Evaluation Brief

U.S. Department of Education
Office of the Under Secretary
Planning and Evaluation Service

SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED AS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT UNDER TITLE I: RECENT EVIDENCE FROM THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

The 1994 Title I reauthorization required states to establish rigorous and explicit criteria for measuring school progress.[1] Based on these criteria, each Title I school is required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward attaining the state's performance standards. Schools (and districts) that fail to make adequate progress for two consecutive years are to be identified for improvement. These schools are required to develop or revise their plans to address identified needs, and are to receive technical assistance by the states and districts through school support teams and other support mechanisms. The law also requires that these schools spend an amount equal to 10 percent of their annual Title I funding on professional development over two years or demonstrate that they are effectively carrying out professional development activities.

If schools identified for improvement fail to show progress, states and districts can take corrective actions. Corrective actions may include, but are not limited to, withholding funds; revoking authority for a school to operate a schoolwide program; decreasing decision-making authority at the school level; reconstituting the school staff; and authorizing students to transfer (without having to pay their own transportation costs) to other public schools served by the local educational agency. In the case of schools identified for improvement that fail to make progress for three or more years, such corrective action is required by law. The statute prohibits states from implementing certain types of corrective action until final assessments are in place (Section 1116(c)(5)(B)(ii)). States are required to report annually the number of schools identified as in need of improvement. Because of the substantial differences in how states define and measure "low-performing schools," these data are neither consistent nor can they be compared across states.[2]

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEF

There is a general lack of information on schools identified for improvement on a national basis. Using data from a large, nationally-representative study of Title I schools, this evaluation brief provides information on the following topics regarding schools identified as in need of improvement under Title I:

1See http: //ww.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/sec1116.html.

2See U. S. Department of Education (2001).

- Whether principals in these schools fully comprehend what it means to be identified as in need of improvement under Title I;

- What these schools look like in terms of demographic and other characteristics;

- What kinds of technical assistance they have received (or failed to receive);

- Whether schools have been subjected to corrective actions by districts; and

- Whether some schools have been successful in meeting AYP targets or in moving out of in need of improvement status.

DATA

This evaluation brief reports on data obtained through the National Longitudinal Survey of Schools (NLSS), a nationally representative survey of principals and teachers in Title I Schools in school year (SY) 1998-1999. Designed and conducted by Westat, the principal and teacher surveys of the NLSS were first fielded during SY 1998–1999; schools that remained in Title I status were followed for the next two years through SY 2000–2001.[3] The surveys focus on whether and how schools are implementing the provisions of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended in 1994. The total sample size for the NLSS was 1,507 Title I schools; schools identified by the district as in need of improvement were oversampled. The total number of responding schools was 1,081 in SY 1998-1999 and 987 in SY 1999-2000.

CONFUSION EXISTS REGARDING WHETHER A SCHOOL HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT UNDER TITLE I

There appears to be some confusion on the part of school principals regarding whether their school has been identified by the district as in need of improvement. For example:

- Overall, in SY 1998-1999, 13 percent of Title I schools were reported by the district as in need of improvement under Title I. However, about a quarter of the principals in schools identified by the district were uncertain about their status or disagreed with the district that their school had been identified for improvement.

- In SY 1999-2000, about 20 percent of Title I schools were identified by the district as in need of improvement. Among these schools, 37 percent of principals disagreed with the district that their school had been identified as in need of improvement, and another 4 percent reported that they did not know whether they had been identified.[4]

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[3]In 1998-1999 the NLSS sample was nationally representative of Title I schools. The sample was not refreshed and consequently is not representative of all Title I schools in subsequent years.

[4]We compared the two groups of schools—schools where the principal agreed with the district that the school had been identified for improvement under Title I and schools where the principal disagreed or did not know that the school had been identified for improvement—to see whether there were any differences between them. Schools where the principal disagreed with the district identification were more likely to be urban, high-poverty elementary schools operating schoolwide programs compared with schools where the principal agreed with the district. However, there was no difference in the average number of years that the principal had been in his or her current position: 5.1 years.

