Bayonne City School District
New Jersey

Superintendent: Patricia McGeehan
Primary contact: Ellen O’Connor, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction*
Schools studied:
- Mary J. Donahoe School
- Midtown Community School
- Lincoln Community School
- Philip Vroom School
8,504 students, preK-12, urban

Districit and School Descriptions
Bayonne, a city of about 62,000 people and three square miles in area, is located on a peninsula in northern New Jersey across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Many district students come from blue-collar, middle-income families.

Mary J. Donahoe School serves 452 students in preK-8, half of whom are low income. After being identified as in need of improvement, the school demonstrated adequate yearly progress for the past two years and was recognized as a “Governor’s School of Excellence” last year for its progress.

Midtown Community School serves 1,100 students in preK-8 from a very large and diverse neighborhood. This year the school was identified as in need of improvement because, according to the principal, the school was held accountable for the low scores of students with disabilities who live in the school’s neighborhood but attend other schools.

Lincoln Community School serves 438 students in preK-8. The school has not demonstrated AYP for the past two years and has been identified as in need of improvement.

The Philip Vroom School serves 400 students, 58% of whom receive free or reduced-price school lunch, and many of whom live in one of three housing projects in the neighborhood. After failing to demonstrate AYP for three straight years, the school demonstrated AYP for the past two years, increasing student achievement and earning recognition as a Governor’s School of Excellence. A key district strategy was closing enrollment to the school for students from the neighborhood, many of whom were economically disadvantaged, and opening enrollment of its preK program to students from other neighborhoods in the district whose parents signed a commitment to keep their children in the school through grade 3.

Key Findings
- District and school administrators credit No Child Left Behind with Bayonne’s emphasis on continuous improvement and focus on the needs of all students, especially English language

* Other contacts for this case study include Patricia McGeehan, superintendent; Pat Bull, director of assessment; Carol Trojan, director of special services; Varda Wendroff, director of world languages and ESL/bilingual; Ann Marie Palmieri-Monahan, director of math; Evelyn Taraszkiewicz, director of social studies, English/language arts; Patricia Bull, director of early childhood and assessment; Rosalie Moran, director of Title I; Nancy Ruane, principal of Mary J. Donahue School; Christina Mercun, principal of Midtown Community School; Susan Kukucka, principal of Lincoln Community School; and Maryann Connelly, principal of Philip Vroom School.
learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. They fear, however, that improving schools are being unfairly penalized by the very law that inspired the improvement.

- One Bayonne school has failed to demonstrate AYP because, according to the school’s principal, it is held accountable for the low scores of students with disabilities who live in the school’s neighborhood but attend other schools.

- Two schools exited improvement status by demonstrating AYP for two consecutive years. Both schools have implemented a set of comprehensive strategies for improving instruction and student achievement, and one school has closed enrollment to students from the neighborhood, many of whom are low income.

- NCLB is resulting in less instructional time for history and the arts in Bayonne schools, as schools are increasing—in many cases doubling—the amount of time spent on reading and math. In addition, teaching of the arts has been moved to after-school programs, with the exception of instrumental music, which is provided for some relatively high-performing students on a pullout basis.

- NCLB has pushed Bayonne educators to ensure the success of all students and to pay particular attention to subgroups of students, especially ELLs and students with disabilities. At the same time, however, NCLB also appears to be pushing schools to focus on the achievement of a relatively small percentage of students performing just below grade level in an effort to demonstrate AYP.

- Bayonne recently received an influx of funding from the state, which it is using to purchase new technology, materials, and curricular programs. The large number of programs has raised concerns about educators’ ability to implement them effectively.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

NCLB has had a number of very positive impacts on Bayonne City School District. District administrators indicated that NCLB has transformed the culture of the school district by focusing on continuous improvement. Patricia McGeehan, Bayonne’s superintendent, admitted that prior to NCLB, the district focused most of its attention on students in general education, failing to address the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.

