7. Colorado

Colorado Springs District 11
Superintendent: Dr. Norman F. Ridder
Contact: Dr. Mary Gromko, Director, Title I
Students: 32,765, K-12 – urban

Key Findings

- The Colorado Springs District 11 has a system in place to focus on student improvement and has been able to adjust that system to meet the requirements of NCLB.

- When offered a choice of schools in 2002-03, only 65 of the 4,155 students who were eligible for choice in Colorado Springs transferred to another school. In the 2003-04 school year, 22 of these students continued in their choice schools, and an additional 67 students took advantage of choice, for a total of 89 students using choice this school year.

- The Colorado Springs district took active steps to alert parents about the availability of supplemental services, including making announcements at school football games to assure that parents knew about the options. The district is also an approved provider, offering before- and after-school tutoring, summer school, and family literacy nights. However, only a few students participate.

Background

The Colorado Springs School District 11 serves the city of Colorado Springs in southeastern Colorado. The city is one of the largest in the state and is a gateway to the Rocky Mountains, with flat prairie land to the east and the mountains to the west. There is a heavy military presence among the families because of the numerous military institutions located in the area, including the Air Force Academy, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), Homeland Security (the national headquarters), Schriever Base (home of the U. S. Space Command), Fort Carson Army Post, and Peterson Air Force Base (home of the 3rd Division).

This urban school district has 64 schools that serve nearly 33,000 students. Although minority students account for 35% of the total enrollment, the degree of diversity varies among schools, as do poverty rates. The highest-poverty elementary school has a poverty rate of 89%, the lowest has a rate of 10%, and the district average rate is 39%.

Progress in Implementing NCLB
**Professional Development and Training**

Colorado Springs District 11 has created a structure to improve the academic achievement of all students by maximizing instructional and learning time. The district plans to attract, develop, and retain a highly skilled and motivated workforce of leaders in order to ensure that students, parents, and the community are involved and working together to improve student achievement. The district and the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs have initiated a professional development school for emerging leaders including school principals. The district is also part of a five district Pikes Peak region team participating in a National Science Foundation five-year grant for elementary science that incorporates a principal leadership academy. In this, the fourth year of the grant, five principals from Title I schools have participated in the leadership academy.

District resources are aligned to support the goals for improving academic achievement, and annual evaluations are used to determine the effective and efficient use of the district’s assets in meeting the educational requirements. Schoolwide teams focus on growth targets by using a collaborative planning template. These teams run their own data on student performance and develop inservice training focused on the areas of greatest need.

**Adequate Yearly Progress**

The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) has been used to test reading for students from grades 3 through 10 and in math for students from grades 5-9. This will change in 2004 when testing will take place for grades 3-10 in both math and reading. Fifth graders will be the first to be assessed in science in 2005-06. In 2003 the district also used a commercial assessment, Terra Nova, and this was given in reading, language, and math in grades 2-10.

The present reporting system for student assessments in Colorado is being adjusted to meet the requirements of NCLB; for example, the report structure provides a composite score for grades 3, 4, and 5 instead of grade level scores, as NCLB requires. Every elementary school in Colorado Springs District 11 made AYP in 2003, and one Title I schoolwide middle school and one targeted assistance middle school did not make AYP. The changes in testing may require district staff to make some changes in the school system to assure that students continue achieving. However, staff members believe that they have a strong structure and well designed process in place at schools to meet any new challenges.

**School Choice and Supplemental Services**

In school year 2002-03, two schools in Colorado Springs were targeted for their second year of school improvement and had to offer both school choice and supplemental services. The parents of 65 students out of 4,155 students who were eligible chose to move their children to other schools. According to the 2003 CSAP results, 7 of 10
schools tested out of school improvement status, so the district is no longer providing transportation to the choice schools for these students. If the parents wanted to keep their children at the schools they were attending for the 2003-04 school year, they were able to do so but they had to provide their own transportation. Letters were sent to 7,640 parents about their eligibility for choice in 2003-04, and a summer registration was conducted. Parents were able to choose from between three and seven schools that had academic ratings ranging from average to excellent. Once again, most parents did not seek to move their children from their neighborhood schools; 67 students were added to the 22 students who elected to continue at their choice schools from 2002-03, for a total of 89 District 11 students exercising choice in the 2003-04 school year.

The district created multiple opportunities for parents to learn about supplemental services, such as meetings, letters and announcements at parent gatherings, even announcements at football games. In 2003-04 the Colorado Springs District is also an approved provider of supplemental services, offering before- and after-school tutoring. All of the state-approved providers who were selected by parents offered student assistance in after-school settings. Even with this outreach effort to parents, only one student took part in the additional services in 2002-03 and 13 in 2003-04.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

_Adequate Yearly Progress for English Language Learners_

With 1,300 English language learners who speak 40 languages, Colorado Springs schools have used English as a Second Language programs to help students become proficient in English and in content areas. The English language learner subgroup—which is increasing in size and diversity—did not make AYP in 2003.

Students who have not yet mastered English are varied not only in their native languages (although Spanish is the most common), but also in the length of time they have lived in the Colorado Springs area and in the United States. Some families of ELLs are immigrant families, others are migrant, and still others are military—soldiers whose spouses are from other countries. Education levels of parents differ widely, too: some parents of ELLs have never gone to school, and others have multiple college degrees. Recognizing that instruction for these English language learners is not “one size fits all,” the district staff members make efforts to differentiate instruction so that all student needs are met.

**Other Implementation Issues**

_Qualifications – Teachers and Paraprofessionals_

Guidelines for determining the qualifications of teachers were developed by the state of Colorado in the summer of 2003. These guidelines will help Colorado Springs assess its teacher qualifications, especially those of middle school teachers of content areas. The
The district has finished reviewing transcripts of new hires and has changed its hiring practices to assure that the new requirements are being met. A major survey of all teacher qualifications was undertaken in the fall of 2003 to determine exactly what is needed for teachers who do not meet NCLB requirements.

Only qualified paraprofessionals are being hired, and plans are in place to purchase a commercial test for the assessment of paraprofessionals who do not have two years of college.

**Data File — Colorado Springs District 11**

**Location:** Southeast Colorado – city of 281,000  
**Type:** Urban  
**Number of Schools:**
- 64 total  
- 39 elementary schools, K-5  
- 9 middle schools, grades 6-8  
- 5 high schools, grades 9-12  
- 6 alternative high schools, grades 9-12 (to include a digital storefront high school)  
- 5 charter schools, including 2 high schools, 1 middle school, 1 K-12 school, and 1 elementary

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**
- Total Enrollment: 32,765  
- White: 65%  
- Hispanic: 20%  
- African American: 10%  
- Asian: 3%  
- American Indian: 2%  
- English Language Learners: 4% (40 languages)  
- Students with Disabilities: 9%  
- Low-Income Students: 39% (ranging from 10% to 89% in individual schools)

**Number of Teachers**
- Total: 1,968  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: N/A

**Number of Paraprofessionals**
- Total: 475  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: N/A

**Number of Title I Schools:** 17 elementary and 1 middle school, schoolwide; 1 charter middle school, targeted assistance.

**Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action**

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8. Colorado

Fort Lupton Weld Re-8 School District
Superintendent: Stephen Morrison
Contact: Kathi Van Soest, Director, State and Federal Programs
Students: 2,622, K-12 – rural

Key Findings

- Ft. Lupton has made dramatic changes in its basic structure, including reconfiguring schools and grade levels, to improve academic achievement.

- As a small, rural district, Ft. Lupton cannot match the higher salaries of larger districts in the region, which means that highly qualified teachers often transfer to other districts.

- English language learners as a subgroup are relatively low performing in Ft. Lupton, so staff and parents are searching for the best ways to teach English to these students.

Background

The Fort Lupton Weld Re-8 School District is located about 25 miles from Denver in north central Colorado. Fort Lupton, the main community in Weld County, is a residential center with an agricultural and industrial base. (The Re-8 designation refers to a Colorado reorganization of rural school districts that occurred several years ago.) The district has four schools—two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Its enrollment of 2,622 students includes a high percentage of Hispanic students (56%), most of whom are English language learners. The poverty level for the district is 59%, and student performance is at low levels.

For 2003-04, elementary grades have been reconfigured from schools serving grades PreK-2, 3-4, and 5-8 to two schools serving PreK-5 and one serving grades 6-8. The district staff believes this change will work better to improve academic achievement. The class size is 18:1 at the elementary level and 26:1 at the high school level. Improvements and additions will be made to the schools as the result of a school bond that was passed in 2001.

Progress in Implementing NCLB

Paraprofessional Qualifications
Of the 52 paraprofessionals in the Ft. Lupton district, only 6 have had two years of college. Nearby universities offer training for paraprofessionals, and even though many employees attended these classes, there was no college credit attached to the courses, so participants did not receive credit toward meeting NCLB qualifications. Plans are in place for Ft. Lupton paraprofessionals to receive training at AIMS Community College, where they will receive credit for the coursework they take. The district staff is also finalizing plans for an assessment to measure whether paraprofessionals have the specific knowledge required by NCLB. The staff is also working on ways to assess paraprofessionals’ ability to assist in instruction, also required by law. Paraprofessionals will receive assistance to help them pass this test and meet the NCLB requirements.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

**Teacher Qualifications**

Of the 180 Ft. Lupton teachers, 70 are on emergency credentials. The district aims to decrease that number by half each year, so that every teacher is fully qualified by 2005, as required by law. Teachers from out of state account for the majority of the credentialing problems, because they need 24 hours of additional coursework to meet Colorado’s teacher requirements. Ft. Lupton depends on out of state teachers because there are not enough teachers in the state to meet the demand.