This level of confusion suggests the need for clearer communication between the district and schools regarding identification under Title I.

Some of this confusion may arise from the dual accountability systems in place in many states.[5] As the recent report from the National Assessment of Title I points out: "In many cases, states' own accountability systems and the systems created to meet requirements of Title I operate separately and are only somewhat overlapping.... Research shows that state and local accountability systems tend to be better understood by educators and have more immediate consequences for schools and districts."[6]

In the remainder of the evaluation brief, we analyze only those schools that were identified by *both* the district and principal as in need of improvement.[7]

CONFUSION EXISTS REGARDING HOW *LONG* A SCHOOL HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT UNDER TITLE I

Even where there was agreement between the principals and districts that the school had been identified under Title I, there was considerable disagreement about how long a school had been identified for improvement. For example, among schools that the district reported had been identified for *two* years:

- Only 29 percent of the principals agreed that the school had been identified for two years; and
- About 37 percent of principals reported that their school had been identified for four years or more.

MANY PRINCIPALS SEEM TO BE UNFAMILIAR WITH STATE MEASURES OF ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS (AYP) UNDER TITLE I

- Overall, among schools that had been identified by both the district and principal, about 48 percent of principals reported being *unfamiliar* with AYP measures established by the state.
- This lack of knowledge differed by the length of time the school had been identified. Those who had been identified for a year or less tended to be the most unfamiliar with these measures compared with schools identified for longer periods of time (65 percent versus 25 percent).

This lack of concordance between district and principal reports and lack of familiarity with state metrics of progress on the part of principals highlights the level of confusion that appears to exist regarding the entire Title I school improvement process. Districts and states need to make the process more transparent, widely disseminate the criteria on which schools are judged, and provide greater follow-through with schools.

Among principals who were familiar with state criteria for adequate yearly progress, 57 percent reported that they did not consider these measures adequate to judge their school's performance.

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[5]Overall, 17 percent of Title I schools had been identified for improvement in SY 1999-2000 under a state or district accountability system. Only one-third of these schools (about 6 percent of all Title I schools) had also been identified for improvement under Title I.

[6]U.S. Department of Education (2001: 25).

[7]This considerably underestimates the number of schools in need of improvement identified by the district because, as noted earlier, in SY 1999-2000, 41 percent of principals disagreed with or were uncertain about having been identified by the district. Clearly, this introduces some unknown bias in our estimates. If principals disagreed, they were not asked this set of questions.

Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement[8] Are More Likely to Be Serving Significant Numbers of Poor and Minority Students and to Be Located in Rural Areas

- Approximately 32 percent of Title I schools identified as in need of improvement were in the highest-poverty category (defined as schools with 75 percent or more of their students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program). Only 19 percent of schools not in need of improvement were highest-poverty schools.[9] (See Exhibit 1).

- About 55 percent of schools identified as in need of improvement were low-poverty schools, defined as those with less than 50 percent of their students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program. Most of these low-poverty schools in need of improvement were located in rural areas and in lower-poverty districts. These low-poverty schools tended to have higher poverty rates on average than the districts in which they were located.

- A third of schools identified for improvement served predominantly minority students (75 percent or more minority students), compared with 17 percent of Title I schools not in need.

- A quarter of the schools in need of improvement were in the highest quartile of both poverty and minority representation, compared with 11 percent of schools not in need.

- About 60 percent of schools in need of improvement were located in rural areas, compared with 45 percent of schools not in need.

- A slightly higher percentage of schools identified as in need of improvement operated schoolwide programs, compared with schools not in need.

- A slightly higher percentage of schools in need of improvement had adopted comprehensive school reform models (48 percent) compared with 43 percent of schools not in need.[10]

Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement Face Significant Challenges

Compared with principals in Title I schools not identified as in need of improvement, principals in Title I schools in need of improvement were significantly more likely to report that:

- Lower percentages of their students were prepared to work at the next grade level (74 percent compared with 85 percent); and

- Their school experienced significantly higher turnover rates for teachers (37 percent compared with 8 percent).

