SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

“Restructuring” is the controversial last step under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) for schools that consistently fail to make made “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward their state’s student achievement targets. The actions that constitute restructuring, from replacing the school’s staff to reopening as a charter school, are intended to dramatically turn around an underperforming school. Will these changes be primarily cosmetic or will they be substantial enough to transform public schooling?

To learn more about how school districts and schools have responded to NCLB’s ultimate sanction, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) reviewed state and district restructuring documents and interviewed state and district officials and local educators in Michigan, one of the first states to have schools in the restructuring phase. Several key points emerged from our analysis:

- **Moderate approach but immense task.** Michigan is taking a relatively moderate approach to restructuring—not as superficial as a makeover, but not so radical as takeover by the state or a private management company. Even so, educators in the districts and schools studied are finding restructuring an immense and underfunded task.

- **Staff replacements.** The most popular choice for restructuring in Michigan has been replacing staff. State officials noted that this may be because shifting staff from one school to another appears to be an easy option; however, many districts found that replacing staff led to additional changes needed to improve the school. For example, changing the staff at Civic Park Elementary in Flint resulted in school uniforms, a new behavior management plan, a revised curriculum, and a campus clean-up project.

- **Trained coaches.** Michigan has added “coaching” to the federal options for restructuring schools. This coaching model, designed by Michigan educators, places state-trained coaches in schools for at least 100 days to oversee restructuring. Officials in districts and schools choosing this option said they found it flexible enough to adapt to the particular needs of their school, yet powerful enough to truly change the culture of the school.

- **An individualized process.** In interpreting NCLB, Michigan state officials determined that restructuring must be an individualized process for every school and must target each school’s specific weaknesses. The state asked districts like Detroit, which originally turned in the same plan for all of its schools in restructuring, to revise the plans to account for the particular needs of each school.
- **No quick fixes.** While districts and schools must choose particular state-approved strategies for restructuring—such as replacing staff, hiring a restructuring coach, or changing the governance structure of the school—no plan appears quick and easy to implement. All of these strategies resulted in major changes in the school's staff, curriculum, culture, and community engagement.

- **Restructuring as a lever for difficult changes.** State and district officials are using NCLB restructuring provisions to leverage needed change, including taking some steps that would otherwise be difficult to do, such as replacing ineffective principals and staff.

- **Differing views.** While most local administrators and educators involved in restructuring responded positively to the process, individual views varied. People seemed to have fewer doubts about the effectiveness of restructuring when they agreed with the school’s vision for the restructuring and believed the school had sufficient funds and resources to carry out this vision.

- **Inadequate federal funding.** School and district officials reported that Title I funds have been inadequate to carry out all the changes needed to truly restructure schools. Some schools and districts have drawn on general operating funds to implement changes. Willow Run in Ypsilanti, for example, used its own funds to provide staff time to rewrite the curriculum and to rebuild a school building to support small learning communities. Other districts in which general operating funds are already stretched thin have had to forgo some changes that educators believe would improve student achievement, such as reducing class size at Brownell Elementary in Flint.

**STUDY METHODS**

To learn more about restructuring in Michigan, Caitlin Scott, a consultant to CEP, interviewed state department of education officials and local administrators and teachers in districts with restructured schools. She also reviewed state and district documents, such as state restructuring policies, state records tracking restructuring implementation, and districts' official restructuring plans. Both the interviews and document reviews were conducted from July through September of 2004, just as the 2004–05 school year began.

We are pleased that the majority of those interviewed were quite optimistic about the outcomes of their efforts. We should note, however, that the people interviewed were those involved in making the restructuring happen, not other parties who may be less hopeful about the changes. In addition, it is too early to know whether these restructuring efforts will be successful. Due to these constraints and to the study's focus on just one state and three districts, broad conclusions about NCLB restructuring provisions should not be drawn from this report. CEP will revisit these schools and districts next year to review progress. The information reported here is part of our ongoing, comprehensive study of federal, state, and local implementation of NCLB.

**FEDERAL RESTRUCTURING MANDATES**

The No Child Left Behind Act, signed by President Bush in January 2002, requires that all states test virtually all students in 3rd through 8th grade plus once in high school, and that all schools and districts meet AYP goals which place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students are academically proficient by 2014. States must also provide
consequences for schools and districts receiving Title I funds that are not making AYP goals. After four consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must undergo a substantial reform process called “corrective action.” After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools are placed in restructuring. In this last consequence for failure to meet AYP, schools and districts must choose from a menu of options designed to completely revamp the school. By federal law, these options include:

- 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
- Restructuring the school’s governance arrangement
- 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

Perhaps because these options are designed to radically change schools, none is easy or quick to implement. As more American schools face restructuring, it will be important to learn from schools, districts, and states that have experienced these changes.