The relatively low pay of the district is a key reason why the district has difficulty keeping highly qualified teachers. In some instances, teachers stay in the district long enough to get fully credentialled, and then they move on to other districts that pay up to $7,000 more per year. In the past three years, 25% of Ft. Lupton’s teachers (about 15 each year) have left the district to take jobs elsewhere.

Some of the district’s special education teachers also need additional certification from the state. Furthermore, teachers of English language learners need 18 hours of coursework for certification, if they teach English as a Second Language or bilingual classes. Teachers from Mexico, hired specifically for their skills in teaching English language learners, are another group that does not always meet the NCLB definition of “highly qualified.” These teachers have Spanish language skills, and they understand the cultures of the Hispanic students, but they frequently do not meet the state teacher licensure requirements.

Other teachers who have entered alternative licensing programs may have a bachelor’s degree in a particular field, but they may lack the state teaching license or have not passed the required test for their content area. Two of the greatest areas of need are teachers of middle and high school math and science. Teachers who teach in two or more content areas are common in small rural high schools, and it is especially difficult for these teachers to meet the qualifications in multiple subjects. Although a teacher may meet the requirements for one content area, it is the second content area (which the teacher often teaches for just one or two periods) for which certification is needed.
Ft. Lupton was able to fill all new positions for 2003-04 with teachers who met NLCB requirements. Some teachers were reassigned as needed; for example, a middle school teacher who lacked content-specific certification but held an elementary certification was reassigned to an elementary class.

The district provides financial support to teachers who need to become fully qualified. Each teacher can receive up to $2,000 in NCLB Title II funds to complete their certification. Of this amount, $1,000 is provided up front, and the other $1,000 is provided when the teacher completes a second year in the district.

**Adequate Yearly Progress**

As noted above, the district’s schools were recently reorganized to serve a different set of grade levels. School leaders believe that this new arrangement will make accountability clearer and allow for a smooth transition from one school to the other. In 2003, the two elementary schools were targeted for school improvement. The middle and high school are no longer Title I schools, since the district is using Title I funds at the elementary schools only.

In the 2002-03 school year, all four of the district’s schools were in school improvement, which meant that all students in the district were eligible to transfer to another school under the NCLB choice provisions, but there were no eligible schools within the district. The district notified parents at the beginning of the year about school choice and offered to provide transportation for any child to attend a school in a neighboring district. No parents chose to move their children to these schools, which were miles away; they kept their children close to their home in the Ft. Lupton schools.

In 2003-04, the parents of all students in grades 1 through 5 were offered school choice, but again, this meant going to another district because both elementary schools are still in school improvement. Because of the reconfiguration of grade levels for 2003-04, Ft. Lupton has been given a two-year waiver by the state before it has to implement supplemental services.

Most of the technical assistance that the district provided to schools in school improvement in 2002-03 focused on professional development—specifically, teaching teachers and other staff how to do data analysis and use data to enhance instruction. Principals received guidance on improvement strategies and how to prepare their plans to address specific student needs. The school staffs and principals presented their improvement plans to the District Advisory Committee (made up of parents and community members). This group analyzed the data and, based on their analysis, made accreditation recommendations to the Board of Education.

The Ft. Lupton district has also made a considerable investment in preschool education, anticipating that efforts toward early learning and literacy will pay off later, especially for English language learners. By taking advantage of state funding and supplementing
those funds with district funds, nearly all four-year-olds in the district receive a year of learning before kindergarten, and special education children have two years. With state funding reduced for 2003-04, however, this program is in jeopardy.

Ft. Lupton staff members are considering ways to close the large gap in academic achievement between Hispanic students, who comprise 56% of the district’s enrollment, and White students, who make up 44% of the enrollment. In 2002, the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) was 34% for Hispanic students versus 54% for White students at grade 3; 14% versus 51% at grade 7; and 29% versus 65% at grade 10. In math, the comparable percentages for Hispanic and White students were 26% and 52% in grade 3, 8% and 31% in grade 7, and 1% and 18% in grade 10.

Considering that more than half of the district’s students are poor and almost half are English language learners, Ft. Lupton staff members recognize that they face a huge challenge in assuring AYP for all students. They believe, however, that they can make a difference. One issue that has not been resolved is how to improve instruction for English language learners. Although the district recognizes that students are not progressing as they should in becoming proficient in English, there is not a consensus about the best way to reach the desired goals. Yet the Ft. Lupton schools must take action in 2003-04 to meet AYP criteria for this subgroup.

Other Implementation Issues

Services for Homeless Students

As part of its response to NCLB, the Ft. Lupton district made an effort to find and provide instructional services for homeless students in its attendance area. Each principal chose a building representative to work with community liaisons, and these representatives trained a group of people in how to search for and identify homeless families. The teams found families living in roadside motels or with relatives or friends. Some families lived on the river in tents and camp trailers. A total of 46 students (White and Hispanic families) were identified, and parents were assisted in obtaining appropriate school services for their children.

Data File — Ft. Lupton Weld Re-8 School District

Location: North Central Colorado; Ft. Lupton’s population is 5,200
Type: Rural
Number of Schools:
   4 total
   2 elementary schools
   1 middle school
   1 high school

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total Enrollment: 2,622  
Hispanic: 56%  
White: 44%  
English Language Learners: 45% (1,180 students)  
Students with Disabilities: 12%  
Low-Income Students: 59%

**Number of Teachers**
- Total: 180  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 70 (39%)

**Number of Paraprofessionals**
- Total: 40  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 32 (80%)

**Number of Title I Schools:** 2 schools, elementary only

**Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action**

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9. Florida

**Collier County School District**
Superintendent: H. Benjamin Marlin  
Contacts: Dr. Kimball Thomas, Director of Federal and State Grants  
   Barbara Mascari, Director of Federal Programs

*Students: 37,109, K-12 – urban and rural*

**Key Findings**

- Collier County, as a rapidly growing district faced with ever increasing student enrollment, recognizes that continual improvement of the instructional program is as important as the constant need to build new schools in order to keep roofs over students’ heads.

- Keeping highly qualified teachers in the district’s high-poverty rural schools, where students face many barriers to learning, is difficult for the Collier County district because teachers often prefer working in the higher-performing and more affluent urban communities.
• Collier County is using its Reading First grant to place reading coaches in Title I schools. These coaches will serve as role models for delivering effective reading instruction and will train teachers in various strategies for raising student achievement in reading.

• Collier County School District has partnered with local community colleges to develop coursework to help paraprofessionals become highly qualified. Some of the district’s Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals are unlikely to complete an associate’s degree, however, because of family pressures to stay at home in the evening. As an alternative, the school district plans to provide free test preparation and test fees to encourage paraprofessionals to take the state-approved test to demonstrate their competence when it becomes available in February 2004.

Background

The Collier County School District is a large countywide system in southern Florida that educates 37,109 students in 35 schools. The district serves diverse communities that stretch from the wealthy beach area of Naples on the Florida Gulf, through the Everglades, and into the high-poverty inland area of Immokalee. Most of the families in Immokalee and in the southern end of the county are very poor, and many are migrants and immigrants. One school in the Everglades is a K-12 school that serves 185 students, primarily from Mexico (Spanish speaking) and Haiti (Haitian Creole speaking). Collier County has the largest number of migrants in the state, a total of 4,968 or about 13% of the district’s enrollment.

An hour away from Immokalee is the beach region of Naples, a fast growing community with an annual growth rate of 5-7%. This means new schools, facilities, and educational services for the Collier County School District, as well as continual adjustments to the always-changing newcomer and residential population. In the summer of 2003, the district was building two high schools, a middle school, two intermediate centers, and an elementary school.

Progress in Implementing NCLB

Adequate Yearly Progress

Each school in Collier County has a plan in place that describes how it will raise academic achievement. Much time has been spent training teachers and support personnel how to analyze data to determine what instructional changes should be made to help all students reach the desired targets. A districtwide database is in place that enables school staff and classroom teachers to access a student’s entire history of achievement, including the student’s academic strengths and weaknesses. The goal is for teachers to use this information to differentiate instruction according to a student’s individual needs.
One of the district goals is to improve the reading skills of students in the early grades so that they will be successful in all content areas as they progress across grade levels. With a new Reading First grant, reading coaches have been placed at school sites to support teachers in various ways. The coaches serve as role models for delivering instruction to students. They also provide staff development and training for teachers in a variety of instructional strategies and help teachers acquire the skills necessary to make teaching and learning more effective. A massive training program is underway to assure that all teachers will be able to bring students to higher achievement in reading.

Collier County has also undertaken an initiative to provide children with a strong base of readiness before they enter formal instruction in kindergarten and the primary grades. Toward this end, Title I schools have pre-kindergarten classes for four-year-olds, funded from Title I and Head Start. Universal pre-kindergarten will be required in Florida in two years.

Because Collier County staff recognizes the need to improve student achievement, the district is working to remove barriers that prevent children from progressing through the grades without the skills they need to be successful.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

*Qualifications of Teachers and Paraprofessionals*

High teacher turnover of in the district’s high-poverty schools may continue to be a challenge for Collier County, because so many teachers want to live in the highly desirable beach area. Schools in the beach area perform at higher levels than others in the district but have fewer vacancies. As a condition of employment, the district requires teachers in all schools to stay in the school for which they were hired for three years.

The district’s staff is looking at ways to reduce teacher turnover and ensure greater staff stability in high-poverty, low-performing schools. The greatest areas of need for teachers overall are special education, mathematics, and science. A total of 144 of the 2,400 teachers in Collier County, about 6%, did not meet the NCLB qualification requirements in 2002-03. All new hires for 2003-04, however, met the requirements.

