

Oakland Unified School District

California

State Administrator: Randolph Ward

Primary contact: Brad Stam, executive officer for instructional services*

Schools studied:

Cox Elementary

Highland Elementary

Sobrante Park Elementary

Whittier Elementary

47,989 students, K-12, urban

District and School Descriptions

Oakland Unified School District is a high-minority, high-poverty, large urban district in northern California. Placed in state receivership in June 2003 due to financial difficulties, the district has continued to face a shrinking budget as a result of declining enrollment and transfers to district charter schools. Over the past five years, total student enrollment within Oakland has declined by 5,748 students. In addition, since 1999 the district has lost an additional 3,306 students to charter schools—resulting in a total loss of over 9,000 students from the Oakland Unified School District.

The four schools included in this study are all high-poverty, high-minority schools located in the “flatlands” of Oakland between highways 880 and 580. All have been identified for restructuring under No Child Left Behind. Through the district’s own restructuring policies, Cox Elementary became a charter school. Highland Elementary replaced staff. The Highland school site also houses a newly created small school, and a second small school is in the works for the site for 2006-07. Sobrante Park Elementary pursued the “any other major restructuring” option under the federal law, and Whittier Elementary replaced about half of its staff. All schools in restructuring also made some staff changes.

Key Findings

- While academic achievement has been increasing in Oakland, these increases have not been enough for all subgroups to meet adequate yearly progress targets. District strategies for increasing student achievement and meeting targets include using data to adjust instruction to the needs of students and to the standards of the state, setting accountability targets for schools, and implementing the Open Court curriculum more faithfully.

* Other contacts for this case study include Niambi Clay, SES community coordinator; Noah Bookman, manager of student assignments; Katrina Scott-George, interim acting chief for community accountability; Delia Ruiz, executive officer, intensive support network; Michael Scott, principal, Cox Elementary; Charles Wilson, principal, Highland Elementary; Marco Franco, principal, Sobrante Park; Carol Lee, art teacher, Sobrante Park Elementary; Lucie Espinosa, parent liaison, Sobrante Park Elementary; Jeanne Ludwig, education program consultant, California Department of Education; Ben Visnick, president, Oakland Education Association; Jean Wing, manager of research and best practices for the district’s New School Development Group; Kevin Wooldridge, executive director, Education for Change, a charter management organization; and Fernando Yanez, principal, Whittier Elementary.

- Declining enrollment in Oakland has meant declining state and federal funding. In addition, district and school officials said funding for NCLB was never enough to help all students meet AYP targets. For example, officials noted that while Reading First provides much-needed support for English/language arts, there are no similar comprehensive supports for math, even though schools and districts are held accountable for students' test scores in this subject.
- Schools that have faithfully implemented Open Court reading materials have had better student achievement in English/language arts, district officials said. They credit the district's Reading First grant, which involves 40 schools, with improving instruction in Reading First schools by providing in-depth coaching in using Open Court materials. The grant has also helped the district as a whole by increasing central office capacity to provide professional development and teacher support in reading, district and school officials said.
- Oakland has taken a proactive role in school restructuring under NCLB. Rather than having schools consider the full range of federal restructuring options, Oakland has limited restructuring choices based on student achievement as well as school and community preferences. Schools in restructuring that have had higher student achievement are the only schools allowed to consider the "any other major restructuring" option of the federal law. Other schools must consider three options: closing and opening as redesigned new schools with a new staff, becoming charter schools with non-union teaching jobs, or having all staff members reapply for their jobs.

Overall Impact of NCLB

NCLB's goal of improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps is consistent with Oakland's aspirations, and thus has been incorporated into district improvement plans, district officials said. Implementation, however, has been a challenge due to the overall low level of funding for NCLB combined with state underfunding of education. For example, while Reading First grants have funded extensive professional development in English/language arts, the federal government has not put similar resources into math or any other subject, pointed out Brad Stam, executive officer for instructional services. Oakland and districts around the country suffer from the federal government's continued underfunding of NCLB, Stam said.

NCLB and Student Achievement

Although the district has not made AYP, the percentage of students meeting AYP targets on state tests has increased since the 2002-03 school year, according to testing information on the state Web site. In English/language arts, the percentage of students meeting AYP targets increased by about 7 percentage points from 2002-03 to 2004-05. During the same time period, the percentage of students meeting math targets increased by about 9 percentage points.

