“Restructuring” is the controversial last consequence under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for schools that fail to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward their state’s student achievement targets for five or more years. The sanctions associated with restructuring, from replacing the school’s staff to implementing a new curriculum, are intended to revive ailing schools and result in dramatic increases in student achievement. Does NCLB provide the framework and resources needed to truly change schools? If not, what can be done to help schools in restructuring meet AYP targets and improve as intended?

To explore these questions, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted a study in fall 2004 of schools undergoing restructuring in Michigan, one of the first states in the nation to have schools facing this consequence. We described our findings in a 2004 report, *Makeovers, Facelifts, or Reconstructive Surgery: An Early Look at NCLB School Restructuring in Michigan*.

This year, in August and September 2005, we returned to Michigan to learn more about how restructuring has progressed and how well school districts and schools have performed under NCLB’s ultimate sanction. This report discusses what we learned.

**SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS**

Several key points emerged from our analysis of restructuring in Michigan:

- **Most restructured schools made adequate yearly progress.** Based on 2004–05 testing, 85% of the Michigan schools in restructuring—or 113 schools out of 133—improved student test scores enough to make AYP. Of these 133 restructured schools, 20%, or 26 schools, made AYP for two consecutive years and moved out of restructuring altogether in 2005–06. The majority—87 schools, including Brownell Elementary in Flint—met AYP targets for the first time based on 2004–05 testing but remain in restructuring until they make AYP for two consecutive years. Although this progress is encouraging, some increases in the percentage of students passing state tests may be due to factors other than restructuring efforts, such as federal and state policy changes that have made it easier for schools to demonstrate AYP.

- **There are no miracle cures, but multiple strategies are better.** Getting out of restructuring takes more than simple fixes, such as replacing the principal or appointing a governance board. Although either of these steps alone would meet the NCLB definition of restructuring, our analysis shows that districts that implemented four or more reforms over the past two years were significantly...
more likely to meet AYP targets in 2004-05 than those implementing fewer reforms. The majority of the schools that moved out of restructuring implemented multiple changes, as illustrated by the experience of Hillside Elementary in Harrison. Still, some schools with multiple reforms had difficulty raising achievement enough to meet NCLB targets. In fact, many schools, including Willow Run Middle School in Ypsilanti, raised achievement in at least one subject but did not meet all subgroup targets.

- **No single strategy was most effective.** Of the options offered to Michigan schools in restructuring in 2004-05, the more popular choices with schools were “implementing any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school,” chosen by 93% of schools; “appointing a new principal,” chosen by 59% of schools; and “employing a coach from the Coaches’ Institute,” chosen by 17% of schools. No single strategy was significantly more predictive of whether a school made AYP based on 2004-05 test scores. However, the restructuring strategies listed by districts on their grant applications may not have been the only reform strategies in play at these schools. Also, our analysis is limited due to small sample size and does not account for other factors, such as how close each school’s test scores were to AYP targets.

- **Grants help leverage change, but funds in some schools are insufficient.** The Michigan Department of Education is using federally funded school improvement grants to help leverage change in restructuring schools. To receive these grants ($45,000 per school for 2005-06), schools must submit an application to the state that describes their restructuring plans in detail. According to state officials, many schools have been told to revise their plans before the state will release the grant funds. District officials said they appreciated these grants, but felt that even with the additional $45,000, Title I funds were not enough to implement all aspects of their restructuring plans. For example, Brownell Elementary could not afford the increased academic coaching hours the principal thought would be more effective.

- **Little guidance is available for year 6 schools.** For the six Michigan schools in year 6 of the school improvement process, the NCLB law is silent on what to do next, and the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has offered little guidance, according to state officials. In Michigan, these schools will still be eligible for school improvement grants, but the director of the Michigan Office of School Improvement plans to review these applicants very carefully. The state department has developed a protocol for auditing schools in what the state calls phase 6. The audit includes interviewing the principal and school staff, providing a report of the audit findings and recommended areas of focus for the school year, convening a group of stakeholders to support the plan’s implementation, and bringing in a turnaround specialist to help the school with its efforts.

- **The state is taking a more active approach to sharing lessons learned.** In spring 2005, the state department of education rolled out a new School Improvement Framework. Based on a review of research and best practices in Michigan, this framework provides schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring with an in-depth tool for planning school improvement efforts. The framework goes beyond simply asking schools to choose one of the restructuring strategies listed in NCLB and instead requires discussion of a broad range of areas that research has shown to be important to school improvement—from the developmental appropriateness of teaching techniques to the reliability of classroom assessment tools.
STUDY METHODS

This study of Michigan’s restructuring efforts in 2005 is part of a series. CEP plans to issue similar reports on restructuring in Maryland and California.

This study also follows up on our 2004 study of restructuring efforts in Michigan, cited above, which found that the most popular strategies for restructuring in Michigan were replacing staff and hiring a state-trained coach to facilitate school reform. In 2004, we also observed that some districts used NCLB restructuring to leverage difficult changes, such as replacing ineffective principals and staff. But none of the restructuring strategies was an easy fix, and state and district officials reported that federal Title I funds were insufficient to carry out all the changes needed to truly restructure schools. Our 2004 study did not report on the effects of restructuring on student achievement and other areas because when we did our review that fall, no school in Michigan had been in school improvement for more than five years, and information on the impact of restructuring was not yet available.

Now that many districts have implemented their restructuring plans for at least one year, it is possible to observe early results. This 2005 report includes information about the 133 schools in Michigan that implemented restructuring plans in 2004-05. To examine the progress of restructuring in Michigan, Caitlin Scott, a consultant to CEP, interviewed state department of education officials, local administrators, and teachers in districts with schools in restructuring. She also reviewed state and district documents, such as state restructuring and school improvement policies, state records tracking restructuring implementation, state report cards, and testing results. Both the interviews and document reviews were conducted in August and September 2005.

These preliminary results should be interpreted cautiously, because some schools may need another year or two of restructuring efforts before their work comes to fruition.