McGeehan added that NCLB has fostered unprecedented collaboration among district administrators, teachers, and principals as the realization has sunk in that “we’re all in this together.” For example, special education teachers are being asked to work closely with the teachers in general education in a way that they have never done previously, according to Carol Trojan, the district’s director of special services.

Ellen O’Connor, Bayonne’s assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, noted that NCLB has also helped to improve the quality of teachers and instruction. NCLB has pushed the district to reduce the use of “one-shot workshops” for training teachers, she said. It’s also helped focus on implementing comprehensive curricular programs over a three-year period. The law in general—and its provisions for highly qualified teachers in particular—has improved the quality of teachers, she noted, especially in special education.

O’Connor expressed concern, however, that NCLB is “penalizing” the very improvement that it inspired by identifying as in need of improvement schools that are making progress. Big schools, which are more likely to meet New Jersey’s relatively small minimum subgroup size (20 students for all groups except students with disabilities, which requires 35 students), are especially affected. So too
are schools serving sufficiently large populations of ELLs and students with disabilities, which according to administrators are improving but often not enough to meet the requirements of NCLB.

McGeehan and other district administrators said that while accountability for subgroups is critical, ELLs need a “sheltered environment” for five years, while NCLB exempts ELLs from AYP-related testing only for the first year they are in a U.S. school. The administrators added that allowing schools and districts to exclude only 1% of their students with the most severe disabilities from accountability requirements and holding a school accountable for the achievement of students with disabilities living in its neighborhood but not attending the school is unfair.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Overall, student achievement in Bayonne has been increasing in grade 4 language arts literacy and math, holding steady or declining slightly in grade 8 language arts literacy and math, and increasing in high school math and language arts literacy. In 2005, relatively high percentages of students at all three grade levels were proficient or better in reading and math, with math proficiency rates trailing language arts literacy rates in middle and high school (see table 1).

<table>
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<th>Grade 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Language Arts Literacy</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>86.0%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
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*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on New Jersey state assessment reports.*

As in other districts, however, significant gaps in student achievement exist between white and Asian students on the one hand and African American and Latino students on the other. For example, whereas 85.7% of white 4th graders scored proficient or higher in language arts literacy, only 68.7% of African American and 73.1% of Latino students did so. Gaps also exist between general education students on the one hand and students with disabilities and English language learners on the other. For example, whereas 88.2% of 4th grade general education students scored at least proficient in language arts literacy, only 45.4% of students with disabilities and 42.9% of ELL students did so. These gaps exist across all grades and subjects.

**Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement**

**DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS**

In 2005-06, Bayonne City School District demonstrated adequate yearly progress for the third straight year. Eight of 12 Bayonne schools, however, did not demonstrate AYP. The district’s one high school, which does not receive Title I funds and is thus not subject to sanctions under New Jersey’s NCLB accountability system, did not demonstrate AYP for the third straight year.

Midtown Community School did not demonstrate adequate yearly progress for the second straight year, and is currently offering choice. In 2003-04, low-income students in grade 8 did not demonstrate AYP in reading. For 2004-05, Latino 8th graders did not demonstrate AYP in either reading or math, and students with disabilities in grades 3 and 4 did not demonstrate AYP
in reading. According to Christina Mercun, the school’s principal, all these subgroups would have demonstrated AYP and the school would not have been identified for improvement were it not for the 246 scores of students with disabilities who come from the school’s very large neighborhood but attend other schools. These students’ scores count in multiple subgroups.

Due to the large number of students with disabilities, the district attempts to group students with similar disabilities and assign them to the same school. It is a state requirement, according to O’Connor, that the test scores of these students be assigned to their neighborhood school even though they are educated elsewhere.