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[8]As mentioned earlier, these are schools identified by both the district and the principal as in need of improvement under Title I.

[9]The comparison group of schools identified here includes only schools that the district had not identified as in need of improvement under Title I. Thus, schools that had been identified by the district as in need of improvement but where the principal disagreed with the district identification or did not know the school had been identified were excluded from the comparison group.

[10]We present evidence later to show that many of these schools were encouraged to adopt models as part of the improvement process.

Exhibit 1. A Profile of Title I Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement and Title I Schools Not in Need of Improvement, SY 1999-2000

Selected Characteristics	Title I Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement	Title I Schools Not Identified as in Need of Improvement
	Percentage	
Percent of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program		
0-49.9%[a]	54.5	50.2
50-74.9%	13.7	30.6
75-100%	31.9	19.3
Percent of minority students		
0-49.9%[a]	59.1	68.7
50-74.9%	8.6	14.3
75-100%	32.3	17.1
Schools with 75-100% of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program *and* 75-100% minority students	24.8	10.7
Urbanicity		
Urban	22.4	22.1
Rural/small town	59.7	45.7
Suburban/large town	17.9	32.2
Title I type		
Schoolwide	57.3	52.6
Targeted Assistance	42.7	48.4
School Level		
Elementary school	80.3	77.5
Secondary school	19.7	22.5
Percent of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students		
0%	62.2	55.3
1-24.9%	35.3	33.5
25-100%	12.5	11.3
Schools that adopted a comprehensive school reform model	48.4	42.5
	Number of Schools	
Weighted	4,963	33,438
Unweighted	137	745

Exhibit reads: 54.5 percent of Title I schools identified as in need of improvement in SY 1999-2000 are in the low-poverty category, with less than 50 percent of students eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program, compared with 50.2 percent of Title I schools not in need of improvement.

Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section Principal Screener and Common Core of Data, 1998-1999

Note: [a]Unweighted sample size is too small to allow further disaggregation.

In addition, principals and teachers in schools in need of improvement were somewhat more likely than principals and teachers in schools not in need of improvement to report that content standards in reading and mathematics were too hard "to a great extent" for most of their students, and that their school faced greater barriers to using content standards with all students, including lack of parent support and difficulty aligning practices with content standards. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

IN SY 1999-2000, ONLY ONE-THIRD OF SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT RECEIVED ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the Title I legislation requires states and districts to provide technical assistance to schools identified for improvement, only about 34 percent of these schools reported receiving additional technical assistance or professional development from outside agencies. Districts appeared to be focusing their support efforts on schools that have been in this status for longer periods of time, as Exhibit 2 shows.

Exhibit 2. Percentage of Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement that Received Additional Technical Assistance by Length of Time Schools Had Been Identified

