Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

Superintendent: Jill Shackelford
Primary contact: Jim Clevenger, director of federal programs*
Schools studied:
  - Central Middle School
  - Caruthers Elementary School
20,217 students, K-12, urban

District and School Descriptions

On the border of Missouri and Kansas, the Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) became a model of urban school reform under the leadership of Ray Daniels, who retired at the end of the 2004-05 school year. In 2005-06, Jill Shackelford, who is committed to sustaining implementation of the district’s reform plan, became superintendent.

Central Middle School serves 700 students, 93% of whom are low income and 34% of whom are English language learners (ELLs). Although proficiency in reading is high (73% of all students and 70% of ELLs are proficient), the school failed to demonstrate AYP for the sixth straight year in math.

Caruthers Elementary School serves 285 students, 91% of whom are low income and 92% of whom are African American. The school demonstrated AYP for 2004-05 and 2005-06 after failing to do so for two straight years.

Key Findings

- Student achievement in Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS) continued its climb upward, and achievement gaps among subgroups of students continued to narrow in 2005. Nevertheless, KCKPS did not demonstrate adequate yearly progress for the third straight year, placing the district in its second year of improvement.

- KCKPS continued to credit the hard work of educators and implementation of First Things First for improvements in test scores, but No Child Left Behind appears to be having a growing impact in the district as the first school entered the restructuring stage. The new superintendent has prioritized support for schools based on their AYP status.

- For the first time, all students in grades 3-8 and high school will be tested using the state assessment. The district does not expect to receive results of tests taken in March 2006 until December 2006—very late in the year to identify schools for improvement and notify parents about choice and supplemental educational services.

* Other contacts for this case study include Jim Antos, principal of Central Middle School; Stacia Brown, principal of Caruthers Elementary School; Marguarite Martinez, ESL/migrant coordinator; Wendy Donnell, Reading First project manager; and Cindy Lane, director of special education.
• Four of eight KCKPS middle schools are in school improvement, and two more could enter school improvement next year, limiting or eliminating the number of choices for middle school students. According to one district administrator, however, the lack of options is not a problem, as parents are satisfied with the quality of schools identified for improvement.

• NCLB has had the biggest impact on KCKPS in the way it provides supplemental educational services, preventing the district from providing services itself and opening the door to providers that administrators consider of poor quality. NCLB has also had an impact on the way in which the district holds schools accountable, although administrators attribute student achievement gains to a school reform model implemented prior to NCLB.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

Overall student achievement in Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools has been increasing, and achievement gaps have been narrowing in both reading and math since 2002. The district, however, gives little credit to NCLB. Rather, the district attributes its improvement to the implementation of a districtwide reform model, which began in 1997, and to “an extreme focus on achievement for all students, instructional coaches in all buildings, and a supportive Board of Education,” said Jim Clevenger, director of federal programs.

That said, NCLB has had an impact on the district. NCLB’s biggest strength, according to Jim Antos, principal of a middle school that has failed to demonstrate adequate yearly progress for six straight years in math, “is that it makes schools accountable.” The biggest weakness, he said, is that the accountability provisions force schools to focus on a narrow curriculum and not “the whole child.” Antos also worries that NCLB attempts to “make good workers out of teachers due to fear, threats, and scare tactics.” Clevenger added that NCLB takes some focus off the district’s reform plan by requiring budgeting for areas such as school choice that the district would not otherwise have to do.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Student achievement in the district has been increasing since 2002 for all subgroups and grades of students. The percentage of students in the district scoring at or above proficiency on the state reading assessment has increased from 32% in 2002, to 52% in 2004, to 56.1% in 2005. The percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency in math has increased from 23% in 2002, to 38% in 2004, to 40.7% in 2005.

At the same time, achievement gaps have narrowed. Students with disabilities, in particular, have made impressive gains, increasing their percentage proficiency by more than 40 points in reading and 20 points in math. Similarly, while the percentage of students in the district scoring at or above proficiency on the state reading assessment increased by 20 points, the achievement gap between white and Latino students virtually evaporated.

**Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement**

**DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS**

For the third year in a row, the district did not make AYP in reading or math. In reading, all students and two subgroups of students did not demonstrate AYP. In math, which has been the district’s weakness, all students and four subgroups did not demonstrate AYP.

As for individual schools, one entered year 1 of improvement, two schools entered year 2 of improvement, and one school entered restructuring after not demonstrating AYP in math for the sixth straight year. All four schools are middle schools.
Two schools in year 1 of improvement for math are on hold after demonstrating AYP in 2004-05. Two other elementary schools—Caruthers and Quindaro—moved out of improvement in 2005-06 after demonstrating AYP for two consecutive years.

**DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

The district has not changed its reform strategy, started in 1998, as a result of being in its second year of improvement. It continues to implement First Things First, a comprehensive school reform model created by the New Jersey-based Institute for Research and Reform in Education, or IRRE. First Things First, which is strongly supported by teachers and administrators districtwide, is built upon seven critical features, among them small learning communities, high standards for academics and conduct, and lower student-teacher ratios.

One offshoot of First Things First is a family advocacy program, which all schools are required to implement. Paid for in part with NCLB Title II funds, the program began its second year of implementation in 2005-06. It features a 45-minute per week homeroom class in which teachers check in with their students and focus on such issues as anger management, stress, and family problems; one-on-one conferences between teacher and student; and at least two conferences with parents per school year. Implementation, according to Jim Antos, principal of Central Middle School, is going well and appears to be having a positive impact on students.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

Two of the four middle schools in KCKPS that are in some phase of school improvement are “a big concern” for the district, according to Clevenger. For each of these two schools, the district has hired two additional math coaches. In 2005-06, the district also adopted for all middle schools eInstruction, a math program that gives “clickers” to students that enable them to respond electronically (and wirelessly) to questions or problems posed by teachers. The program tabulates students’ responses and presents them in various ways to teachers via desktop computers, allowing teachers to determine quickly whether students understand each concept covered.

NCLB has affected which schools receive the most attention from the KCKPS central office. This attention includes both a “stick” and a “carrot.” All schools identified for NCLB improvement lose budget authority—school expenses over $500 must be approved by a district administrator. In addition, the new superintendent has identified “priority 1” schools, which include those targeted for NCLB improvement plus all high schools, and “priority 2” schools, which are not in improvement but did not make AYP. District administrators have performed audits on priority 1 and 2 schools, spending the day in the school to assess how well teachers are engaging their students, and to review the alignment and rigor of curriculum relative to state standards and assessments.

The administrators follow protocols when analyzing the culture and conditions at each school. After the observations, the administrators write a report and present it to the school’s principal with recommendations for how to improve. When the administrators visit the school again, they look at whether the school has implemented these recommendations and evaluate how well the principal has put the recommendations in place.

In addition to this support and monitoring, all priority 1 schools except the high schools received an additional $100,000 from Title I carryover funds that the state “found” and “had to get rid of,” according to Clevenger. The downside of these additional funds, said Clevenger, is that they had to be budgeted by September 30 and spent by December 31, which all schools have accomplished. Priority 2 schools also had the opportunity to bring in extra dollars. They wrote grants to the district, which had Title I carryover money of its own. Since the priority 2 schools were not eligible for NCLB supplemental educational services, many of the schools requested in their grant applications extra funds for after-school tutoring. Middle schools also requested funds to purchase additional eInstruction equipment.
CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES

One middle school, Central Middle, is in restructuring. The district, however, is “concerned the least about this school,” said Clevenger, since it has demonstrated AYP in reading every year despite having a significant number of ELL students and has “just missed” demonstrating AYP in math by a single subgroup (ELL students last year, low-income students this year). Indeed, over the past three years student achievement has increased significantly, says the school’s principal, due to a focus on math and reading in staff development provided by consultants from Kansas State University, Title I-funded tutoring for 80 students, a pullout remediation program on Thursdays for students who fail the school’s weekly assessments, and the family advocacy program. If three more low-income students had passed, Central Middle School would have demonstrated AYP this year.