To make the requisite courses available to paraprofessionals, the district has developed a partnership with the community colleges in Immokalee and Naples and is encouraging employees to attend courses at these colleges. Books and tuition for the community college courses are provided at no cost to paraprofessionals through Title I funds, and both school and district staffs persuade paraprofessionals to attend the classes. The district estimates, however, that as many as half of its paraprofessionals will not be able to pursue an associate’s degree, let alone become teachers. Many of the paraprofessionals are Hispanic and are needed in the schools for their Spanish language skills. In many families, however, women are discouraged from going out at night to take classes, and child care is an issue for those that do.
The district has also selected a state-approved competency test to use for paraprofessionals when it becomes available in February 2004, but any test that is on the state-approved list can be chosen by an employee or prospective employee. In the fall of 2003-04, the district plans to offer free study skills classes and workbooks to help paraprofessionals pass this test. When currently employed paraprofessionals are ready to take the test, the district will pay the fee.

**School Choice**

Two schools in the Collier County district did not make AYP in 2002-03 and are required to offer school choice for the 2003-04 school year. Parents were notified by mail about their choices of schools. The letters were in three languages, and announcements were made in the newspapers, on the Spanish language radio station, and on the school system cable TV channel. Announcements were also posted throughout the community. An informational meeting was held at the local high school to answer questions from parents. The parents of 56 students requested transfers for their children to a different school; all were assigned to their first choice school. Four of the students requested to attend the high school in Naples, and transportation is being provided.

School choice will be offered in 2003-04 for students attending the high school and one elementary school in Immokalee. The elementary students can choose from two other elementary schools in Immokalee, but there is only one high school in Immokalee. The nearest choice high schools are 60-90 minutes away in the Naples area.

**Adequate Yearly Progress for English Language Learners**

The district is aware that it needs to improve the performance of English language learners because state expectations for these students are much greater than in the past. This is likely to be a challenge because the families so often change jobs and residences and the parents often have limited education. Communicating effectively with these diverse families is a related challenge; even though most speak Spanish, dialects and cultures differ, depending on whether the families came to Collier County from Mexico, Haiti, or Cuba.

Recent results from the Florida state high school exit examination indicate that many Collier County Hispanic students lack the skills to reach the passing level on the exam. Even though these students passed their courses and had enough units to graduate, their inability to master the test has kept them away from high school graduation. This has created a new level of high school dropouts and new challenges for the district.

**Other Implementation Issues**

District administrators credit parental support, community efforts, and a committed staff as the key elements that will help the district improve the academic performance of all
students. Collier County's educational improvement plan includes a process for evaluating new initiatives and a thorough cycle of program evaluation, a practice that will be continued and expanded with the implementation of NCLB.

**Data File — Collier County School District**

**Location:** Southern Florida  
**Type:** Rural and urban  
**Number of Schools:**  
- 36 total  
- 22 elementary schools (K-5)  
- 8 middle schools (6-8)  
- 5 high schools (9-12)  
- 1 K-12 school

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**  
- Total Enrollment: 37,109  
- White: 58%  
- Hispanic: 34%  
- African American: 8%  
- Asian: 1%  
- American Indian: 0.4%  
- English Language Learners: 16% (5,862 students representing 40 languages)  
- Students with Disabilities: 8%  
- Low-Income Students: 47% (ranging from 7% to 99% in individuals schools)

**Number of Teachers**  
- Total: 2,400  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 144 (6%)

**Number of Paraprofessionals**  
- Total: 255  
- Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 90%

**Number of Title I Schools:** 15

**Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action**

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**10. Idaho**

**Joint School District #2 - Meridian**  
Superintendent of Schools: Christine Donnell  
Contact: Linda Clark, Director of Instruction  
*Students: 25,937, K-12 - suburban*
Key Findings

- An important component of school reform in the Meridian Joint School District #2 is the district’s effort to get data to classroom teachers in a form that is easily understood so they can use it to improve student performance.

- Meridian has a strong academic achievement record for its students, and although the performance of low-income students at some schools was lower than that of other students in 2003, they still met the requirements for AYP.

- Three Meridian schools exited school improvement in 2003 because of the districtwide emphasis on raising academic performance in the content areas of reading/language arts and math.

Background

When people think of Idaho, Boise often is the place that comes to mind. They may be surprised to know that the largest school district in this mountainous and historic state is not that of the state’s capital city, but Meridian. The suburban area west of Boise is known as Joint District #2, and it is also the most rapidly growing school district in the state, with an annual increase of nearly 1,000 students each year. Meridian now has 25,937 students in grades K-12, and 3,000 are English language learners who speak more than 50 languages. Most of these students are Spanish speakers, including some from families that were migrants, but Meridian has also become home to refugee families from Bosnia and other European countries. Adding to the language diversity are children whose parents, highly skilled in technology, find ready employment in the high tech industries that have replaced the cows that once dotted the countryside. The nationwide slump in the dot-com field has not greatly affected this portion of Idaho, once referred to as the Silicon Valley of the Rocky Mountains.

Once a vast region of 384 square miles of farmland, Meridian is becoming the western suburb of Boise, the capital of Idaho. Joint District #2 has 36 schools, and there would be more if the district could build them faster. A recent facilities bond passed with an 84% approval rate, an example of the community support for education. Four schools operate on year-round schedules with five tracks; everyone has July off, but on a rotating basis, groups of students attend school for nine weeks and then have three weeks off.

The district has found that the year-round schedule is an excellent way to squeeze more students into a building, because around 20% are “off track” at any given time. Parents, even in this traditional community, support the schedule, but teachers have had to learn how to share classrooms and adjust to not having their traditional summer vacation. The
district’s collective goal is to be known as much for its high-quality academic program as for its rapid growth.

The choice of calendars is one of several choices that the district provides for parents. District-sponsored charter high schools provide opportunities for students in the information technology and medical arts career pathways. A pilot for full-time gifted placement in grades 2–6 is underway, and the district will open an elementary magnet school for the arts and communication next fall.

Progress in Implementing NCLB

Professional Development

Issues of teacher quality have not yet surfaced in Meridian because the state of Idaho has not finished defining its requirements for teachers of special education and several other specialty areas. Initially, Idaho has defined currently employed teachers as “highly qualified” if they have state certification. New hires are required to have bachelor’s degrees and state certification and to have passed a state-designed test. Even with its large teacher pool and close proximity to three universities/colleges, Meridian still relies on letters of authorization and consultant specialist designations to fill positions in special education and some specialty fields at the secondary level.

Because none of the Title I schools in Meridian is a schoolwide project, the NCLB regulations in the first year affected only the teachers funded with Title I, and they all meet the state requirements. However, district staff is aware that all teachers in the district must become highly qualified according to NCLB criteria by 2006, and the district plans to provide whatever professional development is needed. According to Linda Clark, the district is committed to reducing the number of letters of authorization and consultant specialist applications annually until there are none in 2005-06.

The requirements for paraprofessionals have had little impact on this district because Title I funds are used mainly to hire teachers rather than paraprofessionals. All the Title I schools are targeted assistance schools, and there are only two paraprofessionals at the schools that are funded from Title I. One paraprofessional already meets the new requirements, and the other one does not. An extensive training program has been implemented for all paraprofessionals, including those who work with English language learners and in special education classes. The purpose of the training is to improve their ability to assist teachers with instruction.

Professional development efforts in the Meridian district are focused on improving student achievement, continuing a trend that began before NCLB. By providing extensive teacher and principal training, changing staff perceptions of teaching and learning, using research-based materials, differentiating and accelerating instruction, and focusing on individual children from kindergarten through grade 12, the district intends to show that a total district effort pays off in higher student achievement. As described below, the 2002
state testing showed that schools in academic decline can be turned around, and poor and disadvantaged children can reach high expectations if clear goals are set as priorities and if the barriers to reaching them are removed.

**Adequate Yearly Progress**

One of the keys to Meridian’s reform efforts is arranging for the collection of extensive data related to student performance and then making that data understandable and usable for principals and classroom teachers. It sounds easy to do, but there are many pieces to this long-range train of records, information, statistics, and research. Now that the pieces are all in place, the data are available for everyone at all grade levels. A 5th grade teacher in a Meridian school in the fall of 2003, for example, received a class list as is normally done in schools, but this teacher can also access a data warehouse system that shows how each child in the class performed in previous years. The teacher knows the specific areas of that student’s strengths and weaknesses. All students are tested in the opening days of school and within 24 hours, the teacher has those results as well.

A complete profile of the class is available, so that the teacher can focus on the standards and on skills connected to those standards that have not yet been mastered. Teachers do not have to waste valuable teaching time on skills and content that students have already mastered. They are able to create a blueprint for each of the least able students, and they also have the tools they need to challenge the most advanced students in the class. All this is on the desktop computer data management system that is connected to the district student information system. The system works the same for teachers of middle and high school because math, reading, and language data are available. Science and end-of-course assessment data will soon be added.

Meridian’s system is not totally in place yet because the student report card is not plugged into the system. Teachers have everything else they need right at their desktop to see not only the academic path already taken by students, but also the direction in which each student needs to head. The goal as stated by Superintendent Christine Donnell of “growth for all and accelerated growth for those behind” brings focus to the district’s commitment to help the lowest-achieving students improve while also recognizing that bright students need to be challenged as well. Through intervention, differentiation, and acceleration, the district aims to address the needs of all students.

As district staff look at how their district got to this point in their development of an extensive and long range academic plan, they noted that the educational changes they have undertaken have occurred in the midst of very rapid enrollment growth. The continual opening of newly constructed schools and living every day with overcrowded facilities bring challenges of their own, but the need to add a substantial number of new staff each year has the benefit of bringing in pools of talented teachers who are eager to do their best in their new assignments. Though building needs dominate Meridian’s list of what needs attention, district leaders indicate that they place equal value on the instructional needs of its teachers and instructional leadership.
Major Issues of Implementing NCLB

School Improvement

Four of Meridian’s Title I schools were in school improvement in 2002-03, and all four schools offered both parental choice and supplemental services. Even though 2,000 students were eligible for transfer, no families chose to change schools for their children, and none selected supplemental services. District staff found that parents were very satisfied with their children’s schools because overall performance was high, with 86-94% of the students at the proficient level. There were only three supplemental service providers on the state list, but no families selected the additional help for their students. Meridian district was planning to become a provider. However, in 2003, three of the four schools exited school improvement, and the only school left in that status is expected to exit in 2004 as it only needs another year of AYP in math to make the exit, which staff believes will occur.

