

BREAKING THE HABIT OF LOW PERFORMANCE



SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING STORIES



BREAKING THE HABIT OF
LOW PERFORMANCE:
SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL
RESTRUCTURING STORIES

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Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement is administered by the Academic Development Institute (Lincoln, IL) in partnership with the Temple University Institute for Schools and Society (Philadelphia, PA) and Little Planet Learning (Nashville, TN).

*A national content center supported by the
U. S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.
Award #S283B050057*

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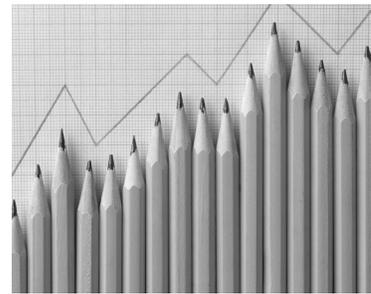


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Introduction

Holabird Academy students begin each day by shouting together the year they will graduate from college. Dressed neatly in uniforms, the students attend classes led by familiar faces because the school enjoys 100% teacher retention. The sparkling campus and brightly-colored murals welcome students and faculty each day to the business of learning. Student achievement is high and growing.

Westwood High School boasts award-winning athletic teams, strong school spirit, and more than 90% of its students performing at or above grade level. The halls “shine like glass;” teachers enjoy coming to work; and community partners and parents are actively involved in the school.

Both schools serve predominantly low-income students of color in forgotten sections of large cities. Both are very recent success stories. Holabird, in Baltimore, and Westwood, in Memphis, experienced persistently dismal student performance for a decade before entering restructuring status under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, reauthorized in 2001 as No Child Left Behind or NCLB). NCLB requires restructuring schools to implement alternative governance structures designed to dramatically improve student performance. Prior to restructuring, few students at these schools scored proficient on state tests in math or language arts. Violence from the surrounding neighborhoods seeped into the schools. Buildings—marred with graffiti and broken windows—outwardly reflected the fatigue and, in many cases, disregard that staff and students felt for teaching and learning.

Despite a habit of poor performance, these two schools transformed themselves after entering restructuring status. With new leaders at the helm, a series of supports from district and state education agencies, and the rallying of outside stakeholders, these schools now stand among the highest-performing in their districts. Too often,

Too often, restructuring efforts fail, but these schools found the right recipe for change.

restructuring efforts fail, but these and other schools featured in this report found the right recipe for change that resulted in improved student performance and school transformation.

The components of a successful school are clear. Many educators can easily list them: high expectations for all students, a safe and orderly learning environment, strong instructional leadership, highly qualified teachers, data-driven decision making, etc. Yet, if we know the components, why don't more schools change what they are doing to mirror them? Knowing the components of effective schools and using that knowledge to transform schools that have none of them into shining examples of success is not an easy or clear task. Certainly, the recipe is different for each school. In nearly every case of a chronically failing school, however, true change requires breaking the habit of dysfunctional processes and raising expectations—for staff and students—that has been low for years.

While many districts and schools commit significant resources, both human and fiscal, to school improvement, little real improvement remains the norm.¹ Yet, some schools and districts have proven that even chronically failing schools can succeed at rapid improvement.² What have these schools done differently from the thousands of schools that languish in improvement status? What actors have intervened to catalyze change or create an

environment conducive to improvement?

Public Impact, working on behalf of the Center on Innovation & Improvement, examined five schools that successfully restructured. By current accountability standards, these schools had long-documented histories of poor performance and failed efforts to improve. At each of these schools, multiple factors enabled them to kick the low-performance habit. We tell their stories here.

The stories are heartening, but we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that like most habits, kicking the habit of low-performance and sustaining the desired behavior are ongoing challenges as opposed to solitary efforts. Our hope is that the schools are able to continue their success, but our examination reflects their recent accomplishments and only time will reveal the sustainability of their efforts.

The authors would like to thank Sam Redding for his commitment to this topic and for his guidance in framing the research questions, state policy leaders for nominating schools, and school and district personnel for carving out time in their busy schedules to share their restructuring stories with us. The authors would also like to thank Julie Kowal, Emily Hassel, and Bryan C. Hassel for editing this work.



School Restructuring

With the reauthorization of ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools receiving Title I dollars that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward meeting grade-level standards for five consecutive years must initiate restructuring to improve academic outcomes. The five restructuring options articulated in the current law encompass alternative governance structures designed to change how low-performing schools are led and controlled. The five restructuring options are:

- Option #1—reopen school as a public charter school;
- Option #2—replace all or most of the school staff, which may include the principal, who are relevant to the failure;
- Option #3—contract with an external provider with a demonstrated record of effectiveness to operate the school;
- Option #4—turn the operation of the school over to the state education agency; or
- Option #5—engage in other major restructuring of the school’s governance that makes fundamental reforms.

In the seventh year of NCLB-driven accountability requirements, there are some positive stories: 75% of Title I schools nationwide demonstrated AYP in 2003-2004.³ Nevertheless, of the 25% that did not successfully make AYP, whether for all student groups or particular sub-groups, increasing numbers of schools are facing heavier mandates for change. In fall 2006, 2,330 schools were identified for corrective action, 937 schools were identified for restructuring after failing to make AYP for five years, and 1,242 schools began implementing their restructuring plans after failing to meet AYP goals for six years.⁴ For the 2007-08 school year, 3,500 schools—or 7% of all Title I schools—were in restructuring planning or implementation status.⁵ The number of schools identified for restructuring is increasing each year as state proficiency goals rise to 100% by 2014.

NCLB is the latest and boldest iteration of federal efforts to infuse accountability into public education and improve the quality of education provided to all students. While NCLB currently provides the strongest mandate to improve, it is a reflection of broader social goals in many state-level accountability systems, several of which predated NCLB. In response to multiple forces driving a commitment to school improvement, including the mandate to demonstrate AYP, states and local districts are engaging in a variety of reform initiatives. Yet, a recent survey of principals shows that while nearly all are engaged in some effort to improve their schools, few leaders of schools identified for restructuring were implementing significant changes to school governance and staffing as envisioned in NCLB.⁶ The Center on Education Policy’s (CEP) analysis of five states’ restructuring efforts further demonstrates that

restructuring schools often choose the least prescriptive restructuring option, Option Five. The vast majority of schools in California, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, and Ohio chose restructuring Option Five during the 2006-07 school year. The table below, adapted from CEP’s cross-state report, summarizes the percentages of schools that chose each restructuring option.

In many cases, Option Five provides a loophole for less-rigorous restructuring efforts, and indeed some districts choose it for this reason. In other cases, however, some or all of the other four options are not available to schools. For example, in 10 states charter conversion is not an option because charter schools are not allowed by state law. In many states that do have charter school laws, charter caps or other restrictions may limit conversion as a restructuring approach.⁷

Percentages of Schools in Restructuring Implementation in Five States Choosing Various Options in 2006-07					
Federal Restructuring Option	CA	GA	MD*	MI	OH*
Option #1—reopen as a charter school	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Option #2—replace all or most school staff relevant to failure	13%	4%	12%	7%	4%
Option #3—contract with an external provider	10%	2%	1%	0%	2%
Option #4—state takeover	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Option #5—engage in other major restructuring	90%	94%	86%	96%	93%

Note: Columns do not total 100% because some schools chose more than one restructuring option.

*Percentages in Maryland and Ohio include Title I and non-Title I schools; these states require both types of schools to implement restructuring.

Source: Adapted from Table 5, p.10 of Center on Education Policy. (2008c). *A Call to Restructure Restructuring: Lessons from the No Child Left Behind Act in Five States*. Washington, DC: Author.

Successful

State takeover of individual schools has also not widely occurred as a response to restructuring efforts under NCLB, for several reasons. Some states have constitutions or laws forbidding state takeover. In other states, many top administrators believe that takeover would be a logistical quagmire. In Montana, for instance, most restructuring schools are public schools located within the borders of sovereign nations of American Indians. Although Montana officials could technically take these schools over, the state has not yet done so in an attempt to sidestep the politically sensitive issue of operating a state-run school for American Indians within another sovereign nation. For other states, state takeover of individual schools, though possible, poses serious challenges to agencies generally more adept at providing guidance and implementing policies rather than directly operating schools.⁸

Contracting with an outside provider has occurred in some states, but for many schools—especially small schools or geographically isolated schools—contractors are simply not available or affordable. Finally, restructuring approaches centering on replacing some or all of the teachers and administrators has been employed by some schools to varying effect. Several pre-conditions, including the availability of leaders likely to obtain better results and high-quality teacher replacements, are necessary for this approach to succeed.⁹

Efficacy of Restructuring

While the body of literature related to effective schools and school improvement is relatively broad and deep, there is limited information about successful restructuring efforts under state or federal accountability systems. CEP has conducted the most in-depth documentation of early school restructuring efforts under NCLB. CEP's case studies in Maryland, for example, documented that while improvement efforts initiated early in the corrective action pipeline were yielding success, efforts to dramatically improve schools formally identified for restructuring have not been successful; more schools were entering than exiting restructuring. In large part due to lack of success in restructuring, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has become more engaged in restructuring and is providing districts with tools and supports. In addition, the MSDE has refined its support to differentiate efforts according to school needs. The most common restructuring approach utilized in Maryland is staff replacement with 38 schools, representing 43% of the schools in restructuring.¹⁰

The CEP case studies of restructuring in Michigan revealed that 9 of 34 elementary and middle schools identified for restructuring had successfully demonstrated AYP, and 5 of these had exited restructuring; efforts at the high school level, however, had not been successful. State and district support efforts such as school audits, mentors, leader coaches, and professional development were credited with helping restructured schools raise achievement.¹¹

CEP's examination of restructuring in California revealed the inherent challenges associated with a state department of education attempting to help the rapidly growing numbers of districts and schools facing restructuring. In spring 2008, California had identified 145 districts and 1,180 schools for restructuring. The state provided districts identified for corrective action with variable levels of assistance based on "severity and pervasiveness" of their academic challenges, with the most troubled districts receiving funding and assistance from external support providers.¹² CEP researchers documented that schools in restructuring were continuing *existing* reform efforts—such as



benchmark assessments, professional coaches, and tutoring—as opposed to embarking upon *new* reforms. In contrast to Maryland, California schools are not using staff replacement as a component of their restructuring efforts.

Unlike CEP's broad studies of restructuring as it has occurred in five states, this report focuses on five individual schools across the country. CEP has found that most schools that enter restructuring languish there; in contrast, the five schools included in this report were identified for study explicitly because they had managed to exit improvement

status. This exploratory study delves into the details of the restructuring process in these five schools. Unlike other research that has focused on the characteristics of successful schools, our primary focus is the process of successful restructuring. These stories convey how these schools with a long history of low performance and failed change initiatives finally broke the habit of poor performance and radically improved outcomes for students.





