



MAKING MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS

School Restructuring in Maryland



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Introduction

This report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP) describes findings from case studies of 10 Maryland schools undergoing “restructuring” as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Schools must undergo restructuring—the final phase of NCLB sanctions—if they fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward their state’s student achievement targets for five or more years. Restructuring entails major changes in school governance, from replacing most of the staff to contracting with a private company to run the school, and is intended to spur dramatic gains in achievement.

The Maryland case studies sought to learn more about how schools are dealing with restructuring, what kinds of assistance they are receiving from their school district and the state, and what impact restructuring is having. To collect data for the study, a CEP consultant reviewed restructuring documents and conducted interviews with administrators and teachers in 10 schools in four Maryland districts, including the Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George’s County districts.

This report focuses on state and district restructuring activities in Maryland during school year 2006-07. The report is part of CEP’s broader national study of year 5 of NCLB implementation and is a follow-up to our 2006 report, *Building on State Reform: Maryland School Restructuring*. In addition, CEP has issued several reports on school restructuring in Michigan and California. All of our reports on restructuring and other aspects of NCLB are available at www.cep-dc.org.

Key Findings

After studying the restructuring process in Maryland, the Center on Education Policy has arrived at the following key findings:

- *Since 2004, 12 restructuring implementation schools—or 16% of the schools in Maryland that reached the phase of implementing restructuring plans under NCLB—have raised student achievement enough to exit improvement.* An additional 16 schools that were in the planning phase of NCLB restructuring have left improvement since 2004; these schools made AYP before they were required to implement their restructuring plans. Many participants interviewed for this study commented that restructuring plans do not appear to be having a great impact on their schools’ ability to meet AYP targets.
- *Based on early experiences of restructuring schools, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has limited the governance options for these schools and has instituted new support programs for them.* For schools that entered the planning phase of restructuring in 2006-07, MSDE eliminated six previously available alternatives for governing the school, such as using an independent “turnaround” specialist and temporarily suspending the office of the school principal. MSDE has also introduced new programs to support restructuring schools, including special technical assistance to schools that have been in restructuring for three or more years.
- *The number of Maryland schools in restructuring implementation has increased by 39% since 2004 (from 46 to 64).* During school year 2006-07 (the year in which this research was conducted), 69 Maryland schools were implementing school restructuring plans. All of these schools were urban, and most (84%) were in the Baltimore City Public School System.
- *A majority of Maryland schools in restructuring continue to use turnaround specialists.* In 2006-07, 65% of the schools implementing restructuring plans were using a full-time or part-time turnaround specialist as their main alternative governance mechanism. Although the state no longer allows schools in restructuring to

choose a turnaround specialist as their alternative governance mechanism, schools that had already made this choice may continue implementing their existing plans.

- ***Replacing all or most of the school staff has become a more common restructuring option in Maryland, and some downsides of this option have emerged.*** With MSDE narrowing restructuring options for schools, many newly restructuring schools are choosing to replace much of the school staff as their alternative governance mechanism. All of the schools we studied that have begun to replace school staff have experienced a downside of lower staff morale and/or a shift in teachers' focus to job security issues.
- ***The logistics of implementing restructuring plans are often complicated, and as a result, the launch of some key aspects of restructuring plans was postponed in 2006-07.*** Schools and districts participating in this study were often not able to begin implementing improvement strategies or hiring staff until well after the beginning of the school year. As a result, many schools were not receiving a full complement of supports before the 2007 administration of the Maryland School Assessment, the test used to determine AYP. Recognizing these difficulties, MSDE has changed its school improvement grant rules to allow districts to begin hiring staff or purchasing services before the beginning of the school year if needed.

Study Description and Report Organization

The study that formed the basis of this report was conducted by Brenda Neuman-Sheldon, a CEP consultant who had researched and written our 2006 Maryland report. We have focused our restructuring research on Maryland, Michigan, and California because these states were among the first to implement test-based accountability systems and to have schools enter the restructuring phase of NCLB. As more schools in other states undergo restructuring, we hope they can learn from the experiences of these states in the vanguard.

To gather information about restructuring in Maryland, Neuman-Sheldon interviewed Maryland state department of education officials and conducted

case studies of four Maryland districts with schools in restructuring. Much of the case study data was collected through interviews with district administrators, principals, teachers, and other school staff. Neuman-Sheldon also reviewed state, regional, district, and school data and documents, such as state restructuring and school improvement policies, state records tracking restructuring implementation, state report cards, and state test score data. The interviews, observations, document reviews, and data analysis were conducted from February through June 2007.

The case studies focused on the following four districts and 10 schools:

- ***Anne Arundel County Public Schools*** (AACPS), which serves the city of Annapolis and extensive suburban and rural areas, enrolls about 73,000 students. Although Anne Arundel County did not have any schools in restructuring during school year 2006-07, district officials voluntarily chose to begin a restructuring effort at Annapolis Senior High School, which was in the corrective action phase of NCLB at the time. Annapolis Senior High participated in our case study.
- ***Baltimore City Public School System*** (BCPSS), the only totally urban district in Maryland, enrolls close to 82,000 students within Baltimore's city limits. Of the Maryland school districts, Baltimore City has the most schools in restructuring. Guilford Elementary/Middle School, Mary E. Rodman Elementary, Morell Park Elementary/Middle School, and Thurgood Marshall High School were involved in our case study.
- ***Baltimore County Public Schools*** (BCPS), the third largest school district in Maryland, serves approximately 106,000 students in the suburbs to the north, east, and west of Baltimore City. Woodlawn Middle School was the focus of our study.
- ***Prince George's County Public Schools*** (PGCPS), adjoining the eastern side of Washington D.C., is the second largest district in Maryland with close to 131,000 students. Arrowhead Elementary School, Bladensburg Elementary School, Charles Carroll Middle School, and G. Gardner Shugart Middle School participated in our study.

The Prince George's County and Anne Arundel County districts had participated in our 2006 study of restructuring in Maryland. In 2005-06, Prince George's was one of three Maryland districts with schools in either the planning or implementation stages of NCLB restructuring; the other two were Baltimore City and Baltimore County. Because of controversy surrounding restructuring in Baltimore that year, we decided to begin our Maryland study in other districts. In 2004-05, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools had one school in restructuring planning. After making AYP in 2004-05, the school exited improvement and did not have to implement the restructuring plan.

In 2006-07, the school year that is the primary focus of this report, the Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George's County districts continued to have schools in the planning or implementation stages of restructuring. An additional Maryland district that was not part of this study, the Frederick Public Schools, had one school enter restructuring planning. As noted above, Anne Arundel County had no schools officially identified for restructuring, but Annapolis Senior High had embarked on a voluntary restructuring plan, so we kept this district in our study.

This report presents data on schools in improvement and restructuring in Maryland and describes the state's past and present options for restructuring schools. It also discusses state funding, guidelines, and support for restructuring schools. A subsequent section summarizes themes from our case studies that are common to the districts and schools analyzed. Later sections discuss specific findings and observations for each of the districts studied. A conclusion offers possible reasons why restructuring efforts have not had a major impact on student achievement to date and considers state efforts to address this situation.

Maryland Restructuring Strategies and Supports

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools and districts are expected to make adequate yearly progress in raising achievement, as determined by the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level on state tests and other indicators. Those that do not make AYP

for two consecutive years are identified for improvement and must undertake a series of increasingly serious steps. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must plan for restructuring (year 4 of the improvement process). After six consecutive years of not making AYP (year 5 of improvement), schools must implement their restructuring plans. Schools exit restructuring if they make AYP for two consecutive years. Neither the NCLB statute nor the U.S. Department of Education (ED) regulations offer guidance for what happens to schools beyond year 5. Maryland's emerging approach for supporting schools that remain in restructuring for multiple years is discussed later in this report.

Maryland, a state that enrolls about 850,000 students in grades K-12, has a well-established testing and accountability system. Consequently, some Maryland schools entered restructuring planning as early as 2003-04.

NUMBER OF MARYLAND SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

In 2006-07, about 16% of Maryland's 1,444 schools were in some stage of school improvement. Maryland applies the NCLB sanctions to all schools, not just the 370 schools that receive federal Title I funds for low-achieving children in low-income areas. Therefore, many non-Title I schools are in improvement in Maryland.

Table 1 shows the number of schools in each stage of NCLB improvement for the entire state and the four case study districts.

As table 1 indicates, about 5% of all Maryland schools, or 73 schools, were in the planning or implementation stages of restructuring in school year 2006-07, based on their 2005-06 scores on the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and other indicators. Of these 73 schools, 61 were elementary and middle schools and 12 were high schools; 46 of the 73 were Title I schools. All but one of the restructuring schools were located within or on the fringes of a large urban area. The Baltimore City district accounted for 79% (58 schools) of all restructuring schools and 74% (43 schools) of Maryland's Title I schools in restructuring.

Table 2 breaks out the number of Title I and non-Title I schools in restructuring planning or implementation for the five Maryland districts with schools in restructuring in 2006-07. As the table makes clear, all schools in the implementation phase of restructuring were in two districts, Baltimore City and Prince George’s County. Within this group, all of the restructuring high schools were in Baltimore City.

Since 2004, the number of Maryland schools implementing restructuring plans has increased by 39%, from 46 to 64. As displayed in **table 3**, five schools, or 8% of the schools in restructuring implementation in school year 2005-06, exited NCLB improvement after that year based on their AYP status, while 11 schools entered restructuring implementation. At the end of 2006-07, five more restructuring schools exited improvement, while two schools entered restructuring implementation.

Table 1. Number of Maryland Schools in Various Stages of Improvement, 2006-07

Phase of NCLB Sanctions	State of Maryland	Anne Arundel County	Baltimore City*	Baltimore County	Prince George’s County
Year 1 of improvement	57	4	10	3	17
Year 2 of improvement	47	4	7	4	22
Corrective action (year 3)	56	1	15	5	30
Restructuring planning (year 4)	4	0	0	1	2
Restructuring implementation (year 5)	69	0	58	0	11
Total number of schools undergoing NCLB sanctions	233	9	90	13	82

* Includes Edison Schools located in Baltimore City.

Table reads: In 2006-07, 57 schools in the state of Maryland were in year 1 of NCLB improvement, 47 schools in year 2, 56 schools in corrective action, 4 in the planning phase of restructuring, and 69 in the implementation phase of restructuring, for a total of 233 schools undergoing NCLB sanctions.

Source: Maryland School Report Card, <http://mdreportcard.org/>.