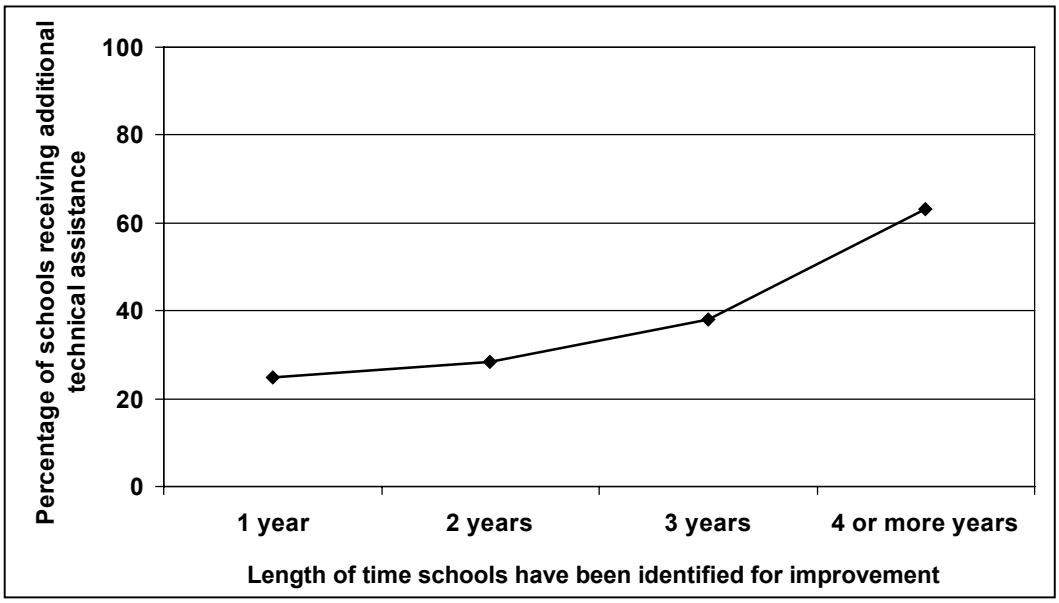

Exhibit reads: 25.0 percent of Title I schools that had been identified as in need of improvement for one year in SY 1999-2000 had received additional technical assistance from outside entities.
Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section E, Q. PE2 and PE8

For example:

- Less than 30 percent of schools that had been identified for one to two years and less than 40 percent of schools that had been identified for three years had received additional assistance; but,

- Over 60 percent of schools that had been identified for four or more years had received additional assistance.

Schools received assistance from a variety of sources. Overall, we find that:

- 25 percent of all schools identified as in need of improvement had received assistance from the state and 22 percent had received assistance from school support teams;

- 22 percent had received assistance from the district;

- 19 percent had received assistance from an intermediate or regional education agency; and

- 14-15 percent had received assistance from university or independent consultants.

In addition:

- About 6 percent of all schools in need of improvement had received assistance from one to two sources;

- 18 percent had received assistance from three to four sources; and,

- 10 percent had received assistance from five or more sources.

The percentages of schools that had received assistance from these sources were substantially higher among schools that had been identified for four or more years compared with schools that had been identified for one to three years. For example:

- Among schools that had been identified for four or more years, 55 percent had received assistance from the district compared with less than 20 percent of schools that had been identified for one to three years; and,

- Among schools that had been identified for four or more years, 48 percent had received assistance from the state compared with less than a quarter of schools that had been identified for one to three years.

ALMOST ALL SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR TWO OR MORE YEARS IMPLEMENTED ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS

Among schools that had been identified for one year, only 37 percent had implemented additional strategies. These strategies ranged from revising or developing a school plan[11] to offering more professional development than in years prior to being identified. Most schools adopted a variety of strategies. Exhibit 3 shows the different strategies adopted by schools that had been identified for two or more years to address school improvement needs.

[11]This is required by the 1994 Title I legislation.

Exhibit 3. Additional Strategies Implemented to Address Need for Improvement by Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement for Two or More Years

