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SPRING–SUMMER 2009 / VOLUME 14. NUMBER 3

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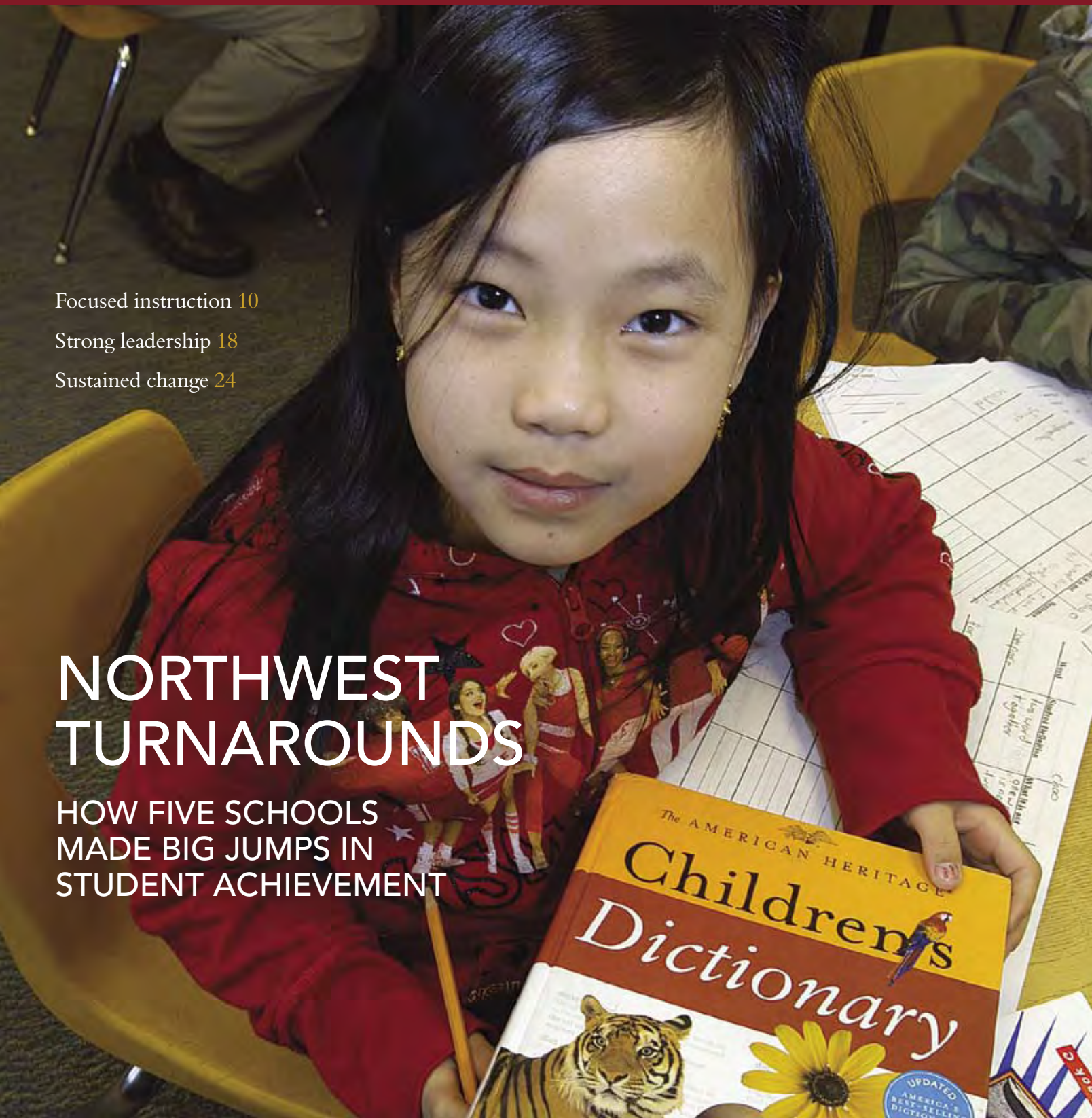

NORTHWEST TURNAROUNDS

HOW FIVE SCHOOLS MADE BIG JUMPS IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

ON THE COVER

A third-grader at Mountain View Elementary looks up unfamiliar words during the daily two and a half hour reading block. An emphasis on reading has been at the heart of the highly diverse Anchorage school's improvement efforts.

Photo by David Predeger

NORTHWEST
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CONTENTS / SPRING–SUMMER 2009 NORTHWEST TURNAROUNDS VOL. 14 / NO. 3

FEATURES

Web exclusives at nwrel.org/nwedu/

DEPARTMENTS

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Statement of Purpose
Northwest Education aims to promote a regional dialogue and to elevate teaching and learning by giving readers the best information, ideas, and personal stories from practitioners, researchers, and other experts.

FORUM

Sharing Our Story

It was a pleasure to read the articles in *Northwest Education* relative to Response to Intervention (RTI: Tiered Instruction Goes Mainstream, fall 2008). Most particularly, I found the article by Jacqueline Raphael, for which I was also interviewed, most helpful in sharing our story. Last week I had the opportunity to share the article at the Education Sub-Committee for Ways and Means in my overview of our office's work at the Oregon Department of Education. The article summarized in a clear and concise way an initiative not easily understood by many. Because of the article I was able to point to sections that I wanted to emphasize and yet also know that the legislative committee had the full story. Again, thank you for including the work of ODE in this story.

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We want to hear from you! Send your letters to the editor, comments on current and past issues, article ideas, and tips on places where good things are happening to nwedufeedback@nwrel.org. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.

EDITOR'S NOTE


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What is a turnaround school? It turns out that is not so easy to define. The definition used in the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guide *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools* was based largely on the need to find existing research into best practices. According to a coauthor of the study, Sam Redding (see our interview with Redding on page 28), there are very few experimental studies of schools that started with extremely low proficiency rates and then made significant gains in a short period of time. Such schools do exist, but the research is scarce.

The IES guide was forced to draw on case studies and to include schools with proficiency levels as high as 80 percent—a number you normally wouldn't associate with chronic low performance. As Redding told me: "The studies we ended up using were looking at schools that definitely got better, but weren't that terrible to begin with. That's not a fault of the committee, it was a decision based on the available evidence."

With little to guide us, we created our own approach to choosing the five schools to include in this issue of *Northwest Education.* First, we consulted with state-level school improvement coordinators or specialists in each of the five states in our region. They gave us a list of possible schools, and from there, our data analyst, Richard Greenough, examined individual school data trends. As a basic guideline we looked for schools whose student achievement scores in reading and/or math were at one time chronically below state averages, but had then taken a dramatic upturn, typically showing double-digit gains within a two- or three-year period in at least one of those core areas. Our goal was simple: We wanted to see what kind of "turnarounds" were happening in our region and to share the strategies those schools have used to make such dramatic progress.

In this issue you will find a brief overview of the topic, which includes some of the data we used to choose our five schools and a short summary of the recommended strategies in the IES practice guide. You will also notice some similarities among the schools.

In this issue's Voices department (page 36), education journalist and author Karin Chenoweth offers insights drawn from her many years of writing about high-performing, high-poverty schools. She mentions two general starting points for most turnaround schools: the "functional but mediocre" and the "completely broken, dysfunctional." Most of the schools we chose began their journey in the first category. Consequently, the turnarounds represented here are less dramatic —and the actions taken less drastic—than those happening in Chicago and other large, urban districts. That kind of total school restructuring is still rare in the Northwest.

Although each of the five schools we profile is unique, many of the same strategies show up in their stories, including strong leadership, a narrow focus on instruction, a shared language and vision, and a staff that is fully committed to the effort. These strategies line up well with those recommended in the IES practice guide.

In addition, each of the leaders of these turnarounds said the same thing: All of the strategies are 100 percent replicable, regardless of your school's starting point or demographics.

I hope you will find inspiration, affirmation, and great ideas in this issue of *Northwest Education.* Although the turnarounds represented here may be less dramatic than those gaining national media attention, they were each undertaken with great urgency. As Valarie Lewis, a principal in a school far outside our region, says: "No one has a right to waste a day in the life of a child." That's true whether you're in Queens, New York, or Roundup, Montana.