Some states will have schools in restructuring sooner than others. This is because some states began calculating AYP based on data collected prior to NCLB to meet the goals of the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) of 1994. Some states were also more aggressive than others about creating the testing and accountability systems required by IASA. As a result, some states with relatively new testing and accountability systems, such as Idaho and Nevada, have no schools in restructuring at this point. Other states, such as Michigan with its well-established accountability system, had schools in restructuring as early as 2003–04.

**MICHIGAN’S RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES**

Based on 2002–03 testing, 101 Michigan schools, or 3.9% of Michigan’s 2,622 schools, were placed in restructuring in school year 2003–04. Of the 101 schools, about 7% are in rural areas, and 17% are in suburban areas. The great majority, 76% of the schools, are in urban areas, with the city of Detroit accounting for 36% of the total. Included in the 101 are four charter schools, three in Detroit and one in Lansing.

Of these 101 schools, 93 have state-approved restructuring plans with clear choices for restructuring and have received grants of $45,000 to implement their restructuring plans. Although all schools required to turn in restructuring plans did so, eight did not include clear choices from among state-approved restructuring options.

“Sometimes what districts gave us was 99 pages of everything they had ever done or wanted to do to improve the school. But, they didn’t really say, ‘we are picking choice four,’” explained Sarah Uhle, who helps coordinate the information on restructuring plans for the state’s Office of School Improvement.

Many of these restructuring plans are being revised. In fact, although NCLB legislation might lead one to believe restructuring a school means simply choosing a plan from a list, state officials said restructuring in Michigan is a dynamic process that evolves over time. Tracking these plans on the state level has proved somewhat difficult;
however, officials say these difficulties are inevitable, because flexibility is key to making sure plans are effective.

To define restructuring more clearly, Michigan elaborated on federal options and added a “coaching” model to the mix. Michigan also chose not to give districts the option of turning the operation of the school over to the state, as the federal provisions would allow. Michigan officials said this option was impractical for the state. “The state does not have the human resources to run individual schools. The state would not see that as its role,” explained Margaret Madigan, supervisor of regional support services, noting that the Michigan Department of Education only employs about 200 people. In addition, Madigan said, “We believe that the other options allow positive changes in the school and recognize the strengths that are there.” The following chart lists Michigan’s elaboration on federal restructuring options.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Restructuring Options</th>
<th>Michigan Restructuring Options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school</td>
<td>Appointing/employing an independent “turn around specialist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reopening the school as a charter school</td>
<td>Closing the school and reopening it as a charter school or as a complete school of choice within district boundaries (i.e., a charter school that only district students can attend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacing all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP</td>
<td>Replacing staff and/or principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring the school’s governance arrangement</td>
<td>Restructuring the governance of the school by appointing a governing board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suspending the office of the principal; indicating how the school will be governed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reform</td>
<td>Turning operation over to the school’s School Improvement Committee/team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointing/employing a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using an external research-based reform model</td>
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</table>

Source: Michigan Department of Education
While Michigan has worked both to offer a variety of restructuring strategies and to ensure that districts develop effective plans for implementation, some options—most notably, replacing staff—are clearly more popular with districts and schools than others. In fact, two of the choices—reopening the school as a charter school or suspending the office of principal—will not be used by any of the 101 schools in restructuring. The following table lists Michigan’s restructuring options in order of their popularity with districts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michigan’s Restructuring Options</th>
<th>Percentage of Schools Using This Option</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Replace staff and/or principal</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an external research-based reform model</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ a coach from the Coaches’ Institute</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure the governance of the school by appointing a governing board</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appoint/employ an independent “turn around” specialist</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn operation over to the school’s School Improvement Committee/team</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close the school and reopen it as a charter or a complete school of choice within district boundaries</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspend the office of the principal; indicate how the school will be governed</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The choices of eight schools are pending.
Note: Percentages total more than 100 because some schools will use more than one strategy.
Source: Michigan Department of Education

As schools refined their restructuring plans last year, state officials said they received little guidance from the federal government, perhaps because restructuring is so new. “I’ve reread this part of the law over and over looking for specific guidance, any hidden messages. Sometimes I feel like we’re making this up as we go along,” said Yvonne Caamal Canul, Director of the Office of School Improvement for Michigan. In view of the pioneering aspect of Michigan’s restructuring efforts, Caamal Canul said the state focused on bringing research-based school reform practices to schools in restructuring. The goal of restructuring is true transformation, not simply fulfilling the letter of the law, state officials reported.