FEDERAL RESTRUCTURING MANDATES

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test virtually all students in grades 3 through 8, plus once during high school, and requires all schools and districts to meet AYP targets that will place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students are academically proficient by 2014. States must also provide consequences for schools and districts not meeting AYP targets. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must plan for restructuring. After six consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must implement their plans. In this last consequence for failure to meet AYP, schools and districts must choose from a menu of options designed to completely revamp the school. By federal law, these options include the following:

- 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
- Restructuring the school’s governance arrangement
- 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
Perhaps because these options are designed to radically change schools, none is easy or quick to implement. All require adjustments to schools’ financial operations, and some may require additional resources, particularly if the school must train staff to work together in new ways. As more American schools face restructuring, it will be important to learn from schools, districts, and states that have experienced these changes.

Some states already have schools in restructuring, while others do not. This is because some states began calculating AYP based on data collected prior to NCLB to meet the goals of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. Some states also had more mature testing and accountability systems than others and were better prepared to comply with the NCLB testing requirements. As a result, some states with well-established accountability systems, such as Michigan, California, and Maryland, had schools in restructuring as early as 2003–04, while other states with relatively new testing and accountability systems, such as Idaho, have no schools in restructuring at this point. Under NCLB law, schools in restructuring must make AYP for two consecutive years before they can move out of restructuring.

**MICHIGAN’S RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES**

**AYP Results for Schools in Restructuring in 2004-05**

In the 2004-05 school year, 133 Michigan Title I schools, or about 5% of Michigan’s 2,622 schools, were in the planning or implementation phase of restructuring, based on their 2003–04 test scores. Of the 133 schools, about 4% are in rural areas, and 16% are in suburban areas. The great majority, 80% of the schools, are in urban areas, with the city of Detroit accounting for 50% of the total. Included in the 133 are two charter schools, one in Detroit and one in Lansing. Although the law gives schools up to a year to plan, many schools in Michigan began implementing restructuring during their planning year, according to state and district officials.

The majority of Michigan schools in restructuring have raised student achievement, as the following statistics show:

**AYP based on 2004–05 testing**

- A total of 113 schools, or 85% of the original group of 133, made AYP based on 2004–05 testing, while 20 schools, or 15%, did not make AYP.

**School improvement phases based on 2003–04 and 2004–05 testing**

- Of the schools in restructuring that made AYP based on 2004-05 testing, 26 schools, or 20% of the total 133, also made AYP in 2003–04. These schools moved out of restructuring altogether and are now in phase 0, meaning that they have a clean slate and are no longer subject to NCLB consequences unless they again fall short of AYP targets in the future.

- A total of 100 schools, or 75% of the original 133, remain in school improvement because they made AYP in just one of the past two years. Of these 100 schools, 13 had made AYP for one year in 2003–04 testing but failed to make it in 2004-05. The remaining 87 schools made AYP for one year in 2004-05 after not making it in 2003–04 and must continue with restructuring until they have made AYP for two consecutive years (except for 6 schools in this group that have closed).

- About 5% of the original 133 schools, or 7 schools, failed to make AYP in both the 2003–04 and 2004-05 testing cycles. One of these schools closed, and 6 have moved into year 6 of the school improvement process.
Although these results are promising, they should not be used to draw firm conclusions about school improvement. Changes in ED policy and changes in the state’s accountability plan may have made it easier for some schools to make AYP in 2004-05, even if nothing else at the schools changed. In particular, ED allowed Michigan to apply an error band of two standard errors to each student’s score. Student scores that fall within this error band were counted as proficient in AYP calculations. For 2004-05, without the standard error, 79% of elementary schools and 74% of middle schools would have made AYP. But with the standard error, that figure increased to 89% of elementary schools and 82% of middle schools, according to a chart created for Michigan’s accountability plan.

Even at schools where student achievement increased above the new error band, the extent to which these improvements can be attributed to restructuring alone is unclear. One or two years may not be enough time for schools to fully implement their plans or for new staff to be fully integrated into schools. Moreover, the AYP results described above do not take into account other factors that may influence a school’s ability to raise student achievement, such as funding, school demographics, staff experience levels, community support, and the presence of additional reform strategies not related to the school’s response to NCLB mandates.

State Options for Restructuring

Of the 133 schools that were planning for or implementing restructuring in 2004-05, all but one had state-approved restructuring plans with clear choices for restructuring and received grants of $45,000 to implement these plans. Although all the schools that were required to turn in restructuring plans did so, one school’s plan, as of fall 2005, had not yet included clear choices from among state-approved restructuring options. The number of schools without clear choices has decreased from last year, when there were 8 such schools.

Michigan must earmark $16 million from its 2005-06 Title I school improvement funds for grants to schools in need of improvement, corrective action, and restructuring. An additional $11 million will be added from Title I school improvement funds left over from 2004-05. Schools in years 3, 4, 5, or 6 of school improvement will be eligible to apply for a $45,000 grant to support their improvement efforts.

For schools in year 6, Yvonne Caamal-Canul, director of the Michigan Office of School Improvement, concluded that “there’s no guidance” after searching the law and seeking advice from the U.S. Department of Education. Therefore, the state department of education developed a protocol for auditing schools in phase 6. Schools that have advanced to this level will have less local flexibility for implementing restructuring options than schools in year 5. They will be monitored by the Michigan Office of School Improvement while still being supported by the state’s restructuring grants.

The same amount of funding, $45,000, will be available for schools that were in years 3, 4, or 5 in the 2004-05 school year but are now in phase 0 because they met AYP targets for two consecutive years. This funding is necessary to sustain improvement efforts and help ensure that schools don’t land back on the state list in two years time, Caamal-Canul explained.

