MANAGING MORE THAN A THOUSAND REMODELING PROJECTS

SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING IN CALIFORNIA
Summary of Key Findings

California school leaders attending the On the Right Track Symposium in the fall of 2007 overflowed the breakout sessions devoted to guidance for schools in the later years of school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act. Despite the statewide conference’s positive title, many attendees oversaw schools that had already implemented restructuring—the last phase of sanctions under NCLB—but had not raised student achievement enough to meet state test score targets. At the symposium, representatives of the California Department of Education (CDE), which cosponsored the conference, told schools struggling with restructuring to take an unflinching look at school data, deepen reforms that are working, and add new initiatives if needed.

“It’s not just rearranging the furniture,” said Jeff Hamlin, director of California’s Region 8 System of District and School Support and leader of one of the breakout sessions. “It’s about remodeling.” But as California state officials noted, remodeling schools, like any major home improvement project, may take more time and effort than first expected. And California, unlike homeowners who undertake improvement projects, has more than a thousand of these school improvement projects in the works simultaneously.

Under NCLB, restructuring is the transformation mechanism for schools failing to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward their state’s student achievement targets for five or more consecutive years. The sanctions associated with restructuring, from replacing school staff to contracting with an outside organization to run the school, are intended to reshape underperforming schools dramatically. The federal law requires districts to choose one of five options for their schools in restructuring. Although federal guidance discourages minor reform efforts, the law leaves much of the details of decision making and implementation to districts and schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

What types of schools are most affected by restructuring? How do states, districts, and schools make choices about restructuring, and which options do they choose? How are restructuring choices being implemented? What is the initial impact of these efforts?

To explore these questions, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) returned to California, where we have been studying the restructuring process since school year 2004-05. California can offer useful lessons about restructuring because it has a rising number of schools in restructuring, a well-developed data collection system, and documented guidance for schools in restructuring. In the fall and winter of 2007-08, we reviewed restructuring documents, analyzed state test data, and interviewed decision makers at the state level. We also conducted in-depth case studies of four districts with schools in restructuring—Grant Joint Union, Oakland Unified, Palmdale Elementary, and Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified—and of nine schools within these districts.

Several key findings emerged from our analysis:

- **More schools have entered restructuring each year.** For the past two years, the number of schools in restructuring in California has increased by about 300 schools per year. Between school years 2006-07 and 2007-08, this number increased from 701 to 1,013; the latter figure includes 416 schools in the planning phase of restructuring (their fourth year of being identified for improvement) and 597 schools in the implementation phase (their fifth year of improvement or beyond). Of the 597 schools in the implementation phase, 122 are in their sixth year of improvement, 187 in their seventh year, and 10 in their eighth year—meaning that many schools fail to make AYP even after years of restructuring.

- **Although urban schools remain overrepresented among restructuring schools, the percentage of restructuring schools that are suburban has risen.** Sixty percent of schools in the planning or implementation phase of restructuring in 2007-08 are located in urban areas, while 35% are in suburban...
areas, and 5% are in rural areas. Compared with
two years ago, this represents a decline in the urban
proportion and an increase in the suburban pro-
portion; the rural proportion has changed little.

- **Few schools have exited restructuring.** Based on
2006-07 testing, only 33 schools, or 5% of
schools in restructuring that year, raised their test
scores enough to exit improvement. This repre-
sents just a small increase from 2005-06, when 10
schools, or 3% of those in restructuring that year,
exited improvement.

- **Taking “any other” action to restructure gover-
nance remains the most popular choice.** Among
the five restructuring options in federal law, a large
majority (90%) of California schools implement-
ing restructuring in 2006-07 used the fifth, the so-
called any-other option, which allows schools and
districts to take any major action, aside from the
other four options in the law, which will produce
fundamental change in the school’s governance
structure. Actions taken under this option varied
widely, from adding district employees to guide
each restructuring school in Grant to dividing
schools into several small schools in Oakland.

- **No single federal restructuring option stands out
as more effective than the others.** Based on statis-
tical testing, no restructuring strategy was associ-
ated with a greater likelihood of a school making
AYP overall or of meeting targets in English lan-
guage arts (ELA) or math separately. No strategy,
therefore, should be promoted over any other.

- **To raise achievement, restructuring schools used
strategies in addition to the federal restructuring
options.** The nine participating schools all used
data to inform instructional decisions. In addition,
all have increased staff collaboration through such
means as reserving time for teachers to plan as a
team. All have added “coaches” who model effec-
tive work, observe staff, and provide suggestions for
improvement to teachers and principals.
Furthermore, all case study schools have changed
their schedules to allow more time for interven-
tions for struggling students.

- **Factors outside of school appear to hamper
schools’ efforts to raise achievement.** Although
interviewees in the districts studied were reluctant
to go on record as making excuses for low student
achievement, several noted the challenges of trying
to emphasize academics when students come to
school unprepared to learn, lack support for home-
work, are influenced by gangs, or face other prob-
lems often found in low-income communities.

**Study Methods and Background**

For the past three years, the Center on Education
Policy has conducted a series of analyses of the school
restructuring process in selected states. Previously, we
issued two reports about the restructuring process in
California in school years 2004-05 and 2006-07 (CEP,
2006a; 2007a). We have also published three reports
on restructuring in Michigan (CEP, 2004; 2005;
2007b) and two on restructuring in Maryland (CEP,
2006b; 2007c). All of these reports are available at

CEP chose to study restructuring initially in
California, Michigan, and Maryland because these
states had already begun implementing test-based
accountability systems and calculating AYP under the
Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, the
federal law that preceded NCLB. As a result, these
states had schools reach the restructuring phase of
NCLB sooner than most other states. For this school
year, CEP has expanded its work on restructuring to
include Georgia and Ohio; findings from these two
additional states will be published later this year.

To collect information about restructuring in
California, CEP consultant Caitlin Scott interviewed
state department of education officials and regional
administrators. To learn more about the details, chal-
enges, and effects of restructuring at the local level, she
also conducted on-site interviews with school district
administrators, principals, and other staff in four dis-
tricts and nine schools:

- Grant Joint Union High School District, an urban
secondary school district in Sacramento, enrolls
almost 14,000 students in grades 7-12. Martin
Luther King Jr. (MLK) Junior High School and
Grant Union High School were the schools
involved in our study.
• Oakland Unified School District, a large urban district, serves just under 40,000 students in the city of Oakland. Four Oakland schools participated in our in-depth study: Cox Elementary, Highland Elementary, Sobrante Park Elementary, and Whittier/Greenleaf Elementary.

• Palmdale Elementary School District, enrolling 22,000 students, serves an outer-ring suburb of Los Angeles. Palm Tree Elementary and Yucca Elementary participated in our study.

• Tahoe-Truckee Joint Unified School District, a rural district near Lake Tahoe, enrolls 4,052 students. North Tahoe Middle School was the focus of our in-depth study.