While African American, Latino, and low-income students, as well as English language learners and students with disabilities have traditionally had more difficulty meeting AYP targets, most groups showed increases since 2002-03, according to state data. However, with the exception of the performance of Latino students in math, which increased at a rate similar to that of the general population, increases in percentages of students meeting AYP targets were slightly smaller for subgroups. In English/language arts from 2002-03 to 2004-05, these subgroups increased by 4 to 6 percentage points, with the exception of students with disabilities, whose percentages stayed about the same. In math during the same time frame, these subgroups increased by 3 to 9 percentage points.

Three of the four schools in this study showed increases in the percentage of the general population meeting AYP targets as well as increases in the percentages of students in all subgroups meeting these targets. Three of the four schools in this study showed increases in the percentage of students meeting AYP targets for both the general population and all subgroups. At one school, Cox, the percentage of Latino students, English language learners, and students with disabilities meeting targets in English/language arts and math declined. At all four schools, achievement gaps are difficult if not impossible to calculate, because none of the four schools has a white or Asian subgroup—the ethnic subgroups that typically do better on state tests in Oakland—and all four are Title I schools, which means that the low-income subgroup includes the large majority of students in the school, indicating high rates of poverty.

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS

Oakland has not met AYP targets for two consecutive years and has been identified for improvement under NCLB. In the 2002-03 school year, the first year the state issued AYP report cards, the district failed to make AYP because of the performance of Latino students in English/language arts. In 2003-04, the district met all targets, except that students with disabilities fell short of the 95% test participation requirement. In 2004-05 testing, California's AYP targets jumped from 13.6% to 24.4% in elementary English/language arts and from 16.0% to 26.5% in elementary math. The high schools' targets also increased from 12.0% to 23.0% in English/language arts and from 12.8% to 23.7% in math. Oakland's subgroups fell short of the higher targets. In 2004-05, despite increases in the percentages of students in most subgroups passing tests, African American students and students with disabilities failed to meet targets in both reading and math. In addition, Latino students, Asian Pacific Islanders, low-income students, and English language learners missed targets in English/language arts.

A little more than two-thirds of district schools also failed to meet AYP goals. Of these, 13 are in year 1 of school improvement, 15 are in year 2 of school improvement, an additional 7 are in corrective action, and 13 are in restructuring. These numbers include charter schools. Subgroups were still responsible for some schools failing to meet goals. In schools with high percentages of minority and low-income students, such as Cox Elementary, Highland Elementary, and Whittier Elementary, this was not true. Instead, at these schools the general populations failed to meet goals in either English/language arts or math or both. All are “flatland” schools, a phrase used by some principals and teachers to describe schools located in the poorer areas of Oakland between highways 880 and 580. Still, some high-minority, high-poverty schools in Oakland reached the targets. Sobrante Elementary, a flatland school with enrollments of about 62% Latino and 30% African American, met all AYP targets.

DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Oakland's strategies to help schools identified for improvement fall under three broad initiatives, said Brad Stam, executive officer for instructional services. The three initiatives include using data to adjust instruction to the needs of students and to the standards of the state, setting accountability targets for schools, and implementing the Open Court reading curriculum more faithfully.

District records show that for 2005-06, central office has provided professional development for school leadership teams consisting of teachers and administrators. These “Dates with Data” at the elementary level and “Data Conferences” at the secondary level train teams to identify students in each grade who need extra assistance in reading and math. The teams then pass on the training to the rest of the school. At schools identified for improvement by NCLB, this data analysis includes determining what the school needs to do to meet AYP targets, Stam explained.

The district is also working on creating accountability targets for schools based on the school's past performance and the district's goals, Stam said, explaining that the district hopes to have these targets created for 2006-07. The targets would include multiple measures of student well-being, including attendance and discipline records, as well as student achievement on tests. "Targets would be attainable, but a stretch for each school," Stam said. The targets would differ from AYP targets because they would be tailored to each school and would provide information on individual students. "It's not just saying, 'Everybody should be proficient; isn't that wonderful,'" Stam said. Instead, the targets and data analysis would have detailed information that schools could use to change instruction for individuals and groups of students, Stam explained. At schools in need of improvement, this would help create a path toward meeting AYP targets, Stam added.

Many schools in need of improvement have not fully implemented the district's Open Court reading program, Stam noted. To help teachers implement the reading program, the district added 5 days of mandatory professional development in Open Court starting in 2004-05, with beginning, intermediate, and advanced training for teachers at different levels of mastery. The district is also holding teachers more accountable for using Open Court correctly, Stam said. For example, the district has adopted a pacing guide that ensures that teachers in each grade all teach the same lesson on the same day. This allows principals to observe teachers and easily determine if they are teaching Open Court as prescribed.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES

As a district, Oakland has taken the lead in determining how schools are restructured by narrowing schools' choices. Only schools that achieved a 2004-05 Academic Performance Index (API) of 590 or greater on state tests Only schools that achieved a rating of 590 or greater on the state's Academic Performance Index in 2004-05 and met schoolwide AYP targets for 2003-04 were eligible for what Oakland called "internal restructuring," an option corresponding to the "any other major restructuring" option in the federal law. Three Oakland schools met these criteria: Allendale, Sobrante Park, and Stonehurst. Allendale and Sobrante Park chose to use this option.