To define restructuring more clearly, the Michigan Department of Education elaborated on federal options and added a “coaching” model to the mix. Michigan also chose not to give districts the option of turning the operation of the school over to the state, as the federal provisions would allow. Michigan officials said this option was impractical for the state. “The state does not have the human resources to run individual schools; the state would not see that as its role,” explained Margaret Madigan, supervisor in the Office of School Improvement, Field Services Unit, noting that the state department
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEDERAL RESTRUCTURING OPTIONS</th>
<th>MICHIGAN RESTRUCTURING OPTIONS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCHOOLS USING OPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enter into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school</td>
<td>Appoint an outside expert to advise the school based on its school improvement plan</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appoint/employ an independent turnaround specialist</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn the school’s operation over to a private management company</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reopen the school as a charter school</td>
<td>Close the school and reopen it as a charter</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close the school and reopen it as a complete school of choice within district governance (i.e., a charter school that only district students can attend)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replace all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>Appoint a new principal</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replace most of the staff, including the principal</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replace the staff relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure the school’s governance arrangement</td>
<td>Decrease the management authority at the school level</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restructure the governance of the school by appointing a governing board</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspend the office of the principal; indicate how the school will be governed</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees</td>
<td>Not applicable. The Michigan Department of Education decided that the state did not have the capacity or desire to run individual schools in restructuring.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reform</td>
<td>Appoint/employ a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Extend the school year or school day for the school</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement a new research-based curriculum and provide appropriate professional development for all</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restructure the internal organization of the school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn operation over to the school’s School Improvement Committee/Team</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use an external research-based reform model</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Many schools chose more than one option.

Source: Michigan Department of Education
of education only employs about 200 people. In addition, Madigan said, “We believe that the other options allow positive changes in the school and recognize the strengths that are there.” Table 1 lists Michigan’s elaboration on federal restructuring options for 2004-05 and shows the number of schools selecting each strategy.

While Michigan has worked both to offer a variety of restructuring strategies and to ensure that districts develop effective plans for implementation, some options—most notably, “implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school” and “appoint a new principal”—are clearly more popular with districts and schools than others. In fact, three of the choices—“close the school and reopen it as a charter,” “turn the school’s operation over to a private management company,” and “extend the school year or school day for the school”—were not used by any of the schools in restructuring.

Effectiveness of Common Restructuring Strategies

To see whether any specific strategies for restructuring seemed to help schools improve more than others, CEP examined how many schools using various strategies made AYP. Table 2 lists Michigan’s six most popular restructuring strategies in order of their popularity with districts and shows the number and percentage of schools using each strategy that met AYP targets, based on 2004-05 testing. Many schools opted to implement two or more restructuring strategies simultaneously, so it is often impossible to attribute changes to a particular strategy. For that and other reasons described in the discussion of AYP above, the table should be interpreted with caution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>NUMBER AND % OF SCHOOLS USING STRATEGY</th>
<th>NUMBER OF SCHOOLS MAKING AYP</th>
<th>% OF SCHOOLS USING STRATEGY THAT MADE AYP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any strategy or combination of strategies (state average)</td>
<td>133 (100%)</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>124 (93%)</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint a new principal</td>
<td>78 (59%)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
<td>22 (17%)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an external research-based model of reform</td>
<td>20 (15%)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ an independent turnaround specialist</td>
<td>19 (14%)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure the governance of the school by appointing a governing board</td>
<td>16 (12%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Michigan Department of Education
Although high percentages of schools using each of these popular strategies made AYP, it appears that none of these strategies was guaranteed to improve scores enough to meet AYP targets, especially in light of the caveats mentioned above about attributing causes. CEP did a statistical analysis to determine whether or not the likelihood of a school making AYP using a particular strategy differed significantly from the overall likelihood of a school in restructuring making AYP. Overall, 85% of schools in restructuring made AYP in 2004-05. In other words, these statistical tests examined whether, compared to the overall figure of 85%, differences in percentages of schools making AYP and using a particular strategy were meaningful or could have occurred randomly.

Using the scientific test for significance described above, CEP found that, compared to the general likelihood of a school in restructuring making AYP in 2004-05, no single strategy was significantly more or less likely to be associated with a school making AYP. Although some percentages might seem to differ from the overall figure of 85%, the small sample sizes and the small percentage of schools not making AYP mean that the percentage results could have occurred randomly. The small sample sizes, particularly of schools not making AYP, make these findings tentative, however.

It was not possible to compare any individual strategy directly to another individual strategy using a statistical analysis. Many schools used more than one strategy simultaneously, and sample sizes for schools using just one strategy became too small to be compared statistically. In light of these difficulties with the quantitative data, CEP has also included state and districts officials’ observations about the effectiveness of some of these popular strategies in the sections below.

Replacing the principal

Replacing the principal may be somewhat less successful than other strategies based on the observations of state officials. Of schools using this strategy, 81% raised scores enough to meet AYP targets, a slightly lower percentage than the 85% of all schools in restructuring that met AYP targets, but not a statistically significant difference. In CEP’s 2004 report, Caamal-Canul predicted that relying on simply replacing staff and/or the principal was unlikely to help schools improve. She noted that many districts were having funding difficulties and were unlikely to be able to attract exceptional new teachers and principals, especially to the state’s most troubled schools. Often in Michigan, Caamal-Canul explained, schools with long-term student achievement problems already had multiple open positions each year and regularly lost good principals and more experienced teachers to other districts. “Replacing staff in this climate is not a change,” she said, speculating that this is perhaps why the strategy was less successful.

Caamal-Canul also noted that replacing the principal may be particularly ineffective when it is seen as a quick fix, and the new principal is left on his or her own to solve the school’s problems. “With the right coaching and mentoring, replacing the principal could be effective,” she predicted. This year, the state has convened a “principals’ academy” to improve principal’s leadership skills. In the future this academy might specifically serve principals in schools in restructuring, Caamal-Canul said. Currently, new principals in restructuring schools are not required to have any particular supports or training.

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1 The statistical analysis used Chi squares ($\chi^2$).
2 When strategies were used by 22 or fewer schools, the number of schools (15%) expected to fail to make AYP was less than 5, which is the number traditionally needed for this type of statistical test ($\chi^2$) to be reliable.
Coaching

Like most strategies, two strategies given more support by the state department of education—coaching and appointing a new governance board—had mixed success. With coaching, often the difference between success and failure was the coach’s ability to remain neutral and objective, state officials said. For example, in one school that met AYP targets in 2005-06, a coach helped the school to better coordinate reforms that had previously been well-intentioned but contradictory, according to state officials. “The coach got them focused on a core plan that looked at the data, but the school made the decisions,” explained Ben Perez, who helped train coaches last year through Alliance of Building Capacity in Schools (ABCS), a collaborative of 13 different organizations, including higher education institutions, teachers unions, parent groups, public schools, and professional associations.