Oakland, Palmdale, and Tahoe-Truckee were involved in CEP’s previous studies of restructuring in California. They had been selected from a list of districts recommended in 2004 by the California Department of Education, the former Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center (SCCAC), and WestEd, a nonprofit regional educational laboratory. CEP chose these three districts because they represented an urban, suburban, and rural district and had all engaged in a collaborative district-school process to determine which restructuring options were best for their schools. For 2006, CEP added the Grant district, which had participated since 2003 in our local case studies of NCLB implementation and was making interesting changes in schools in restructuring. District personnel chose restructuring schools to participate in this study. This year, 2007-08, Palm Tree Elementary was added to increase information about schools that have successfully come out of restructuring.

In addition to conducting interviews and document reviews, Scott observed the On the Right Track Symposium sponsored by CDE and WestEd. The symposium, which was held from September 30 to October 2, 2007, in Anaheim, California, featured presentations on three districts and nine schools that had been in school improvement and had raised student achievement. It also featured breakout sessions that provided guidance and assistance to educators from schools in NCLB improvement.

As part of this study, Scott also reviewed state, district, and school data and documents, such as state restructuring and school improvement policies, state records tracking restructuring implementation, state report cards, and state test score data. The interviews, observations, document reviews, and data analysis were conducted from September 2007 through January 2008.

**Overview of Restructuring in California**

California’s policies for its growing number of restructuring schools closely follow the requirements in federal law. The state does not dictate specific options for restructuring schools, but it does collect information about schools’ restructuring choices. The state also provides funding and other forms of assistance to restructuring schools.

**FEDERAL AND STATE RESTRUCTURING REQUIREMENTS**

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test virtually all students annually in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, plus once during high school. It also requires all schools and districts to meet state targets for adequate yearly progress that place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students will be academically proficient by 2014. Between 2006-07 and 2007-08, California raised its targets for the percentages of students that must score at or above the proficient level for a school or district to make AYP (see table 1).

To make AYP, schools must also meet a 95% test participation requirement and reach other state-determined targets in such areas as attendance, graduation rates, and growth on California’s own Academic Performance Index (API), another measure of student academic achievement.

Under NCLB, schools and districts that have not made AYP for two consecutive years are identified for improvement and are subject to sanctions. If a school continues to fall short of AYP targets and remains in improvement status, the sanctions progress from offering public school choice in year 1 of improvement, to providing tutoring services in year 2, to undertaking “corrective action” in year 3. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must plan for restructuring...
(year 4 of NCLB improvement). After six consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must implement their restructuring plans (year 5 of improvement). Schools and districts identified for restructuring must choose from the following menu of options in federal law, designed to completely revamp the school:

- Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school
- Reopening the school as a charter school
- Replacing all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP
- Turning operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees
- Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform

California allows schools to use any of these options for restructuring except turning the school over to the state. The state takeover option is not practical, said Wendy Harris, the state’s assistant superintendent for school improvement, because the state department of education does not have the resources or the desire to run large numbers of schools.

Perhaps because these options are designed to radically change schools, implementation can be complex. When fully implemented, all of these options require adjustments to schools’ financial operations, and some may require additional resources, particularly if the school must train staff to work together in new ways.

**NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING**

In the 2007-08 school year, 1,013 California Title 1 schools—about 11% of all California elementary and secondary schools—were placed in the planning or implementation phase of restructuring based on their 2006-07 test scores. This number represents a 45% increase over 2006-07, when approximately 701 schools were in restructuring, and a 153% increase over 2005-06, when about 401 schools were in restructuring. Figure 1 shows this growth in the number of schools identified for restructuring.

States vary widely in their numbers of schools in restructuring. California has a large number of schools in restructuring not only because it is a populous state with several thousand schools, but also because it started earlier than many states to actively develop a standards-based testing and accountability system and began to identify schools for improvement under the federal law that preceded NCLB. Thus, California currently has schools in their fourth year of restructuring implementation (their eighth year of improvement).

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1 Title I schools are those that receive federal funds under the Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by NCLB; this program supports education for low-achieving children in low-income areas.
Of the 1,013 schools in restructuring in 2007-08, 416 are in the planning phase and 597 are in the implementation phase. The state of California does not officially move schools beyond “year 5” of improvement, the reporting level required under NCLB. This is because there are no federal provisions specifically for schools in year 6 of improvement or beyond, said Harris. Still, of the 597 schools in year 5 status, 122 have actually failed to make AYP for seven consecutive years (putting them in year 6 of improvement), 187 have failed to make AYP for eight consecutive years (year 7 of improvement), and 10 have failed to make AYP for nine consecutive years (year 8 of improvement).

While the number of schools in restructuring has grown by about 300 per year over the last two years, comparatively few California schools have raised test scores enough to exit restructuring. Based on 2006-07 testing, 13 schools exited restructuring implementation and 20 schools exited restructuring planning, for a combined exit rate of 5% of all schools in either phase of restructuring that year. This is up just a few percentage points from last year, when no school exited restructuring implementation and 10 schools exited restructuring planning, for a combined exit rate of 3%.

**TYPES OF SCHOOLS IN Restructuring**

Sixty percent of the schools in either phase of restructuring in 2007-08 are located in urban areas, 35% in suburban areas, and 5% in rural areas. Although urban schools continue to be overrepresented among those in restructuring, the proportion of urban schools has actually decreased slightly over the last two years, while the suburban proportion has grown, and the rural proportion has remained relatively constant. **Figure 2** displays this trend.

**FUNDING FOR Restructuring**

Beginning in 2004, all states were required by federal law to set aside 4% of their total school district allocations under the federal Title I program to assist districts and schools in improvement, including schools in restructuring. However, states that did not receive sufficient increases in Title I allocations could not reserve the full 4% because of a “hold-harmless” provision in NCLB, which prevents states from setting aside the entire 4% if doing so would cause districts to lose funds compared with the previous year. As a result, some states like California have flat or declining Title I set-aside funds available to assist schools.

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1. This situation is explained in more detail in two CEP reports on Title I funding (2006c; 2007d) available at www.cep-dc.org.
For 2006-07, this 4% set-aside in California totaled $68,939,318—about $2 million less than the 2005-06 set-aside of roughly $71 million. This reduction came at a time when the percentage of schools in restructuring had increased by about 49%. The main reason for the reduction, according to Harris, was the law’s hold harmless provision.

Because the set-aside is dependent on child poverty counts rather than on the number of Title I schools in improvement, the amount of funding per school varies widely by state. Perhaps as a result, states have taken a range of approaches to distributing these funds. Some states help schools design restructuring plans and explicitly sign off on those plans, while others do not collect any information on schools in restructuring beyond what they collect from other schools in improvement. The California Department of Education has chosen a middle-of-the-road approach, collecting information on schools in restructuring and providing technical assistance, such as professional development and online tools for schools in restructuring, but not limiting or directing schools’ approaches to restructuring beyond the expectation that schools will follow the federal law. This approach has continued, although funds have been reduced and the number of schools in the late stages of improvement has increased.

In 2006-07, the 4% set-aside supported school improvement activities that were similar to those supported in previous years. While funds were not specifically targeted toward schools in restructuring, some restructuring schools did see indirect funding increases because they had also been identified for state monitoring under the state accountability system or because their districts had been identified for improvement. In addition, all restructuring schools could benefit from funding directed at providers of technical support for schools in improvement, such as the state’s Regional System of District and School Support (RSDSS).