Table 2. Number of Maryland Schools in Restructuring, 2006-07

School District	Restructuring Planning		Restructuring Implementation		Total
	Title I	Non-Title I	Title I	Non-Title I	
Baltimore City*	0	0	40	18	58
Baltimore County	1	0	0	0	1
Prince George’s	0	2	3	8	13
Frederick	1	0	0	0	1
Total	2	2	43	26	73

* Includes Edison Schools located in Baltimore City.

Table reads: In the Baltimore City school district, 58 schools were in the implementation phase of restructuring in 2006-07, including 40 Title I schools and 18 non-Title I schools. No Baltimore City school was in the planning phase of restructuring that year.

Source: Maryland Report Card, <http://mdreportcard.org/>.

Table 3. Schools That Exited Restructuring Implementation

Year	Number of Schools in Restructuring Implementation	Schools That Entered Restructuring Implementation	Schools That Exited Restructuring Implementation
2004-05	46	0	2 (4%)*
2005-06	63	22 (35%)	5 (8%)
2006-07	69	11 (16%)	5 (7%)**
2007-08	64	2 (3%)	NA

* Three additional schools in restructuring implementation closed at the end of the 2004-05 school year.

**Two additional schools in restructuring implementation closed at the end of the 2006-07 school year.

Table reads: In 2005-06, 63 Maryland schools were in the implementation phase of restructuring. This total included 22 schools that had entered restructuring implementation in 2005-06. Five schools made sufficient gains in student achievement to exit restructuring at the end of the 2005-06 school year.

Source: MSDE documentation provided by Sandra Toomey, July 2007; Maryland Report Card, <http://mdreportcard.org/>.

In short, over the past four years more schools have entered restructuring implementation than have exited. The implications of these statistics are discussed later in this section.

STATE OPTIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING

When schools and districts are identified for restructuring, they must choose from a menu of alternative governance options in federal law designed to completely revamp schools:

- Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school
- Reopening the school as a charter school
- Replacing all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP
- Turning operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees
- Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school's governance that produces fundamental reform

Maryland's state policies mirror the federal options for alternative governance with one exception—Maryland does not allow districts or schools to turn over school governance to the state. And unlike California and some

other states that allow districts to simply affirm that they have chosen their own alternative governance option, Maryland has established a list of more specific alternative governance mechanisms within the federal options, from which districts and schools were required to choose. This list has changed over time as the state has gained more experience with restructuring.

In previous years, Maryland had permitted districts and schools to use any of the following five alternative governance mechanisms that fell under the federal category of “undertaking any other major restructuring of the school's governance”:

- Temporarily suspend the office of school principal (and have the district central office take over the principal's duties)
- Appoint or employ an independent turnaround specialist for the school with limited powers over the school's curriculum, staff development, and decisionmaking processes
- Close the school and reopen it as a complete school of choice
- Use an external reform model
- Replicate the governance model of a charter school using a governing board granted a degree of autonomy from the local district

Additionally, the state board previously approved another restructuring option for Baltimore City, the Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools model, which breaks large urban high schools into smaller learning communities.

For the 2006-07 school year, Maryland further limited the alternative governance strategies available to schools in restructuring. Schools that entered restructuring planning in 2006-07 could no longer use any of the five state-specific mechanisms listed above, nor could they use the special option for Baltimore City. According to Ann Chafin, assistant superintendent for student, family and school support at MSDE, the state based this decision partly on a lack of evidence about effectiveness:

We didn't see evidence that the turnaround specialist option worked. Both Baltimore City and Prince George's County were not producing data that supported this option as an effective strategy for turning around failing schools. The two school systems provided enough evidence to warrant removing this option. The other options were removed because they simply were not being selected.

Schools that had previously selected one of the former alternative governance mechanisms were not required to change their restructuring plans. For example, schools that had elected to use a turnaround specialist as an element of their restructuring plan before the 2006-07 school year were permitted to continue their existing plans and keep using that alternative governance mechanism.

For schools that entered restructuring planning in 2006-07, Maryland offered four alternative governance options:

- Replace all or most of the school staff
- Contract with a private management company
- Reopen the school as a public charter school
- Appoint or employ a distinguished principal from another school district or from New Leaders for New Schools, a national nonprofit organization that selects and trains current and former educators to become urban public school principals and that has programs in Baltimore and other cities.

The distinguished principal option was an entirely new approach to restructuring introduced by the state in 2005-06. Furthermore, although schools and districts did not officially have the option last year to develop their own alternative governance plan, MSDE was considering allowing some schools in Baltimore City to enter into a partnership with nearby Towson University as their alternative governance mechanism.

In 2006-07, there was little diversity in the alternative governance mechanisms used by schools in restructuring implementation. **Table 4** compares the number of schools using the various restructuring options available in Maryland in 2005-06 and 2006-07. Because schools that were already in restructuring implementation were not subject to the state's new constraints, they could have chosen from the nine options shown in the table. (State takeover of schools is omitted because Maryland never allowed it.) As the table shows, two of the available options—reopening as a school of choice and implementing an external reform model—were not implemented by any school. Sixty-five percent of restructuring implementation schools in 2006-07 were using a turnaround specialist, and 14% (10 of the restructuring high schools) were using the Blueprint for High School Reform. The remaining schools replaced school staff, opened as charter schools, replicated charter school governance models, suspended the office of principal, employed a distinguished principal, or contracted with a private management company.

Turnaround specialists are not unique to Maryland. In Michigan, another state in which CEP explored NCLB school restructuring, turnaround specialists are becoming a popular option for alternative governance. In 2006-07, 72% of MI restructuring schools used this option.

STATE FUNDING FOR RESTRUCTURING

Maryland does not set aside any state funding specifically for restructuring schools. Rather, State School Improvement Grants (SSIG), funded through the Maryland General Assembly, are available to both Title I and non-Title I schools in all stages of improvement. SSIG applications are considered separately from school restructuring plans. Furthermore, SSIG funds are awarded to districts as a whole, rather than to individual schools. In 2006-07, districts received \$10,000 for each school in improvement, plus \$33.63 per pupil.

Table 4. Number of Maryland Schools Using Various Restructuring Options

Federal Restructuring Options	Maryland Restructuring Options	Number of Schools Using Option, 2005-06	Number of Schools Using Option, 2006-07
Enter into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school	Enter into a contract with an entity such as a private management company to operate the school	1	1
Reopen the school as a charter school	Reopen the school as a public charter school	1	1
Replace all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP	Replace all or most of the school staff	5	8
Undertake any other major restructuring of the school's governance that produces fundamental reform	Have the district central office take over the principalship of the school	0	2
	Appoint a school "turnaround specialist"	46	45*
	Close the school and reopen as a complete school of choice	0	0
	Use an external reform model	0	0
	Replicate the governance of a charter school	0	1
	Appoint a distinguished principal**	NA	2
	Use the Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools models	10	10

Table reads: In school year 2005-06, five Maryland schools had chosen to replace all or most of the school staff as their alternative governance option for restructuring. In 2006-07, eight schools were using this option.

*Three schools using this option exited improvement, and one school new to restructuring implementation had selected this option.

**This was a new option in 2006-07.

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from the Maryland State Department of Education Alternative Governance Rubric, December 2006, and on documentation provided by Sandra Toomey, July 2007.

This funding structure represents a change from the previous year, when schools received school improvement grants directly and amounts were calculated based on the school’s stage of improvement as well as its enrollment. Ann Chafin explained that these changes in funding structure were adopted because “it is possible to have a Title I school in improvement that’s got . . . buckets of money coming in the door from multiple state, local, federal, and/or private funding sources, and [the principal is] not really sure how to spend it.” Superintendents could help avoid this situation, she noted, by writing plans that would allow them to spend the school improvement monies as they saw fit. Chafin further explained that MSDE felt that superintendents were in the best position to identify schools’ fiscal needs, knowing the funding structures under which each school operates.

According Chafin, Maryland distributed \$9,279,592 in SSIG funds to the 16 school districts with schools identified for improvement. Additionally, \$6,531,226 in federal Title I school improvement funding was awarded to eight school districts with schools in restructuring or other stages of improvement.

Table 5 displays the SSIG funds and Title I school improvement funds distributed to the four case study districts.

Since Maryland’s disbursement of SSIG funds was based on both a per pupil allocation and the number of schools in improvement, the “per school” allocation could vary greatly, ranging from \$29,555 in Baltimore City to \$63,697 in Baltimore County depending on the average size of the district’s schools.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES AND SUPPORTS FROM MSDE

Beginning in 2006, the Maryland State Department of Education developed several new supports and processes for schools in improvement, including those in restructuring.

Teacher Capacity Needs Assessment

New in 2006-07, MSDE asked schools in restructuring planning to complete a Teacher Capacity Needs Assessment (TCNA). The TCNA leads a school through a self-diagnosis and analysis of root causes that contribute to teachers’ capacity (or lack thereof) to teach the Voluntary State Curriculum effectively and assess student learning. The TCNA is intended to help the schools develop possible solutions and action steps to support school improvement, including selecting an alternative governance mechanism.

The TCNA asks schools to examine how well they are implementing six aspects of education:

- Teaching state standards and expectations
- Assessing state standards and expectations
- Using school assessment data for school improvement
- Providing professional development to build teacher capacity
- Intervening with students who are not succeeding
- Utilizing resources and materials

Table 5. 2006-07 State and Federal School Improvement Funds Distributed to Case Study Districts

School District	State School Improvement Grants	Title I School Improvement Funds
Anne Arundel County	\$553,532	0*
Baltimore City	\$2,659,958	\$3,451,397
Baltimore County	\$828,067	\$300,000
Prince George’s County	\$3,420,672	\$2,179,830

Table reads: In 2006-07, the Baltimore City school district received \$2,659,958 in state school improvement grant funding and \$3,451,397 in federal Title I school improvement funds.

* Anne Arundel County did not have any Title I schools in improvement and was therefore ineligible for Title I school improvement money.

Source: Ann Chafin, July 27, 2007.

The TCNA calls on schools to complete three main steps: (1) identify and gather relevant student and staff data, (2) use these data to rate their implementation of specific components of the six aspects above, and (3) determine why they have not appropriately implemented one or more of the educational aspects examined.

City Data Project

The Maryland State Department of Education has also started the City Data Project with eight Baltimore City schools in their first year of restructuring implementation. These schools work closely with the state, providing data and improving their capacity to analyze their data to boost achievement.

Support for Special Education

Maryland provides grants to schools identified for improvement solely due to the performance of the special education subgroup, according to JoAnne Carter, Maryland's deputy superintendent for instruction and academic acceleration. These competitive grants are accompanied by technical support from MSDE personnel, who provide professional development, conduct observations and share best practices. MSDE has granted over \$3 million dollars in these special education grants during the past three years.