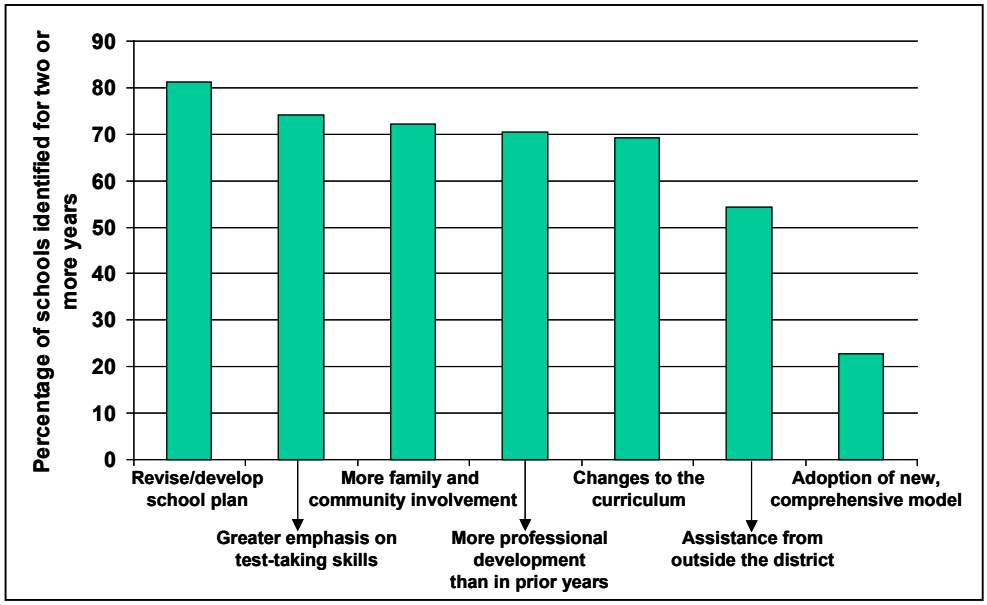

Exhibit reads: 81.3 percent of principals in schools identified for improvement for two or more years in SY 1999-2000 reported that they had revised or developed their school plan in response to being identified for improvement.
Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section E, Q. PE9A

- Over 80 percent had revised or developed a school plan.
- Between 70-75 percent adopted strategies that included greater emphasis on test-taking skills; increased family and community involvement;[12] increased professional development for teachers; and changes to the curriculum.
- About 54 percent had sought assistance from outside the district.
- A little more than one-fifth had adopted a new, comprehensive school reform model.
- About 45 percent of schools with students with limited English proficiency adopted teaching or learning strategies focused on students with limited English proficiency; among schools with migrant students, about 40 percent adopted teaching or learning strategies focused on migrant students.

[12]Schools in need of improvement were significantly more likely than schools not in need to offer training for parents (84 percent compared with 65 percent).

PRINCIPALS IN ABOUT HALF THE SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED FOR IMPROVEMENT FOR TWO OR MORE YEARS REPORTED BEING SUBJECTED TO CORRECTIVE ACTION BY DISTRICTS

Districts can take additional steps with schools that fail to improve for two or more years. As mentioned earlier, these corrective actions can range from making alternative governance arrangements (such as creation of a charter school) to developing agreements with other public agencies to provide health, counseling, and other social services needed to remove barriers to learning.

- Between 42-46 percent of principals in schools that had been identified for between two to three years reported that their school had been subjected to corrective action by the district, as did
- 69 percent of principals in schools that had been identified for four or more years.

Exhibit 4 shows the percentage of Title I schools identified for two or more years that had been subjected to particular corrective actions.

Exhibit 4. Corrective Actions Taken by the District with Schools that Had Been Identified for Improvement for Two or More Years