More specifically, about $7 million of the 2006-07 set-aside went to 51 districts that had been identified for improvement. About $15 million was used for districts that were not yet in improvement but had large numbers or percentages of schools in improvement. Just over $18
million was distributed to 105 Title 1 schools targeted for monitoring under the state accountability system; 45 of these schools were in restructuring. Some $10 million went to county offices of education as part of California’s RSDSS. Unused funds were carried over into 2007-08.

The budget for 2007-08 was not yet finalized at the time our study was completed. As of November 30, 2007, approximately $47 million from the 4% set-aside had been scheduled for use in 2007-08. Additional funds available and not scheduled would be carried over into 2008-09. About $17 million had been set aside for districts that have been identified for improvement. About $20 million had been reserved for Title I schools targeted for monitoring under the state accountability system, and $10 million had been appropriated for county offices of education with schools in improvement as part of California’s RSDSS.

Funding for schools in improvement in California may change in the future, since the Congress provided increased funding for school improvement under another section of Title I. For example, California received about $16 million in new federal funds for school improvement in December 2007. State officials expected to award these funds to districts in late spring of 2008 after a competitive grant process. Funding might also be increased if the state devotes additional state funding indirectly to support districts assisting schools in restructuring. As an example, in January 2008, Governor Schwarzenegger announced plans to increase funding to help districts in improvement meet potential new state requirements affecting them (Asimov, 2008). Some of these districts are likely to have schools in restructuring.

### Options Chosen by Restructuring Schools

Although states are not required by law to track schools’ restructuring choices, the California Department of Education has collected this information for the past two years from schools in the implementation phase of restructuring. In 2006-07, the “any-other” option continued to be the most popular by far; 90% of schools in restructuring implementation reported using this approach. As shown in table 2, the percentages of schools using each of the options changed little from last year. Differences are primarily due to the fact that fewer schools used multiple strategies in 2006-07.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restructuring Option</th>
<th>Number and Percentage Using Option in 2005-06*</th>
<th>Number and Percentage Using Option in 2006-07*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All schools in restructuring implementation</td>
<td>245 (100%)</td>
<td>352 † (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform</td>
<td>219 (89%)</td>
<td>317 (90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing all or most of the staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>73 (30%)</td>
<td>47 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school</td>
<td>24 (10%)</td>
<td>35 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reopening the school as a charter school</td>
<td>5 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: In 2005-06, of the 245 schools that were implementing restructuring plans and had reported their restructuring choices, 219 schools, or 89%, chose the option of “undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform.”

* Some schools chose more than one restructuring option, so numbers in these columns add up to more than the total number of schools in restructuring and more than 100%.

† The total number of schools implementing restructuring plans in 2006-07 was 358. CDE was missing data for one school. The five other schools are not included here because they either closed, are no longer Title I schools, or were held in restructuring planning due to revisions in their AYP data.

Source: Analysis by the Center on Education Policy of unpublished data from the California Department of Education, September 2007.
It is important to note that CDE is not required to and does not check to ensure that all schools are actually implementing these restructuring strategies. In a national sample, the Government Accountability Office (2007) found that many schools in restructuring did not actually implement any of the federal options. In California, Harris said that she had no reason to suspect schools were not implementing restructuring; however, it “would be almost unfathomable” for CDE to develop the capacity to monitor each school in restructuring. Instead, she said, “we have long touted county offices as being closer to the problem and the solution.” Thus far, she said, these county offices have had no complaints about schools being out of compliance with NCLB restructuring, although many schools have not improved achievement scores despite their efforts.

Using statistical techniques called Chi squares, CEP compared the likelihood of a school making AYP using each particular strategy with the overall likelihood of a school in restructuring making AYP. Table 3 shows the percentage of schools within each category of options that made AYP based on 2006-07 test data, that met targets in English language arts, and that met targets in math. For most strategies, there were no significant differences. (It was not possible to apply this statistical test to schools that became charter schools because the sample size of just two schools was too small.)

**STATE ASSISTANCE IN RESTRUCTURING**

Since schools began implementing restructuring, California has created tools and strategies designed to help schools and districts make good decisions about restructuring, but the state has stopped short of dictating strategies to schools. As State Superintendent Jack O’Connell said in his speech to educators attending California’s On the Right Track Symposium, “I wish there was a one size fits all solution, but there isn’t.”

This symposium was the main state professional development event for schools in restructuring in fall 2007. According to WestEd records, about 870 people attended from about 120 districts, or about 10% of California’s districts. Key sessions were videotaped, and CDE plans to make them available online. In the two previous years, the state workshops that included information for schools in restructuring were held regionally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restructuring Option</th>
<th>Percentage of Schools Using Option That Made AYP</th>
<th>Percentage of Schools Using Option That Met ELA Targets</th>
<th>Percentage of Schools Using Option That Met Math Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All schools in restructuring implementation</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing all or most of the staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reopening the school as a charter school*</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

Table 3. Percentages of California Schools Using Various Restructuring Options in 2006-07 That Met AYP Targets

Table reads: Based on 2006-07 testing, 14% of the schools that used the any-other restructuring option made adequate yearly progress by meeting achievement targets in both English language arts and math; 17% of schools using the any-other option met achievement targets in English language arts, and 46% met targets in math.

* Only two schools used the charter school option, so 50% represents one school, while 100% represents two schools.

Source: Analysis by the Center on Education Policy of unpublished data from the California Department of Education, September 2007.
One of the videotaped sessions aimed at assisting schools in restructuring in 2007-08 was called “Unlocking the Power of Planning—Program Improvement Years 3, 4, & 5.” This session provided information about how schools are identified for improvement and what the requirements are for years 3, 4, and 5 of school improvement. It also encouraged educators to create a “cycle of improvement.” The session provided contact information for several people and organizations that can assist California schools in restructuring, including representatives in California’s RSDSS, specialists in the county offices of education, and supporters in universities and other outside agencies such as WestEd.

This same session also described tools available to help schools and districts gather information they can use to make decisions about restructuring. The four tools created by CDE include the District Assistance Survey (DAS), which analyzes the kinds of district-level support schools need; the Academic Program Survey (APS), which gauges how effectively a school has implemented nine “essential program components” that state research has found to be present in California schools with higher academic achievement; the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Survey Self Assessment, which focuses on how schools and districts are serving students with disabilities; and the English Learner Subgroup Self Assessment (ELSSA), which focuses on how schools and districts are serving English language learners (ELLs). These surveys are available on the state Web site at www.cde.ca.gov/ta/lp/vl/improvtools.asp.

A tool specifically aimed at helping schools make restructuring decisions is Look Before You Leap: Responding Effectively to PI Year 4 Requirements (SCCAC, 2005), created by Dennis Fox, once a consultant to the former Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center and currently an employee of the Los Angeles County Office of Education. This decision-making guide was designed to help administrators develop a major restructuring plan or select an alternative form of governance that will best meet the needs of their school.

Finally, the session emphasized an improvement “pyramid” for schools that includes four steps:

1. Reforming the school leadership team
2. Examining the school program
3. Revising the school improvement plan
4. Building a new learning community

Presenters at the session were quick to admit they did not have packaged answers about what schools should do to improve. Instead, they emphasized a collaborative approach that involved all key stakeholders and that based decisions on data collected from the aforementioned state surveys, the state test, and other available local sources.