—Bracken Reed, reedb@nwrel.org

NORTHWEST TURNAROUNDS

HOW FIVE SCHOOLS MADE BIG JUMPS IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

SPRING–SUMMER 2009 / VOL. 14. NO. 3

Turning Around Chronically Underperforming Schools

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

BY BASHA KRASNOFF

Photo by David Predeger

Based on their statewide assessments and accountability policies, state departments of education across the nation have currently designated 10,000 schools in need of improvement; 2,300 of these schools are in restructuring because of failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) proficiency targets for five or more years. Without drastic measures, it's anticipated that the number of schools in restructuring will reach overwhelming proportions by the year 2014. Consequently, more districts are considering the turnaround option as the most viable plan of action.

Until recently, turnaround literature primarily focused on efforts in the public (non-education), nonprofit, and business sectors to help failing organizations make drastic yet sustainable changes. The process of turning around chronically underperforming schools refers to a district-managed restructuring effort intended to make quick,

1 **Signal the need for dramatic change with strong leadership:** A failing school does not have the luxury of years to implement incremental reforms. Instead, leaders at the school should make a clear commitment to dramatic changes from the status quo and signal the magnitude and urgency of those changes.

dramatic, and sustained improvement in student academic achievement by replacing the school leader and any staff relevant to a school's chronic low performance.

While turnaround literature points out many similarities between school turnarounds and turnarounds in other types of organizations, there are critical differences. For example, other types of organizations can choose to stop producing a product or serving a market. In public education, on the other hand, while districts may significantly alter how education is delivered, they still must deliver education services to all children. Another example is that in other industries, the failure that precedes turnaround threatens the existence of the organization. Before the passage of NCLB, a school's chronic failure had serious consequences for its students but only rarely did it threaten the existence of the school. There is a limited research base documenting successful turnarounds in the education sector. But, federal and state education policy demands for accountability and dramatic, sustained improvement of chronically low-performing schools is a leading impetus for rigorous research to inform school turnaround efforts.

Approximately two-thirds of the states have laws enabling districts or states to replace a school's leaders and staff, and several turnaround efforts were undertaken under state law before NCLB legislation was enacted. Most occurred during the late 1990s and the vast majority were implemented by district officials across multiple schools. These early turnaround efforts in San Francisco (1983), Houston (1993), Prince George's County, Maryland (1997), and Chicago (2000) are well-documented. Literature about these turnaround efforts generally presents evidence of a set of environmental conditions and leadership actions associated with successful turnarounds. Most of the research confirms that no two low-performing schools were identical; and that, although many "best practices" have been identified, the most effective combination of these practices vary with each school's circumstances. Although there are anecdotal accounts of individual schools throughout the United States known to have made dramatic improvements under turnaround leaders, there is little documentation in the research literature of successful turnarounds of individual schools.

In its practice guide, *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools,* the Institute of Education Sciences draws lessons from 35 case studies to recommend a combination of four elements that appear to work together to help failing schools make significant improvements quickly:

2 **Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction:** Chronically low-performing schools need to maintain a sharp focus on improving instruction at every step of the reform process. To improve instruction, schools should use data to set goals for instructional improvement, make changes that immediately and directly affect instruction, and continually reassess student learning and instructional practices to refocus the goals.

3 **Make visible improvements early in the school turnaround process (quick wins):** Leaders should identify one or two clear goals that can be accomplished quickly, with notable success, and often without requiring district approval or teacher buy-in. These quick wins can show that it is possible to move toward the overarching goal of raising student achievement and to establish a positive climate for long-term change.

4 **Build a committed staff:** The school leader must build a staff that is committed to the school's improvement goals and qualified to carry out school improvement. This recommendation is about having the right personnel in the right places, and thus might include actions such as creating new positions, modifying job descriptions, organizing intervention teams, reviewing or expanding the roles of support staff, or transferring staff out of the school and bringing in new staff.

There has been speculation that the documentation of individual school successes has not been widespread for two reasons: The successes in one school are not readily replicated by other school leaders; dramatic changes have proven challenging to sustain after the turnaround leader leaves. Challenges to replication and sustainability are being addressed by programs like the University of Virginia's School Turnaround Specialist Program and Rensselaerville Institute's School Turnaround Program, which train cadres of educators to lead and sustain school turnarounds. But the scope of this challenge is becoming greater each year. Researchers agree that much stronger evidence is necessary if we are to begin turning around the ever-increasing number of schools being identified as chronically underperforming. ■

HOW WE GOT HERE

The sizable achievement gap between the academic performance of white, middle-class students and poor, minority students led to the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. For the next several decades, the U.S. government funneled federal funds to poor, failing schools in an effort to counter the devastating effects of poverty on academic achievement. An accountability movement gained momentum as educators and legislators sought evidence of the effectiveness of these efforts. The ESEA was reauthorized in 1994 with accountability requirements: States had to develop math and reading standards, administer standards-based statewide assessments of student proficiency, and adopt a benchmark for school improvement known as "adequate yearly progress (AYP)."

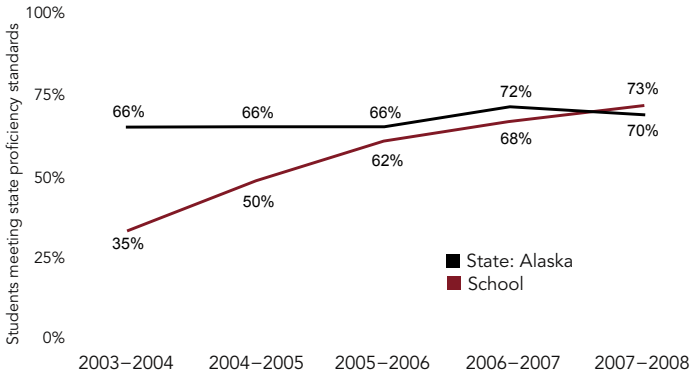
Most states and districts instituted accountability systems at that time, based on standardized test scores. These systems were tied to a variety of rewards and consequences for schools that did or did not meet the state's student proficiency standards. When Congress reauthorized ESEA in 2001 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the law specified a new accountability framework designed to make schools accountable for closing achievement gaps between white and minority students, and poor and middle-class students. NCLB required that annual test scores be reported and published for each student subgroup to keep in the public awareness the discrepancies in achievement that had previously been hidden in schoolwide averages. NCLB also required each state to develop a time line for meeting state-determined proficiency targets. The states were given until 2014 to bring every student to proficiency in reading and math.

Persistently underperforming schools faced increasingly strong consequences. After failing to make AYP for five consecutive years, NCLB requires that schools engage in restructuring activities. The law specifies five options districts can implement to improve academic performance. These options are more dramatic than any school reform options employed in the past and each offers potential for significant change. The five restructuring options are:

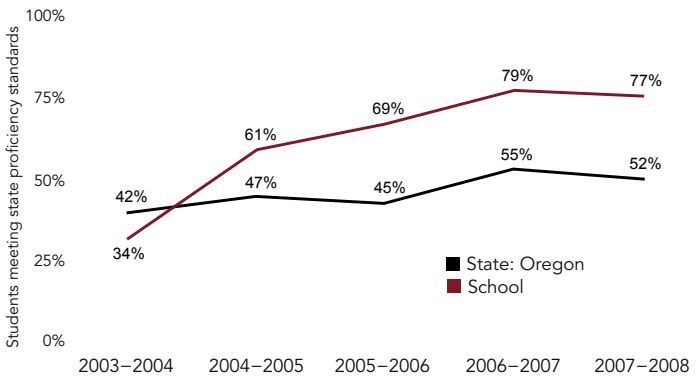
1. Convert the school to a public charter school.
2. Replace "all or most of the school staff (including the principal), who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress" (the "turnaround" option).
3. Hire an external contractor, such as a private management company with a proven track record of effectiveness, to operate the school.
4. Turn the "operation of the school over to the state educational agency, if permitted under state law and agreed to by the state."
5. Engage in any other form of major restructuring that makes fundamental reforms "to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make adequate yearly progress."