Principal's Academy

The MSDE sponsors a year-long professional development program for principals working in restructuring schools. The academy emphasizes principals' capacity to conduct purposeful classroom observations that link instruction and evaluation.

Other Assistance

In addition to its new programs and initiatives, MSDE contributes other types of support to help schools and districts make AYP:

- Providing direct support to help superintendents identify which areas of reading and math need to be addressed to make AYP targets
- Building a relationship with the state Charter School Office to work on issues of restructuring facing charter schools

- Providing hands-on training to Title I coordinators
- Monitoring districts through an annual review of their master plans
- Engaging in an annual Title I review
- Providing \$2,000 annual stipends to teachers who hold advanced certification and work in corrective action or restructuring schools

Dr. Nancy Grasmick, Maryland state superintendent of education, commented that the state has undergone the necessary and difficult process of designing a system for schools in restructuring, an accomplishment often overlooked in discussions of NCLB:

There's never any recognition, there's never any demand for funding, and we are the architects and enforcers of the law . . . yet the role of the state department of education has not been elevated as important by foundations, by policy institutes, or by the law itself. It's really kind of disappointing.

Special Assistance for Schools in Restructuring for Three or More Years

In 2006-07, MSDE piloted the Restructuring Implementation Technical Assistance (RITA) process in three Baltimore City schools and one Prince George's County school. According to MSDE officials, RITA is intended to assist schools that have been in restructuring implementation for at least three years and appear to not be making progress. As explained in the 2007 "RITA Overview" by MSDE, the process is designed to help these schools identify which programs and systems are effective in raising student achievement and which need to be improved or eliminated. The process focuses on nine standards and 45 indicators.

RITA primarily consists of a support team that works with this group of schools, reviewing student achievement data and intermediate progress measures, visiting classrooms, and interviewing teachers, principals, district staff, parents, and community members. At the end of the process, the RITA team provides a report that indicates the obstacles to effective teaching and learning and includes recommendations for improvement and suggested resources.

PROGRESS OF SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

As noted earlier in this section, only a limited number of schools in Maryland have made sufficient test score gains to exit restructuring. Since 2004, 12 restructuring implementation schools—or 16% of Maryland schools that reached the phase of implementing restructuring plans—have left NCLB school improvement (not including schools that have closed). Nine of these schools were using a turnaround specialist, two contracted with a private management company, and one school reconstituted the school staff. All were located in Baltimore City. An additional 16 schools that were in the planning phase of NCLB restructuring have left improvement since 2004; these schools made AYP before they were required to implement their restructuring plans. These statistics seem to indicate that restructuring implementation efforts are having limited success in Maryland schools.

It is difficult to conduct systematic analyses of the success of restructuring efforts in Maryland because there has been little variation in the alternative governance mechanisms used by restructuring schools. Since 2004, 49 of the 77 schools in restructuring implementation, or 64%, have used a turnaround specialist. Very few schools have used the other options. With Maryland restricting its alternative governance mechanisms beginning in 2006-07 and eliminating the turnaround specialist option, it remains to be seen whether schools will choose a wider variety of mechanisms.

Themes from Restructuring Districts and Schools

Several broad themes emerged from our case studies that were common to participating districts and schools.

First, all of the districts studied experienced enormous changes in school year 2006-07. Three of the districts had new superintendents beginning in summer 2006. All four districts supported one or more new alternative governance mechanisms, and all substantially modified their support for schools in restructuring.

Second, full implementation of restructuring plans and school improvement strategies was problematic for all of the districts studied. Although schools and districts have the responsibility to implement their state-board-approved restructuring plans as of the first day of the

upcoming school year, in many cases, logistical issues with training teachers, hiring support staff, or finalizing plans postponed implementation of important features of school restructuring plans. As a result, many types of support did not reach the schools until a few weeks before the state test was administered in spring 2007. According to MSDE officials, this problem should be remedied for the 2007-08 school year because all fiscal year 2007 State School Improvement Grants were extended through December 31, 2007. This change will enable school districts with unspent funds to plan for and hire new staff well before the opening of the 2007-08 school year. Districts and schools will be able to do the same type of advance planning for the 2008-09 school year.

Third, replacing all or most of the school staff has become a popular alternative governance option for schools entering restructuring, and this type of dramatic and sometimes traumatic change brings its own set of difficulties. At least one school in each of the four districts studied is engaging in some form of “zero-based” staffing, which means that a substantial portion of the school staff is replaced or needs to reapply for their positions. In each case, school staff and administrators reported that the disruption associated with rebuilding school staff was substantial enough to interfere with instruction. Administrators commented that the burden of interviewing job candidates left them with no time to act as school leaders, and teachers noted that anxiety over job security superseded academic concerns. We must note, however, that the interviews for this study were conducted while some schools were in the early stages of implementing zero-based staffing—either waiting to hear if this action would be taken or interviewing candidates for jobs. Thus, staff reactions to this restructuring strategy were particularly fresh, and often impetuous.

Fourth, several activities associated with restructuring were very similar across the schools studied, regardless of the district or the alternative governance mechanism. All the schools studied engaged in the following four activities to improve student achievement on the Maryland State Assessments:

- ***Tutoring outside the regular school day.*** All of the case study schools mounted programs before or after school and sometimes on Saturdays to provide additional learning opportunities in reading and

math for low-performing students. Often districts have used state school improvement funds to pay for this extra instructional time. Sharon Kanter, a Baltimore City official, explained how this works:

That's one of the pieces that we're able to do with state department grant money. We do interventions where we have kids . . . come after school for tutorials, come to Saturday classes. We pay teachers stipends to help students in Saturday classes. Right now, every school has some type of intervention going on where we are focusing on getting these kids ready for [state exams].

- **Increasing instructional time in reading and math.** District officials, school administrators, and teachers all mentioned that they have increased the time students spend on tested subjects during the school day. Whether through adding a class period, pulling out some students for special instruction, or using two teachers in the same classroom to help integrate reading and math into other subjects, schools and districts are finding ways to pile on extra instruction.
- **Using assessment data diagnostically.** All of the case study schools use periodic assessments instituted by district to determine how and where to focus instruction. Both teachers and principals mentioned that the use of data to drive instructional planning has increased since enactment of NCLB, as described by a Prince George's County teacher:

[The principal] has constantly had us track our data so that we can focus more on where the student's needs are, so about once a month we have some type of assessment where we just look at the data. We have one skill that we check to see how the kids have progressed in that skill, and when we do that we know whether we need to re-teach that skill or whether we can move on to the next skill.

- **Focusing on students just below proficiency.** Officials in all the case study schools mentioned that their schools pay special attention to, and provide additional resources for, students who are “on the bubble” of proficiency on benchmark assessments. Principals and teachers all noted the expediency of working with these students, who are the most likely to improve enough to increase the percentage of students scoring proficient on the MSA.

Fifth, two districts chose to restructure schools before the schools had reached year 4 of NCLB sanctions. In both cases district leaders reported that they were acting in the best interests of the schools and doing what needed to be done. However, it is unclear what kinds of actions MSDE will take if these restructuring efforts do not result in the school making AYP. Will the state require these schools to restructure again?

In addition to these five broad themes, our case studies revealed detailed findings about restructuring in the four Maryland case study districts, described in the remaining sections of this report.

Prince George's County Public Schools

The Prince George's County school system includes 202 schools, about a third of which are Title I schools. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of the district's students are African American; 43% receive free or reduced-price meals due to low family income. About one-third of PGCPs schools are Title I schools.

BACKGROUND ON PGCPs AND RESTRUCTURING

As a district, the Prince George's County Public Schools failed to make AYP for the fourth consecutive year based on 2006 state testing and was identified by the state for corrective action. At the elementary level, the district missed AYP targets for low-income students and English language learners in reading, and for students with disabilities in both reading and math. At the middle school level, the district fell short of AYP targets for all students and for the African American subgroup in reading, and for students with disabilities, low-income students, and English language learners in reading and math. At the high school level, PGCPs met AYP targets in reading and math overall but did not make AYP for English language learners in reading or for students with disabilities in reading and math.

In 2006-07, PGCPs, 13 schools were in the planning or implementation phase of restructuring. Only three of these were Title I schools. As in past years, all 11 restructuring implementation schools were using the same alternative governance mechanism—the turnaround specialist.

Our case studies of 2006-07 included two schools that had participated in our research the previous year:

- ***G. Gardner Shugart Middle School*** missed AYP in multiple subgroups in both math and reading in 2006. The school had similar results in 2007 testing and remains in restructuring implementation.
- ***Bladensburg Elementary School*** made AYP in all areas in both 2006 and 2007 testing and has exited improvement.

Two more schools joined our case studies of 2006-07:

- ***Charles Carroll Middle School*** missed AYP in 2006 for multiple subgroups in reading and math. The school had similar results in 2007, and remains in restructuring implementation.
- ***Arrowhead Elementary School*** was in restructuring planning, having missed AYP in 2006 for multiple subgroups in reading and math. In 2007, students with disabilities were the only subgroup that did not make AYP in reading or math. The school is in restructuring implementation.

DISTRICT STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

All four PGCPs case study schools cited similar concerns about and reasons for their difficulties in raising student achievement. Teachers and principals spoke of the need for additional staff, such as subject matter coaches and mentors for new teachers, and for a greater number of highly qualified teachers. They also pointed to the turnover in school staff and administrators, as well as inadequate implementation of curricular programs. None of the principals interviewed cited a lack of money as a cause of the school's academic problems. "I don't need money," said Douglas Anthony, principal of Arrowhead Elementary school. "I need people. I need quality teachers, and I need specific supports."

Many PGCPs strategies and supports for schools in improvement remained the same in 2006-07 as in the previous year. For example, the district continued to provide extended learning opportunities for students in restructuring schools. Schools identified for improvement received district school improvement funds to provide after-school and Saturday learning opportunities for students. The district also continued to admin-

ister quarterly benchmarking assessments, aligned to the Maryland School Assessment, that are intended to be used to identify students who need more help. In addition, the PGCPs Department of School Improvement and Accountability continued to coordinate the school improvement process for the district, to assist schools with improvement planning, and to assign school improvement resource teachers to all schools in improvement.

In addition to continuing many previous efforts, PGCPs also made some significant changes in its approach to working with restructuring schools. Many of these changes, explained below, can be attributed to Dr. John Deasy, who became the new Prince George's County superintendent in school year 2006-07.