To support the school, a school and district governance council—composed of the district administrator responsible for middle schools, the deputy superintendent, and the district’s instructional coach for math, as well as the school principal and instructional coach—monitor the school’s implementation of its improvement plan. The council also serves as a decision-making body for the school, making decisions about budget, professional activities, and school improvement initiatives. In addition, the school received a new assistant principal and an additional instructional math coach.

Finally, at the end of the school year, Jim Antos, principal of Central Middle School and considered to be an excellent instructional leader and manager, is retiring after 32 years in education. Clevenger and Antos emphasized that he is not being replaced due to the school’s restructuring efforts, but the superintendent’s biggest priority for this year is to phase in the replacement for Antos.

Testing Issues

In 2004-05, the Kansas State Assessment tested students only in grades 5, 8, and 11 in reading and grades 4, 7, and 10 in math. In 2005-06, the assessment will test students in grades 3 through 8 and high school, as required by NCLB. The problem, said Clevenger, is that the district is not expected to get AYP results until December of 2006.

Concerned about the lack of timeliness of state results and about the lack of data for planning instruction, KCKPS has decided to implement the Northwest Evaluation Association’s MAP Test (Measures of Academic Progress) in high school and to pilot the test in three elementary schools for reading, language arts, and math. The test is aligned with state standards and gives student results by academic benchmark. In addition, students take the assessment four times a year online, meaning that data are reported immediately and much more frequently than the state assessment.

Educators are excited about the NWEA assessment, said Clevenger, because “for the first time we have a handle on what kids do and don’t know.” It remains to be seen, however, how effectively the NWEA assessment drives instructional practice as intended. The district has neither provided, nor plans to provide, training for teachers or principals on how to use test results to improve instruction, although Clevenger did note that some schools are having teachers meet to discuss test results and plan lessons.

For testing students with disabilities, KCKPS has followed guidance from the state, which changed at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year, according to Cindy Lane, the district’s director of special education. The change includes adding a level of assessment depending on the student’s disability. The district has been examining the criteria for placing students at the appropriate level and is still determining the impact on students, schools, and the district.

In 2004-05, the state required for the first time the administration of the Kansas English Language Proficiency Assessment (KELPA) to assess the English proficiency of English language learners. The test was difficult and costly to administer, said Marguarite Martinez, the district’s
ESL/migrant coordinator, because it requires one teacher or administrator to work with a single student. To implement the test, KCKPS trained retired teachers and administrators. The state encountered difficulties grading the tests, rendering the results unusable. The district, added Martinez, has threatened to not administer the test in 2005-06 unless the state improves the quality of the test and ensures the validity and reliability of the results.

**Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction**

KCKPS revised its curriculum in 1998, when the district implemented First Things First, and has made no changes as a result of NCLB, according to Clevenger.

NCLB has not changed instruction for students with disabilities, said Lane, but it has promoted closer collaboration between special education teachers and general education teachers regarding the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. “I believe we are working even more collaboratively than before,” she added.

**English Language Learners**

The district serves a student population that speaks approximately 26 languages, although 95% of English language learners speak Spanish. Of the remaining 5%, most are refugees from Middle Eastern, African, and Asian countries, according to Martinez. In 2004-05, KCKPS began working with the Bueno Center from the University of Colorado to improve outcomes for ELLs.

The center worked with four schools with high ELL populations, observing classrooms and writing a report recommending ways to improve instruction for ELLs in self-contained classrooms and general education classrooms. Recommendations focused on finding ways to communicate and involve the non-English-speaking community, collecting data about the language needs of students, using nonverbal communication in classrooms, and targeting assignments to students’ individual levels. In 2005-06, the four schools, with district support, are trying to implement recommendations. KCKPS is also trying to implement the recommendations districtwide through a newly created ESL Strategic Planning Committee.

