INTENSIFIED SUPPORT

Changes in School Restructuring in Georgia under the No Child Left Behind Act

September 2009
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**Introduction**

Since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) went into effect in 2002, Georgia has developed a systematic approach to improving schools that have entered restructuring, the final stage of sanctions under the law. NCLB requires dramatic changes to these schools, which have failed to make adequately yearly progress (AYP) on state assessments for six or more years. The details of those changes are left largely up to states and school districts, however. In Georgia, schools in restructuring receive detailed guidance and intensive support from the state. With a relatively small number of schools reaching the restructuring implementation phase—under 50 per year since 2006-07—and with sufficient state and federal funds, the state has been able to intensively intervene in restructuring schools and spur reforms consistent with state priorities for school improvement.

In 2008-09, Georgia further intensified its support for restructuring schools. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education allowed selected states to pilot new approaches to NCLB accountability that include imposing different sanctions based on schools’ needs. Georgia was one of six states approved for the first round of this “differentiated accountability” pilot. (An additional 3 states joined the pilot in January 2009.) Georgia also received an extra $20 million from a new federal appropriation to assist schools identified for improvement under NCLB. Using the additional funds and a revised plan for NCLB accountability, Georgia dispatched additional state personnel to restructuring schools to guide improvements and expanded staff training at those schools to include district leaders and principals from feeder schools.

In this second report on school restructuring in Georgia, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) examined Georgia’s intense and systematic approach to school restructuring. Data for this report were collected by interviewing decision makers at the state and local level, reviewing school documents, and analyzing state test data in the winter of 2008-09. We also conducted case studies of restructuring through interviews with school administrators and staff and document reviews in four school districts—Atlanta Public Schools, Muscogee County School District, Stewart County School District, and Grady County School District—and in eight schools within these districts.

**Key Findings**

Several key findings emerged from our analysis:

- **Most Georgia schools undergoing restructuring in 2007-08 made adequate yearly progress, and a substantial number improved enough to exit restructuring.** Of 46 schools that underwent restructuring in 2007-08, 63% made AYP during spring testing, and 22% subsequently exited restructuring. It remains unclear, however, whether the relatively small number of Georgia schools in restructuring and the high number exiting is due to the success of state interventions and reforms or simply the result of a low bar for proficiency on state tests. Nevertheless, the small number, as well as the state’s willingness to invest additional dollars in supports for schools in improvement, has allowed Georgia to provide a degree of support and monitoring not found in many other states whose restructuring efforts CEP has studied.

- **Under the differentiated accountability pilot, the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) intensified its supports for schools in restructuring in 2008-09.** Interventions that had formerly been reserved for schools that had been in restructuring for multiple years, such as frequent on-site coaching from a leadership facilitator, were extended to schools in their first or second year of restructuring. The extra supports were made possible due to the additional federal funds for school improvement appropriated under section 1003(g) of Title I law.
Middle schools have been more likely than elementary or high schools to land in restructuring. Of Georgia’s 43 Title I schools that implemented restructuring in 2008-09, 33 schools (77%) are middle schools, 5 (12%) are high schools, and 5 (12%) are multi-level schools that include high school and elementary or middle school grades. No Georgia elementary school implemented restructuring in 2008-09. Several state, school, and district officials interviewed by CEP suggested that the larger size of middle schools was a reason for the disparity. Whereas elementary schools often had too few students in a particular subgroup to count for AYP purposes, middle schools more often had subgroups large enough that their performance counted. High schools were less likely than schools serving lower grades to be targeted for state interventions under NCLB, in part because high schools are less likely to receive Title I funds due to their lower percentages of low-income students receiving federal free or reduced-price lunches.

Schools in our case studies focused extra attention on the academic growth of students who were the most likely to help the school make AYP. Middle school teachers and administrators kept a list of “targeted students” who had previously scored just above or below the mark needed to meet standards on state exams that count towards AYP. Nearly all middle schools provided in-school tutoring for these students or made an extra effort to enroll them in after-school programs. The high school in our case studies organized a tutoring period for students in 11th grade, which is the high school grade where test performance counts toward AYP.

At case study schools in restructuring that made AYP, personnel interviewed by CEP most often named five reasons for their success. They noted that (1) teachers carefully tracked student assessment data and swiftly intervened when students fell behind; (2) the school had created extra time forremediating students before, during, or after school; (3) the school had replaced ineffective teachers with effective ones; (4) new teachers had received intensive professional development; and (5) school management had improved. Staff interviewed at case study schools agreed that state support had played a significant role in at least some of these improvements.

Restructuring schools throughout Georgia concentrate on similar instructional strategies to raise student achievement. These strategies include tailoring instruction to a variety of learning levels and focusing lessons on challenging questions that require students to analyze or evaluate information rather than simply recall it. According to state officials interviewed, the common set of strategies is based on “best practice” research and is reinforced through state training, school performance reviews, and on-site coaching from state personnel. School staff interviewed by CEP often found the strategies challenging to implement but believed they would be effective in raising student achievement.

Changes in Identifying Schools for Improvement in Georgia

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test virtually all students annually in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, plus once during high school. It also requires all schools and districts to meet targets for adequate yearly progress that place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students will be academically proficient by 2014. In Georgia, each subgroup of 40 or more students in a school or district also has to meet these targets.

In 2007-08, Georgia’s AYP targets rose for all subjects and grade levels, as shown in table 1. The AYP target in math for grades 3 through 8 did not rise as much as anticipated, however. The state had originally set the bar in math at 66.7% of students reaching or exceeding the proficient level on state tests, but the U.S. Department of Education allowed the state to lower the bar to 59.5% for one year as it rolled out a new math curriculum and a new state assessment. (To make AYP, schools also must comply with the federal 95% test participation requirement and meet a target for either graduation rate or student attendance depending on the school level.)

Georgia schools that miss these proficiency targets can still make AYP if their percentage proficient falls within a “confidence interval” of the target (a sort of margin of error); if the average of their test results over three years meets the target; or if they decrease the percentage of students scoring below proficient and meet other criteria for NCLB’s “safe harbor” provision.
Table 1. Percentage of Students That Must Score At or Above the Proficient Level on State Tests for Georgia Schools to Make AYP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grades 3 to 8</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/language arts</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>59.5%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 11</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/language arts</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: In 2004-05, 66.7% of students in grades 3 through 8 had to score at or above the proficient level on the state reading/language arts test for a school in Georgia to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB.

*The Georgia Department of Education received permission from the U.S. Department of Education to lower the AYP target for grades 3-8 from 66.7% because the state had recently introduced a new math curriculum.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, 2008a.

Changes in the Number of Georgia Schools in Restructuring

Despite the increase in state test score targets in 2008-09, the number of Georgia Title I schools in the implementation phase of restructuring decreased to 43 from 46 the previous school year. Table 2 shows a continuing downward trend in the number of Georgia schools in restructuring implementation (those that have not made AYP for six or more consecutive years and are in year 5 of NCLB improvement or beyond). Since 2005-06, a substantial number of Georgia schools undergoing restructuring have exited restructuring after the end of each school year. However, the percentage exiting declined slightly from 29% in 2005-06 to 22% in 2007-08. At the same time, fewer schools have entered restructuring.

Table 2. Number of Title I Schools in Restructuring Implementation and Number and Percentage That Exited*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2005-06</th>
<th>2006-07</th>
<th>2007-08</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools implementing restructuring</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools exiting at end of school year</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of schools exiting</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: At the beginning of school year 2005-06, 66 Georgia schools were in the implementation phase of NCLB restructuring. Based on tests administered during 2005-06, 19 schools, or 29% of the 66 schools, had improved their performance enough to exit restructuring after the end of the school year.