“There was a critical friend,” added Caamal-Canul, contrasting this situation with that of other schools where coaches were drawn into building politics. She cited a particularly unfortunate case in which a school hired the district’s former superintendent to be its coach. Then, the new superintendent was fired. “We’re talking about a turbulent district,” she said. “That coach should never have worked in that district. She was too close to staff,” said Caamal-Canul, explaining that cliques within the school and district made cooperation and, thus improvement, very difficult.

The state and ABCS provided coaches with training, which included eight days of regional workshops and four supplemental days of whole group training. The state and ABCS also certified that the coaches were ready to work in schools, but the responsibility of placing coaches was left up to districts and schools, Caamal-Canul explained. Schools hired coaches directly using restructuring grants. “Word gets around about effective coaches,” she said.

In 2005-06, coaches will receive additional days of follow-up training, but no new coaches are being recruited or trained because the supply seems adequate to meet the demand, according to Caamal-Canul. For 2004-05, the state trained 75 coaches. An additional 24 individuals involved in training coaches were also identified as qualified coaches. Of these 99 coaches in the registry in 2004-05, 83 remain active for 2005-06. The others have opted not to work as coaches primarily because they took other full-time jobs, an ABCS official reported.

New governance board

Results of appointing a new governance board were also mixed. “We’ve learned that success is contextual,” Caamal-Canul said. “Not all school cultures are ready for alternative governance.” The new governance boards that were successful tended to have four elements, she explained: institutional formality, regular meeting schedules with a clear agenda, clear roles for members, and a membership that is representative and respected by the community.

The governance board in Wyoming Community Schools is an example of a board with these elements, Caamal-Canul said. This governance board consisted of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, the school improvement coaches, a representative from the district’s Regional Education Service District, a representative from the area university’s college of education, and a representative from the state’s Office of School Improvement. The board not only oversaw decision making at the school, but its members also participated actively in all the school’s improvement planning meetings and
in some grade-level team meetings. “The staff was apprehensive at first,” said Principal Kevin Murphy of Rogers Lane Elementary. “But now they want the board members in the building even more.” He said that because the staff found the board so helpful, he hopes it can continue even after the school exits restructuring.

But even successful governance boards may not become permanent. Harrison Community Schools, which appointed a new governance board in 2004-05 for its elementary schools in restructuring, will not keep the board now that these schools are no longer identified for restructuring, said Harrison Superintendent Chris Rundle. In Harrison, the staff said coaching and other major restructuring efforts, not the governance board, were what turned the schools around.

**Multiple strategies**

While at present no single strategy appeared statistically associated with meeting AYP targets, multiple strategies did seem to be more effective than single strategies. CEP’s statistical analysis showed that districts that implemented four or more restructuring strategies over the past two years (school years 2003-04 and 2004-05) were significantly more likely to meet AYP targets in 2004-05 than those implementing fewer reforms.\(^3\) Compared to the 85% of all schools in restructuring which made AYP in 2004-05, 96% of those that had implemented four or more strategies over the past two years made AYP. Among those implementing fewer than four strategies, only 80% made AYP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Strategies Combined</th>
<th>Number of Schools Using Combination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint a new principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure the governance of the school by appointing a governing board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ an independent turnaround specialist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ an independent turnaround specialist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information collected from the Michigan Department of Education

\(^3\) The analysis used Chi square \((\chi^2); \chi^2(1, N = 133) = 5.97, p = 0.02.\)
Moreover, the majority of the 26 Michigan schools that raised achievement and moved out of NCLB school improvement implemented multiple changes. This finding was corroborated by the observations of Caamal-Canul, who has characterized restructuring as a complex process with no single quick fix.

CEP also analyzed combinations of strategies. Of the 18 different strategies listed by the state, schools used 37 different combinations. Five different combinations were used by five or more schools, as listed in table 3. The remaining 32 combinations were used by fewer than five schools.

CEP found that the most popular combination of strategies, implementing any other major effort that significantly changes the governance of the school and appointing a new principal, was significantly less likely to be associated with schools making AYP in 2004–05.\(^4\) Compared to the 85% of all schools in restructuring that made AYP in 2004–05, 78% of schools using this combination of strategies made AYP. These figures could indicate that this combination was less useful; however, all schools that used this combination but did not make AYP were located in Detroit. Therefore, it is impossible to say whether it was the combination of strategies or other factors in Detroit that accounted for these schools not making AYP. The other combinations were too small to be tested for statistical significance.

The School Improvement Framework

Michigan’s first response to the NCLB mandates was “woe is us, send in the SWAT team,” admitted Caamal-Canul. But as of summer 2005, she said, “I think the response is now more purposeful, more coherent, and more optimistic. We ask, ‘Is this working? How do we know? If it’s not working, how can we change it?’” After several years of working with schools in restructuring, the state department of education decided it was time to codify what the state had learned about school improvement. The state created the School Improvement Framework, a document designed to help schools with the process.

The state’s new framework was drafted between July 2004 and November 2005. After an initial July meeting of 60 representative educators from around the state, the document was fleshed out by a smaller work group of school improvement specialists from intermediate school districts, the state’s regional service providers. The group members based the document on their review of the research on school improvement and what they knew about best practices in Michigan. The document also incorporated existing state and federal school improvement policies.

The Michigan Board of Education reviewed the document in January and February 2005. A series of conferences from May through August 2005 sought input from districts. A national review was completed in November 2005, and the state board is expected to adopt the revised framework in December 2005.

The framework contains six strands, 12 standards, and 26 benchmarks, all shown in table 4. Each benchmark also includes key characteristics and discussion questions. For example, in Strand I (Teaching for Learning), under Standard 2 (Instruction), one key characteristic under the Planning Benchmark is “developmental appropriateness.” Discussion questions designed to help explore how teachers plan developmentally appropriate instruction include, “How are the planned instructional processes and practices appropriate for the levels and needs of all students?” and “How are the planned instructional processes and practices engaging for all students?”