Methodology

Our research examined six questions:

- What approach did the schools use to restructure?
- What, if any, role did the school leaders play in developing and implementing restructuring efforts?
- What, if any, role did external entities play in the restructuring effort (e.g., district, state department of education, or external consultants)?
- What, if any, additional resources did the schools obtain in order to restructure?
- What do internal and external actors credit for the successful restructuring?
- What, if any, barriers did the school have to overcome in order to successfully restructure?

To answer these questions, we identified five schools, conducted interviews with school and district-level leaders, and developed descriptive profiles about each school's successful restructuring process. Given the limited scope of the project, school selection was relatively opportunistic as opposed to representative. Our sample of schools came from states that: 1) had schools exit restructuring status, and 2) replied to our inquiry for information. From these states, we purposely sought to identify schools to reflect a variety of restructuring approaches, grade configurations, and levels of urbanicity to provide diverse ideas for states and districts crafting their own approaches to supporting schools in corrective action or restructuring status.¹³ As an overview, the following tables summarize information about the schools and their restructuring characteristics. A full profile for each school follows the tables.

Table I: School Profiles

School	Grades Served	Enrollment 2007-08	Demographics (2007-08)					
			African American	Hispanic	Native American	White	Multi-Racial	Free/ Reduced Price Meals
Cobb Elementary, Anniston, AL ^a	K-5	240	94%	2%	0%	3%	0%	94%
Holabird Academy, Baltimore, MD	K-7	220	59%	18%	2%	20%	NA	94%
Box Elder 7-8, Box Elder, MT	7-8	50	NA	NA	98%	NA	NA	98%
MacArthur Middle, Berkeley, IL	6-8	500	51%	40%	0%	5%	3%	63%
Westwood High, Memphis, TN	9-12	420	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%	89%

Sources: 2007-08 school report cards listed in Appendix B.

^aCobb Elementary demographics were gathered via phone call with Anniston City Schools Federal Programs office. Cobb Elementary's racial/ethnic demographics are for the 2008-09 school year.

Table II: School Restructuring Profiles

School	Grades	Restructuring Option and Actions Taken ^a	Years in Restructuring ^b
Cobb Elementary, Anniston, AL	K-5	Option Two—Replaced principal	3
Holabird Academy, Baltimore, MD	K-7	Option Five—Placed a Restructuring Implementation Specialist in school and replaced principal	5
Box Elder 7-8, Box Elder, MT	7-8	Option Five—Instituted self-contained classrooms	4
MacArthur Middle, Berkeley, IL	6-8	Option Five—Reorganized daily schedule for math emphasis and replaced some staff	3
Westwood High, Memphis, TN	9-12	Option Five—Hired High Schools That Work program, placed Exemplary Educator in school, and replaced principal	4

^aAlthough the actions were sometimes similar across schools, only Cobb Elementary explicitly chose a restructuring option other than “Option Five” under NCLB.

^bYears in Restructuring” begins with the school’s restructuring planning year and ends after the school makes AYP for two consecutive years and officially exits improvement status.

Table III: School Restructuring Characteristics

School	Role of SEA ^a	Role of LEA ^a	Staff Replacement	Additional funding ^b	Additional personnel	External Partners
Cobb Elementary	Intensive	Intensive	Replaced principal	Limited	✓	
Holabird Elementary	Minimal	Intensive	Replaced principal, experienced 85% staff turnover the summer between principals	Limited	✓	✓
Box Elder 7-8	Moderate	Intensive	Hired additional teachers, no staff replacement	Limited	✓	
MacArthur Middle	Intensive	Intensive	Targeted staff replacement	Limited	✓	✓
Westwood High	Intensive	Intensive	Replaced principal, targeted staff replacement	Limited	✓	✓

^aWe categorized the roles played by SEAs and LEAs in the restructuring of the five schools highlighted in this report. "Intensive" indicates that the SEA/LEA provided one or more resources identified as central to the restructuring effort by interviewers, "moderate" indicates SEA/LEA provided some resources identified as beneficial to the restructuring effort, and "minimal" indicates that resources provided by the SEA/LEA were not identified as important in the turnaround or that no/very few resources were provided.

^bAdditional funding has been categorized only as "limited." Most of the schools received some Title I restructuring funds, and schools used those funds to purchase desks, textbooks, and classroom items such as manipulatives.



School Profiles

Cobb Elementary School Anniston, Alabama

Introduction

Cobb Elementary, in the small Anniston City Schools district, persisted in program improvement for seven years with little effect. At the end of the 2003-04 school year, about half of Cobb's students scored proficient or better on the state tests. In 2004, during Cobb's restructuring planning year, the superintendent replaced the school's principal with a seasoned administrator and expected quick results. The new principal, along with two state-level officials located in the school and the full involvement of the teaching staff, turned the school around. Cobb left improvement status three years later with about 70% of students scoring proficient or better on the state tests.

The improvement efforts undertaken at Cobb—including aligning the curriculum to state standards and increasing classroom monitoring of teachers to provide actionable feedback—were thereafter rolled out to the four other elementary schools in the district. Five years after its initial restructuring, Cobb continued to make AYP, and no elementary schools in the Anniston district were in program improvement.

Key Restructuring Actions Taken at Cobb:

- Replaced principal during planning year
- Accessed state mentors
- Rewrote school improvement plan
- Ensured that instruction focused on state learning standards (“alignment”)
- Moved stronger teachers to tested grades
- Targeted professional development on student weaknesses
- Instituted teacher induction program and support system
- Improved parental involvement

Background

Cobb Elementary School is a K-5 school located in the small city of Anniston, Alabama just sixty miles from Birmingham. Cobb enrolls a predominantly low-income, African American population of 240 students. The school originally entered program improvement under Alabama's existing accountability system and, with the passage of NCLB, entered restructuring in 2004 after seven years of low student performance.

Restructuring

In the fall of 2004, Cobb Elementary School entered its restructuring planning year. Anniston City Schools acted quickly to turn the school around. Cobb was the first school in the small district to enter restructuring, so the district used Cobb's struggle as an opportunity to strengthen the entire system of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Restructuring actions centered on personnel changes, teacher development, and improved academic programming.

New Principal, New Plan

When Cobb was slated to enter its restructuring planning year, Anniston City Schools' superintendent chose the turnaround restructuring option ("Option Two") for the school. The superintendent transferred Cobb's principal to another position and placed an experienced administrator, Bob Phillips, as the new head of the school. Phillips brought more than two decades of experience as a school administrator, as well as the skills and knowledge to guide Cobb through drastic changes. By placing the new principal in the school during the restructuring planning year, the superintendent created the opportunity for Phillips to both work with the school improvement team as it planned its restructuring and also implement several changes during the planning year. Even before the school entered the implementation phase of restructuring, these changes resulted in student achievement gains, and the school met 12 out of 13 AYP goals that year.

State Mentors

The district requested school mentors from the Alabama Department of Education to support Cobb during restructuring. The state placed two mentors in the school who worked with the principal to build the school improvement team (SIT) with experienced faculty and staff; helped the SIT conduct data analysis to create a new school improvement plan; and developed capacity among the school's staff to analyze and use data to guide curriculum changes. With the SIT, the state mentors also developed a seven-month pacing guide designed to expose students to all relevant materials before the state exam.

Shifted Roles

Cobb Elementary made a strategic move to place its strongest teachers into the grades tested by the state. Because testing in Alabama begins in third grade, placing the school's strongest teachers in the later grades also worked to increase the number of students meeting state standards as they transitioned to the district's middle school, rather than making gains early in their elementary careers and losing ground before the middle school transition. One veteran teacher at Cobb stated, "Transferring personnel within the building was very important for improving performance on the tests."

Greater Support for Teachers

To support teachers during their move to new grade levels, state, district, and school leaders took several steps to improve teacher quality and the academic program. They provided targeted professional development to ensure that instruction followed the curriculum, an intensive teacher monitoring and feedback process, and a teacher induction and mentoring program.

Joan Frazier, then-Director of Federal Programs for the district, worked with the school to improve student performance on state exams. Frazier and members of the SIT identified available district resources to prepare teachers to align the school's curriculum to state standards. The professional development supported the SIT's process, noted

Successful

before, to develop a seven-month plan that served as a pacing guide and a school improvement plan. The pacing guide aligned teaching to state standards and reinforced instruction in demonstrated areas of weakness in student performance. District leaders shared this guide with other Anniston elementary schools to support their own improvement efforts. The district continually maintains curriculum alignment by hiring some teachers each year during the summer to update the local curriculum and assessments to reflect any changes in the state's standards.

To ensure full implementation of the new curriculum, Cobb heightened classroom observation of teacher performance. A new monitoring system focused on identifying teachers' strengths and areas for improvement. Initially, the state mentors placed in the school spent much of their time observing teachers to provide actionable feedback. District and school leaders supplemented that observation and continued the process once the state mentors left Cobb when the school exited improvement status. Francetta Brown, a teacher at Cobb for more than a decade, credited the state mentors with having a central role in the restructuring's success. She said, "The [mentors] visited classrooms and monitored teachers regularly. It was a good thing, because it made teachers more aware and kept us on top of our game. Some may have felt uncomfortable initially, but after awhile, everybody became used to it, and we realized that the mentors were here to help us not harm or criticize us."

Parental Involvement

Cobb, like many schools, faced challenges getting parents involved. To strengthen parental participation in the school and encourage their support for the changes made at Cobb, the school hired a Title I parent liaison (as did, subsequently, the other four district elementary schools). The parent liaisons, according to new Superintendent Joan Frazier, helped in many ways: "They worked on getting all parents in during parent teacher conference month. Since hiring the parent liaisons, all five elementary schools get 100% participation in parent-teacher meetings." These meetings provide an important opportunity for teachers to share

with parents where their student is performing and what the performance goal is. Despite the gains, one teacher noted, "we still struggle with getting parents involved in the school in other ways; for example, with student discipline issues. But no matter what barriers we—or our students—encounter, we know all things are possible as long as we believe in our students."

Results

After two years under the leadership of Principal Phillips, Cobb made AYP. Phillips left Cobb for another position, and the district hired Yolanda McCants to replace him. New to being a principal, Ms. McCants was soon recognized for her gifts as a motivator, and she focused on maintaining the fire under the school's continuous improvement process. Her first year as principal, McCants led Cobb to again make AYP and exit school improvement status.

Developing a theme to guide the school each year, Ms. McCants chose the word "Believe" during her first year to encourage students and staff to believe that they could succeed in improving student performance. Her second year, McCants chose, "Step Up Your Game" to send the message that the school would celebrate its victories but continue to focus on improvement. Student performance dipped after Phillip's departure, but Cobb Elementary School continued to make AYP. In addition, the restructuring efforts that yielded results at Cobb boosted student performance throughout the district. In the 2008-09 school year, no schools in the Anniston district were in restructuring.