Testing in Idaho has taken place at grades 4, 8, and 10, but grades 3 and 7 will be added to the testing cycle in 2004. Whether the addition of these grade levels will make a difference in AYP for Meridian schools remains to be seen. Dr. Linda Clark, the Director of Instruction who is responsible for implementation of curriculum across all grade levels, is pleased with the academic progress of Meridian schools. She credits the gains in proficiency and growth to “changes in curriculum, structures for learning and teacher practices, excellent site level leadership, and an attitude of No Excuses.”

NCLB subgroups could become a challenge for Meridian, but most schools do not have enough poor, Hispanic, or English language learner students to disaggregate test scores for these subgroups. High school students with disabilities and low-income students at some schools are the two subgroups that the district is monitoring to make sure that they continue to show academic progress.

Fiscal Problems

Once the recipient of funds from the Albertson Foundation that sparked teacher training throughout the state of Idaho, Meridian is now challenged to maintain its improvement course with district funds. Since there are declining educational budgets at the state level, implementing all the requirements of NCLB will be difficult. Staff members are aware of the barriers that may stand in the way of continued progress, such as continued growth, the need for new buildings, and declining budgets that have stretched the Meridian district to the limits. According to district staff, there are no funds for textbook adoptions in the current budget, and all supply budgets were reduced for the year. A comprehensive high school of 1,800 students and an elementary school of 450 were opened in the fall of 2003, but the net increase in staff for the district was only 11 positions; the rest of the staff resulted from reassignments and adjusting current ratios.
Other Implementation Issues

Class Size Reduction

Class sizes in Meridian are large by the standards of most districts and states. The teacher-student ratio in the district’s primary classes is 24:1, but from 4th grade on, ratios of 30 or more to one teacher is the norm, and some class ratios go as high as 35:1. To some extent, Meridian may be the poster child for proving that class size is not a key indicator of student achievement. Other than in the primary grades, district staff has not seen great differences in student performance based on class size.

Superintendent Christine Donnell and her team are optimistic that they will be able to resolve the issues related to AYP and school improvement and that they will demonstrate high levels of student achievement at all schools even if their class sizes are relatively high.

Data File — Joint School District # 2 - Meridian

Location: Central Idaho
Type: Suburban – Boise area
Number of Schools:
36 total
25 elementary schools K-5
6 middle schools, grades 6-8
5 high schools, grades 9-12

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total Enrollment: 25,937
White: 93%
Hispanic: 4%
Asian: 2%
Other: 1%

English Language Learners: 10% (major language is Spanish – 51 languages
Students with Disabilities: 8%
Low-Income Students: 17% (ranging from 8% to 64% in individual schools)

Number of Teachers
Total: 1,496
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 12 (less than 1%)

Number of Paraprofessionals
Total: 2
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 1

Number of Title I Schools:
5 elementary schools and 1 middle school

Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action
2002-03 2003-04
Key Findings

- Conflicting and changing information from the U.S. Department of Education and the state of Illinois about the law’s interpretation complicated the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in the Chicago Public Schools during school year 2002-03.

- The implementation of the NCLB school choice provisions in Chicago has been hampered, district officials say, by small numbers of available slots at receiving schools and a short period between the time the state identified the eligible schools and the beginning of the school year.

- The Chicago Public Schools undertook efforts to identify teachers who are highly qualified, but state requirements for teacher certification and licensure sometimes conflict with the NCLB requirements, so there are many teachers who meet the state’s standards but are not “highly qualified” according to the federal Act.

Background

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is one of the largest school districts in the country. Its student population exceeds 438,000—put another way, about 21% percent of all public school students in Illinois attend Chicago public schools. The district’s students are representative of the diversity found in the city of Chicago. More than 46 languages are spoken in the district’s 602 schools. Student demographics include 50.9% African American, 36.4% Latino, 9.2% White, 3.3% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.2% Native American. The CPS budget for fiscal year 2003 was over $3.66 billion. Children from low-income families constitute 85.3% of the student enrollment, and 14.3% are listed as English language learners. In 2002-03, of the district’s 46,601 budgeted positions, 42,091 were employed in the schools, 3,055 held citywide positions and 1,455 worked at central office or in one of 24 areas.
Since the mid-1980s, the Chicago school district has undergone a series of reforms that have profoundly affected the status of education in the city and shaped how the system approached implementation of NCLB. In 1989, the city took a far-reaching step toward public accountability by creating local school councils in every school. These councils gave parents and others in the community the opportunity to have a direct and active choice in how their schools would be operated. In 1995, after years of battling with the state legislature for funding, the mayor of Chicago argued that if the legislature was not going to give the city sufficient money to run the schools properly, then the legislature should place control of the school system under the mayor—and it did.

The marriage between the local school council action and the mayor’s takeover of the schools has been a rocky one, but it is far from ready for the divorce courts. The district has made progress in school improvement, teacher professionalism, reading scores, curriculum, and choice.

**Progress in Implementing NCLB**

In the early months after NCLB was enacted, the CPS legal department carefully reviewed the law and began to put on a series of workshops and seminars. The goal was to actively get the word out about the law—both internally, so that CPS departments would be prepared to do what they had to, and externally so that the community would understand the new law.

Chicago people had no problem with the overall focus of the law: improve professionalism among teachers, offer additional tutoring for struggling students, strengthen accountability, improve reading scores, and create urban schools that work for children. But in the details of implementation, Chicago school officials saw potential difficulties that could slow down reform in a system that had finally begun to show progress through its own efforts.

School officials also had numerous questions about how various provisions of the law would be interpreted. For example, if children were to be given the option of changing schools, would there be enough eligible schools and seats in those schools to take the students? How would costs be absorbed? And what criteria would the state use to designate the schools, and would those criteria stand the test of scrutiny? School leaders worried that implementing the school choice provisions alone would not only tax CPS departments but also make it difficult for them to accomplish the real intent of the law—to give students safer and better schools to attend. Even preliminary reports and analyses from the Illinois State Board of Education were leading many to believe that few Chicago students would really be able to move to another school. There simply weren’t enough schools not on the school improvement list with empty seats in them to accommodate the students who would be deemed eligible to switch.
CPS officials felt that they did not receive clear answers to their questions about these and other matters from the state and federal levels. The district was anxiously awaiting guidelines from the state and specific information about which schools would have to offer choice and supplemental services.

Shortly after Duncan took office, when action began in earnest on implementation of NCLB, the CEO opted to develop teams from different departments rather than create a new NCLB Department. This allowed the district to build on what it was already doing, rather than viewing NCLB as a new reform that would have to be layered on top of what was already in place.

The reforms occurring in Chicago at the time the law was passed were far more advanced and orderly than in many other cities across the country. With school reform elements already well underway in Chicago, the question became how to implement NCLB without undermining the work already started in public school choice options, teacher improvement and accountability, reading instruction, and other areas.

CPS seemed to be adopting a two-pronged approach to implementation for fall 2002. On one hand, departments that would be most affected by NCLB began to plan for implementation, making every effort to adapt systems that were already in place to meet the demands of NCLB. At the same time, CPS was waiting until the state board developed its own accountability system, prepared the list of schools in need of improvement, and issued more definitive guidelines on a host of other issues before it moved ahead at full speed. CPS strategically made the choice to avoid any public “nay-saying” about the law, even though many school officials had concerns about how its provisions would affect large urban systems.

Chicago already had three schools that Duncan had closed in June 2002 because they had a long history of doing poorly—some for more than 10 years. Plans called for the three schools to be closed for at least a year so that they could be completely restructured, then reopened. Seats for these children had to be found, putting any others who might opt for school choice under NCLB in line behind them.

Duncan had already established several goals for his tenure: improved professionalism and professional development for teachers; more choice for those who wanted it, in the form of magnet schools, charter schools, small schools, and gifted centers; better accountability; and more schools that could serve as centers of the community.

Duncan put together a quality management team to manage NCLB, consisting of members from many CPS departments: Academic Advancement, Research and Accountability, Education, Human Resources, Technology, Communication, Law, Budget, and Finance. Duncan headed the group and other departments were brought in on an as-needed basis. Because of the senior level of those who work on the team, effective decisions could be made promptly and implemented quickly.
During the hectic summer of 2002, it seemed clear to many at CPS that if it relied solely on the state for implementation and guidelines, it would not serve CPS’s best interests, so Duncan moved to get approval from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for the district’s implementation plans.

One area of confusion between CPS and the Illinois state board on one hand and USED on the other concerned the rate of students’ adequate yearly progress. As discussed in more detail in the section on AYP, CPS officials thought it would be acceptable, under the state’s AYP plan, for the district to improve at different rates in different years. But after negotiations between the state of Illinois and USED, the two parties emerged with a policy which assumed that average achievement would grow at a steady annual rate.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

*School Choice*

CPS has a history of offering its students public school choice options. About 150,000 students across the district opt out of their neighborhood school to attend magnet schools, charter schools, and gifted centers. CPS considers that to some degree it had already implemented a variation of choice before NCLB was enacted.

Rather than create new NCLB systems, CPS looked around within its own processes and procedures to find something already in place and operating effectively that could be adapted for NCLB purposes. With respect to choice, CPS had a system that was working reasonably well for some of its selective-enrollment schools. Parents would fill out interest and preference forms, mail them by a specific deadline, and then their names would be entered in a lottery. From the lottery—if they had more than one choice—parents could visit the schools and then choose the one they wanted. A similar process, conducted by the same CPS department, was developed for NCLB choice. Parents received notification from CPS, applied by a deadline, and then their names were put in a lottery to be moved to a new school.

