Interim superintendent: Ron Ciranna
Primary contact: Regina Williams, director of secondary education*
School studied: Willow Run Middle School
2,673 students, K-12, suburban

District and School Descriptions
Willow Run Community Schools is a suburban district in southeastern Michigan with 2,673 students. The Willow Run area serves as a home base for people who commute to work in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and Detroit. Due to its easy access to these larger cities, Willow Run has a very transient population, and its enrollment and revenues tend to fluctuate. About 60% of its students are African American, and 37% are white. The district faces some challenges related to poverty; about 63% of students are from low-income families. Willow Run Middle School was placed in restructuring in 2003-04. Over the summer of 2004, the district built a new building and restaffed the school. This new staff implemented a new research-based curriculum.

Key Findings
- District officials said they found it difficult to track student achievement using state tests alone, because of the timing of the state test, the periodic increases in adequate yearly progress targets, and past changes in the grade levels tested. Instead, teachers and administrators are turning to assessments provided by Edperformance, STAR Reading, and STAR Math to help make decisions about student achievement and to help plan instruction.

- To improve achievement at the district’s high school, which did not make AYP for the third time based on 2004-05 testing, the district is counting on a High Schools That Work (HSTW) grant. A school improvement initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board, HSTW focuses on increasing academic expectations and adult mentoring for high school students. Although the grant is not part of No Child Left Behind, it provides funding for professional development and consultation for high school teachers.

- A single year of restructuring has not been enough time to fully implement the Willow Run Middle School plan; therefore, to improve achievement at the middle school, the district will continue reforms started in 2004-05. When the school opened, the district restaffed the school and implemented a new curriculum. District officials said it may take more time before the effects of these changes are felt.

*Other contacts for this case study include Lana Tatom, director of elementary education and state/federal grants; and Deanna Wright, math teacher, Willow Run Middle School.
Hopes for the new middle school curriculum have sparked changes throughout the district. In 2004-05, district cross-curricular teams met and redesigned the curricula in math, science, social studies, and the arts. The redesign focuses on higher-order thinking skills and practical applications of new knowledge and skills in students’ everyday lives. These changes are being implemented in 2005-06.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

NCLB has given the district extra leverage to make changes, such as replacing staff and implementing a new curriculum, officials said. These changes are in line with the district’s overall goals of improving student achievement and engaging students in learning. NCLB’s school choice and supplemental services sanctions have had less impact on the district. No students have transferred based on school choice, and 2004-05 was the first year in which substantial numbers of students participated in supplemental services.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Willow Run officials said that they believe student achievement is up in the district, but that these increases have not always shown up on state tests, especially at the middle school and high school levels, where students have traditionally had more trouble meeting AYP targets. Elementary school students have met targets, although passage rates on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) test from 2003 to 2005 have stayed stable in math and declined by about 5 percentage points in reading. Based on the MEAP tests taken in the middle school, performance increased steadily in math. In reading, students made gains in 2004 but performance dropped in 2005. In MEAP tests taken in the high school in both math and reading, the percentage of students passing tests has declined, as shown in table 1.

<table>
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<th>7th grade reading: percentage who met or exceeded target</th>
<th>8th grade math: percentage who met or exceeded target</th>
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<tr>
<td>Willow Run Middle School (formerly Edmonson Middle School)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow Run High School</td>
<td>11th grade reading: percentage who met or exceeded target</td>
<td>11th grade math: percentage who met or exceeded target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Willow Run Community Schools.
At both schools and throughout the district, students with disabilities, as a subgroup, have had the most difficulty passing state tests. At the middle school, for example, only special education students in math failed to meet AYP targets. District officials estimated that if only two more special education students had passed, the school would have made AYP. Ironically, Regina Williams, director of secondary education, said that Willow Run has a reputation of having a good inclusion program and attracts students with disabilities from outside the district. Indeed, about 20% of district students are students with disabilities.

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

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

Many middle and high school students, not just students with disabilities, have said they do not give the test their best effort, added Lana Tatom, director of elementary education and state/federal grants. She noted that the school board has discussed how to create an environment in which the students feel the test has value. Tatom said district officials believe that if students valued the test more, they would be better able to demonstrate their skills. The district is still working on this issue.

