Flint Community Schools
Michigan

Superintendent: Walter Milton
Primary contact: David Solis, director of state, federal, and local programs*
School studied: Brownell Elementary
20,028 students, preK-12, urban

District and School Descriptions
Located in southeastern Michigan, Flint Community Schools is the fourth largest urban school district in the state. A former center for heavy industry, the city has been losing jobs and population since the decline of automobile manufacturing in the U.S. Addressing the challenges of poverty and dwindling enrollment are paramount in the city’s schools, where 68% of students are eligible to receive free lunch and all but one school are eligible for Title I funding. All elementary and middle schools receive Title I funds.

Brownell Elementary has a highly mobile student population. The school was in restructuring in 2004-05, and then made adequate yearly progress. Brownell needs another year of high student achievement to come off the state’s list of schools in improvement.

Key Findings

- Six of the eight Flint schools in restructuring made adequate yearly progress based on 2004-05 testing. For schools in restructuring, Flint has had success with employing state-trained coaches to provide professional development and also with turning school decision making over to the school’s improvement committee.

- Academic achievement has increased in Flint in most areas tested. District officials attribute these increases to better use of resources, including textbooks and tutoring programs, increased focus on academics, and on-site professional development provided by instructional specialists.

- Because Flint had difficulty tracking attendance in supplemental educational services, the district hired an outside firm to do this work. In the 2004-05 school year, attendance taken by supplemental service providers and attendance taken by school principals frequently did not match. As a result, district officials were concerned that the district may have been overcharged for services. The new system put in place by the private company should solve this problem for 2005-06, officials said.

* Other contacts for this case study include David Comsa, chief of human resources and labor relations; John Conway, Title I compliance specialist; Deryl Evans, restructuring coach at Brownell Elementary 2005-06; Ana Maria Hufton, coordinator for ESL/bilingual and migrant education programs; Karen Lee, assistant director of state and local programs; Mary Alice Ross, English/language arts coordinator; Marcia Sauvie, restructuring coach at Brownell Elementary; Dana Simmons, math coordinator; Lucy Smith, principal, Brownell Elementary; Reba Walling, Title I English/language arts instructional specialist; and Elizabeth Williams, specialist, classified personnel.
Meeting No Child Left Behind requirements for highly qualified staff has not been a large problem in Flint. Due to declining enrollments, Flint has had to lay off teachers and para-professionals in the last two years. This attrition has helped ensure that the remaining employees are highly qualified, district officials said.

Title I funding has increased slightly in Flint, due to increases in the number of economically disadvantaged students. These increases, however, have not kept up with inflation and the rising cost of health care for employees, district officials said. Because of inflation and increased employee health care costs, more money has not resulted in more services for students.

Overall Impact of NCLB

In some ways, NCLB has had a positive impact in Flint, district and school officials said. For example, the law has focused the district’s efforts on boosting academic achievement and on better use of resources to meet state standards. These resources include textbooks and other materials, tutoring and intervention services, and professional development. In addition, some subgroups, such as ELL students, have gotten more attention from staff. The requirements of NCLB, however, have not been accompanied with the necessary funding, staff said. The district struggles to keep services at current levels, and schools cannot do all the things that teachers think would help raise achievement.

NCLB and Student Achievement

The academic achievement of Flint students has improved in past years, particularly on Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests, as shown in the table below. In all cases, percentages of students passing state tests increased, except in high school math, where passing rates declined slightly overall. Reasons for this decline were unclear to district officials.

| Table 1: Percentages of Students Passing Michigan Educational Assessment Progress (MEAP) Tests in 2003 and 2005 |
|---|---|---|
| | 2003 Met or Exceeded Expectations | 2005 Met or Exceeded Expectations |
| **Elementary** | | |
| Reading | 50.1% | 66.5% |
| Math | 39.0% | 48.4% |
| **Middle** | | |
| Reading | 26.8% | 37.3% |
| Math | 18.4% | 26.9% |
| **High School** | | |
| Reading | 47.5% | 68.8% |
| Math | 28.0% | 25.7% |

Source: Michigan Department of Education.
Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS
Based on 2004-05 testing, Flint district officials are optimistic about their schools. “According to state standards, we have improved. All elementary schools made AYP,” reported David Solis, director of state, federal, and local programs. “We’re moving in the right direction.” This is a first for Flint, where elementary schools have typically struggled to meet rising AYP targets. Middle school students also met all targets, and the district as a whole made AYP this year, although high school students in the district did not meet all targets.