Intensive Support and Intervention Schools (ISIS)

The district's Intensive Support and Intervention Schools (ISIS) program is designed to provide additional services to schools in improvement based on the school's student achievement or the number of subgroups falling short of AYP targets, rather than on the school's stage of NCLB improvement. Schools are supposed to receive services based on their ISIS level, independent of their alternative governance mechanism or school improvement plan. The ISIS program has four "levels"—schools receive intensive, extensive, moderate, or targeted services. Both Carroll and Shugart Middle Schools were identified as intensive schools.

According to PGCPs documents, schools identified for intensive intervention were supposed to receive the following services:

- Support from a faculty support team in reading, math, and science
- Full-time coaches in reading, math, science, and social studies for middle and high schools (separate from the turnaround specialist)
- A full-time testing coordinator
- A full-time English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) teacher if needed
- Mentors for all teachers with less than two years' experience

Although the ISIS program was slated to begin in 2006-07, most of these services for intensive schools never materialized that year. District and school officials said that the program was not implemented early enough to be able to appropriately staff it.

Eric Wood, principal of Charles Carroll Middle School, explained that teachers were applying for the coaching positions, and since the district tried to fill the coaching positions after the school year had begun, hiring good teachers as coaches would have created “hundreds of vacancies in those schools. So realistically, you just have to wait.” Kathleen Kurtz, Region Four regional assistant superintendent, elaborated:

We also had identified, for our ISIS schools, coaches. And then when we started screening we realized that we were really going to be pulling good teachers out of classrooms in the middle of the year . . . [and] that just wasn't a good idea. So identifying some of these key things that we want to put in place early enough, so that we're not impacting staffs of schools or impacting program initiatives in the middle of year, is important.

New Curricular Reforms

In its 17 middle schools in corrective action or restructuring implementation, PGCPS piloted a whole school reform program, America's Choice, during 2006-07. Like the ISIS program, this initiative did not get underway until the middle of the school year, so most teachers had not been fully trained in the programs and the initiative had not been implemented for a full year.

Highly Qualified Staff

PGCPS has focused on staffing the neediest schools completely with highly qualified teachers. The district created a priority list of 76 schools, including the 51 Title I schools in various stages of improvement, to be assigned highly qualified teachers first. Arrowhead Elementary School was the first on the list, since highly qualified staff is an important element of its restructuring plan.

Faculty Support Teams

Administered through the five regional offices and directed by the district professional development office,

Faculty Support Teams are sent to schools to work with teachers. These teams provide professional development and coaching, demonstrate lessons, assist with collaborative planning and data use, or do whatever else a school may need. The teams provide services and support to their assigned schools for a full month, then return every two months. According to the regional assistant superintendents interviewed, schools in restructuring are prioritized, and Faculty Support Teams are sent to priority schools first.

TRANSFORMING THE TURNAROUND SPECIALIST

One of the more high-profile changes in the district's approach to restructuring schools was its attempt to transform the role of the turnaround specialist. Although the state no longer allows schools entering restructuring planning to select the turnaround specialist option, the district decided to maintain this governance mechanism for the 11 restructuring schools that had already been using it.

In 2005-06, PGCPS designated its regional directors, an existing position, as the turnaround specialists for restructuring schools in their regions. For various reasons, this was problematic. A primary problem was that the regional directors' time was stretched very thinly because the turnaround specialist duties were added onto their existing responsibilities. Many regional directors said they could not devote as much time as they would have liked to schools in restructuring.

The role of the turnaround specialist in PGCPS was somewhat controversial, and opinions varied widely about the past effectiveness of the position. For example, William Ritter, former Region Five regional assistant superintendent, made this observation:

Initially, it didn't appear the implementation of this alternative governance option was fully thought through. Originally, regional directors were charged with this task. This decision may have been made for reasons having nothing to do with the goals of the turnaround specialist. It was clear we were going to have to reassign some duties elsewhere or reassign this task if we were to be successful. A second issue arose as we worked to reassign the tasks to others. Some of those chosen were highly qualified for this position and appropriate. In other cases, staff were selected who, in retrospect, were not as qualified as others who had sought the positions but not been chosen.

In 2006-07, under the leadership of the new superintendent and new director of accountability, the district created new turnaround specialist positions whose sole responsibilities were devoted to restructuring schools. By February 1, 2007, seven turnaround specialists, the number set by the district, had been hired. According to Donna Muncey, chief accountability officer, one turnaround specialist was assigned to work “preemptively” with three schools in corrective action.

In 2006-07, each turnaround specialist was assigned no more than two schools and was expected to spend two days a week at each school. According to Dr. Karen Kunkel, a former regional director who served as a turnaround specialist in 2006-07, the “new” position was a vast improvement because she could spend more time in her assigned schools:

Last year, with my other responsibilities, I was able to get into the three schools for an average of a day and a half per week. This year [2006-07] I'm able to monitor my two schools for two days a week each. So I'm able to meet the mandates and the criteria set forth by the state.

All three principals interviewed for this study also commented that they have seen their turnaround specialists more often, an improvement over the preceding year. Curtis Smalls, principal of Shugart Middle School, noted that during school year 2005-06, she saw her turnaround specialist only about 11 times. During school year 2006-07, she saw her turnaround specialist more than twice as often, even though the specialist was not hired until January 2007.

All of the turnaround specialists interviewed described their responsibilities in similar ways. Tujuana White, a turnaround specialist, said, “I work collaboratively with the principals to focus on those areas that are impacting student achievement.” Joyce Edwards, another turnaround specialist, said that her position “involves assessing and analyzing the school” and that her first priority is the instructional program and her second priority is “building the capacity of school leader.” According to interview participants, the turnaround specialists fulfill a range of responsibilities:

- Meeting with the principal and providing administrative mentoring or coaching
- Observing and monitoring classroom instruction

- Mentoring new teachers
- Attending staff and departmental meetings to monitor instructional planning
- Monitoring implementation of the school improvement plan
- Assisting with implementation of curricular programs (such as America’s Choice)
- Providing resources for teachers and the principal as needed
- Attending regional principal meetings

Although the principals and teachers did not explicitly say so, the turnaround specialists appear to serve as an additional instructional leader in the school. While the turnaround specialist may not have official decision-making power, many teachers noted that this person was responsible for many of the same duties as a principal. “She’s an extra mouthpiece for [the principal], making sure we’re on task and on top of our jobs,” said one teacher.

PGCPS also exercised more oversight of the turnaround specialists in 2006-07. Rather than being based in the district’s regional offices as in the past, all turnaround specialists began reporting directly to the district’s chief accountability officer. Furthermore, in 2006-07, the turnaround specialists met on a regular schedule with the chief accountability officer, with other key district leaders, and with each other. In addition, the turnaround specialists were required to submit bimonthly reports, documenting their activities and assessing their schools’ progress in student achievement and a variety of other areas.

All three principals interviewed who worked with turnaround specialists spoke very highly of them, noting that their turnaround specialists become part of the school and were providing valuable resources to teachers and leadership teams. Eric Wood, principal of Charles Carroll Middle School, described the specialist’s role in this way:

She’s very hands-on, whether it’s from participating in a back-to-school night, a parent night, PTO, or . . . helping proctor an exam or administer an exam. Every aspect of running a school is involved with that position. It’s an

extremely valuable resource, especially to me, coming in as a new principal and coming into a school that was in such dire need of support from the outside.

The teachers interviewed for this study also expressed positive views about the turnaround specialists. Most teachers said that they saw their turnaround specialist often and that the specialist was a real help, providing assistance in content areas as well as classroom management. “She’s always there to help you if you have any questions,” said one teacher. “She’s a good resource.”

Still, the principals involved with turnaround specialists did not necessarily attribute their school’s progress directly to the work of the specialist. All of these principals said that multiple factors contributed to their success, or lack thereof, on state assessments. “A turnaround specialist is not going to be the be-all and end-all of the fixing of the schools,” said Rhonda Pitts, principal of Bladensburg Elementary School. “It takes strong leadership. It takes getting your staff to buy into a vision.”

Some of the turnaround specialist positions were not filled until well into the 2006-07 school year. As a result, some restructuring schools were not fully implementing their alternative governance mechanism until shortly before the 2007 administration of the Maryland School Assessment. In Bladensburg Elementary and Shugart Middle Schools, the turnaround specialists were not hired and working in their schools until January. Up to that point, the only additional support for restructuring in these schools came through the Faculty Support Teams.

NEW STRATEGIES FOR RESTRUCTURING AT ARROWHEAD ELEMENTARY

Arrowhead Elementary School was one of two PGCPs schools in restructuring planning in 2006-07, the first year that Maryland prohibited schools from choosing a turnaround specialist as their alternative governance mechanism. For this reason, the district and school had to create a restructuring plan that differed from those used by the PGCPs schools already in restructuring implementation. Douglas Anthony, principal of Arrowhead Elementary School, described this experience of piloting something new:

I know that there may be schools that will be in restructuring planning in my district next year and that the district is hoping that I’m getting a really good understanding [of how to make restructuring work] to be able to share with my colleagues who may be in a similar position next year.

Since Arrowhead was one of just two district schools in restructuring planning, the district was able to focus considerable attention and greater resources on the school. Anthony explained that although he could not say what supports other schools have received, the district leadership “has been clear about giving [Arrowhead] certain supports” and has placed “an emphasis on making sure we get what we need.”

According to Kathy Kurtz, regional assistant superintendent for Arrowhead Elementary, the process of developing the school’s restructuring plan was far more comprehensive than in years past and involved a great deal of input from the staff and principal and extensive data analysis. In contrast to previous years, when principals of restructuring schools reported that they had little or no input in developing the restructuring plan, Anthony said that he was heavily involved in the process.

While Arrowhead’s restructuring plan is technically the alternative governance mechanism of replacing all or most of the school staff, district officials and the principal explained that the plan actually has four parts:

1. Replace all staff members who are not highly qualified, according to NCLB.
2. Implement the Comer School Development Program, a school reform model that focuses on building supportive bonds between parents and school staff.
3. Implement additional benchmarks for the special needs population at the school.
4. Provide additional staff supports, coaches, and special education support.

Anthony estimated that replacing all of the staff who were not highly qualified staff in 2006-07 could mean turning over 14 out of 60 teachers, including several special education teachers (who tend to have more difficulty meeting the NCLB requirements for subject matter expertise because they teach multiple subjects).