*Two schools implementing restructuring in 2007-08 were closed by fall 2008 and were therefore no longer on the state’s restructuring list.

Source: Center on Education Policy analysis of unpublished data from the Georgia Department of Education.
Of the 46 Georgia schools undergoing restructuring in 2007-08, 63% made AYP during spring testing. The percentage was equally high for schools in years 7 and 8 of improvement—schools that have been in restructuring for multiple years and that receive the most intensive supports under a special state category that Georgia calls “contract monitoring.” Seven of ten schools in year 8 of improvement made AYP for the first time. As a result, only three entered year 9 of improvement. Table 3 compares the number of Georgia schools in each year of school improvement in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Table 3. Number of Georgia Title I Schools by School Improvement Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Year 8</th>
<th>Year 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-09 (based on 07-08 tests)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08 (based on 06-07 tests)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: During school year 2008-09, 19 Georgia schools were in year 4 of NCLB improvement, which is the planning phase of restructuring. This is the same number of schools that were in year 4 during school year 2007-08.

*Two schools in year 8 were new small schools that enroll 6th and 7th graders from the attendance area of a restructuring school that is being phased out and now serves only 8th graders.

Georgia has shown some progress in math on NAEP since restructuring began, providing another source of evidence, in addition to state tests, that student achievement in that subject is rising. Between the NAEP administrations of 2003 and 2007, the percentage of the state’s students scoring at or above the proficient level in math grew from 27% to 32% in grade 4 and from 22% to 25% in grade 8 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). NAEP reading scores, however, remained flat in grade 8 and increased by just one percentage point in grade 4.

As in previous years, the majority of schools undergoing restructuring are middle schools. Of the 43 Title I Georgia schools implementing restructuring in 2008-09, 33 schools (77%) were middle schools, 5 (12%) were high schools, and 5 (12%) were multi-level schools that include high school and elementary or middle school grades. No Georgia elementary school underwent restructuring in 2008-09.

Atlanta Public Schools Deputy Superintendent Kathy Augustine attributed the disparity in her district—six of eight Atlanta schools implementing restructuring are middle schools—to the focus of district reform...
efforts. After Superintendent Beverly Hall, came to the district in 1999, the system focused first on reforming elementary schools and then turned to high schools because of the opportunity for foundation funding to divide large high schools into smaller learning communities, said Augustine. The district is now planning a Middle School Transformation Initiative, partly in response to the number of middle schools identified for NCLB improvement, said Augustine.

Educators in other case study districts observed that elementary schools, being generally smaller than middle schools, may find it easier to make AYP because their subgroups often fall below the state’s minimum size of 40, making it less likely these schools will be held accountable for subgroup performance in AYP determinations. But when students from several elementary schools feed into one middle school, the subgroups may become large enough to count for AYP purposes. The principal of Washington Middle in Grady County said that this occurred in his school, which is in year 7 of school improvement due to the performance of the subgroup of students with disabilities.

“It’s not necessarily the middle school that’s the problem—it may go back to the elementary,” said Diane Bradford, Georgia’s deputy state superintendent for education support and improvement. And low achievement by subgroups isn’t the only issue; many elementary schools are barely making their schoolwide AYP goals, she said. For that reason, the state is urging districts to make feeder schools part of the reform strategy for any middle or high school in restructuring.

**New Developments in Restructuring at the State Level**

Several new developments affecting restructuring schools have occurred at the state level since CEP’s earlier study of Georgia (CEP, 2008).

**STATE DIFFERENTIATED ACCOUNTABILITY PILOT**

States with large numbers of schools identified for NCLB improvement often have difficulty providing these schools with meaningful technical assistance. The four-year differentiated accountability pilot initiated by the U.S. Department of Education is intended to help states and districts better target their resources by varying the intensity of interventions in schools that narrowly missed AYP and those that missed it by a wide margin.

Georgia used flexibility to create different levels of intervention for schools in years 3 and 4 of school improvement (which Georgia considers the corrective action phase). The state gives schools that came closer to making AYP more autonomy in crafting their corrective action plans than the lowest-performing schools, which must implement corrective actions selected by the state. The U.S. Department of Education also allowed Georgia to switch the consequences for schools in years 1 and 2 of improvement, requiring schools to offer supplemental educational services (tutoring) beginning in year 1 and offer school choice transfers to higher-performing schools beginning in year 2. (The state views tutoring as a tool to help keep schools out of year 2 of improvement and sees the school choice requirement as largely ineffective because many districts lacked sufficient receiving schools for students.)

For schools in restructuring implementation (year 5 and beyond), Georgia’s differentiated accountability plan creates more intensive and uniform intervention. Previously schools had been subjected to progressively more intervention the longer they remained in improvement. Schools in year 5 submitted a restructuring plan and attended mandatory professional development. Schools in year 6 did likewise and also underwent a state review of their school leadership and teaching practices. Only in year 7 of improvement did schools enter contract monitoring, which required them to follow certain improvement strategies such as completing short-term action plans. A part-time state leadership facilitator spent at least two full days a week at the school site to mentor the principal and leadership team. A state contract monitor also visited the school at least every four to six weeks to check the school’s progress in implementing its short-term action plans. Contract monitoring continued in year 8, at which point a school also underwent a second state quality review. As of 2007-08, no school had yet entered year 9 of school improvement, the point at which the GDOE had intended to send a contract manager to guide school improvement in partnership with the principal.
Now, under differentiated accountability, schools receive a similar level of support regardless of the number of years they have remained in school improvement. The contract monitoring stage that formerly began in year 7 now begins in year 5. That means that all restructuring schools are assigned a leadership facilitator—now called a state director—and must sign a contract with the state in which they agree to follow specific improvement strategies in addition to those in their individual restructuring plans. Every school implementing restructuring must create a short-term action plan that is reviewed and revised every four to six weeks under the guidance of a lead state director. In addition, state quality reviews, known as the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS), now occur a year earlier, in years 5 and 7 of improvement rather than years 6 and 8.

STATE INTERVENTIONS

Two developments influenced the GDOE’s decision to intervene more quickly in restructuring schools. First, the extra intervention seemed to make a difference in state test results. Contract-monitored schools received the most intensive supports, including mandatory professional development and on-site coaching for teachers and administrators. In 2008, 12 of 19 contract-monitored schools made AYP, 7 of them for the first time.

Second, funding to expand interventions became available through the additional $20 million in NCLB school improvement funding that Georgia received from the U.S. Department of Education.1 Most of the money went directly to districts with schools in improvement. But the GDOE was able to convince districts with restructuring schools to use a portion of the money to cover the cost of a state director for each restructuring school.

The GDOE initially had planned to hire one full-time state director for each restructuring school in year 7 of improvement or beyond and a part-time state director for each restructuring school in year 5 or 6 of improvement. However, finding qualified individuals to fill these positions proved challenging, and the state was only able to hire 30 state directors to cover 43 schools instead of the 48 directors it had intended. As a result, some schools shared a director. “We tend to not hire unless it’s a great fit and they have the talent to move that school forward,” said Deputy Superintendent Diane Bradford.

Experience at the middle or high school level was a key qualification for state directors. “Most of the chronically low-performing schools are middle and high schools. So we are looking for someone [who] understands that school level,” Bradford explained. The GDOE also looked for former principals or assistant principals with reputations as instructional leaders. However, the relatively low salary likely deterred some potential candidates, she said, and many of those hired were retirees who could afford the modest pay.