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\(^4\) The analysis used Chi square (\(\chi^2\)); \(\chi^2 (1, N = 133) = 5.37, p = 0.02\).
While the Michigan framework includes the mandates of NCLB, it goes beyond by wrestling with school characteristics that research shows are important but are not as clearly measurable or uniformly interpretable as the characteristics dealt with in NCLB. For example, in Strand III under Standard 1 (Personnel Qualifications), key characteristics required of staff include state certification and NCLB highly qualified teacher requirements, but they also include content knowledge, communication skills, school/classroom management, collaboration, student-centered attitudes, and technology skills.

By including questions that address subjective but important school characteristics, the framework provides a decision-making process that is absent from NCLB legislation. This process individualizes school restructuring plans so they meet the unique needs of each school, explained Caamal-Canul. She anticipated the framework will be used in four ways. First, school staff members will use the prompting questions to discuss their school and make school improvement decisions. Second, officials in the state department of education will use it as a guide for their work. For example, if the state designs professional development for districts and schools, the professional development will be aligned to the framework. Third, it will be used in state grant applications. Applicants are likely to be asked how each funded activity is aligned to the framework and will address weaknesses that staff has identified by using the framework. Fourth, the framework will replace the self-reported school indicators, which have traditionally been part of Michigan’s report card.
The content of the framework came as no surprise to many district administrators. As Michael Flanagan, Michigan’s superintendent of public instruction, said, “It’s like apple pie. Everyone knows what’s in it.” It’s not that people don’t like what research says about how to improve schools, he explained, it’s that making these changes is often complex and difficult.

Several district administrators anticipated that the framework would be useful in getting staff to dig into the hard work of changing a school. “In Michigan, we all know that we have to do these things. The state just keeps coming out with better and better ways to do them,” said Michele Sandro, principal of Hillside Elementary in Harrison, who plans to use the framework with her staff.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RESULTS OF THREE POPULAR RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES IN MICHIGAN

To identify districts to participate in this CEP study, CEP asked the Michigan Department of Education in the summer of 2004 to recommend several districts that were on track in implementing their restructuring plans for 2004-05. From these recommendations, CEP chose to study the Harrison, Flint, and Willow Run school districts because each was using one or more of the four most popular restructuring strategies. The three districts were also chosen because they represented different types of districts: Harrison is rural, Flint is urban, and Willow Run is suburban.

Governance Changes, Coaching, and Other Restructuring Efforts in Harrison

Harrison Community Schools is a rural school district serving 2,122 students in central Michigan. The vast majority of the students, 96%, are white, and about 55% are low-income, so the district faces challenges related to poverty. Due to declining enrollments and fiscal difficulties, the district closed its most rural elementary school building at the end of the 2002-03 school year. The other two elementary schools, Larson Elementary and Hillside Elementary, historically had difficulty meeting AYP targets. Both were placed in restructuring based on 2002-03 state test scores. Both made significant changes during the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. Based on 2004-05 testing, both schools moved off the state’s list of schools in need of improvement. As of the 2005-06 school year, no Title I schools in Harrison are identified for improvement. Hillside, however, will remain eligible for a state restructuring grant because this is its first year after restructuring.

Restructuring governance

Harrison used a variety of strategies to improve its two schools in restructuring. To comply with the NCLB requirements for restructuring, the schools added a new governance board. Superintendent Christopher Rundle appointed this board, which consists of state and local education leaders, to make major decisions about the schools’ operations. Members of the new governing board include Rundle, Harrison’s field services consultant in the state Office of School Improvement, the director of the state Office of School Improvement, the superintendent of the district’s Regional Education Service District, and the president of the district’s teachers union. The board met as needed, with the first meeting in January 2005 and about five meetings total during the year, Rundle said.
While meetings were at times difficult because of the members’ widely varying backgrounds, Rundle said he believed the group was useful. “I think it was valuable in generating ideas and talking about things to try to improve schools,” he said. “The work we did ended up being helpful.”

Choosing the right members for governance boards may be difficult. While Rundle said non-district members brought fresh perspectives, at least one felt removed from the actual processes occurring in schools. “I felt more like an outsider than part of the process,” said governance board member Robert Balwinski, field services consultant for the Michigan Department of Education’s Office of School Improvement. He would recommend that others creating governance boards choose members who are more familiar with the districts they will be governing and that they structure meetings in ways that allow all board member voices to be heard.

Even with these changes, however, Balwinski said he is not sure governance boards hold the key to school improvement. “There is no research that shows that appointing a governance board is a good idea,” he pointed out. “That was part of our problem. We were pioneers.”

Balwinski and others said the governance board was not the primary reason the Harrison schools improved. District officials said the last two years brought a major cultural shift to the district. As Balwinski put it, “The people were ready for change. The data hit them in the face.” Changes in grade configurations, teacher teams, and coaching all had a large impact on the schools and will be continued, officials reported. Now that the schools are no longer in restructuring, however, Rundle said the governance board will no longer meet.

**Grade-level reconfiguration and all-day kindergarten**

In addition to creating the new governance board, the district also changed the schools’ grade-level configuration and created teacher teams, two steps that interviewees felt helped to leverage improvement. Instead of having two schools that both served kindergarten through 5th grade, in 2004-05 the district created three schools within two buildings. Larson served kindergarten and 1st grade. Hillside was divided into two separate schools with two separate principals. The lower school served 2nd and 3rd grades, and the upper school served 4th and 5th. For 2005-06, Hillside will become one school with one principal serving grades 2 through 5.

Prior to these changes, the elementary schools had competed against each other for students and community support. Reflecting the old allegiances, staff and parents initially resisted the new grade configurations. “The first year was gruesome,” said Sandra Bristol, 4th grade teacher at Hillside. “There was historical conflict that went way back. I think we worked on that. I think the community is blending more.” Grade-level teams and training were essential to the schools’ new cooperative approach, teachers said.