For example, Caamal Canul read every restructuring proposal and asked districts with plans that either didn’t meet the requirements under NCLB or were less than adequate to revise. “Detroit’s plan was the same for every school,” she said. “We asked
them for major revisions before we released any funding to support the restructuring. That might not have been real popular,” Caamal Canul recalled, explaining that each plan must specifically address the needs and culture of each school.

With a revised plan that met this goal of individualization, Detroit’s restaffing plans were accepted. Each of the 36 Detroit schools received $45,000 in additional Title I funding earmarked for restructuring in 2003–04.

Funds for restructuring come from the 4% of the state’s Title I money that must be set aside for school improvement, according to federal law. Ninety-five percent of that set-aside has to be used for grants to districts with schools in improvement. Michigan’s set-aside for school improvement for school year 2004–05 is about $11 million but may be supplemented with funds carried over from 2003–04, district officials said.

In 2003–04, Michigan offered grants of $45,000 per school to each district with schools in restructuring. For 2004–05, in an effort to distribute the funds more equitably, the state will offer grants on a sliding scale: $45,000 per school for districts with fewer than 5 buildings in corrective action or restructuring, $35,000 per school for districts with 5 to 10 buildings in corrective action or restructuring, and $25,000 per school for districts with more than 10 buildings in corrective action or restructuring. The logic behind this new funding structure was that districts with more schools in restructuring would need less funding at the district level due to the economy of scale.

Before districts see any of this money, however, they have to show the state that they have clear and effective plans for restructuring. “We’re holding a pretty firm line on the money,” said Caamal Canul, noting that this was one way the state could influence district and school policies for restructuring.

Replacing Staff

More than half of the Michigan schools in restructuring will replace principals and staff. In some cases, state officials observed, superintendents used restructuring to make staffing changes that they had wanted to make for years but that had been blocked by school boards and/or employee contracts. Caamal Canul recalled the response of one superintendent: “He said that he was happy to have an opportunity to do some major restructuring and that NCLB gave him the needed leverage.” Put another way, Caamal Canul said, “The Superintendent used restructuring to move or let go of staff.”

In some schools, changing staff has spurred additional school reforms, district officials said. For example, Civic Park Elementary in Flint, Michigan, got a new principal, Fred White, in the middle of the 2003–04 school year, as well as a coach at the beginning of the 2004–05 school year. Before the coach arrived, White instituted school uniforms, started a strict behavior management plan, changed the curriculum, and cleaned up the campus. “I looked at the test scores and I made a plan of action,” White said, noting that he took many of his ideas from Lorraine Monroe’s book, Nothing’s Impossible: Lessons from Inside and Outside the Classroom.

Still, state officials said replacing staff was not an option for many schools. “With which principals and teachers are you going to replace them?” asked Caamal Canul. She noted that many Michigan districts have financial troubles already due to state budget shortfalls and “skyrocketing” insurance costs. As districts like Detroit, Lansing, and Flint lay off teachers and close schools to address financial crises, they may not always be able to attract bright, new teachers and principals to fill positions created by restructuring.
Caamal Canul said she feared that some districts strapped for cash could end up shifting staff from school to school rather than actually replacing staff and reforming the school.

Coaching

While replacing staff has been the most popular option for restructuring schools, coaching is frequently suggested to schools by the Michigan Department of Education and is used by schools to get a wide variety of restructuring plans off the ground. Based on the theories of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Edgar Schein, Michigan’s coaching model was created by the state’s own educators. The model does not bring in “experts” to “fix” schools, but instead brings in trained educators whose facilitation can help schools fix themselves, state officials said. As a result, each school’s restructuring activities will be tailored to that school’s community. “It’s not an ‘I’ve got a hammer, so everything looks like a nail’ model,” Caamal Canul explained.

To design and implement the model, the state of Michigan awarded a competitive grant to Alliance for Building Capacity in Schools (ABCS), a collaboration of 13 different organizations including higher education institutions, teachers unions, parent groups, public schools, and professional organizations. ABCS has a core faculty of Michigan educators who designed the training curriculum and currently oversee the program.