Common Themes from Restructuring Districts and Schools

Several common themes emerged from our studies of four California districts and nine schools.

First, most restructuring initiatives for 2007-08 were not new. Instead, seven of the nine schools were continuing prior restructuring initiatives without major changes, which may reflect the fact that many California schools have been in restructuring for some time. Interviewees gave several additional explanations for this continuity. Many said that student achievement was increasing, and they believed that with more time the school would meet AYP targets. In schools where student achievement was not improving, interviewees said the school was using research-based strategies that had been successful in other similar schools and that they believed would eventually help their school. Some of the seven schools did add a new element to their efforts, such as an intervention specialist or a new focus for professional development.

Of the two schools that started new restructuring efforts, Martin Luther King Jr. in the Grant Union district received outside grant funding to become a “technology academy” with additional technology for students and staff, district staff assistance, professional development about the technology, and a new “compact” in which teachers agreed to the changes. The other school, Whittier Elementary in Oakland, split into two smaller schools.
Mirroring a finding from our 2006-07 study of California schools in restructuring, representatives of all districts and schools in this year’s study said their “official” federal restructuring options were not the sole strategies they relied on to dramatically improve schools. Instead, all districts and schools reported employing a variety of additional strategies, including intensive use of data to make decisions about teaching students. Most also used data to place students with similar needs together for instruction. These groups changed frequently based on reassessment of students.

In addition, all case study schools have increased staff collaboration to improve student achievement. For example, all have instituted some type of teacher team planning time. All have added coaches for teachers or principals; these coaches model effective work, observe staff, and provide suggestions for improvement. In addition, all case study schools have changed their schedules to allow more time for interventions for struggling students. Several have added before- or after-school programs that extend the school day for students who need more time to learn.

Although we did not ask about issues outside of school that affect students’ achievement, interviewees in all districts voluntarily discussed difficulties their students face in their communities that made academics challenging. These include coming to school inadequately prepared to learn, having few places other than school to do homework or get help with homework, and facing other difficulties associated with family poverty. Interviewees in two districts mentioned that their students faced difficulties with gangs, and two mentioned problems at their school with graffiti and lack of trash removal. Study participants were quick to say they were not using community problems as excuses, and several asked not to be quoted when discussing these problems. Participants did, however, think these problems were factors in the low achievement at their schools.

Restructuring in Grant

Grant Joint Union High School District in Sacramento currently includes six middle schools, five high schools, and six alternative schools. Low-income students make up 69% of the student population; about 29% of Grant’s students are ELLs, and 11% are students with disabilities. Within the boundaries of this large secondary district are six independent elementary school districts that have their own schools for grades K-6. The district is mostly urban but includes some suburban areas.

The Grant district is set to change dramatically in the 2008-09 school year, when three of the six independent elementary school districts will merge with Grant to form a new K-12 district with a new board and a newly appointed superintendent. The public voted in the November 2007 election to merge Rio Linda, North Sacramento, Del Paso Heights, and Grant Union. Local media reports attributed this support for the merger in part to public concern about the performance of Grant schools under NCLB and a sense that better communication between elementary and secondary schools would help improve student achievement in the upper grades (Rosenhall, 2007). District officials participating in this study agreed that the merger would improve achievement but said the change would also bring upheaval at the district level as the administration reorganizes.

Despite public concern about achievement in Grant, the district itself has not been identified for NCLB improvement and has made steady gains in recent years. Since 2003, the percentage of students performing at or above the proficient level has increased by about 8 percentage points in ELA and about 13 percentage points in math. The district has also narrowed gaps between low-income students and the overall student population, and between English language learners and students overall. Achievement gaps have not narrowed, however, for African American or Latino students. The district has also had difficulty meeting AYP targets for special education and African American students. The performance of these subgroups kept the district from making AYP in 2006-07.

Individual schools also struggle with NCLB requirements in Grant. Three of the district’s 14 Title I schools implemented restructuring in 2006-07: Don Julio Junior High, Grant Union High School, and Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High. The district employed a number of strategies to assist schools in restructuring, all of which fall under the any-other federal option.

Grant has a long history of using technology and data to shape instruction (Erenben, 2006; Buchanan, 2006). Starting about six years ago, the district began
developing quarterly assessments aligned with state standards that place students in classes based on their needs. Weekly benchmark assessments help teachers in these classes further shape instruction to meet students’ individual needs. Results of these various assessments are posted online to give teachers easy access to data that can help them determine what students need to learn next and how they should be grouped. All of Grant’s improvement efforts for restructuring schools “really revolve around district systems of diagnostic assessment and placement for every student,” according to Adam Berman, assistant superintendent of education services.

The district has also placed a district-level site coordinator of curriculum and instruction at each restructuring school to assist with all aspects of restructuring. In addition, restructuring schools went through a voluntary School Assistance and Intervention Team (SAIT) process, which involved visits from a CDE-approved team, self-assessments using CDE-developed tools, and recommendations for improvement. The work of the site coordinators and the voluntary SAIT led to changes at schools. According to district staff, these changes mostly focused on increasing data use and staff collaboration and adopting interventions for struggling students such as Launching Educational and Academic Performance (LEAP), an academically focused after-school program.

Restructuring efforts appeared to be successful at Don Julio Junior High. In addition to implementing the district strategies for all schools, Don Julio merged with Highland High School, which was in restructuring planning. With this merger, Highland became a school serving grades 7-12 at the beginning of 2006-07. The 7-12 school made AYP based on 2006-07 test scores and exited restructuring. At Grant Union High restructuring efforts also appeared to be successful. The school met AYP targets in all areas except for the English language learner subgroup in English language arts. Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High, however, did not meet any targets in math, and only the Asian subgroup met targets in ELA. Furthermore, overall achievement in math at MLK declined by four percentage points.

Table 4 displays the AYP results for Grant Union and Martin Luther King. Achievement is higher at Grant Union High than at MLK, and Grant Union High almost made AYP. However, the school will have to increase student achievement to meet rising AYP targets in California in 2007-08.

Based on the 2006-07 test results, the Grant district decided to “restructure restructuring,” according to Rick Carder, the district’s director of state and federal programs. “Each year, we evaluate what’s working and what isn’t working,” he explained. The result of this evaluation was to continue and deepen reforms already in place and to transform MLK into a technology academy.

**STAYING THE COURSE AT GRANT UNION HIGH**

Staff at Grant Union High agreed that rather than instituting new improvement efforts for 2007-08, the school was deepening and intensifying its efforts—a process that could be just as hard as starting new reforms. “Look, this isn’t glamorous; this isn’t like the flavor of the month,” said Principal Craig Murray. “We’re talking hard work. It’s kind of a grind, but hey, this is what the kids need to learn.”

Administrators at Grant explained that they were asking more of teachers this year, even though the reforms themselves weren’t new. For example, rather than bringing in outsiders for the school’s monthly professional development sessions, “we have teachers from our site leadership teams actually leading those professional development opportunities this year,” said Anna Trunnell, the school’s site coordinator of curriculum and instruction. “The teachers were ready for it.”