The next option considered for schools in Oakland was "new school creation," which involves appointing a leader to form a community-based design team that spends a year designing the school, and hiring a staff committed to the design team's vision. At the end of that year, the new school opens and the old school is either closed or phased out over two years.

The first new school creations were piloted in Oakland in 2001 under the district's New Small Autonomous Schools policy. At the end of three years, a total of nine new schools had been created. At this time, district evaluation of the new schools showed that most of these schools had significantly larger academic gains, higher attendance, and fewer suspensions than other large district schools serving the same communities. The district therefore decided to expand the program, and in 2005, the district offered new school creation as one possible option for schools in restructuring, explained Jean Wing, the district's manager of research and best practices in new school development. New school creation also continues to be an option for other district schools, including those not in restructuring under NCLB.

If a school was not eligible for internal restructuring and the district and/or school did not support the idea of new school creation, the third option was becoming a contract or charter school. District documents emphasize that this option is only considered after the district rules out the first two options, and only if the district receives a viable application from an outside entity to run the school. The district uses a rubric to evaluate the applications. Typically, when a school becomes a charter, all staff reapply for their jobs, and these jobs are non-union.

In Oakland, a new charter organization, Education for Change, was founded specifically to serve schools in restructuring. Although other charter organizations were able to apply to manage schools, only Education for Change was successful in contracting with schools in restructuring. Education for Change will use the same curricular materials as the district but will focus on better delivery of instruction, said Kevin Wooldridge, executive director of Education for Change and

former district administrator. In the past in schools in restructuring, Wooldridge said, “The materials were being used, but not necessarily as designed. We’re about full implementation.”

Replacing staff is also a frequently used option in Oakland. While district documents stated that replacing staff would be only a partial solution to restructuring in Oakland, all schools in restructuring have, in fact, made some staff changes. According to data from the Oakland Education Association (OEA), approximately 120 teachers were involuntarily transferred out of the 13 schools in restructuring, and about 50 of this group were placed in other Oakland schools. About 70 of this group had not been placed by the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, but many of these teachers remained on the district’s payroll. A few retired or resigned. OEA has initiated grievance procedures for many of these transfers, OEA President Ben Visnick said.

For 2005-06, plans for restructuring are in progress. Two schools, Sobrante Park and Allendale, will undergo “internal restructuring.” Both have also made staff changes. Five new small schools are in the process of being designed and will open on four restructuring campuses in 2006-07; this process also typically changes the staff. Two schools have replaced some staff members and are considering other changes, including new school creation or becoming charter schools for 2006-07. Two additional schools have become charter schools for 2005-06. Three schools relied solely on staff changes. These changes are summarized in **table 1**.

Table 1. Restructuring Choices for Oakland Schools in 2005-06

School	New School Creation (opening in 2006-07)	Charter School	Internal Restructuring	Staff Changes
Allendale			x	x
Cox		Education for Change		x
Hawthorne		Education for Change		x
Highland †	x			x
Jefferson				x
Lockwood ‡				x
Mann				x
Melrose	x			x
Prescott	x			x
Sobrante Park			x	x
Stonehurst	x			x
Webster ‡				x
Whittier				x

Table reads: In the Oakland Unified School District in 2005-06, among schools in restructuring under NCLB, Allendale underwent internal restructuring and staff changes, while Cox contracted with the charter school management organization Education for Change and made staffing changes.

† Highland also houses the newly created small school, Rise Elementary, which opened in 2005-06.

‡ These schools are considering additional restructuring options, including new school creation and becoming charter schools for 2006-07.

Source: Oakland Unified School District.

While district officials saw restructuring as an opportunity to make positive changes in schools, the process of restructuring schools was challenging and at times created controversy, they said. “The surprisingly hard part is getting the community to accept that schools need to change,” explained Katrina Scott-George, interim acting chief for community accountability. “There are service providers who make their bread and butter from serving failure.” Once the community accepts the need for change, Scott-George emphasized that the process should allow the community to have input in decisions and to participate in beneficial ways.

