Cleveland Municipal School District
Ohio

Chief Executive Officer: Barbara Byrd-Bennett
Primary contact: Paulette Poncelet, director of program research and evaluation*

Schools studied:
- J.D. Rockefeller (K-8)
- Wade Park (K-8)
62,542 students, preK-12, urban

District and School Descriptions
Like many large city school districts, the Cleveland Municipal School District has a shrinking population, with many middle-class residents of all races moving to the suburbs. As a result, the city schools are left with a student population that is predominately low income. Since a chief executive officer appointed by the mayor took office in fall 1998, the district has focused on improving academic achievement, starting with improving literacy at the elementary school level. But decreasing state funding and the failure of voter support for two recent levies has caused a financial crisis in the district. Many central office personnel, including the CEO, will be leaving. Teacher layoffs, school closures, and increases in class size threaten academic progress, district officials said.

The two schools included in this study, Wade Park School and J.D. Rockefeller School, are predominately African American and low income. Located in the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland, both were placed in school improvement at the inception of No Child Left Behind due to the performance of students on state tests. Both schools increased student achievement substantially and came off the state list in 2003-04, but this improvement has proved difficult to sustain. Neither school made adequate yearly progress based on 2004-05 criteria.

Key Findings
- For most, though not all, grades tested, Cleveland students have improved their passing rates. District officials attributed this growth to a focus on literacy in the early grades. Cleveland has developed the “Cleveland Literacy System,” which is based on a cycle of assessment, planning, and teaching and uses materials from Harcourt, one of the publishers recommended by Reading First. Teachers said this system provides the structure and immediate feedback Cleveland students and teachers need. In addition, 20 Cleveland schools have Reading First grants.

*Other contacts for this case study include Mary Adamo, 7th grade teacher, Wade Park; Clifford Andrews, director of funded programs; Debra Burke, manager, employee services certification, compensation, HR data and records retention; Edna Connally, principal, J.D. Rockefeller; Joyce Hicks, director of data quality; Jane Kysela, 6th grade teacher, J.D. Rockefeller; Rebecca Lowry, chief academic officer; Leslie Myrick, director of student assignments; Helen Robinson, special education teacher, J.D. Rockefeller; Amy Soltes, 2nd grade teacher, Wade Park; and Deborah Ward, supervising superintendent.
State testing for No Child Left Behind does not give teachers a clear picture of what individual students need to learn, Cleveland’s district and school officials said. To gain more information about student achievement, Cleveland has developed benchmark tests in math and reading. These assessments, which are given several times during the year, have been tested for reliability and validity by district staff and are used by teachers to group students and plan instruction.

Seven Cleveland schools that had exited improvement in 2003-04 did not make AYP in 2004-05 after they lost the extra resources afforded by NCLB. Principals at the two schools interviewed for this study observed that getting off the state’s list of schools in need of improvement meant losing resources such as supplemental educational services and extra district and state support. They suggested that NCLB supports needed to remain at improved schools to help ensure future success. The entire Cleveland district and about two-thirds of its schools failed to meet AYP targets in 2004-05.

Many district and school staff members said they worried that academic growth would not be sustained due to the financial crisis in the district, which has led to increased class sizes and lack of materials for many students. Due to lack of funds, Cleveland had to cut back or phase out some initiatives many said had improved achievement. For example, the district no longer employs professional developers, who modeled reading and math lessons and provided professional support for teachers. School-level staff said these professional developers had been very effective in helping teachers improve instruction and raise student achievement.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

NCLB has encouraged the Cleveland school district to increase its efforts to raise student achievement, district officials said. “We have a better alignment of standards with what goes on in the classroom,” said Rebecca Lowry, chief academic officer. “We did all that before NCLB,” she said, “but perhaps not at the same pace.” In addition, she said NCLB has made parents more aware of their rights and teachers more aware of what they need to do to reach all students.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

Ohio is in the process of switching from “proficiency tests” based on learning outcomes to “achievement tests” based on state standards. In addition, the questions on the new achievement tests have a broader range of difficulty and focus more on higher-order thinking skills. Cleveland officials said that the new tests gave them more information about their students for the year the test is given, but because these tests are new, the district has less information about students over time. For example, the 3rd grade math achievement test, 5th grade reading achievement test, 7th grade math achievement test, and the 8th grade reading and math achievement tests were all given for the first time this year and cannot be compared to the previous proficiency tests. In addition, a new 10th grade Ohio Graduation Test introduced in 2004-05 measures high school achievement, but its scores cannot be compared to the earlier 9th grade proficiency test.