Teachers have been stepping up to the more intense challenge at Grant Union, according to administrators. History teacher Sue Prentice characterized these changes as “a changing of the guard in the culture of the school . . . a shift from what was to what will be.” Students have also noticed the change, she said. “I think the students see a relevance to education that, perhaps, they weren’t seeing from their older brothers and sisters or their parents and grandparents.” Prentice has observed more students concentrating in class and flocking to LEAP, the school’s after-school program, which she said bodes well for future improvements in academic achievement at the school.
BECOMING A TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY AT MLK

For 2007-08, Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High was assigned a new site coordinator of curriculum and instruction, Latonya Bazemore. Bazemore is an especially effective leader at MLK, said Rick Carder, because she has taught at the school and enjoys a positive relationship with staff. Bazemore helped shepherd through two new strategies at MLK: a teacher compact and an intensive technology initiative.

At the end of school year 2006-07, MLK staff rewrote the vision and mission of the school, Bazemore said. At the same time the school received a Qualified Zone Academic Bond Technology grant that would add new technology to every classroom. “The change in environment was huge,” she said. As part of this process, the staff created a teacher compact that listed all the things teachers would do in school year 2007-08 to support the changes, including adding five extra days of professional development at the beginning of the year. “We really needed to have buy-in from the beginning,” Bazemore noted.

Seventh and eighth grade ELA teacher Nelson Freitas said the compact also helped some teachers understand the challenges MLK is facing: “The agreement was mainly just having each teacher acknowledge the responsibilities and the tasks that we’re facing. Quite honestly, many people see those as things they don’t want to face.”

The technology grant added several types of technology in every classroom: “thin clients” or dummy terminals at each student desk, a digital camera, an LCD projector, and an Interwrite Pad, a wireless device that allows teachers to project computer images, including their own handwriting, from anywhere in the classroom. The district also supported the new technology by stationing a district instructional technology person at the school full time for the first half of the year.

Table 4. Percentages of Students Scoring at or Above the Proficient Level in Two Grant Union District Schools, Based on 2006-07 Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroup</th>
<th>Grant Union High</th>
<th>MLK Jr. Junior High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELA Target 22.3%</td>
<td>ELA Target 24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Math Target 20.9%</td>
<td>Math Target 26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students in school</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.3%*</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>19.5%*</td>
<td>175%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.1%*</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>273%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Based on 2006-07 testing, 23.9% of students in the African American subgroup at Grant Union High School scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts, which exceeds the state AYP target of 22.3% proficient in ELA.

- Met target based on two-year averaging.
- Met target based on NCLB “safe harbor” provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level decreased by 10% or more from the previous year.

While MLK staff is enthusiastic about having the new technology, learning to use it well presents a challenge. “The teachers have told me that the technology lessons take much longer to create,” Bazemore said. She hopes that with time and collaboration, using the new technology will become easier.

Freitas acknowledged that just having the technology in classrooms was not enough to improve achievement, noting that “how teachers apply the technology in the classroom is the critical element.” In addition, he said, “students must have open minds and open ears and open eyes for learning. Without that, all the bells and whistles mean nothing.”

MLK staff expressed great hopes for future student achievement but thought the new initiatives might take more than one year to work. “I think long-term it’s going to make a huge difference,” said Bazemore. “I think that short-term, we’re still in the process of just adjusting to the technology and implementing it.”

### Restructuring in Oakland

Oakland Unified School District serves the city of Oakland in northern California. The district’s enrollment is 40% African American, 33% Latino, 16% Asian, and 6% white. In addition, 66% of students come from low-income families, 26% are ELLs, and 10% are students with disabilities. The demographics vary by school, however, with some schools serving the city’s more affluent “hill” neighborhoods and others serving very poor, high-minority neighborhoods in the “flatlands” between highways 880 and 580. Placed in state receivership in June 2003 due to financial difficulties, the Oakland district has continued to face a shrinking budget due to declining enrollment.

Although Oakland students overall met state achievement targets based on 2006-07 testing, the district did not make AYP. The subgroup of students with disabilities fell short of the targets in both math and ELA, and English language learners and students with disabilities missed the mark in ELA. Across individual schools, student achievement varies. Eight of the district’s 138 schools are in restructuring planning, and 17 are in restructuring implementation; all of these restructuring schools are located in the flatlands.

In 2005-06, Oakland Unified took the lead in determining how its schools were restructured by narrowing schools’ choices. Only schools that achieved an API of 590 or greater on the state accountability index in 2004-05 and that met schoolwide AYP targets for 2003-04 were eligible for “internal restructuring,” which corresponds to the any-other option in federal law.

Another option for Oakland schools under this district-led approach was “new school creation.” A leader was appointed to form a community-based design team that spent a year completely designing the new school and hiring a staff committed to the design team’s vision. At the end of that year, the new school opened and the old school was either closed or phased out over two years. This option combined the any-other option in federal law with replacing staff. As noted below, this option is being curtailed.

If a school is not eligible for internal restructuring and the district or school does not support the creation of a new school, a school can become a charter school. In Oakland, a chartering organization, Education for Change, was founded specifically to serve schools in restructuring and manages three former district schools.

While district officials said that the federal option of replacing staff is only a partial solution to restructuring in Oakland, some schools did replace staff as their main restructuring strategy, and all schools in restructuring have made some staff changes.

Schools entering restructuring in 2006-07 used the district’s list of options to help formulate their restructuring plans. For schools that restructured in 2005-06 but did not make AYP, district and school representatives based decisions about future strategies on the school’s test results, district officials explained. Schools that had made progress on state tests were instructed to continue their restructuring efforts, while those that did not were asked to restructure again. Some in this latter group replaced more staff, and others went ahead with new school creation.

In 2007-08, Oakland has built on this district-led approach to school improvement and has created a “score card,” which ranks schools using a student performance metric similar to AYP, a growth metric similar to API, a value added metric, an achievement gap metric,
and other measures such as enrollment. “This is a local system that we’ve laid over the state and federal system, but we have aligned it with those to the extent that we can,” explained Brad Stam, the district’s chief academic officer.

The new approach ranks schools by color (blue, green, yellow, orange, and red), with most restructuring schools ranked “red.” Red schools get the most structured support and the least flexibility. For example, all schools are assigned to a district-level “network officer,” who acts much as a regional superintendent would and works with small networks of 8-14 schools with a focus on leadership development. Red schools get more supervision and support from their network officer. Stam explained that in red schools the principal and network officer have veto power over the budget, which in Oakland has been typically controlled by a site-based team of parents, teachers, and administrators. Red schools also receive more instructionally-focused monitoring visits by their network officer, and staff changes are always considered, Stam added. These options mostly fall under the any-other federal option, often in combination with replacing staff. “Even though our ‘red schools’ operate under intense supervision,” Stam said, “we are constantly engaging with the school communities and leaders using inquiry and evidence-based strategies, with an ethos of shared ownership, urgency, and continuous improvement.” This process of identifying schools to receive differentiated interventions comes under Oakland’s Expect Success Redesign initiative, which is now in its fourth year and is supported by special grants through the Gates Foundation, the Dell Foundation, and other funders.