Informant-Identified Lessons Learned

- Taking decisive action to replace the principal with a proven leader resulted in quick gains.
- Requesting support from state representatives to assist teachers in planning and delivering instruction based on state-tested content strengthened teachers' skills and boosted student test scores.
- Leveraging changes in one school in the district may have prevented other schools from entering improvement status.

Figure 1. Cobb Elementary, percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, by subject.

Subject	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Reading	56.9	73.0	84.0	78.9	71.2
Math	47.7	53.2	80.6	58.7	60.0
Actions and Results	Seventh year of improvement status	Restructuring planning; replaces principal	Restructuring Implementation; school makes AYP	Principal leaves and district places new principal in school; school makes AYP and exits restructuring status.	School makes AYP

Sources: Interviews with school and district leaders, Alabama school report cards, and grade-level performance reports available at: <http://www.alsde.edu/accountability/accountability.asp>.

Note: school report cards did not provide a school-wide proficiency average.

For this table, the percent proficient was averaged across the tested grades and assumed the same number of students per grade (i.e. this is not a weighted average). In 2003-04, only data for fourth grade performance was available.



Holabird Academy Baltimore, Maryland

Introduction

After struggling with high student poverty and transiency rates, a crumbling physical plant, high staff turnover, and low student test scores, Holabird Elementary embarked upon a new restructuring effort in 2003. At that time, only one in four students at the K-5 school scored proficient or better on the state tests in reading and math. By the end of the 2007-08 school year, the school—now known as Holabird Academy—boasted growing enrollment, strong parent and community involvement, low teacher turnover, and the accomplishment of exiting restructuring status. In 2008, more than three quarters of Holabird’s students (81.1% in math, 78.3% in reading) scored proficient or better on the state exam.

Background

Holabird Elementary, located in the O’Donnell Heights neighborhood on Baltimore’s southeast industrial edge, primarily serves the residents of the public housing units nearby. In the years prior to restructuring, neighborhood families increasingly transferred their children from Holabird to other neighborhood schools. Although all of the schools faced the same challenges, parents reportedly opted out of Holabird because the school had a reputation for its uninviting atmosphere. Plummeting enrollment—from a high of 350 to a low of 160—endangered the school’s continued operation. Rumors abounded in the neighborhood that Holabird’s closure was eminent, which only exacerbated student flight to more appealing schools.

Restructuring

In 2003, nearly 30 schools in Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) entered restructuring status for the first time. To respond to this wave of schools in need of major reforms, district leaders chose a single restructuring approach for all 30 schools: place a Restructuring Implementation Specialist (RIS) in each school. Over the next four years, BCPS supplemented the RIS-centered restructuring approach at Holabird in three critical ways: the district removed an ineffective school leader, provided an additional district staff member to support data-driven instruction, and organized

Holabird with 14 other restructuring schools into a unit called “Area 9.” Area 9 served as the conduit for sharing proven academic interventions aligned with the state curriculum and provided an extended support network for leaders and teachers in the district’s lowest-performing schools.

Key Restructuring Actions Taken at Holabird:

- ▶ Placed a district specialist—a former school turnaround leader—in the school
- ▶ Organized restructuring schools into a single academic unit
- ▶ Provided targeted teacher professional development
- ▶ Improved school climate with college-bound focus
- ▶ Developed strong leadership team focused on data-driven intervention
- ▶ Built relationships with district specialists, community members, and students’ families to drive change

Restructuring Implementation Specialists

BCPS placed a RIS in each of the elementary and middle schools in restructuring status. The district’s School Improvement Office recruited individuals to become RISs from the ranks of their former principals and district leaders and provided a week-long training program to prepare each one to support a school in restructuring.

In the first few years, the RIS placement at Holabird was ineffective. School and district leaders reported that the prior principal was very difficult to work with, and the RIS did not remain at the school. It was not until 2007, when the district assigned the school a new principal, Lindsay Krey, and a new RIS, Dolores Winston, that the RIS placement effectively supported change efforts. “It was a match made in heaven,” recalled Krey. Winston, a retired principal with strong school turnaround experience, served as a sounding board, a source for ideas, and a constant champion for the school improvement plan. “Even though she was a ‘rock star’ principal with deep experience, Ms. Winston never talked about herself, but rather led through example,” said Krey. “Her

attention to detail, great follow through, and humble approach made her a natural fit for our school.”

Academic Area 9 and Targeted Academic Interventions

Before the arrival of Krey and Winston at Holabird, some academic gains occurred under the earlier principal. District officials credited these initial results primarily to the services provided through Academic Area 9. In 2006, BCPS created Academic Area 9, an administrative unit comprised of 15 restructuring schools. BCPS placed Area 9 under the leadership of Dr. Mary Minter, a Maryland Distinguished Principal. The district created Area 9 to direct meaningful, targeted support to restructuring schools.¹⁴ Dr. Minter began her work with Area 9 by identifying two exemplary educators in the state who had developed approaches and materials to bring math and language arts education in full alignment with the state’s voluntary curriculum. Dr. Minter recognized that teachers implementing these approaches had dramatically improved their students’ performance and sought those results for her Area 9 schools.

Minter arranged for this professional development to be provided first to the teachers and then to the principals. Dr. Minter stated, “My belief is, if you are going to make a difference in a school, it has to be at the teacher level. I will inform principals about what is going on, but I will train the teachers directly rather than waiting for the information to ‘trickle down’ to them.” Her approach to providing training directly to teachers in a “supervisor-free zone” also created an opportunity for teachers to admit what they did not know and seek help from their peers. “Teachers have to be comfortable to admit when they don’t understand something they are supposed to be teaching,” Minter stated, “and they are not going to say that if their principal is in the room.”

Minter’s training approach appeared to pay dividends: in Area 9’s first year (2006-07), seven Area 9 schools made AYP and each of the remaining eight schools posted academic gains.¹⁵ At Holabird, the percent of students who scored proficient or better in math rose from 36.8% to 76.3% and the school made AYP.¹⁶

New Leadership

Despite impressive student gains at the end of the 2006-07 school year, Holabird continued to struggle. Families continued to opt out of the school, the school’s reputation as “uninviting” persisted, and staff left in droves. The district transferred the principal to another school and charged Dr. Minter with replacing her. Dr. Minter knew that the school needed to repair its relationships with families and the community if it was to remain open and thrive. She hired Ms. Lindsay Krey, her protégé and a newly-minted graduate of the New Leaders for New Schools program, to lead Holabird. It would be Krey’s first principal position. Krey had impressed Minter with her strong interpersonal skills and ability to use data to guide decision making. Minter commented, “Ms. Krey was just what Holabird needed to move to the next level.”

Krey took several steps to turn the school around quickly and build upon the academic gains made the year before, including:

- **Hiring a new staff.** From the previous year only two classroom teachers and one teacher leader remained; 85% of the staff had left over the summer. Krey built her team with largely novice teachers, but sought teachers who demonstrated willingness to do what it took to improve student performance and “focus on the details.”
- **Overhauling the school’s image.** Krey implemented improvements to the school’s physical plant; strictly enforced the district’s school uniform policy; established high expectations for students; renamed the school Holabird Academy to highlight the school’s academic, college-bound focus; and required staff to emulate the actions and behavior they expected from their students.
- **Building a strong leadership team.** Krey embraced her mentor’s belief that “it’s not about you, the principal, doing everything, but how you get others around the table to assist you doing it. You can’t do it on your own—you’ll burn out, and it’s important that others feel they own the problems, too.” Reflecting on this principle, Krey built a strong leadership

Breaking

team that included the RIS, Dolores Winston, BCPS School Improvement Coordinator Dawn Shirey who shared her data analysis skills, three teacher leaders, and community and parent stakeholders. She relied on these leaders to run meetings, support one another, analyze data, take on new initiatives, and stop efforts that did not get results.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Krey's leadership model was that, despite a limited budget and small enrollment, Krey hired three teacher leaders who were freed from teaching responsibilities to focus entirely on guiding their own team of four novice teachers. In this way, Krey was able to effectively lead a nearly entirely novice staff through their first year and still make impressive student gains, make AYP, and exit restructuring status. "Some people would say it's crazy to spend those types of resources on teacher leaders, but we couldn't use novice teachers as an excuse for poor performance. We had to have novice teachers and make AYP," recalled Krey.

- **Instituting collaborative analysis and planning.** Krey and her leadership team built a professional environment in which her teachers felt comfortable sharing student data openly. With a single teacher for each grade, there was no anonymity or shelter from poor student performance or classroom behavior problems. Teachers, most of whom were new to the profession and unfamiliar with a different approach to planning, felt comfortable with this approach. When one outside principal-observer stated that her teachers wouldn't allow this type of exposure, Krey recalled a Holabird teacher replying, "We're just being honest about it. If I have a lot of office referrals, I need to answer to the rest of the staff about it. We've always felt our data is public and needs to be examined school-wide to help us improve."
- **Engaging key stakeholders in the community.** Krey, Winston, and the entire Holabird staff worked tirelessly to rebuild community and

family relationships with the school. Through revived partnerships with businesses and community organizations, door-knocking campaigns to share plans for change and boost student enrollment, and community picnics to reintroduce the school to the neighborhood, Holabird's leaders and staff slowly mended years of apprehension about the school.

Engaging Additional District Staff

In addition to reaching out to parents and the community, Holabird leaders engaged additional district staff to support the restructuring effort. Shirey made frequent visits to the school to guide teacher use of data to identify specific concepts with which students struggled and determine the efficacy of various interventions. Shirey noted that Holabird's teachers often focused on actions rather than outcomes. She worked with teachers to help them recognize their assumptions about the impacts of various actions and then to test those assumptions against the available data. This process allowed teachers to identify efforts that produced results and those that did not improve student outcomes, no matter how well-intentioned, planned, or executed.

Shirey also provided an outside perspective on school improvement efforts and teacher development. She participated in classroom walkthroughs with the principal and often sat in on the data subcommittee of the leadership team where teachers and teacher leaders regularly reviewed student progress data. Shirey reported back to Krey with ideas for improvement in the subcommittee's process. Krey trusted Shirey to build her teachers' data analysis skills and keep them focused on using data to make decisions about changes in student instruction. Having an additional strong leader at her side, Principal Krey explained, helped her "be in multiple places at once."

Shirey reported visiting Holabird as often as once a week during the school's last year of restructuring, and she regularly participated in the SIT meetings. She explained that her involvement at Holabird was more intensive than with other restructuring

schools for two reasons. First, the principal reached out to her, requested real feedback, and acted upon the feedback to make improvements. This strong working relationship and the student achievement results reinforced Shirey’s time investment in the school. Secondly, Holabird, as a late-start school, held its SIT meetings in the morning when Shirey could easily attend. Most other restructuring schools in the district held meetings after school on the same day, creating a scheduling conflict that limited her involvement with those schools.