As well as rearranging the grades in the elementary school, the district expanded to all-day, every-day kindergarten. Prior to 2004-05, the district offered kindergarten only every other day with alternating Fridays. Unspent Title I funds from the 2003-04 set-aside for choice and supplemental services helped finance the expansion, said Hillside Principal Sandro. All-day, every-day kindergarten will continue in 2005-06. Kindergarten teachers said they noticed a difference in how much students learned when they attended every day. “Kids coming into 1st grade will be at a much higher level,” confirmed Sharon McNutt, 1st grade teacher at Larson, who has observed the kindergarteners.
Teacher teams

Within their new grade levels and schools, teachers were organized into grade-level teams, which met for about an hour and a half twice a month. In addition, cross-grade-level teams met for half a day, once a month to work on math and writing curricula. Restructuring funds provided substitutes for teachers while they were meeting. These teams will continue in 2005-06, although the cross-grade-level teams will meet after school to cut down on substitute time.

Decisions of teachers in cross-level teams changed curriculum and instruction in the schools, teachers said. Curricular teams had funding from the district’s restructuring budget to buy supplemental materials, such as computer software for improving math achievement and math textbooks that matched the texts used in the middle school. These curricular teams bought the materials, passed on information to the grade-level teams, and recommended professional development to support curricular goals.

These teams also helped to facilitate a move toward flexible grouping for language arts and math. In grade-level teams, teachers frequently analyzed student achievement data, grouped their students according to the skills they needed to work on, and then designed lessons to meet the needs of each group. “We’re using assessment to guide instruction,” explained Barbara Elliott, Title I teacher at Hillside.

This flexible grouping is a departure from previous practice. “Before, lots of teachers just taught a cookbook lesson,” said Maureen Conklin, Reading Recovery teacher at Larson. Small group instruction is supported by having Title I and Reading Recovery teachers like Elliot and Conklin work in the classroom alongside the regular classroom teacher. This team teaching made it possible to run several group lessons simultaneously and increased communication and teamwork among staff, teachers said.

Coaching

Using restructuring funds and other grant funds, the district also hired a coach from the Coaches’ Institute to provide professional development for the teams. “People automatically think a group is going to know how to work together,” said Hillside teacher Barbara Elliot. “That’s not true.” The coaches’ work on team building and conflict resolution was essential to the success of the teams, teachers said.

“Our teams have fostered trust,” said Heather Jensen, 5th grade teacher at Hillside, explaining that teachers are no longer hesitant to visit one another’s classrooms and ask for and receive advice on how to improve. “There’s a lot more teamwork and camaraderie. It’s pretty exciting.”

Future focus

Although Harrison staff members are optimistic about their work, they said they would need to continue their efforts to be successful. “The key for us is going to be continued growth,” said Sandro. “There is still some belief that if we just teach to the test we’ll be okay. We still need to change that thinking.”

Funding is also uncertain. Like most districts in Michigan, Harrison has experienced cuts in state funding, said Superintendent Rundle, but the district has adjusted without cutting programs for children. He expressed hope that Harrison’s recent increases in student achievement will stop what had been an enrollment decline of about 50 students per year and perhaps attract additional students from neighboring districts. “Our reputation is going to get us students,” he said, “but not overnight.”
Title I funding to the district has remained relatively flat. Coming off the state’s list of schools in need of improvement will eventually mean a loss of funds earmarked for restructuring. In 2004-05, the district received an additional $90,000 for restructuring. These funds were used for the improvement coach, materials, additional meetings, and the hiring of substitutes for teacher training and team planning times. This year only Hillside will be eligible, and the funding will amount to $45,000. “I do believe we will notice a difference,” Sandro said. “There’s a huge financial support that will be gone.”

Funds from other federal programs, such as a Comprehensive School Reform grant and a 21st Century Schools grant, will help the district take up the slack, Sandro noted. Teachers also said they believed the schools would continue to improve despite this reduction in funding. “The structures are in place. I think we can maintain growth,” Bristol said.

As for teachers, “We’re all making a personal commitment,” added Sharon McNutt, Bristol’s colleague at Larson Elementary. She speculated that teachers would be more willing to give their time to school improvement efforts now that student achievement is clearly on the rise.

Coaches, Turnaround Specialists, and Improvement Committee in Flint

Located in southeastern Michigan, Flint Community Schools is the fourth largest urban school district in the state. Brownell Elementary, in the center of Flint, is a predominantly African American school with high student mobility and high poverty. A former center for heavy industry, the city has been losing population since the decline of automobile manufacturing in the U.S.

Addressing the challenges of poverty and declining enrollment are paramount in the city’s schools, where 68% of students are eligible to receive free lunch and all but one school are eligible to receive Title I funding. All elementary and middle schools receive Title I funding. Based on 2004-05 testing, all elementary schools, including Brownell, made AYP. This is a first for Flint, where elementary schools have typically struggled to meet rising AYP targets. Brownell, for example, had never before met all AYP targets. Despite this improvement, schools like Brownell still face NCLB sanctions because they must meet AYP targets for two consecutive years before they are removed from the list.

Coaching and turnaround specialist

Based on the theories of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Edgar Schein, the Michigan coaching model was created by Michigan’s own educators. The model does not bring in “experts” to “fix” schools, but instead brings in trained educators whose facilitation can help schools fix themselves, state officials said. As a result, each school’s restructuring activities will be tailored to that school’s community. Coaches were trained in 2003-04 by the ABCS collaborative. Schools can use state restructuring funds to hire coaches from this pool.

Coaching was an appealing option for Flint because it focused on making real changes at the school, said David Solis, director of state, federal, and local programs. Flint already had experience with reconstitution, another state program that replaced staff at schools that were having difficulties. But, as Solis explained, “There’s no guarantee when you bring in new people. You can replace people, but if they do the same thing, you’re going to get the same results.” With coaching, the district is “trying to change the culture in the building.” After the success of Flint elementary schools in 2004-05, he said, “We’re now a firm believer in coaching. You can’t just replace the staff.” Instead, training existing staff has proved more effective in Flint, according to Solis.
At Brownell Elementary, Principal Lucy Smith attributes the increase in student achievement to coaching. The school started the year with two state coaches, Marcia Sauvie and Rita Langworthy, but Smith said the state informed her that she could only contract with one coach using the school’s restructuring grant. Therefore, Smith used other Title I funds to employ a turnaround specialist, Elsie Babcock. Both individuals, Sauvie and Babcock, essentially functioned as coaches at the school, although they were funded from different sources and Sauvie spent more time at the school than Babcock.