Several teachers interviewed at Arrowhead expressed concerns about and dissatisfaction with the school's restructuring plan. Some commented that a teacher does not need the "highly qualified" label to be an excellent instructor or viewed the label as a technicality which is keeping good teachers from staying at the school. Others noted that the restructuring plan may force people who want to teach at Arrowhead to leave and force people who do not want to be at the school to come. In addition, some teachers pointed out that the prospect of being asked to leave takes teachers' focus away from students and shifts it to job security, as the following teacher comment illustrates:

I have a lot of people [on my team] who will be leaving . . . They're no longer focused on the students; they're focused on "my plan B, my next option, writing a resume, can you write me a letter of recommendation," instead of focusing on children's progress . . . So, I'm sitting here having conversations about children's progress and they're talking about getting another job next year.

Baltimore City Public Schools

The city of Baltimore is the only large urban center in Maryland and faces educational challenges of an even greater magnitude than a district like Prince George's, which abuts a major city. Like many large cities, Baltimore suffers from declining population, violence, drug problems, and deeply entrenched poverty. Additionally, over the past four years the city government and school system have had a difficult relationship with both the Maryland State Department of Education and the state governor's office. These relationships led to many public power struggles over issues such as school finances, facilities management, and the best means to support failing schools. In the past six years, the Baltimore City Public School System has had five chief executive officers. Most recently, during the summer of 2006, one CEO left and was replaced by an interim CEO, Charlene Cooper-Boston, for school year 2006-07. In the summer of 2007, Andres Alonso was named the new CEO.

BACKGROUND ON BCPSS AND ITS RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

The Baltimore City district serves a student population that is 89% African American and 72% low-income. Of the district's 196¹ schools, 122, or 62%, are Title I schools. Altogether, 46% of the district's schools are undergoing some stage of NCLB improvement. Particularly telling is the fact that 39% of all Maryland schools in any stage of NCLB improvement are located in Baltimore City.

Based on its 2006 test results, the Baltimore City district failed to make AYP for the fifth year and was identified by the state for corrective action. At the elementary level, low-income and special education students fell short of AYP targets in both reading and math, as did American Indian/Alaskan Native students in reading. At the middle school level, the only subgroups that made AYP across the district were American Indian/Alaskan Native students in math, and Asian/Pacific Islanders and white students in reading and math. At the high school level, the district failed to make AYP for all students and for the African American subgroup in math, and for low-income, special education, and English language learner students in reading and math.

In 2006-07, 58 BCPSS schools, including 43 Title I schools, were in restructuring implementation. Twelve of these restructuring schools were high schools—the only high schools in Maryland implementing restructuring plans.

Unlike the restructuring schools in Prince George's County, Baltimore City schools were implementing a variety of restructuring plans, as shown in **table 6**. Still, the turnaround specialist—which BCPSS calls a restructuring implementation specialist (RIS)—remained the most popular option. According to Linda Chinnia, former BCPSS chief academic officer, district officials originally encouraged the RIS option because it was the "easiest" strategy for the district to support when NCLB sanctions began to affect many schools:

There was such a large number of schools that had to suddenly [implement restructuring plans] . . . At that time the restructuring specialist seemed the least disruptive in terms of what schools were already trying to do around change. So there was

¹ Includes Edison Schools located in Baltimore City.

Table 6. Restructuring Options Used by Baltimore City Schools, 2006-07

Maryland Restructuring Options	Number of BCPSS Schools Using Option, 2006-07
Enter into a contract with an entity such as a private management company to operate the school	1
Reopen the school as a public charter school	1
Replace all or most of the school staff	8
Have the district central office take over the principalship of the school	2
Appoint a school “turnaround specialist”	33
Close the school and reopen it as a complete school of choice	0
Use an external reform model	0
Replicate the governance of a charter school using a governing board granted a degree of autonomy from the local district	1
Employ a distinguished principal	2
Implement the Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools	10

Table reads: In school year 2006-07, one Baltimore City school in the implementation phase of restructuring had entered into a contract with an outside entity to operate the school.

Source: MSDE documentation provided by Sandra Toomey, July 2007.

some encouragement, I think, on the part of the district to look at a model that didn't cause as much change as we were trying to figure out just what was going on.

Our study profiled four Baltimore City Schools:

- **Guilford Elementary/Middle School** made AYP in all areas in 2006 but did not make AYP in 2007, falling short overall in reading and missing AYP targets for various subgroups in reading or math. The school remains in restructuring implementation and is using a RIS as its alternative governance mechanism.
- **Mary E. Rodman Elementary School** missed AYP targets in 2006 for most subgroups in reading and math; in 2007, the school also fell short for multiple subgroups in reading but made AYP for all subgroups except special education students in math. The school remains in restructuring implementation and is using a RIS as its alternative governance mechanism.
- **Morrell Park Elementary/Middle School** did not make AYP for multiple subgroups in reading and math in either 2006 or 2007, so it remains in restructuring implementation. The school chose to replicate a charter school's governance as its alternative governance mechanism in 2006-07.
- **Thurgood Marshall High School** was created as a small learning community in 2003 when the district broke up a large neighborhood high school. The school has been in restructuring implementation since it opened because it inherited the NCLB status of its “parent” high school. On the 2005, 2006, and 2007 state High School Assessments (HSAs), Thurgood Marshall did not make AYP overall or for any subgroup in reading or math. The school has chosen the Blueprint for High School Reform and Derivative High Schools as its alternative governance mechanism.

GENERAL STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

Baltimore City has put in place a host of strategies, typical of those found in many urban districts, to help restructuring schools improve student achievement. These include quarterly benchmark exams linked to the MSA, instructional support teachers, subject matter coaches, money for after-school and weekend tutoring programs, support for data analysis, and new curricula.

Of particular note is the BCPSS decision to focus more attention and resources on the eight schools that entered restructuring implementation in 2006-07 than on those already implementing restructuring. According to district officials, these eight schools received a larger portion of the district's state school improvement grant, support through their participation in the state's City Data Project, and greater guidance from the district in developing and implementing their restructuring plans.

In addition, BCPSS created several new administrative structures, positions, and programs, explained below, to help support restructuring schools.

Office of School Improvement, School Improvement Specialists, and RISs

Established in July 2006, the Office of School Improvement provides support and resources to help restructuring schools develop and implement their improvement plans. According to Marsha Taylor, director of school improvement, this office helps schools “do the process piece of making informed decisions” and has created a range of tools, checklists, and online resources toward this end.

The Office of School Improvement also houses, oversees, and provides centralized professional development and other support for the district's school improvement coordinators and the aforementioned restructuring implementation specialists.

School improvement coordinators are charged with providing technical assistance to schools as they prepare their improvement plans and alternative governance proposals, monitoring the implementation of plans, and providing training on school improvement issues. Each coordinator has been assigned a caseload of no more than 10 schools. Although the district created

seven coordinator positions, Taylor said that there were never more than six coordinators on staff at any given time during school year 2006-07 due to illnesses and hiring delays.

According to Marsha Taylor, the restructuring implementation specialists were in place to help schools implement a sustainable school improvement plan and help the principals analyze assessment data and monitor and improve the school instructional program. “They are supposed to work arm in arm with the principal in helping the principal make good decisions,” she explained. One principal described the varied responsibilities of the school's RIS in this way:

She has lots of experience in working with schools that had struggled with meeting AYP, or struggle with maintaining student achievement . . . She provides me with feedback—helping me along as a mentor, giving me ideas that I can consider in terms of trying to move the school forward . . . She's part of the leadership team. She communicates with teachers about the instructional practices, providing them with feedback and support. She's in the classrooms . . . She's very visible throughout the building.

The RISs in BCPSS also appear to function as a second administrator, not only building the capacity of the principal to improve student achievement but acting as a second set of hands for administrative roles. “[The RIS] just jumps in and will say, ‘Let me take this off your plate,’ and it's freed me up to do other things,” another principal explained.

In 2006-07, BCPSS hired several new RISs and transferred many to different schools. These changes were made in response to a state requirement that RISs be qualified in the areas in which their assigned schools need help; for example, an RIS must have math expertise to work with a school that has not made AYP in math. As former chief academic officer Linda Chinnia said, “we really honed in on having the restructuring specialist be a specialist.”

In 2006-07, all of the RISs received monthly professional development through the Office of School Improvement. The activities focused on creating a professional learning community among the RISs and enhancing their capacity for school improvement.

Elementary Restructuring Area

The Baltimore City school district is divided into nine administrative areas, each overseen by an area administrative officer (AAO). In 2006-07, BCPSS had four elementary areas, one middle school area, two high school areas, one charter school area, and the Elementary Restructuring Area (ERA), established in the summer of 2006. In contrast to the other administrative areas, which encompassed 20 to 25 schools each, the ERA covered 11 of the city's elementary schools that had been in restructuring since the inception of NCLB, as well as one school that served as a professional development demonstration site for the other schools. All 11 schools were using the RIS as their alternative governance mechanism. The ERA is overseen by Dr. Mary Minter, who serves as both its AAO and as principal of its non-restructuring school. The small size of the ERA has been one of its greatest advantages to the restructuring schools, said Minter, allowing her to have a more visible presence in her schools:

It's just something about being small and being able to share strategies with each other and to just be able to connect because you're small . . . So it's more of a family and more intimate when you can be inside a building and do the bonding that needs to go on in coaching.

At least once a month, Minter explained, she or one of her executive assistants will do a “walk-through” of each school, observing instruction and meeting with the principal—much more often than the two or three times a year that the AAOs in other areas visit their schools.

The ERA also delivered more professional development than other areas in the BCPSS, according to Minter. In particular, the ERA provides training, coaching, and workshops for classroom teachers, principals, instructional support teachers, and RISs. As part of this effort, professional developers provided ongoing training and coaching at the individual school sites, and the ERA held a series of Saturday workshops that brought together teachers from all 12 schools. At the workshops, said Minter, the teachers had a chance to plan together and share strategies.

In addition, during the 2006-07 school year, the 12 ERA schools were piloting two curricular programs, Math Works and a special education initiative developed by LeapFrog.

SPECIAL REFORMS AND SUPPORTS FOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Although most restructuring high schools in Baltimore are undertaking the same activities and initiatives as restructuring elementary and middle schools, the BCPSS has implemented several programs to improve student performance in high schools, including those undergoing restructuring. All 12 BCPSS restructuring high schools are located in the same district administrative area and receive similar guidance and supports.

Blueprint for High School Reform

In 2000, BCPSS, in conjunction with local and national funders, began a massive effort to reform Baltimore City high schools by breaking large neighborhood high schools into smaller learning communities and allowing students and families to choose from among several citywide high schools without entrance criteria. Through this Blueprint for High School Reform effort, eight new small high schools were created from three larger neighborhood high schools.