To make this participation possible, the district sent letters to all parents in schools in restructuring explaining the restructuring process. The district also solicited letters of interest from any and all community groups serving neighborhoods with schools in restructuring. These letters asked the community groups for suggestions and offered the community groups the opportunity to participate in new school creation or charter school management. The district sent out a press release, posted the request for letters online, and communicated the process to parents, teachers, and community members in meetings at the 13 schools, district officials said. The district received approximately 55 letters of interest, Scott-George said. Responses came in from a variety of groups ranging from community groups like the First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Oakland, to charter school organizations like Education for Change, to education think tanks like WestEd.

In order to report on Oakland’s restructuring options in more depth, CEP visited four schools in restructuring: Sobrante Park Elementary, which will use internal restructuring; Cox Elementary, which has become a charter school; Highland Elementary, which replaced staff, housed a newly created small school, and plans to be the site for a second small school in 2006-07; and Whittier Elementary, which has replaced staff.

Sobrante Park Elementary

Sobrante Park’s strategies for school improvement include continuing curricular changes, implementing a new schedule with added time for teaching and professional development, and starting supplemental educational services earlier in the school year. Staff changes were also required by the district, but these changes will not be the primary tools to improve the school, Principal Marco Franco said. In 2004-05, the school hired Performance Fact, Inc., a local for-profit professional development provider to facilitate staff meetings and document the school’s plans for improvement.

In terms of curriculum, the school has continued implementing Open Court, the district’s reading program. In addition in 2005-06, the school also has a full-time instructional assistant/coach who will help teachers by modeling lessons and providing consultation. Teachers have been pleased with Open Court, Franco said, and will therefore add a “math workshop” in 2005-06 similar to the small groups used in Open Court. In the math workshop, teachers will work with students who are grouped by skill level. Ongoing assessments will help teachers regroup students frequently as they gain new skills. To emphasize math and reading skills learned in school, teachers decided that all grade levels should assign set amounts homework in 2005-06. Before this policy, teachers’ homework assignments varied. The new homework policy calls for 20 to 30 minutes of homework in kindergarten Monday through Friday; 45 to 60 minutes of homework in 1st through 3rd grades Monday through Thursday, with a weekend writing assignment; and 60 to 90 minutes of homework in 4th through 5th grades Monday through Thursday, with a weekend writing assignment.

To reach more students, Sobrante Park has extended in-school instructional time for 2005-06. The school has added full-day kindergarten. In addition, the school has instituted a before-school intervention time. Each classroom teacher has invited about 5 to 10 students to participate based on their scores on state assessments, Open Court assessments, and teacher observation. These students receive extra instruction from 8:00 to 8:50 a.m. Monday through Friday. Most parents have been cooperative about sending their children to school early, Franco said. Teachers work under extended contracts and are paid for the extra teaching time from Title I funds.

An additional schedule change at the school has increased the quality of professional development, Franco said. For 2005-06, the school changed its “minimum day” to Friday. The minimum day is a districtwide policy that sends students home about an hour early on Fridays so that teachers can participate in professional development. The rest of the district has this day of professional development on Wednesday. By changing the day, Franco found that he did not have to compete with other schools to get trainers to deliver the professional development, and therefore has been more likely to get his first choice of trainers and workshops.

Finally, Sobrante Park started supplemental educational services after school earlier this year and will supplement these services with additional tutoring. In 2004-05, Kaplan and Platform Learning were popular supplemental educational services providers. About 60 to 70 students attended, but services did not start until February. This year Kaplan and Princeton Review, the school’s two on-site providers, started in November. These providers are only offering 30 to 60 hours of tutoring per student. To supplement this tutoring, the school will also offer a computerized tutoring program produced by Edusoft, a Houghton Mifflin subsidiary. Franco said he hopes that this year will have an even larger turnout for after-school tutoring.

Although not key to student achievement, staff changes did occur at Sobrante Park due to restructuring, Franco said. The district required him to transfer four teachers of his choosing. Then, the district filled the four positions with transfers from within the system, Franco explained. This process had some glitches at Sobrante Park. “One teacher who was assigned here refused to come,” Franco recalled. But he said this allowed him to hire back a teacher he thought was excellent whom he had let go because she was not yet “highly qualified” under the NCLB criteria. The teacher has a master’s degree in psychology and will be highly qualified by November, Franco anticipated. As a restructuring option, replacing staff was problematic, Franco said. “NCLB and unions get in each other’s way,” Franco said. “You have to meet the federal regulations without violating union rules.”

