enforcing the plan. In addition, all the students were reminded of their role in maintaining good behavior by a banner that flew at the end of all "fight-free" days.

Just last year, in an effort to raise teacher morale, a new faculty member proposed a teachers' social committee. She and another veteran teacher took the lead in establishing this group which hosts parties and breakfasts at teachers' homes.

During her three year tenure as vice principal, Regina Williams has taken the lead in developing programs that foster student citizenship. She has revamped the school safety patrol, initiated a student council, supported a teacher in establishing the SPARK program (Spellman Acts of Random Kindness), and created numerous other incentive-based student activities. Recently, responding to the students' need for after-school recreation, Williams announced try-outs for a coed basketball team. The response was overwhelming; more than 100 students filled the gym to compete for membership on the team.

Williams speaks proudly of the students' growing sense of responsibility. She relates this positive change to these opportunities and to the consistent modeling and guidance by staff. She shared a story of a sixth-grade student who had stopped to help a young child who was being chased by a dog. This student later told Williams, "I did that, because we are the leaders of the school and we have to help other people out."

Spellman staff recognize that these emotional supports and developmental opportunities enhance student performance. The school counselor provided students a measure of stability and a safe place to talk, He said, 'I've been able to give kids that chance to say, 'I need to talk.' "

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

In only four months as principal, Lopez has made significant progress in restoring the relationships with parents. They feel welcomed by her open-door policy. One parent shared her impressions:

> I came in August and introduced myself and my daughter to her [Lopez]. I didn't have a clue what she looked like. She came right out and introduced herself. Then she welcomed me into her office. In the past the door had always been closed, but this was very inviting. It was like you open your front door and say, 'Come into my living room and have a seat.' I was encouraged before school started that things were going to be more comfortable.

Parents have been reassured by the principal's presence in the hallways. Another parent explained:

> Even being in the hallways there's a decided difference with Lopez. You see her in the hallways all the time. You see her in the hallways when the kids are coming to school. The kids know her. She knows them.

Parents have also noticed Lopez' commitment to improving school-parent communication. For instance she used Title I funds to have the school's automated phone service announce PTA meetings. Indeed, this simple act was quite effective in generating a remarkably large turnout. More than 70 parents attended the last PTA meeting.

Conclusions

Today the Spellman community awaits good news about their recent state assessment results. There is a sense of anticipation in the air, an awareness that years of hard work and difficult changes are coalescing to bring results. Academic achievement remains paramount at Spellman: it is a source of pride and motivation, and the predominant feature of the school culture. Nonetheless, the calmer halls, Lopez' open door, and the crowded gym all suggest that Spellman's definition of success has been expanding.

James Ward Elementary School

Chicago Public Schools

Chicago, Ill.

1997-98 School Year

Student Enrollment 438

Attendance Rate 95%

Grades Served Pre-K-8

Demographics

African American..... 18.5%

Asian American 47%

Hispanic 15.8%

Other 0%

White..... 18.7%

Limited English Proficiency 31.7%

Mobility..... 19.2%

Low Income (Free or Reduced-Price Lunch) 88%

Key Programs: Lighthouse After-School Program, Community Learning Center, 21st Century Empowerment Zone, Links to Literacy, Hug-a-Book, Chicago Science Academy, Annenburg Foundation Grant

James Ward Elementary School
Chicago Public Schools
Chicago, Ill.

Background

James Ward Elementary School, a Chicago public school built in 1874, is the oldest school in the state of Illinois. The school has three floors and a basement that are connected by an uncommonly wide staircase. The small plot of land next to the school building serves as a playground. The inviting playground equipment makes it a popular place for children, even after the school day is over.

Until a few years ago, the school building had not seen many repairs, therefore its deterioration was quite advanced. Explained one fifth-grade teacher:

> Paint was falling from the ceiling. The classrooms were so cold that students had to wear their coats and gloves. Many times the wind was whipping through the windows and there was snow in the corners of the windowsills…. The children were not going to learn well in such an environment.

Two decades ago almost none of the neighborhood children attended the school. Ward was the special education center for its Chicago sub-district. The student population reflected a culturally diverse environment comprised of Hispanic, white, and African American students. Although some time later the school was organized into instructional teams among the grade levels, the special education classes were excluded from the teams. Thus, special education classes created their own teams including the hearing-impaired team, the cognitive-disabled team, and the partially sighted team. During this period, issues of parity in resources existed between the grade-level teams and special education teams.