FIVE NORTHWEST TURNAROUND SCHOOLS
Mathematics Proficiency Rate Compared to Statewide Rate, 2003–2004 to 2007–2008

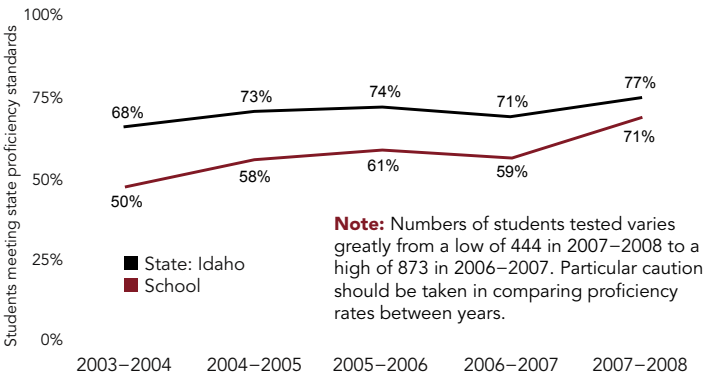
Mountain View Elementary: All Grades



Forest Grove High: Grade 10

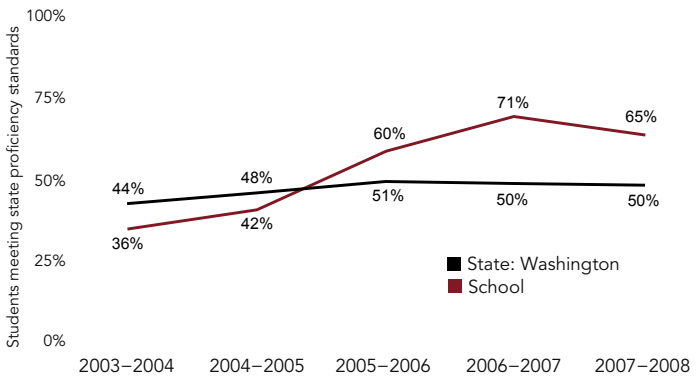


Vallivue Middle: Grades 7–8

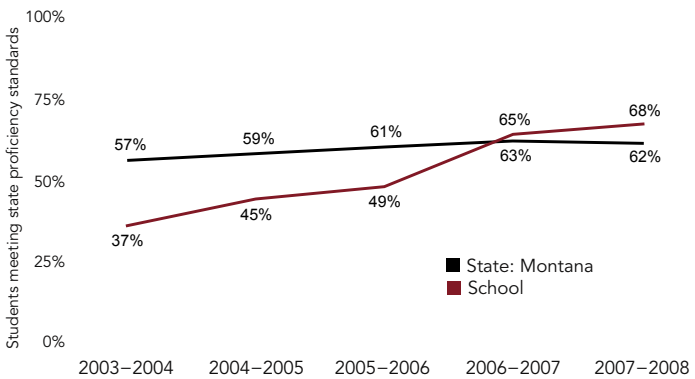


Note: Numbers of students tested varies greatly from a low of 444 in 2007–2008 to a high of 873 in 2006–2007. Particular caution should be taken in comparing proficiency rates between years.

Chelan High: Grade 10



Roundup Central: All Grades



Sources: Mountain View Elementary, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, annual state and "school site" AYP worksheets, retrieved from www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/assessment/accountability.html; Vallivue Middle, Idaho's online ISAT assessment results (annual), retrieved from www.boardofed.idaho.gov/saa/isatresults.asp; Roundup Central, Montana's NCLB Report Card, retrieved from www.opi.mt.gov/ReportCard/; Forest Grove High, Oregon online assessment results, retrieved from www.ode.state.or.us/data/schoolanddistrict/testresults/reporting/PublicRpt.aspx; Chelan High, Washington online report card, retrieved from http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us.

A Second Chance at SUCCESS

A middle school in western Idaho uses intervention classes and strong relationships to create a safety net for at-risk and failing students.

Story and photos by BRACKEN REED

CANYON COUNTY, Idaho—On any given day in one of Debbie Watkins's seventh-grade math classes you might find a student standing under a giant lightbulb, calling a parent, family member, or guardian on an old white telephone attached to the wall. Occasionally, the entire class will turn to watch the student make the call. Other times they barely notice, it's become so commonplace.

It may sound like a punishment, but it's actually a unique reward. A student gets to turn the light bulb on when they've finally demonstrated mastery of a difficult concept, typically one that has been causing them grief for several weeks. Then they get to call an adult of their choosing to share the good news.

It's a small victory—one little step on the ladder of improvement—but the phone calls can be emotional moments. Once in a great while a student chokes back tears. Other times, they high-five or strut to the phone as if they've just scored a touchdown. More often, they play it cool but beam with pride. One can imagine the adult on the other end of the line, doing the same.

"These kids love to call home," says Watkins. "They love to be proud of themselves. That's something that's rare in all aspects of their lives, so when we can give them those little success stories it's huge for them."

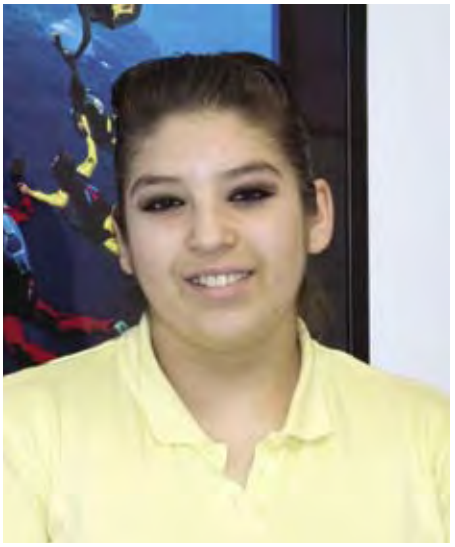
These lightbulb moments and celebratory phone calls are indicative of several things at the grade 6–8 Vallivue Middle School, just outside Caldwell, Idaho. First, dealing with students' emotional needs is a constant reality here, as it is in many middle schools. Second, the school has its share of struggling students who come from poverty or other disadvantaged circumstances and have not had a lot of success or praise in their young lives. And third, the entire staff at Vallivue is dedicated to creating an emotional and academic safety net for these at-risk students. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the school's math intervention classes.

In the past three years Vallivue has created an intense "double dose" math intervention process that gives the lowest achieving students a second chance at academic success. Based on the data, it's working.

Prior to the 2004–2005 school year, the percentage of Vallivue students meeting math proficiency on the statewide assessment hovered around 50 percent, well below the state average. Since then, the school has made big gains, raising its proficiency, most recently, to 72 percent. During that same time the statewide average for math proficiency went up only five percentage points.

The school's improvement is less dramatic in reading, but there, too, it has improved at a rate double that of the state's. Vallivue was recently a "showcase school" at the statewide Title I conference, even though it has never made adequate yearly progress (AYP). Almost no middle schools in Idaho have consistently made AYP, especially those with demographics similar to Vallivue's. Last year the school missed AYP

Teacher Debbie Watkins helps Jennifer, an eighth-grader in an intervention math class.



Vallivue students Britney, Jacob, and Shanelle have responded well to math intervention classes. Students typically test out several grade levels higher after a single year.

by only a few percentage points in a single subject area in one subgroup. They're almost there.

THE FALLEN-THROUGH-THE CRACKS KIDS

Vallivue Principal Rod Lowe jokingly refers to the middle school years as the black hole. "Grades often drop, emotions run really high, everything goes a little haywire," he says. "You've got parents saying 'This isn't the kid I raised!' I tell them: 'If you figure it out, write a book, because you're the exception.'"

More than anything, says Watkins, students feel confused and out of control. "They're in between everything: youth and adulthood and everything that goes with it," she says. "They have no idea what they're doing. They're intensely self-conscious. Hardly anyone feels good about themselves in seventh grade."

For many of Vallivue's 720 students there are other pressures as well. The Caldwell-Nampa area is a semirural, semisuburban area just west of Boise. The Vallivue School District serves the county area between the two towns, and despite the proximity to Boise, agriculture is still the main industry here. There is a sizable population of Latino families who do seasonal work, and many others who struggle with rural poverty, as reflected in the 55 percent of Vallivue Middle School students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. A 30 percent mobility rate also speaks to the number of families who jump back and forth among Caldwell, Nampa, Boise, and as far afield as Mexico, looking for work.

By the sixth grade such socioeconomic pressures have already taken a toll on many students. Add puberty to the equation and it's not uncommon to see an academic free-fall.

These are the students that Watkins calls "the fallen-through-the-cracks kids," and "the hardest ones to reach." Typically, they are not students with learning disabilities, but simply those that fell behind early and never caught up.

"If you never have success at something, you start to give up," says Watkins. "These are students who fell farther and farther behind, and then you start to see behavior problems because they're not engaged. Before long they've become the troublemakers and the underachievers—the 'worst of the worst.'"

These are also the students most likely to drag down a school's test scores and keep it from making AYP. That equation may seem cynical, but it's not. The standards and accountability movement has given many schools the resources and urgency to address these "problem kids" in a more direct and intense way than ever before. That has been the case at Vallivue, and it is starting to pay off—in improved test scores, yes, but also in brighter futures for many students who were heading down a dark road.

YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE

Vallivue's approach to helping these struggling students is not unusual or groundbreaking, but like any other instructional strategy it can be done poorly or done well—it's all in the details. In the simplest terms, the math "double dose" is given to the lowest scoring students in all three grade levels, 6–8. In the sixth and seventh grades they choose the bottom 48 students, based on assessments given the previous spring. By eighth grade many of those students have been brought up to grade level, which means there are fewer students in the program.

In order to keep class sizes to 16 or fewer, there is a full-time intervention math teacher for all three grade levels: Christin Barkl teaches sixth grade, Watkins seventh, and Bruce Johnson eighth. Each has three 51-minute intervention classes in the morning and three in the afternoon. Students in the program must give up an elective and take the class twice a day, one period in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because of scheduling, students don't stay with the same group of peers from morning to afternoon, but in every other way the program strives for consistency and structure.

"These students don't like change at all," says Watkins. "This has been a struggle for them. They often have a lot of change in their personal lives, and you have to make up for some of that. We put a lot of emphasis on having clear expectations and specific requirements to stay in the program."

A key to the program's success has been to choose the best

teachers and to match them to the grade level with which they are most comfortable. "You have to put the right people in the right places," says Lowe. "In the past some schools made the mistake of assigning the least qualified teachers to the most at-risk students. We do the exact opposite. These are three of the best teachers we have."

It has taken some tinkering to find just the right fit. In the three years the school has had the program Johnson and Watkins have switched grade levels and a different teacher has filled the third slot each year.

"It takes a certain kind of teacher to do this," says Instructional Specialist Brenda Hogg. "You have to be very confident and have a lot of self-esteem and know exactly what you're doing, because these kids will test you at first. And then, you have to believe that you can help them and that they can learn. Not all teachers truly believe that, deep down."

Another key, says Lowe, is to build positive relationships. "I really encourage all of our teachers to be relational, but that's especially true for the intervention teachers," he says. "They have to know how to connect to these kids."

According to Watkins that connection has to happen from day one. "With the intervention students, if I don't build a relationship with them right off the bat, I don't have them at all. It's got to happen immediately," she says.

Step inside any of the three teachers' classrooms and you'll see how they create those connections. All students are treated equally and held to the same high standards, but each is also treated as an individual. The teachers are constantly working to differentiate instruction and they address individual learning styles by incorporating strategies from the sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP), in which the entire staff has been trained. The small class sizes also ensure that each student gets one-on-one attention when they need it.

BUILDING A FOUNDATION

The other major key to the program's success is the curriculum itself. Hogg calls it a "spiraling" curriculum that focuses on developing students' understanding of individual math concepts, one-by-one, until they have built a firm foundation of skills and knowledge. All three teachers use the same language to teach the concepts and they repeatedly refer to previous lessons in a kind of back-and-forth weave that draws on students' growing knowledge base.

Repetition and consistency are again part of routine. Each new concept is taught three times. First, the concept is introduced "cold"—without explanation—while students take notes. When the concept is reintroduced a second time, the students try to solve equations using only their notes. After they've tried, the concept is then explained in more depth, on the chalkboard or overhead projector, with reference to the students' own notes as well as to related concepts they have already mastered. Finally, the teacher and students go over problems in repetition, often in a kind of rapid call-and-response, with the teacher providing assistance only as necessary. Johnson, for one, uses whiteboards during these sessions, so that students can quickly hold up their answers.

During the course of the school year the students will learn approximately 200 individual math concepts, each of which builds on the one before it. "They get each concept at least three times a week, in its entirety," says Watkins. "And then it goes on the board with the master list of concepts. We just keep adding to the bottom of the list and reteaching, reteaching, building that knowledge base."

Shanelle, a student in Johnson's eighth-grade classes says the methodical approach has made it far easier to understand math. "In other classes I've had they just went through it really fast, from the book," she says. "But Mr. Johnson's teaching methods are really good. He does problems on the board and shows you what to do, what steps to follow, one problem at a time. The way he puts things makes it very easy to learn. And then he makes sure everybody gets it before he moves on."

Jacob, a student in Watkins' class says the instructional approach makes him feel more appreciated and less like a face in the crowd. "Ms. Watkins works with me one-on-one a lot," he says. "She doesn't give up on me when I don't understand something. She just keeps trying until I learn it."

Watkins' belief in Jacob has paid off. He was previously performing at the "basic" level, or below grade-level proficiency, but is now testing out at advanced for seventh grade. Next year he'll be able to return to the general eighth-grade math class.

The number of intervention students who reach proficiency is impressive, especially considering that many of them come in well below grade level. On average, about 40 percent of the sixth- and seventh-graders will move out of intervention before the eighth grade. As a result, Johnson's classes average only about 10 students each. Last year, Johnson moved 78 percent of those students into proficiency and out of intervention.

The intervention classes are now among the most popular in the school. "It's a testament that intervention is working here when I have kids in the hall constantly saying, 'I want to be in your math class. How can I get in your math class? It's fun!'" says Watkins. "They're hearing about it from their fellow students—kids that have been unsuccessful, academically, their entire lives, and now they're enjoying being in a math class twice a day and giving up an elective to do it."

The math intervention classes are only one part of a schoolwide strategy to help Vallivue's most at-risk students, but their effect has been profound. Not only have they contributed to the school's big jump in achievement scores, they have also helped get many students' lives back on track.

"This can be such a positive thing for them," says Watkins. "They're really good kids who have a lot to offer, they just don't know it yet. My goal is that, by the time they leave my class they're not only up to grade level in math, but they've also started to see the positive in themselves and to think of themselves as successful. That's what's going to carry them through high school and into more meaningful lives." ■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GOING THE DISTANCE

In the race toward student achievement, strong leadership and direct instruction in reading propel a primary school out of last place.

Story by RHONDA BARTON
Photos by DAVID PREDEGER

ANCHORAGE, Alaska—Even before the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Mountain View Elementary was cast as a struggling school. In 2000, only about 20 percent of the Title I school's third-graders read at grade level. "It was our highest need school in the sense of the highest poverty rate, a very high mobility rate, and very low student performance," remembers Carol Comeau, who became Anchorage School District's superintendent that year. "Even though they worked really, really hard, it was just a low-performing school overall."

In the infancy of NCLB, Mountain View continued to post some of the district's lowest scores and was labeled "in need of improvement" after not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years. But, change was afoot in this older one-story building. A charismatic leader, committed staff, additional district and federal funding, and an emphasis on direct instruction in reading helped the school start turning around.

Reading proficiency went from 29 percentage points below the state average in 2003–2004 to 8 points below in 2005–2006. While the school has given up some of those gains since, scores were still 19 percentage points higher in 2007–2008 than four years before. In math, Mountain View more than doubled its proficiency rate in that same four-year period, going from 31 percentage points below the state average to three points above it in 2007–2008.

The gains catapulted Mountain View into the ranks of schools making AYP for three consecutive years—a remarkable achievement for one of the most ethnically diverse schools in the state. More than 40 percent of the students receive English as a Second Language services. A huge number of Hmong students fill Mountain View's desks, along with Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, Samoans, Hispanics, African Americans, and multiethnic youngsters. In 2007–2008, only 19 of 210 students were identified as Caucasian.

Although the K–6 school barely missed the AYP mark last year, it no longer carries the stigma of its past.

"No-nonsense" leadership

Ask what made the difference at Mountain View and the answer is likely to be Roger LeBlanc. A United States Air Force veteran—and current Major in the Alaska Air National Guard—he brought a single-minded focus and strict discipline to the new battlefield of Mountain View. Arriving in 2001 for what was his first principalship, LeBlanc found the school mired in a stereotype. "It had been underperforming for so long that it had become the norm," he says. "It wasn't so much that there weren't good teachers, they just needed someone with an untainted view to spearhead what needed to be done in order to provide the best education for the children."

Third-grade teacher Paula Mariscal had been at the school for three years before the change in leadership. "Roger was a take-charge kind of leader … with a single-minded goal of bringing scores up," she recalls. "He reminded me of my own

father, who was in the military: 'You're going to do it my way, or the highway.' That's not insulting. In any military family that's just how it is."

Reading coach Patricia Jackson also describes LeBlanc as a "very strong, no-nonsense leader" with clear expectations. "He never said 'if you don't want to do this, leave.' But, we all knew if we weren't going to, then we needed to move on somewhere else," says Jackson. Although about a third of the staff turned over when LeBlanc arrived, the remaining faculty didn't balk at the new regime. "There was a lot of excitement, especially in the people who had been here before," Jackson remarks. "They were hungry for good strong leadership and they got right on board. We started to see results almost immediately with the kids."