Cox Elementary

Cox Elementary has become a charter school managed by Education for Change. Describing this organization, Principal Michael Scott said, “The strength of Education for Change is that it was founded by educators, former principals, and teachers who clearly understand the connection between quality instruction and high academic achievement.” The CEO of Education for Change, Kevin Wooldridge, is the former executive director of the leadership academy in Oakland’s central office. While Education for Change pays a facility usage fee to the district and is a potential client for other services, such as professional development, Wooldridge explained that the organization is an independent non-profit. Still, the organization is closely linked to the district and currently operates only in Oakland. “The impetus for starting Education for Change was to give year 4 schools the opportunity to become charters,” Wooldridge said.

Several changes made possible by becoming a charter will be key to school improvement, Principal Scott said. First and foremost, Scott emphasized that having staff members reapply for non-union jobs will make a difference. “My belief is that the key ingredient in academic growth is quality teaching and a cooperative, coherent program, followed throughout the school,” he said. Before contracting with Education for Change, Scott, who was principal at the time said, “We didn’t have coherence and agreement among the staff.” Scott said he reapplied for his job because he believed hiring a new and committed staff would make a difference. “There’s no tenure with Education for Change. Everyone’s a first-year teacher. We all have room to grow and improve,” Scott said. Of the school’s 31 teachers, 24 are new to Cox this year, Scott reported. All had to agree to be non-union, at-will, contract employees, and to forego participation in the district’s tenure system. “Part of the difficulty with the tenure system was getting rid of teachers who didn’t want to get with the program,” Scott explained.

In addition to the change in staff, the district has decreased the student enrollment at Cox. In 2004-05, the school had 855 students, Scott said, while in 2005-06 the district capped enrollment at 685. This decrease in the student body combined with the new staff has led to a positive climate change in the school, Scott said, noting that “classroom to classroom you can see high-level teaching and high-level student engagement.” What teachers are supposed to teach, however, has not changed. “The curriculum is exactly the same,” Scott said. The difference is that this year teachers are actually teaching the curriculum. When Open Court was introduced at the school about five years ago, Scott said, “Teachers hated it. They fought it.” This year, he said, teachers are implementing the program.

Highland Elementary

Highland Elementary will be replaced by two new schools—Rise Community School and New Highland Academy. Rise underwent new school design last year and opened in 2005-06 on the Highland Elementary site. New Highland Academy is currently being designed and will open on the site in 2006-07. Meanwhile Highland Elementary replaced about half the staff and the principal for 2005-06.

Highland Elementary currently has 18 classroom teachers, 9 of whom are new hires for 2005-06. In addition, eight of nine new teachers are first-year teachers. The new principal, Charles Wilson, who was a 7th grade English teacher last year, said he looked for career changers to fill the new positions because he said they would be more mature. In addition, Wilson said, “I tried to hire all my teachers as temporary rather than permanent.” He explained that if the new employees didn’t work out, the district could release them at the end of the year without going through the probation process, which offers teachers mentoring and a chance to improve. Finding people to fill the nine open positions was not easy, Wilson said.

About the applicants, he noted, “They came with a variety of credentials. Not all were equipped to teach in an urban school.” He explained that some didn’t want the position after they found out where the school was located. “I got turned down more often than I was accepted,” he said. The human resources department, which had many new employees last year, did not vet the applicants or advertise the positions other than posting them at the district, Wilson said. To get more applicants, Wilson said he resorted to advertising on Craig’s List, a Web site that serves as a classified ads listing for a number of cities nationally. At the end of the first day of school, four teachers quit, Wilson said, but fortunately all but one relented and returned to teach.

Schools throughout the district had a difficult time hiring staff for 2005-06, noted Delia Ruiz, executive officer, intensive support network. Ruiz monitors some of the schools in restructuring and provides support at Highland. “Last year human resources was redesigned. We were not strategic in our timing. Basically the whole department was wiped out. So the principals did all the recruiting and all the work,” Ruiz explained.

The main focus for Highland’s teachers this year is fully implementing Open Court.

“It’s pretty structured. If teachers teach it the way it’s set up, students do well,” Ruiz said. Despite additional professional development and attention from the district, not all teachers use only Open Court materials, and not all stick to the pacing chart that dictates day-by-day instruction.

“The more experienced teachers tend to be more off-track,” Wilson noted. “The new teachers are much more team players.”

While Wilson and Ruiz focus on improving instruction for 2005-06, Highland is also the site for a second new school creation. District officials said the New Highland Academy design team was still in the beginning stages of creating the new school as of December 2005, but that it is certain that the teaching staff at Highland will have to reapply for their jobs again next year if they want to be part of New Highland Academy.