Although the neighborhood surrounding Ward was relatively safe and insulated from the gang activity that many Chicago urban schools encountered, some staff remembered that the hallways were often noisy with children running or speaking loudly. The administration spent a substantial amount of time on discipline; there were always students in the after-school discipline rooms.

The teaching staff was stable and relatively mature. Several faculty members have been at the school for more than 20 years. Teachers used traditional teaching methods and they taught in relative isolation. Although they talked to each other, it was usually to share their woes. Conversations were dominated by complaints. Also during that time, the school ranked low in student achievement in comparison with other schools in the sub-district.

Finally, in 1995, the school building began a long-overdue facelift. The building received a new roof, new light fixtures, new windows, a paint job, a new $4,000 floor for the science room, and

a full remodeling of the library. The hallways and classrooms became bright and clean and custodians work diligently to keep it clean. The newly painted walls are covered with displays of children's work and special decorations prepared by parents who volunteer their artistic talents to the school. As one walks throughout the school it is easy to see that Ward celebrates its diversity and multiculturalism. The diligent buzz of children as they work can be heard along the hallways since classroom doors are open and the halls are often used for cross-grade lessons and activities. These changes have made the school a cheery and pleasant environment for the children, staff, and the community.

Population Served

During the past 10 years the demographic profile of the student population at Ward has changed. The school has experienced a 9.3 percent growth in student population. As of the fall of 1997, the total enrollment was 438 students: 47 percent Asian American, mostly Chinese; 18.5 percent African American; 18.7 percent white, and 15.8 percent Hispanic. The majority of students, 88.4 percent, belong to low-income families, many of them recent immigrants from China. However, student attendance, at 95.4 percent in 1997-98, was higher than district and state average attendance. The mobility rate has also decreased sharply. The special education population still represents 23 percent of all students, but they are now included in the regular education classrooms and are encouraged to participate in all activities.

Academic Improvement

Ward has received district and state recognition for its students' academic achievement on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a nationally-normed test. In 1991, the percentage of Ward students scoring at or above the 50th percentile on the ITBS reading assessment was 18.9 percent, while it was 42.6 percent on the math assessment. In the spring of 1998, 51.2 percent of Ward students scored at or above the 50th percentile in reading, representing a doubling since 1995. Math scores in particular have increased steadily throughout the decade. More than 63 percent of Ward students scored at or above the 50th percentile in math in 1998.

Scores on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP), the state achievement test, also provide evidence of Ward's rapid improvement in student achievement. The percentage of students that meet or exceed state goals in mathematics has increased dramatically since 1993. In 1998, 98 percent of third graders, 77 percent of sixth graders and 89 percent of eighth graders achieved this goal, and all of these figures were close to or above the state average, and always well above the district average. In 1998, the percentage meeting and exceeding state goals in reading and writing represented an increase from the previous year. More than 50 percent of third, sixth, and eighth-grade students met state goals in reading, and 75 percent of third graders, 81 percent of sixth graders and 95 percent of eighth graders did so in writing. Ward students also scored above the state average in science and social studies. More than 70 percent of students in all grades tested met or exceeded state goals.

The transformation of James Ward Elementary to a high-performing school can be attributed to the convergence of several elements. However, it is important to note that these elements neither appeared nor coalesced overnight. The journey toward high achievement began more than 10 years ago and began evidencing improved academic achievement in the past three or four years.

Starting Points:
Developing Instructional Leadership

Sharon Wilcher started as principal at Ward in the fall of 1994. Previously, she had worked at Ward as a special education teacher, then head teacher, and then assistant principal under a previous principal, Daniel Breen.

Breen retired after serving as principal at Ward for 20 years. As principal, Breen initiated an intense professional development plan with a focus on the development of leaders from within the school staff. During the past 20 years, all of the administrative and instructional leadership at Ward has emerged from its own teaching staff. The development of leadership from within has been a consequence of general as well as targeted professional development among the staff, and the practice of shared leadership to complement individual strengths and limitations.

By developing leaders from within, trust between staff and leadership has evolved naturally. The leaders possess extensive knowledge of the school environment, staff, and students, and understand the school's culture. This knowledge has been helpful in building upon the strengths of teachers and students. Also, it has been helpful in focusing the staff on issues of importance to the improvement of academic achievement. The leaders at Ward have been effective in creating a culture of inclusion, teamwork, and unity of purpose around student achievement. Part of this culture is also a nurturing and validating environment for the staff and for students.

Breen had been Ward's principal for several years when he realized that while traditional pedagogy worked for some children it was not effective for most children at Ward. To address the issue, he sought first to improve his own knowledge of effective instructional practices. Breen immersed himself in several professional development initiatives, such as a six-month intensive training on the whole-language model, which he participated in by taking a leave of absence. Upon his return he brought videos, tapes, and literature to the school and trained his teachers on what he had learned.