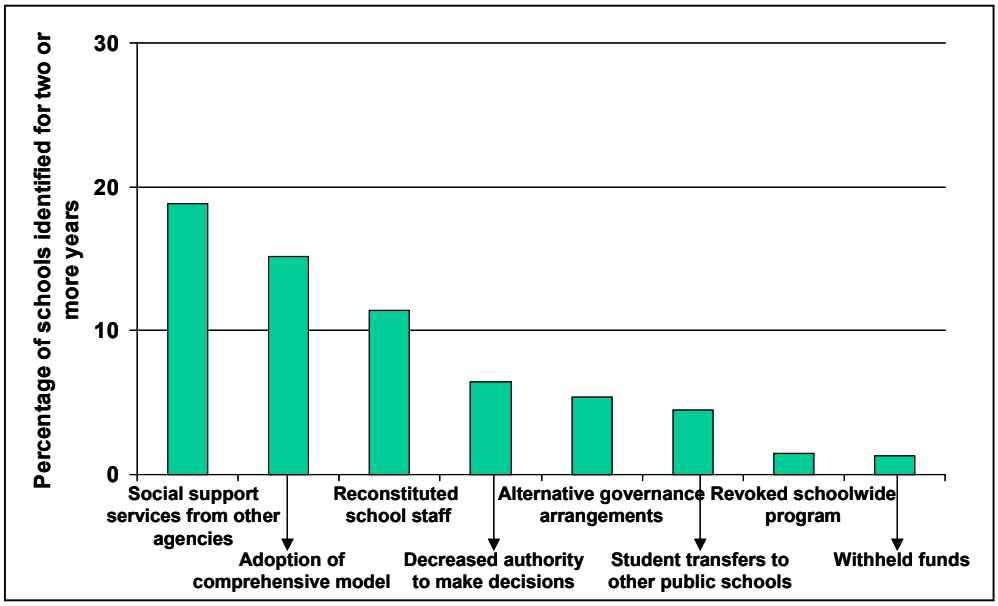

Exhibit reads: 18.8 percent of principals in schools identified for improvement for two or more years in SY 1999-2000 reported that their district had developed agreements with other public agencies to provide health, counseling, and other social services needed to remove barriers to learning, as a result of the school's identification as in need for more than one year.
Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1999-2000, Section E, Q. PE10 and PE10A

The most frequently adopted strategies were arranging to provide social support services from other public agencies, requiring schools to adopt comprehensive school reform models, and reconstituting school staff. However, even these strategies were reported by only 10-18 percent of principals. Authorizing transfers of students to other public schools occurred very infrequently, in less than 5 percent of the schools.

SOME SCHOOLS WERE SUCCESSFUL IN MEETING TITLE I AYP TARGETS IN SY 1998-1999

Schools have to meet AYP targets for two out of three years following identification to no longer be considered in need of improvement. In SY 1999-2000, principals of schools identified as in need of improvement were asked whether their school had met the Title I targets for adequate yearly progress (AYP) in the previous year. We do not know whether these schools have met AYP targets successfully for two out of three years, merely that they met their AYP target the previous year.

Schools that reported meeting AYP goals in SY 1998-1999 included:

- Almost 60 percent of the schools that had been identified for two years;
- Only 21 percent of schools that had been identified for three years; and
- 60 percent of schools that had been identified for four or more years.

ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF SCHOOLS WERE SUCCESSFUL IN MOVING OUT OF IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT STATUS[13]

Because our data allow us to track schools for two years, we can identify schools that were successful in moving out of in need of improvement status by looking at whether schools were identified by the district as needing improvement in SY 1998-1999 but not identified as needing improvement in SY 1999-2000. Thirty-four percent of schools identified in SY 1998-1999 were not identified by the district as in need of improvement in SY 1999-2000.[14] It is important to remember that many of these schools had been identified for improvement earlier than SY 1998-1999. The NLSS asked districts to list all schools that were in improvement status as of SY 1998-1999.

We examined the relationship between success (in moving out of in need status) and selected characteristics of schools that were in improvement status in SY 1998-1999. Four factors appeared to be significantly related to the likelihood of success: length of time the school had been identified for improvement, whether the school received outside support; whether the school received support from the district; and whether the school received support from school support teams (Exhibit 5).[15]

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[13]It is important to remember that this section examines schools that were successful in moving out of in need status, not schools that met AYP criteria the previous year as reported in the preceding section.

[14]Unfortunately, we only have data for a subset of these schools because some of the principals identified in SY 1998-1999 disagreed with the district identification. The success rate for all schools identified by the district as needing improvement in SY 1998-1999 is higher—44 percent—than the number reported above. Principals who disagreed with the district identification did not answer this section of the survey.

[15]Because of small sample sizes, we were not able to model the net effect of these factors on success in a multivariate framework.

- Forty-one percent of schools identified for three or more years were no longer in need of improvement compared with 38 percent of those identified for two years.

- Forty-one percent of schools that received additional support were no longer identified for improvement in SY 1999-2000 compared with 27 percent of schools that did not receive such support.