On the tests that do have year-to-year comparisons, Cleveland students have done better on most, but not all. From 2003-04 to 2004-05, Cleveland students increased passing rates on the 3rd grade reading achievement test by 9 percentage points. Staff attributes this increase to an intense focus on this grade level, explained Joyce Hicks, the district’s director of data quality.

On proficiency tests that have been given since the first year of NCLB (2002-03), passing rates in reading have remained stable according to state report cards, increasing or decreasing by less than 1%. Math passing rates increased by 6 percentage points on the 6th grade proficiency test, and by 3 percentage points on the 4th grade proficiency test. Hicks noted that the district
has placed more emphasis on the results of the new 3rd grade reading scores because the proficiency tests will be phased out and are not as closely aligned to state standards.

Achievement gaps between most subgroups and the general population have not been as large in Cleveland as in the rest of the state, Hicks said. But it is important to note that achievement in Cleveland overall is lower than that of the rest of the state, so the narrower gap may be attributed to lower passing rates in general. From 2002-03 to 2004-05, Latino students in particular have narrowed the gap, she noted. On reading and math proficiency tests, these students increased achievement by 2 to 9 percentage points in the grade levels tested. For other groups, however, no clear pattern of narrowing or widening achievement gaps is discernable. For example, according to state report cards from 2002-03 and 2004-05, the reading achievement of English language learners on proficiency tests increased in 4th grade but decreased in 6th grade.

**Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement**

**DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS**
The Cleveland Municipal School District failed to meet AYP goals in 2004-05 and is in year 2 of improvement. Ohio combines 3rd, 6th, and 10th grade scores to calculate AYP. Based on the performance of all students, the district met reading targets but did not meet math targets. In both reading and math, African American students, ELL students, and students with disabilities failed to meet targets. In reading, Latino students also missed the target. In math, low-income students, a subgroup which in Cleveland is identical to all students, failed to meet math targets. Safe harbor, however, gives credit to subgroups that decrease the number of students not making AYP by 10%. All Cleveland students and subgroups made safe harbor in both reading and math except ELL students who failed to meet safe harbor for math.

Cleveland met the 95% test participation goal for all subgroups except students with disabilities. The district needed to test just 3% more of these students to meet the goal. Hicks said test participation remains a challenge for Cleveland. “As we go up in grades, participation declines,” Hicks noted, explaining that high school teachers and principals are making extra efforts to increase participation, such as phone calls home and home visits, to ensure that the required 95% of students are tested.

More than two-thirds of Cleveland schools failed to meet AYP targets. Due to declining enrollment and financial difficulties, 9 of these schools closed for the 2005-06 school year. Not counting schools that closed, 7 schools are in year 1 of school improvement, 17 schools are in year 2, 3 schools are in corrective action, 2 schools are in restructuring planning, and 2 are in restructuring implementation. While all these schools face sanctions under NCLB in 2005-06, 11 actually made AYP based on 2004-05 test scores and may exit school improvement if they are able to meet AYP targets again in 2005-06. Gains in achievement can be attributed at least partially to the district’s literacy initiative, Hicks said. Principals and staff added that the extra resources such as coaching and supplemental services that came with being identified for improvement have helped their schools improve.