In the fall of 2003, ABCS selected its first 83 coaching candidates from a pool of 160 applicants. Selection was based on a review of the candidates’ resumes and their responses to three essay questions about their experiences and school improvement initiatives. From February to May of 2004, these candidates participated in more than eight days of training in the following areas:

- Understanding “process consultation,” Schein’s method for facilitating rather than dictating change
- Using data to improve instruction
- Implementing math and literacy standards
- Assessing and improving school climate
- Increasing parental involvement
- Working with the community
- Helping schools meet the demands of NCLB

At the end of their training, coaching candidates completed a reflection journal based on the training and gave it to an independent evaluation team. The team then interviewed each candidate for 90 minutes, asking questions about coaching as well as role playing coaching scenarios.

In evaluating the interviews, ABCS consultant Ben Perez said the team asked, “How well does this person create a helpful relationship, not an ‘expert’ relationship?” The entire process resulted in 78 acceptable coaching candidates. Of these, 75 have thrown their hats in the ring to be matched with schools. Coaches are actually chosen by individual schools, based on the background of the coach and the needs of the school. “This is a free market,” Perez emphasized.

Coaches, now in their first months at schools, have been reporting some success with the model, said Barbara Markle of Michigan State University, who coordinated much of the training. For example at Brownell Elementary in Flint, coach Marcia Sauvie said she
and Rita Langworthy, another coach, facilitated well-attended workshops on analyzing last year’s state test scores, which gave teachers time to plan strategies for the upcoming year.

Markle attributes these successes to the model’s ability to draw school staff into the change process. “They’re creating a new kind of culture in the school,” she said. “It’s like therapy. In the end the school has to solve its own problems. We’re not saying we deny expertise, but it isn’t going to be the driving force.”

A CLOSER LOOK AT THREE POPULAR RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES IN MICHIGAN

In order to identify districts to participate in this CEP study, CEP asked the Michigan Department of Education to recommend several districts that were on track in implementing their restructuring plans. CEP chose to study Willow Run, Flint, and Harrison because these districts were each using one or more of the four most popular restructuring strategies. The three districts were also chosen because they represent different types of districts: Willow Run is suburban, Flint is urban, and Harrison is rural.

Willow Run: Replacing Staff and Using an External Research-based Reform Model

District Description

Willow Run is a suburban district with approximately 2,600 students located near interstate 94. It serves as a home base for people who work in Ypsilanti as well as some who work in Ann Arbor and Detroit. Due to its easy access to these larger cities, Willow Run has a very transient population, and its enrollment and revenues have fluctuated. About 55% of its students are African American, and 43% are white. The district faces some challenges related to poverty; about 63% of students are from low-income families.

Why the District Chose These Restructuring Strategies

Since the advent of NCLB, Willow Run has had only one school consistently failing to make AYP: Edmonson Middle School. Edmonson was not particularly different from the district as a whole: about 51% of its students are African American and about 47% are white; about 70% of students are low-income. Edmonson was the only middle school in the district, so the only other option for middle-grade students who wanted to transfer under the NCLB choice provisions was Cheney, the district’s academically successful K–8 Math/Science Academy. At Cheney, about 82% of students were African American and 17% were white, but poverty rates were slightly lower at about 47%.

When Douglas Benit came on board as superintendent in August 2003, he said he did an academic review of all district schools. “As I looked back we saw that [Edmonson] had made AYP just once in the past five years,” he recalled. In addition, he said he had received multiple complaints from parents about the school. “They just didn’t feel it was meeting the needs of their kids,” Benit said, admitting that he agreed
with these parents. When he examined the school’s academic record, Benit found it “alarm- ing.” He did not attribute the school’s failure to the demographics of the school but to a lack of consistent support and various staffing needs.

School choice under NCLB had been offered at Edmonson, but no parents chose to transfer to Cheney. One reason might have been the minimal amount of available slots. Supplemental educational services in the form of after-school tutoring had been more popular, with about 25% of students participating. Students made only minor academic gains as a result of the tutoring, district officials said.

Replacing Staff at Edmonson/ Willow Run Middle School

In the summer of 2003, the district was slated to build a new, state-of-the-art middle school as part of its $53 million building program. The new school, to be called Willow Run Middle School, would replace Edmonson, and filling it with staff that had experienced consistent failure was not appealing, Benit said. In addition, the results of 2002–03 testing placed Edmonson in restructuring.