Just as Breen sought opportunities to improve his instructional expertise, he encouraged teachers to do the same by supporting training in their areas of professional and personal interest and strength. The former principal then encouraged these individuals to become a resource for other teachers. These teachers became the source of future leadership in the school.

Ward's former assistant principal, who is now the principal at another school, described how Breen identified her teaching skills and abilities and then helped her become an instructional leader for the school, particularly in math. In 1991 he created a new position for her, director of

instruction and resources; a position she held in addition to her full-time classroom duties without any extra compensation. She went on to receive a wide variety of training in instructional strategies, curriculum alignment, assessment, and data analysis, which greatly benefited the school as she applied what she learned.

Teachers in different subject areas were identified as teacher-leaders. A primary grade teacher was identified to apply the whole-language model across grades. Overall, teachers who were receptive to new ideas were encouraged to develop expertise in different instructional and organizational strategies and to help other teachers apply them in the classroom through in-service training and by modeling the strategies in classrooms.

The current principal, Sharon R. Wilcher, is both a product and a producer of leadership development efforts at Ward. She became head teacher two years after she started at Ward. As head teacher she was in a quasi-administrative position directing the special education curriculum. While in that role, she received further training in administration and developed expertise for her future roles as assistant principal and principal. Wilcher's administrative, classroom management, instructional, and interpersonal skills were recognized early and nurtured.

As principal, Wilcher supported the development of other leaders at the school. A former assistant principal (who is currently principal at another school) described how Wilcher gave her opportunities to learn and contribute:

> Frequently after school Wilcher would say things like, 'Come to the computer and sit down. Let me show you how to do this. Let me teach you this. Let me show you how to pull this off the e-mail.' I was very fortunate. I think that's one reason I gave so much of myself to the school, because I was allowed the access [to learning opportunities]. I was allowed to really feel that my contribution and my skills were important and needed.

High-quality leadership has been important in keeping Ward focused on improving the academic achievement of children. A Chicago school district administrator, who has worked closely with Ward since 1995 told the story of a difficult time of transition for the school and how the staff pulled together to overcome the situation and focus on the students' learning and achievement. In the summer of 1995 Ward was in the midst of a major rehabilitation project and it seemed like the building was not going to be ready to open for the new school year. Wilcher had only been principal for a year, and there was a great deal of change occurring. In addition, the Chicago school district was also going through a re-organization, under a new board of trustees and a new chief executive officer. The new regional education officer for Ward, a position similar to an area superintendent, recalled:

> Normally, the faculty's emotional state would be affected by all that, but the faculty was tightly knit. They had a clear sense of purpose and understood that the first couple of weeks were not going to be easy. They were really clear about how they needed to stay together and work through all of this business. The

> principal's position was very clear. She clearly gave the message, 'All of this is extraneous to what we do with the kids in the classroom.'

Changing Academic Instruction: Creating and Maintaining a Well-trained Teaching Staff

A key to Ward's success has been the development of a stable teaching staff that was well-trained in a variety of strategies and methods to address the needs of all children. The teaching staff has exhibited an openness to change and experimentation in classroom instruction. They have been willing to take risks in their planning, delivery, and evaluation of instructional practices. Moreover, the teaching staff has learned to work well together in an environment of trust, respect, and mutual support around instruction. Their cohesiveness has made it easier for them to focus on common instructional goals and their experience as instructional leaders has made them confident in accepting new challenges. The result has been an effective teaching staff that is well supported with resources and trusted by their leaders.

Ward did not achieve a stable and professionally mature teaching staff because of characteristics such as location or reputation. Furthermore, it was not an accident that so many teachers have chosen to remain at this high-poverty school for so many years. The quality of the working environment, the support from the school's leadership, and the shared focus on academic growth have caused teachers to love the school and remain there. Stability was a consequence of actions and attitudes that promoted a likeable, comfortable, and successful environment.

Changes in instruction were approached thoughtfully, methodically, and in a manner that respected the need for teachers to understand and internalize proposed changes. To prepare his staff to receive new ways of teaching Breen devoted a significant amount of staff time to developing a mindset for change. A staff member recalled, "We spent a lot of time with a video; it was on changing paradigms. We spent several of our staff development days just talking about and doing trust-building activities that focused on changing paradigms." In this all-important preface to the changes he would encourage them to make, Breen provided opportunities for staff to reflect on what they were doing in the classroom, their effectiveness, and the possibility that there was something else out there, some other way to accomplish the goals.