Whittier Elementary

The primary restructuring strategy at Whittier Elementary was replacing staff. For 2005-06, all teachers and the principal had to reapply for their jobs, said Fernando Yanez, the former principal who was rehired for 2005-06. Almost all of the school's 27 teachers reapplied for their jobs. The school lost one classroom position due to declining enrollment, and 10 of the 26 teachers for 2005-06 were new to the school, Yanez said.

"The ideas about restructuring were still in the embryonic stages," said Yanez recalling the summer of 2005 when the school had to be restaffed. "At the same time we restructured, the district was reconstituting its human resources staff," he noted, explaining that after he was rehired he had little assistance hiring teachers. A few of the strategies he used to attract new teachers paid off, he reported. First, he recruited new teachers from a list of good substitutes that he had compiled in 2004-05. Second, he offered the school as the site for districtwide math training. He said he used the training to meet teachers from other schools and talk to them about transferring to Whittier. All 10 new hires are highly qualified, Yanez reported, and 4 are career changers in their first year of teaching on an alternative license.

Yanez said he believes restaffing the school will lead to higher academic achievement. "I think our students weren't getting what they needed. For far too long we've had low expectations," he explained. "I can create a road map, but if I don't have buy-in from the staff, nothing works." Of veteran teachers, he said, "People get so set in their ways sometimes."

The curriculum has not changed at Whittier for 2005-06. The school is still using Open Court for reading. Instead, instruction has changed, Yanez said. "We had a standards-based curriculum; the next logical step is standards-based instruction," he explained. "It's much easier as an administrator to work with a teacher who is new and needs support to grow professionally and teach them to use Open Court. Veteran teachers think they know best." To help teachers stay on the pacing chart for Open Court, Yanez said he now has a curriculum schedule that lets teachers know when instruction should begin and end.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Since NCLB and the state adoption of new reading texts, Oakland has focused a good deal of energy on implementing a new reading curriculum. This curriculum based on Open Court materials was piloted in 1999-2000. The first official year of districtwide implementation was 2001-02; however, at that time many teachers did not actually use the new materials as designed, Ruiz said. Professional development in Open Court and monitoring of teacher practice has stepped up in the district, particularly after 40 Oakland schools received Reading First grants, which involve full implementation of Open Court.

The new curriculum, though aimed at raising student achievement, was not directly related to NCLB. "We did it because our kids couldn't read," explained Ruiz, who has been with the district for 22 years. Before Open Court, Ruiz said, "Our kids couldn't read and couldn't write, and teachers did whatever they wanted."

District officials and school principals said they would like to see national attention given to math as well as reading. Some Oakland schools, such as Sobrante Park, have tried to institute math programs modeled on Open Court, in that they use small group instruction and pacing guides to make sure the curriculum is taught well. These efforts are limited due to lack of federal funding and guidance, Stam said. "We know what kind of professional development support it takes to change teacher practice in Reading First," Stam said, but he noted that this support is not there for math. In math, Stam said, "We're trying our best with limited resources. But, nationally, math has taken a backseat."

English Language Learners

During the past three to five years and corresponding with the implementation of NCLB, California has moved toward teaching English language learners in English-only classes sooner. As a result, Oakland also moved in this direction and aimed to transition all students to English by the end of 3rd grade, Stam said, although he added that now some new schools are opening with a special focus on dual-language instruction.

Sobrante Park, which is 55% ELL, is an example of a school that phased out bilingual classes in the upper elementary grades. “Often parents of English language learners want to keep kids in bilingual programs to keep their kids with kids of the same culture,” said Franco, who was himself an English language learner when he entered school. “My first political action [as principal] was to get rid of bilingual education in grades 4 through 5. Parents went on a crusade against me.” However, with more outreach to parents and explanations by the school’s family liaison, Lucie Espinosa, parents became more accepting of the push for English-only instruction for most students. For 2004-05, the 3rd grade became English-only in January. In 2005-06, the 2nd grade will also transition to English-only instruction in January, Franco said. He noted that the school provides extra help for ELL students who enter the school in the later grades, but said that most ELLs enter at kindergarten and have time to learn English.

Whittier Elementary, which is about 61% ELL, also eliminated 4th and 5th grade bilingual classes. “It made me unpopular,” said Principal Yanez, but he added that he believed it was the right thing to do to help students achieve more. Yanez, who learned English in an English-only classroom himself, explained that to help students learn in English-only classrooms he has focused on training all staff to work with ELL students, rather than putting students in special classes that use Spanish for some instruction.