Of the 12 Baltimore City restructuring high schools, 8 are these smaller “derivative” schools. According to Gary Heath, assistant state superintendent for accountability and assessment, the state decided to assign the new derivative schools the same NCLB improvement status as their parent high school because the schools were essentially serving the same populations of students with the same basic faculties but in smaller communities. In addition, MSDE did not want to send other schools the message that all they had to do to exit school improvement was to create a new school.

Prior to the 2006-07 school year, MSDE permitted Baltimore City high schools in restructuring implementation to use the Blueprint as their alternative governance mechanism. But the state eliminated this option, according to MSDE staff, because it wanted each school to have an individual plan rather than falling under one large initiative. JoAnne Carter, deputy superintendent for instruction and academic acceleration, elaborated on the rationale:

We, MSDE and Baltimore City Public Schools, have looked at the performance of the derivative schools and the yield was not improved achievement. Trend data demonstrated that just breaking larger schools into other smaller schools does not, in and of itself, become a sufficient alternative governance mechanism.

As noted above, schools already in restructuring implementation did not have to change their plans, so in 2006-07 all of the schools that were already using the Blueprint (as all but two restructuring high schools were doing) continued to use it as their alternative governance mechanism. It is important to note that high schools using the Blueprint as their restructuring plan received no additional supports or staffing due to their restructuring status. No Baltimore City high schools qualify for Title I funds, and the district has not allocated specific school improvement funds for restructuring. The dearth of additional resources was clearly felt by teachers at Thurgood Marshall High School. The teachers interviewed were adamant that they did not receive enough resources or materials to operate effectively. A teacher on the school improvement team said that the district cut their budget in half, leaving them to “fight and scrap for everything we get.”

High School Curriculum and Instructional Programs

The Baltimore City district has undertaken several programs in its high schools that revise curriculum, instruction, and school schedules, with the goal of improving student performance on the Maryland High School Assessments. According to Sharon Kanter, the district’s high school area administrative officer, these include the following:

- Implementing a new English curriculum aligned with the HSA
- Teaching each tested subject (English I, Algebra I, biology, and government) in 90- minute classes throughout the year
- Reorganizing course offerings to ensure that students complete useful prerequisite classes before taking courses that culminate in an HSA exam, such as taking chemistry before biology or U.S. history before government
- Implementing Wilson Reading, a research-based reading curriculum, as a remedial reading intervention

In addition to these efforts, the district provides professional development supports to high schools, said Kanter, including the following:

- Content-based professional development for instructional support teachers
- Monthly principals’ meetings
- Learning walks where principals visit other schools to observe best practices
- Area-based math and English coaches to support schools

For principals, Kanter said that she emphasized instructional leadership. In 2006-07, she asked principals to spend at least 50% of their time in classrooms. She also visited each high school in her area two or three times during the year, spending at least two hours in the school to assess the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

New Restructuring Efforts for High Schools

BCPSS earmarked a significant portion of its 2006-07 State School Improvement Grant funding for two initiatives aimed at secondary schools in restructuring. First, all restructuring high schools received additional staffing and funding for curricular programs. Second, three BCPSS comprehensive high schools that have not been broken into smaller learning communities received SSIG funds to create new, more effective restructuring plans. According to Sharon Kanter, the three schools proposed the following new restructuring plans for 2007-08:

- Frederick Douglass High School is replacing the administration and a good portion of the staff and plans to implement Talent Development, a Comprehensive School Reform model developed at Johns Hopkins University.
- Northwestern High School is asking staff to recommit to working at the school, to agree to a longer day, and to participate in added professional development. The school is also implementing a new technology focus and partnerships with local businesses and the University of Baltimore.
- Patterson High School is being divided into academies and is also implementing High Schools That Work, a school reform model that provides coaching, professional development, and curricular support.

THEMES FROM BCPSS SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

While the Baltimore City Public School System has instituted numerous districtwide supports for restructuring schools, it does not have a comprehensive strategy for restructuring. As a result, schools' experiences with restructuring seemed to be heavily influenced by their chosen alternative governance mechanism. Our case studies revealed themes related to the most common governance strategies.

Restructuring with an RIS at Guilford and Rodman Schools

In the two BCPSS schools using restructuring implementation specialists, the principals interviewed made similarly positive comments about the value of this resource. Sheilah Myers, principal at Guilford Elementary/Middle School, said that the RIS was an invaluable resource to her as a first-year principal:

Having an experienced person on staff who has worked in a similar environment is valuable to me because while I may have ideas where I may see things one way, she might bring a different perspective. She has a good handle on what good instruction looks like, and that's what it's all about.

Jerome Butler, principal of Mary E. Rodman Elementary, also spoke highly of his RIS, noting that "it's like having two principals thinking instead of one." Butler explained that the RIS spends the bulk of his time working with teachers and families, rather than with the principal, as a strategy to improve student achievement.

Still, although the teachers and administrators interviewed at both Guilford and Rodman Schools liked having an RIS, they did not see this alternative governance mechanism, or restructuring in general, as influential enough to improve student achievement. For example, in 2006, Guilford made AYP in all areas for all subgroups, and the staff was justly very proud of what the students had achieved. But when pressed about the causes of these gains, neither the teachers nor the principal could point to any specific programs or initiatives. Overall, teachers interviewed at Guilford believed that the specific staff working at the school and the small class sizes in grades 3, 4, and 5 were the greatest factors contributing to the school's AYP success. However, neither the teachers nor the principal at

Guilford was optimistic about making AYP based on 2007 testing because numerous teachers had left the school and class sizes were larger than in the previous year. In fact, the school did not make AYP and remains in restructuring.

Restructuring Using Other Strategies at Morrell Park and Thurgood Marshall

While educators at the schools using RISs had a clear understanding of their alternative governance mechanism and could clearly point to the implementation of a restructuring plan, the other two Baltimore City schools we studied, Morrell Park Elementary/Middle School and Thurgood Marshall High School, suffered from what appeared to be incomplete implementation of their restructuring plans.

Morrell Park entered restructuring implementation in school year 2006-07. According to school staff and administrators, the school submitted three separate restructuring plans to the state. The first two plans were rejected. The third plan, which was accepted and implemented, called on the school to replicate the governance of a charter school. However, the principal and staff that we interviewed said the school's alternative governance mechanism was to work with an external entity, Towson University. In addition, both the principal and teachers noted that after school year 2006-07, many teachers were to be let go or reassigned. According to the principal, this was "modified zero-base" staffing, in that only about half of the teachers would be asked to leave. It is unclear if this staffing process was initiated as part of a partnership with Towson or was another element of the current restructuring plan.

The most salient feature of restructuring at Morrell Park was confusion. Neither teachers nor administrators could clearly articulate the features of the school's restructuring plan, and no one at the school seemed certain of the plan's implications for the school. At the time of our school interviews, the school was clearly in transition, communication with school staff about restructuring was poor, and no strong alternative governance mechanism was in place. Although the school was in restructuring implementation and had an alternative governance mechanism on record, no plan was being implemented that was transforming the school in any way.

Unfortunately, all of the upheaval at the school detracted from educating children. Even those teachers who believed that the restructuring plan was a positive addition to the school acknowledged the difficulties that year. “I’m just trying to keep my own kids going in the right direction,” said one teacher.

Thurgood Marshall High School had about 35 teachers in 2006-07 and enrolled approximately 720 students, nearly all African American. The school had in place all of the same initiatives as other restructuring Baltimore City high schools, including in-school and after-school tutoring. However, the school has instituted a unique initiative—its department heads teach the courses tested in the state exams, which makes it possible to reduce class size in these courses to 25 students instead of the more typical 35.

Both the principal and staff at Thurgood Marshall were very clear that the school’s restructuring plan is to be a “small learning community.” According to Principal Russell Williams, this designation means that “we ask teachers to build relationships.” To accomplish this, the school is supposed to enroll no more than 600 students, Williams said, but enrollments have always exceeded that limit. Still, he added, “We’re working with what we have. We know that this is not an ideal situation, but it is better than it was. At [the predecessor school], they had 2,100 kids. Here we have 720—big difference.”

While the principal reported that Thurgood Marshall has built an effective small learning community, several teachers interviewed said they did not believe the school was any different than its parent neighborhood high school. These teachers pointed out that they did not have enough resources, but they did have the same difficult students to work with, a restrictive curriculum, and class sizes larger than the small sizes promised.

With a larger school size than was specified and with teachers’ perceptions that the school was not a small learning community, Thurgood Marshall did not appear to be fully implementing its restructuring plan.

BCPSS Restructuring Results

Most of the teachers, school leaders, and district administrators interviewed noted that the stagnant achievement in BCPSS schools was the result of numerous causes, including many beyond the purview of school

reform. Furthermore, most interviewees mentioned that the needs of BCPSS schools were so great that it would be unreasonable to expect any particular reform or restructuring effort to succeed instantly where others have failed for decades.

Marsha Taylor, former district director of school improvement, observed that “most of our schools stay in restructuring, so it doesn’t seem like any [alternative governance mechanisms] are all that effective.” The restructuring efforts themselves are not to blame, she said; rather, there are so many deeply embedded issues in Baltimore City, like teacher turnover and student mobility, that even if instruction improves the barriers are high. “Schools are getting better, but you’ve got things outside the school that are impacting inside,” she explained. Taylor expressed the belief that an emphasis on schools making data-driven instructional decisions is more important than the specific restructuring plans.

Additionally, Taylor said that her work was not adequately supported by either BCPSS or MSDE and that too few financial and human resources are available to support schools in restructuring. She added that it is unreasonable to expect seven individuals to adequately support all of the restructuring schools in BCPSS because they are stretched too thin:

I think this office is understaffed. You need more people so that you can really get in there to be a part of the instructional leadership team meetings—to be a part of the discussion and to ask the right questions to really move the group along.

Generally speaking, district officials reported that BCPSS schools in restructuring were improving. But the individuals we interviewed rarely cited restructuring plans as the reason for school success, when applicable. When asked what it would take for their schools to make AYP and exit restructuring, most BCPSS principals and teachers interviewed said more money was needed for additional instructional programs and after-school programs, smaller class sizes, or incentives for teachers to work in restructuring schools.

Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Anne Arundel County contains urban, rural, and suburban areas. Its northern tip adjoins the southern edge

of Baltimore City, and its eastern border lies along the Chesapeake Bay. Anne Arundel County is home to the state capital of Annapolis and the state's major airport.

BACKGROUND ON ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY AND ITS SCHOOLS

Anne Arundel County Public Schools serve a student population that is 71% white and 22% African American. About 18% of AACPS students are low-income. Fourteen of the district's 121 schools were Title I schools in 2006-07.