- Between 46-47 percent of schools that received district support or support from school support teams were successful in moving out of in-need status, compared with 25-26 percent of schools that did not receive such support.

Exhibit 5. Percentage of Schools in Improvement Status in SY 1998-1999 that Succeeded in Moving out of In-Need Status in SY 1999-2000, by Selected Characteristics of Schools

Selected Characteristics	Percentage of Schools that Succeeded in Moving out of In- Need Status
Overall	33.6
Length of time school had been identified for improvement	
1 year	24.6
2 years	37.5
3 or more years	40.7
Additional assistance provided by outside entities	
Yes	40.6
No	27.3
District provided additional assistance	
Yes	45.9
No	25.7
School support teams provided additional assistance	
Yes	46.8
No	25.1
Number of schools in improvement status in SY 1998-1999 that succeeded in moving out of in-need status in SY 1999-2000 (weighted)	1,410
Total number of schools in improvement status in SY 1998-1999 (weighted)	4,191

Exhibit reads: 33.6 percent of Title I schools that were in improvement status in SY 1998-1999 succeeded in moving out of in need of improvement status in SY 1999-2000.
Source: NLSS Principal Survey, SY 1998-1999 and SY 1999-2000, Sections Principal Screener and E, Q. PE2, PE8, PE8A

While we found some differences by school characteristics, these differences were not statistically significant. Nonetheless, we believe the findings are useful in highlighting factors that appear to affect the ability of schools to get out of in-need status.

For example:

- Lower-poverty schools and those with lower percentages of minority students were somewhat more successful in moving out of in-need status.

- Elementary schools were more successful in moving out of in-need status.

- Principal familiarity with district measures of progress also contributed to success.

Among schools that had a model, schools that received assistance from the model developer also showed higher rates of success than schools that failed to receive such assistance.

The additional strategies shown in Exhibit 3 did not appear to lead to higher success in moving out of in-need status, with the exception of increased professional development. Schools that had implemented increased professional development were relatively more successful in moving out of in-need status compared with schools that did not adopt this strategy, although it is not clear what the focus of this increased professional development was.

SUMMARY

- In SY 1999-2000, about 20 percent of Title I schools were identified by the district as in need of improvement. This represented an increase from SY 1998-1999, when 13 percent of Title I schools were identified by the district as in need of improvement.

- Considerable confusion existed on the part of principals regarding whether their school had been identified as in need of improvement under Title I. For example,

    - In SY 1999-2000, over 40 percent of the principals in Title I schools that had been identified by the district as in need of improvement either disagreed with the district that their school had been identified as in need of improvement or did not know whether they had been identified.

    - Even where there was agreement between the principals and districts that the school had been identified under Title I, there was considerable disagreement about how long a school had been identified for improvement.

- A little less than half of the principals in schools identified by both the district and the principal as being in need of improvement reported being unfamiliar with AYP measures established by the state.

- Schools identified as in need of improvement were more likely to be serving significant numbers of poor and minority students, to be located in rural areas, and to experience higher turnover rates for teachers. Principals in these schools were also much more likely to report that lower percentages of their students were prepared to work at the next grade level.

- Only one-third of schools in need of improvement received additional technical assistance or professional development.

- Most schools that had been identified for two or more years had implemented additional strategies in response to being identified. These strategies ranged from revising or developing a school plan to more professional development than in years prior to being identified.

- Principals in about half the schools identified for improvement for two or more years reported being subjected to corrective action by districts, including arranging to provide social support services from other public agencies, requiring schools to adopt comprehensive school reform models, and reconstituting school staff.

- About a third of schools identified in SY 1998-1999 were not identified by the district as in need of improvement in SY 1999-2000. Four factors appeared to be significantly related to the likelihood of success: length of time the school had been identified for improvement; whether the school received outside support; whether the school received support from the district; and whether the school received support from school support teams.

REFERENCE

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *High Standards for All Students: A Report from the National Assessment of Title I on Progress and Challenges since the 1994 Reauthorization.* Washington, D.C.: Author.

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