Letters to parents about the options to move their children were mailed out in summer 2002. During August of that year, open houses were held at schools that would be receiving students. Parents were required to send their applications for participation in the choice programs by the postmark date of August 15, 2002. They would be notified of student placements through the mail, and letters were sent out on August 23, 2002.

Because CPS had received approval from USED to pilot choice at 48 of its 179 low performing schools, only parents at those schools received letters about submitting an application for either the Paired Choice or the Cluster Choice option. Shortly after the letters went out but before the deadline for applying, two open houses for both pilot programs were held at the receiving schools. Information was provided to parents about their options and the choice process. Of the 26,000-plus families from the 48 low-
achieving schools who received notification, only 1,400 parents attended the open house information sessions.

When the August 15, 2002 deadline arrived, CPS had received applications from 2,425 parents who wanted to exercise their choice option. These names were placed in a lottery held a week later for the 1,500 seats CPS had been able to identify in receiving schools. Low-income, low-performing students from the 48 schools identified for school improvement were given preference. The lottery resulted in 1,165 students of the more than 430,000 in the CPS system changing schools under the NCLB choice implementation.

By the end of the 2002-03 academic year, 707 students were still at their new choice schools. About 25%, or 294 students, had returned to their original schools, and 36 students had left the CPS system for other districts. The remaining 128 had moved to other CPS schools.

The small number of students who participated in the first round of choice can be attributed to several factors, district officials said. One clearly was the option granted to CPS by USED to test the plan during the first year rather than offer choice to move all of the students who were eligible. Another factor could be traced to the fact some CPS schools that would have been classified as receiving schools were already at capacity or seriously overcrowded and therefore could not take new students.

CPS staff noted other factors reducing use of the choice option, including the large number of low-performing schools in the system that simply weren’t doing well enough themselves to take on students. Consequently, the number of available seats within the system was severely limited. Another issue was the management, logistical, transportation, and financial turmoil likely to arise if school choice had been offered to the more than 26,000 students who were eligible.

CPS officials made what they saw as an additional gesture of good faith regarding choice. For the receiving schools, as well as for all 179 low-performing schools on the state-designated watch list, CPS offered what it called educational enhancements. Parents of students enrolled at low-performing schools who were not eligible for the choice option were sent letters about the educational enhancements their schools would be receiving.

Two types of choice programs were offered during 2002-03:

- **Paired choice:** 40 schools from the state list of 179, including the bottom 21, were paired with other, better-performing schools with slots available to take students. The receiving schools were within three miles of each other.

- **Clustered choice:** 8 low-performing schools were clustered with 2 or 3 schools offering specialized curricula, and students could transfer within the cluster. Two pilot programs were created in 48 of the 179 elementary schools not meeting state standards.
Parents could transfer their children to better schools either through Paired Choice or Cluster Choice. The cluster system, which struggled in 2002-03, was dropped for the 2003-04 school year.

In August 2003, more than 270,000 letters went out to CPS parents advising them of their school choice opportunities. Again a lottery was held that included the names of students who returned their forms before the deadline. There were approximately 1,100 seats available. Nineteen thousand applications were received for the lottery, and 1,097 students were offered the opportunity to move under choice for the 2003-04 school year. It was estimated that about half of those who “won” the lottery actually reported to their new schools when classes began in September 2003. The following table shows what has happened to the students who qualified for choice in 2002 and 2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Happened to the CPS Students Who Qualified for and Then Took Advantage of School Choice and Supplemental Services?</th>
<th>August 2002</th>
<th>August 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who were eligible for choice and received letters</td>
<td>26,000+</td>
<td>270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate number of seats available in “approved for receiving students” schools</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who applied for choice slots</td>
<td>2,425</td>
<td>19,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who were placed in available school slots</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>1,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who stayed in the new choice school for the year</td>
<td>707</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who returned to their former schools</td>
<td>294</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who left their new choice school and went to other CPS schools</td>
<td>128</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of student who left and transferred to non CPS schools</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools identified for choice and supplemental services</td>
<td>179 choice only; 25 choice and supplemental services</td>
<td>136 choice only 229 choice and SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of letters sent out regarding supplemental services</td>
<td>18,000+</td>
<td>133,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students who applied for supplemental services</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>17,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CPS was criticized for having made the choice process very complicated, particularly in its letters to parents explaining their rights. CPS staffers responded that NCLB guidelines were specific as to what the letters could and should say, and that compliance itself complicated the process.

Frustrations with school choice implementation among district officials ran so high that many speculated whether it would be worth implementing in future years. Suggestions for legislative changes, such as putting all the choice dollars into supplemental services, were receiving an attentive ear because many believed it would be a better use of time, money, and manpower. Duncan also went on record as indicating that supplemental services should be undertaken first before the drastic step of moving children.

**Supplemental Services**

The Chicago Public Schools, along with other districts in the state, thought they had an understanding that supplemental services would not be offered until the 2004-05 school year. This came about as a result of a clause in the state’s consolidated application to USED. In the state application, Illinois had given this start date, and the application had been approved. Additionally, CPS felt that it could take a little more time to implement the supplemental tutoring because it was already offering many after-school programs that provide additional educational assistance to students.

However, in February 2003, according to CPS staff, USED notified Illinois that its districts had to begin complying with the law by providing supplemental services immediately, despite the clause in the state’s approved application. The state hurried to approve more than 20 service suppliers who could begin to provide tutoring services to eligible schools, and CPS worked overtime to put them online so they could be paid.

After the state identified 25 schools (13 elementary and 12 high schools) in Chicago that qualified for supplemental services because they had been identified for school improvement for a second year, CPS was again pressed into creating and implementing, on the fly, a process for parents to request the supplemental tutoring for their children. Service providers were asked to submit information about their programs and to indicate how many students they would be able to handle. Letters were sent out to approximately 18,000 parents advising them of their rights under NCLB. Information from the providers was included, along with a form on which parents could indicate which provider they wanted to use for their children. CPS created a deadline and required that all forms be returned by mail.
Once the parents had made their selections, CPS assigned students to the various providers and set up sites across the district’s schools where the tutoring would be held. (Some had off-school sites, and parents were responsible for getting the children to them.) Providers were required to meet with the parents on an individual basis, test the children, and design an achievement plan for each.

Approximately 1,200 parents completed the process and were assigned to supplemental service providers. CPS reported that 800 children actually registered for the tutoring. The program began in late April 2003 and ran for seven weeks.

NCLB calls for the supplemental services to be provided so that test scores improve, but district officials note that because of the confusing signals from the state and federal governments, Chicago children did not receive the services until after testing was completed.

CEO Duncan publicly expressed his support of the concept of tutoring services and hoped that 25,000-30,000 students might be served during the 2003-04 school year. (About 17,000 registered for supplemental services in fall 2003.) Duncan went on record as very much in favor of the additional help, and has spoken about wanting to have tutoring services at all 600 CPS schools. He has stated his belief that supplemental tutoring services should come before school choice and has suggested changing the law to require this. "It just makes sense educationally," he said. "Where we're seeing improvement, we want to invest in the schools – not in more yellow school buses."

**Highly Qualified Teachers**

As part of its responsibility to comply with the teacher quality provisions of NCLB, CPS began working in late 2002 to compile the necessary information about teacher qualifications. By January 2003, CPS had established—in partnership with the Chicago Teachers Union and the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association—the Educator Qualification System (EQS) to effectively verify whether teachers were in compliance with the law. The role of EQS was to inventory teacher certification, endorsements, and assignments. It was also charged with developing and implementing the system to inform parents regarding the qualifications of the teachers in their children’s schools.

Data for the inventory came from CPS records, Illinois State Board of Education records, principals, and the teachers themselves. The system was put online so the information could be updated at the school level—what subjects teachers were teaching, whether they were teaching in their content area, and if they had the necessary certifications and endorsements. Data was collected about 26,000 teachers and 5,000 assistant teachers.

The first CPS teacher audit was conducted in January and February 2003. In total, 25,496 teachers, including regularly appointed, long-term substitutes, and citywide special education teachers giving students instructional support, and 5,147 paraprofessionals were audited. Under NCLB, only core teachers teaching in the same
classroom for at least 20 consecutive days are determined to be highly qualified or not highly qualified. Core subjects include English, Reading/Language Arts, Math, Science, Foreign Languages, Civics/Government, Economics, Arts, History, and Geography. Special education teachers were evaluated using the rules in place then. Parents could request credential information for any teacher teaching their child for at least 20 consecutive days. Not reviewed were day-to-day substitutes, cadre substitutes, and paraprofessionals who did not work directly with students.

A process was developed to advise parents of their rights to know about the educational background and certification of the children’s teachers. Initial letters were sent home by school principals informing parents of their right to request information about their child’s teacher’s credentials. CPS also had to notify parents if their child was not being taught by a highly qualified teacher. CPS does not have records to indicate which children are assigned to each teacher in elementary schools. CPS central office staff and principals worked together to match students to teachers and to stuff and mail the letters. For high schools, CPS does not have records to indicate which students are assigned to which teachers, so central office compiled all of those letters. In total, more than 100,000 letters were sent to parents.