In 2006-07, AACPS had nine schools in improvement. Only two of the district's Title I schools have been in improvement since the advent of NCLB; one exited improvement in 2005, and a second was identified in 2007. Based on 2006 assessments, the Anne Arundel County Public Schools made AYP as a district.

AACPS did not have any schools in restructuring planning or implementation in 2006-07. However, Annapolis Senior High School, which was in corrective action that year, began to implement a comprehensive restructuring plan that included zero-basing the entire school faculty and staff. Annapolis Senior High School is "a unique school, with unique students," said Dr. George Arlotto, the district's director of high schools. With a minority student enrollment of 57%, including 44% African American students, Annapolis Senior High is more heterogeneous than the district's other high schools.

Annapolis Senior High School did not make AYP based on 2007 assessments, and is currently in restructuring planning.

DISTRICT STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOLS IN IMPROVEMENT

A new superintendent, Dr. Kevin Maxwell, came on board in AACPS in 2006. According to Maxwell, he did not change anything in the curricular office in his first year in the district and kept most of the supports and guidance for schools in improvement the same. But the new administration did introduce some additional strategies and supports for schools in improvement. Because of his four-year contract, Maxwell noted, he felt a certain amount of pressure to make "a bit of a difference" quickly.

Office of Continuous School Improvement

In the summer of 2006, AACPS established the Office of Continuous School Improvement (OCSI), which was created by reorganizing the work of existing district staff and involved no additional monies or staffing. The office is currently staffed with three senior managers—one who works with middle schools, one who works with high schools, and one who addresses strategic planning needs. These individuals help schools in improvement develop and implement their school improvement plans, assisting schools with analyzing data and identifying students who need interventions. According to George Arlotto, the senior managers are also the "eyes and ears" for the central office, letting him know when to devote additional supports or resources to schools. Lynn Whittington, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, noted that the function and purpose of the Office of Continuous School Improvement continue to evolve.

AYP Content Area Specialists

AACPS established four full-time non-teaching positions called AYP Content Area Specialists, one for each of the HSA-tested subjects. The AYP specialist position is designed to function as a teacher mentor and coach and to assist with identifying students who need more support or assistance to pass the HSAs. According to Jan Mills, senior manager of secondary school improvement, in 2006-07 the AYP specialists conducted demonstration lessons, helped teachers develop lesson plans, worked with teachers on continuous student assessment, and improved student engagement.

Instructional Program Reviews

The AACPS Division of Curriculum and Instruction conducted Instructional Program Reviews of all district schools in corrective action or year 2 of school improvement. This review was intended to assess teachers' adherence to the district curriculum and pacing guides, the quality of instructional delivery, and the level of student engagement. The review team observed classroom instruction in all subjects and in special education and English as a second language.

SUPPORTS AND RESTRUCTURING AT ANNAPOLIS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

On top of the assistance made available to all district schools in improvement, AACPS provided Annapolis Senior High School with unique types of support. “What we are doing over there is a much different type of support than what we’re doing in some of the other schools at this time,” said Lynn Whittington. “It has to be more intense.”

In late January 2007, Superintendent Maxwell publicly announced his plan to initiate a massive restructuring of Annapolis Senior High. Although the school was not officially in restructuring, Maxwell chose to make drastic changes before the state required the school to do so. According to numerous district officials, Maxwell had been in serious discussions about how to make changes at this high school from the moment it entered corrective action. District officials noted that Maxwell sought input from a variety of people and took a long, hard look at a wide range of data. Although Maxwell consulted his colleagues at AACPS and talked with Don Lilley, the school’s principal, about his thoughts on improving student achievement, Maxwell ultimately made the final decision alone to restructure the school.

Maxwell said that the main reason he chose to restructure Annapolis Senior High before the state required it was to take responsibility for his schools rather than abdicate control to the state: “I’d rather be in control of the destiny of the schools in this district than to have somebody else in control of it.”

District Supports for Annapolis Senior High

The district provided four unique supports to Annapolis Senior High that, although not directly part of the restructuring plan, were intended to improve instruction, raise achievement, and lay the groundwork for restructuring.

First, the district’s senior manager of secondary school improvement and all four AYP specialists spent all of their time during the second half of the school year with Annapolis Senior High.

Second, the district set up bimonthly meetings with Principal Lilley and an Achievement Steering Committee, consisting of assistant superintendents and other key district-level officials. At these meetings, par-

ticipants planned for the next school year, and Lilley made requests for resources and reported on the school’s progress with restructuring.

Third, in spring 2007, the district assigned a retired AACPS high school principal to serve as co-principal and run the day-to-day operations of the school, freeing Lilley to work on rehiring staff and preparing for school year 2007-08. Lilley said he was pleased to have the assistance, adding that “I could not do it all.” George Arlotto concurred, noting that “interviewing for almost 200 positions is a greater challenge when you’re also trying to run your school.”

Fourth, the district began revising the Annapolis Senior High School handbook to serve as a guide to the district’s expectations of teachers in the substance of their job—specifying, for example, what good instruction looks like—as well as the logistics.

Lilley described the support he received from the district as outstanding and said he has not wanted for anything in his efforts to improve student achievement:

The superintendent said, “You need to help these children. We need to get the school where it needs to be . . . You tell me what you need. You make it happen. You ask for my support, it is there.” And I must say there hasn’t been a thing I’ve asked for so far I haven’t received, and that tells me I have support.

Restructuring Strategies at Annapolis Senior High School

The restructuring effort at Annapolis Senior High has two major components—zero-basing the staff and administration and developing new teacher contracts for staff.

Zero-basing

District officials maintained that zero-basing the school staff is very important to reforming a school because requiring staff to recommit to a school makes it easier to implement new programs. In addition, George Arlotto explained, “We wanted to give [the principal] the opportunity to have his own team rather than the one that he inherited.”

The district’s approach to zero-basing required all teacher and administrator positions to be refilled. Every position, from school principal to classroom teacher, was consid-

ered open. According to district officials, all administrators and teachers were encouraged to reapply for their jobs but with no guarantees they would be rehired and with the understanding that everyone would have to go through an application and interviewing process. Any staff members who chose not to reapply at the school, or who reapplied and were not rehired, were guaranteed a position at another AACPS school.

District officials first interviewed for the position of school principal. Don Lilley, who had been principal at the school for three years, chose to reapply for his job, was interviewed along with four other candidates, and was rehired. Next, Lilley and a district team of interviewers replaced the bulk of the assistant principals with candidates from other AACPS schools. This new leadership team began working with Lilley on March 1, 2007. Lilley and the district team then hired department chairs and filled the classroom teacher positions.

The district was very involved in restaffing Annapolis Senior High. In addition to organizing the interview process and interview team, AACPS also put together a mini-job fair, before the districtwide job fair, to pre-screen candidates inside and outside the county who were interested in working at this school.

According to Lilley, 71 teachers, or 66% of those employed at Annapolis Senior High during 2006-07, chose to reapply for their jobs, and 90% were rehired. An additional 43 teachers were hired from outside the school. Four assistant principals reapplied for their jobs, and two were rehired. Four additional assistant principals were hired from other AACPS schools.

New teacher contracts

While the zero-basing of the staff received the greatest amount of attention from the community and the press, a second significant feature of the superintendent's restructuring plan was a new teacher contract, negotiated only for teachers employed at Annapolis Senior High School. The new contract included the following features:

- A 12-month work year instead of a 10-month one
- A three-year agreement to remain at ASHS
- A one-time \$2,500 signing bonus

- A longevity stipend of \$3,000 per year for three years
- Cash bonuses if the school makes AYP of \$1,500 for the first year, \$2,000 for the second year, and \$2,500 for the third year

All teachers who signed contracts to work at Annapolis Senior High were guaranteed from \$5,500 to \$7,000 in bonuses in 2007-08; an additional \$3,000 to \$5,000 in 2008-09; and an additional \$3,000 to \$5,500 in 2009-10. Thus, over the course of three years, teachers were guaranteed between \$14,500 and \$20,500 in bonuses. Furthermore, the pay rate for all teachers at the school rose by about 20% because their contract requires them to work for an additional two months.

According to Kevin Maxwell, the bonuses in this new contract were designed to encourage teachers to come to the school, provide them an incentive for staying, and reward them for meeting goals. The bonuses were an important feature of the restructuring plan, said Maxwell, because the district wanted "an attractive package for people who were really interested in doing the right thing."

Still, these bonuses will be extraordinarily expensive. The district will need close to \$2.5 million to pay the approximately 120 individuals eligible for all of the bonuses, not counting the pay increases associated with the longer teacher work year. AACPS officials admitted frankly that they were not quite sure where they would find the funds for the bonuses. At the time of our interviews, district administrators had just learned that the district would not be receiving adequate funds from the county executive's budget to support the restructuring of Annapolis Senior High. But the superintendent remained committed to his plan, as his comment makes clear:

We've got to sit down and look at our priorities, but I'll tell you [the bonuses are] a priority, and it will be funded, and what we do without in order to fund it is what the real question becomes. We just have to figure out what we are going to have, what we're not going to have, but we are going to have the money to pay for Annapolis High School and we'll go from there . . . And I've been assured by my financial people that we can make this work.

Additional restructuring efforts

All of the AACPS district officials interviewed for this study acknowledged that zero-basing in itself is not enough to turn around Annapolis Senior High School. Lynn Whittington said it is important to ask, “When the students walk in the door, how is it going to be different?”

At the time of our interviews, AACPS officials and Don Lilley were still developing the new programs and mission for ASHS. However, the following programs had already been decided on and were slated to begin in 2007-08:

- A 9th grade academy designed to provide a small learning community and additional supports for first-year high school students, to enable students to build relationships with the staff and maintain a connection to the school
- Academic advisory periods that will provide students with safety nets and a connection to a caring adult
- Project-based learning activities integrated into the day

Reactions to Restructuring

The principal of Annapolis Senior High School characterized the staff reaction to the restructuring as “outrage” and noted that everyone on staff took the superintendent’s decision personally. The teachers interviewed concurred. “There’s a great deal of anger and also a great deal of apprehension,” said one teacher. At the time of our interviews, the staff at the school—whether or not they chose to reapply and whether or not they were rehired—were generally very unhappy with the whole process of zero-basing, and morale at the school was very low.

One of the teachers’ greatest complaints was that there was very little communication about the whole restructuring process, beginning with how they were notified about restructuring. All of the teachers interviewed told the same story about the superintendent’s announcement of the zero-basing policy. One teacher described it in this way: “The superintendent comes in, he says, ‘We’re going to zero-base the school; pamphlets at the back. Thank you very much.’ He didn’t even stay to answer any questions.”