Breen also recognized that major instructional changes required modeling, time, encouragement, and support. As one teacher explained:

> One of [his] strengths was as an instructional leader. I admire him greatly because he allowed all of his staff the freedom to grow. He set the example by being involved in staff development for himself. By providing substitutes, he provided opportunities for any of us who wanted to grow. He set up opportunities to do peer mentoring and I think this had a positive impact on me.

One such professional development opportunity was participation in the Teacher's Math and Science Academy. Classroom teachers participated in weekly math and science classes held at the Illinois Institute of Technology for a semester. Teachers attended classes during the school day and substitute teachers were provided by the Academy. In addition, Academy science experts supported the teachers in their classrooms as peer coaches. Teachers were learning how to teach math and science using a "hands-on" approach.

Principal Wilcher continued to invest considerable resources in the development of teachers. Funding for training costs and for substitute teachers (when teachers participated in training during the school day) came from several sources, such as federal Title I and state Chapter I. Substitute teachers were also provided for teacher planning time. Funding was also used to remunerate teachers for in-service extended days. A teacher of children with learning disabilities gave examples of how she was encouraged and paid to attend meetings to keep up in her field. The professional growth of non-teaching staff was also supported. The school's child welfare attendant explained how she was allowed to attend special education professional development or parent support meetings offered by the Chicago district, even though this was not a requirement for her position. Wilcher encouraged her to attend; however, and bring back information to share with the special education teacher and parents.

A teacher of kindergarten and first-grade students described the positive effect that extensive teacher professional development has had on teaching and learning at Ward school:

> We were introduced to whole language, multiple intelligences, and thematic approaches. Every catch phrase out there, we were introduced to. When Ms. Wilcher became our principal, she not only embraced all of that, but also she said, 'Let's look at the needs of our students now.' So I feel that after all these years, when a student comes into my room, I look at them as an individual. We pull out of our bag of tricks whatever we need to do, because we've been trained in everything. And we use it for that child.

Ward's administration has also made good choices in hiring capable and motivated teachers in recent years. Several veteran teachers attributed the school's academic success, in part, to the younger teachers who have come on board. These new teachers have brought innovative teaching methods, an ability to relate well to children, and a high level of motivation to teach. For instance, some of the veteran teachers noted the current assistant principal's creativity and excellent rapport with the children; "She's young, and she's vivacious, and she can be the kids' friend. But they know she's the boss. She's very good for the kids."

When Wilcher became principal, Ward's staff had grown in their knowledge of a variety of instructional practices and they were open to innovation. However, teachers were still trying to teach on their own. Teachers spent minimal amounts of time working in teams or collaborating on instructional issues. A continued investment in staff growth was still needed, with greater emphasis on learning to collaborate and share effective practices across classrooms.

Ward's regional education officer, the person to whom Wilcher reported, supported this focus on collaboration. He explained that he gave schools under his supervision a very consistent message:

> It is the classroom teacher who is the single most important element in the success of the kids in the classroom. I don't care what you buy, what you bring, who you bring, any of that. It is the teacher who is most important. Therefore, effective collaboration among teachers is essential for success. [Effective collaboration] involves having discussions of what is successful, as opposed to talking about increasing levels of frustration.

At Ward, this increased level of collaboration has emerged through the development of trust, teamwork, and a sense of unity of purpose.

The tremendous investment in the staff at Ward has led to a "state-of-the-art" teaching staff, confident in its abilities to direct student learning and serve all children. At the same time, teachers are flexible and open to change and innovation in instruction. A wealth of support is available to teachers in the form of assistance from aides, paraprofessionals, and parents. Moreover, teachers receive considerable instructional guidance and modeling from each other and from their principal and assistant principal. Special education teachers are now an integral part of the school's instructional teams and issues of parity have been almost eliminated. As a result, teacher relationships have grown closer and tensions have been reduced.

Changing the School Climate

At Ward the climate changed both for the students and the staff of the school. For the students, the climate became more supportive and positive. Among the adults, a new trust and sense of teamwork were developed.

Developing Trust, Teamwork, and Unity of Purpose

Principal Wilcher has helped teachers become comfortable as they collaborate with and support each other. Her hands-on leadership style brings out great contributions from staff, which may explain why student achievement leapt in the past three years. Her demeanor is warm and her words are gentle though sometimes direct. She considers her candor to be one of her limitations. When teachers described her decision-making, they consistently indicated that collective decision-making was the norm. She agreed and also noted that there are situations that require someone to step in and "take the reins," which she does.