The state director serves essentially the same function as the former leadership facilitator, working as a “best practice” coach for the principal and administrative team. But with additional time on site, the state directors can spend more time in classrooms modeling lessons for teachers or observing lessons and offering feedback, said Bradford. Even under state direction, the principal continues to retain the final decision-making authority, she added.

While all restructuring schools are required to sign a contract with the state, the state allowed more flexibility in these requirements in 2008-09 than in previous years. Among other mandates, restructuring schools must still agree to participate in Raising Standards training, which helps staff understand research-based strategies for teaching the new state standards. They must also agree to assess students throughout the year on their progress in meeting the Georgia Performance Standards and hire an instructional coach for each subject in which the school fell short of AYP. But to better customize those requirements, the GDOE’s School Improvement Division sent representatives to sit down with teams at each restructuring school. Staff at some schools complained that the state’s online bank of practice test questions didn’t always match the Georgia Performance Standards. “[T]hey were absolutely right,” said Bradford. Her team allowed schools to substitute tests designed by their districts. In other cases,

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1 In 2007, Congress appropriated $125 million for school improvement under section 1003(g) of Title I, as amended by NCLB—the first time this authority was funded. In 2008, $491 million was appropriated under section 1003(g). States were awarded these school improvement funds through the same formula used to distribute other Title I funds. The 1003(g) funds reached schools and districts beginning in spring 2008.
schools requested that the Raising Standards training be better targeted at their own deficiencies. For instance, some schools that had missed AYP targets only for the subgroup of students with disabilities wanted to focus on strategies to reach those students, said Bradford. “It was, ‘don’t make us go through everything, target what we need,’” said Bradford.

The Raising Standards training underwent a number of changes in 2008-09 in response to feedback from restructuring schools. Workshops are now held regionally rather than at one central location. (Schools had complained that excessive travel time kept teachers from the classroom.) Workshops were also revised to avoid repeating content for schools in their second year of the two-year training. Science teachers were able to attend workshops that focused only on topics they actually taught, such as life science or physical science, rather than be subjected to a broad overview, Bradford said. And, based on the School Improvement Division’s own self-evaluation, the year-long workshop series was streamlined and moved earlier in the school year to heighten its impact on the year’s standardized test results.

The School Improvement Division made another significant change in 2008-09 after realizing that its approach to reform had been too narrowly focused on the principal, according to Bradford. Reform efforts at some schools faltered because too little attention was paid to developing the skills of other school and district leaders, she said. Principals simply cannot accomplish all the necessary management and instructional leadership work on their own, Bradford explained. “They need to have people around to help them. If you put that all on the shoulders of one principal, that’s not going to be successful.”

Last summer, the GDOE organized a training session designed to support a more collaborative approach to school improvement. Using a portion of the additional federal school improvement funds, the state held a week-long summer leadership academy for teams representing 25 restructuring schools in years 7 or 8 of improvement, plus a handful in year 6 that did not make AYP in 2008. Each principal was asked to invite 10 people critical to the school’s success, including “some from central office, an elementary feeder school, the school board, maybe the superintendent,” Bradford said. Training topics included how to improve school culture, how to use data collected during classroom observations to plan improvements in teaching, and how to budget Title I funds to support those plans. “You’ve got to have a fortified group of district people to support these schools and sustain [changes],” she explained. “The state really can only do so much.”

COMMON INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Improving classroom instruction is at the core of the GDOE’s reform efforts at restructuring schools. Professional development and coaching are directed at training teachers and administrators to follow the new Georgia Performance Standards and to use research-based best practices in the classroom. The state’s approach is based on meta-analyses of education research by Robert J. Marzano and colleagues (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Restructuring schools throughout Georgia work on similar instructional strategies. These are introduced in the Raising Standards training and reinforced through coaching from the state directors, professional development from state math facilitators, and the work of state evaluators who complete the Georgia Analysis of Performance on State Standards. Georgia’s Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) also provide professional development on the same strategies to schools in need of improvement. The strategies include the following:

- Differentiating instruction to create a variety of activities aimed at students with different learning levels in the classroom
- Using lesson openings and closings to engage students and give them immediate feedback
- Focusing lessons on essential questions that are central to students’ understanding of the material
- Posing questions throughout a lesson that require higher-order reasoning skills
- Beginning in summer 2009, using commercially published graphic organizers called Thinking Maps that are applicable to any subject and can help students visualize thinking processes
The two urban districts in our case studies had already advocated some of these strategies before the state mandated them. Educators in the Atlanta Public Schools and Muscogee School District said that because the state focused on strategies widely regarded as best practices, local and state reform efforts tended to reinforce each other rather than conflict. For example, the Atlanta Public Schools district evaluates its teachers on a list of 26 best practices that include higher-order questioning and instructional differentiation. In Muscogee County, staff introduced Thinking Maps to its teachers before the state announced its intention to do the same. “Whatever the Georgia Department of Education asks us to do is a best practice in education [and is] usually already included in our plan,” said Harriet Steed, Title I director in the Muscogee School District.

In school year 2008-09, the GDOE began to take an even more systematic approach to spreading research-based teaching strategies, according to Bradford. Previously these strategies had been introduced to teachers, principals, and district staff simultaneously during the Raising Standards training. Now Bradford’s division is introducing new strategies to district staff first, then to principals and finally to teachers. “Principals [and district staff] need to know and get slightly ahead of the teacher if they’re going to lead this initiative,” she explained.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO STATE SUPPORT

Restructuring schools in our case study districts unanimously praised the support they received from the GDOE. State directors got high marks from principals and teachers for thoughtful, focused coaching and a collaborative rather than directive approach.

“The state director that we’ve got now didn’t just come in and beat you over the head and say, ‘Y’all are bad; this is what you’re going to do and you got to do it right now,’” said Lanny Gainous, a 6th grade teacher at Washington Middle School in Grady County. “She said we’re going to work together; we’re going to be a team. That was good for morale.”

Principal Melody Morgan of the Coretta Scott King Young Women’s Leadership Academy in Atlanta said that her director uses the Georgia School Keys, a compendium of effective, research-based practices developed by the state for all Georgia schools (GDOE, 2008b), to help school staff focus on priorities for improvement. “We go through those keys with the state director. She helps us to collect the evidence that demonstrates that we’re working towards meeting the standards. She actually goes into classrooms. She observes practice. She makes recommendations, and at the same time she understands that there is a principal in the building,” said Morgan. “So she’s not here to take over, she’s here to support. And I think the support is incredible.”

Teachers and principals appreciated the support of the state math facilitators. Since many schools are struggling to make AYP in math, the state hired math facilitators beginning in 2007-08 to work with restructuring schools. The facilitators visit each school about twice monthly to model strategies for teachers in upcoming units, observe lessons, and provide feedback to teachers and school instructional leaders. The math facilitator at Kennedy Middle in Atlanta even collects useful math activities, student assessments, and other resources from Web sites and other schools in improvement, said Millicent McCaskill, dean of academics. “She’s awesome.”

The summer leadership academy also won high praise. Principal Arthur Anderson of Washington Middle in Grady County said the workshops helped his administrative team find areas for improvement that they had previously overlooked. Following the academy, his school sought help from its RESA to work with teachers on how to effectively open a lesson—“how to get kids motivated, how to get them interested,” he said. “You’re working with middle-schoolers. [If] you don’t get their interest you’re going to lose them for a whole entire class period. And that time is too valuable to lose.”