Despite this improvement at the elementary school level, NCLB sanctions still apply to many Flint elementary schools, because schools must meet AYP goals for two consecutive years before they are removed from the list of schools needing improvement. In Flint for 2005-06, the state identified 14 schools as in need of improvement, just one less than last year’s count. Nine of these 14 identified schools, however, are elementary schools that made AYP based on 2004-05 testing.

Next year, district officials anticipate that many of these schools will come off the state list entirely.

The reasons schools did not make AYP vary somewhat, Solis said, but typically English language learners and special education students have more difficulty meeting targets than other subgroups. For the general population, math targets are also more likely to be missed than English/language arts.

DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
Recent improvements in identified schools can be attributed in part to alignment of resources, Solis said, particularly the alignment of school improvement plans and the district improvement plan. This alignment ensured that all teaching materials, tutoring interventions, and professional development supported one another and were aimed at helping students meet state standards.

“We don’t have these random acts of improvement anymore,” Solis explained. Instead, he said, everyone is on the same page, can pool resources, and learn from each other’s experiences. Eugene Rutledge, chief of academics, has been the driving force in aligning resources, professional development, teaching, and learning, Solis noted.

Part of the coordination comes from an increased emphasis on literacy and academic content areas in Flint. While the district has focused on literacy since the 1990s, two years ago the central office designated an academic team to help schools in need of improvement. The team consists of the district’s chief academic officer and content area specialists in literacy, math, science, and social studies.

In addition, in 2002-03 the district hired four instructional specialists to help schools with literacy. Over the years, the number of specialists has increased due to their success. For 2005-06, every district school has an assigned literacy support teacher funded by the federal Title II program that provides funds to school districts for teacher recruitment and professional development. These teachers are trained by the district to go into classrooms and demonstrate good teaching techniques, Solis said. In addition, they provide weekly professional development for staff. While this professional development focuses on content standards, support teachers also modify professional development based on student assessment data and individual needs.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES
As a district, Flint has two preferred strategies for schools in restructuring. The first is using a state-trained coach to help the school restructure. The second is turning decision making, such as curricular choices and selection of teaching materials, over to the school improvement committee. Schools may also add other strategies from the state’s list of strategies for schools in restructuring.

Based on the theories of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Edgar Schein, the Michigan coaching model was created by Michigan’s own educators. The model does not bring in “experts” to “fix” schools, but instead brings in trained educators whose facilitation can help
schools fix themselves, state officials said. As a result, each school’s restructuring activities will be tailored to that school’s community. Coaches were trained in 2003-04 by the Alliance of Building Capacity in Schools (ABCS), a collaborative of 13 different organizations, including higher education institutions, teachers’ unions, parent groups, public schools, and professional associations. Schools can use state restructuring funds to hire coaches from this pool.

Coaching was an appealing option for Flint because it focused on making real changes at the school, said Solis. He explained that the district had experience with reconstitution, another state program that replaced staff at schools that were having difficulties. But, he added, “There’s no guarantee when you bring in new people. You can replace people, but if they do the same thing, you’re going to get the same results.” With coaching, the district is trying to change the culture in the building. After the success of Flint elementary schools in 2004-05, Solis said, “We’re now a firm believer in coaching. You can’t just replace the staff.” Instead, training existing staff has proved more effective in Flint.

At Brownell Elementary School, Principal Lucy Smith attributes the increase in student achievement to coaching. The school started the year with two state coaches, but the state informed her that she could contract with only one coach using the school’s restructuring grant. Therefore, Smith used other Title I funds to employ a turnaround specialist. Basically, the two individuals, Marcia Sauvie and Elsie Babcock, both functioned as coaches at the school, although they were funded from different sources. Sauvie spent more time at the school than Babcock.

Sauvie focused on English/language arts and set up the “leveled library,” which brought more than 50,000 books to the school and rated their difficulty so that teachers could easily assign books that are appropriate to students’ reading levels. Sauvie then helped the teachers learn to use the library and group students for reading instruction. These small reading groups used a “rotation” of staff that Sauvie organized, rather than just classroom teachers. Groups of six to eight 3rd and 4th graders rotated through 3rd and 4th grade teachers, the literacy specialist, and Sauvie. Each teacher had every child at least twice a week, Sauvie explained, and this allowed teachers to collaborate on best strategies to serve those students’ needs. “I attribute our success to the wonderful cooperation of the teachers,” she said.

Babcock focused on math and the district’s newly adopted math text. Both coaches provided professional development and assisted the principal and staff as needed. Despite their many responsibilities, the coaches at Brownell said they were not “the bosses” at the school. Instead, they helped the school community identify problems and work together to solve them.