In addition to its work with the Bueno Center, the district is using funds from Title II of NCLB to train 250 teachers and instructional coaches—out of the approximately 500 requesting support—in ELL courses and to help teachers earn ELL endorsements. The district is using its $392,000 in Title III funds to hire bilingual paraprofessionals and a part-time data technician and to pay for ELL instructional materials, according to Clevenger.

At Central Middle School, the reading achievement of ELL students has been very high. Ninety-one percent of ELL students were proficient in reading in 2004; 70% were proficient in 2005. According to Antos, all students in the school prepared for the Kansas state assessment by receiving instruction that was based on the Kansas State Standards. Students below grade level in reading—whether or not they are ELL—have access to a remedial curriculum (Read 180), while students at or above grade level in reading use the Read XL curriculum. ELL 8th graders, according to Antos, received the same test preparation, but as a state-defined accommodation were allowed to take the 5th grade assessment and have passages read to them.

**NCLB School Choice**

The number of KCKPS schools required under NCLB to offer choice decreased slightly from seven in 2004-05 to six in 2005-06. In five of the six schools, almost no students have chosen to change schools, according to Clevenger. In the remaining school, which is in its first year of improvement, 140 students elected to change schools. Clevenger said that so many students in this school are taking advantage of choice due to the school’s location in what is considered an
unsafe neighborhood. School year 2005-06 represented the first year that a significant number of students changed schools, said Clevenger, who added that it remains to be seen what the impact on student achievement will be.

Clevenger said that the district has struggled to place students in other schools, especially at the middle school level. In 2005-06, four of the eight middle schools were at least in the first year of improvement, and two more may enter improvement next year. As a result, there are few schools that can receive students choosing to leave their neighborhood school. One of the middle schools filled up quickly, requiring the school to stop accepting students under the choice option.

KCKPS is considering seeking a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education, said Clevenger, that would allow the district to offer supplemental educational services in the first year of school improvement, and choice in the second year, rather than the other way around as is now required by NCLB.

Supplemental Educational Services

More than anything, NCLB has changed the way KCKPS provides tutoring and academic support for struggling students. Instead of the district providing supplemental educational services (SES) as it once did, KCKPS—which is prevented from serving as an SES provider because it is in improvement—now must offer students a choice of providers approved by the state. Approximately 15 providers initially made themselves available to students, said Clevenger, but some were using “questionable” practices. One provider (Greater YMCA), for example, planned to use high school students to tutor younger children. Other providers included Education Station, Plato Learning, and Newton Learning. “We would much prefer that the district be its own provider,” Clevenger said.

Despite the number of options, most parents and students (555 out of the 600) have chosen School Linked Services, an organization that uses the district’s SES program and teachers, as their SES provider. Clevenger said that the district would be satisfied if it could offer School Linked Services exclusively, believing that it provides the highest quality service that is most aligned with district goals and curricula. All 5 of the remaining students participating in SES have selected YMCA as the provider.

Overall, five schools are offering SES in 2005-06. This excludes some schools that need the services most but are not yet in their second year of improvement, such as the middle school that is losing many students to choice.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

Virtually all teachers in KCKPS are highly qualified. Although NCLB’s highly qualified teacher requirements originally appeared to be a problem for the district, it has turned out to be “not that big of a deal,” according to Clevenger, who added that virtually all veteran teachers have been able to become highly qualified under the high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE).