The number of student scores counted against the school could not be confirmed, but Mercun’s larger point was confirmed by educators across the district. An accountability system that identifies a school as in need of improvement partly because of low test scores of students attending other schools is neither valid nor fair. Mercun said that Midtown Community School is a “beautiful” and highly effective school whose hard work is in jeopardy because it has been identified as a school in need of improvement. This label, said Mercun, is “beyond my control—it’s in the hand of legislators. But my parents and teachers are very concerned... We have a great school—you only have to spend one day here to see it—but I’m getting tired of fighting an unwinnable fight.”

Susan Kukucka, principal of Lincoln Community School and former assessment director for the district, summarized the general feeling in the district when she said that AYP is a “puzzle you’ll never solve. If the makeup of a school changes or circumstances change, you can suddenly find yourself as a low-performing school. Added on top of that is the fact that New Jersey has a tough test—which is fine—but the expectations have not been made clear.”

**DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

The district’s overall theory of change is to focus on continuous improvement, said McGeehan. She added that, although a large number of children will probably never achieve proficiency as measured by the state assessment, every child should be pushed to achieve his or her full potential. All Bayonne schools are required to create “shared decision-making teams” of teachers and principals who plan and monitor school improvement activities. All four principals interviewed reported that these teams have played critical roles in their school improvement process.

In addition, schools must set aside one period a week for teachers of the same grade to work together to analyze student work, plan lessons, and discuss instructional and formative assessment strategies. Principals are encouraged to allow new teachers to observe veteran teachers, and new principals are asked to work in close collaboration with veteran principals. Principals meet once a month with the superintendent to discuss school improvement issues and collaboratively solve problems facing all schools. Other than these strategies and other specific professional development activities, the district’s central office views its role as modeling collaboration for schools and providing support as requested.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

One Bayonne school—Midtown Community School—is in its first year of improvement in 2005-06 after failing to demonstrate AYP for the second straight year. The school has adopted a number of strategies in the hopes of demonstrating progress this year. First, Christina Mercun, the school’s principal, devotes “countless hours” to analyzing students’ test scores with the goal of identifying school strengths and problem areas. Then she holds a meeting with all teachers to analyze the test scores.

Teachers examine the data in the context of their curricular benchmarks to identify particular areas of student weakness and develop instructional strategies for addressing the weaknesses. Teachers of grades K-2, even though their students are not tested, are part of the training so that they can shape their own instruction to ensure students’ proficiency by the time they reach the 3rd grade and provide ideas and support for teachers of the older grades. This school year, according to Mercun, teachers have been analyzing the test scores by student subgroup and,
when necessary, grouping children by subgroup for instruction and remediation to ensure that their needs are being met.

In addition, the school makes sure that students and teachers have a great deal of support. For students, the school offers tutoring before school, during lunch, and after school using Title I and state funds. For teachers, the school has hired retired Bayonne teachers and a private consultant (using part of a $300,000 state grant focused on improving achievement of ELL students) to improve instructional strategies and, in the case of the consultant, integrate technology into the classroom. Mercun then observes teachers’ instructional practices using a “very detailed rubric” so that the teachers know what is expected of them, and provides feedback intended to improve student outcomes. The central office, said Mercun, is helpful in providing support as needed or requested.

Mercun added that all this work is paying off. “We’re doing everything we can and we’re getting great results for students who attend this school. Our school has never done so well, and we feel like a family.” Indeed, the school has increased achievement significantly in all subjects and grades in recent years, with proficiency levels now at 84.9% in grade 4 reading (up from 72.3% in 2002), 87.9% in grade 4 math (up from 64.8% in 2002), 69.2% in grade 8 reading (achievement levels have fluctuated over time), and 59.6% in grade 8 math (up from 52.0% in 2002). The problem, added Mercun, is that the school gets punished for the achievement of students attending other schools, and this lowers the morale of staff. New Jersey has maintained the way it calculates AYP.