Sauvie focused on English/language arts and helped set up the “leveled library” of more than 50,000 books in the school; she rated their difficulty so that teachers can easily assign books appropriate to students’ reading levels. Sauvie then helped the teachers learn to use the library and group students for reading instruction. These small reading groups used a rotation of staff that Sauvie organized, rather than just classroom teachers. Groups of six to eight 3rd and 4th graders rotated through 3rd and 4th grade teachers, the literacy specialist, two support staff who worked within the classroom, and Sauvie and Langworthy (before she left the school). Each teacher had every child at least twice a week, which allowed teachers to collaborate on best strategies to serve those student’s needs. “I attribute our success to the wonderful cooperation of the teachers,” Sauvie said. Babcock focused on math and the district’s newly adopted math text. Both coaches provided professional development and assisted the principal and staff as needed. Despite their many responsibilities, the coaches at Brownell said they were not “the boss” at the school. Instead, they helped the school community identify problems and work together to solve them.

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

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

School improvement committee

The strategy of turning over some decisions for improving schools to a school improvement committee is another restructuring option required throughout Flint, district administrators said. The idea is to create a team of people to make decisions rather than just the principal. For example, Solis explained, “All requisitions must be signed by the principal, the [reform] coach, and the school improvement team.”

Using a school improvement team was not as much of a change for Brownell as coaching was, Smith said. “School improvement committees were always designed to improve curriculum and instruction,” she explained. The school has had a committee in place for several years. The school improvement committee at Brownell also produced less change than coaching because coaches can focus full time on school improvement, while most committee members have other duties during the day.

For 2004-05, the committee’s monthly meetings consisted of about nine people, although all school staff and parents were invited to join. The committee included the principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, and the improvement coaches. At the beginning of the year, a parent facilitator also participated but had to stop attending meetings due to illness. Smith said she attempted to get other parents to attend but none did so consistently.
“The committee’s focus was to implement the district’s curriculum and tweak it to our school’s needs,” Smith said. When there were choices of materials or instructional methods, for example, the committee reviewed the choices and made the decision.

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

Smith said the parties were very popular with students: attendance increased and tardiness decreased. Unfortunately, the parent facilitator who coordinated the never-tardy parties became ill and was unable to set up the parties, so the practice ended. While Smith said the committee would like to bring back the parties, there may not be enough resources to coordinate them without a parent.

**Future focus**

Restructuring efforts continue at Brownell for 2005-06, but staff members expressed concern about this year’s tests. The state moved testing from January/February to October, which may pose a problem in Flint and at Brownell in particular. “It seems to me that every time you think you’re making ends meet, they change the ends,” Smith said. She explained that because her students are highly mobile, many students enrolled this fall did not attend the school last year and did not benefit from the school’s restructuring efforts. Evans said she and the teachers are working hard to get students up to speed, but it’s an uphill battle with some. The stress is taking a toll on the school, Smith said.

In addition, this year Brownell will suffer from staff turnover and will lose two teaching positions due to declining enrollment. New staff members did not have the opportunity to participate in the intensive professional development of 2004-05. Smith said she worries about setbacks due to this turnover, although she hopes that coaches will be able to bring new staff up to speed quickly.

Staff funding has been a problem throughout the Flint district this year, Solis said. Title I funds rose between 1% and 2% for 2005-06, reflecting a rise in the district’s poverty rate. But this increase was not enough to offset inflation or increased health care costs for Title I staff, Solis said. While schools like Brownell may have a slight increase in Title I funds, these funds simply won’t go as far, he said.

Despite these challenges, Brownell will continue to attempt to raise student achievement in 2005-06. In English/language arts, Smith noted that writing will be a major emphasis because “the test is really heavy in writing.” In math, the staff will receive more training on how to use the new math texts. Coaches will continue to coach, and the school improvement committee will continue to direct decision making. With all this effort, Evans said, “I believe we’re going to make a difference.”

**Using a Research-Based Model and Replacing Principal and Staff in Willow Run**

Willow Run Community Schools is a suburban district with 2,673 students in southeastern Michigan. It is home to many people who work in Ypsilanti and some who work in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Due to its easy access to these larger cities, Willow Run has a very transient population, and its enrollment and revenues have fluctuated. About 56% of its students are African American, and 41% are white. The district faces some challenges related to poverty; about 63% of students are from low-income families.
Willow Run Middle School was placed in restructuring in 2003-04. Over the summer of 2004, the district built a new building and restaffed the school. This new staff implemented a new research-based curriculum. Although some district officials argued that the new school should get a clean slate for NCLB, state officials determined that the school’s past performance was still relevant to NCLB status. Due to the performance of students with disabilities in math, the school did not make AYP and remains in restructuring for the 2005-06 school year.

**Using an external research-based reform model**

Willow Run’s research-based reform model was developed by a design team made up of teachers, parents, and district administrators. The team met regularly for a year to explore possible reform models and come up with a specific plan that would work for the new school. The reforms chosen were based on proven strategies identified by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, effective middle schools research from the National Middle School Association, and Turning Points research by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In addition, district staff said several of these approaches to learning had been successful in the district’s K-8 elementary school, while the middle school’s past focus on memorizing facts for tests had been unproductive.

Research-based reforms for the new middle school included the following:

- Dividing the school into four small learning communities
- Providing time for teachers to work in teams within the small learning communities
- Creating flexible, block schedules that allow students to study a subject for longer chunks of time than the typical middle school class period
- Developing a new curriculum focused on learning rather than memorizing facts and based on four essential questions:
  - How do students construct knowledge of the world?
  - How do students communicate in the world?
  - How do students consider their place in the world?
  - How do students contribute to their world?
- Adding more exploratory courses, such as choir, digital imaging, keyboarding, and swimming
- Adding a three-year-long “advisory” class, which allows teachers and students to develop long-term relationships
- Creating a handbook and code of conduct agreed on by students, teachers, and parents

Many reforms, such as the small learning communities and new exploratory courses, were also made possible by the physical structure of the new building, which has four separate classroom wings and many technological enhancements.