Coming off the state’s list of schools in need of improvement is not always a good thing, some principals said, because it means losing extra resources and funding. For example, both J.D. Rockefeller School and Wade Park School increased student achievement and came off the state list based on 2003-04 testing. Teachers and principals attribute this success to extra coaching, additional school improvement funds, and supplemental educational services. When the schools came off the list, however, they lost these extra services and failed to make AYP based on 2004-05 testing. “When you have resources and they’re taken away, you fall back to where you were,” observed Edna Connally, principal of J.D. Rockefeller, suggesting that NCLB should continue to support schools that come off the state list so that students can continue to succeed.
DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

After analyzing test data in Cleveland, the district decided to phase out middle schools. “Middle school children do better in a K-8 setting,” Hicks explained. While this change started five years ago, before NCLB, the district’s recent financial problems accelerated the switch. “If we have to close buildings, we said let’s get it all done,” Hicks recalled. For 2005-06, 2 of the remaining middle schools were closed, 11 switched to K-8, and 3 became or are in the process of becoming 6-12 buildings, with special programs for middle school-aged students. This change should help middle school students achieve more academically, district officials said.

In addition to the middle school closure, the district closed a total of 13 schools for reasons not primarily related to academic achievement. “Demographics were the major decision factor for closing buildings. When it was a close decision, the district did look at student achievement. There was a lot of community input,” Hicks said.

In an additional push to raise student achievement, in 2004-05 Cleveland offered an extended learning day for some schools. Teachers used the extended day to work in small groups with students who were having difficulty. This tutoring was completely aligned with classroom instruction during the regular day, Lowry explained. Based on benchmark assessments for students who attended extended day last year, Lowry said, “We do know that extended day helps.” For 2005-06, Cleveland decided to discontinue extended day due to lack of funds.

Another district strategy previously put in place to improve academic achievement has been discontinued. Prior to 2004-05, all Cleveland elementary schools had at least one English/language arts professional developer who modeled lessons, observed teachers, and provided professional development. Many elementary schools also had a math professional developer. J.D. Rockefeller lost its professional developers in 2004-05, the same year that test scores fell. Principals and teachers said losing the professional developers meant less support for teaching and less coordination of staff efforts. They attribute declining test scores in part to the absence of professional developers.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Individual schools have instituted additional improvement strategies. Often these strategies are connected to community partners who support the schools. For example, J.D. Rockefeller School, which no longer has supplemental educational services because it moved out of school improvement, has continued to recruit corporate tutors. Staff said the one-on-one work has been beneficial for students and has boosted staff morale. Employees from Dominion East Ohio, a local gas company, and volunteers from Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) are tutoring students several times a week for 2005-06. Teachers, who said the withdrawal of NCLB support hinders student achievement, especially appreciated the outside help. “It means a lot when you still have people who care,” said special education teacher Helen Robinson.

CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES

All seven Cleveland schools in corrective action or restructuring have written improvement plans. A district administrator meets monthly with the principals and union representatives of these schools to discuss and plan improvement efforts. All of these schools are also participating in a classroom assessment project being conducted in partnership with Educational Testing Service (ETS), Lowry said. Three additional Cleveland schools also participate in the program. This program aims to use ongoing formative assessment techniques to improve instruction and student achievement. In the five days before the 2005-06 school year started, teachers and principals were trained in how to use classroom assessments and monthly professional development packets and training to keep learning moving forward. Teachers and principals meet twice a month to examine the data and plan instruction based on what students have learned and what needs to be retaught. ETS contributes the services and materials, while the district pays teachers for work that extends beyond the school day, Lowry explained.
The four schools currently in restructuring under NCLB have additional changes in place. All schools have implemented changes that fall under the federal option of “undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform,” such as using a leadership or school improvement committee to make decisions, Lowry explained. In addition, the district has hired an outside consultant to restructure one school and has replaced the principal in about half the schools. Two additional schools that would have been in restructuring in 2005-06 closed.