The new school creation option, which was popular for red or restructuring schools in the past, is being curtailed. “Because we now have 39 new small schools in Oakland, this is not a strategy that we can continue to do ad infinitum,” Stam explained. “So, we have significantly scaled back that strategy and are focusing on aligning support and supervision to ensure the academic success of the new small schools. However, closure is still an option that’s on the table. We’re also a declining enrollment district, so we may be closing some schools but not reopening them as new small schools, just closing them and moving the students to other schools.”

Two of the four Oakland elementary schools participating in our study, New Highland and Whittier, created new schools. Sobrante Park underwent internal restructuring and exited restructuring in 2006-07. Cox became a charter school. Student achievement at these schools varied a great deal last year, as shown in table 5.

**INTERNAL RESTRUCTURING AT SOBRANTE PARK**

Sobrante Park Elementary School improved student achievement enough to exit restructuring in 2006-07. At that point, the school lost the additional funding available for schools in improvement as well as its Reading First grant, which reached the end of the grant period. Perhaps in part as a result of this decline in funding, 2006-07 test scores dropped by 15 percentage points in ELA and 19 percentage points in math. This drop was fairly consistent across subgroups. “It was not a step in the right direction,” said principal Marco Franco, “especially because we had been steadily improving.”

Franco also said that in 2006-07 he had to reassign teachers to new grades because of fluctuations in the numbers of students per grade. As a result, some teachers were not experienced in the curriculum for the particular grade they were teaching. In addition, one teacher had serious health problems and was out most of the year.

In previous years, consistency in teachers really helped the school improve, according to 4th grade teacher Paul McDermott. When the school began to change with restructuring, he said, many teachers “held their ground and said, ‘I’m not going to be one of these people cycling through this school.’” These teachers also started teaching the district curriculum consistently, he said, although he admitted that at first he was resistant to the curriculum.

To address the need for more consistency, Franco is adding to the reforms that began with restructuring. In 2007-08, the school added an intervention teacher who teaches English language development, ELA, and math to small groups of struggling students during the school day. This interventionist, he said, would be especially useful to students who fell behind because their classroom teacher was absent or inexperienced.
The school will also keep many of the changes that started with restructuring. These include a late start that allows the school to provide interventions for struggling students in small groups before school, an early release on Wednesdays that gives teachers time for grade-level collaboration, a writing instructor who assists classroom teachers with writing, and an after-school program that combines academics, enrichment, and extracurricular activities.

Both Franco and McDermott are hopeful that test scores will improve next year, even though the school has lost funding for two of five paraprofessionals and for some of the professional development activities of past years. The school’s reading coach has also been reduced from a full-time to 75% position. While Franco said he did not think special funds and assistance for restructuring should continue forever, he did view the lack of adequate public school funding as an issue that deserved more national attention: “Things are not going to change until our national priorities shift away from war and commercialization, and we say, ‘You know what? Our kids are important.”’

CREATING NEW SCHOOLS AT HIGHLAND AND WHITTIER

New Highland Elementary reopened as a “new school” in the fall of 2006, after the old Highland school closed at the end of 2005-06. At that time, new schools were still being supervised in a separate network within the district’s Office of New School Development. Whittier Elementary planned for its transition to a new school in 2006-07, and Greenleaf Elementary opened on the Whittier campus in 2007-08. The two schools currently coexist, but in time Whittier will be phased out. The year Greenleaf started, the district had placed all schools in geographic networks and had shifted its focus away from creating new schools. Perhaps as a result of this timing, the new schools at Highland and Whittier/Greenleaf are somewhat different. These differences may also reflect dif-

### Table 5. Percentages of Students Scoring at or Above the Proficient Level in Four Oakland Elementary Schools, Based on 2006-07 Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroup</th>
<th>Cox</th>
<th>New Highland</th>
<th>Sobrante Park</th>
<th>Whittier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students in school</td>
<td>Target 23%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>Target 26.0%*</td>
<td>26.0%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>23.4%**</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>9.3%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>25.1%**</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>24.0%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>26.0%**</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>21.6%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELLs</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>275%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>23.0%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Based on 2006-07 testing, 19.6% of students in the African American subgroup at Cox Elementary School scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts, which falls short of the state AYP target of 24.4% proficient in ELA.

* Met target based on two-year averaging.

** Met target based on the NCLB “safe harbor” provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level has decreased by 10% from the previous year.

ferences in staff and culture, since new school creation is a very individualized process in which each planning team has a strong say in the future of the school.

At New Highland, administrators said their efforts during the first year of the new school focused primarily on creating a positive school climate. “Last year was really about teaching the core values that we’ve adopted, ‘be kind, work hard, get smart, talk it out,’ and making sure we had a coherent discipline plan and system of classroom management,” said Principal Liz Ozol. The school also began an arts integration program and collaborated with a number of community arts organizations. The school gained about five percentage points in ELA and seven in math, although students still fell short of AYP targets in ELA.

In 2007-08, with a more positive culture in place, New Highland has begun to focus more tightly on academics, Ozol said. The school is piloting standards-based interim assessments that were developed by New Leaders for New Schools, a federally-funded, New York-based, nonprofit organization with a strong presence in the Oakland area.

Partly as a result of using the new assessments, teachers realized their students needed individualized instruction, said Ally Wray-Kirk, New Highland’s teaching and learning coordinator. Teachers came to her and said, “Our kids are on so many different levels and nowhere near mastery. We need to differentiate. We need to know about centers and really scaffolding instruction.” The principal said, “fantastic,” Wray-Kirk recalled. At that point the school switched from a year-long focus on writing to a year-long focus on differentiating instruction.” The principal said, “fantastic,” Wray-Kirk recalled. At that point the school switched from a year-long focus on writing to a year-long focus on differentiating instruction.” Wray-Kirk and Ozol said the new school’s emphasis on collaborative planning made it possible for teachers to set the direction for the school and use their strengths to support one another.

Greenleaf is also piloting the standards-based assessments developed by New Leaders for New Schools, but has chosen a somewhat different approach from New Highland’s. Last year, the Whittier planning team decided to focus broadly on three key principles: “parents as partners,” “equity pedagogy,” and “efforts-based learning.” This year, Principal Monica Thomas said, the school is still developing and fleshing out its understanding of these broad, abstract principles. Three of the first steps of implementing the key principles involved creating professional learning communities, focusing on using student achievement data to shape instruction, and integrating reading comprehension strategies into nonfiction content in science and social studies, Thomas explained.

The teaching staff also changed for 2007-08. Whittier teachers had to reapply for their jobs. About half the staff reapplied, Thomas said. She hired back eight of the nine teachers who reapplied, and then hired 11 new teachers. “There was trepidation about coming on board,” she explained, because teachers weren’t sure exactly what the school would look like. Many were concerned about having enough preparation time, Thomas said, and in the end the school gave each teacher three 50-minute prep periods a week, including a common prep time on Wednesdays. The school also instituted a protocol for meetings. Grade-level chairs were trained to use the protocol and in turn trained teachers. The protocol focuses on analyzing student work and using collaborative planning time more effectively, Thomas said.

This gradual transition from Whittier to Greenleaf has made for less than dramatic change, according to resource specialist Jan Young. When asked how this year was different from last, she responded that “there isn’t a whole lot of difference.” However, special education teachers, who are directed by the district’s special education office rather than the principal, were not involved in the restructuring planning process in 2006-07, Thomas noted.