In October 2003, Benit began working to restructure the middle school. As one of the changes, he opted to place a new principal at the school and appoint the current principal to the position of curriculum coordinator for grades 5–9. He also took steps to replace some of the teaching staff. By February, Benit reported, he had negotiated a teacher retirement package with the union. About a third of the teachers at Edmonson took the package. About 12 newer teachers chose to stay at Edmonson, while the rest chose to transfer to other district schools. At the same time, the district announced it would remove the middle school grades from its successful but overcrowded K–8 building. All of the middle school teachers from the building agreed to move to the new middle school. Open positions were filled with transfers and new hires. Benit stressed that this restaffing of the middle school was one of the keys to his improvement plan for the school. “You can build a new building,” he said, “but if you don’t address the real issues, you’re just doing window dressing.”

While replacing staff is typically unpopular with many people, from unions to school boards to individual parents, Benit said NCLB’s mandate for restructuring gave him the opportunity to make necessary changes. In addition, he said it was helpful that many teachers were nearing retirement and that the district had the means to offer a very attractive retirement package. “I don’t look at any of this stuff as negative,” Benit concluded. “We used NCLB as a kind of lever.”

While Benit and Willow Run’s school board stand firmly behind the district’s restructuring plan, Benit added that the restructuring has been expensive due to the teacher buyout, the increased training for the new staff, and the time needed for meetings to plan the research-based reforms for the new school. He noted that despite Title I funds earmarked for restructuring, an effort similar to Willow Run’s might not be possible in all districts. Of Title I funding for restructuring, Benit said, “It isn’t enough. We’ll have to pick that up with our general funds.” Fortunately for Willow Run, Benit said he was certain that general funds would be able to supplement Edmonson’s restructuring and that the school board would support the expenses.

Using Research-based Reforms at Willow Run (formerly Edmonson) Middle School

While parents and incoming Willow Run staff were well aware of the replacement of staff for the 2004–05 school year, they also looked to research-based reforms and a new
school building to transform the middle school. In fact, many teachers who elected to teach at the new middle school in 2004–05 said they joined the staff because they found the research-based reforms inspiring.

These research-based reforms were agreed upon by a design team made up of teachers, parents, and district administrators. The team met regularly for a year to explore possible reform models and come up with a specific plan that would work for the new school. The reforms chosen were based on proven strategies identified by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-grades Reform, effective middle schools research from the National Middle School Association, and Turning Points research by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In addition, district staff said several of these approaches to learning had been successful in the district’s K–8 elementary school.

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

- Dividing the school into four small learning communities
- Providing time for teachers to work in teams within the small learning communities
- Creating flexible, block schedules that allow students to study a subject for longer chunks of time than the typical middle school class period
- Developing a new curriculum focused on learning rather than memorizing facts and based on four essential questions:
  - How do students construct knowledge of the world?
  - How do students communicate in the world?
  - How do students consider their place in the world?
  - How do students contribute to their world?
- Adding more exploratory courses, such as choir, digital imaging, keyboarding, and swimming
- Adding a three-year-long “advisory” class, which allows teachers and students to develop long-term relationships
- Creating a handbook and code of conduct developed jointly by students, teachers, and parents

Many reforms, such as the small learning communities, advisory class, and new exploratory courses, were also made possible by the physical structure of the new building, which has four separate classroom wings, a central media center, a computer lab, an acoustically-designed music center, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

The new staff attracted by the redesign is quite different from the original staff, district officials said. For example, in the mid 1990s, the administration at Edmonson tried to introduce an advisory period similar to the one scheduled for the new school, but the old staff refused.

Current teachers confirm their attraction to the new design. “I believe in the goals that were established,” said Betty Hopkins, who transferred from the district’s elementary school to teach science in the new middle school. “I like to be involved in creating change to improve student learning,” she added.

Some of the current teachers also participated on the design team and became committed to the new school through their work. “I enjoyed what was happening. The
meetings were very stimulating intellectually,” commented Deanna Wright, who will teach math at the new school.

Parents who have been involved in the middle school also have high hopes for the new design. “We’ve been looking to make changes for quite some time,” said parent Fawn Martin, who served on the design committee. “The curriculum is more centered on children learning versus children remembering. I expect great things to come out of this development,” Martin commented.