Two schools—Mary J. Donahoe and Philip Vroom—demonstrated AYP for the second straight year after having been found to be in need of improvement under NCLB. Asked to explain how Donahoe went from being a school identified as in need of improvement to being the recipient of a $25,000 award for being a Governor’s School of Excellence last year, the school’s principal, Nancy Ruane, answered, “I live this... Educating these children is a passion of mine.” She added that improving the school took a lot of hard work on the part of students, teachers, and administrators and that “there is no silver bullet.”

Ruane said that when she started at the school four years ago, she “changed everything”—scheduling double periods of reading and math, improving professional development for teachers, purchasing materials requested by teachers to help students perform better on the state assessment, aligning curriculum with standards and assessment, shaping instructional practices based on analyses of test results, mainstreaming Title I students and students with disabilities, and increasing tutoring for students in the tested grades.

In addition, said Ruane, she worked hard to ensure that all teachers work together to improve student achievement across the school and to take responsibility for student achievement in every grade level. Finally, Ruane credited Bayonne’s central office with providing the school with a great deal of support. This support has included the traditional—such as additional resources for school maintenance, student tutoring, and professional development—and the less traditional, including help in removing some teachers from the school who were deemed ineffective.

Philip Vroom School’s path to success under AYP is also an interesting story. In the late 1970s, the school became a magnet as a result of the district’s response to being out of compliance with its 1976 desegregation plan. In the mid-1990s, the school became a neighborhood school. After returning to its neighborhood status, the school, which served a very poor and transient student population, saw its achievement levels “plummet,” according to Maryann Connelly, the school’s current principal. In July 2000, Connelly became the school’s fifth principal in five years. For the next three years the school improved, said Connelly, but did not demonstrate AYP.

In 2003, the district closed enrollment to the school for students from the neighborhood, many of whom were economically disadvantaged, and opened enrollment of its all-day preK program to students from other neighborhoods whose parents signed a commitment to keep their children in the school through grade 3. The motive was to desegregate the school and keep class sizes small. At the same time, a number of school improvement strategies were implemented. Improvement strategies included the following:
Transforming the culture of the school (by replacing some teachers, creating school committees, building school spirit, improving student discipline, renovating the building)

Shifting the most effective teachers from non-tested to tested grades

Creating teacher specialists (having one 4th grade teacher, for example, teach reading and the other teach math)

Incorporating technology in the classroom

Aligning curricula to assessments

Providing teachers with professional development

Increasing the amount students write in class

Tutoring students

Charting the academic weaknesses of every student and tailoring instruction to address their needs

Targeting students close to proficiency

Grouping students by NCLB subgroups for instruction and remediation

In 2005, Vroom demonstrated AYP for the second year in a row, was given a New Jersey Best Practice award for its writing program, and was identified as a Governor's School of Excellence.

**CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES**

No Bayonne school is in corrective action or restructuring.

**Testing Issues**

Last year the state assessed all students in grades 3 and 4 using the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, or NJASK; in grade 8, using the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment, or GEPA; and in grade 11, using the High School Proficiency Assessment, or HSPA. To supplement the state assessment, the district used “NJ PASS” (a norm-referenced test published by Riverside) to assess students in grades 2, 5, 6, and 7.

This school year, in March 2006, the state is using NJ PASS for grades 5-7 to comply with NCLB, and the district will continue to use NJ PASS in grade 2. Bayonne is also pilot testing a diagnostic math assessment for grades 5 and 6 that was given at the beginning of the school year and will be given again in January 2006. The plan is to use the assessment in other grades to provide instant feedback to teachers that will help them improve their instruction for all students and provide remediation for struggling students.

**Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction**

**GENERAL CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

NCLB is resulting in less instructional time for history and the arts in Bayonne schools, according to Bayonne’s senior administrators, as schools are increasing—in many cases doubling—the amount of time spent on reading and math. (See the section below on Funding and Costs for a description.
of new math and reading programs purchased and implemented by Bayonne this year.) In addition, the teaching of the arts has been moved to after-school programs, with the exception of instrumental music, which is provided for some relatively high-performing students on a pullout basis.