The change in staff was also seen as less dramatic than similar restaffing initiatives the school had undertaken in the previous two years. The staffing changes in 2005-06 in particular were difficult, said Thomas and Young, and left veteran teachers less enthusiastic about changing staff yet again. Thomas also said she had difficulty finding enough teachers for the 2007-08 school year and spent much of the summer searching for teachers.

This year, in 2007-08, Thomas said she feels the loss of the new school network. Although she appreciates the support of those in her geographic network, “there are different needs as a brand new school,” she observed. “Your culture is important to establish, and you really only have one shot at doing that.” Establishing a new culture is not the most important issue for principals of the traditional schools in the geographic network, she said.
BECOMING A CHARTER SCHOOL AT COX

In response to restructuring under NCLB, Cox Elementary became a charter school managed by Education for Change in 2005-06. As part of this process, all staff reapplied for their jobs, and all agreed to be non-union, at-will, contract employees. The same principal, Michael Scott, was rehired, but more than half the teachers hired were new to the school. Since becoming a charter, Cox has made slight academic gains. The percentage of students reaching proficiency has increased by about one percentage point in both math and reading since 2004-05 testing, when the school was a district school.

Under new principal Fernando Yanez, the school has maintained the initiatives started when it became a charter. Yanez was principal of Achieve, another Education for Change school, and before that was principal of Whittier. He said that “consistent strategies” are the hallmark of Education for Change’s philosophy. At Cox, he explained, this means that teachers implement the Open Court reading curriculum precisely, by following the pacing guide. Teachers also meet weekly in grade-level teams to plan instruction. To ensure that the curriculum is taught as intended, the principal, assistant principal, and two Reading First coaches periodically walk through classrooms to briefly observe teachers and give feedback.

Fifth-grade teacher Betty Walker Blue said the consistent curriculum helped her grow professionally and collaborate with other teachers. Since Cox became a charter, she said, “there’s more focus on everyone teaching the curriculum consistently. It makes for more collaborative efforts here. I know I can go to my colleagues, and we are on the same page.”

During its first year as a charter school, one-fourth of Cox’s teachers were new to the school, and for 2007-08, more than half (15 of 28 teachers) are new to Cox, including five who are new to the teaching profession. Both Yanez and Walker Blue attributed this to an Oakland district policy. “After two years in a charter, staff had the option to return to the district and retain their seniority and tenure,” Yanez explained, adding that many teachers felt they could not afford to lose these benefits with the district.

Despite the staff turnover, Yanez and Walker Blue were both optimistic about the school year and anticipated modest growth in student achievement. Yanez, however, said he believed the NCLB target of 100% of students attaining proficiency by 2014 was unrealistic. “That doesn’t mean we can’t push and keep growing,” he said. “But working here, living within a couple miles of the community and not in the hills, I think we have to look at adjusting our measurement. What’s true growth? What’s real and what’s rhetoric? What’s sound policy and what’s a setup for failure?”

Restructuring in Palmdale

Palmdale Elementary School District lies about 67 miles north of Los Angeles International Airport. While some residents commute to Los Angeles, the parents of many Palmdale students work in the Antelope Valley in the aerospace or service industry. Some also work at Edwards Air Force Base, about 50 miles away. The school district has been challenged by rapid growth and high rates of poverty: 59% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches and 28% are ELLs.

The Palmdale district has been identified for improvement but has made steady progress. Since 2003, the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level has increased by nine percentage points in both ELA and math. For 2007-08, Palmdale has 11 of 27 Title I schools in restructuring implementation and 4 in restructuring planning.

Palmdale began its school restructuring efforts in 2005, using the Look Before You Leap guide to make restructuring decisions. The guide leads school teams through exercises examining a variety of school data and formulating strategies for restructuring. Although each school’s plan was slightly different, all fell under the any-other federal option. All focused on using data from benchmark assessments to shape instruction, ensuring that teachers used curricular materials as intended by following flexible pacing guides, and increasing teacher planning and collaboration time.

The two Palmdale elementary schools participating in our study, Palm Tree and Yucca, both used the Look Before You Leap process and have improved student achievement over time. Palm Tree never officially entered NCLB restructuring implementation, but the
school did implement its restructuring plan and exited restructuring in 2007-08. Yucca remains in restructuring implementation.

Because both schools are improving, they are continuing the efforts started when they entered restructuring, explained Betty Stiers, assistant superintendent of educational services. In the past, she said, the district made the mistake of not giving reforms enough time. “When we didn’t see results right away, we embraced the next big thing.” Now district and school officials realize that “change occurs over time,” she added.

Based on 2006-07 testing, Palm Tree made AYP, as shown in table 6, and exited restructuring. Yucca did not meet any AYP targets, although the school has increased the percentage of students scoring proficient by 8 percentage points in ELA and 12 percentage points in math since NCLB took effect in 2002-03.

Both Palm Tree and Yucca Elementary Schools implemented restructuring strategies that fall under the any other federal option. Principals at the schools described similar efforts. Both schools use district benchmark assessments to help teachers plan instruction; both also provide interventions for struggling students during the day using paraprofessionals and offer extended kindergarten. Yucca offers full-day kindergarten, while Palm Tree provides half-day kindergarten with an additional half hour of small-group instruction each day for struggling kindergarteners. Both principals also said they had relied on their Reading First grant, which provides coaches, materials, and teacher training, to improve instruction in reading. Teachers at both schools also said teacher collaboration has increased since restructuring.

At Palm Tree, Principal Kim Shaw said it was impossible to point to any one thing that made the school perform well enough to exit restructuring. Instead, she said, the school benefited from a global focus on student achievement. “We didn’t really talk about, ‘We’re in restructuring and we need to do this.’ It was, ‘We need to do what’s good for kids and student achievement,’” she explained.

Miriam Torres, 2nd grade teacher at Palm Tree, noted that restructuring was hard work. “I have a lot more work because it takes a lot of time to give the assessments . . . [and] to sit down and analyze the assessments.” Like Shaw, however, she said the focus on individual student progress was essential to Palm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroup**</th>
<th>Palm Tree Elementary</th>
<th>Yucca Elementary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELA Target 24.4%</td>
<td>Math Target 26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students in school</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>25.3%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Based on 2006-07 testing, 23.9% of students in the African American subgroup at Grant Union High School scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts, which exceeds the state AYP target of 22.3% proficient in ELA.

* Met target based on two-year averaging.

** Met target based on NCLB “safe harbor” provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level decreased by 10% or more from the previous year.

Tree’s success. She also said the approach helped her professionally: “I’m a much better teacher than I was before restructuring because I’m more conscientious and more aware of what the children need to know.”

As Shaw looks ahead, she is not blithely confident that Palm Tree will make AYP again, especially since the targets are rising for 2007-08. “It’s hard work,” she said, “but at least we have the momentum, and we have that positive attitude, and we’re all willing to do it.”

Although similar restructuring efforts were reported at Yucca, the school has not raised student achievement enough to make AYP. When reviewing past efforts at Yucca, new principal Esmeralda Mondragon said, “Yucca has had good district support and has provided teachers with good practices to improve student achievement. Yucca has made continued growth.”