The beauty of coaching is the extra staff, Smith said. “We had two people who were able to focus entirely on the curriculum piece.” When principals work alone, Smith explained, they are overcommitted and often “hit and miss” in providing professional development to staff.

Brownell, which is still in restructuring for 2005-06, will continue to have two coaches, although Smith said she would like to be able to afford more hours from them. Derryl Evans, the new coach for English/language arts, said the new library is up and running now, and she is impressed with the school’s materials. Last year, according to other staff members, materials were lacking in the school. Evans said she is focusing on professional development and modeling best practices for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Turning the school over to the school improvement committee for restructuring is also required throughout Flint, district administrators said. The idea is to create a team of people to make decisions rather than just the principal. For example, Solis explained, “All requisitions must be signed by the principal, the improvement coach, and the school improvement team.”

Using a school improvement team was not as much of a change for Brownell as the coaching was, Smith said. “School improvement committees were always designed to improve curriculum and instruction,” she explained. The school has had a committee in place for several years. Unlike coaches, who can focus full-time on school improvement, most members of the school improvement committee have other duties during the day.
For 2004-05, the committee’s monthly meetings consisted of about nine people, although all school staff and parents were invited to join. The committee included the principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, and the coaches. At the beginning of the year, a parent also participated, but had to stop attending meetings due to illness. Smith said she attempted to get other parents to attend, but none did so consistently.

“The committee’s focus was to implement the district’s curriculum and tweak it to our school’s needs,” Smith said. When there were choices of materials or instructional methods, for example, the committee reviewed the choices and made the decision, she added.

Another area the school improvement committee addressed last year was school climate. For example, the committee noted that many students at Brownell were late to school or often absent, so the committee created a monthly “never-tardy party” for students who arrived at school on time every day of the previous month. In lieu of the student’s half-hour gym period that day, never-tardy students attended a special gym period that included treats and favorite activities like skateboarding.

Smith said the parties were very popular with students; attendance increased and tardiness decreased. Unfortunately, the parent on the committee who coordinated these parties became ill and was unable to set up the parties, so the practice ended. While Smith said the committee would like to bring back the tardy parties to address returning attendance problems, there may not be enough resources to coordinate the parties without a parent.

**Testing Issues**

In Flint, district and school staffs are concerned about this year’s state tests. The state moved testing from January/February to October, which may pose a problem in Flint, where students are highly mobile and may have attended their current school for less than two months before testing.

At schools that made large strides in achievement last year, this switch may be particularly difficult. “It seems to me that every time you think you’re making ends meet, they change the ends,” Brownell Principal Lucy Smith said. Brownell was in restructuring in 2004-05, made AYP, and needs another year of high student achievement to come off the state’s list of schools in improvement. Smith explained that because her students are highly mobile, many enrolled this fall did not attend the school last year and did not benefit from the school’s restructuring efforts. Derryl Evans, Brownell’s coach, said she and teachers are working hard to get students up to speed, but noted that it’s an uphill battle with some. The stress is taking a toll on teachers, Smith said.

**Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction**

Over the past two years, Flint has changed curricular materials in reading and math in order to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state standards. District officials said the new adoptions are aimed at supporting NCLB and raising student achievement. The new math curriculum was adopted districtwide in 2004-05 and included elementary and pre-algebra texts. For 2005-06 in math, the district has also adopted common assessments for 2nd through 12th grades. Professional development is underway to help teachers use these new materials and assessments.

Elementary reading materials and texts are being piloted this year. Based on district protocols, five companies were invited to present their materials and curriculum to staff and were evaluated using a rubric, explained Reba Walling, the district’s Title I English/language arts instructional specialist. A teacher committee chose two companies to pilot their materials and curriculum in schools from November through March, after which the staff will make recommendations to the school board about which curriculum and materials the district will adopt.
English Language Learners

Flint has four teachers who are certified in teaching English as a second language and about 35 bilingual paraprofessionals. These teachers and paraprofessionals travel from school to school to work with the highest-need ELL students. In addition, over the past two years, teachers of ELL students have worked to align their services with state standards and the academic objectives the classroom teacher has for students. This work has paid off in rising test scores for ELL students, but their test scores are still below grade level and the achievement gap has not been eliminated, said Ana Maria Hufon, Flint’s coordinator for ESL/bilingual and migrant education programs.

NCLB has had very positive effects in Flint because it has drawn attention to ELL students and their classroom needs, Hufon said. “Before NCLB, many schools and many classroom teachers did not believe that the ELL students in their classrooms were their responsibility,” she explained. Now when I talk to principals and teachers, they begin to understand that ‘all students’ means ALL.”