This narrowing of the curriculum is almost solely resulting from the schools’ intense focus to improve students’ test scores in math and reading, according to district and school administrators. In response to the narrowing curriculum and intense focus on testing, schools have begun, also with central office encouragement, to devote two periods on Fridays to special projects—on topics such as Shakespeare and rocketry—that extend students’ learning and “make school fun.”

NCLB has had a somewhat conflicting impact on the types of students who receive educators’ attention. On the one hand, teachers, principals, and district administrators emphasized that NCLB has pushed them as never before to ensure the success of all students and to pay particular attention to subgroups of students, especially ELLs and students with disabilities. At the same time, NCLB also appears to be pushing schools to focus on the achievement of a relatively small percentage of students performing just below grade level. Many schools, with central office encouragement, are targeting tutoring and support services on students who are just below proficiency, believing that such an emphasis is most likely to have the biggest impact on AYP results. For example, 9th graders who scored “partially proficient” on the statewide assessment as 8th graders are enrolled in special math and reading blocks to accelerate the learning of skills they need to be successful in high school.

**CHANGES IN CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION FOR SUBGROUPS**

Prior to NCLB, many Latino and ELL students were educationally “ghettoized,” said McGeehan, who added that NCLB has pushed the district and schools to improve services for these students significantly. Principals, particularly Nancy Ruane, the principal of Donahoe, are placing more students with disabilities in general education classrooms rather than educating them in self-contained classrooms. The impact of this mainstreaming is not clear yet, although Ruane said that the mainstreamed students (8 out of the school’s 23 students with disabilities) are doing “remarkably well.”

**English Language Learners**

Two K-8 schools in Bayonne offer bilingual programs, in which students are taught in both English and Spanish, for ELL students from across the district whose first language is Spanish. Another K-8 school and the high school have English as a second language (ESL) programs for ELL students from across the district whose first language is neither English nor Spanish.

**NCLB School Choice**

Across the country, relatively small percentages of students in schools identified as in need of improvement are taking advantage of the opportunity to attend another school. This is certainly the case in the one Bayonne school—Midtown Community—required to offer school choice. Approximately 16 of the school’s 1,100 students chose to attend another school this year, according to Christina Mercun, the school’s principal. One factor that might be exacerbating the low participation rate in Bayonne’s choice program is that the school district does not offer transportation to students in general and therefore is not required to provide transportation for students who choose to attend another school. This policy likely increases the chances that students will select the school closest to where they live.

**Supplemental Educational Services**

No Bayonne school is offering supplemental educational services this year, because none is in year 2 of school improvement.
Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS
Virtually all teachers in Bayonne are highly qualified, said O’Connor, although the district is facing a shortage of secondary math teachers.

The district has implemented two strategies to improve its ability to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers, according to the superintendent. First, it increased salaries to compete with those being offered by nearby “Abbott” districts. These districts have received significantly more state funding than Bayonne as the result of the state court decision, Abbott v. Burke, which found that 30 New Jersey districts had been receiving inadequate funding. Second, Bayonne has begun offering contracts earlier to prospective teachers, often those who work in the district as student teachers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
The district has had to hire 325 new teachers this year as a result of Bayonne “buying out” the contracts of veteran teachers over the past three years. The buyouts have enabled the district to save money on the salaries of veteran teachers, said McGeehan, but have required the district to increase its training of new teachers. Bayonne teachers have three days throughout the year set aside for district-provided professional development. The district brings in outside speakers for two of these days, and schools work in teams to analyze student test scores and develop instructional approaches on the third day. In addition, the district manages a Teacher Academy in which teachers receive training; after they earn 30 credits, they receive a bump in the salary scale equal to that received by a teacher with a master’s degree. It is the responsibility of the schools to provide any other training needed by their teachers, although the central office supports them in their efforts.