Improvements everyone can see

Making highly visible, "quick-win" improvements is one of the hallmarks of school turnarounds. At Mountain View an all-out commitment to the Reading Mastery curriculum was largely responsible for those wins. The switch to the direct instruction program preceded LeBlanc, but the school was experiencing varying degrees of success with the adoption. Under LeBlanc, all resources were concentrated on making it work.

Although no other Anchorage school had adopted Reading Mastery for all primary grades, it proved to be the perfect fit for Mountain View's polyglot student body.

Intensive training helped teachers implement the program with fidelity. LeBlanc comments that "outside professionals came in to work with the staff, but not just for one- or two-day inservices. We had them for the entire first two years of the program, so teachers had experts available all the time, every day, to help them through the process." Extra funds from the district helped pay for that expertise, and LeBlanc also received moral support from the district's director of elementary education, Patricia MacRae, who had a strong background in Reading Mastery and in using data to improve student achievement.

Roger LeBlanc

Mountain View's master schedule was overhauled to allow for two and a half hours of reading instruction, including a 90-minute block in the morning where students "walk to read" at their instructional level. Pull-outs for gym, library, art, and music were scheduled at the same time for all students in a single grade level so their teachers could meet once a week during the school day. "Roger insisted we take notes at our meetings, which really helped focus us," says Mariscal, "and the focus was always going to be reading." Bimonthly all-staff meetings also centered on reading instruction.

Coach Patricia Jackson checks a student's oral reading as part of her weekly assessment of progress.

Another change was the shift to data-driven instruction. "We started doing DIBELS the first year," says Jackson, "though we joke now that we were admiring the data and not analyzing it." As teachers became more adept at mining the data and targeting their classroom practice accordingly, they saw student progress jump. Improvements were visible as early as the second semester of LeBlanc's first year.

Jackson recalls how students would stop her in the hallway and ask for help with projects they were working on. "If they're stuck, I'll always say 'read the directions.' Now, even the little first-graders can and that wasn't the case when I first got here," she says. "It always brings a smile to my face, reflecting back on how far we've come."

Reading wasn't the only subject to see gains. The skills picked up in Reading Mastery spilled over into writing and math. "As kids and teachers started to see and experience success in one thing, it transitioned into others," says LeBlanc. The same approach to professional development and scheduling for reading found its way into different core areas.

Family ties

With students and staff motivated and excited about the changes at Mountain View, the next challenge was getting parent buy-in. LeBlanc acknowledges that was one of the hardest pieces, not only because of communication barriers but also because of low expectations. "Parents had sort of settled for what they were getting at the school," says LeBlanc. "We had to recreate that sense of need and the fact that they, too, were valuable in what we were trying to do for their children."

With 27 different languages represented at the school—and many parents who did not speak English—Mountain View relied heavily on translators at open houses and conferences. LeBlanc went door to door in the neighborhood—"pounding the pavement and being visible"—so parents had a face to attach to the school. And, he showed up at local community centers and churches.

A program called Second Cup of Coffee drew parents inside Mountain View. Every two weeks, the school offered coffee and a chance to drop in on the principal for an informal chat. A parent resource coordinator hosted videos on job training and interview skills, which morphed into a Parent University. With grant funds, LeBlanc paid classroom teachers to extend their lessons to students' parents at night, offering instruction in reading and speaking English. Local businesses and organizations stepped up and provided courses in finance, earthquake safety, and first aid. "We hosted a lot of events—math nights, multicultural fairs, Saturday school—and built relationships that way," says LeBlanc. "We were able to sell them on some of the things we were doing as a school."

Out-of-school time

Another piece of the improvement picture—then and now—has been a robust 21st Century Community Learning Center, which is in its ninth year. Five days a week, the after-school program serves more than 100 students a day with two hours of homework help, academics, and enrichment. "Students are teacher-referred for academic, social, or behavioral needs," explains Director Denielle Baldwin. Her staff of 13 includes a dozen of the school's daytime personnel, including eight certificated teachers and two bilingual tutors.

In a fall 2008 survey, 98 percent of students reported that they were doing better in school since coming to the after-school program. Both assessment scores and testimonials bear that out. A sixth-grade bilingual student comments, "My parents appreciate that I am learning better ways in math … and it's not confusing to read." Another child says, "My dad wants me to be better at math than he is. He did not get to finish school in his country and he really doesn't know math a lot. He says this program will change my life for the better."

A teacher credits the extra reinforcement in the after-school program with helping a monolingual kindergartner make substantial progress. She says, "He was very uncomfortable in the classroom setting because he spoke very little English and didn't recognize any familiar faces. He was so determined to leave that he bolted out of the [class]room and into the street right in front of a passing car. It took three teachers to calm him down. Now, this student displays so much more confidence. He speaks English like you wouldn't believe, follows directions, [and] tries really hard to be successful with his work."

Paula Mariscal readies her third-graders for the daily "walk to read" session.

Sustaining progress

The mission of boosting student success that Roger LeBlanc tackled in 2001 now falls to Chris Woodward. He took over as Mountain View's principal last year, after turning around two Yupik schools in the Alaska bush and guiding them to AYP. LeBlanc moved to Fairview Elementary, another troubled Title I school where he felt he could make a difference. Using the analogy of a relay race, LeBlanc says that after seven years he was ready to pass the baton. "I'm not the finisher of the race," he reflects. "My job was to run some leg in between."

Woodward faces perhaps a tougher challenge: building on progress rather than building from the ground up. "That's a much easier task to take a school that's very low performing and fix it, because pretty much anything you do is going to be a change for the positive," he says. "Here, I've got to try to make changes that will keep us moving upward but also sustain the things that are in place. I'm looking to see where we can still make improvements because even if you've made AYP 100 years in a row, there's still going to be room for improvement."

While striving for improvements, Woodward faces a rapidly expanding population and growing numbers of ELL students. Mountain View's enrollment shot up to 450 this year—an increase of 100 students—and the bilingual rate climbed to about 75 percent. Hmong families continue to pour into the neighborhood surrounding the school, some coming from Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand while others resettle from communities in California, Minnesota, Arkansas, and Wisconsin. Reading Mastery continues to serve these newly arrived students well, while the school is now using the district's standard Houghton Mifflin curriculum for grades 4–6. Teacher collaboration, staff professional development, data-driven instruction, and parent involvement remain a key part of the school's culture.

In the race toward student achievement, Mountain View has come a long way from its starting position in the back of the pack. Now it's moved toward the middle, but there's still plenty of hard work ahead to reach the top finishers. ■

LESSONS FROM A TURNAROUND SPECIALIST

An experienced principal meets high expectations with a "keep it simple" approach to school improvement.

Story by JACQUELINE RAPHAEL, photos by KATIE GLEASON

FOREST GROVE, Oregon—In 2002, Forest Grove School District Superintendent Jack Musser was looking for a new high school principal. The school was at a crossroads—students were chronically low achieving, and the school culture could be summed up in one disheartening phrase, "Good enough for Forest Grove." The proof was in the data: The school had some of the lowest test scores and the highest dropout rate in Washington County.

Musser was determined to shake things up. Looking through the pile of applications, one stood out. John O'Neill, a principal in San Bernardino, California, had turned a large, chronically low-performing high school into a high-achieving, award-winning institution. His previous accomplishments as a middle school principal were equally impressive.

Rather than simply inviting O'Neill to Forest Grove for an interview, Musser decided to take the unusual step of visiting O'Neill's school in California. He was looking for something beyond test scores—a sense of the school's culture—and the only way to find it was by meeting with the teachers, students, parents, and community members who lived it every day. At a group meeting, Musser recalls with amusement, he found what he was looking for.

"One grandmother in the room wasn't speaking," says Musser. "Then she finally said to me, 'I'm very angry. I don't want John to leave here, so I'm not going to answer your questions.'"

Before the visit was over, Musser had decided to offer O'Neill the job, but he wanted to be sure his own high expectations were completely out on the table. "Can you turn our school into a high-performing school, as you've done here?" Musser remembers asking O'Neill.

"I guarantee it," O'Neill responded, not missing a beat. The failing school he had turned around was significantly larger and more troubled than Forest Grove High School. He knew what it took; he was convinced it was replicable at any school in the country; and he gave his word that with district and school board support, he could make it happen at Forest Grove. As he flew back to Oregon, Musser knew he'd found the right person for the job.