Teachers, administrators, and parents agreed that the restructuring of the school has run relatively smoothly so far. They attributed this success to preplanning and shared goals. “I think we have a foundation from which everyone can work,” said Hopkins.

Challenges remain ahead, however, teachers said. “The new concept-based curriculum may be difficult to implement,” said Jamie LaGoe, who taught at the middle school in 2003–04 and elected to stay. She notes that curriculum refinement will be an ongoing team process.

LaGoe, who participated on the design team’s public relations committee last year, also noted that this year the school will need to work to regain the trust of the community. Martin, who helped represent parents on the design team, concurred, noting that, “There may be some skepticism, but once the doors are open, the interest will begin to flow.”

**Flint: Hiring Coaches**

**District Description**

Located in the southeastern part of Michigan, Flint is the fourth largest urban school district in the state. A former center for heavy industry, the city has been losing population since the decline of automobile manufacturing in the U.S. Addressing the challenges of poverty and declining enrollment are paramount in the city’s schools, where 68% of students receive free lunch and all but four schools are eligible for Title I funding, both indicators of widespread poverty.

**Why the District Chose Coaching**

Coaching was an appealing option for Flint because it focused on making real changes at the schools, said David Solis, the district’s director of state, federal and local programs. Based on 2003–04 testing, six Flint schools had not made AYP for five or more consecutive years and therefore had to restructure. “They’ve selected the coach option,” said Solis. “We’re not replacing staff. We’re not hiring an outside entity.” The coach will help the school revamp all aspects of its curriculum and culture.

“We’ve had experience with reconstitution,” another state program that replaced staff at schools that were having difficulties, Solis explained. “There’s no guarantee when you bring in new people. You can replace people, but if they do the same thing, you’re going to get the same results.” With coaching, Solis said, “We’re trying to change the culture in the building.”

Despite the challenge of total school transformation, Solis said he thinks Flint may have some advantages over other districts in using the coaches. Beginning in 2002–03, the district hired four instructional specialists to assist schools in need of improvement.
One had expertise in reading, one in math, one in science and one in social studies. Due to the success of these specialists, Solis reported that the school district created 14 similar positions for the following year. These new literacy support teachers had expertise in reading. Several of these instructional specialists and literacy support teachers have now been trained by the state to serve as coaches. These specialists, who are retired administrators, have been highly effective because although they are specialists, they are free to work on all aspects of the school district, from finance to curriculum to school culture, explained Chief of Schools Linda Thompson. Their most appropriate title, she said, should be “successful jack-of-all trades.”

Thompson added that one of the schools in restructuring this year will get a new principal. Although changing administrators was not part of the “official” restructuring plan at the school, Thompson said, “We’re looking for new leadership to change the building.”

Coaching at Brownell Elementary

Brownell Elementary, located in the center of Flint, is a predominately African American school with high student mobility and high poverty. Brownell has never met AYP goals, due to low achievement scores overall. Principal Lucy Smith attributed the school’s poor academic performance to a transient student population, as well as fluctuations in the state’s methods of calculating AYP. She noted that the state’s recent switch from using a reading score to assess reading to using a combination of reading, writing, and listening scores caused the school to miss AYP in reading. “The state target moved as fast as our clientele,” Smith joked. In addition, Smith said, in the past the school has lacked the resources, such as books and adequate staff, to improve instruction.

In past two years, Brownell offered school choice under NCLB. Although no students transferred specifically because of NCLB choice, some did transfer using the district’s magnet school option, Smith said. She noted, however, that last year the majority of these students returned to Brownell mid-year due to dissatisfaction with their magnet schools, a situation that increased student enrollment after school budgets had been set in the district. More students, about 18%, participated in supplemental educational services. Smith said she hopes to increase that percentage this year.

With more resources being brought to the school due to restructuring this year, Smith is hopeful that academics will also improve this year. Among a long list of desired changes, Smith said, “We’re concentrating on literacy, developing a leveled library, and new software for reading assessments. We are excited about it, but it’s a huge task.”

Brownell will have two coaches contracted jointly for 100 days of service. Currently, Marcia Sauvie will focus on schoolwide writing, manage new software, and work primarily with 3rd to 6th grade teachers in the classroom. Rita Langworthy will focus on schoolwide literacy and will work primarily with kindergarten to 2nd grade teachers in the classroom. Langworthy will also set up the “leveled library,” which will bring more than 50,000 books to the school and rate their difficulty so that teachers can easily assign books that are appropriate to students’ reading levels. Both coaches will provide professional development and assist the principal and staff as needed.