The district’s biggest problem area with regard to the highly qualified teacher requirements has been high school science. Kansas licenses teachers by specific subject (e.g., biology, physics) in science, limiting the number of teachers available. In addition, KCKPS organizes its high schools into smaller learning communities and has teachers “loop” with their students, meaning that they remain with their students for multiple years and must teach multiple subjects. The district is working with the University of Kansas to increase the number of science teachers, but there is still a shortage, said Clevenger.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
In 2005-06, the new superintendent changed the district’s department of professional development into the department on equity and closing the achievement gap. The department has a director and a coordinator who audit schools, provide recommendations to district and school administrators, and train principals and instructional coaches. Clevenger said that this shift in emphasis was not a result of NCLB, but was certainly consistent with the law’s goals. Moreover, Clevenger said that NCLB has pushed the district to increase the number of instructional coaches in schools and focus more professional development activities at the school level.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support
In 2005-06, virtually all paraprofessionals in KCKPS are “highly qualified” as defined by NCLB. Of those who are not highly qualified, most serve students with disabilities. To ensure that all paraprofessionals were highly qualified, the district provided classes, practice test sessions, and tuition for college classes, and paid for the first administration of the Praxis exam. Paraprofessionals who do not meet the highly qualified criteria by May 2006 will be let go.

Funding and Costs
In 2003, the Kansas state legislature paid for a study of the adequacy of state funding for education. The study found that the state should be paying an additional $750 million over two years to ensure that every student receives an adequate education.

In spring of 2004, the Kansas Supreme Court found that the state method for funding education was unconstitutional. Although the legislature did not raise taxes, it allocated an additional $200 million statewide for the 2005-06 school year by increasing funding for programs for ELLs and at-risk students. The KCKPS school board increased teacher salaries by 7% to compete with surrounding districts. This increase wiped out the entire supplement of state funding and required local dollars as well.

As a result of a declining student population, the Title I allocation to KCKPS was reduced by about $500,000 between 2004-05 and 2005-06. The district did not learn of this reduction until July 2005, which made budgeting very difficult, according to Clevenger. To compensate, the district pulled Title I funds out of the school choice program, later replacing these funds with dollars carried over from the previous year.

Reading First
KCKPS received a Reading First grant for one elementary school in 2003-04 and for another school in 2004-05. The grants for both schools have declined from $760,000 in 2004-05 to $672,000 in 2005-06. In both years, the majority of funds are used “for people,” according to Wendy Donnell, the district’s Reading First project manager, including school-based reading coaches, ELL coaches, and “adjunct” teachers who are substitute teachers permanently assigned to Reading First buildings to allow classroom teachers to be released for professional development activities.

The district categorizes its training for teachers into two levels. Level 1 training is for teachers who are new to the school, grade level, or Reading First grant. These teachers receive intensive training every week, participating in professional development activities and a one-on-one case study with a student who is having difficulty reading. The goal is for the teacher to apply to all students what he or she is learning from working with that one child. Level 2 training is for teachers who have already received level 1 training. These teachers work with a coach one afternoon per month and intensively with three to four children per day, three to four times per week. Again, the goal is to apply lessons learned in working with the coach and students to improve reading instruction for all students.
The district hopes to include in this training teachers from other schools that did not receive a Reading First grant as time and resources allow. In general, Donnell said that the Reading First grants are helping to improve implementation of the district’s literacy model across all schools, although the impact has not yet been evaluated. In addition to applying this literacy model, Reading First schools are working to target specific interventions to the particular needs of students. Those needs are determined through an array of assessment strategies, including the state-required Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment, as well as spelling inventories, running records, and writing samples.

Data File—Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools

**Location:** Eastern Kansas

**Type:** Urban

**Number of Schools**
- Total: 48
  - Elementary: 30
  - Middle/junior high: 8
  - High schools: 6
  - Other: 4

**Number of Title I schools:** 42

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**
- Total enrollment: 20,217
  - African American: 46%
  - Latino: 32%
  - White: 18%
  - Asian: 3%
  - American Indian: 1%

  - Low-income students: 74%
  - English language learners: 20%
  - Students with disabilities: 13%

**Teachers**
- Total number of teachers: 1,442
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 95.9%

**Paraprofessionals**
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 302
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 94.4%

**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: 17 (12 were Title I)
### Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

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<td>Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four or five consecutive years):</td>
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<td>Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for six or more consecutive years):</td>
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(Note: Two schools made AYP based on 2004-05 testing but remain in improvement.)

### Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

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