Even with state support, staff at restructuring schools reported that changes in teaching practice tended to have a longer implementation timeline than improvements in school management, student supports, or even school culture. In 2008-09, all of the staff we interviewed at case study schools reported good student discipline, strong faculty collaboration, and a range of student supports such as tutoring and mentoring. At a number of schools, the quality of instruction was improved by replacing teachers who lacked a work ethic or basic competence and providing the newly hired teachers with intensive professional develop-
opment. But administrators and teacher leaders at nearly all schools visited found that the strategies advocated by the state were much more successfully implemented in some classrooms than others. Some of the most potentially effective strategies, such as differentiating instruction, are challenging to master, administrators explained. Teachers have traditionally planned and managed one lesson for the whole class, explained Anderson of Washington Middle. “To meet every child on their level in your class—it can be done but it’s difficult,” he said. “We are learning to do it and we’re making some progress.”

CHANGES IN FUNDING TO SUPPORT RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

Total funding to support reform efforts in Georgia schools in improvement rose from $28 million in 2007 to $44.5 million in 2008-09 because of the aforementioned $20 million in additional formula funding for school improvement. Other funding declined slightly as the number of schools in improvement likewise declined from 323 in school year 2007-08 to 307 in 2008-09. Federal law requires states to set aside 4% of other Title I, Part A funds to assist districts and schools in improvement. In Georgia, these funds declined from $16.5 million in 2007 to $14.4 million in 2008. State funding for school improvement also declined slightly from $11.2 million in 2007 to $10.1 million in 2008.

The 2008-09 school improvement funds were used as follows:

- Almost $24.3 million in federal funds was distributed to the 184 Title I schools in improvement that were targeted for monitoring under the statewide accountability system. Of these 184 schools, 43 are Title 1 schools that are implementing restructuring.

- About $5.7 million in federal funds paid for state directors at schools undergoing restructuring.

- Almost $5.2 million in state funds went toward school improvement specialists to work directly with schools in years 3 and 4 of improvement.

- About $4.2 million went to Regional Educational Service Agencies as part of Georgia’s statewide system for providing technical assistance to Title I schools and districts identified for NCLB improvement. Almost all of these schools were in year 1 or 2 of improvement.

- Some $3.5 million in federal funds from 2007-08 was carried over and used for salaries for state directors in schools implementing restructuring.

- About $1.6 million in federal funds was used for state administration related to Title I school improvement.

Restructuring at the District and School Level

In winter 2008, CEP interviewed personnel from four districts and eight public schools in restructuring to see what had changed since we completed case studies in Georgia a year ago. These schools and districts were selected because they serve a large city, a small city, a small town, and a rural area in different regions of the state. Four of the eight schools made AYP in 2008; four did not.

- Kennedy Middle and Long Middle Schools are part of Atlanta Public Schools, a large urban district with 50,000 students. Both participated in last year’s case studies. This year CEP visited two additional Atlanta schools: BEST Academy and Coretta Scott King Young Women’s Leadership Academy. Both are small, single-gender middle schools recently opened to replace a failing school in one of Atlanta’s most impoverished neighborhoods.

- Eddy Middle and Baker Middle Schools are part of Muscogee County School District, a mid-sized urban system serving some 33,000 students from the city of Columbus and several nearby communities, about 100 miles south of Atlanta. Both participated in last year’s case studies.

- Stewart-Quitman High School is located in Stewart County School District, a rural district about 140 miles south of Atlanta. Stewart-Quitman participated in last year’s case studies.

- Washington Middle School is part of Grady County School District. The school serves students from a small town in this rural district about 250 miles south of Atlanta.
COMMON FOCUS ON "TARGETED" STUDENTS IN RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

The No Child Left Behind Act holds schools and districts accountable for increasing the percentage of students who meet or exceed a state-set standard of proficient performance on state tests. In Georgia, this requirement has led to a systematic focus on raising the achievement of students scoring just above or below the proficiency mark. These students are commonly referred to as “targeted students” or “bubble kids.” Every one of our case study schools kept a list of these students, and most of the middle schools gave them preference for after-school remediation or extra remedial time in place of classes such as art, music, or physical education.

Most of the school staff we interviewed acknowledged that, although the lowest-performing students were not excluded from after-school programs, educators made the strongest efforts to enroll targeted students who were most likely to meet state standards as the result of intervention. “We try to place an emphasis on getting those target kids in what we call our ‘safety net’ programs,” said Principal Alonzo James of Eddy Middle in Muscogee County School District.

Stewart-Quitman High, the only high school in the CEP case studies this year, did not focus extra academic support on students just above and below proficiency. Instead, it targeted all 11th graders—the one high school grade tested for NCLB purposes in Georgia—for a daily tutoring class during their homeroom period. (Ninth graders at Stewart-Quitman also got extra tutoring during homeroom to assist them with the state’s newly released math curriculum, which the school considered challenging.)

MAKING AYP IN ATLANTA, MUSCOGEE COUNTY, AND STEWART COUNTY

Four of the five restructuring schools in CEP’s case studies of 2007-08 made AYP based on spring 2008 testing. They include Kennedy Middle and Long Middle Schools in Atlanta, Baker Middle School in Muscogee County, and Stewart-Quitman High in Stewart County. Although these schools made AYP in different ways—Kennedy and Long by meeting state AYP targets outright, Baker by qualifying for NCLB’s safe harbor provision, and Stewart-Quitman by receiving a state waiver—the leaders and staff we interviewed in the four schools often cited similar reasons to explain how their schools improved.

AYP Status of the Four Schools

Based on spring 2008 testing, Kennedy and Long Middle Schools in Atlanta met the AYP targets in all areas. As shown in table 4, Kennedy made a 15 percentage point gain between 2007 and 2008 in the percentage of students meeting the state’s proficient standard in reading, and a 45 point gain in math. Long Middle School had fallen short of AYP in math last year but posted a 12 point gain in the percentage meeting standards in 2008.

In Muscogee County, Baker Middle missed the AYP target for students overall in math and for students with disabilities in reading, as displayed in table 5. However, the school showed sufficient progress with students below the proficient level to make AYP through NCLB’s safe harbor provision.

Stewart-Quitman High in Stewart County also missed the AYP targets in math and English/language arts, as shown in table 6, but the gains for students below proficient were sufficient for the school to make AYP through safe harbor. The school also fell 12 percentage points short of the 70% graduation rate needed to meet Georgia’s target for the second indicator used to determine AYP. But Stewart-Quitman still posted a large enough gain in graduation rate—15 percentage points—to receive a waiver from the state and make AYP.

Reasons for Improvement in Four Schools

In our interviews, we asked school and district staff to explain how these four schools—Kennedy and Long Middle Schools in Atlanta, Baker Middle in Muscogee County, and Stewart-Quitman High in Stewart County—were able to make AYP in 2008. They most often gave the following five reasons:

Teachers analyzed and responded to student assessment data. All four schools said they had carefully tracked student progress against state standards and used the test data to guide their instruction or to intervene with particular students.

In Atlanta, teachers at Kennedy Middle worked together to design and administer weekly assessments, “which gave you an opportunity to go back and reinforce anything that needed to be re-taught,” explained math teacher LaQuife Vincent. At Long Middle, teachers tested students monthly against state stan-

Intensified Support
Table 4. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests in Atlanta Public Schools and Statewide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading/Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State AYP target, grades 3-8</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State average, grades 3-8</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Public Schools average, grades 3-8</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Middle</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy Middle</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carson Middle*</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST Middle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coretta Scott King Middle</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: In 2005, 67% of the students in Long Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is above the state target of 66.7% needed to make AYP in reading in grades 3 through 8 but below the state average of 87% and below the Atlanta district average of 79%.

*Carson Middle was phased out beginning in 2007-08, when incoming 6th grade boys in its attendance area entered BEST Middle and girls entered Coretta Scott King.