Results

Based on spring assessment data, Holabird exited restructuring status in the fall of 2008. That school year Holabird added the seventh grade, boosted student enrollment to 220, and retained nearly 100% of the staff. More than 90% of the rising seventh graders performed at or above proficient the previous year and continued to thrive at the new Holabird Academy. Informants agreed that none of the approaches alone would have resulted in the same impressive results as the powerful combination of actions taken.

Informant-Identified Lessons Learned

- Placing a new leader in the school with the interpersonal skills to heal relationships with families, community, and the district allowed the school to move forward with restructuring.
- Building strong working relationships between school and district entities created an environment conducive to maintenance of improvement efforts.
- Organizing restructuring schools into a single administrative unit allowed the district to efficiently and effectively provide resources focused on the specific needs of teachers in restructuring schools, including: teacher professional development, networking opportunities between staffs at struggling schools, and training on proven instructional programs.
- Choosing a blanket restructuring option for all restructuring schools produced mixed results. Additional supports and relationship-building were necessary to effect change.

Figure 2. Holabird Academy, percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, by subject.

Subjects	2002-03 ^a	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08 ^b
Reading	29.8	35.0	42.5	56.2	71.2	78.3
Math	21.5	23.2	23.2	36.8	76.3	81.1
Actions and Results		Restructuring planning; school enters restructuring with 30 other Baltimore schools.	Restructuring Implementation; school receives specialist (RIS) from the district as the chosen restructuring approach.	In restructuring; limited academic gains.	Holabird placed in “Area 9;” teachers receive targeted professional development; school makes AYP	Principal Krey arrives; new staff is hired after 85% of teachers leave school; school makes AYP and exits improvement status.

Sources: Interviews with school and district leaders and Maryland school report card for Holabird. Report card available at: <http://www.mdreportcard.org/Assessments.aspx?K=300229&WDATA=School#MSAsnapshot>

^a2003 data does not include 4th grade (no data available),

^b2008 data includes new 6th grade class). Note: the school report cards do not provide a school-wide proficiency average. For this table, the percent proficient was averaged across the grades tested and assumed same number of students per grade (i.e. this is not a weighted average).

Box Elder 7-8

Box Elder, Montana

Introduction

Box Elder, Montana is a small, rural community of a few hundred residents located 65 miles south of the Canadian border. The local school district consists of a single campus that serves a K-12 student population of about 375 students from a nearby American Indian reservation. The single K-6 elementary, 7-8 middle school, and high school in Box Elder face many challenges that are common among rural schools, including high poverty rates, low parental education levels, and sometimes limited access to resources. In addition, Box Elder faces a unique constellation of challenges associated with educating American Indian students from the local reservation. After years of low student performance, Box Elder 7-8 entered restructuring in 2005. In 2006, Box Elder 7-8 converted to self-contained classrooms. Two years later, it exited school restructuring status after more than doubling the percent of students meeting state standards in reading and more than tripling those meeting standards in math.

Background

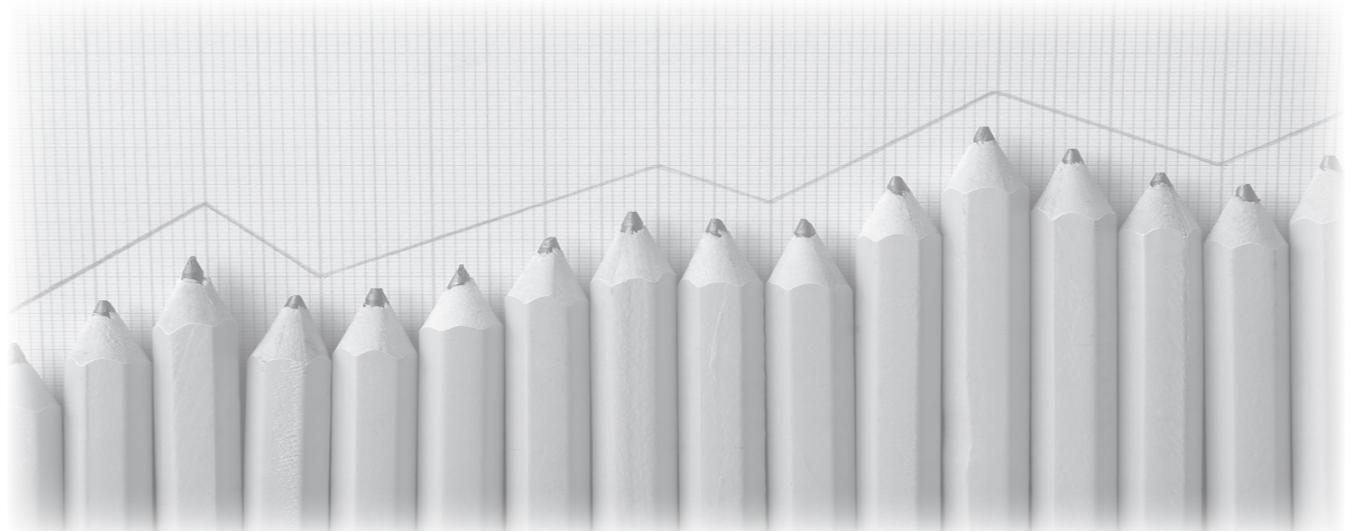
Nearly every Box Elder student is a member of the Chippewa-Cree tribe and lives on the nearby Rocky Boy Reservation, Montana's smallest American Indian reservation, with fewer than 4,000 residents. Half of Rocky Boy's residents are under the age of 18. Box Elder school leaders acknowledged that, for years, the challenges faced by the residents of the

reservation—including high unemployment rates, poor health, rampant alcohol and drug addiction, and limited economic opportunities—negatively impacted their students' readiness to learn. Some students moved frequently between homes of family members and friends and others experienced periods of homelessness. Family struggles, coupled with the distrust held by many American Indians for schools off the reservation, had created significant barriers to improving student learning.¹⁷

In the Box Elder schools, dealing with student discipline and behavior issues often overshadowed academics. School counselor Kevin Barsotti recalled that he used to routinely have more than a dozen crisis-counseling sessions a day. "I was doing nothing but putting out fires." This chaotic environment stemmed in part from, and exacerbated, teacher turnover. The district's schools employed fewer than 40 staff members and "would have at least 10 staff members lined up to leave the district each spring," Barsotti noted.

Restructuring

Entering restructuring forced Box Elder 7-8's staff and district leaders to reconsider their role in serving students. Despite the challenges their students faced, the staff needed to design a program that would greatly improve the number of students meeting state standards. There could be no more excuses. District and school leaders worked together to rebuild an improvement plan that would achieve results. The plan centered on developing a stronger academic focus, accessing resources to support their students, changing grade and class configurations,



providing targeted professional development, improving the school climate, and sharing leadership responsibilities throughout the school.

Key Restructuring Actions Taken at Box Elder 7-8:

- Focused on academics
- Accessed state, tribal, and grant resources to support restructuring
- Converted to self-contained classrooms
- Provided targeted professional development for teachers and expanded teaching staff
- Improved school climate through a proactive behavioral program, support for healthy lifestyles, and an emphasis on American Indian culture
- Utilized “plurality of leadership” to capitalize on talents

Academic Focus

Box Elder 7-8 school leaders admitted that, strangely enough, academics had not been a strong focus at their schools. Staff often felt the many challenges their students faced took focus away from class work. In addition, “basketball was king at Box Elder, like it is in most Indian schools,” several individuals noted. To exit restructuring, Box Elder officials knew they would need to redouble their efforts on “the business of learning” and to make only those changes that would improve student academic performance.

Staff also realized that academics were low on a list of priorities for kids facing homelessness, hunger, transience, and violence. Kevin Barsotti, school counselor and Title I Director, said “successful schools change what they can and don’t get distracted by what they can’t.” School leaders knew that the school could provide a safe, healthy, culturally-aware, stable environment that served to ameliorate some of the problems students faced beyond school walls and would allow students to give greater attention to learning.

Although improvement was necessary at all three Box Elder schools, the school leaders recognized

that the middle school students needed special support. “We noticed that student scores fell by 10% between fifth and sixth grade;” commented Principal Darin Hannum, “they were just falling off a cliff.” Academic counselor Shari Ruff agreed, “The middle school kids were struggling. They went from fifth grade, which was very structured in a single classroom, to sixth grade changing class every period and sharing the hallways with the high school students.”

When the middle school entered restructuring planning status in 2004-05, restructuring options were limited. As a small, rural school system, the first four restructuring options outlined by federal legislation were impractical or impossible, for several reasons. First, there is no charter school law in Montana. In addition, the state had not yet chosen to take over any schools, and outside contractors were not interested in Box Elder’s small, rural schools. Replacing the principal and staff posed difficulties given the remote location and limited access to replacement teachers. Left with planning a tailored restructuring approach under Option Five, Box Elder’s leaders and teachers used their current five-year plan as a starting point and developed an action plan focused on academic achievement.

Relationships and Resources

Because the district consisted only of the Box Elder schools, it did not have many additional resources or staff for the school to access while restructuring. Several school leaders explained that the small district required them to reach out to the state office and other sources of support in developing and implementing its restructuring plan. For example, Box Elder administrators requested that the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) come to the school and conduct an external review. Montana’s OPI provided a week-long scholastic review audit that resulted in detailed improvement suggestions across nine areas related to Lezotte’s seven correlates of effective schools. Box Elder 7-8’s leaders used the findings of this review to guide their SIP development and focus their improvement efforts to avoid implementing changes haphazardly.

A Classroom Organization that Worked

Despite a re-written improvement plan and some academic gains, it was not until the spring of 2006 that school leaders developed a plan that ultimately paid off in student achievement gains. Box Elder’s Superintendent Robert Heppner attended

a conference presentation on the benefits of a self-contained classroom model for middle school students. Convinced the approach could work at Box Elder, Heppner brainstormed with two colleagues on how best to implement the approach. They realized that limited teacher resources required that the self-contained model be applied to the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes. The next day, Heppner announced the change would occur during the 2006-07 school year. Citing stronger teacher-student relationships, increased safety, and decreased time in transition, Heppner made the case for the new approach. Teachers and principals were, they admitted, leery of the change but hopeful. Mark Irvin, the high school principal acknowledged, "It's not always the best for a superintendent to make a decision unilaterally, but in our case it worked."

Staff and administrators set about hammering out the details necessary for effective implementation of self-contained classrooms. Reorganizing the four subject-specific classes into two self-contained classrooms for each grade required overcoming several hurdles. First, school and district leaders needed to ensure it could continue to meet highly-qualified teacher (HQT) requirements while shoring up teacher skills in multiple subject areas. Second, the school leaders knew they would have to provide intensive support for teachers as they relearned subjects and dealt with the discomfort inherent in any change process. And finally, they needed to hire two new teachers.