Wilcher recalled that when she became assistant principal the school had already begun the transition toward a team-oriented culture; "We had started moving toward an inclusive, team effort. But Wilcher has elevated this orientation to a new level."

Wilcher explained her philosophy in the following way, "I think that as a principal, you must make the staff, the custodians, everyone, feel that they're working *with* you and not *for* you, because as long as they're working with you for the children, they will work harder. When they work *for* you, you're lost."

Ward's former assistant principal pointed out:

> "I think Ms. Wilcher's leadership style and vision took us to the next level. Her leadership style encouraged people to take the next step, to not be afraid to be risk takers. I think one of her strengths is that when she says to you, 'I'm going to trust you to do this,' she lets it go and she depends on you. When people see that, then they really become empowered because they know their contribution is going to be respected.

The upper team leader, an eighth-grade teacher, described the flexibility and support provided by the principal throughout the team's effort to departmentalize the upper (sixth through eighth) grades.

> We tried it [departmentalization] about five years ago but we didn't have enough personnel. Ms. Wilcher pushed for it this year, and I guess because she's been hearing about the middle school concept, she thought that we might be able to try that. She's been good with innovations and trying new ideas, and giving us a lot of freedom to do what we want. She gave us planning time and paid us for it.

A variety of internal initiatives have emerged that have positively affected the quality of instruction and planning, and that have made it easier for teachers to reach every student in their classrooms. Organizational strategies, like the instructional teams arrangement and the departmentalization of the upper team, show commitment from teachers to collaborate in planning and instruction. Creativity has also been a critical element in the effective delivery of instruction, particularly in reading and writing, due to the difficulty many Ward students face as non-native English speakers. Through team planning and collaboration, creative strategies have been developed, such as intra-team heterogeneous groupings and grade level or across grade hallway lessons. Literature-based classes are conducted where a variety of multicultural books are available for students to read at their reading level. Often teachers act characters out from a book to increase reading comprehension. Another important improvement in classroom instruction has been the integration of test-taking strategies into the content area.

Ward's Regional Education Officer shared his opinion about the effectiveness of the school's staff:

> The fact is that when teachers find a location in which they are comfortable, where they have a sense that they are appreciated, where they have a sense of effectiveness, they don't leave. Teachers find this a comfortable and enjoyable environment to work in. So as long as the teachers and the principal are working

> well together professionally, the community, the youngsters are wonderful, you don't want to leave.

The spirit of teamwork and support was particularly available to new teachers at Ward. As a teacher who started at Ward seven years ago explained, "When new people come to this school, they're taken under somebody's wing. When I first came here it was the people who I met who first made me feel comfortable. We're always sharing and very open."

Recently, Ward was recognized for its outstanding achievement on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Wilcher copied the certificate that she was awarded and gave a copy to each member of her staff, assistant teachers, cooks, the custodian, and teachers alike. She thanked each one for their work, noting that the achievement could not have been accomplished without them. Such demonstrations of respect for the staff have nurtured a culture in which staff members give their finest effort to Ward's students and community.

Creating a Supportive Environment for Students

Several teachers noted that the overall climate of the school is warm and supportive, for students as much as for adults. For instance, students who come to Ward with records of poor discipline often are able to improve their behavior. The principal conveyed the details of a situation in which a chronically disruptive upper-grade student was transferred to Ward from another school with Wilcher's prior consent. During the initial meeting with the student and mother, Wilcher agreed to allow the student one chance; after the first infraction, he would be disciplined and sent home, his enrollment at Ward terminated. Then, in private, Wilcher addressed the student as she crumpled a piece of paper and threw it away, conveying that the paper represented the student's previous history. "Don't tell anybody the bad things you've done, they won't know. No one knows but you and me," she said. It should also be noted that Ward has a campus counselor/case manager, and access to a district social worker (who visits the campus regularly), and a district psychologist to address students' social and emotional needs.

Ward's approach to discipline focused first on establishing proactive and positive policies that supported good student behavior. As an example, the current principal and the staff issued a discipline policy that focused on high expectations for student behavior. Letters were sent to parents regarding attendance and punctuality. The letter solicited the parents' partnership in supporting the school's high standards for student behavior.

Another way in which the school promoted a supportive environment for students is through the use of nearly a dozen special academic programs for students. Several of these programs have been established through the individual efforts of teachers. For instance, a fifth-grade teacher, with support from fellow teachers, initiated the Buddy Reading Program. The program paired older children (fifth graders) with younger children (kindergartners) to read, sing, or participate in other activities together. The focus was on giving students some responsibilities that they might have later as parents. The program was later expanded throughout the school when it was integrated with the Hug-A-Book Program, in which older and younger students read together.