Testing Issues

Test score information from the state is not detailed enough to help teachers plan instruction, district officials said. After student tests are graded, Hicks said, “The state sends a class data analysis, not a student analysis, and the questions are secure.” In other words, teachers can see what their class did as a whole by the general topic of the question. But they cannot see how individual students answered specific questions. In Cleveland, where students have a wide range of skill levels, Hicks said this leaves teachers with little to go on. As a result, Cleveland has developed its own benchmark tests. These benchmark tests, which mirror the state tests, have been reviewed by district staff for reliability and validity. Using the benchmark tests twice a year, teachers can tell more precisely what each student needs to learn and can group students for instruction accordingly.

Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Cleveland has focused on improving reading since 1999, when CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett came to the district. This emphasis has intensified under NCLB, Lowry said. To meet the needs of Cleveland students, the district developed the “Cleveland Literacy System.” Based on a cycle of assessment, planning, and teaching, the Cleveland Literacy System uses materials produced by Harcourt. Before the Cleveland Literacy System, Lowry said, “We kind of had flavor of the month.” Many materials were good, she explained, but because of Cleveland’s high mobility rate, the district needed standardization.

Teachers are supportive of the new program. “Our children need structure, and it really provides that, but there’s creativity within the activities,” observed Jane Kysela, 6th grade teacher at J.D. Rockefeller, noting that students have the opportunity to respond to reading with their own ideas and can incorporate writing and artwork into these responses.

The district has also mandated a 90-minute uninterrupted block of time for reading instruction and recommends a 45- to 50-minute block for writing. The writing block is new for 2005-06, Lowry said. (Some schools have implemented the 80- to 90-minute math block, but most devote less time, usually 45 to 50 minutes.)

Other math reforms mirror the changes in reading but are not as far along, Lowry said. For 2005-06, she said, “We are building a pacing chart in math. The next step will be intensive professional development.” Math instruction, however, is hampered by old materials, Lowry admitted. “We haven’t had a new math text adopted in years. Classroom additions are sometimes so old you can’t get replacements.” With the current budget crisis, Lowry said that purchases of new materials would be limited.

English Language Learners

Approximately 4.9% of Cleveland’s students are English language learners. Spanish is the language predominately spoken by ELL students. Other languages include Albanian, Arabic, Cambodian, Chinese, Hindi, Hungarian, Laotian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Eight Cleveland elementary schools offer services for ELL students, and one of
these schools is a dual-language school where all students learn in both English and Spanish. Four high schools also offer ELL services.

ELL students have traditionally had difficulty passing state tests. Progress appears to be uneven: 4th graders’ passing rates have increased since 2002-03, but 6th graders’ have decreased. However, it is important to note that there have been changes in the ways ELL students have been tested in Cleveland. In 2002-03 there was confusion about which students should be tested, which resulted in low participation rates. In 2004-05, the state allowed translators for ELL students, but the district did not have enough time to prepare for these translators, and therefore questioned the reliability of some tests. The 2005-06 tests may be the first time ELL students have been tested accurately.

**NCLB School Choice**

For Cleveland, “Choice has really been a nonfactor,” observed Clifford Andrews, the district’s director of funded programs. “The demand,” he added, “has remained low.” In the 2004-05 school year, 32,311 students were eligible for choice, 85 requested transfers (all of which were granted), and 47 actually decided to change schools. For 2005-06, district officials anticipated having about 230 NCLB transfer requests and being able to accommodate all these requests easily.

With the 2005-06 closure of 12 regular Cleveland schools and 2 alternative schools, many students were already due to change schools. Dissatisfaction with these changes may account for an increase in the number of students requesting NCLB transfers. District officials pointed out, however, that the number of transfers is still very low. The use of school choice may also be limited because Cleveland already offers students the option of attending private, mostly Catholic, schools through a voucher program, as well as the option of attending local charter schools.

**Supplemental Educational Services**

In 2004-05, Cleveland had 9,161 students eligible for supplemental educational services. Of those eligible, 1,545 applied for services and 946 actually participated. This is more than three times the number who participated in 2003-04 and more than nine times the number who participated in 2002-03. While fewer students were eligible in years past, the increase is also due to growing parental awareness of and demand for these services, district officials said. “It just takes a while to get the word out,” Lowry said, noting that the district has always sent mail to parents and held events advertising provider services, but that more parents responded last year than ever before.