While current teachers have four years under NCLB to become highly qualified according to the law’s definition, many wore the stigma of being unqualified because of differences between the NCLB requirements and those of the Illinois state certification/North Central Accrediting Association. Many teachers are considered well above state standards and hold Illinois endorsements, but they are not highly qualified teachers according to the federal law. The chart below delineates the variations between the two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Requirements for Teacher Qualifications vs. NCLB Requirements For 2002-2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STATE of ILLINOIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers need reading endorsement if they are teaching reading more than 50% of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with Type 29 (bilingual) certification can teach all subjects for the 8-year life of the certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teachers need grade level certification and special education endorsements for the disabilities with which they work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and recent out-of-state graduates with provisional certificates may teach for a full year under these certifications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
High school teachers and subject-specialists in middle schools need grade level certification and endorsements in subjects taught 3/5 of the time; 2/5 of subjects taught may be off certification

These teachers need an endorsement or a college/university subject major, or must have passed a state subject area test for each subject taught

Teachers enrolled in programs for, or working on, alternative certification are considered by the state and local district to be qualified

These teachers do not meet standards

(Some Chicago public schools have as many as 23-62 foreign languages spoken by students)

Teachers must be fluent in the languages of the children in their classrooms

CPS faced some difficult NCLB implementation issues regarding its districtwide reading initiative and teacher qualifications. When the reading program was begun, almost all teachers were required to teach reading at some time during the day. CPS knew it faced a major challenge. Many core teachers were pressed into the service of teaching reading even if they did not have a reading endorsement. So a series of training programs and workshops were provided to prepare teachers. Training was extensive and consistent. CPS provided considerable training but it was not accompanied by any university or professional development credits, so it did not qualify as training meeting NCLB specifications. Once again, many teachers found themselves well-trained to handle their reading responsibilities but unqualified according to the NCLB.

CPS encountered other implementation problems. In Illinois, teachers were allowed to teach “off endorsement” for up to two-fifths of their daily schedule—a ruling endorsed by both the Illinois State Board of Education and the North Central Accrediting Association. This long-standing Illinois practice was in direct contradiction to NCLB, which insisted that teachers face the immediate label of being not highly qualified if they lacked the proper credential in any content area taught. When the NCLB criteria replaced existing state practices, this created an inordinate number of core content teachers who were publicly labeled as not highly qualified. The NCLB requirements for new hires to be “highly qualified” by the law’s definition posed further difficulty for CPS because the district, like many across the country, was facing a dwindling pool of teacher candidates from which to choose.

Adequate Yearly Progress

Battles with how to measure adequate yearly progress began early. CPS was clear: it had a new accountability system that created categories of schools that Exceed, Meet, or Do Not Exceed standards.

Elementary schools would be measured on improvement in scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills compared to the citywide average; the schools’ average student improvement
in Iowa scores; their improvement on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test compared to the citywide average; and progress on the ISAT compared to the previous year’s scores. High schools would be measured on the Prairie State exam and on dropout rates and on-track-to-graduate rates. The new system would concentrate on all schools instead of just those on probation; would consider many indicators instead of just one; would include rewards for improvement; and would focus on the more important issue of student gains rather than school gains. School officials believed it was much more important to know if its students were making yearly gains.

The system was newly rolled out in fall 2002, and by early accounts a Chicago school could fall in CPS’s Schools of Distinction category (“exceeds standards”) and then find itself on the state watch list created by the NCLB criteria for measuring AYP. This might happen as a result of disaggregating student populations or because of student movement through choice, as the example in Box 1 illustrates.

**Box 1 -- C school example**

The experience of one Chicago school, C Elementary School (CES), illustrates the challenges of having a different evaluation system under NCLB than the state or district’s system. The school had shown gains over a several year period and was on the state’s list of improving schools. Under NCLB, however, improvement had to be shown in all disaggregated student groups. Among its English language learner students, CES had percentages that initially failed to show the NCLB-required improvement.

Another factor contributed to the CES dilemma. ELL students move out of the bilingual program and into the general student population when they make significant progress—or in other cases—after three years. This meant that the only students who were left in the ELL pool, disaggregated for NCLB purposes, would always be those who were not proficient.

Adding yet another hurdle for CES was the fact that the Illinois State Board of Education changed its required percent of improvement for ELL students to “allow for statistical margin of error.” CES went off the state’s list of schools not meeting standards and retractions had to be issued.

CPS and many other districts also worried that it would be very difficult to achieve the same annual percentage of academic progress every year. Their experience showed that improvement did not happen in neat increments. There were likely to be years when a steady annual growth of a specific percentage was not a realistic goal, they reasoned.

According to CPS officials, conversations between CPS, state officials, and USED led to what many felt was a reasonable solution. AYP would be flat at first, then rise sharply and sustain itself at that level over a period of time. Initially, USED agreed to this
concept, or so Illinois educators thought, and the state proceeded under the assumption that this was acceptable path. But in June 2003, USED indicated dissatisfaction with the plan because the growth would not occur in equal increments. At the time this case study was completed, USED had indicated its preference for a fixed growth rate per year. CPS and state staffers—along with educators across the country—argue that no growth is ever consistent in all groups over a sustained period of time.

**Release Dates for State Data**

Release dates for the state lists of schools that did not make AYP gave CPS short time frames in which it could implement choice. The state released the first list based on preliminary data in July 2002, and CPS had to roll out its choice plan in the same month. This meant, among other issues, identifying schools that could receive students, determining which services would be provided, determining which students would be eligible, contacting those students, and establishing a lottery process because there would not be enough spaces among improving schools.

NCLB required states and districts to use the most recent data to determine school eligibility lists. This meant acquiring the data from 2001-02—data that historically was not available in Illinois until late in the summer. Waiting for the most recent information did not allow much lead-time for implementation to take place in a timely manner. The initial list for CPS in summer 2002 included 179 schools. CPS could have gone down the road another district took: going with the most recent data from the previous year, which would result in a shorter list of poorly performing schools and fewer eligible students and thereby make implementation somewhat easier. CPS chose not to do this in an effort to fully comply with NCLB.

While there was frustration about NCLB in many areas, educators were clear on one challenge: receiving information about how they were supposed to implement the law. District staffers were concerned that the U.S. Department of Education gave different answers to the same questions and then was reluctant to put the agreed-upon answer in writing. This posed a problem for the district; if it implemented a policy, it could be told later by USED that what the district did was unacceptable. A lack of firm responses, according to CPS staffers, also led to missed deadlines and to parents, teachers, principals, and others being left hanging as to what was required.

Many CPS departments felt the challenges too. When a new law of such magnitude as NCLB is enacted, it stands to reason the departments in a school system would also be affected. CPS was no exception; some district staffers estimated that as many as 30% of the departments at CPS had to make some adjustments or major changes. A sampling of affected departments follows:

- **Payroll:** Teachers were required to obtain university transcripts in order to aid with determinations of their status as qualified or not. CPS agreed to pay their
fees for this service. Checks were processed for $6.00 each for the teachers who were required to provide transcripts for the Teacher Quality audit.

- **Transportation:** For 2003-04, systems to transport students to their choice schools were developed, only to be scrapped as not feasible. Alternative systems involving reimbursements and public transportation were created. This in turn drew in Safety and Security, which had to deliver public transportation passes to the schools.

- **Sports Administration:** High school student athletes who opted for choice had to deal with sports eligibility and recruitment issues.

In summary, NCLB has created considerable challenges for the Chicago Public Schools, challenges shared by other large urban districts. Nearly all aspects of the law’s requirements become more logistically complex when hundreds of thousands of students, tens of thousands of teachers, and hundreds of schools are involved. Chicago also seems to be working hard to implement NCLB in a way that maintains the momentum of its reforms that were already showing positive results. As state and federal policies become more concrete over time, the district should be better able to respond because at least it knows what is expected.

**Data File 2002-03 — Chicago Public Schools**

**Location:** Northern Illinois  
**Type:** Urban  
**Number of Schools:**  
602 total  
470 elementary schools (421 traditional, 35 magnet, 14 special)  
23 middle schools  
95 high schools (70 general/technical/academic preparatory, 13 special, 5 magnet, 7 vocational)  
14 charter schools (9 elementary, 5 secondary)

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**  
Total Enrollment: 438,589  
African American: 50.9%  
Hispanic: 36.4%  
White: 9.2%  
Asian/Pacific Islander: 3.3%  
Native American: 0.2%  
English Language Learners: 14.3%  
Students with Disabilities: N/A  
Low-Income Students: 85.3%

**Number of Teachers**  
Total: approximately 26,000  
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 1,900 did not meet NCLB criteria in 2002-03; criteria have changed for 2003-04 so these numbers are not reliable for 03-04.

**Number of Paraprofessionals**  
Total: approximately 5,000 Title I paraprofessionals
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: N/A

Number of Title I Schools: N/A

Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action
- Identified as not making adequate yearly progress for at least one year:
- Required to offer school choice: 48 in 2002-03; 365 in 2003-04
- Required to offer supplemental services and choice: 225
- In corrective action: N/A

12. Kansas

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools
Superintendent: Dr. Ray Daniels
Contact: Jim Clevenger, Director, Federal Programs
Students: 20,425, K-12 – urban

Key Findings

- Kansas City has an extensive program of professional development and technical assistance, which local administrators believe has helped the district improve student performance and implement the requirements of NCLB.

- Overall student achievement in Kansas City rose in 2003, and three of the 10 schools subject to school improvement in 2002-03 made sufficient academic gains to exit improvement status. District officials attribute this progress to intensive technical assistance and professional development. Among the more effective initiatives are school audit teams that review school goals and make recommendations for targeting all resources to achieve these goals, and site-level teacher leaders who help teachers change their instruction through coaching and mentoring.

- Only a limited number of eligible parents in Kansas City chose to enroll their children in supplemental services. The Kansas City school district was the only approved provider of supplemental services in school year 2002-03, and the number of providers is limited for the current school year. To increase participation in these services, district officials believe that parents and students must recognize how students can benefit from this extra help and must embrace an expanded concept of “school” that includes additional learning hours in various settings.

Background
The Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools is an urban district that serves 20,425 students, most of them poor and most African American. Forty-two schools house students in configurations of grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12.