Despite these positive effects of NCLB, Hufon also saw negative effects. “Urban districts do not have the necessary funds,” she said. Title III, she explained, adds funding but not enough to provide ELL students with an appropriate education and help them meet AYP targets. On Hufon’s wish list were enough funds to hire more ELL teachers and paraprofessionals, to pay for staff professional development, to buy materials, and to reimburse itinerant teaching staff for mileage.

NCLB School Choice

In the 2004-05 school year, 15 Flint schools offered choice under NCLB. At these 15 schools, 6,904 students were eligible for transfers. The district allowed transfers to any district school that had the appropriate grade level and was not on the state’s list of schools in need of improvement. While several district elementary schools could accept students, only one traditional 6th through 8th middle school in the district escaped the state list. This magnet middle school had academic requirements for admission. The situation could have caused problems, if students had not met the entrance requirements but wanted to transfer under NCLB, noted John Conaway, Flint’s Title I compliance specialist, but no parents have complained. The district has not had to decide what to do in the case of a conflict between NCLB transfer requests and district policy. In 2005-06, all traditional middle schools in the district are identified as in need of improvement and must offer choice. The only transfer options within the district will be elementary schools serving upper grades or the district’s three 6th through 12th grade high schools. District officials do not anticipate that many students will request these transfers, because choice has historically not been popular in Flint.

Of students eligible in 2004-05, a total of 71 applied for and received transfers, and 31 actually transferred. In all, this represented fewer than 0.5% of those eligible. “Most parents want their children within walking distance of their school,” Solis said, even though the district provides free transportation to schools of choice under NCLB.

Supplemental Educational Services

In 2004-05 in Flint, 14 schools offered supplemental educational services. Based on free-lunch counts in those schools, 3,783 students were eligible for services. Of these, 1,551 or 41% participated in tutoring for at least some part of the year. Initially, the district set a deadline for enrollment, but as Solis explained, not enough students signed up and some dropped out, so the district allowed students to enroll throughout the school year.

Tracking the enrollment of these students became a major problem. “We were getting invoices from private providers for student participation that we could not document,” explained Karen Lee, the district’s assistant director for state and local programs. Often, Lee said, princi-
pals’ lists of student participation contained far fewer hours and fewer students than the provider’s invoices, leaving the district to wonder whether or not the invoices were fraudulent.

To address this problem, in December of 2004, Flint contracted with CAYEN, a private company, to track attendance and invoicing. “It was a lifesaver,” said Lee. The company required students to sign in for every tutoring session on-site, tracked the signatures, matched them to provider invoices, and flagged any discrepancies. For 2005-06, all providers serving Flint must sign a contract agreeing to use the system. This year, Lee said, “Without a student signature, we don’t pay.”

In addition to tracking attendance and using this record as the basis for invoicing, 2005-06 contracts require providers to develop an individual achievement plan for each student and to provide pre and post tests for each student, all of which is shared with the district. Despite these additional requirements, Lee noted, no providers have dropped out. The district and CAYEN gave training to providers designed to help them use the new attendance and invoicing system and provide pre and post tests. Although the district pays CAYEN about $6,300 per year to maintain the system, it does seem to save the district money overall. For a period of approximately six months in 2004-05, invoices totaled about $2 million less than they had the previous six months, Lee said.

The fluctuations and irregularities in reported enrollment in 2004-05 have made it difficult for the district to budget for 2005-06, Solis said. “We’re having to average monthly invoices to figure out how much to set aside.” Eligible students at 12 schools will be offered services this year.

While CAYEN has solved many of the problems Flint experienced with supplemental educational services in 2004-05, other problems remain. A major concern, said Lee, is whether providers can offer services aligned with state standards. “I’m not always sure that is happening,” she noted. With one online provider joining the mix this year, Lee said her concerns about the quality of instruction have grown. The district did some on-site monitoring of providers but did not get to all of them, she said. “This year, we’ve made monitoring one of the goals of this office.”

Monitoring might not have become such an issue if the district schools had provided supplemental educational services (SES) themselves, using their own highly qualified teachers, Solis said. Conflict of interest stopped Solis from recommending that Flint become a provider. “If we became a provider, how could we be fair to the other providers?” he asked. Ultimately, he believed that opting for the higher administrative costs of monitoring outside providers was better for Flint than dealing with the potential conflict of interest of becoming a provider. The district will continue to examine SES closely throughout 2005-06. “The jury’s still out on the effectiveness of SES,” Solis concluded.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

Of the 1,207 teachers in the district, 91% are “highly qualified” based on the state’s definition. Because of declining enrollment in Flint, the district has laid off teachers over the past several years. Attrition has contributed to most district teachers being highly qualified. In addition, veteran teachers may use Michigan’s portfolio assessment plan to prove that they are highly qualified. This plan is more flexible than those in other states, according to David Comsa, chief of human resources and labor relations. The portfolios, he explained, allow teachers to become highly qualified based on years of teaching, college-level content coursework, professional development, and service in the profession.