Box Elder staff worked closely with Montana OPI to gain feedback and ideas about the self-contained program and meeting HQT requirements. In 2004, NCLB had provided new flexibility for rural schools and multi-subject teachers. To prevent teachers from having to go back to school to earn additional credentials, each state had to develop a High, Objective, Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSS) for veteran teachers to demonstrate they knew the subjects they taught. Under Montana HOUSS rules, Box Elder's teachers met the requirements for HQT. Montana had also made a state determination that allowed self-contained classrooms in middle schools that provided a clear administrative path for Box Elder to make the switch to self-contained classrooms.

Targeted Teacher Professional Development and Support

Before self-contained classrooms, the middle school had four full-time teachers and one teacher who taught math at the middle and high school levels. The teachers, half of whom had been with the school for more than a decade, had taught only one subject area; they knew they would need significant additional support to strengthen their content knowledge and teaching skills in the other subject areas.

Teachers began by working after school, on the weekends, and during the summer to align the curriculum to state standards and relied on the expertise of their colleagues as they developed lesson plans for the coming year. Montana OPI also provided funding for additional professional development to support the teachers through the change process and fill in any subject gaps remaining. Box Elder hired two new teachers and, that fall, implemented self-contained sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade classrooms with a student to teacher ratio of about 15 to 1.

With self-contained classrooms, Box Elder's middle school was able to make remarkable student gains without letting go of any teachers and by rallying experienced educators around the change process. That year, reading proficiency nearly doubled and math proficiency more than doubled. Middle school principal Hannum said, "If I could give any advice to principals in restructuring schools, it would be 'trust your staff, support them, and give them the tools to be successful.' That's what we did and we've made great gains."

Improving School Culture

To support the academic changes undertaken at the school, administrators and staff built on earlier gains in improving the health, stability, safety, and cultural focus of the school environment. All staff continued to implement a proactive behavioral program that allowed them to identify struggling students before they caused classroom disruptions. This program resulted in far fewer office referrals and classroom outbursts and improved school safety.

The school also focused on improving the health of students through the school meals program. Because nearly every student qualified for free or reduced-price meals and ate two meals a day at school, staff wanted to provide healthy, balanced foods to

students. Given the high rates of diabetes, obesity, and other health issues among American Indians, they knew healthy eating habits developed at school could help counter those problems. Through grant sources, Box Elder was able to provide scratch-made, sugar-free, well-balanced meals to all of their students.

Finally, Box Elder schools heightened cultural awareness among staff and students through the institution of Cree language classes, after-school programming in American Indian music and dance, and the involvement of tribal elders and families in the school's cultural programming. "Ten years ago, you wouldn't know this was an American Indian school" one staff member noted. "Today, the culture permeates our school and instills our students with an understanding and sense of pride in their heritage."

Strong Leadership Team

Despite its small size, Box Elder schools had several teachers and staff willing to bring their skills to bear on the restructuring process. The math teacher who had some experience as an assistant principal became the middle school principal; the guidance counselor wrote grants to fund specific restructuring efforts; and the academic counselor provided a sympathetic ear to teachers who were initially reticent about the big changes taking place. "We all have to walk in the authority we are given," said Kevin Barsotti. "Our school operates under a plurality of leadership that allows everyone to use their skills and talents for the good of the school." Box Elder was able to capitalize on its existing staff throughout the restructuring process.

Results

Once the middle school implemented self-contained classrooms, the staff noticed positive changes right away. The hallways were more orderly during classroom changes for the high school, because middle school students were no longer in the halls. Office referrals decreased dramatically, and teachers began to develop a better understanding of which students were struggling across the board rather than only with specific subjects. Parental involvement improved somewhat due to the ease of communicating with one teacher about a child's performance across subjects. Counselor Shari Ruff heard reports from parents that children enjoyed coming to school after the switch. Staff reported

that the increased stability, close relationship with a single teacher, and improved safety made school more enjoyable for many middle school students. After only one year of implementing self-contained classrooms, student performance improved so much, the state of Montana awarded Box Elder 7-8 the Title I Distinguished School Award.

Self-contained classrooms also increased personal accountability for student achievement. Rather than being responsible for achievement in one subject for 70 students, teachers were responsible for the total learning experience for only 15 or 20 students. Several individuals observed that teachers took student results more seriously after the switch to self-contained classrooms. Shari Ruff stated, "One teacher, who initially came to me with significant concerns about the switch, said that it was the best thing that had ever happened to her as a teacher." The close relationships she now had with her students and their improved test scores had proven to her that the many extra hours spent to get up to speed with the content and how to teach it, aligning the curriculum, and working with the other grade-level teacher preparing lessons were worth it.

Although they made great strides, the leaders at Box Elder all agreed that they still had much work to do. Principal Darin Hannum pointed out that "only about half of our students graduate high school on time, due in large part to high transiency rates and poor attendance. We still have a long way to go." Kevin Barsotti concurred, "We're always arriving, never arrived."

Jack O'Connor, a School Support System Specialist from the Montana OPI commented, "We provide restructuring schools like Box Elder with a thorough school review, a list of tailored action items, professional development opportunities, and access to improvement grants. But all the help in the world does not matter unless a school actually does something with it. The leaders at Box Elder decided they were going to focus on academics and improve student performance. They made a plan and stuck with it. They made no excuses. The leaders, the teachers, and the students made the restructuring successful."

Informant-Identified Lessons Learned

- Identifying the central reasons for low performance and choosing a restructuring approach that addressed those causes resulted in rapid, strong student achievement gains.
- Building relationships with the SEA, various tribal agencies, successful outside educators, and key stakeholders strengthened restructuring efforts undertaken.
- Accessing additional resources through grants, federal entitlement funds, Bureau of Indian Affairs funds, etc. allowed the school to overcome the limitations of its small district size and rural location.
- Instituting a “plurality of leadership” drew on the strengths of various individuals at the school and district level and did not rest restructuring success on a single leader.
- Building cultural awareness into school’s programming and culture catalyzed other changes at the school.

Figure 3. Box Elder 7-8, percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, by subject.

Subject	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Reading	33%	38%	68%	87%
Math	26%	14%	38%	61%
Actions and Results	Restructuring planning	In restructuring; state provides week-long evaluation	Implements self-contained classrooms; makes AYP	Made AYP; exits improvement status

Sources: Interviews with school and district leaders and Montana school report card for Box Elder 7-8. Report card available at: <http://opi.mt.gov/reportcard/index.html>

MacArthur Middle School Berkeley, Illinois

Introduction

MacArthur Middle School serves nearly 500 sixth through eighth graders in the working-class neighborhood of Berkeley, Illinois, near Chicago's West Side. "Families leave Chicago's neighborhoods and public schools and come out here to Berkeley to provide a better option for their kids," said MacArthur's principal, Dr. Keith Wood. Nearly two-thirds of the school's students qualify for free or reduced-price meals; half of MacArthur's students are African American and more than 40% are Hispanic.

During the 2003-04 school year, 55.8% of the school's students met or exceeded standards on the state test in reading and only 28.2% did so in math. After years of failing to make AYP, MacArthur Middle School entered restructuring planning during the 2004-05 school year. MacArthur's SIT analyzed student performance data and the course schedule and decided to focus its initial efforts on improving math instruction. After successfully improving math scores, MacArthur focused on English and special education. After three years of restructuring implementation, more than 80% of MacArthur's students performed proficient or better on state exams, and the school exited restructuring status.

Background

For years, teachers struggled to improve student academic achievement at MacArthur. MacArthur's leadership faced difficulties in improving student performance, Dr. Wood stated, because Berkeley school district—consisting of only four elementary and two middle schools—was a "starter district." Young teachers began teaching there, he said, and then once they had a few years of experience, transferred elsewhere. High teacher turnover of 25-50% of the teaching staff each year made it difficult for any change efforts to take hold.

Despite these challenges, Assistant Principal Donna Trowbridge, who had spent several years as an administrator in MacArthur's two elementary feeder schools, knew that their students were making AYP. She conceded that the subjects the students studied in middle school were more complex and the tests were different, but she believed that if the students were not entering middle school substantially

behind, then the problems in achieving AYP were located in MacArthur's approaches.

Key Restructuring Actions Taken at MacArthur:

- Fostered a network of support for the school
- Employed data-driven planning
- Aligned class schedule and curriculum to state standards and areas of weakness
- Strengthened the teaching team
- Provided targeted teacher professional development to implement new approaches
- Improved school climate

Restructuring

Entering restructuring status served as a catalyst for the school to take a serious look at existing practices and identify a course of action that would result in more dramatic—rather than gradual—student achievement gains. Dr. Wood, MacArthur's principal, worked with the school improvement team and several district leaders to map the best way forward. Because MacArthur was the first school in the district to enter restructuring status; the district worked closely with MacArthur's administrators to develop a restructuring plan and provided a number of services and supports central to MacArthur's dramatic improvement.

Building a Network of Support

The small district size fostered close working relationships between administrators at MacArthur and in the district, which leaders capitalized on during restructuring. They scheduled monthly "AYP meetings" during the planning and implementation years to brainstorm, create action plans, and provide feedback on implementation. Dr. Wood believed that frequent contact with district leaders kept him focused on the change efforts and held him accountable for full implementation of the plan. The meetings also provided an opportunity for Dr. Wood to discuss teacher and student reactions to the changes and how best to deal with any growing pains associated with restructuring. To

leverage the impact of these meetings, the district invited the district's other middle school principal to participate. The other middle school avoided entering restructuring implementation reportedly because of the change efforts that were planned and implemented as a result of these AYP meetings.

Data-Driven Planning

MacArthur's principal, other school leaders, teachers, and family members formed the school improvement planning team. Together, they scoured state test data and other data sources to identify the most important action steps to support improvement. The data demonstrated that math was the weakest area for MacArthur's students. While the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards in reading was nearly 16 points higher than the state AYP target, the percentage of students meeting standards in math was 12 points below the target.

The SIT compared these data with the class schedule and realized that students received three periods of language arts-based instruction per day, but only one period of math instruction. The SIT resolved to reorganize the class schedule to include more math instruction and provide more hands-on, group-oriented math applications to reinforce the concepts students were already learning.

Aligning the Schedule and Curriculum to Standards

In addition to including more math instruction for students, MacArthur's SIT chose a new math program, called M2T2, and aligned the curriculum to state standards to increase student access to the materials on which they would be tested.¹⁸ Before restructuring, MacArthur used a math program that tested individual students and provided instruction based on each student's current performance level. This resulted in differentiated instruction, but students covered concepts that were not necessarily aligned to the grade level test they took each year. Eva Smith, Assistant Superintendent for Special Services, recalled, "When it came time for students to take the state test, no matter what level they were working on in class—above or below their actual grade level—they were administered the test for their grade. This resulted in students not meeting standards for their grade, because the specific concepts tested were not familiar for some or still fresh in the minds of others."