In recent years the school district has benefited from the involvement of the Kauffman Foundation, a private foundation, in its professional development program. The Kauffman Foundation initiated this partnership with the public schools with profits from the sale of the Kansas City Royals baseball team. School year 2002-03 marked the district’s third year of funding from the Foundation.

Professional development, supported by the Kauffman Foundation, has been a major goal of the Kansas City Public Schools since before NCLB was enacted. A structured professional development program called Teaching Is Learning provides weekly professional development sessions to all teachers in every school, grade, and subject. Students at all schools are released two hours early on Wednesdays so that teachers and other school staff can participate in this training, which helps them to incorporate standards and benchmarks into their teaching, develop strategies to improve reading and math instruction, and use student assessment data to refine instruction. Staff members who work as instructional coaches help plan these weekly sessions, and coaches also serve as mentors for their colleagues. The district is also implementing a web-based professional development program, described below.

The district is also using other strategies to raise achievement, such as instituting a computerized data system that tracks educators’ efforts to keep parents informed about their children’s progress and encouraging teachers to move to the next grade with the same class of students, so the students can stay with the same teacher for two or three years.

**Progress in Implementing NCLB**

**Professional Development and Technical Assistance**

The Kansas City school district is implementing a web-based professional development program that contains the content standards, benchmarks, and other indicators that teachers need for specific grade levels. Plans are in place to create links to high-quality lesson plans, created by teachers, that directly address specific standards and contain scoring rubrics and exemplary activities. Teachers will be able to find the standard and benchmark they need to address, then click on available lesson plans for their grade level. After selecting a lesson plan, they can change it to suit the particular needs of their students and can save the revised plan in their own computer folder for future use.

In 2002-03, the district provided major technical assistance, including professional development, to the 10 schools targeted for school improvement. In 2003, three of these schools made large enough achievement gains for the second consecutive year to exit school improvement. District officials assert that school-level “audit teams” for math and
reading have made a substantial impact in all 10 schools. These audit teams, which consist of district teachers and other staff, spent a week at each of the 10 schools reviewing how personnel, facilities, and funds were used and how all of these resources were targeted toward areas of need. They also sought to assure that schoolwide goals were in place and that all efforts were directed toward achieving those goals. The table below shows the kinds of questions the audit teams examined.

**Kansas City School Audit – Technical Assistance for School Improvement Schools**

1. Are school goals set?
2. Are they adequate to move the school to AYP achievement?
3. Are the strategies described in the School and Small Learning Community Action Plans sufficient to improve student achievement to a level that achieves AYP?
4. Is the staff development plan sufficient to support the staff in learning and implementing the strategies?
5. Are the resources (instructional materials, money, personnel, space, time) aligned to maximize the effectiveness of the action plans?
6. Is Principal Leadership and practice effectively supporting and expecting the implementation of the plan?
7. Is Instructional Coach leadership and practice effectively supporting and expecting the implementation of the plan?
8. What is the current implementation level of action plan?
9. Recommendations

The audit teams often made very specific recommendations about ways to improve school plans, such as recommending particular instructional strategies in reading.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

**Adequate Yearly Progress**

Although in the past, Kansas City schools have not performed as well academically as the district’s leaders and the community have desired, solid achievement gains were made in 2003. Academic achievement increased at most schools and in most content areas, and there was a substantial increase in the number of students who scored at the proficient level, including those in the designated subgroups. District staff members believe that their investment in professional development is beginning to pay off, and it was very encouraging to staff that three schools moved out of school improvement.

All 10 schools in school improvement in 2002-03 made AYP in reading, and seven made AYP in math. Three schools came off school improvement for reading and math, and two schools came off in reading only. Of the seven schools remaining in school
improvement, all made achievement gains in 2003, but they will need to sustain these gains for another year to exit school improvement. Four of these schools made AYP in both reading and math, two made AYP in reading, and one made AYP in math. Four schools could come off improvement in reading and math in 2004 if they make AYP in reading and math again. Three schools could come off school improvement in reading if they make AYP in reading again. More importantly, no new schools entered school improvement.

The 2003 assessments show a substantial increase in the number of students achieving at the proficient or above levels across the district on the state tests for grades 4, 7, and 10 in math and grades 5, 8, and 11 in reading. At the district level, all subgroups met the AYP requirements in reading, but four of nine subgroups (low-income, English language learner, African American, and Asian/Pacific Islander students) did not make AYP in math.

The percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level in reading in grades 5, 8, and 11 combined increased substantially from 31% in 2001, to 33% in 2002, to 48% in 2003. The percentage of students in these same grades who scored at unsatisfactory levels declined from 39% to 21% between 2001 and 2003. The share of students scoring at the proficient level in math, although not as dramatic as reading, increased from 21% to 29% during this same period, while the percentage scoring at the unsatisfactory level declined from 53% to 44%.

One of the schools in improvement status scored among the highest in the district in 2003, with 70% of its students scoring at or above the proficient level in reading and 69% in math. This high-poverty school seems to be on its way to becoming a high performing school.

Five of the Kansas City schools were targeted for corrective action in 2002-03, a serious phase of the NCLB sanctions for schools that consistently fail to make AYP. Because these schools made exceptional achievement gains in 2003, however, they will continue to implement their improvement plans in 2003-04 and will not be subject to harsher sanctions, such as reorganization or staff replacement. The district intends to continue providing technical assistance to these schools, anticipating that another year or two of achievement gains will enable all five schools to exit improvement status. One school is in restructuring status, but the state has agreed to accept the reform efforts being done at the school for 2003-04.

**School Choice and Supplemental Services**

Kansas City was required to offer school choice in 10 schools in 2002-03, including three schools that had to offer supplemental services, as well. In 2003-04, seven schools must continue to offer choice and supplemental services.
In 2002-03, only a small number of parents took advantage of the opportunity to move their children to a different school—just 127 students transferred schools, out of 4,500 eligible. Almost half of the requests to transfer (56) were from one school. Although parents were notified about their options in a variety of ways, most were reluctant to move their children from their neighborhood schools. For 2003–04 only 59 students transferred to another school. The school that had the most requests for transfers in 2002-03 is no longer in school improvement, and parents were not interested in transferring their children from schools that are improving in performance.

Similarly, only 283 students participated in supplemental services in 2002-03. In 2002-03, the school district was the only approved provider, and school officials believe the district can serve students more efficiently than many other providers. Service providers continue to be limited. One of the providers wanted to charge the parents for part of the costs of services because their typical fee was more than the district could pay, but the district would not allow that to occur. In 2003–04, there are 422 students from seven schools enrolled in supplemental services. The majority of parents chose the district as the provider.

Most supplemental services are delivered after the regular school day. To increase students’ participation in these services, district officials believe that parents and students will have to change their concept of “school” to encompass a longer learning day in a variety of settings and to understand how students can benefit from the additional services.

**Qualifications of Teachers and Paraprofessionals**

Of the 1,600 teachers in the Kansas City district, only 40 do not meet NCLB qualifications. The district participates in a state-approved program that allows people who are seeking second careers in education to be assigned to schools through an alternative endorsement program for new teachers. The teachers who do not meet NLCB requirements teach in hard-to-fill content areas for which they do not have a state endorsement.

The state of Kansas has determined that for an experienced teacher to be considered highly qualified according to NCLB, he or she must have a bachelor's degree, must hold a state license in the area in which he or she teaches, and must have achieved one of the following: passed a rigorous content assessment, hold a college major in the content area being taught, have 30 credit hours in the content area being taught, or earn 100 points on a state-developed rubric. The state rubric, piloted last spring, awards points for teaching experience in the content area, credit hours in the content area, service to the profession, awards and honors earned in the content area, and published articles in the content area. It is anticipated that all teachers who need to complete the rubric will do so in 2003-04. However, middle school teachers who have little teaching experience and lack a strong background in the content area they are teaching may have difficulty earning 100 points on the rubric.
The Kansas City school district also employs 93 paraprofessionals who work in Title I schools. Of these, 82 (88%) do not meet NCLB requirements. In accordance with the NCLB criteria, Kansas will require paraprofessionals to have an associate’s degree, have 48 hours (two years) of college credit, or achieve a passing score on the paraprofessional assessment. For those who want to take the approved test, the district is providing support and assistance. In the summer of 2003, a total of 40 paraprofessionals took the pre-test, and those who did well will now take the assessment. NCLB Title II funds are being used to purchase study guides and 100 on-line testing licenses. Study sessions are offered on topics covered on the test.

New hires are required to have two years of college, and the district is encouraging paraprofessionals to take additional college coursework.

**Other Implementation Issues**

Kansas City uses funding from the Kauffman Foundation to support district students who want to pursue a college education. In a district where 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, this scholarship program is indeed a top prize for academic excellence. Support is provided in both the middle school and high school to assure that students will be successful in college, and their college costs are paid by the Foundation.

The 2003–04 school year was the first year of implementation for this program called “Kauffman Scholars.” The program began with 72 7th grade students from nine middle schools. Kauffman will help support these students academically through high school and then academically and financially through college. The plan is to pick up new students from the 7th grade each year. The Kauffman Foundation runs the program and works with the students, and even though they may hire district staff for academic support, no district funds are used in the program.

Ten to fifteen years ago, the Foundation had a similar program called “Project Choice that was started by the late owner of the Kansas City Royals, Ewing Kauffman. Twenty low-income students were randomly chosen from each school and offered all expenses paid for college if they stayed off drugs and did not become parents. This program ended after five years, but even though the dropout rate was high, there were more students from low-income families that went on to college and received degrees than from similar groups of students in the same schools.

