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Majority of Michigan Schools in No Child Left Behind's "Restructuring" Raise Student Achievement Enough to Meet State Targets

Hiring a "Turnaround Specialist" Becomes Most Popular Reform Option, But Report Finds that a Combination of Reform Strategies Proves Most Successful

WASHINGTON – March 28, 2007 – About two-thirds (64 percent) of Michigan schools in restructuring – the No Child Left Behind Act's ultimate sanction for chronically failing schools – improved achievement enough to meet targets for adequate yearly progress under the law in 2005-06, according to a new report from the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy (CEP).

The study, *What Now? Lessons from Michigan about Restructuring Schools and Next Steps under NCLB*, also finds that more than half of the 90 Michigan schools in restructuring – 51 schools – had met adequate yearly progress targets for two consecutive years, allowing them to exit the restructuring process altogether in 2006-07.

However, it is unclear to what extent the achievement gains are due to school improvement efforts and other instructional changes, and to what extent they are due to federal and state policy changes that have made it easier for schools to demonstrate AYP, according to the report.

Restructuring, No Child Left Behind's controversial last consequence for schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward their state's student achievement targets for five or more years, requires schools to undertake drastic reforms intended to transform schools and increase achievement that can range from wholesale replacement of school staff to becoming a charter school.

And while the schools in restructuring have been steadily improving, according to the report, the options they have implemented to boost achievement have changed dramatically. In 2005-06, 72 percent of schools chose to hire turnaround specialists – up from just 16 percent the previous year – making it the most popular reform strategy for schools in restructuring. The specialists have limited powers over the school in regards to curriculum, staff development, and decision-making.

The report also finds that while almost all of the schools in restructuring – 94 percent – opted against more radical strategies and implemented the "any other" reform option in 2004-05, only 23 percent of schools did so in 2005-06. In addition, far fewer schools – 8 percent – chose to replace their principal in 2005-06, compared with 63 percent of schools just one year earlier.

But the report indicates that no single factor is the most responsible for the achievement gains, and that schools that implemented a combination of five or more reforms over the past two years were significantly more likely to exit restructuring in 2006-07 than those implementing fewer reforms.

“The experience of these schools suggests that there is no silver bullet, and that solving the problems of struggling schools requires a variety of solutions and strategies,” says Jack Jennings, president and CEO of CEP. “But pursuing multiple reform strategies requires a greater investment than many schools are presently capable of making without additional support – an imbalance that must be remedied in order for more schools to follow the approach that is clearly the most promising at this point.”

In fact, a majority of officials at schools in various stages of restructuring interviewed for case studies conducted for the report say they have insufficient funds and that they were unable to implement all of the restructuring reform strategies that they would like. And while the Michigan Department of Education provides grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$45,000 to struggling schools, reform options are in part limited due to a decline in federal Title I allocations prompted by new federal formulas that calculate funding based on population gains and losses, as well as loss of revenue from declining enrollments.

Schools profiled in the report’s case studies did indicate a common approach to reform efforts: using a variety of strategies to improve achievement beyond their “official” restructuring strategy. These efforts included making greater use of data to make instructional decisions, increasing collaboration among teachers, and sharing decision making at the school rather than relying on the principal alone. The case study districts and schools include:

- **Detroit Public Schools:** Cerveney Middle School, Cleveland Middle School, and William Beckham Academy;
- **Flint Community Schools:** Brownell Elementary School;
- **Harrison Community Schools:** Larson Elementary School and Hillside Elementary School; and
- **Willow Run Community Schools:** Willow Run Middle School.

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all schools and districts to meet AYP targets to ensure that 100 percent of students are academically proficient by 2014. After five consecutive years of missing AYP, schools must plan for restructuring – after six years schools must then implement those plans. A few states, like Michigan, are home to the first restructured schools in the nation because they began calculating AYP based on data collected prior to NCLB to meet the goals of the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994.

Over the past three years, the Center on Education Policy has conducted a series of analyses of the school restructuring processes in Maryland, Michigan and California as part of its comprehensive, multiyear study of the No Child Left Behind Act. The reports are all available at www.cep-dc.org. The Michigan findings are included in two reports: *Makeovers, Facelifts, or Reconstructive Surgery: An Early Look at NCLB School Restructuring in Michigan* (2004) and *Hope but No Miracle Cures: Michigan’s Early Restructuring Lessons* (2005).

Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in January 1995, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

The report, along with additional information on CEP, its publications and its work, is available on the web at www.cep-dc.org.