Table 5. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests in Muscogee County Schools and Statewide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading/Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State AYP target, grades 3-8</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State average, grades 3-8</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscogee Co. district average, grades 3-8</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy Middle</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker Middle</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: In 2005, 74% of the students in Eddy Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is above the state target of 66.7% needed to make AYP in reading in grades 3 through 8 but below the state average of 87% and the Muscogee County district average of 87%.

Teacher Greg Leap. Teachers at Long also kept spreadsheets to show whether each student had mastered each state standard. Knowing precisely how to help individual students, rather than providing more general remediation, made a difference in standardized test scores this year, he added.

In Muscogee County, teachers at Baker Middle gave classroom assessments biweekly and schoolwide unit tests about once a quarter. Teachers met biweekly in grade-level teams to discuss student progress and help each other intervene with students who had fallen behind. “If a student is struggling with social studies, there may be a strategy another content area teacher can provide to move that student forward” explained Keshia Douglas, Baker’s school improvement specialist for language arts and social studies.

Stewart-Quitman High tested students quarterly on their mastery of state standards. During a daily homeroom period, students were grouped for additional help based on their test results. Teachers kept detailed information on every student, said Floyd Fort, superintendent of Stewart County Public Schools. “We broke it down to each individual child, exactly what they needed and how much of what they needed in order to get over the [proficiency] threshold.”

The school created extra time for instruction. All four schools added instructional time to assist struggling students before, during, or after the regular school day. After-school programs were in operation at all four schools. After-school programs in the middle schools were more structured; all included remedial classes in math and reading. Stewart-Quitman High organized a tutoring period for students who needed extra help or for those with absences who were required to make up class work.

Before school, Baker Middle held a tutorial in the computer lab twice a week. Struggling students, as well as those “targeted” for being just above or below state proficiency standards, completed math and reading activities on the computer using software purchased by the district. The software assessed students’ mastery of state standards and allowed them to progress at their own pace.

In-school tutoring was another common strategy. Middle schools pulled students who had missed state math standards out of classes such as physical education, band, or keyboarding so they could attend a remedial math class. Kennedy aimed the extra help at all students who fell below state standards; Long and Baker targeted mid-level students who had narrowly missed or barely exceeded the standard. Baker also hired part-time tutors, mainly retired teachers, to provide in-school tutoring for its lowest-performing students.

Long and Kennedy both rearranged their academic schedules to add time for subjects in which they had previously missed AYP targets. Long added an extra half-hour of math for all students. Every teacher partic-

**Table 6. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests for Stewart-Quitman High School and Statewide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English/Language Arts</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State AYP target, grade 11</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State average, grade 11</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stewart-Quitman High School</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: In 2005, 74% of the students in Stewart-Quitman High School scored at or above the proficient level in English/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is below the state target of 81.6% needed to make AYP in English/language arts in grade 11 and below the state average of 90%.

ipated in reinforcing basic math skills during this 30-minute period, which freed the regular math teachers to focus exclusively on the middle school math curriculum. For two months before testing, Kennedy arranged for pairs of language arts and social studies teachers and pairs of math and science teachers to “co-teach” their classes twice a week. The idea was to reinforce math and reading skills by applying them to a content area. For example, students in one co-taught class calculated velocity to practice multiplying decimals.

In addition, Kennedy replaced out-of-school suspensions with in-school suspensions, where students had to complete a packet of work that addressed their weakest area on state tests.

**The school had replaced ineffective teachers with effective ones.** Two schools lost or removed teachers in an area crucial for making AYP and replaced them with more effective ones. Since 2007, Principal Lucious Brown at Kennedy has replaced about a third of his faculty. According to school and district administrators, some teachers were unwilling to work hard or didn’t believe that disadvantaged children could be taught to high standards. “We knew we had to make a change in the way teachers thought about what students could do and their abilities,” said Millicent McCaskill, dean of academics at Kennedy.

When school opened in fall 2007, three of six math teachers were new to Kennedy Middle. What they lacked in experience they made up for in dedication, said McCaskill. “They came in fresh and they came in working.” One math teacher, who was a day away from giving birth to twins, showed up at school the morning of the state math test, recalled McCaskill. “She visited each one of those classrooms to make eye contact with each one of her students, and said, ‘You can do this.’”

The new teachers held kids to higher standards while providing them with more personal attention, McCaskill said. That combination of support and rigor influenced students’ belief in their own ability and their attitude towards school, she explained. “They knew that if they were successful, that the school [would be] successful, and they wanted the school to be successful.”

Baker Middle in Muscogee County lost three special education teachers in 2007, but the district was able to recruit highly motivated replacements. The three new special education teachers analyzed their students’ deficiencies and worked with the students at every opportunity—during class, after school, during their free periods, and even over the weekend, said Keshia Douglas, language arts/social studies improvement specialist.

“The teachers’ high expectations of their students made a big difference,” agreed Tammy Anderson, Baker’s school improvement specialist for math and science. “They told [students] they could do it, and those students believed they could do it and they did it.”

Between 2007 and 2008, the percentage of students with disabilities at Baker who met or exceeded state proficiency standards rose 12 points in math and 16 points in reading.

**New teachers had received intensive professional development.** Kennedy’s new math teachers and Baker’s new special education teachers both received intensive professional development to help them learn effective teaching strategies. Sharon Williams, who oversees Kennedy as executive director of School Reform Team 1, said she assigned her best math specialist to the school. The specialist met with the new math teachers for two hours monthly to introduce the lessons in the math curriculum. She also modeled the lessons and explained the expectations teachers should have for their students. In addition, the new teachers attended the state’s Raising Standards workshops, which are required for selected staff at restructuring schools. They also received coaching and feedback from Kennedy’s math coach. “So it was intense training,” McCaskill said.

In Muscogee County, the district sent two special education administrators from the central office to Baker to work directly with special education teachers for two to three days a week. First, the administrators helped teachers review students’ individualized education programs (IEPs) to ensure they were up-to-date and well-designed. Then they worked with teachers on co-teaching, a strategy that places a subject area teacher and a special education teacher together in a classroom to work with both special education and regular education students. The idea is to help special education students keep pace with the general curriculum.
The district administrators held co-teaching workshops at the school, modeled strategies in classrooms, and helped special education and regular education teachers plan lessons jointly. “I was able to really, really get a better understanding as to how we were supposed to be teaching,” said Taneshia Fitch Ingersoll, a 6th grade math teacher. “It definitely made a difference.”

**School management had improved.** Better school management helped raise achievement at Kennedy, Baker, and Stewart-Quitman High, according to school and district staff. (School management had already improved at Long just before it entered restructuring, according to school and district staff interviewed for last year’s report.)

In 2006-07, Atlanta Public Schools replaced a principal at Kennedy Middle, appointing Lucious Brown, who had recently been assigned to the school as assistant principal. Before Brown’s appointment as principal, “I might go up there [to Kennedy] and not find a teacher in the classroom,” said Sharon Williams. “They might leave the kids and have a coffee break.” When teachers were present, they often sat behind their desk while kids did seatwork or wasted time, she said. Students often cut class and loitered in the hallways. “Basically what you had was kids not being taught.”

Under Brown’s leadership, expectations changed, Williams said. Now she sees quieter hallways and attentive students, teachers interacting with students and monitoring their work, and lesson objectives posted on each chalkboard. “You can look at the kids’ work and see if it matches the objectives,” she said. “[Principal Brown] has a system. And you’re going to see that from classroom to classroom.”