Ward has also become part of the Chicago Science Academy Program, where experts from this institution come one day per week to teach science lessons to the intermediate and primary grades. Teachers had opportunities to observe these lessons for their own use.

When asked how Ward had improved student achievement, one teacher replied:

> There is an emphasis on excelling. There are more programs in which students can participate and have opportunities to compete and excel. There is a lot of adult investment in school. For instance, teachers acted out the ballad, "The Night Before Christmas." Kids see teachers are excited and that the teachers are interested in what the children are doing. The kids get a lot of love here.

A second-grade teacher observed that there are two other schools relatively close to Ward. She explained that parents now, tend to prefer Ward for their children:

> Parents in the neighborhood used to prefer those schools because they had a good reputation. However, because the quality and variety of the after-school programs has increased, parents like our school. The children have more time to learn and they think that's important.

Changing the Relationships with Parents and Community

In the 1997-98 school year, the school staff had personal contact with the parents and guardians of every student at the school. The high rate of parental involvement exceeded both district and state averages. Continuous parental contact was cited as the main element improving student discipline in recent years. Discipline problems are now minor, freeing up the time of administrators to provide instructional leadership. A policy of uniforms for students, started a few years ago, has also proved helpful in improving student discipline.

The principal's "open-door" policy to parents, children, community members, and staff has modeled a receptive atmosphere that has transformed relationships with the Ward community. The principal has helped make everyone feel like Ward is their school. Parents said they experienced a welcoming atmosphere at the school, particularly when they sought to provide assistance in the classroom. As one parent explained:

> She [Wilcher] encourages the teachers to have an open mind toward us being there. It is more likely that teachers want you to be there, want you to be part of the classroom, or want to see you in the school, not the other way around. They welcome you to bring your preschool child in the classroom with you. They never say it's a problem.

Parents have been supportive, in part because they perceived the principal as a fair disciplinarian. Wilcher's reputation for fairly and judiciously resolving conflicts has been acquired through her role as the school's disciplinarian for a number of years. Thus, she has won the confidence of

parents, teachers, and students. One might further attribute the parents' willingness to work with the school to the school's commitment to meeting the needs of the children and the community. Wilcher has been known to handle conflicts that occurred off the school grounds, even when the conflicts occurred during the weekend. She has demonstrated a genuine concern for the children and their parents wherever they are at any time during the week. Thus, when teachers or school administrators sent letters or made phone calls regarding absences, chronic tardiness, or other disciplinary issues, parents tended to respond in a supportive manner.

Changing the Organization of Schooling

The current assistant principal and teachers felt they had much more direct access to money and other resources because of Wilcher's commitment to providing teachers sufficient resources. Ward's staff consistently cited the increased availability of funds and their access to those funds as important factors in bolstering the instructional program.

In recent years, state supplementary funding rules have given campuses control of discretionary funds allocated to them, such as Title I funding. The principal, staff, and the Local School Council are allowed to decide how to use the dollars to enhance student achievement. Ward began receiving Title I funds in 1996. Funds are received in proportion to the percentage of children whose family incomes were at, or below, the poverty level. At first allocations were assigned to individual teachers to spend at their discretion, but more recently allocations have been made to each of the three teams who decide how they should be spent. This way the allocation is substantial and can be applied in a manner that significantly affects instruction. Furthermore, with the team organization, special education classes are part of each team and therefore are equal beneficiaries of funding.

Teachers at Ward have come to understand that their principal will somehow stretch dollars, acquire new grants, or access additional funds from the school district in order to make sure that teachers have what they need in order to teach their students well. As the assistant principal explained:

> The other day I was telling her [Wilcher] that some of the teachers were telling me they needed some additional materials as a result of our discussions about learning styles. I asked her, 'Is there money available?' She said, 'Money is not the issue. It's not something we need to discuss right now. Tell me what's needed and we'll go from there.' I got on the computer and I ordered all these things. When I finished I just told her how much I spent.

In a conversation with the librarian about the school's substantial investment in improving the library, she explained that the principal made resources available; however, school staff helped acquire new resources through the development of grant applications:

> At Ward, you have all the supplies you want, access to copiers, and access to the budget. If you need something in your classroom, just tell the principal or you

> can go out and purchase it yourself, and you will be reimbursed. I have also participated in grant writing. We have received the Learning Power grant, which basically takes the library into the 21st century. Under the administration of Sharon Wilcher it's, 'children first.' You ask her, you tell her, and she will give you what you need; but, she expects you to teach these children. That's what counts.