**Data File — Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools**

**Location:** Eastern Kansas  
**Type:** Urban, city of 149,767  
**Number of Schools:**  
- 42 total  
- 28 elementary schools (K-5)  
- 8 middle schools (6-8)
1 school serving grades 8-12
5 high schools (9-12)

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total Enrollment: 20,425
African American: 50%
Hispanic: 25%
White: 21%
Asian: 3.5%
Other: 0.5%
English Language Learners: 13%, mostly Spanish speaking
Students with Disabilities: 13%
Low-Income Students: 75%, ranging from 46% to 100% in individual schools

Number of Teachers
Total: 1,600
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 40 (2.5%)

Number of Paraprofessionals
Total: 93
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 82 (88%)

Number of Title I Schools: 26

Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action

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13. Louisiana

St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools
Superintendent: Michael Coburn
Contact: Annette Jennings, Title I Curriculum Coordinator
Students: 5,589, K-12 - suburban

Key Findings

- St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools hopes to get double mileage from encouraging paraprofessionals to enroll in college coursework instead of passing a test, because that will enable them to assist classroom teachers more effectively and may also lead to their becoming teachers.

- Recognizing that a high-poverty district must use different ways to actively involve students in learning and must accommodate individual differences to
increase the literacy rate, St. John has embarked on a new three-year districtwide plan that starts in kindergarten to improve literacy.

**Background**

With the Mississippi River running through the parish, St. John the Baptist Parish in Louisiana serves in some ways as a gateway to New Orleans. St. John is a suburban school parish, separate from but connected geographically, historically, and culturally to the city of New Orleans. Lest one be fooled by the name, St. John is a public school district.

St. John began its existence in the early 1720s as the second permanent settlement in the Mississippi River region. A group of Germans settled on the west bank of the river, which became known as the “German Coast.” The towns of Lucy, Edgard, and Wallace on the west bank and Garyville, Mt. Airy, Reserve, and LaPlace on the east bank make up the attendance area of the St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools. The region still celebrates its long-ago creation of andouille, the spicy Cajun pork sausage, with a festival every fall.

More than half of the children who live in the parish attend parochial school. The public school student population is 71% African American, 27% Caucasian, 1% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. A total of 5,589 students attend the 11 schools, nine of which are K-8 and two of which are high schools. Many families whose children attend the public schools are poor, and the poverty levels in the district’s schools range from 61% to 100%. Because of these high levels of poverty, all the schools receive Title I funds.

In the fall of 2003, a school board member from St. John the Baptist Parish proposed that elected school board members be held to high measures of accountability just as everyone else in the district was. In particular, he suggested that that monthly pay of board members should be withheld if schools in the district were failing. This was felt by some to be a way to publicize the discrepancy between the accountability expectations of teachers and principals compared to that of elected officials. According to a district staff member, there was little attention given to the statement in local papers although it received some attention nationally.

**Progress in Implementing NCLB**

*Professional Development*

Louisiana has begun to provide training for principals, teachers, and support personnel to better prepare them to develop and improve their school improvement plans and meet the requirements of NCLB. The St. John district has also been approved by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to offer a teacher preparation program for certification in special education. Currently, the district offers a Practitioner Teacher
Program, which is a fast-track teacher certification program of 270 hours of instruction. To date, this program has focused on preparing teachers for students in grades 3 through 8. School placements of teachers in the Practitioner program vary each year depending on the need for teachers with appropriate certification. It is the intent of St. John’s to use this program to assist special education teachers in reaching full certification.

A balanced literacy program with a phonics base has been implemented in St. John’s schools, and teachers have been trained to use standards-based instruction and specific strategies to motivate students who are not achieving as they should. Teachers are also trained to use technology so they can become proficient in using a prescriptive/diagnostic approach to individual student needs in math, writing, and reading. All teachers are required to attend this training—either in the summer of 2003, when they were paid to attend, or during the fall, when they were given release time from classroom duties. Each teacher is provided with three non-teaching days during the year. During these times, teachers work in study groups with specialists and coaches as part of teams to improve day-to-day instruction.

St. John has also put in place paraprofessional training and is using Title I funds to pay tuition to a two-year college as an incentive for paraprofessionals to start working on a degree. St. John plans to encourage its paraprofessionals to take the coursework, not only as a way to develop future teachers, but also to better prepare paraprofessionals to assist teachers with instructing students, whether in the computer lab, a special education classroom, or the simulated “supermarket” created in the classroom to help students apply math skills. Thirty-two paraprofessionals were enrolled in the college courses offered by River Parishes Community College in 2003.

**Parent Involvement**

Recognizing that past efforts with parent involvement did not produce the results that were needed, St. John adopted a different way of delivering services to parents. Each school received a specific budget for parent involvement activities, and a variety of new programs were designed and carried out. For example, some schools created Breakfast Clubs as a way to encourage parents to start off the school day with their children. More than 300 parents attended a Saturday “Parent Reading Extravaganza” for families. The district implemented a full program of parent literacy that used special software designed for adults. And one school developed a partnership with a local baseball team; team members visited classes, classrooms featured “literacy dugouts,” and families attended the baseball games free of charge as part of the partnership.

**Major Issues of Implementing NCLB**

**Adequate Yearly Progress**
St. John Parish faces many challenges in improving the academic performance of its students. Many high-poverty schools do reach high levels of achievement, but it takes a great effort to eliminate the many barriers that interfere with student learning. It also takes much effort to create the conditions where learning for all will flourish. Several St. John schools were in school improvement under the previous state system of accountability. In the 2002 testing cycle, some schools were able to meet the state targets and exit school improvement as a result of the district efforts to improve instruction in both math and reading.

Based on test data from 2003, which the district did not get until the fall of 2003, six of St. John’s schools did not meet their growth targets or had a decline in academic performance. At least two schools missed their growth targets by tiny percentages, and the status of some schools is still under appeal to the state. One school missed its target by a tiny fraction. According to district staff, there is a wide variance between the computation that was done by the district and that computed by the State Department. The school that was in Corrective Action grew by 19.6 points, which resulted in a high growth label, and the subgroups also met the standard. The State labels schools in various phases of School Improvement (Phase I, II, etc.) rather than using the term “Corrective Action.”

Schools that improved did so because of a variety of factors such as the new math program that utilized a balanced program of instruction with hands-on activities. Participation in the Southeastern University Writing Project for English Language Arts was high in the schools that showed improvement. Other factors included revised lesson plan formats with weekly checks, principals being in the classrooms regularly, and written indicators of teacher performance with corrective information when necessary.

One group likely to require additional attention in St. John is the large number of children who are identified for special education. Since this group makes up 18% of the enrollment and is counted in determining whether schools make AYP, the parish will be taking a close look at how students are identified for special education and how their instructional needs are being met.

St. John has strongly emphasized the improvement of student achievement in reading. The district adopted “Reading Renaissance,” a 3-year plan to improve literacy in K-8. Plans also include Accelerated Math and Writing along with Reading. The total Renaissance model is being implemented in stages, beginning with reading, and math is just beginning.

Michael Coburn, the superintendent, challenged St. John students to read more than a quarter of a million books in the school year. One of the schools that bought into the program wholeheartedly was the Garyville-Mt. Airy School, a school that declined slightly in 2003 and thus did not meet its growth target. Prior to the start of the school year, staff members participated in numerous professional development opportunities. Every teacher was provided with 50 new titles of books for the classroom library, and the district provided all libraries in the parish with thousands of new books. All K-8 students
at Garyville-Mt. Airy take part in reading activities for one hour every morning. The staff and students have become more involved in reading than ever before, and reading is being integrated into their lives, according to the principal, Patricia Triche. Students at the school read more than 13,000 books in the first nine-week period of this school year. In addition, the school offers many other programs to boost student achievement, including Cornerstone/Skills Bank, Aztec Learning System, Accelerated Math, Accelerated Reading, Accelerated Vocabulary, Surpass, and Ed Connect, in addition to programs correlated with the district’s textbook series.

Providing school choice to students in St. John Parish will mean transporting students for miles across the parish, but a choice policy is not yet in place. Providing supplemental services in the future will mean changing parent’s views and expectations of schools so that they will follow up on the additional instructional opportunities available for students who are not achieving.

**Highly Qualified Teachers**

In 2002, 95% of the St. John regular education teachers were certified, and 70% of the teachers assigned to teach students with disabilities were certified for their teaching assignments. This was a significant increase from the previous year, when 82% of the district’s regular St. John teachers and only 44% of its special education teachers were certified. The goal for 2003 is to have 100% of the regular education teachers and 80% of the special education teachers certified. In order to do this, St. John has established a number of incentives, including offering financial assistance for tuition and test-taking and offering the aforementioned Practitioner Teacher Program. In addition, the parish plans to actively recruit highly qualified teachers and encourage the reassignment of effective teachers to address the needs of at-risk students. Through this multi-faceted plan, St. John Parish intends to resolve its obstacles to having highly qualified teachers for all students in all schools.

**Other Implementation Issues**

**Preschool Readiness for Kindergarten**

St. John’s also works with parents on preparing children for kindergarten through readiness activities. There is a child care center on each side of the river, and several preschool programs are in operation including Head Start (federally funded), Starting Points (state funded), and Model Early (state funded). Parents receive transition packets so that they are better able to help their children adjust to kindergarten when they finish preschool. The preschool programs are connected to kindergarten programs in the schools, and staff workshops are focused on readiness for learning.
Data File — St. John the Baptist Parish Public Schools

Location: Southern Louisiana
Type: Suburban – New Orleans area

Number of Schools:
11 total
9 elementary schools K-8
2 high schools, grades 9-12

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total Enrollment: 5,589
African American: 71%
White: 27%
Hispanic: 1%
Asian: 1%
English Language Learners: 2%
Students with Disabilities: 18%
Low-Income Students: 78% (ranging from 61% to 100% in individual schools)

Number of Teachers
Total: 373
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 5% - Does not include special education teachers

Number of Paraprofessionals
Total: 84
Not Meeting NCLB Qualification Requirements: 71 (85%)

Number of Title I Schools: all 11 schools

Number of Schools in School Improvement or Corrective Action

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