In addition to the M2T2 program, MacArthur implemented a new schedule that included a math lab. The school improvement team carved out room in the schedule for the math lab by folding health class into the physical education curriculum and including the formerly separate speech and drama courses into one of the language arts classes. With room in the schedule, the school converted the computer lab into a math lab and hired a math lab teacher. The math lab teacher employed the computers to provide some math instruction, but also incorporated the use of manipulatives and group work to reinforce math concepts students were learning in class.

To implement the math lab effectively, Dr. Wood instituted weekly math team meetings to facilitate communication between the math teachers and the math lab instructor. These meetings provided time for teachers to coordinate their lessons, discuss individual students who were struggling, and identify the best ways to reinforce particular concepts. MacArthur also hired a math coach for its math teachers. The math coach observed classrooms and provided instructional feedback to the teachers.

To further the impact of the increased time on math and to improve student performance overall, MacArthur hired some of its teachers during the summer of 2005 to align the new course schedule's curriculum to state standards. "We had a lot of room for improvement in that area," reported Dr. Wood.

With an aligned curriculum, clear communication, and coaching, MacArthur's math teachers improved student learning in the first year of restructuring implementation. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding math standards increased dramatically from 36.6% to 75.8%.

Creating a Strong Teaching Team

Even with curricular and scheduling changes, MacArthur's leadership recognized that restructuring would only work if they had high-quality, dedicated, and experienced teachers. MacArthur undertook a multi-pronged effort to reduce unwanted staff turnover, strengthen current teachers' skills, remove ineffective teachers, and replace them with promising new educators. A new teacher mentoring program offered monthly meetings between school administrators and new teachers centered on communicating expectations, providing an opportunity for new teachers to share

challenges they were experiencing, and building rapport between teachers and administrators. New teacher induction also improved with the introduction of an aligned curriculum. Assistant Principal Trowbridge recalled, "Aligning the curriculum helped our new teachers come in and get on board in their first year." This support, she reported, helped teachers acclimate to the school more readily and improved teacher retention.

The district also sought to remedy its high teacher turnover by implementing a pre-screening process called Ventures for Excellence, which Assistant Principal Trowbridge credited with bringing in more uniformly stronger teaching candidates. The Ventures for Excellence process utilizes two screeners. The first screener reviews applications online, and the second screens videotaped face-to-face interviews. During interviews, screeners are trained to recognize if teacher candidates have a strong student-centered focus. The process is based on the understanding that student-centered teachers teach the whole child and engage students in an atmosphere that considers student abilities, aptitude, attitude, learning styles, and interests. Dr. Wood added, "It has certainly helped our district find candidates who are more likely to be effective in the classroom, especially novice teachers. It is easier to teach technical skills, such as classroom management or effective reading strategies, to novice teachers with the right educational belief system in place."

Hiring and keeping quality teachers was only half of the staff-improvement equation. MacArthur's administrators also selectively removed teachers who were not performing effectively. Assistant Principal Trowbridge commented, "In the first couple of years of restructuring, we had to remove more poor-performing teachers, especially those with three years of experience and eligible for consideration for tenure. Now, to maintain our teaching team, we may hire five teachers a year and let one go at the end of the first year. We make a concerted effort to support them, but if they don't make it in the first year, we have to let them go. We do not have time, and our kids do not have time, to wait and see if a poor performing teacher can improve." MacArthur did not removed any tenured teachers, but the administrators noted that once resistant teachers saw their coworkers getting on board with the school improvement efforts, they either got on board as well or realized the school was not the right place for them and opted to leave.

These combined efforts have resulted in halving staff turnover from ten or more people a year to four or five. The reasons for leaving have changed as well. Assistant Principal Trowbridge stated that teachers now leave for reasons outside the school's control, such as when a spouse receives a job transfer, teachers move into administration, or they leave to start a family.

Targeted Professional Development

MacArthur also strengthened teachers' skills through a professional development partnership with the West 40 Intermediate Service Center.¹⁹ The Illinois Department of Education paid for MacArthur to access West 40's professional development, consulting, and teacher coaching services while the school was in restructuring. All three school and district leaders interviewed commented that the West 40 services were one of the best restructuring resources they accessed. West 40 provided teacher and principal training on the newly-implemented M2T2 math program that guided teachers in how to teach higher order thinking in math and also provided teacher coaches to the school.

Eva Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services in Berkeley School District, noted that the professional development provided by West 40 was not "one off" workshops that relied on teachers to go back to their classrooms and implement changes on their own. Rather, West 40 provided professional development through instructional coaches working directly with teachers in the classroom. These instructional coaches provided teachers with feedback and shared strategies that would help them reach their students. The coaches also familiarized teachers with the information and skills students would be tested on during the state exam. Based on rapid improvement in student test scores, the district recognized that the instructional coaches greatly improved teachers' skills at MacArthur and decided to provide instructional coaches to all of the district's schools.

MacArthur's administrators highlighted two additional reasons for the efficacy of the professional development. First, school leadership participated in professional development with teachers. Administrator participation signaled to the teachers the importance of the training and provided the principal and teachers with a common approach

around which to focus the change conversation back at the school.

Secondly, the administrators reasoned that their strong relationships with the staff improved the outcomes of the professional development. Taking the time to build and repair the relationships within the school helped the administrators build teacher buy-in for the myriad changes introduced in the professional development. “Teachers have to know that you have their backs,” noted Trowbridge. “We may see them failing at their first attempts at a new approach, and the teachers need reinforcement that it’s OK, because we need them to take those risks for us to get where we want to be.”

Changing the School Climate

MacArthur students’ low level of engagement and behavior problems before restructuring stifled their learning. During restructuring, MacArthur’s leaders worked to counter these problems through the comprehensive teacher supports discussed earlier, the implementation of a school-wide behavioral program, and after-school life-skills and academic programs for students.

MacArthur’s staff worked to reduce student behavior problems through a school-wide implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program (PBIS). MacArthur had implemented PBIS before it entered restructuring, but school and district leaders admitted that implementation was spotty. During restructuring, school leadership more consistently built staff buy-in to promote uniform implementation. Administrators reported that student behavior problems decreased and time on task increased due to full implementation of the PBIS program.

Student engagement and behavior also improved as a result of after-school programming designed to bridge the gap between the end of the school day and when parents returned home from work. The school brought in Youth Outreach Services (YOS) to provide programs that supported academic and life skills development. In addition, MacArthur developed a relationship with education students at local Elmhurst College to provide tutoring to MacArthur students struggling with reading. Students reportedly enjoyed these programs because they provided a safe and engaging place for them after school. “Our kids hunger for the attention,” said Dr. Wood.

Results

At the end of 2005-06, MacArthur had made significant student achievement gains, increasing the percent of students meeting or exceeding standards by 39.2 points in math but only 3.5 points in reading. Although these scores exceeded the state targets, MacArthur did not make AYP because of the reading scores in its subgroup of students receiving special education services. The remarkable gains in math achievement encouraged MacArthur to undertake similar efforts in the areas of reading and special education. During the second year of restructuring implementation, 2006-07, MacArthur hired reading and special education teacher coaches, and provided additional professional development. That year, performance increased more modestly in math, and the reading efforts paid off. Subgroup performance for the students receiving special education also improved, and MacArthur made AYP that year under “safe harbor” for the special education subgroup.²⁰

At the end of the 2007-08 school year, MacArthur again made AYP and exited restructuring status. In reading, 81.7% of students met or exceeded standards and 85.5% did so in math. For the 2008-09 school year, MacArthur’s leaders looked ahead to the steadily increasing cutoff points for AYP and continued to implement new initiatives to increase student performance such as a guided reading program and a school-wide Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to support the academic and social-emotional growth of every MacArthur student. “You’ve got to maintain your change efforts to stay ahead,” asserted Dr. Wood.

Informant-Identified Lessons Learned

- Choosing a restructuring approach based on an analysis of student performance, the existing curriculum, and daily class schedules allowed teachers to address specific areas of weakness using existing resources.
- Building a high-quality teaching staff within existing teacher employment rules occurred through selective hiring, comprehensive teacher induction, targeted professional development, and timely termination of poor-performing teachers.
- Supporting school-level change through regular meetings between principal and district-level specialists maintained a focus on continuous improvement and supported dissemination of promising practices to other district schools.

Figure 4. MacArthur Middle School, percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, by subject.

Subject	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Reading	55.8	62.2	65.7	77.1	81.7
Math	28.2	36.6	75.8	79.6	85.5
Actions and Results		Restructuring planning	Restructuring implementation; math focus; reorganizes class schedule; does not make AYP	Restructuring implementation; makes AYP	Restructuring implementation; makes AYP and exits restructuring status

Sources: Interviews with school and district leaders and Illinois school report card for MacArthur. Report card available at: <http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source=AYP%20Information&schoolID=140160870021005&level=S>

Westwood High School

Memphis, TN

Introduction

Westwood High School in Memphis, Tennessee experienced many years of declining student performance and an increasingly tough social environment aggravated by gang activity in the neighborhood. It entered restructuring status in the fall of 2003. At the time, 76% of the students scored proficient or better on the state exam in reading, but only 23% did so in math. When the district decided to place Ms. Tommie McCarter as new principal at Westwood in January of 2005, the school underwent a dramatic transformation—hallways shined, students re-engaged with classes, and teachers focused on instruction in the safe and orderly environment. The transformation positively influenced student performance as well. Westwood left restructuring status and became a school in good standing after the 2006-07 school year. The school went from ranking at the bottom of Memphis City Schools to one of the top high schools in the state. In 2008, 95% of students met or exceeded language arts standards and 88% did so in math.

Key Restructuring Actions Taken at Westwood:

- Worked actively with outside contractor
- Hired a vision-driven leader who focused on relationship building and high expectations
- Improved school climate
- Built a strong teaching team
- Accessed state-provided Exemplary Educator
- Implemented a new grade configuration
- Received extended restructuring supports after exiting improvement status

Background

Westwood High School stands in an older section of Memphis, Tennessee among once-stately homes. In the early 1990s, however, the school and neighborhood underwent significant changes and

began falling into decline. Gang violence increased, and drive-by shootings began. As Memphis closed down public housing units elsewhere in the city, residents relocated to the public housing in the neighborhood surrounding Westwood High. Ms. Wilhemenia Wilkins, a history teacher who arrived at Westwood in 1987, noted that the influx of low-income residents brought different kinds of learners to the school. The new students entering her classroom faced the challenges of poverty, low parental education level, and community violence. Student performance declined dramatically.