Seven years later, Forest Grove is the only school that has been recognized by the state for making significant student achievement gains among minority and/or low-income students for four consecutive years. Thirty-six percent of Forest Grove's students are Latino, for whom English is often a second language, and 45 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Despite those challenges, the percentage of its students meeting standards in reading and math has been consistently higher than the state average since 2004. Last spring the school won one of three national Breakthrough Schools awards given by the MetLife Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals to secondary schools that make and sustain dramatic achievement gains for large


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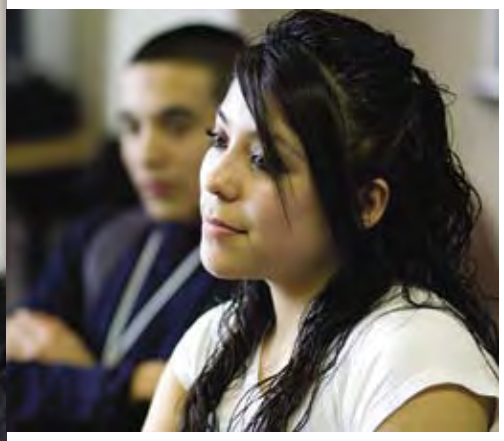

Sophomores Desteny Mathis, Max Nieto, and Cecilia Villanueva were in Annette Faris's math workshop last semester. All three have now passed the state math test.

numbers of low-income students.

Clearly, O'Neill has delivered on his promise, and in doing so has added to his reputation as a turnaround specialist. But as O'Neill himself insists, the story of Forest Grove's turnaround has not been about a single dynamic leader. Nor has it been about resources, strategies, technical assistance, or curricula that are not available to any public school. Forest Grove's success, as with the success of O'Neill's previous schools, comes down to this: doing a few important things incredibly well.

SETTING A COURSE OF ACTION

O'Neill's first priority upon taking the helm of Forest Grove High was to look at the data. As a principal in California—one of the first states to make school rankings public—O'Neill fully understood the importance of the numbers. One of his first hires was Brigetta Martell, a former Intel employee, who was working as a part-time instructional aide in the district. O'Neill tapped her expertise by making her the school's first full-time testing coordinator and data specialist. Martell and O'Neill led the other staff members in a "big picture" look at the school's data, including graduation, dropout, and college enrollment rates, as well as student achievement on the statewide assessment.

The data overview was enlightening, but only half of the picture. To get the rest—and to share the data and communicate his own vision of Forest Grove as a high-performing school—O'Neill used a previously planned staff retreat. During two days at the Oregon coast, the school improvement team—which included department chairs, all building administrators, as well as district, parent, student, and school board representatives—pored over the data, looked at the results from a school climate survey, and shared their perspectives about the school's most significant needs. In the end, two major themes emerged: the correlation between poor reading and math skills and academic failure and the fact that many students felt "like a number" at the school.

"You have to prioritize," says O'Neill. "You have to identify the most pressing needs first, and then put your entire focus on addressing them."

At Forest Grove, increasing academic rigor and improving the quality of relationships—particularly for underclassmen—moved to the top of the list. The school improvement team conducted research reviews on both issues and chose the strongest, most relevant strategies to implement that year. Drawing on his own experience taking school improvement strategies to scale, O'Neill had one important piece of advice: Keep the focus narrow.

INCREASING ACADEMIC RIGOR

To address academic rigor, the school chose to place its initial focus on the incoming freshmen who were most at risk for academic failure. These students received a "double dose" of reading and/or math instruction on top of their regular coursework. These additional, more individualized "workshop" classes were designed to fill learning gaps in these fundamental subjects early on, before deficiencies took hold and left students too far behind to catch up. Research suggests that instead of remediation, many struggling students are more successful with this "acceleration" approach.

Having used intervention classes successfully in San Bernardino County, O'Neill launched a pilot workshop program for Forest Grove ninth-graders that focused entirely on the standards covered by the statewide assessment. These classes, which took the place of an elective, led to significant increases in student achievement scores after only one year.

"Once we had the data showing our ninth-graders, with just one year of support, were catching up to or surpassing our 10th-graders, we had made our case," says O'Neill. As research suggests, this "quick win" earned O'Neill the trust and confidence of the school board and increased the buy-in from school and district staff.

When Superintendent Musser asked what the school needed to maintain its momentum, O'Neill used this political capital to make a list of requests. One was that the school board require all incoming freshmen with grade 8 RIT scores below 239 on the state test—a cut-off slightly above passing—to take

workshop classes for elective credit, for as long as it took, until they passed the high school–level state test. For this O'Neill would need additional financial support, as reading and math workshops would now be taught to approximately 75 percent of all incoming freshmen.

Musser believed O'Neill was on the right track, but staying on it wasn't easy at first. There were some battles, including some irate phone calls.

"We had a lot of pressure to allow students to opt out," Musser says. Some parents accused the district of caring only about test scores. But O'Neill and the district staff kept pointing to the correlation between skill deficiencies and academic risk in the early grades, arguing that workshops were about more than passing a test.

Over time, Forest Grove fine-tuned the workshops with creative add-on strategies to enhance their power. Because workshops take the place of an elective, for example, students are highly motivated to hunker down and pass the test so that they can take an elective of their choice. The plan also provides an incentive for teachers: As students "pass out" of a section, class size is reduced, allowing the instructors to focus even more on the students who need the most help. Another school might have reconfigured workshops each semester, keeping class size constant and reassigning an instructor to a different course.

Perhaps most important, O'Neill deliberately assigns Forest Grove's most qualified instructors to these intervention classes. "For these teachers, who want the challenge these students present, teaching the workshops is a calling," O'Neill explains.

Math workshop teacher Annette Faris agrees. "It fits me, because I see the absolute need for these students to get a double dose in math," she says.

Faris appreciates the variety of students in the workshop, including some with serious behavior issues and/or disabilities and others with small but critical gaps in their skills. She sees her job as getting all of them to care, at least enough to master the fundamental standards they'll need in the future.

Whitney Karp, who teaches AP English as well as reading workshop, emphasizes the flexibility of the curriculum.

"If students are reading at the third-grade level, we can have them read at that level and build their skills from there. In their regular English classes, the teachers might just say, 'We're going to read *Romeo and Juliet* no matter what your reading level is.'"

In the ninth-grade reading workshop students read books of their choosing and use the results of comprehension tests to chart their progress. In between silent reading, Karp provides highly structured lessons. Using state test data and the "Accelerated Reader" software program, goals are set every six weeks and target specific skills, such as making inferences.

Karp says the "personal touch" is critical. "We use Accelerated Reader,

Banners proclaiming the school's academic achievements cover the walls.

(clockwise from top left): Math workshop teachers Dawn Hofsted and Annette Faris, and reading workshop teacher Whitney Karp, work closely with students.

but it's how the teachers are using it that creates success, not the software alone." Teachers infuse workshop with modeling, monitoring, individual attention, and cheerleading. Karp says too many schools assign their weakest teachers to their weakest students, and it doesn't work.

In her classroom, math workshop teacher Dawn Hofsted talks to students directly, treating them like adults and conveying a clear sense of high expectations. She also makes it fun.

On one afternoon, for example, Hofsted introduces geometric transformations by alluding to the popular movie *Transformers.*

"You may think this character is Optimus Prime, but that's just his movie name," she says. "He's really Reflection, Translation, Dilation, or Rotation." The students laugh, but they also pay close attention. As Hofsted walks around the room, between the students' desks, she pops questions at individual students—"What part of our body dilates?"—and every student must be ready for a rapid-fire response.

Hofsted's classroom also looks more like an art room than a math class, with dozens of small, colorful three-dimensional models—of cubes, spheres, and pyramids—hanging from the ceiling, and bright posters, filled with figures and formulae, covering the lime-green walls.

Most students respond well to the smaller class sizes, creative teaching strategies, and sense of camaraderie that the workshops foster. Junior Chris Wells says the games and rewards used in the class made him do his best work. "You feel like you have something to work for. Everyone says we're supposed to be working toward a career after high school, but this is like instant gratification. You get candy, or you get to skip the next homework assignment. You feel good and special because everyone else who failed is sitting there doing it, too."

Desteny Mathis, a sophomore who recently passed the state test, likes the individual attention she got in Faris's math workshop. "Regular teachers think they can explain the math upfront and students will just know it," she says. "They don't normally walk around to different students the way Ms. Faris does."

By focusing on the algebra and geometry standards covered on the state test, math workshop helps students in their regular math classes. Dianna Torres, a junior currently taking geometry, still draws on approaches that her workshop teacher covered two years earlier, showing the long reach of workshop instruction.