All schools in year 2 of school improvement had providers willing to offer students supplemental educational services, and most providers offered these services on-site at the schools. The number of students eligible for services has increased for 2005-06, and the number of students participating is also likely to increase, district officials said. In addition, the number of providers selected by parents is likely to more than triple, said Andrews, who oversees Title I funding for the district. In 2004-05, the district had 12 providers. For 2005-06, more than 30 were requested by parents, Andrews said.

In the past, Andrews said monitoring attendance and invoicing proved difficult. By contracting with Coriendo, a private business solutions company, Andrews said, “we’ve automated the process and standardized it.” All providers use the same online sign-in sheets, and parents sign off on a monthly tally of attendance for their child. “I think with this system in place, we should have very accurate accounting,” he said.

The effects of supplemental educational services remain unclear in Cleveland. “We honestly can’t tell at this point which services are helpful,” Lowry said. She explained that Cleveland does track the achievement of these students; however, the district doesn’t have the resources to monitor what subjects are actually addressed during tutoring or how these subjects are taught.
Therefore, it is impossible to say whether changes in student achievement can be attributed solely to supplemental services or to other services offered during the school day, Lowry explained.

Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development

HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

In 2004-05, approximately 96% of core academic classes were taught by teachers who met the state's definition of “highly qualified.” This is up from 2003-04, when only 84.5% met the state’s requirements. Recent staff layoffs, however, are likely to have a negative effect on the percentage of highly qualified teachers for 2005-06, district officials said. This percentage will be officially reported on the state report card at the end of 2005-06.

Layoffs were done by seniority, so people getting started in their teaching careers were let go first. More recently hired teachers were more likely to be highly qualified because they received certification when state certification requirements were aligned with NCLB requirements, explained Debra Burke, manager of employee services. At the peak of layoffs, 1,314 teachers were let go. Due to retirements, the district was able to rehire 494 of these teachers after the start of the 2005-06 school year, Burke said.

While the teacher contract required that layoffs be done by seniority, several district officials said that the district lost many good, young teachers as a result. At Wade Park School, for example, about half the staff of veteran teachers left in 2002-03 because they did not want to implement changes required by corrective action under NCLB. The principal got special permission from the union and district to hire new staff without using the seniority system, and many were teachers at the beginning of their careers. The layoffs hit this young staff hard. For the 2005-06 school year, 20 out of 31 teachers are new to the school. Several of these teachers were assigned to the school as late as October.

In an attempt to help more teachers meet the state requirements, the district offers individual and group counseling to determine if teachers are highly qualified. “Many teachers are still confused by what is being required of them. I see many teachers who complete work in subjects they didn’t need and not in areas they do need.”

While Cleveland has increased the percentage of core academic classes taught by highly qualified teachers, Burke said the district may still have trouble meeting NCLB’s deadline for having highly qualified teachers. The state clarified the requirements for highly qualified teachers in special education in October 2004. While in the past the district understood that special education teachers with special education certificates or licenses from the state were highly qualified, now it is clear that special education teachers in grades 7 through 12 who are the teacher of record for a core content class must be highly qualified in both special education and the core content area. Some teachers may need more time to meet this requirement, Burke said.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Cleveland teachers are served by several providers of professional development, including the district itself, the state department of education, and local universities. The district’s offerings are free, while the others require a nominal fee, Burke reported. Much of the funding for the district’s offerings comes from outside grants from private institutions, she said.

A large number of the district’s professional development activities in the past have been in literacy, specifically reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, noted chief academic officer Lowry. “We are just beginning to attack math,” she said, explaining that this was true especially in the elementary grades.
Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Of the 487 Title I paraprofessionals in the district, 55% meet the state’s definition of highly qualified. The district offers paraprofessionals professional development to help them pass state assessments and become highly qualified. Based on this ongoing support, Burke said, she expects most to be highly qualified by June 2006.