Ward Elementary has taken full advantage of resources made available by the Chicago school district. Ward participated in the district's extended-day initiatives for schools, the Lighthouse Program. The Lighthouse Program at Ward provided several components: an academic program, a social center, and hot meals. Ward offered a first hour of reading and math on alternating evenings, four evenings per week. An evening cook and a porter were hired to run the hot dinner program. The social center was offered for an hour, five evenings per week after the academic hour, providing community classes such as English Literacy classes to monolingual Chinese-speaking parents. Teachers were paid to teach the academic classes and parents were paid to teach the social center classes.

The Lighthouse Program was so popular that it served half of Ward's 438 students. The program was important to the community because many parents worked long hours or multiple jobs. This program not only kept the children in a supervised setting for a longer period, but it also provided the evening meal four days a week. In fact, after the program adjourned for the evening, children could be found playing on the playground and lingering around the school. When the principal jokingly told students they were going to be required to attend the Lighthouse Program on weekends, the students enthusiastically consented.

Besides the obvious benefits of added instructional time for participating children, a positive outcome of the after-school program has been that teachers were able to understand their students better as they interacted with them in slightly different settings. According to a second-grade teacher who had students from her class as well as from other second-grade classes in the after-school class, "I have one of my lowest-achieving students in the after-school class. I discovered that he is able to do the work but he's just not doing it during the regular class time. In the after-school class, he pays more attention, and when I ask him questions, he can answer them well."

The Chicago School District also provided an extended-year program that has been important to the success of Ward students. The program was provided in support of the district's "no social promotion" policy. Students who did not pass third, sixth, and eighth grades were required to participate in the Summer Bridge Program so they could learn essential skills and earn promotion to the next grade. Some Ward teachers felt that the "no social promotion" policy has motivated students to give their best effort. Thus, this district initiative has supported Ward's efforts to improve academic achievement.

The state of Illinois has given schools more autonomy and accountability since 1989. The 1989 Illinois School Reform Law required Chicago public schools to create Local School Councils in every school. Local School Councils are school-based governing bodies that include parents,

teachers, and community individuals. The Council's major responsibilities are to hire the school's principal and to develop the school improvement plan. This planning process, which occurs every year, involves teachers and other staff, alongside administrators, in making decisions about the use of fiscal resources at the school. They have the ability to support school improvement recommendations with dollars.

In addition, the state has developed a policy of accountability for student achievement through the institution of the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) in 1991. All schools in Illinois must administer this test in the spring of every academic year. This test helps identify students, classrooms, and schools that are achieving at or below expected. Ward teachers, as well as the district area administrator, expressed their belief that the institution of this test has been critical to improving instruction. Though Ward teachers have a history of being conscientious regarding student achievement, the adoption of the test elevated attention to academic instruction. As a first-grade teacher commented, "I think everyone is more diligent about keeping on task and adhering to issues of student achievement."

Ward has used both the governance policies and the assessment policies to support the school's process of improvement. In the past few years, the development of the school improvement plan has involved bringing staff together, including bus attendants and other ancillary staff, to analyze student scores on both the nationally-normed test and the state assessment. Each student's scores were closely examined. Students who scored below the passing level on the Spring 1998 administration of the test were "targeted" for additional assistance and were required to participate in Ward's after-school program. While many schools have after-school programs, Ward has maximized the effectiveness of its program by targeting students who need extra assistance. Because all teaching staff participated in analyzing assessment data, all staff gained a deep understanding of what students needed to learn and help was focused accordingly. As well, additional support was made available through tutoring by a parent, instructional aide, another student, or all of the above during the regular school day.

Students received these intensive academic interventions throughout the school year. If a targeted student failed to attend the after-school component the assistant principal called his or her parent or sent a letter if they did not have a phone. In the case of one child whose parent told the assistant principal that the child could not attend because he did not have transportation, the assistant principal replied, "I'll make sure he gets home…. He needs to stay".

Related to the state assessment initiative, the Chicago Public School District has developed learning objectives or standards to be used by all Chicago schools in guiding instruction. These objectives were important at Ward, where teachers were given the freedom to customize curriculum and instruction to ensure that all students in a grade acquired the same skills. This means that two first-grade teachers might teach from different texts; however, lessons are focused on the attainment on the common set of standards.