Despite their many responsibilities, the coaches at Brownell said they do not expect to “be the boss” at the school. Sauvie noted that when she introduced herself during a teachers’ meeting, she admitted to staff that if she were a teacher at Brownell she would be skeptical about coaches. She said she might even be saying to the coach, “What do you think you’re doing, coming in here and telling us what to do?” This provoked
knowing laughter from teachers and seemed to break the ice, Sauvie said. The coaches then assured teachers that they were there to help but would rely on staff for direction.

As Sauvie has gotten to know the teachers, she observed, “Frankly, this staff is pretty darn good, but they’ve been thwarted at every turn.” She noted a distressing lack of books, materials, technology, and staff training. These four areas will be addressed this year by restructuring and Title I funding.

The principal and coaches fear, however, that not all of Brownell’s problems can be solved this year. “We have a lot of road blocks,” Sauvie admitted. Many are due to lack of funds in the district.

For example, classrooms tend to become overcrowded at Brownell with 30 or more students per class, Smith said. Last year, two classrooms had to mix grade levels due to overcrowding. “Can you imagine one teacher trying to prepare both 4th and 5th graders for testing?” Smith asked. Due to budget constraints, Brownell could not split the rooms into smaller classes. Smith said she fears the same thing will happen this year as enrollment grows due to students moving into the neighborhood and students returning from magnet schools.

When Sauvie talked of the many limitations Brownell faces due to lack of funds—from the overcrowding to the antiquated ditto machine used to make copies—she said, “My heart breaks.”

Despite these limitations, the principal and coaches at Brownell said they were hopeful that this year’s restructuring would bring significant changes that would help students. While restructuring is a dynamic process and the coaches and principal couldn’t predict exactly how the school would look at the end of the year, all expected that by the end of the year the increases in books, materials, technology, and training would pay off. “I expect these teachers to be much more highly trained in the places that Rita and I have seen they need training and in the places they see they need training,” said Sauvie. “I expect the morale of teachers to go up. I expect the school culture to improve. I expect scores to go up,” she said.

**Harrison: Restructuring the Governance**

Harrison is a rural school district serving about 2,100 students in northern Michigan. Due to declining enrollment and fiscal difficulties, the district recently had to close its most rural elementary school building. While the majority of students in the district are white, Harrison does have significant subgroups as measured by NCLB: 57% of students receive free or reduced price lunch, an indicator of poverty, and 20% of students participate in special education services.

**Why the District Chose to Restructure the Governance**

The elementary school closing at the end of the 2002–03 school year was highly unpopular with some of its parents and teachers, district officials reported. Although the school had been doing better than the district’s two more centrally located buildings, the district decided to close the more rural building because of declining student numbers in the school’s attendance area, increased transportation costs, other financial considerations, and a desire to enhance collaboration among the district’s teachers and reduce competition among buildings.
Meanwhile, based on 2002–03 testing, Larson, one of the two more centrally located schools, was identified for restructuring. A year later, Hillside, the other remaining elementary school, was identified for restructuring based on 2003–04 testing, while Larson made AYP in 2003–04.

To improve elementary school instruction, district officials said they knew they had to regain the trust of parents and teachers and potentially face difficult issues such as addressing teacher performance and the structure of the school day. To accomplish these goals, Harrison chose to restructure the governance of both elementary buildings. The superintendent, Christopher Rundle, appointed a governing board consisting of state and local education leaders to make major decisions about the schools’ operations. “The role [of the new board] will be to convene as necessary in support of the educational goals of the school district and of the principals,” Rundle said.

Members of the new governing board include Rundle, Harrison’s field services consultant in the Office of School Improvement at the Michigan Department of Education, the superintendent of the district’s Regional Education Service District, and the president of the district’s teachers union. Rundle said he intentionally kept the board small so that it could make decisions more easily.

Board members will act as “an administrator at the school rather than having just a principal,” said Robert Balwinski, the field services consultant in the state Office of School Improvement. As a board member, Balwinski said he saw his role as “an overseer, monitor, and supplier of ideas and resources.”

In addition, Rundle said he wanted the board to be made up of people whose authority was respected. “We wanted it to be people who can say, ‘This is the way it’s going to be,’” he explained. He did not, however, want the board members to be people who would have to work closely with schools on a regular basis, because he anticipates that the board will be called on to resolve difficult issues. “The board will be in situations where our school teams and principals haven’t been able to resolve the issues,” he explained. “Its role is to be ‘the bite.’”