Still, some instruction in Spanish remains in Oakland. Stam pointed out that some new schools have dual-language programs and advertise these programs widely with hopes of drawing more students to the school through the district’s open enrollment program. In addition, according to district records, 20 elementary schools offered Foro Abierto, the Spanish version of Open Court, in 2005-06. This instruction is offered particularly for parents who want their children to have instruction in Spanish. These students will also receive language instruction in English through “Language for Learning,” published by McGraw-Hill.

NCLB School Choice

In 2003-04, only 39 of the 17,609 eligible students—just a fraction of a percent—took advantage of the NCLB choice option. In the 2004-05 school year, 402 of the approximately 22,000 students eligible—or just under 2%—changed schools due to NCLB. District officials said they expected NCLB transfers for 2005-06 to be similarly small. District records showed 443 students requesting transfers from schools identified for improvement under NCLB in 2005-06. Oakland has long had an open enrollment policy; therefore, some dissatisfied students may have transferred out prior to their school offering choice under NCLB, district officials noted.

In addition, district officials suggested that some parents may be happy with their neighborhood school, and some may want to work with the school to change things they are dissatisfied with. All Oakland schools have school site councils made up of parents, school staff—and in secondary schools, students. The councils are responsible for preparing and implementing a “single site plan for student achievement” that includes funding for Title I and other categorical programs. Some parents may prefer to stay in neighborhood schools and work for change through site councils, district officials speculated.

Supplemental Educational Services

For 2005-06, the California Department of Education listed 74 state-approved supplemental educational service providers. Of these 40 communicated their interest in servicing Oakland, and the district contracted with 25. Education Station, Spectra, and ARC provide services to the largest number of students. The majority of providers offer services on-site at schools. Five offer services off-site, and three are flexible about where they can meet students.

Of the approximately 12,000 eligible students, district officials said they had the capacity to serve about 3,500 with the district's set-aside. To advertise the services, Oakland held three districtwide fairs as well as a number of fairs for individual schools. In the first round of applications, 2,500 students requested services. In the second round, 2,400 applied. After weeding out duplicate applications and determining eligibility, district officials anticipate that approximately 3,500 students will participate in supplemental educational services this year, said Niambi Clay, SES community coordinator.

Of supplemental services, Clay said, "I think it's a good program in theory, but I don't think people thought about the implementation issues in a large urban school district." She emphasized that Oakland wants students to get good tutoring but that managing supplemental educational services stretches an urban district's capacity because of the large number of students who could potentially participate and because the majority of the management falls on the district rather than the providers. For example, in the first round of parent applications for supplemental educational services, 300 parents who returned forms saying they wanted services failed to fill in the name of the service provider they wanted. In the second round, 200 parents did not name their preferred provider. Because Clay wanted more students to participate in tutoring, she and her assistant attempted to call all 500 parents and ask them to choose one of the 25 providers.

In addition, the district received many duplicate applications. For example, some parents signed up with one provider at the district's fair and then signed with another provider who visited the student's home, Clay said. She explained that it is up to the district to determine which provider is really providing services and to make sure students are not getting services from more than one provider. Because each of the 25 providers can be at multiple sites throughout the large district, this task can be daunting, Clay said.

While Clay said she thinks tutoring could help raise student achievement, she also said it is too early to tell how effective the current providers are. Based on informal principal reports, the quality of tutoring varies from provider to provider and from site to site, she said. While she stressed that by law districts cannot tell parents which providers to choose, she said Oakland hoped in the future to provide parents with more information about the effectiveness of provider services. Without this information, she said, parents have difficulty making good decisions about tutoring.

Schools in Oakland have also been overtaxed by the demands of supplemental services, some principals said. Advertising services and offering equal access to all providers takes up a lot of time and energy, said Yanez, principal of Whittier Elementary. "If we invite one group, we have to invite all groups. The principal should not have to meet with all these providers," Yanez said.

In addition, when providers recruit tutors from among Whittier's teachers, it takes their focus away from the regular school day. "I compete with [providers] for my teacher's time," Yanez explained. For some teachers, especially new teachers, their time could be better spent planning for instruction during the regular day and taking a break in the evening, rather than spending their out-of-school time tutoring and planning instruction for the supplemental educational services, Yanez said.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

According to state records, 13% of the 1,755 teachers in core academic classes in Oakland are “highly qualified” by state definitions. This percentage is not, however, entirely accurate, district officials said, because the district is still in the process of collecting information from all schools. Schools that have not yet provided the documentation were recorded as having 0% highly qualified teachers. Of the 13% reported by the state, Jeanne Ludwig the state’s education program consultant who manages information about highly qualified teachers and paraprofessionals said, “It’s an accurate estimate of what the district knows, but it is not an accurate estimate of the percentage of highly qualified teachers in classrooms.” District officials estimated that in 2004-05 about 81% of teachers were highly qualified, and the percentage is expected to be similar in 2005-06.

