Superintendent: Mark Payler
Primary contact: Dr. Carrie Duits, executive director of student achievement*
2,324 students, K-12, rural

District Description
The Fort Lupton Weld R-8 School District in Weld County is only 30 miles from Denver, Colorado's state capital. The small city of Fort Lupton and its surrounding area are undergoing many changes. Cattle and horse ranching and vegetable farming continue to some extent, but fields are valued more now for their oil, natural gas reserves, and rich mineral resources. The changes are bringing jobs to the region, but many of the more skilled workers live in the Denver suburbs and commute to Fort Lupton. The area's new immigrants, unskilled workers for the most part, come primarily from Mexico and live with their families in Fort Lupton.

This economic shift is bringing great changes to the school district, including an increase in the number of students from low-income families who now constitute more than half of the district's enrollment, and an increase in the number of English language learners, who make up more than a third of the district's enrollment. District officials said they want the schools to continue to be a source of pride for the community. They also want to provide a safe and appropriate learning environment for all students.

Key Findings
• The Fort Lupton district is struggling to improve student performance at schools that have experienced several years of low performance. Two years ago, grade levels of most of the schools were reconfigured, a change made to improve academic results. The district made many other changes in curriculum, instruction, and staffing at its schools, but still the low achievement trend continues, despite many efforts to reverse it.

• The Fort Lupton district has experienced much difficulty in retaining teachers. Many teachers leave each year to take better positions in other districts. A third of the teaching staff left at the end of school year 2003-04, and a similar percentage left at the end of 2004-05. The stability of the instructional program at the schools is greatly affected by teacher mobility. The district has to train teachers each year in its expectations for student learning, and since many teachers are new to the profession, they also need assistance in getting fully licensed.

• One of the four Fort Lupton schools made adequate yearly progress in 2004-05 after an appeal to the state about testing of English language learners. This was the first school in the district to make AYP in the four years of No Child Left Behind accountability requirements.

* Other contacts for this case study include Scott Graham, director of consolidated grants and secondary achievement coordinator; and Mike Campbell, principal, Fort Lupton High School.
Overall Impact of NCLB

The Fort Lupton district undertook a major reorganization in 2002-03 because of consistently low levels of academic performance. The district did not meet either the AYP targets for NCLB or the expectations for Colorado state accountability. In the reorganization, the grade levels of three of the district’s four schools were reconfigured in ways district officials hoped would produce better student performance. Even though achievement has improved somewhat, the state AYP targets have increased, and Fort Lupton schools continue to fall short. The district has set a major goal to be taken off the state’s watch list by meeting AYP targets and the other accreditation indicators. Closing the achievement gap for English language learners is another goal the district hopes to reach by accelerating the English acquisition of the students in that subgroup.

NCLB and Student Achievement

Much to the disappointment of the architects of the Fort Lupton change of two years ago, student performance has not improved significantly, and its schools again face sanctions. In 2003-04, the first year after reorganization, none of the four schools made AYP. In 2004-05, one school, Leo William Butler Elementary School, made AYP, but the other three did not.

District officials point to three main reasons why the trend of low performance appears to be continuing. The greatest problem is teacher retention. Sixty new teachers, nearly a third of the teaching staff, were hired for 2005-06 to replace teachers who left the district. The pattern was similar the previous year.

A second problem the district is encountering is the rapid increase in the number of English language learners in the schools. Even though there have been many changes in how these students are taught English, not all the complexities of curriculum and instruction have been resolved. The third problem in the district is that some parents are taking their students out of the Fort Lupton schools and enrolling them in neighboring districts with better performance levels. The students who leave tend to be white students, and often they are higher-achieving students from families with higher incomes.

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS

Fort Lupton High School, Fort Lupton Middle School, and Twombly Elementary School did not make AYP for the past two years. The middle school and high school are not Title I schools, but Twombly Elementary is, so that school is now in year 1 of school improvement. Leo Butler Elementary School is the only school that made AYP in 2004-05, but this occurred only after a successful appeal regarding the exemption of some English language learners from testing.

Four subgroups at all schools are having difficulty making AYP: English language learners, Latino students, low-income students, and students with disabilities. A large number of students are in three of these subgroups, so if one such student performs poorly, it affects the outcomes for three subgroups.

The 2004-05 state target for AYP in grade 3-8 reading was 68% of students performing at the proficient level. Butler’s percentage of proficiency dropped from 53% in 2003-04 to 45% in 2004-05, and Twombly’s increased from 40% to 45%. The state target in writing was 55%; Butler dropped from 41% to 30%, and Twombly increased from 30% to 33%. In math the state target was 66%; Butler increased from 45% to 50%, and Twombly decreased from 35% to 33%.

The middle and high school percentages trailed the state targets in both years, and the gap was greatest in math. The state target for middle school math was 49% of students scoring proficient; Fort Lupton’s percentage was 11%. The state target for high school math was 32%, and
Fort Lupton’s percentage was 15%. The closest Fort Lupton came to the target was in high school reading, with 50% proficient compared with the state target of 66%.