The teachers also said that throughout the hiring process, they had not been told why the superintendent decided to zero-base the school.

Several teachers interviewed pointed out that they didn’t have a problem with the zero-basing itself but were instead upset by the change in their contracts. One teacher estimated that about half of the teachers who chose not to reapply did so because they could not rearrange their schedules to work 12 months or were not able to commit for three years.

Furthermore, the turmoil surrounding zero-basing—both the chaos related to interviewing and the discontent among teachers—became all-consuming, to the point that it interfered with the educational program. One teacher described the situation in this way:

Since January, all the programs that the English department had in place stopped. It gave me the feeling that people felt, “Well, if I’m not going to be here, then I’m not accountable.” I feel like the kids deserve a lot more than what we’ve been giving them since January.

Sustainability of Reforms at Annapolis Senior High

Two striking features of restructuring at Annapolis Senior High School were the expense and preemptive nature of the zero basing. Those two factors raise issues about the sustainability of such a reform and whether AACPS’s actions will actually forestall actions from the state.

As a first issue, there is a real question about the sustainability of a restructuring effort as expensive as the Annapolis one. Maxwell readily admitted that he has been able to focus this kind of attention on Annapolis Senior High School because he is working only with one school:

If I had eight schools I was looking at, the amount of money that I’m proposing to spend at Annapolis High School, I couldn’t spend in eight schools . . . there is no way they have that much money.

Both George Arlotto and Lynn Whittington said they believe AACPS has a responsibility to support any other school that enters corrective action as much as it has supported Annapolis Senior High. However, they hoped that districtwide initiatives like the AYP special-

ists and the Office of Continuous School Improvement will prevent other schools from needing such extensive intervention.

Second, although AACPS made no formal agreements with MSDE regarding what happens if Annapolis Senior High enters restructuring implementation, Maxwell said that he had many conversations with State Superintendent Nancy Grasmick, and she was supportive of his efforts. Still, there are no guarantees that MSDE will not require additional restructuring efforts if the school continues to miss AYP targets. District officials were working from the premise that their proactive measures to restructure the school would be taken under advisement by the state. George Arlotto explained:

So, we believe that we can make a pretty good case for it not being appropriate for the state to restructure the school . . . but rather they would look favorably on the fact that we've already taken that step and that they would give us time to see if it works. Our hope is that if they see the drastic measures, they're less likely to step in and do what they want.

Arlotto further noted that the district will keep looking at Annapolis Senior High; without future improvements, the three-year plan could change.

Baltimore County Public Schools

In the Baltimore County Public Schools, just over half (54%) of the district's students are white, and 38% are African-American; 31% are low-income. Of the district's 169 schools, three are Title I schools.

BCPS SCHOOLS IN IMPROVEMENT AND RESTRUCTURING

Based on 2006 assessments, the Baltimore County Public Schools met its AYP targets for the district as a whole, but several of its schools did not. In 2006-07, BCPS had 13 schools, including all three Title I schools, in various stages of NCLB improvement.

One of these 13 schools, Woodlawn Middle School, was in restructuring planning in 2006-07. A Title I school serving grades 6 through 8, Woodlawn is located in southwest Baltimore County, less than a mile and a

half from the Baltimore city limits. Its population closely resembles that of many urban Baltimore schools. In 2006-07, 95% of the school's nearly 800 children were African American, and about 68% were low-income.

In 2006, Woodlawn Middle School made AYP in all areas, so it remained in restructuring planning for a second year. In 2007, the school missed AYP targets for multiple subgroups in both reading and math and entered restructuring implementation.

Woodlawn Middle School's restructuring plan included replacing all or most of the school staff as the alternative governance mechanism. Although not required to do so, the school implemented its restructuring plan in 2006-07, at the discretion of the superintendent, while it was still technically in the restructuring planning phase. According to Principal Brian Scriven, the superintendent made this decision because he felt the school had been neglected for some time, and "there was no need putting something off something that needed to be done anyway." Scriven further explained that the main objective of zero-basing the staff was to ensure that the individuals who worked in the school were a true match for the building.

DISTRICT STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOLS IN IMPROVEMENT

Like the other districts we studied, BCPS provided support for schools to operate after-school and weekend tutoring programs, conduct systematic data analysis, and give additional instructional support to students with the greatest needs.

Supports for Schools in Improvement

Close to half of the BCPS schools in improvement, including Woodlawn Middle School, are located in the county's Southwest Area, an administrative division of the district. These schools have served as pilot sites for several programs that the district was planning to roll out for all schools, including the following:

- **Focus plans.** Woodlawn Middle School continues to have a focus plan that identifies its most deficient academic area and includes a plan for addressing the deficiency and a tool for monitoring progress. According to Manuel Rodriguez, Southwest Area assistant superintendent, the focus

plans identify instructional interventions to help students performing at a basic level on the Maryland State Assessment improve in areas where they are “deficient.”

- **Short-cycle assessments.** Short-cycle assessments are formative assessments, aligned with the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum, that are administered every four weeks. These assessments allow schools to determine whether students are acquiring the necessary curriculum knowledge, Rodriguez explained. The assessments are also used to determine student placement in the new period at the end of the day (see below).
- **Condensed schedule.** Woodlawn Middle School has condensed transition periods between classes and lunch and has taken a minute or two from each classroom period to create an additional 40-minute period at the end of the school day. During this period, students are assigned to acceleration, remediation, or enrichment classes based on their short-cycle assessment performance. These classes focus on reading two days a week, math two days a week, and science one day a week.

Zero-Basing

According to Manuel Rodriguez, BCPS decided to engage in zero-based staffing at Woodlawn Middle School to ensure a high-quality teaching staff:

Teachers are the most vital element in any classroom, and the superintendent wanted to be sure that we had teachers that were caring, empathetic, sensitive to the needs of the kids, and that in reality wanted to be there.

As part of the Woodlawn restructuring, BCPS provided a one-time stipend of \$5,000 for teachers and \$2,500 for support staff hired to work at the school, Rodriguez explained.

According to Brian Scriven, Woodlawn’s zero-basing process required all persons associated with the school to reapply for their jobs, including the principal, administrative team, teachers, custodians, secretaries, and support staff.

Principal Scriven was the first to be rehired. He then proceeded to hire a new school staff with a great deal of

support from the district, he said. Scriven described the process as collaborative: BCPS human resources officials screened candidates, and the district provided interview teams.

Most of the instructional positions at Woodlawn Middle School (60) were filled by staff who had already been teaching at Woodlawn. An additional 23 new teachers were hired. Scriven said he was looking for staff who would buy into the same vision and commitment to high expectations for all students. “The zero-basing enabled people to have a clear understanding of the vision, of the direction, and then to make an educational choice for themselves” based on the information presented, he explained. Scriven described the rehiring process as a burdensome one involving “long hours” of interviewing and setting up schedules, but a positive experience overall:

I feel that the campus is moving forward because we have so many more individuals who are sharing a vision, and that’s so invaluable, so very beneficial. So yes, tedious, a lot of time, but when you look at the fruits of that . . . I’d do it again, bottom line, if necessary.

Other Restructuring Efforts

In addition to zero-basing, Woodlawn Middle School implemented several programs and initiatives aimed at improving student achievement:

- A college preparatory program using strategies developed by the College Board
- A reorganized schedule to create greater collaboration time for teachers
- Action teams to monitor implementation of the school improvement plan, particularly in the areas of professional development, curriculum and instruction, parent involvement, and school safety
- A Principal’s Cabinet composed of randomly selected students who provide input directly to the principal on school matters and school improvement
- A community task force to communicate with local stakeholders about school progress
- A partnership with the University of Maryland–Baltimore County to improve education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

- The AIMS program, which works with Woodlawn’s feeder elementary schools to identify incoming 6th graders who need additional supports in reading or math

Early Results

At the time of our interviews, Woodlawn Middle School was in the middle of its first year of implementing its restructuring plan. Before the administration of the 2007 MSAs, Scriven was optimistic about the results, noting that the school had made progress before zero basing and now had all of the right people on board to keep the positive trends going. He elaborated:

We made AYP last year while we were getting ready for restructuring. So that does speak to the abilities of a lot of the staff members that were already in place. Now it’s just that continuum of moving forward and having folks that believed in that vision . . .

Although Scriven expressed high hopes for the success of zero basing, he pointed to the short-cycle assessments and focus plans as the changes that were likely to have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Although it remains to be seen what impact the restructuring efforts will have on student achievement, the school did not make AYP and entered into restructuring implementation.

Conclusions

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, very few Maryland schools in restructuring implementation have improved student achievement enough to exit school improvement, and many individuals interviewed for this report acknowledged that restructuring efforts do not appear to be having a great impact on schools’ ability to meet AYP targets. It is unclear why this is so, but the individuals interviewed suggested several possible explanations.

Several interviewees mentioned that restructuring schools struggle with many factors external to school reform efforts, such as socioeconomic influences and family conditions, and that these may have a greater impact on student performance than any school reform effort. These factors are not targeted by NCLB and are

difficult to address inside and outside of school. School restructuring may not be a sufficient strategy help schools make AYP in the face of these challenges.

Case study participants also pointed to the wide variety of activities taking place in schools in addition to NCLB restructuring plans, such as tutoring, increased math and reading time, diagnostic assessments, and a focus on the “bubble” students. Interviewees felt that these may have an impact on student performance that is as great as or greater than any alternative governance mechanism. The multiple approaches being used to improve student achievement may detract from each other or may confound any explanation for school improvement.

Lastly, the alternative governance options available to Maryland’s restructuring schools may not be effective approaches to substantially raise student achievement. Thus far, MSDE has deemed several restructuring options as unsuccessful—notably the turnaround specialist and Baltimore’s Blueprint for High School Reform—and has indicated that from the state’s perspective, all alternative governance mechanisms are not sufficient change agents for schools.

Maryland is still searching for the right combination of alternative governance options and supports to improve restructuring schools. To date, the state has not required schools that are implementing restructuring plans but not making AYP to change their alternative governance. However, it has taken steps to provide greater support and technical assistance to those schools.

No definitive explanation has emerged for the lack of progress in Maryland’s restructuring schools. The state of Maryland and the four districts profiled in this report are all taking active steps to improve the results of restructuring. It appears as though everyone is attempting to learn from the early experiences of schools in restructuring to increase the likelihood that these schools will make substantial academic progress in the future.

MSDE and the districts with schools in restructuring are becoming more actively involved in managing restructuring. Whether through regulating reform options, centralizing support, providing additional oversight of alternative governance, or concentrating resources, restructuring schools in Maryland received a great deal of focused attention during the 2006-07 school year.

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