Oakland principals reported having difficulty hiring highly qualified teachers, particularly to replace teachers transferred due to restructuring. Several said that candidates did not want to come to the school after they learned the school’s location and that the school was in restructuring. At the same time, the 2005-06 school year started with about 80 Oakland teachers who were on the payroll but not placed in schools. These teachers were transferred out of schools in restructuring.

Professional Development

NCLB, and Reading First in particular, has allowed Oakland to increase professional development for teachers, district officials said. In addition to added professional development for Reading First, “Dates with Data,” and “Data Conferences,” the district has instituted a “minimum day” every Wednesday. During this time, students go home early or go to after school activities, while teachers participate in schoolwide professional development activities chosen by the school or district, Stam explained.

Despite the popularity and perceived effectiveness of the minimum day, the amount of time spent in professional development had to be decreased for 2005-06, due to contractual and financial issues. In 2004-05, students left schools two hours early on minimum day. For 2005-06, the district could only afford one hour of professional development on Wednesdays. Some schools have elected to pay teachers extra to stay for an additional hour, Stam noted.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Record gathering on paraprofessional qualifications in Oakland is also incomplete. The official state report shows that 21% of the district’s 474 Title I paraprofessionals are “highly qualified.” Again, schools that did not send documentation were counted as having 0% highly qualified paraprofessionals.

Funding and Costs

Due to declining enrollment, Oakland has fewer Title I funds for 2005-06 than it did for the preceding year. For example, Title I, Part A, funds amounted to \$26.6 million last year but only \$25.1 million this year in 2005-06. District officials said implementing NCLB in a time of declining revenue and a shrinking central office is challenging. The government’s pattern of increasing accountability without increasing resources makes Stam question the government’s commitment to really improving student achievement. “When the military says they need more money, they get it,” Stam pointed out. “When educators say we need more money, we don’t get it.”

These funding challenges have reached the school level as well. “Education is very expensive,” noted Principal Franco. “Until we realize that as a nation, we will not succeed.” For example, at

Sobrante Park the district is rewiring the school so that the computers in the library's computer lab can access the internet, but the computers are so old most aren't equipped to get the internet in the first place. The school will seek private donations to complete the lab. "I'll have to go to the Rotarians and get on my hands and knees. In this country, we should not have to do this," Franco said.

Reading First

Oakland has 40 Reading First Schools. Every school receives a full-time literacy coach, who provides on-site professional development in Open Court, models instruction, and facilitates data analysis sessions aimed at identifying and planning instruction for students who are behind in reading. Schools with more than 25 classrooms have two coaches.

"Reading First provides more structures for success," said Ruiz. For example, she said the scripted lessons provided by Open Court give teachers what they need to reach most students. In addition, Reading First's insistence on data collection keeps teachers and students on task, she explained. Also, Ruiz praised Reading First for ensured extended reading time, though many Oakland schools already had this.

With more than half of the district's elementary schools receiving Reading First grants, the program has a large impact on the district, Stam noted. District level funding for Reading First benefits all schools, he said, because it increases central office capacity for offering professional development and other support services. Oakland would welcome a similar national initiative for other subject areas, particularly for math, he added.

Data File—Oakland Unified School District

Location: California

Type: Urban

Number of Schools (Data includes charter schools)

Total: 125

Elementary: 68

Middle/junior high: 24

High schools: 26

Other: 7 (participating in California's Alternative Schools Accountability Model)

Number of Title I Schools: 105

Student Enrollment and Demographics

Total enrollment: 47,989

African American: 41%

Latino: 34%

Asian: 15%

White: 6%

Filipino: 1%

Pacific Islander: 1%

Multi-racial or did not respond: 1%

English language learners: 30%

Students with disabilities: 11%

Low-income students: 37%

Teachers

Total number of teachers: 1,755

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 13%§

Paraprofessionals

Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 474

Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 21%§

Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing

Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP,
including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 81

Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

	Based on 2003-04 testing	Based on 2004-05 testing
Schools in year 1 of improvement (Did not make AYP for two consecutive years):	20	13
Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years):	10	15
Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four consecutive years):	1	7
Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for five or more consecutive years):	13	13

Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

	Based on 2003-04 testing	Based on 2004-05 testing
Schools offering choice <i>only</i> :	20	13
Schools in year 1 of school improvement Offering SES <i>instead</i> of choice:	0	0
Schools offering SES <i>and</i> choice:	124	35

§Oakland is still gathering this information.