Disruptive student behavior was also an issue at Baker in Muscogee County until a new assistant principal was assigned in 2007-08, said Peggy Connell, the district’s chief academic officer. The new administrator, Michael Davis, worked with the school’s leadership team to implement a consistent discipline policy across the school and to support teachers in enforcing it. “He made a huge, huge difference,” said Yvette Nathan-Jones, a language arts teacher.

A change in leadership also improved management at Stewart-Quitman High. In 2006, the district hired Viola Hodge Fedd as principal of the middle school, located on the same campus as the high school, and appointed her to lead instructional improvements at both schools. Fedd monitors and supports the faculty as they attempt to implement new strategies introduced at state and regional trainings. She played a key role in helping the faculty move toward more standards-driven instruction focused on students’ needs, said Fort. “We had to make sure that we were teaching the right things. We had to make sure that we were teaching [during] the time that we were supposed to be teaching, and in a way that students were engaged.”

Discipline was another barrier at Stewart-Quitman until the district replaced the principal in spring 2007. His successor, David Davis, was a veteran social studies teacher at the school with a reputation as a strict disciplinarian. Davis organized the faculty in maintaining consistent, high expectations, according to Fort. “Our principles are ‘Be in class. Be in class on time. Do what you’re supposed to do when you get there,’” he said. “We talk about it every day [over the intercom] during morning breakfast assembly and during lunch. We just keep stressing expectations. We don’t have a perfect school by any means, but the overall shift in the culture has been big.”

**Next Steps**

In 2008-09, all four schools continued to refine their improvement strategies, in some cases, expanding on approaches that had already proved successful. Kennedy Middle started twice-a-week, interdisciplinary core classes. Stewart-Quitman High added more tutoring time for students by having them spend their 30-minute home room period each day with a different core subject teacher. At Baker Middle, teachers continued to analyze student assessment data in more detail to identify weak areas. Long Middle continued to track each student’s progress in mastering state standards and began sharing that information with students to help them monitor their own learning. “They can reflect on the tests that they just took and make statements about what specific standard they did not master and what that means,” Gregory Leap, a math teacher. “For example, ‘I need more help with absolute value, but I’ve already mastered bar graphs.’”

All four schools are carrying on with efforts to change teaching practices. Kennedy and Baker are both continuing training for regular and special education
teachers to co-teach classes of regular and special education students. To co-teach effectively, teachers need to plan and deliver instruction together so that students receive the benefit of the classroom teachers’ content expertise and the special education teachers’ understanding of pedagogy, explained Chief Academic Officer Connell. “The special education teachers want to be actively engaged in instruction and not just assisting the regular education teachers, she observed. Now the Muscogee County School District is hiring a full-time academic coach to help teachers at restructuring schools learn how to co-teach, she said.

At Long, teachers said they were continuing to fine-tune their program through frequent professional development sessions at the school, their own data analysis, and feedback from school, state, and district coaches. For example, the school’s state director suggested teachers reserve five minutes at the end of class to summarize the lesson and check students’ understanding with a brief written quiz, according to Angela Washington, a language arts teacher.

Stewart-Quitman High is maintaining its work on best-practice strategies introduced in the Raising Standards workshops with the support of a consultant from the Regional Educational Service Agency, said Viola Hodge Fedd, who leads instructional improvement for the school. These strategies include managing a variety of small group activities targeted at different learning levels and using lessons that emphasize higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis or synthesis, rather than a simple recall of facts. The school is investing in wireless laptop computers and interactive whiteboards that allow students and teachers to manipulate computer-projected images. The goal is to make lessons more engaging, explained Superintendent Fort. “Some of the teachers are just doing a magnificent job with it; others are not quite there yet, but they all know where we expect them to be by the end of the year and we’re just working towards that.”

All restructuring schools received additional funding in 2008-09 because of the new federal appropriation. Stewart-Quitman expected an extra $75,000 in discretionary spending, for a total of $250,000, according to Superintendent Fort. He said the school planned to spend it on its content area coaches, an online credit recovery program to help boost its graduation rate, and a new in-school detention program to reduce out-of-school suspensions and lost learning time. Principal Lucious Brown planned to spend some of Kennedy’s $268,000 on new technology, such as interactive whiteboards, and to stock up on math and science manipulatives in case the school makes AYP and loses the extra funding.

Staff at all four schools said they expected to make AYP again in 2009, although those at Baker and Stewart-Quitman perceived more obstacles to doing so since both had fallen short of the targets in 2007. Stewart-Quitman is on track to meet the state’s standard for the graduation rate, said Superintendent Fort, but will need a gain of at least another 10 percentage points to meet the achievement targets in both math and English/language arts. “We know it’s going to be a challenge, but we’re doing everything we can, even more than we did last year, to make sure those students get what they need.”

Baker Middle, with only 50% of its students meeting state standards in math in 2008, had another steep climb to make AYP in math again in 2009. But improved teacher morale at Baker is providing the school some momentum, school and district staff reported. “[The staff’s] attitude is, ‘We’re going to make AYP, and we’re going to work hard and do what we need to do to get the children where they need to be,’” said Tammy Anderson, one of the improvement specialists.

Connell from the Muscogee County district office also sees Baker’s teachers taking on more of a leadership role. In 2007-08, administrators led grade-level and department meetings at the school, but in 2008-09, teachers consistently led discussions about data, student interventions, and improvements to instruction, she said. “They’re more self-directed.”

However, teacher attendance remains a concern, since it has a profound impact on student progress, staff reported. “It affects the team, it affects the students, it affects behavior in the halls, and all of those things affect student achievement,” Anderson explained.

Staff at Long and Kennedy Middle Schools, both of which met AYP targets in 2008, felt the more confident than staff at the other case study schools about repeating that accomplishment in 2009. “We get what we have to do, and we’re just doing it,” said math teacher Gregory Leap at Long, indicating that under
restructuring, teachers at his school had been inundated with professional learning. “Obviously you can always improve, but I don’t think there’s anything anyone can show me now that I haven’t seen,” he said.

Sharon Williams, the regional district administrator who oversees Kennedy, said that since the school serves public housing, student transience is a continuing challenge. “You get kids mid-year who haven’t been in school, and you have a short period of time to bring them up,” she observed. However, she noted that Kennedy successfully hit test score targets for district accountability in 2008, which are higher than those needed to earn AYP, and that staff morale is running high. “The teachers are pumped up,” McCaskill agreed. “And I don’t think it’s going to change.”

**INTENSIFYING STUDENT SUPPORTS AT EDDY MIDDLE**

When Eddy Middle in Muscogee County again failed to make AYP in 2008, both school staff and district officials were surprised. The year before, the school had fallen short only because of its subgroup of students with disabilities. And although that subgroup had missed AYP targets by wide margins in 2007—by 20 percentage points in reading and 30 percentage points in math—interim assessments provided by the state predicted that students with disabilities would make at least a 10 percentage point gain on the upcoming state tests, enabling the school to make AYP under the safe harbor provision.

But in 2008, students with disabilities at Eddy again missed AYP targets in both subjects. The percentage of these students who met or exceeded state standards actually declined by one point in math and two points in reading. The school otherwise hit its AYP targets, although it posted only a two-point gain in reading with an equivalent decline in math.

“Eddy not making AYP was really disheartening for those teachers,” Connell acknowledged. The school had made substantial improvements to its special education program, she said. By 2007-08, including special education students in regular education classes and teaming pairs of special and regular education teachers to co-teach them were standard practices at Eddy. After-school programs are “always jam-packed,” she added. “They did so many things. We all thought they were going to make it.”

Since Eddy appeared to be on track, the district did not provide it with the same intensive professional development on best practices in special education that Baker received. In 2008-09, the district sent one of its special education administrators to provide Eddy with similar support. For the 2009-10 school year, the district is also recruiting a full-time academic coach to work on special education best practices with all three of its Title I restructuring schools, Connell reported.