Rundle and school principals anticipated that the new governing board might be called in to address personnel issues, teacher quality issues, and/or contractual issues. All of these educators, however, emphasized that they did not know exactly what issues the school year would bring. “We don’t have any guidelines, because this is the first year,” Rundle explained.

While the district’s “official” strategy for restructuring is establishing a new governance board for the schools, district officials and school principals said this was not the primary change for elementary schools during the 2004–05 school year. The district also reconfigured the elementary schools’ grade levels. Instead of two schools serving all elementary grades, in 2004–05 the district has created three schools within two buildings. Larson is serving kindergarten and 1st grade. Hillside has been divided into two separate schools with two separate principals: Hillside Lower Elementary serves grades 2 and 3, and Hillside Upper Elementary serves grades 4 and 5. The schools may also hire a state-trained coach to assist in their transformation.

The New Governance Structure at Larson and Hillside Elementary Schools

Principals at Larson and Hillside said they were hopeful that changes would improve student achievement this year. Past NCLB mandates had little impact on the two schools, noted Michele Sandro, who serves as principal of Hillside Lower Elementary as well as director of state and federal programs for the district.
The Harrison school district wasn’t able to offer choice because both its elementary school buildings were identified for improvement. In addition, few supplemental educational service providers were interested in working in the rural district. The district’s Regional Education Service District did offer onsite tutoring services. Kumon Math had a program about 35 miles from the schools, Sylvan Learning had a program about 70 miles from the schools, and various providers offered online services, but few students have access to computers.

NCLB requires districts to set aside 20% of their Title I allocations for supplemental services and transportation related to school choice. Of choice and supplemental services in Harrison, Sandro said, “At the end of the year, I was sitting on $198,000. I just think it’s a bad plan.” No students used supplemental educational services at Larson last year, and only 13 of the 393 eligible students at Hillside used the services. Sandro noted that she got a waiver from the state to allow her to use the leftover funds for other Title I expenses.

This year’s changes have more potential to impact students, principals said. Both Larson principal Julie Rosekrans and Sandro anticipated that the new board had the potential to help solve workplace issues and possible union issues. “If there are contractual issues that keep us from being successful with kids, we can take it to the governance board,” Sandro explained. As examples of these issues she cited “a teacher who shouldn’t be teaching” or “the number of minutes in the school day.”

Sandro did, however, express some skepticism about the new governance board. “I suspect we also did it because it was a compliance issue,” she said. “It was the least harmful choice on the page,” she added, noting that grade level reconfiguration alone would not have met the state’s requirements for restructuring.

All three principals, Rosekrans at Larson, Sandro at Hillside Lower Elementary, and Russell Fimbinger at Hillside Upper Elementary, said they believe, however, that the grade level reconfiguration would be a substantial change. On the one hand, Sandro said, principals could “narrow their focus” by supervising a smaller number of teachers who taught fewer grade levels. On the other hand, Sandro said, the three principals could work very closely together to make sure the curriculum is coordinated throughout the elementary school grades. This consistency, coupled with the fact that all students now will attend all buildings, removes some of the competitiveness that existed between buildings in the past, Sandro said.

“Teachers can work together, collaborate on lessons, and look at the data,” Rosekrans added. To describe how the data will be analyzed, Rosekrans gave this example: “Say we have a class where reading levels are getting higher. Then, we ask what are they doing differently?” Unfortunately, principals said due to the current contract there is no time set aside for teacher collaboration. This lack of time may be one thing brought to the attention of the new governing board, they anticipated.

While district officials say they have faced difficult and unpopular decisions over the past two years, those difficulties are lessening. “As the year took off, things ran very smoothly,” Rundle noted. Of parent and teacher responses to the start of the new year, Rosekrans said, “It’s been pretty positive. Any type of change is hard for teachers and parents. It wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be.”

District officials and principals were all cautiously hopeful that their restructuring efforts would mean higher test scores. “We need to make these new climate and restructuring efforts work,” said Hillside Upper Elementary principal Fimbinger, noting that students’ academic futures and staff jobs were at stake. “I have a sincere vested interest in making sure that this happens in the next few years and that we turn around this sinking ship,” he said.
What’s happening to schools in Michigan that reach the “restructuring” phase of the No Child Left Behind Act?