Still, Comsa anticipated that meeting NCLB’s deadline for highly qualified teachers will be challenging for Flint. “Middle school will be the real test. I’m guessing we’ll have a lot of retirements.” Before NCLB, middle school teachers in Michigan only needed elementary school certification to be qualified to teach. Now, middle school teachers must also prove their expertise in each subject they teach.
Professional Development

Most of the professional development in the district is ongoing and occurs on-site. In all schools, literacy support teachers provide professional development, model lessons, observe teachers in classrooms, and offer suggestions for changing practice. In addition, content area specialists at the district level provide similar though less frequent professional development, modeling, and observation. In schools in restructuring, coaches add to the professional development opportunities but specifically focus on implementing the school’s restructuring plan. Teachers have the opportunity to participate in more traditional professional development as well. For example, all staff attends four workshops a year to develop their skills in teaching ELL students.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Flint has 242 Title I paraprofessionals, and 70% are highly qualified according to state definitions. In early 2004, Flint hired the professional training firm Action Management to conduct training and state testing for all paraprofessionals. This training and testing continued through December 2005. The NCLB deadline for having all Title I paraprofessionals highly qualified is June 30, 2006. After that date, instructional paraprofessionals who have not met the requirement will lose their seniority, explained Elizabeth Williams, Flint’s specialist in classified personnel. Because of yearly layoffs due to declining enrollment, district officials predict that Title I paraprofessionals who are not highly qualified are likely to be let go.

Funding and Costs

Title I funds rose between 1% and 2% for 2005-06 in accordance with an increase of poverty rates in the district. This increase will not offset inflation combined with the increased cost of healthcare for Title I staff, Solis said, explaining that he believes this is a nationwide problem. In response, Flint continues to look for discretionary programs to cut.

For 2005-06, the district will also shift Title I funding slightly to give more attention to middle schools, which did less well on recent testing. During 2004-05, Solis explained, “We drove a lot of the funds to elementary schools. Middle schools had some funds but not sufficient funds. This year, all elementary schools will get Title I funding, but at a lower per pupil amount.”

Solis said he believes this distribution will still keep all schools’ Title I funding at a level that will make an impact on students. Still, he called making decisions about the distribution of Title I funds “a really difficult task.” He anticipated that if high school testing increases, as is currently being discussed at the national level, this task may become impossible, because there simply won’t be enough money to go around.

Reading First

As a district, Flint decided not to apply for a Reading First grant. “We took a hard look at it,” Solis said. Staff was concerned about the requirements involved in the grant, which Solis said might cost the district more than the grant was worth. “Also, Reading First is very prescriptive about instruction,” Solis noted, explaining that the district was not certain this strict program would work in Flint, where teachers typically favor a more flexible reading program that can address the variety of students’ needs.
## Data File—Flint Community Schools

**Location:** Michigan  
**Type:** Urban

### Number of Schools

- **Total:** 37  
  - Elementary: 26  
  - Middle/junior high: 4  
  - High schools: 4  
  - Other: 3 (middle/high school combined)

### Number of Title I Schools: 30

### Student Enrollment and Demographics

- **Total number of students:** 20,028  
  - African American: 78%  
  - White: 19%  
  - Latino: 3%  
  - Low-income students: 70%  
  - Students with disabilities: 20%  
  - English language learners: 1%

### Teachers

- **Total number of teachers:** 1,207  
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 91%

### Paraprofessionals

- **Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals:** 242  
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 70%

### 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: 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action</th>
<th>Based on 2003-04 testing</th>
<th>Based on 2004-05 testing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Schools in year 1 of improvement (Did not make AYP for two consecutive years):</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years):</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four consecutive years):</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2§</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for five or more consecutive years):</td>
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<td>7**</td>
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</tbody>
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### Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

- **Based on 2003-04 testing:**  
  - Schools offering choice only: 3  
  - Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES instead of choice: 0  
  - Schools offering SES and choice: 12

- **Based on 2004-05 testing:**  
  - Schools offering choice only: 2  
  - Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES instead of choice: 0  
  - Schools offering SES and choice: 11

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† Both schools in year 1 made AYP and are in delay.  
‡ Both schools in year 2 made AYP and are in delay.  
§ One school in corrective action made AYP and is in delay.  
** Six schools in restructuring made AYP and are in delay.