Not all responsibility for student performance rests on the shoulders of workshop teachers. Forest Grove also uses reading-across-the-curriculum and other schoolwide approaches to help students develop reading skills. Additionally, school leaders recognized early on that as reading and math workshops raised the floor, the school would need a higher ceiling. Forest Grove went from offering seven Advanced Placement (AP) courses when O'Neill arrived to 23 this year. AP enrollment has tripled, involving nearly 20 percent of all students.

IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS

When O'Neill arrived, the school was already working on creating a more personalized environment for students. The survey conducted before he came

suggested that many students dropped out during their freshman year because they didn't feel connected to the school. Using the same federal grant that paid for the retreat on the coast, O'Neill and other staff members chose several strategies to address the problem. Some were simple, such as a summer "welcome call" from an upperclassman peer mentor to each incoming freshman as part of the new Links program. Others were more complex, including an advisory system that provides a teacher who serves as advisor and student advocate. Because district and school board representatives had participated in the school improvement retreat, they understood the rationale for these strategies and could support decisions made at the building level.

Furthermore, as with the focus on academic rigor, with each personalization strategy staff were determined to achieve a high level of implementation. By choosing only a few new programs to implement at any one time, the chances of doing each one well went up significantly. Also, as with the academic workshops, Forest Grove's programs to strengthen relationships are interconnected. Incoming freshmen *and* their parents participate in a well-developed orientation program, for example, and the advisories are carried through all four years of high school, usually with the same advisor. Ninth- and 10th-graders and their teachers are grouped into "houses," with the staff meeting during common prep periods to discuss their students' progress. More recently, a career academy program was established for 11th- and 12th-graders to ensure they can continue in a small-school structure through six available career pathways.

Hiring, too, reflects the school's emphasis on relationships.

"We have 'The Screener,'" says assistant principal Karen Robinson, referring to a set of questions used to identify student-centered applicants.

"The tool is extremely powerful," says O'Neill, who used it in California. "People don't get hired here unless they score rather high on that."

Personalization strategies are also directly connected to academic rigor. For example, students who aren't making progress in summer school are put in touch with a designated counselor to address their personal needs. And teachers have worked explicitly on connecting with students through the advisory and smaller learning community structures.

Due to these combined schoolwide improvement efforts, 84 percent of Forest Grove students now report feeling connected to the school.

FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

Seven years later, O'Neill has taken "good enough for Forest Grove" and turned it on its head. It's nearly impossible now for a student to fall through the cracks. Reading and math workshops, houses, academies, advisories, and other interventions join to create a safety net that reinforces high expectations for all students.

When asked what has contributed most to Forest Grove's turnaround, Assistant Principal Jerry Fitzpatrick, who's been at the school for 20 years, says it was O'Neill's ability to focus the entire building on student achievement, while not getting overwhelmed by the details.

"He can maintain his focus regardless of everything going on in this crazy environment," adds Robinson.

"You cannot have a broad focus," Assistant Principal Sue Voigt agrees. "You need a narrow one, and John understands that."

O'Neill says having a wife who is also a principal has helped him keep his focus in mind at all times. "We bounce ideas off each other. She was a very effective high school leader when I was making the transition from middle to high school leadership," he says.

Just as important "is surrounding yourself with a great team and building upon each person's strengths," he says. Significantly, about 40 percent of current Forest Grove staff members were hired during O'Neill's tenure, due to teacher retirements and an influx of 500 new students.

O'Neill gives a lot of credit to his administrative team, each of whom he says is "unbelievable" at taking a program and running with it. For example, O'Neill says he hasn't needed to attend an advisory committee meeting since 2004, when the program started. And the assistant principals appreciate the respect, stressing that O'Neill invites and uses their input on decisions large and small.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the school's intense focus is that, seven years later, most programmatic decisions still relate directly to the goals established at the initial planning retreat in 2002. Indeed, the entire staff, whether administrators, teachers, or office personnel, often use identical language to talk about their school's success: Their progress is "100 percent replicable"; "success breeds success"; and intervening early with struggling students is a "calling." Such a high level of consistency in the language heard throughout the building is one sign that the school's turnaround has reached a point of sustainability.

"We don't have 100 percent of everyone on board yet," says Assistant Principal Robinson, "but we're very close. I think we could maintain our direction and current student achievement level if John moved on. But, we would not have gotten here without him." ■

FOREST GROVE'S AWARDS

- 2008 MetLife/NASSP Breakthrough Schools Award
- 2008 Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education
- 2006–2007 Exceptional School Designation, Oregon School Report Card
- 2009 Oregon Assistant Principal of the Year—Jerry Fitzpatrick
- 2008 Oregon High School Principal of the Year—John O'Neill
- 2007 Milken National Educator Award—John O'Neill

THE LONG TURNAROUND

An award-winning elementary school in rural Montana sees big jumps in student achievement after more than a decade of hard work.

Story and photos by BRACKEN REED

ROUNDUP, Montana—According to the numbers, Central Elementary School in Roundup, Montana, seems to fit the currently fashionable definition of a "turnaround" school. After many years of below-average test scores, the school has recently made double-digit gains in the number of its students meeting proficiency on the statewide assessment. In true turnaround fashion, that improvement appears to have happened in a very short period of time.

As recently as the 2005–2006 school year, for example, Central's math score was nearly 20 percentage points below the state average. In the following school year that proficiency rate went up by 16 percent, and by 2007–2008 the school was six points higher than the state average in math. Meanwhile, the school's reading score, while consistently above the state average, also rose by nearly 20 percentage points between 2003–2004 and 2007–2008. This fall the school received a National Title I Distinguished School award, based on "exceptional student performance for two or more consecutive years."

Ask current principal Vicki Begin about the school's success, however, and she'll insist that it's been anything but a quick turnaround. In fact, Begin (pronounced BEIGE–en), who is in her second year at Central, gives much of the credit not only to the school's veteran teaching staff, which averages 23 years of experience, but also to her predecessor, Joe Ingalls, who guided the school from 1994–1995 to 2006–2007. Obviously, this is not a case of overnight success or of cleaning house and starting over.

In fact, there would seem to be little in common between Central Elementary and the handful of schools that have gained national media attention for their dramatic turnarounds and the drastic measures, such as total reconstitution, they have occasionally taken. As a small, rural school in a perpetually cash-strapped state, Roundup's only K–6 elementary school has turned things around gradually, without a major influx of funds, resources, new personnel, or outside technical assistance.

While that may make the label "turnaround school" an uncomfortable fit, it also makes Central representative of the hundreds of other schools around the country—including many in the predominantly rural West—who have been working hard for many years to put all the right pieces in place, often with minimal resources. In the end, it's less important what you call Central Elementary, and more important how they got here.

A HARD LOOK IN THE MIRROR

In the mid-1990s Joe Ingalls was a first-time principal still in the process of earning his doctorate via extension classes. A lot of the reading and discussion in those classes focused on the nuts and bolts of curriculum and instruction, and inevitably that information began to color the way Ingalls viewed the day-to-day operations at his school. "The research I was immersed in really indicated those things that needed to be

Principal Vicki Begin, in her second year at Central Elementary, has taken student achievement to the next level.

in place for students to be successful," says Ingalls. "And I could see that they were not in place at our school."

Due to the school's below-average achievement scores, Ingalls initiated a committee-based school improvement process, long before such a process would be required by the No Child Left Behind Act. Each staff member served on at least one committee, such as reading, math, school safety, population/demographics, or the overall school improvement steering committee. Although many of Central's staff members had already been teaching for a decade or more, primarily within the Roundup School District, the committee approach gave them an opportunity to collectively evaluate and compare their instructional practices in a way they had never done before.

Anita Burch, a kindergarten teacher at Central, remembers how surprised the staff members were at what they discovered. "It was the first time we really sat down together and said: What are we actually teaching, at every grade level?" she says. "And one of the things we found is that we had big holes in our curriculum. There was an assumption that at third grade this was being taught and so fourth grade could just start from there. When in actuality that skill hadn't been taught in third grade. And so, we had to go back and say: How do we fill those holes?"

Although Vicki Begin was a teacher in nearby Lewistown at the time, she relates to how difficult, exposing, and ultimately rewarding that kind of schoolwide look in the mirror can be. Often, she says, the problem is wrongly diagnosed as bad teaching.

"Teachers are the experts in learning," she says. "They really are. They know what works for kids. And so, for example here [at Central], each of them would do exactly what they thought worked for kids, but the kids were having trouble connecting the pieces. It wasn't that any one teacher wasn't doing that important part of teaching, and it wasn't that kids weren't learning. It's just that none of the pieces stacked together."