The curriculum was implemented in 2004-05 but is still in its infancy, according to district and school staff. “Last year at the middle school, the curriculum was basically a draft. A big percentage of the staff caught on and ran with it, but some people didn’t,” said Regina Williams, formerly the curriculum coordinator for the district and now the director of secondary education.
Math teacher Deanna Wright praised the new curriculum for being more student-centered but agreed that the curriculum was still evolving. “We’re still getting some new texts,” she explained, noting that it takes teachers a while to integrate new materials into their classrooms.

The evolving curriculum might partly explain the school’s failure to meet AYP targets and its somewhat flat academic achievement in general. District officials pointed out, however, that the middle school came very close to making AYP. Only students with disabilities in math failed to meet AYP targets. District officials estimated that if only two more of these students had passed, the school would have met the target. Ironically, Williams said, Willow Run has a reputation of having a good inclusion program and attracts students with disabilities from outside the district. Indeed, about 20% of district students are students with disabilities.

Math teacher Wright said the test sometimes didn’t really measure what some students with disabilities knew, because some didn’t take it seriously. Of her special education students in math, she observed, “Some didn’t want to take the test. At least three of the kids I had just refused to try. The test has no value to them.”

In addition, Williams questioned whether the state test is appropriate for all students with disabilities who are required to take it, because it is so far above the level of their school work and therefore is intimidating and discouraging. About testing for these students, she said, “The basic premise is great but the actual test doesn’t serve all students well.”

Replacing the principal and staff

In addition to developing a new curriculum, the district also replaced the principal and much of the middle school staff when it opened the new middle school building in 2004. Many teachers who had taught at the old middle school took advantage of an attractive early retirement package and did not move to the new school. Some teachers did move to the new school, and the remaining positions were filled with transfers and new hires.

While the new middle school staff is beginning to jell, district officials said the transition was not without challenges. “Last year was a new school and had all the problems of a new school,” said secondary education director Regina Williams, noting that some of the teachers had previously taught younger students. In addition to the new curriculum, these teachers had to adapt to students at a different developmental level. While Williams said the teacher teams within the school worked well together, she said she believes the school as a whole has yet to establish an identity.

“Last year was challenging because of the mix of teachers and students,” math teacher Deanna Wright confirmed. She explained that teachers coming from the elementary school knew each other well, while teachers from the old middle school also had established relationships. It took a while to get to know and trust one another, Wright said. Students were in a similar situation and often identified with either the elementary school they came from or with the old middle school. She said this challenge has lessened over time as the new middle school staff and students continue to blend. “This year is much smoother,” she said.
**Future focus**

To help teachers implement the new curriculum more effectively, in 2005-06 the Willow Run district has increased its professional development days from one full day and one half day, to three full days and three half days. Regina Williams expects the professional development to make teachers more comfortable with the new curriculum.

In addition, 2005-06 will be a time to focus on building a schoolwide identity at the middle school. Williams said the small learning communities were great for students and teachers, but the school didn’t come together as a whole. “We ended up creating four small schools. What we’re working on next year is making it one school,” she said. “Staff and students need to think globally.” To do this, the principal will meet with house leaders at least once a week, and several whole school activities will be planned.

While increasing professional development and collaboration hold promise, district officials are concerned about decreasing Title I funding. This year the district received $70,000 less in Title I funding, or about 94% of the prior year’s funding. Although state Title I funding increased overall, state funding decreased under two of the four Title I allocation formulas in federal law. Willow Run lost funds, even though the percentage of students in poverty in the district did not change substantially. As a result of this funding cut, Willow Run had to eliminate Title I teachers at most elementary schools. This resulted in four fewer teaching positions in the district as a whole.

Like Flint, Willow Run is also concerned about the AYP implications of the state’s shift in testing dates from January/February to October. “We’ll be comparing apples to oranges,” said Lana Tatom, director of elementary education and state/federal grants. While Tatom supports the idea of using tests for accountability and decision making, she said fluctuations in state and federal AYP policies make it difficult to use test data. “We’ve been aiming at a moving target,” she said, adding that “it doesn’t seem fair that AYP is being calculated differently in different states.” Due to this perceived lack of consistency in NCLB testing, the district is looking at other assessments to track student progress, such as the STAR assessments that are used to place students in Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math and the ongoing assessments that accompany these two accelerated programs. Tatom explained, “As we become more honest with where students are, we’ll make more progress.”

**CONCLUSION**

Far more Michigan schools in restructuring made AYP in 2004-05 than in the previous year. While these results are encouraging, some improvement must be attributed to changes in state and federal AYP policies, and some may be due to factors beyond the scope of this study, such as funding, school demographics, staff experience levels, community support, and the presence of additional reform strategies not related to NCLB mandates.
Despite the difficulty of pinpointing the cause of school improvement, CEP’s analysis of restructuring data, combined with interviews of state, district, and school educators, points to several conclusions.

First, simply choosing one of the federal options for restructuring is not likely to guarantee improvement on state tests. In other words, Michigan’s experiences over the last two years show that there are no miracle cures when it comes to turning around a low-performing school. Second, successful restructuring of schools appears to be a complex process involving a number of interrelated reform strategies. Implementing these strategies appears to require intensive planning, teamwork and, at times, resources that are not necessarily provided by Title I.

As Michigan schools use the state’s new School Improvement Framework to help make restructuring decisions for 2005-06, the state and nation will learn more about what it takes to improve schools. Instead of a miracle cure, we are likely to see a holistic approach that involves multiple far-reaching efforts.
CREDITS

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Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in January 1995 by Jack Jennings, the Center on Education Policy is a national independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. We do not represent any special interests. Instead, we help citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create the conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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Does NCLB provide the framework and resources needed to truly change schools?