**DISTRICT AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

The Fort Lupton district is in its second year of improvement, and the district is making many changes to try to reverse the trend of low achievement. The most notable change, made two years ago, was the reconfiguring of grade levels at three schools. Previously, one school had served PreK through grade 2, another had served grades 3 and 4, and the third had served grades 5 through 8. After reconfiguration, the two elementary schools served PreK through grade 5, and the third school became a middle school for grades 6 through 8. The high school remained a 9-12 school.

Because of these changes in the grade levels served by the schools, the district and the schools were able to start with a clean slate for adequate yearly progress, as permitted by NCLB, and for state accreditation. The district is now in its second year of the new cycle. School improvement activities are also part of the reorganization in the reconfigured schools. Although not referred to as corrective action or restructuring, the plan initiated two years ago is similar to these provisions of NCLB. The district also made changes in its bilingual program for English language learners to help students make an earlier transition to English.

District officials are concerned that the high staff and student turnover makes it difficult for schools to consistently implement better instructional strategies and programs. The new strategic plan for Fort Lupton schools focuses on increased professional development and training for new teachers, as well as improving the achievement of students across the grades.

The state’s process of accreditation affects both Title I and non-Title I schools. In 2004-05, the academic performance rating for all Fort Lupton schools showed improvement, although the rating was “low” for three schools and “average” for Leo Butler. The academic growth of students in 2004-05 was rated as “stable” for the high school and middle school, “improvement” for Twombly, and “significant improvement” for Leo Butler.

**Testing Issues**

The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) is used for NCLB accountability. Students in grades 5 through 10 have taken the reading, writing, and math tests for the past five years, but students in grades 3 and 4 took only reading and writing. In 2004-05, math was added to the testing program for students in grades 3 and 4.

Butler Elementary appealed to the state to reconsider its AYP status for 2004-05 on the basis of an issue related to testing English language learners in grades 3-5. The state had allowed students who had been in the country for less than three years and identified as non-English proficient or limited English proficient to be tested with an alternative test. The district was allowed by the state to appeal the initial AYP ruling, and Leo Butler Elementary made AYP in 2004-05.

**Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction**

Four major efforts have taken place in the past two years that address curriculum and instruction across all the grade levels. First, Fort Lupton has developed a universal preschool program to better prepare children for kindergarten and grade 1. Second, the district has placed special emphasis on literacy from kindergarten through grade 3 and has put in place specific plans for students who need help. Third, the district is in the process of expanding its structured reading program to the high school, and fourth, it undertook a curriculum-mapping initiative in the middle school and high school to align district curriculum with Colorado’s Content Standards.

In addition, the district has encouraged differentiated instruction at all grade levels and in every classroom to make sure that each student’s diverse needs are continually addressed. The focus of instruction is on the core areas of reading, writing, and math, and students are provided
with opportunities to participate in tutoring and after-school instruction. Several alternative programs are being reviewed to see if they will help meet the needs of certain students.

The middle school has moved to a block schedule, in which core classes are taught in long blocks of time on alternate days. Daily remediation in math and reading is scheduled for students who perform below grade level in those subjects, and the school is using pre-Advanced Placement best practices in the core areas to help all students become college-ready. Other interventions include a daily advisory period for all students and a program to help mid-level students build their academic skills.

The district is concerned about its high dropout rate and is reviewing options for alternative programs for high-risk students. The high school has developed a new daily schedule that does not allow 9th and 10th grade students to leave the campus during lunch time, an effort aimed at keeping the younger students involved at the school. A change in scheduling that has shown good results is a three-week interim period in January, between the two semesters, that is used for students to take enrichment classes or to make up failing grades. According to Scott Graham, director of consolidated grants and secondary achievement coordinator, this interim time was successful in mediating over two-thirds of the failing grades in the first semester of last year, and it helped to keep students on track to graduate on time.

English Language Learners

Major changes have taken place in Fort Lupton in the past two years in the methods used for teaching English language learners. Concerned about these students’ rate of English acquisition, the district has attempted to improve the quality of teaching materials, resources, and staff training. The language transition from Spanish to English is also being reviewed. The district goal, according to Dr. Carrie Duits, executive director of student achievement, is to have a clearly defined program of language acquisition across all grades, along with general agreement from parents, the community, and school staff about curriculum and instruction for English language learners.

The district is using a set of tests in reading, language, and math that teachers can administer periodically to review how well students are learning. The tests are Internet-based and provide almost immediate feedback (within 24 hours), according to Graham. “These tests are being used to shape curriculum as the year progresses,” he said, noting that this is another way to help prepare individual students for the state standardized tests in the spring.

NCLB School Choice

Although three Fort Lupton schools are in their first year of improvement, the two secondary schools do not receive Title I funds, so only Twombly Elementary must offer school choice. Five students of the 697 that were eligible transferred from Twombly to Leo Butler in 2005-06 through the NCLB choice option.