For more than a decade, teachers and three different principals made many changes in attempts to engage and educate students and prepare teachers for a different student body. One principal, Mr. Johnson, organized the teachers into departments to facilitate coordination and teamwork within subjects. Mr. Johnson also brought in new technology to pique student interest and support different learning styles. His successor, Mr. Smith, increased the professional development opportunities available to teachers and facilitated a professional learning community for them. Despite these efforts, student performance did not improve dramatically enough for the school to make AYP, and Westwood remained one of the lowest-performing schools in the district.

Restructuring

When the school entered restructuring in 2003, Memphis City Schools took several steps to support Westwood's improvement efforts. The district created the restructuring plan, brought in High Schools that Work, and provided the school with support in hiring highly-qualified teachers.²¹ The district also replaced Westwood's principal. The Tennessee Department of Education provided an Exemplary Educator (EE) for the school as well. After four years in restructuring, Westwood transitioned out of school improvement status and continued to make gains.

Restructuring Plan: High Schools That Work

The district chose a restructuring option that fell under Option Five, and centered its restructuring plan for Westwood on bringing in High Schools That Work (HSTW). HSTW consultants provided strategy development, lesson planning support, classroom observation, and teacher feedback both directly to teachers as well as to administrators.

The program also sent teachers to conferences to collaborate with other schools that had made great strides in student achievement.

HSTW had worked with Westwood High before, with little lasting impact. Teachers commented that HSTW's packaged approach did not work at their school. They believed, instead, that active negotiation between Principal McCarter and HSTW's consultants tailored the approach to work for Westwood. McCarter asked teachers to identify what aspects of the program would serve their students well, and she worked with HSTW to change those parts of the program they believed would not be as effective.

Ms. Wilkins, who was teaching at Westwood when HSTW first came through, stated that "most programs have something of value, and HSTW provided helpful resources." She believed, ultimately, that Westwood's successful restructuring and the benefits of HSTW stemmed from Ms. McCarter's leadership in implementing the program.

New Principal

Westwood entered restructuring under the direction of a new principal. For a year and a half, his leadership led the school to some gains, but it was clear that Westwood needed a stronger change agent and relationship builder to turn the school around. James Q. Bacchus, Academic Superintendent of High Schools at the time, placed Ms. Tommie McCarter in her first head administrator position at Westwood High during the middle of the school's second year in restructuring. Bacchus asserted that McCarter's experience as an assistant principal and as director of Memphis' summer school program demonstrated her considerable skills at working with students with challenges. Bacchus "believed Ms. McCarter had the skills and personality necessary to keep the whole school—students and staff—continuously focused on the business of improving." Mr. Bacchus agreed that Ms. McCarter's leadership was the key to the school's successful transition out of improvement status.

Ms. McCarter met Mr. Bacchus' expectations by first developing strong relationships and buy-in with staff, engaging stakeholders, building school safety and order, redoubling academic pursuits in the school, and drawing on the talents and skills of her staff.

- **Building Relationships**—Principal McCarter's first actions were to meet with her team of 40 teachers and build a relationship with them. Many of the teachers had been at the school for years and had significant connections with the students and community. She wanted to build on these relationships during the school improvement process. She asked them what they envisioned for the school, and many said they desired a safe environment where they could focus on teaching. This goal meshed with McCarter's vision of an impeccable, safe school with high expectations for all students. She said, "they bought into the vision with me and demonstrated their willingness to collaborate to improve student achievement."

With the staff on board, McCarter's leadership team built support for restructuring within the community and with students' families as well. Ms. McCarter reached out to the community—at local churches on Sundays, for example—to inform them about the changes taking place at Westwood. She required teachers to meet with students' families when behavioral and academic problems arose. She also sent the message of change by improving the school's physical plant. The halls, bathrooms, and classes were immaculate, and landscaping improved the face of the school. "Westwood felt like a new school," said Ms. Wilkins.

McCarter also strengthened relationships with the school's community "adopters," local businesses and organizations that provided program funding, incentives for students, tutoring support, and even event supplies.

- **Instituting Safety and Order**—McCarter targeted the few students known for making the school feel unsafe, and she made it clear to them and to the other students that such activity would no longer be tolerated. The school implemented the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) system, and McCarter implemented in-school suspension and after-school detention policies.

In addition, McCarter required every staff member to explain and enforce the rules that already existed for students, such as arriving to class on time and adhering to the district's uniform dress policy. McCarter stressed the importance of consistency across the

school, and students soon realized they would receive the same consequences for the same infraction school-wide; the old days of uneven enforcement were gone.

- **Creating a Renewed Focus on Academics—** McCarter and her leadership team used data to identify academic areas of weakness. One teacher stated, “We modified our instruction based on every data source we had including student and teacher attendance, interim assessments, common assessments developed by teachers, office referrals, etc. This allowed us to gain a ‘global’ observation of where we were.”

The data highlighted significant problems with math performance, missed assignments dragging down student grades, and a weakness in written portions of state exams. McCarter’s leadership team and other teachers developed a series of interventions to remedy these shortcomings. They implemented double math class periods and created daily math quizzes aligned to state exams. Students took the quizzes on handheld devices that provided immediate feedback and informed targeted remediation.

Westwood also implemented the Zeros Aren’t Permitted (ZAP) program that provided Saturday make-up sessions for students missing assignments and created after-school homework and tutorial help for any student needing additional support.

The teaching staff integrated writing across the curriculum and designed every aspect of their curriculum to support the skills students needed to meet the standards on the Gateway tests required for graduation. The school participated in several weeks of “Drop Everything and Write” that further developed students’ writing skills.

- **Identifying Talented Leaders—**Several interviewees commented on McCarter’s ability to identify her staff members’ unique skills and talents and to use those skills in the school improvement process. One district employee who worked with Westwood during and after the restructuring recalled, “Before Ms. McCarter came, no one was bringing the best out of the teachers and the students.” Ms. Wilkins concurred, “Ms. McCarter finds the talents in each individual and puts those talents to work.” For example, Ms. McCarter asked a science teacher with strong data analysis skills to collect

various student data and prepare power point presentations to share with the rest of the staff during meetings.

Building a Strong Team

Westwood staff reported that, under state policy, the school had to make significant progress during the second year of restructuring or face the next level of sanctions: an imposed “fresh start” from the district. That strategy would require every staff member to re-interview for their job, and the school would be placed under the control of an outside entity. Ms. McCarter actually had the option to institute a “fresh start” approach upon her arrival, but once she met her teaching staff, she said, “I knew I had a great in-house staff and that with the assistance and supports from the state and district, we could make improvements without replacing the staff.”

Ms. McCarter let her staff know the high standards to which she would hold them and met with them frequently to share her concerns or highlight successes. “Sometimes you have to have courageous conversations,” noted Ms. McCarter. She was not afraid to tell staff or students when they were not meeting her expectations. But several teachers said her criticisms were always accompanied by strategies and supports for improving.

McCarter built confidence and trust with her teaching team by including teachers in her decision-making process, having an open door policy that made her accessible to staff with concerns or ideas, and trusting teachers to be leaders in the school’s change process.

This new environment of high expectations and accountability for teaching staff resulted in a few staff departures. McCarter stated she never had the power to fire anyone but remarked, “When a majority of our teachers were working very hard and buying into the vision of our school, some teachers realized that Westwood just wasn’t the place for them and left.” One teacher stated, “When teachers left because they did not want to rise to the expectations, it created an opportunity to fill that space with an individual dedicated to achieving the mission.”

The district also played an important role in removing poor-performing teachers. The Tennessee DOE placed responsibility upon districts to remove any barriers to school success; Memphis City

Schools fulfilled this responsibility in part by moving low-performing teachers to schools that were not in program improvement. The district was then able to fill teacher vacancies at Westwood with new, highly-qualified educators. District officials explained that records of poor performance followed teachers to their new schools so that, in the event of continued low performance, the new school could take steps toward termination. In this way, the district sought to avoid moving poor-performers indefinitely from school to school.

New Grade Configuration

At the time of Ms. McCarter's arrival, Westwood had nearly 1,000 students in a 7-12 grade configuration. The district approved McCarter's request to convert the school to a traditional 9-12 configuration starting in the 2006-07 school year, and enrollment dropped to fewer than 500 students. With the smaller enrollment and 9-12 grade configuration, Westwood was able to implement a number of strategies employed by comprehensive high schools that implement Small Learning Communities.

Exemplary Educator

The Tennessee DOE provided Westwood High School with an Exemplary Educator (EE) during its restructuring process. Across the state, there was some disagreement between the DOE and districts about the best way to improve struggling schools, which often complicated Exemplary Educators' work at the school level. Dr. Roderick Richmond, Superintendent of Striving Schools for Memphis City Schools, however worked to mend this sometimes-adversarial relationship through inclusion of EEs in district-wide principal meetings and sharing information about district initiatives with EEs to keep everyone on the same page.

At Westwood, the EE worked in the school two or three days a week to identify practices and individuals that were acting as barriers to the restructuring success. The EE sat in on classes and provided teachers with effective strategies to remedy any problems. The EE also played an important role in helping teachers and administrators understand state and federal requirements for school improvement. Multiple teachers commented on the

benefits of the EE's depth of knowledge in these areas. Colonel Sparks, the ROTC coordinator at the school, recalled, "She came in and gave us insight into the state standards and exactly what we needed to do to meet them. That knowledge helped us more effectively plan our improvement efforts."

Extended Services

Although Westwood High exited restructuring status in 2007, the school continued to receive targeted supports from the district during the 2007-08 school year. That year, the district organized 17 priority schools (including schools, like Westwood, that were in their first year out of school improvement) into a single administrative unit under the guidance of Dr. Roderick Richmond. Dr. Richmond oversaw the provision of targeted professional development for teachers at restructuring schools and collaboration among leaders and staff at striving schools. Fourteen of the 17 striving schools improved student performance that year.

Memphis City Schools also began providing several academic coaches to its striving schools, including Westwood, during the 2007-08 school year. The district provided literacy, math, and graduation coaches. Although Westwood had already exited restructuring status, teachers and administrators at the school stated they greatly appreciated the additional district support for continued school improvement.

Results

In 2007, Westwood High School made AYP, and more than 85% of the school's students scored proficient or better on state exams. Westwood's administrators and teachers continue to see growth in student performance, but are now focused on the schools' graduation rate. Although the rate improved during restructuring, one-third of Westwood's students still did not graduate on time in 2008. As they hold students to higher standards each year, staff members are working to make sure that struggling students do not get lost in the process.

Success

When asked what the key was to her success and the successful restructuring at Westwood McCarter said, “You cannot browbeat people and force them into doing their jobs effectively. You have to get them to buy into the vision with you and keep them motivated. You have to get them to realize the power within themselves to be leaders—as teachers, staff, and students—and that motivates them to perform at ever higher levels.”

Informant-Identified Lessons Learned

- Creating an orderly, clean, safe environment fostered an environment conducive for learning and set the tone for other restructuring efforts.
- Facilitating working relationships between individuals at various levels—state, district, outside contractor, community, and school—allowed the principal to effectively access all resources necessary for school improvement.
- Providing extended restructuring resources after schools leave improvement status can facilitate a smooth transition out of restructuring.