Unlike some other CEP case study schools, Eddy has maintained a fairly consistent staff throughout most of its years in restructuring. The teachers we interviewed credited staff cooperation and administrative support for curbing turnover. Under the leadership of Principal Cleo Griswould, the school made solid gains during restructuring, with the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards rising 14 points in reading and 7 points in math between 2004 and 2008. For 2008-09, however, Griswould accepted a principalship at one of the district’s high schools and was replaced by her assistant principal, Alonzo James. Harriet Steed, the district Title I director, credits James’ administrative skills and a detailed improvement plan for a smooth transition.

Eddy’s improvement plan for 2008-09 intensified previous efforts the school considered successful, such as providing students with remedial support. An after-school program, in which teachers work with small groups for four hours weekly, began two months earlier, in September of 2008 rather than November. Eddy also added a new computer-based tutoring program purchased by the district to its computer lab, allowing two rotating groups of about 25 students to practice math and reading skills for an hour before school. It continued a half-day Saturday math and reading tutorial and a remedial course for targeted students that met on alternating days in place of a class like art or music. (Saturday classes are taught by classroom teachers, and the school-day remediation by retired teachers who are highly qualified in math or reading.)

In 2008-09, Eddy also worked to more quickly identify and remediate student weaknesses. The school continues to rely on the framework tests provided by the state and administered throughout the year to monitor student progress on state goals. Furthermore, in 2008-09, content area teachers at each grade level began to create common interim assessments to administer at more fre-
quent intervals. Common assessments allow teachers to compare their results, explained English teacher Debra Terrell. Teachers who have more success on a particular topic are then able to share their strategies or even co-teach a review session, she said.

Despite the school’s extra efforts, challenges remain. The most significant, according to Terrell, is convincing some of the lowest-performing students and their parents to take advantage of the extra support. “The majority of our students try their hardest, and they’re here for the after-school [program], they’re here for the before-school, they’re here for the Saturday [school],” she said. But to get that kind of cooperation from others “is like pulling teeth,” she explained. “We’re working hard to get to that group.”

STARTING FROM SCRATCH AT BEST AND KING ACADEMIES

When Carson Middle in Atlanta entered year 5 of school improvement in 2005-06, it was among the city’s most chronically underperforming. Only 63% of students met state standards in reading, and just 44% did so in math, placing the school 20 to 30 percentage points below the district average in each subject. Judging that new leadership would be insufficient to transform a negative school culture, the district chose more drastic action. Carson would be phased out over several years as each of its three classes graduated. In its place, the district would open two single-gender middle schools in 2007-08 in new buildings with newly hired staff.

NCLB sanctions were not the impetus to phase out Carson, said Tamara Cotman, executive director of School Reform Team 4 and a regional administrator for Atlanta Public Schools who oversees Carson and its replacement schools. Although “replacing all or most of the staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP” is one of five restructuring options in the NCLB law, the district did not officially choose it for Carson. Rather, the district was continuing its own reform agenda that began in 1999 when Beverly Hall became Atlanta’s superintendent, explained Cotman. Carson is one of two schools Atlanta has phased out and replaced during Hall’s tenure.

According to Cotman, the decision to replace Carson with single-gender schools grew out of meetings with community partners, in particular the 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Inc., a coalition of civic leaders and volunteers that seeks to aid disadvantaged youth. “Originally the vision was for us to look at the plight of our African American males,” she said. School dropouts, unemployment, and incarceration were endemic in the Bankhead neighborhood on Atlanta’s West Side, especially for young black men. But Hall “realized that we were also losing quite a few of our young women to the same kinds of things—gang activity, crime, pregnancy,” Cotman explained.

In 2006, district administrators set to work researching single-gender schools and scheduling site visits to successful ones around the country. Parents and community members joined design teams “to create everything from the school colors to the curriculum,” Cotman said, while the district “went about the very difficult work of finding leaders for the schools and then identifying staff.” With interest in the new schools running high, more than 380 principals applied, said Cotman.

Under Georgia’s Single Statewide Accountability rule, when a school is opened to replace a failing one, the new school must retain the former school’s improvement status if at least half of its student enrollment remains the same. Atlanta Public Schools, however, objected to forcing a brand new school to suddenly undergo NCLB restructuring. The state agreed to a compromise: Coretta Scott King Young Women’s Leadership Academy and BEST Academy could avoid a “needs improvement” label altogether if they met AYP targets in the first year.

In 2008, the two schools, each enrolling only 6th graders in their first year, succeeded in making gains over Carson’s 2007 state test results, as shown earlier in table 4. BEST posted a four percentage point increase in reading and a three point gain in math but fell short of the AYP target and did not qualify for safe harbor. King made a 20 percentage point gain in reading, surpassing the score needed for AYP, and made a 10 point gain in math, which would have qualified it for safe harbor if it had also met student attendance goals. However, both schools missed the target for student attendance; BEST missed for students overall and King for its low-income subgroup. The new schools were ordered to submit restructuring plans. In their second year of operation, King and BEST entered year 8 of school improvement.
“Given all that we had done, we felt like we were being punished, rather than rewarded,” said one teacher interviewed at BEST. At King, the faculty was “pretty devastated,” said Principal Melody Morgan, “but you have to keep a positive attitude and show people where they made tremendous gains.”

Staff at King and BEST felt they were placed at an unfair disadvantage for meeting the student attendance goal. The schools, which in spring 2008 enrolled a total of 550 6th and 7th graders, were housed at locations outside students’ neighborhood as they awaited the opening of new school buildings in fall 2009. Students were bussed to school each morning, which was about a 20-minute trip for King students, reported Tameka Alexander, the literacy coach. “Because parents sometimes come from economically disadvantaged situations, they don’t necessarily have transportation if the child misses the bus.”

But staff said they did appreciate the extra funding that came along with their restructuring status—$264,000 for each school—and the extra support from state personnel, particularly a state director whom the two schools share and a math facilitator who visits twice a month. “They work together to make sure that we are in compliance and we are on target with everything [in the improvement plan],” said Cheryl Parker, King’s math coach. “The guidance and the direction that the state is providing is great.”

Prior to entering restructuring, both schools were following many of the best practices advocated by the district and state, such as aligning instruction to state curriculum frameworks, analyzing student assessment data to pinpoint weaknesses, and providing struggling students with time for remediation outside of regular school hours. Under restructuring, staff at both schools said they have intensified their efforts.

Staff at both schools reported working harder at instructional strategies advocated by the state. For example, teachers at BEST were paying more attention to the elements of an effective lesson—an engaging opening, a clear purpose, and a check for student understanding at the close—as presented at state trainings. After reflecting on its GAPSS review, King decided that teachers needed to work on asking questions that required students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information rather than simply recall facts.

The schools scheduled additional time for student remediation. At midyear, BEST was organizing an extra daily math class for practice on basic math skills, word problems, and test-taking. Teachers also planned to begin pulling struggling students out of classes such as art or physical education for additional tutoring. At King, the lowest students practiced math skills on the computer in place of one such class.

To improve student attendance, King hired an additional case manager to meet regularly with truants and their parents. The case manager “formed a club, and so each month when their attendance improves they receive incentives” such as gift certificates, Morgan said.

Professional development in math was a priority for both schools. Using school improvement money, King hired a math coach to demonstrate strategies in the classroom and assist teachers in planning common assessments. The coach also served as an instructor in the school’s Saturday Academy for student who needed extra help. BEST planned to hire an outside consultant to work with teachers on designing math lessons that better engaged students.