Conclusions

Wilcher was able to gain the respect and confidence of her peers and the community and has led the school to the exemplary status it has achieved. It is notable that there was little animosity or conflict among her peers regarding her rise to leadership — only one voter on the Local School Council had reservations about appointing Wilcher to the principalship. This possible obstacle was overcome through the consensus-building process that Ward staff learned and applied routinely.

Wilcher recalled an incident when visitors entered the building and were directed down the hallway to where she and another staff member were standing side by side. On this day, as usual, she was suited in business attire and, as usual, her co-worker was suited in jeans, a shirt, and tennis shoes. As the visitors approached them, they proceeded to introduce themselves to the European American male plant engineer as opposed to the African American female, who in fact, was the principal. This circumstance occurs from time-to-time. Recently, a visitor walked up to her and said, "I'm looking for the principal." Wilcher replied, "You're lucky, you're looking at her." In her characteristic humorous way she explains, "A title is just a title. I'm here to do a job. I can't take that title to the grocery store to get bread. If I could take that title to the store and get bread free, then maybe I'd be worried about the title."

The fact that Wilcher is African American and the student body is predominantly Asian American has not presented major challenges with the parents or the community. While many schools struggle with these issues, they have not been issues for Ward, primarily because of Wilcher's leadership style. She explained that she has been a member of the Ward staff for 20 years and has forged relationships with parents who were once her students, and grandparents who are now raising the children of her former students. During those years she has been involved in those families' lives, often helping to provide many of their needs. She knows the circumstances that many families face and has responded to them to the best of her ability. She is vested in the community, shown through her presence at community activities and her accessibility to community members. For example, she attends the Chicago Alternative Policeman Program meetings and the Olahuke Scholarship Fund (a scholarship fund established for Asian American students) meetings. In addition, Ward students participated in activities with senior citizens who live in a community center across the street from the school.

A good example of Wilcher's collegial and inclusive leadership style is the fact that she was the last person interviewed for this study. Parents, instructional aides, bus attendants, the school counselor, several teachers of students with special needs, classroom teachers, the present and past assistant principal, and a district administrator were all interviewed first. Her intention was to give as many of her staff as possible the opportunity to tell the story of Ward's change from their perspectives, rather than from her perspective.

REPORT CONCLUSION

These nine schools are not perfect. Each school continues to struggle to improve achievement. In some schools, they are working to deepen student learning in core subject areas. In other schools, they strive to extend academic excellence beyond reading and mathematics to other areas of the curriculum. In some of the nine, they continue to work to build a team among teachers, support staff, and parents. In others, they are trying to get students to accept a broader sense of responsibility for their learning and school success. Although teachers and administrators at the schools were quick to point out the areas where they still hope to improve, all nine schools have achieved impressive results.

Surrounded by poverty and all of the negative features associated with poverty, these schools have achieved academic goals that many people would have assumed unrealistic. Their academic results compare favorably with other schools in urban, poor communities; but also, they compare well with many suburban schools that serve much more affluent populations. In some cases, their achievement is demonstrated on norm-referenced assessments. In others, their success is visible in results from criterion-referenced or performance-based assessments. As well, in each school there are many other evidences of academic success in the daily work of students as they demonstrate the ability to read with understanding, write in a manner that communicates ideas clearly, and use mathematics to solve problems.

If such success was apparent in only one school, we might applaud the administrators and teachers as heroes and wish that we were so lucky to have such miracle workers in our communities. In contrast, however, there were nine successful schools in this study and if data, resources, and time were available, we probably could have identified 90 others throughout the country. These successes came from the hard work of everyday teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and students.

Ultimately, the question posed by these schools is “Why not?” If a school in inner-city Detroit, Houston, or Boston can achieve these results, then why not the school a mile or two down the road? If a school in a poor community in San Antonio, Chicago, or Atlanta can bring almost all of its students to high levels of academic success, they why not the school in my community? If a school in East St. Louis, metropolitan Washington, D.C., or Milwaukee can achieve such a high level of academic distinction, then why not every school in America?

The answer certainly cannot be attributable to the problems of students or parents because these nine schools have students and families with the same challenges found in any poor community. The answer cannot be attributable to the quantity of resources available. Although these schools had reasonable resources, they generally had no greater resources than low-performing schools in their districts.

Perhaps, the answer to “why not,” is that many of us assumed that this level of achievement could not be attained or at least, could not be attained at “my school.” Perhaps, the answer is that many of us simply did not know where to begin, what to do, or how to proceed to move

from current levels of performance to a much higher level of academic expectation. Hopefully, the stories of these nine schools address both types of answers and increase our resolve to create excellent schools in every community throughout the nation.