Yucca’s reading coach, Kelly Kastel, echoed Mondragon’s praise for the school. “I like NCLB because it holds all schools accountable,” she said. “It tells us that we have to set high expectations, and we need to keep the focus on the kids. But if we don’t make AYP, we still need to be proud of what we’ve done.”

Compared to Palm Tree, Yucca started with lower student achievement and therefore has further to go to make AYP. In addition, Yucca has had three new principals in the last three years, while Palm Tree has had consistent leadership. Mondragon also noted, as did the two prior Yucca principals we interviewed previously, that Yucca suffers from long-term neglect of facilities. “The playground is really in poor shape,” she said, adding that this sends a negative message to students.

Mondragon said she would like to see the focus of the school’s restructuring efforts broaden beyond academics. “I would like to see us looking at the whole school, in a sense—not only the instructional program but the personnel, the location of the school, the community, the mobility rate, all the different components.”

Restructuring in Tahoe-Truckee

The Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District is located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, about 100 miles northeast of Sacramento and 35 miles west of Reno, Nevada. The district includes the north shore and some of the western shore of Lake Tahoe and encompasses more than 720 square miles. Its 4,052 students come from three counties—Nevada, Placer, and El Dorado.

Since 2002-03 testing, Tahoe-Truckee has increased the percentages of students scoring at or above the proficient level by 11 percentage points in English language arts and 18 percentage points in math. The district as a whole, however, did not make AYP and is in its third year of improvement due to the performance of Latino and English language learners in ELA. Performance also varies by school. Both of the district’s Title I elementary schools are in improvement—one made AYP and is holding in year 3, and the other did not make AYP and has moved into year 2. (The district has five elementary schools altogether.) The students in the elementary school in year 3 of improvement feed into North Tahoe Middle School, which is in restructuring implementation under NCLB. This targeted assistance Title I middle school serves approximately 250 students, 36% of whom are low-income and 40% of whom are Latino.

When North Tahoe Middle School first implemented restructuring in 2004-05, few schools in the surrounding counties had reached restructuring, noted Dave Curry, currently the district’s interim director of educational services and formerly the principal of North Tahoe Middle. As a result, North Tahoe Middle piloted many of the reforms used in other district and county schools, Curry said. Major changes at North Tahoe Middle have included adding two full-time academic coaches who focus on ELA and math issues respectively, as well as one half-time coach who focuses on English language learners. The school also took steps to provide a half-day of professional development and collaboration for teachers each Wednesday, using benchmark and biweekly student assessments to help teachers plan instruction, and to give struggling students an extra period of ELA and/or math in lieu of an extracurricular activity.

While North Tahoe Middle School met AYP targets for students overall based on 2006-07 testing, multiple subgroups fell short of targets in both ELA and math, as shown in table 7. In addition, compared with 2005-06, scores from 2006-07 testing fell by 4 percentage points in ELA and 17 percentage points in math.
District administrators said they were uncertain what the falling scores mean, but they remain convinced that their restructuring strategies do not need to change dramatically. Instead, Curry said, “we are keeping what’s there, but refining and honing.”

This refining and honing includes the use of a “collaborative inquiry model” to improve student achievement, Curry said. This three-year project is supported partly by a grant from the S. H. Cowell Foundation and partly by district funds. The first year of the grant, 2007-08, is focused on training administrators and teachers to work in professional learning communities using collaborative inquiry. In Tahoe-Truckee, this means the staff learns how to participate in discussions that are respectful, that allow all participants to express their opinions, and that remain student-focused. In these discussions, the staff identifies student learning problems, along with strategies and solutions to address these problems; ways of monitoring the implementation of these solutions; and methods of using data to make instructional decisions. This training can help staff make better use of coaches and of the Wednesday half-day professional development time, district administrators said.

Many of the reforms started with restructuring have become routine at North Tahoe Middle School, such as the Wednesday professional development time, extra periods of core subjects for struggling students, and coaches. “Everything we’ve adopted has been something we would continue to keep because we know it’s effective, even if we raised our scores or got off of program improvement,” said new principal Teresa Rensch, who was the school’s assistant principal in 2006-07.

Although the strategies did not raise overall student achievement on state tests for 2006-07, Rensch said that research supports the strategies and that she expects them to pay off in the long run, especially as the school deepens its collaborative and reflective processes. For example, this summer all teachers read Marvin Marshall’s *Discipline without Stress, Punishments, or Rewards* and are now using the techniques described in the book to help students take responsibility for their own learning and behavior. “Compared to last year, there seems to be a much more positive atmosphere,” she said. “We have better rapport with the kids.”

Linda Bendock, the math coach, also noticed changes in the school and students. Most importantly, she observed, teachers are now more focused on teaching to the standards and using data to shape instruction and group students. “It’s not anymore, ‘Oh I’d like to teach dinosaurs.’ Everyone’s got a set of standards and this is what you teach,” she explained.

### Table 7. Percentages of Students Scoring at or Above the Proficient Level at North Tahoe Middle School, Based on 2006-07 Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Subgroup*</th>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students in school</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-income</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reads: Based on 2006-07 testing, 12.7% of students in the Latino subgroup at North Tahoe Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts, which falls short of state AYP target of 24.4% proficient in ELA.

* Data for students with disabilities and African American students are not given because these subgroups were too small to be counted for AYP purposes.

Students are also aware of what they need to do to succeed, according to Bendock. For example, she tells students that if they “don’t want two periods of math, just work a little harder. Come use the resources. We have after-school help. We have homework help. There [are] teachers that are willing to work with you.” On the downside, she said, there is a lot of pressure for students to succeed, and many students are anxious about testing.

Conclusion

In California, federal accountability policies have led to large increases in the numbers of schools identified for restructuring each year. The proportions of different types of schools in restructuring have also shifted slightly. While urban schools are still overrepresented, the proportion of suburban schools in restructuring has grown.

At the same time, federal restructuring strategies have very rarely helped schools improve student achievement enough to make AYP or exit restructuring. Our analysis shows that no federal restructuring strategy was more likely than the others to be associated with schools meeting AYP targets. Districts and schools participating in this study noted they use many strategies other than the official federal restructuring strategies in attempts to raise student achievement. While these strategies have been successful in some settings, they have not uniformly helped all schools.

Our findings in California point to the need to rethink restructuring across the nation. In 2007-08, California must assist more than a thousand schools that are formulating and implementing restructuring plans. Other states also face growing numbers of schools entering restructuring. The federal options for restructuring far from guarantee that a school will meet AYP targets, so exiting restructuring is challenging. Some schools in this study, for example, met the requirements of the law but actually decreased the percentages of students passing state tests in one or both core subjects.

California state officials encourage schools to make serious changes, to remodel rather than just rearrange the furniture, but state and federal officials may need to provide more guidance on how to actually raise achievement. They may also need to provide more monitoring of restructuring, which is difficult with so many schools and a lack of capacity in the state department of education. In addition, policymakers may need to look beyond what schools can do, since factors in students’ lives outside of school affect their academic achievement.

Finally, funding for school improvement, including schools in restructuring, has been limited. In California, as in some other states, funding has decreased slightly while the numbers of school needing funding has increased dramatically. Increased funding may help schools pay for true remodeling in place of simply shifting existing resources.

References


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