This year, the district and schools are focusing their professional development activities on helping teachers implement the new reading (Scott Foresman) and writing (Collins Writing) program with help from the publishers. Districts and schools are also working with consultants from the new math program (Scott Foresman) to help teachers with implementation.

Ellen O’Connor, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, acknowledged that Bayonne’s professional development is not as strong as she would like. She has wanted to put instructional coaches in schools for years, she said, but the district has never had sufficient resources. O’Connor also expressed concern about the district’s ability to recruit and retain instructional coaches with the knowledge, skills, and credibility necessary to be successful.

Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support
Bayonne has no Title I paraprofessionals in its schools, a long-term policy intended to focus limited resources on teachers’ salaries.

Funding and Costs
For the past five years, the state of New Jersey has “flat funded” Bayonne, according to O’Connor, even as the district has added 1,000 new students. As a result, said O’Connor, the district has had to rely on “creative budgeting” and “saying no to schools.” All that changed this year. Bayonne borders New Jersey’s “Abbott districts,” which have received millions of dollars in supplemental spending from the state as a result of a court case that found that 30 New Jersey districts had been receiving inadequate funding. This year, Bayonne received $5.6 million additional dollars as an “Abbott rim” district. Of this amount, said O’Connor, $4.1 million went to the city to help reduce taxes and $1.5 million went to the district.

O’Connor said that the district has used its $1.5 million to purchase new programs and materials districtwide and to provide schools with support as needed or requested. This summer,
Bayonne purchased a new K-5 reading program (Scott Foresman), a new science program for grade 3, a new K-12 writing program, math manipulatives for all schools, a computer for every high school teacher’s desk, chapter books for classroom libraries, and a new electronic grading system for grades 4 through 8. The flurry of new programs and materials has left administrators and educators struggling to use everything effectively, said O’Connor, especially since they have been rolled out all at once with little or no training. On the other hand, said O’Connor, “At least I don’t have to say no to schools anymore.”

For 2005-06, Bayonne received $2.28 million in NCLB funding, $1.6 million of which came from Title I—a slight increase over 2003-04 and 2004-05. Of the $1.6 million, the district set aside 5% for professional development. It also set aside 15% for supplemental education services and 5% to implement the transportation provisions under NCLB’s school choice policy. The district, however, provides neither SES nor transportation. Therefore, according to Rosalie Moran, the district’s Title I director, Bayonne must request a waiver to use this 20% of Title I funding, which may not be granted until June 2006. Of the remaining Title I funds, said Moran, virtually all go to support Title I teachers—educators who either pull Title I-eligible students out of class or work with them in class to provide remedial instruction.

**Capacity Issues**

Until the 2005-06 school year, the district had insufficient funds to purchase needed instructional programs and materials or to provide the type of professional development that it believed was necessary for teachers to help students meet the goals of NCLB. The infusion of cash this year for being an “Abbott rim” district appears to be somewhat of a mixed blessing. On the one hand, there is no question that Bayonne needed an infusion of money after being flat funded by the state for five years. On the other hand, O’Connor said that the big jump in revenues has led the district to purchase a lot of needed programs and materials very quickly, perhaps overwhelming teachers and principals and sacrificing some quality of implementation.

**Reading First**

The district did not receive a Reading First grant.

**Data File—Bayonne City School District**

**Location:** New Jersey  
**Type:** Urban

**Number of Schools**
- Total: 12  
  - Elementary: 0  
  - Middle/junior high: 1  
  - High schools: 1  
  - Other: 10 (K-8)

**Number of Title I schools:** 10

**Student Enrollment and Demographics**
- Total enrollment: 8,504  
  - White: 54%  
  - Latino: 31%  
  - African American: 9%  
  - Asian: 6%
Low-income students: 33%
Students with disabilities: 17%
English language learners: 3%

Teachers
Total number of teachers: 800
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 99.5%

Paraprofessionals
Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 0
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: NA

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: 8

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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