While district officials supported the idea of using tests for accountability and decision making, they said fluctuations in state and federal AYP policies make it difficult to compare test data. For example, for 2005-06, the state has shifted the testing date from January and February to October. “We’ll be comparing apples to oranges,” Tatom said. “We’ve been aiming at a moving target,” she added. “It doesn’t seem fair that AYP is being calculated differently in different states.” Due to this perceived lack of consistency in NCLB testing, the district is looking at other assessments to track student progress, such as Edperformance and the STAR assessments that are used to place students in Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math and the ongoing assessments that accompany Accelerated Reader and Accelerated Math. “As we become more honest with where students are,” Tatom explained, “we’ll make more progress.”

Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS
As a district, Willow Run met AYP targets for 2005-06. In Michigan, district AYP is reported for the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and the district must meet all targets for two out of three levels. Willow Run met all targets in elementary and middle school but missed high school targets due to the performance of all students in both math and English/language arts.

Willow Run High School also missed AYP targets for all students in both math and English/language arts. The high school is in year 2 of school improvement. Willow Run Middle School missed AYP targets in math for students with disabilities. Although some district officials argued that the new school should get a clean slate for NCLB, state officials determined that the school’s past performance was still relevant to NCLB status. The failure to make AYP based on just one subgroup has affected morale in the middle school, district officials said.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
Willow Run has only two schools identified for improvement—the high school and the middle school, which was identified for restructuring. The biggest change for the high school in 2005-06 is that the school has implemented the High Schools That Work model, using federal funds from
their Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant. This research-based initiative is a product of the Southern Regional Education Board. HSTW has a track record of improving student achievement by increasing academic expectations and providing adult mentoring for high school students. District officials said that they hope that the work associated with the grant will improve academic achievement at the high school and help students meet AYP targets.

A group of teachers attended summer training through High Schools That Work and have brought that training back to the whole staff, Tatom said. In addition, as part of HSTW, the school has switched from block scheduling back to six periods a day so that students receive instruction in all subjects every day, a strategy that has been successful in other schools using the High Schools That Work model.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES

To restructure the middle school, which was relocated to a new building over the summer of 2004, Willow Run restaffed the school and implemented a new research-based curriculum. The research-based reform model was developed by a design team made up of teachers, parents, and district administrators. The team met regularly for a year to explore possible reform models and come up with a specific plan that would work for the new school. The reforms chosen were based on proven strategies identified by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, research on effective middle schools from the National Middle School Association, and Turning Points research by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In addition, district staff said several of these approaches to learning had been successful in the district’s K-8 school, while the middle school’s past focus on memorizing facts for tests had been unproductive.

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

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

Many reforms, such as the small learning communities and new exploratory courses, were also made possible by the physical structure of the new building, which has four separate classroom wings and many technological enhancements.
The curriculum was first implemented in 2004-05, and is still in the infancy stages, according to district and school staff. “Last year at the middle school, the curriculum was basically a draft,” said Regina Williams, formerly curriculum coordinator for the district and now director of secondary education. “A big percentage of the staff caught on and ran with it, but some people didn’t.”

Math teacher Deanna Wright praised the new curriculum for being more student-centered; however, she agreed that the curriculum was still evolving. “We’re still getting some new texts,” she explained, noting that it takes teachers a while to integrate new materials into their classrooms. The evolving curriculum might partly explain the school’s failure to meet AYP targets and the somewhat flat academic achievement in general. District officials noted, however, that the middle school came very close to making AYP.

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

While the new middle school staff is beginning to jell, district officials said the transition was not without challenges. Williams noted that there were some construction problems, and that some of the teachers had previously taught younger students. In addition to teaching a new curriculum, these teachers had to adapt to students who were at a different developmental level. While Williams said the teacher teams within the school worked well together, she said she believes the school as a whole has yet to establish a school identity.

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

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

GENERAL CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
Willow Run is using the curricular changes at the middle school as a model for the entire district. In 2004-05, district cross-curricular teams met and redesigned the curricula in math, science, social studies, and the arts. The teams focused on switching from an overall curriculum based on facts and memorization to one that teaches students to think critically and apply concepts across subject areas. In addition, the new curriculum aims to be more relevant to students’ lives. The completed curriculum is being implemented and refined in 2005-06. “We’re working on the curriculum so that students learn more deeply and are able to think critically,” Williams said. While the impetus to redesign the curriculum came from a desire to help students become lifelong learners, Williams said the district also believes it will help students meet NCLB targets.

CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUBGROUPS
Willow Run has been working to improve its inclusion program for special needs students. Each school now has an Instructional Consultation Team. The district trained teachers to facilitate the meetings at each school. At the meetings, special and general education teachers discuss strategies for working with students who are having difficulties within the general education classroom. These students may or may not be identified for special education. As an added bonus of this approach, Williams said, “We’ve found our special education referrals have decreased.”
NCLB School Choice

In the past two years, no Willow Run student has transferred under NCLB. While the district has no other middle or high school that students could transfer into, Michigan has had a longstanding policy of allowing interdistrict transfers, which has been expanded to include NCLB transfers. “Overall, our community seems to be satisfied with its schools, but less satisfied with how AYP is calculated,” Tatom observed.

Supplemental Educational Services

During the 2004-05 school year, 30 to 40 middle school students—about 50% of those eligible—attended after-school supplemental services regularly, Williams reported. Most attended a nearby Sylvan tutoring program, while a handful attended other programs. Using the leftover supplemental services funds, the district offered summer tutoring through Sylvan to rising 9th graders. About 35 students participated.

For 2005-06, district officials reported that about 60 middle school and 60 high school students are eligible for services. Tatom was tentatively optimistic about the results of the tutoring, but is waiting to observe long-term results at the end of this year.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

All teachers in Willow Run meet the state’s definition of “highly qualified,” Williams and Tatom reported. One thing that helped Willow Run meet NCLB’s goal was the early retirement package offered at the end of the 2003-04 school year, Williams said. While the primary purpose of the package was to facilitate the restaffing of the middle school, it also eliminated teachers who did not meet the new state standards, particularly the requirement that all middle school teachers have subject area expertise rather than K-8 certification. “When we hired new people, we looked for the highly qualified,” Williams explained.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To help teachers implement the new curriculum more effectively, in 2005-06 the district has increased its number of professional development days from one full day and one half day to three full days and three half days. “The professional development for the teachers will make them feel more comfortable with the new curriculum,” Williams explained.

In addition, 2005-06 will be a time to focus on building a schoolwide identity at the middle school. Williams said the small learning communities that the new building helped nurture were great for students and teachers, but not so great for the school as a whole. “We ended up creating four small schools,” Williams said. “What we’re working on next year is making it one school. Staff and students need to think globally.” To facilitate this, the principal is establishing a building leadership team, which will focus on improving student achievement. The team will meet at least once a week to plan several activities that will involve the whole school.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

All Title I paraprofessionals in Willow Run are highly qualified according to NCLB, district officials reported. Some met the definition of being highly qualified because they had an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, Tatom said. The majority of those without the necessary coursework passed the state test in order to meet this NCLB goal, Tatom said, while a few took additional classes in order to obtain the skills to pass the test.
Funding and Costs

While increasing professional development and collaboration hold promise, district officials are concerned about maintaining these interventions while Title I funding has decreased. This year, the district received $70,000 less in Title I funding, or about 94% of the prior year’s allocation. Although state Title I funding increased overall, state funding in basic grants and concentration grants—two of the four Title I formulas—decreased. These decreases had to be passed on to Willow Run, despite the fact that the percentage of students in poverty in the district did not change substantially. Due to this decrease in funding, Willow Run had to eliminate some Title I teachers at most elementary schools, although no Title I schools lost their Title I status. This resulted in four fewer teaching positions in the district as a whole.

Data File—Willow Run Community Schools

Location: Michigan
Type: Suburban

Number of Schools
- Total: 8
- Elementary: 5
- Middle/junior high: 1
- High schools: 1
- Other: 1 (early childhood)

Number of Title I schools: 8

Student Enrollment and Demographics
- Total enrollment: 2,673
  - African American: 60%
  - White: 37%
  - Latino: 2%
  - Asian: 1%
  - American Indian: 1%
  - Low-income students: 63%
  - Students with disabilities: 20%

Teachers
- Total number of teachers: 180
- Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 100%

Paraprofessionals
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 50
- Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 100%

Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing
- Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP, including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 2
### Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

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### Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

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