Supplemental Educational Services

No Fort Lupton school is in year 2 of school improvement, so none is required to offer supplemental educational services.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

A year ago Fort Lupton had 19 teachers (14% of the teaching force) on provisional or emergency certification; in 2005-06, with all the new hires, that number has increased to 26. Mike
Campbell, the new principal of Fort Lupton High school, has a teaching staff of 50 teachers, but 25 of them are still on probationary status. Half of this group consists of teachers who are new to the school.

“I am the fifth principal at this school in a 10-year period,” Campbell said. “There are a multitude of issues I need to address. I am creating a climate and culture of trust and collaboration with two general approaches. First we have to develop a strong sense of stability.” Second, he said, he also wants to provide individual teachers with a “persistent set of strategies and prompts” that will motivate them to expand their instructional capacity.

Staff turnover at the middle school is even greater than at the high school. Of the 38 teaching positions, 31 (82%) are probationary teachers, and 12 are new to the district.

Although 85% of the Fort Lupton teachers meet the NCLB requirement for being highly qualified, the district is working with the 26 teachers who need to improve their qualifications. Most of the teachers are at the middle school and high school. Several special education teachers are at the elementary schools. It is anticipated that all will meet the requirements in 2006.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development in Fort Lupton has become a major activity due to the large number of new teachers hired each year. The new hires may be considered highly qualified by state requirements, but many are first-year teachers who need support and assistance.

The state of Colorado requires school districts to provide induction programs for teachers new to the profession who hold provisional licenses. Fort Lupton’s staff development plan lists the expectations for the new teachers and includes a mentor to work with them. District mentors must have at least three years of teaching experience including at least one year in the district. The mentors each work with up to four inductees, and they receive small stipends for their work. Induction must be completed during the first three years of teaching, and after those three years of successful teaching, the teacher is eligible to apply for a professional teaching license.

The Fort Lupton district provides a second mentor program for teachers called “Just in Time” Mentors. Teachers can request extra support of three hours a week in addition to the state mentoring program, which is only one hour a month. Dr. Carrie Duits, who developed the district’s mentor program, said that teachers request this extra assistance. “We provide the new teacher with a support mentor who is an exemplary teacher—someone who is retired or who might be working in a job share.” The mentors help the new teachers with organization, classroom management, assessment, and instructional strategies. They also spend time in the new teacher’s classroom.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Two years ago Fort Lupton had 40 paraprofessionals and only 20% of them met the NCLB qualifications. In 2004-05 that number was reduced to 29, with 72% considered highly qualified. In 2005-06 there are 23 paraprofessionals at the two elementary schools, and 83% (all but four paraprofessionals) have met the NCLB qualifications by passing the state-required test.

Funding and Costs

Fort Lupton receives approximately $800,000 in NCLB program funds, about the same amount received in 2004-05. In addition, the district is funded from several other federal grant programs such as the 21st Century Community Learning grants, which fund after-school tutoring and enrichment programs at the middle school and high school levels. Others include Read to Achieve, which promotes reading at the mid-elementary level; Colorado Reading First, a state program that promotes reading at the lower-elementary level; a state-funded program to promote college prep Advanced Placement and pre-AP classes at the middle school and high school; and the federal Comprehensive School Reform program to promote schoolwide changes at the middle school.
Reading First

Fort Lupton receives funding from the Reading First program, but 2005-06 is the last year of the three-year program. Because of all the new teachers in the district, the training had to be differentiated to address the varied needs of the teachers. Duits, who oversees the program, met with the trainers and Colorado Department of Education leaders to work out a way that all the teachers could get the training they needed for the remaining hours. “Since this is our last year,” said Duits, “we are planning to have a January summit to create the district’s vision of literacy instruction.” Through discussions with the coaches and principals, Duits plans to focus on what has been learned through Reading First to identify the next steps in reading instruction. “I am eager for this meeting,” said Duits. “We will have input from our K-5 teachers about assessments, interventions, staff development, support, materials, essential elements of instruction, and expectations, and we will be ready to move on.”

Other Issues

In order to improve student achievement, Fort Lupton district officials recognize that they need to improve the district’s ability to retain teachers.

Data File—Fort Lupton Weld R-8 School District

Location: Central Colorado, west of Denver
Type: Rural

Number of Schools
- Total: 4
  - Elementary: 2
  - Middle/junior high: 1
  - High schools: 1

Number of Title I schools: 2

Student Enrollment and Demographics
- Total enrollment: 2,324
  - Latino: 65%
  - White: 34%
  - Other: 1%
  - Low-income students: 60%
  - English language learners: 35%
  - Students with disabilities: 9%

Teachers
- Total number of teachers: 175
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 85%

Paraprofessionals
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 23
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 83%

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: 3
### Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

**Note:** 2003-04 was not applicable because the district started over on accountability.

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