Figure 5. Westwood High School, percent of students meeting or exceeding standards, by subject.

Subject	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Reading	76%	76%	90%	83%	89%	95%
Math	23%	29%	42%	56%	85%	88%
Actions and Results	In corrective action status	In restructuring; places new principal in school.	Principal McCarter arrives in January; school focuses on safety, order, respect, student support and high expectations	School makes AYP	School converts to a 9-12 configuration; school makes AYP; exits restructuring status	School continues to receive some district supports; makes AYP

Sources: Interviews with school and district leaders and Tennessee school report cards for Westwood. Data only includes grades 9-12 student achievement. Report cards available at: <http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:20:4197215125169256::NO>, <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd06/school2.asp?DN=791&SN=0770&S=7910770>, <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd04/school2.asp?S=7910770>

Appendix A: School Selection Methodology

Because NCLB was first implemented in 2002, the only states with schools that have formally exited the restructuring process are those that had pre-existing accountability systems (e.g. Alabama, California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Tennessee). There is not currently a national database of schools identified for, or engaged in, restructuring under NCLB. Nor is there a comprehensive list of schools that have successfully exited restructuring.

To create a list of potential schools to highlight in this report, we used the following two criteria:

- ▶ School formally planned for and implemented restructuring under NCLB accountability sanctions (i.e., school failed to demonstrate AYP for 6 consecutive years), and
- ▶ School successfully demonstrated AYP for two consecutive years after implementing a restructuring plan and exited improvement status.

To identify schools that had exited restructuring, we contacted the U.S. Department of Education and key state department of education personnel in states with the largest numbers of schools in restructuring. We reasoned that states with the largest number of schools in restructuring had not reset their schools' improvement statuses upon the implementation of NCLB and were thus more likely to have schools that had exited restructuring. We referred to Sara Mead's *Education Next* article titled "Easy Way Out," which provided information on the percent of schools in restructuring status by state; we contacted those states in which two or more percent of the states' schools were in restructuring.²²



We contacted 20 states via email to determine if any schools had exited restructuring status under NCLB and, if so, we requested nominations of schools that would be appropriate to highlight in this report. Twelve states responded; eight confirmed that schools had exited restructuring and provided us with one or more school names. These states were Alabama, California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, New York, and Tennessee.

With a list of 47 schools from these 8 states, we gathered school performance data from schoolmatters.com. Rather than comparing performance across states (a process that would not take into account the varied difficulty levels of state tests), we averaged the gains in student proficiency

within each school over the number of years of data available (generally three to five years) and put the schools in order of greatest average gains to least.

We then chose the top five schools from different states that provided a range of grade configurations, locations (e.g. state, urban/rural), and student demographics. In all, we contacted ten schools to gain access to five that agreed to participate in the interview process.



Appendix B: School Profile Sources



Cobb Elementary School

Francetta Brown, Teacher, Cobb
Elementary School

Joan Frazier, Superintendent, Anniston
City Schools

Yolanda McCants, Principal, Cobb
Elementary School

Anniston City Schools: <http://www.annistonschools.com/>

Cobb Elementary School: http://www.annistonschools.com/index.php?src=gendocs&link=Schools_Cobb_home&category=Cobb

School report cards:

- 2006-07 <ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/ReportCards/2006-2007/105/1050025.pdf>
- 2005-06: <ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/ReportCards/2005-2006/105/1050025.pdf>
- 2004-05: <ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/ReportCards/2004-2005/105/1050025.pdf>
- 2003-04: <ftp://ftp.alsde.edu/documents/ReportCards/2003-2004/105/1050025.pdf>

Holabird Academy

Lindsay Krey, Principal, Holabird Academy
Dr. Mary Minter, Chief Academic Officer (and former Chief Area Officer of Area 9), Baltimore City Public Schools
Dawn Shirey, School Improvement Coordinator, Baltimore City Public Schools
Dolores Winston, Restructuring Implementation Specialist, Baltimore City Public Schools

Maryland Report Card for Holabird

<http://www.mdreportcard.org/Assessments.aspx?K=300229&WDATA=School#MSAsnapshot>

Schoolmatters.com Data for Holabird Elementary:

<http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sl/sid=46525/midx=KeyData>

MacArthur Middle School

Eva Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services, Berkeley School District 87
Donna Trowbridge, Assistant Principal, MacArthur Middle School
Dr. Keith Wood, Principal, MacArthur Middle School

AYP Information

<http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source=AYP+Information&schoolID=140160870021005&level=S>

School Profile

<http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source=School%20Profile&schoolID=140160870021005&level=S>

Test Results

<http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source=Test%20Results&schoolID=140160870021005&level=S&source2=ISAT>

Box Elder 7-8

Kevin Barsotti, Counselor and Title I Director, Box Elder Schools
Darin Hannum, Assistant Principal and Teacher, Box Elder 7-8
Mark Irvin, Principal, Box Elder High School
Jack O'Connor, Montana Office of Public Instruction
Shari Ruff, Academic Counselor, Box Elder Schools

Montana school report card generator
<http://opi.mt.gov/reportcard/index.html>

Westwood High School

James Q. Bachus, Chief of Student Support Services and former Academic Superintendent of High Schools, Memphis City Schools
Tommie McCarter, Principal, Westwood High School
Dr. Roderick Richmond, Chief of School Operations and former Academic Superintendent of Striving Schools, Memphis City Schools
Wilhelmenia Wilkins, Teacher, Westwood High School

Report Cards:

- 2008 <http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:20:4197215125169256::NO>
- 2007 <http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us/pls/apex/f?p=200:20:4197215125169256::NO>
- 2006 <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd06/school2.asp?DN=791&SN=0770&S=7910770>
- 2005 <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd05/school1.asp?S=7910770>
- 2004 <http://www.k-12.state.tn.us/rptcrd04/school2.asp?S=7910770>
- 2003 http://evaas.sas.com/tn_reportcard/welcome.jsp?Main=1&ID=791&School=770



Endnotes

¹Center on Education Policy. (2008c).

²Brinson, D. Kowal, J., & Hassel, B. (2008). *School turnarounds: Actions and results*. Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement; Northwest turnarounds: How five schools made big jumps in student achievement. (2009). *Northwest Education 14:3*. Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. Available at: <http://www.nwrel.org/nwedu/14-03/pdf/14-03.pdf>; Mass Insight. Turnaround Challenge Resource Center provides school and district improvement case studies at: <http://www.massinsight.org/turnaround/reports.aspx>

³U.S. Department of Education (2007), *State and local implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume III—Accountability under NCLB: Interim report*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, D.C., 2007.

⁴U.S. Department of Education, 2008 U.S. Department of Education (2008). Federal Register; <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2008-2/042308a.pdf>.

⁵Center on Education Policy. (2008c). *A call to restructure restructuring: Lessons from the No Child Left Behind Act in five states*. Washington, DC: Author <http://www.cep-dc.org/>.

⁶U.S. Department of Education 2007.

⁷Hassel, E. A., Hassel, B., Arkin, M. D., Kowal, J. & Steiner, L. M. (2006). *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When?* Washington, D.C.: Public Impact for Learning Point Associates. <http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/RestructuringGuide.pdf>

⁸Steiner, L. (2006). *School restructuring options under No Child Left Behind: What works when? State takeovers of individual schools*. Washington, D.C.: Public Impact for Learning Point Associates. <http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues/StateTakeovers.pdf>

⁹For more information on staff dismissal and replacement, see Kowal, J. (2009). *Performance-based dismissals: Cross-sector lessons for school turnarounds*. Public Impact for the Center on Innovation and Improvement. For more information on the efficacy and impacts of “reconstitution” efforts (staff and leader replacement without other changes in governance structure), see: Rice, J. K. and Malen, B. (December, 2003). The human costs of education reform: The case of school reconstitution. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 39:5. pp. 635-666.

¹⁰Center on Education Policy. (2009a). *Looking for new ways to make progress school restructuring in Maryland, 2008-09 follow-up report*. Washington, DC: Author <http://www.cep-dc.org/>

¹¹Center on Education Policy. (2009b). *Expanding restructuring and taking on high schools: An NCLB follow-up report in Michigan*. Washington, DC: Author <http://www.cep-dc.org/>

¹²Center on Education Policy. (2008b). *Top down, bottom up: California districts in corrective action and schools in restructuring under NCLB*. Washington, DC: Author <http://www.cep-dc.org/>, p. 3.

¹³For a detailed description of our school selection methodology, see Appendix A.

¹⁴The name, Area 9, originated from the BCPS administrative structure that consisted of areas organized geographically and by grade-level served. Area 9 broke with this structure and grouped together struggling schools from around the city.

¹⁵In the eight schools that did not make AYP, percent proficient increased from 0.9% to 16.1% in reading and 0.3% to 17.7% in math. Two of these schools made AYP in all subgroups except for special education. Source: February 2009 phone interview with Dawn Shirey, School Improvement Coordinator, Baltimore City Public Schools.

¹⁶These numbers were calculated by averaging third, fourth, and fifth grade percentages of students performing proficiently or better on the year-end test. Hence, these numbers do not weight for one grade having greater or fewer students than another. Percent of students performing proficiently or better in math in 2006 and 2007, respectively were: 3rd grade 39.3%, 82.2%; 4th grade 46.1%, 80%; 5th grade 25%, 66.7%.

¹⁷From the late nineteenth century through the 1970s, many Native American youth attended compulsory Indian boarding schools where white school leaders forced Native American students to live separated from their families, speak only English, and endure harsh punishments for failing to assimilate to European-based cultural mores.

¹⁸M2T2, or Mathematics Materials for Tomorrow's Teachers, are mathematics modules created by a team of educators and others within Illinois and are aligned to the five math goals in the Illinois Learning Standards. For more on this program, please see: <http://www.mste.uiuc.edu/m2t2/default.html>.

¹⁹The West 40 Intermediate Service Center is part of Illinois' network of regional education agencies providing support to public schools and districts in the western Cook County suburbs. Services include professional development, alternative learning centers, school improvement planning support, and assistance with implementing governmental policies and initiatives. <http://www.west40.org/>

²⁰Under the NCLB safe harbor provisions, a school can demonstrate AYP, even if all sub-groups do not demonstrate adequate progress, if the school succeeds in reducing the number of students below proficient by at least 10% from the prior year. See <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/roadmap/roadmap.pdf>

²¹High Schools That Work is a school improvement initiative implemented by the Southern Regional Education Board. HSTW has been implemented in 1,200 schools in 31 states. For more information, please see: <http://www.sreb.org/Programs/HSTW/HSTWIndex.asp>.

²²Mead, S. (Winter, 2007). Easy way out. *Education Next*. Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution.



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