School improvement money paid for additional student supports. King hired after-school tutors; BEST hoped to hire retired teachers to assist struggling students in the classroom. Both schools purchased new technology, including interactive whiteboards, as a strategy to motivate students. At midyear, staff interviewed at both schools felt optimistic about their progress. “My staff knows that just working a little bit harder, we’re going to make those gains,” said Morgan. “I’m sure we’ll make them this year.”

**IMPROVING SPECIAL EDUCATION AT WASHINGTON MIDDLE IN GRADY COUNTY**

Grady County School District serves 4,400 students from a 450 square mile area in southwest Georgia near the Florida border. Two of the district’s schools are located outside the county seat of Cairo and serve students from preschool through 8th grade. The other schools, including three elementary schools, a middle school, and one high school, are located in Cairo, a working class town of 9,000 residents in south central Georgia. Cairo was for many decades the center of Georgia’s cane syrup industry. The town has lost much of its industrial base in recent years, including a major
food manufacturer, which closed its plant in 2002. Many residents now commute to similar jobs, some as far as Tallahassee, Florida, about 35 miles south.

The district is somewhat more economically disadvantaged than the state average. Low-income students make up 61% of the district’s enrollment, above the state average of 53%. The district’s racial/ethnic makeup mirrors state averages: almost half of students are white, 38% are African American, and 10% are Hispanic.

Overall, Grady County school district performs just below the state average on standardized tests, as displayed in table 7. The high school, now in year 2 of improvement, outperformed the state slightly in reading in 2008 but underperformed it in math, with two subgroups falling short of AYP targets in that subject. The elementary schools have performed better—none is in school improvement and three have consistently made AYP. Washington Middle is the district’s only restructuring school.

Tommy Pharis, superintendent of Grady County Public Schools, feels that Washington Middle is unfairly stigmatized by the “needs improvement” label. “The staff is a good staff,” he insisted. “They’ve been under the gun because of this AYP issue for several years, and I think they’re feeling a little downtrodden.”

Washington Middle serves a higher percentage of minority students than the district average: 54% of the 600 students enrolled are African American, 33% are white, and 8% are Hispanic. The school also serves a higher percentage of disadvantaged students—75% are low-income. Washington had 90 students transfer to other schools under the No Child Left Behind school choice provision, putting the school at a further disadvantage for making AYP, said Pharis. “Those 90 kids passed the [state] test. So you know what that does to your stats.”

Overall, Washington Middle’s math and reading scores still far exceed the mark needed for AYP and hover only two or three percentage points below the state average, as shown in table 7. But the school’s subgroup of students with disabilities has repeatedly failed to make AYP in either subject by a wide margin. In 2008, only 46% of these students met or exceeded state standards in reading/language arts and only 30% did so in mathematics. These percentages were 27 points below the AYP targets in reading and almost 30 points below the targets in math. They were also significantly below the state averages for that subgroup of 67% meeting standards in reading and 48% in math.

Unlike a number of other restructuring schools in our case study districts, Washington Middle has not undergone a leadership change, a dramatic overhaul of its pro-

| Table 7. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests in Washington Middle and Statewide |
| Reading/Language Arts | Math |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State AYP target, grades 3-8 | 66.7% | 66.7% | 66.7% | 73.3% | 58.3% | 58.3% | 58.3% | 59.5% |
| State average, grades 3-8 | 87% | 87% | 87% | 90% | 81% | 82% | 80% | 77% |
| Grady County, grades 3-8 | 85% | 84% | 87% | 89% | 79% | 80% | 79% | 73% |
| Washington Middle | 81% | 86% | 89% | 87% | 73% | 72% | 75% | 70% |

Table reads: In 2005, 81% of the students in Washington Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is above the state target of 66.7% needed to make AYP in reading/language arts in grades 3-8 and below the state average of 87%.

grams, or major shifts in school culture. Staff at Washington who spoke with us reported a long history of stable leadership, faculty cooperation, and few discipline problems. Since the subgroup of students with disabilities is the only one to consistently fall short of making AYP, improving the special education program is a major thrust of the school’s restructuring effort. “We’re trying to be focused on that but not lose focus of our high achievers,” said Principal Anderson. “That’s kind of hard to balance, but I think we’re doing a good job.”

Washington has included special education students in regular classrooms for many years, but only in 2008-09 did it begin to make full use of a range co-teaching strategies, according to Laurie Walton, the district’s lead teacher for behavior intervention. In the past, the classroom teacher would typically present a lesson while the special education teacher circulated and assisted individual kids. “That isn’t a bad thing, but it’s not the most effective model,” she explained. Teachers often did not break material down into small enough steps for students with disabilities to grasp it, she said.

To strengthen special education instruction, the school hired an outside consultant in 2008-09 to provide professional development on co-teaching for the entire faculty. Teachers learned a variety of strategies, including how to present a lesson jointly to make full use of the expertise of both teachers and how to divide the class into smaller groups to better target student needs. As teachers experimented with the new methods, the consultant observed and evaluated them individually on their progress. The district followed up with additional training and evaluation, Walton said.

Washington also organized daily common planning time so that special education and classroom teachers could plan lessons together, and assigned special education teachers to co-teach in their strongest subject area, either math or reading. In addition, Walton assisted the school in designing a behavior management system for students with behavior disorders. The idea was to use small prizes to encourage good behavior and avoid the disruptions that often resulted in suspension, Walton said. “A lot of our [behavior disordered] kids, the reason they don’t make AYP is that they’re out of the classroom so much.”

The school’s improvement efforts are not limited to special education. Washington is pursuing strategies to raise AYP similar to those reported at other restructuring schools. The school has scheduled time for remedial help, including an early morning extra-help period for all students (targeted students attend a supplemental math class) and an after-school program that provides three hours of extra help weekly, primarily in math. Special education students also practice math and reading skills using software in the computer lab for one period each day in place of a class like band or keyboarding.

Analyzing student assessment data to guide instruction is another top priority, although it is an area that needs further improvement, according to Jackie McCurry, Washington’s instructional coordinator. Every nine weeks, the school administers benchmark tests to monitor student progress towards AYP targets. At each grade level, teachers also administer weekly assessments. Two 7th-grade teachers took the lead in demonstrating how to chart student assessment data “so that other teachers can see that once you start doing it, it’s not difficult to do,” said McCurry.

Based on the results of those tests, teachers are expected to reteach material or work with students in small groups to address specific weaknesses. Consultants from RESA have provided professional development on managing small group activities tailored to a variety of learning levels. But for teachers used to teaching the whole class at once, “it’s a challenge,” said McCurry, who also serves as a classroom coach. “We go through spells where we’re really doing a good job of regrouping our children [but] I believe we still have a way to go with that.”

Overall, restructuring has been a mixed blessing for the school, McCurry said. “The negative part is the perception that because you don’t make AYP, nothing is happening at the school that’s any good.” In fact, she said, because of restructuring Washington is ahead of many others on implementing the School Keys. “We’ve had to do things because we were required [to] but have discovered how beneficial they are for the students,” she said. “I think we’re getting more out of them than we ever have before.”
References


Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was written by Elizabeth Duffrin, CEP consultant, with assistance from Caitlin Scott, CEP consultant. Nancy Kober, CEP consultant, edited the report. Jack Jennings, CEP’s president and CEO, and Diane Stark Rentner, CEP’s director of national programs, provided advice and assistance.

We are grateful to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which supports this project, and to the George Gund Foundation and the Phi Delta Kappa International Foundation, which provide general support to the Center. The statements made and the views expressed in this report are solely the responsibility of the Center on Education Policy.

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