Funding and Costs

Beginning in 2004-05, Cleveland faced a deficit of $100 million due to poor economic conditions in the city, declining student enrollment, and rising health care costs. Two levies have failed with voters, and all district officials reported that this financial crisis has resulted in changes that could threaten student achievement. These changes include teacher and central office layoffs, school closures, inability to purchase textbooks and consumable materials, and cuts in assistance to schools, such as the elimination of literacy and math coaches.

Title I funds have increased since 2004-05, however, because the number of students in poverty has grown according to the data used to calculate Title I formulas. The district received about $47 million in 2004-05 and $48 million in 2005-06, reported Clifford Andrews, director of funded programs. “The amount of federal funds Cleveland gets post-NCLB is significantly higher than what it got pre-NCLB. That’s a benefit,” he said. But, Andrews also observed, “As NCLB gets more mature and more schools fall victim to NCLB sanctions, districts lose control of those funds. The set-asides shift dollars away from schools and give others control over those dollars.”

Capacity Issues

Teacher and central office staff layoffs are making implementation of NCLB more challenging, district officials said. At the central office, Hicks noted, “We have a fraction of the staff to do all of the work we did before.” The central office has tried to compensate for staff and teacher reductions by computerizing as much work as possible. Report cards, for example, are now reported by teachers directly online, which cuts down on errors and data entry by central office staff. Still, district officials said layoffs have resulted in increased pressure and lengthy days for remaining staff.

Teacher layoffs have increased class sizes across the district. For example, at J.D. Rockefeller, kindergarten and 1st grade classes had about 30 students for 2005-06, while 7th and 8th grades had almost 40 students per class. In other grades, numbers were in the mid-20s. Teachers said these large class sizes make it difficult to give all the students the attention they need.

Wade Park School has had similar increases. The school itself doubled in size from about 300 students in 2004-05 to about 600 in 2005-06. This rapid growth combined with financial difficulties in the district has meant a lack of textbooks and supplies. “The biggest stumbling block has been not having materials,” said 2nd grade teacher Amy Soltes. Her colleague, 7th grade teacher Mary Adamo, agreed. She added that more funding needed to go to schools like those in Cleveland which lacked resources and parent involvement due to the stresses of poverty. The state test compares Cleveland schools to those in the suburbs, but in terms of capacity, Adamo said, “We’re not even on the same playing field.”

Reading First

Cleveland has 20 schools with Reading First grants. The program dovetails well with what Cleveland was already doing in reading, Lowry said. For example, the district already required a 90-minute reading block and used Harcourt materials recommended for Reading First. The grants do, however, bring much-needed extra resources to specific schools, Lowry added.
Data File—Cleveland Municipal School District

Location: Ohio
Type: Urban

Number of Schools
- Total: 104
- Elementary: 82
- High schools: 16
- Other: 6 (3 grade 6-12, or in the process of becoming 6-12; 1 early childhood center; 1 alternative K-12 school; 1 alternative high school)

Number of Title I schools: 102

Student Enrollment and Demographics
- Total enrollment: 62,542
  - African American: 70.2%
  - White: 17.4%
  - Latino: 10.0%
  - Asian: 0.7%
  - American Indian: 0.3%
  - Multiracial: 1.5%
  - Low-income students: 100.0%
  - Students with disabilities: 15.9%
  - English language learners: 4.9%

Teachers
- Total number of teachers: 4,286
  - Percentage of core academic classes taught by highly qualified teachers: 72.9%

Paraprofessionals
- Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: 487
  - Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 55%

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: 62 (includes 9 schools that have closed)
### Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

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<td>10†</td>
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<td>Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years):</td>
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### Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

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<td>Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES instead of choice:</td>
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† Of these 10, 7 made AYP but remain in year 1, and 3 closed.
‡ Of these 20, 4 made AYP but remain in year 2, and 3 closed.
§ Of these 4, 1 made AYP but remains in corrective action, and 1 closed.
** Of these 6, 2 made AYP but remain in restructuring, and 2 closed.