During the improvement process Ingalls and the staff came to the same conclusion: The "pieces" of the school's approach to curriculum and instruction were not coming together to make a unified whole.

The problem revealed itself in several ways, all of them interrelated. First, although the school had a core curriculum for both reading and math, neither was being used with fidelity by the entire K–6 staff. This was the main cause of the "big holes" in the curriculum that Burch and her fellow teachers noticed.

"Generally, what happens with a curriculum that is inadequate or poorly aligned is that it starts to splinter," says Ingalls. "People begin to pick and choose what they want to use, and maybe what they don't feel is as important goes by the wayside. That might work fine for an individual teacher, but ultimately it doesn't work for kids."

The second problem was also related to a lack of alignment in the curriculum, but in this case alignment to state standards. Although standards were in place by this time, the school had only aligned its curriculum to them in the most general way. The problem showed up most clearly when Ingalls asked each grade-level team a question. "For example," says Ingalls, "if I sat down with a grade-level team and asked them: 'Where should we be with number sense by the end of the year?' the teachers weren't able to verbalize that. It was a real challenge to know what the teachers expected of the students. And in most cases, their expectations were much lower than they should have been or would later come to be."

The third major problem was an inadequate assessment strategy. Several assessments were in place, but the fragmented curriculum made them ineffective, especially for tracking a student's progress over time. In addition, teachers were not adequately trained in how to use assessment data to drive their instruction.

The final problem was the lack of a common vision and a common language. The latter situation was sometimes literal. Even when a concept was being taught in the right sequence, for example, something might be lost in the translation between two teachers or two grade levels. As an example, Barbara Crosby, another veteran teacher, says: "When I taught third grade I used the term 'statement' to describe a certain kind of sentence. It wasn't until I moved up to teach fourth grade that I realized they were using the term 'declarative' to describe the same kind of sentence. That might sound like a small matter, but it puts all the pressure on the student to make the connection and to build on the concept."

Of course, Ingalls and the Central teaching staff did not come to a clear recognition of all these problems at once. The actual process of identifying them, facing up to them, and coming together as an entire school to address them was gradual and not entirely painless. "But the biggest key," says Ingalls, "was that we had staff buy-in right away. That was essential."

THE SUM AND THE PARTS

It was not by chance that Ingalls chose a committee-based school improvement process. As Begin says, "Joe and the staff developed a vision of where they wanted to be and that was part of the vision—the teachers had to be involved. Everyone had to take a piece of it and communicate with each other and share ownership."

If there is a single theme that runs through Central Elementary's decade-plus of hard work, it is that unity of vision. After looking their underachievement in the eye, the school made a collective decision that can be summarized as follows: We are no longer going to teach as individuals; from now on, we are a team. We will throw open the doors of our classrooms, speak a common language, and work for a common cause. And that cause will be one thing: the academic progress of each and every student in our school.

Without that vision, everything that followed would have been so many pieces and parts. With that in mind, here are some of the specific steps the school took to address its problems.

First, Ingalls and a staff committee spent a year, including one summer, on what he calls the "foundational piece" of identifying the essential learning skills embedded in the state standards and then aligning them to their core reading and math curricula. No longer would teachers be unable to identify what students should know and be able to do in a given skill area at the end of a grade level. Or, as Roberta Hagstrom, a member of that committee and the school's current Title I director says, "We always want to know exactly what we're teaching, at what point we're teaching it, and why."

In the process of identifying those essential learning skills, they realized that even if the current reading and math curricula were taught with fidelity, they would not be sufficient to the school's needs. Eventually, they would replace both the core reading and the math programs, implement 6+1 Trait® Writing in all grades, and add ReadWell® as an intervention reading program in the primary grades. Intense staff training accompanied each of these curriculum adoptions, often in partnership with their regional educational cooperative or the Alliance for Curriculum Enhancement (ACE) Consortium, both of which allow the school to pool its resources for professional development and other purposes.

Each new curriculum was also mapped to the essential learning skills and aligned "horizontally and vertically"—or within and between grade levels. The math program, in particular, is also deliberately "spiraling," a concept similar to but distinct from vertical alignment. The end result is that Central's curriculum is now logical, sequenced, and transparent to all, while still allowing teachers some flexibility to personalize a given lesson.

Another significant step the school took was to update its assessment system. Early on they chose an assessment from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA, no relation to NWREL), which met Ingalls's goal of tracking student achievement over time. With the implementation of ReadWell they also began using the DIBELS assessment to monitor students' progress more frequently. DIBELS has since been expanded schoolwide—all students take the diagnostic test at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. With this combination of assessments the school is no longer caught off guard by holes in the curriculum. Holes still show up, but they are caught and addressed almost immediately.

A final important strategy, what Begin calls "achievement-oriented teacher collaboration," is almost synonymous with the school vision. Teachers are now in constant dialogue about student data, instructional strategies, interventions, curriculum, and everything else going on in each other's classrooms. "For those of us who have been teaching for a very long time, it's a much different type of teaching than we were brought in on," says Begin. "The majority of our staff has 25-plus years of teaching experience. They had to learn to adapt and they have."

At Central this collaboration includes all staff members, including the school's invaluable paraeducators, who were named paraeducator staff of the year in 2007–2008 by the Montana Comprehensive System of Professional Development.

As with the recognition of problems, this synopsis may give the illusion that all these actions happened smoothly and in a short period of time. In reality, although each piece of the puzzle was implemented logically, carefully, and with an eye toward research, it is worth reiterating that it has taken 15 years of hard work to get to this point.

A CONSTANT PROCESS

When Joe Ingalls took a job at an elementary school in Wyoming in 2007, he left Central Elementary much better than he found it. Still, he says, "It was difficult to leave, knowing that there were things that still needed our attention and needed more work."

The hiring of Begin made his exit easier. "Vicki was the right person at the right time," he says. "She came in and was able to see the vision we had and the direction that we were headed. She picked it up and ran with it and has done an incredible job."

The school's national recognition as a distinguished school is an acknowledgment of its continued progress. And the school continues to push ahead. In the past year and a half they have established a full-day kindergarten program, started implementing response to intervention, and focused professional development on improving teacher's use of data to differentiate instruction. In Roundup, turning things around may have taken awhile, but it also never stops. ■

QUICK WINS AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

A Conversation With Sam Redding

Sam Redding is the director of the Center on Innovation and Improvement (www.centerii.org) and the coauthor of the recent Institute of Education Sciences practice guide *Turning Around Chronically Low-Performing Schools*. Redding is also the coauthor of several books, including *School-Family Partnerships for Student Success* and *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*. An in-demand speaker and consultant, Redding talked with *Northwest Education* by telephone.

Q: *Although there are a lot of schools in the Northwest region that are either at the point of restructuring or getting close to it, there are very few that have actually proceeded with restructuring. Is that true nationally?*

In a lot of states NCLB [the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001] has only been in place long enough for schools to just now be getting to the restructuring point based on the accountability system established in NCLB. So, we have a record of restructuring primarily in states that carried their prior accountability systems into NCLB. In other words, they already had schools that under the state system weren't making AYP for two or three years, and then NCLB came in and instead of starting over they just kept them moving. There are about six states that did that, and that's where most of our evidence is coming from.

And in those states are many of the schools actually being restructured?

Under NCLB when you get to restructuring you're supposed to have five options. In the early evidence, such as the reports coming out of the Center on Education Policy, it looks like districts have mostly taken the fifth option, or what NCLB calls "other significant change in governance." Those are typically the mildest remedies.

Is it your opinion that those milder remedies are not going to cut it—that we need to take more drastic measures?

I don't think we have any evidence that they have cut it, so I think that's right. It's not about, "Let's do the same things we've been doing but do a little more of it." As Gene Wilhoit from the CCSSO [Council of Chief State School Officers] said recently, what we're realizing is that—in the worst instances—these are schools in "toxic" surroundings. These schools are so much an exception to the usual pattern of how you go about school improvement that they need to make a dire departure. He thinks we have to completely reexamine what schooling means in some of these communities, to the point that we don't take the same thing called a "school" and just change the people in it or change the curriculum or whatever. Sometimes these schools have such a deficit of resources and human capital that we have to look at how we can make more significant changes in the conditions of schooling. Obviously, there are schools that may have reached restructuring status but are not in such dire straits. You have to look at each school individually.

If you change the school staff but don't change the district policies or any of the other factors that may have contributed, then aren't you only addressing part of the problem?

Well, there are people who think that the poorest performing schools are the least desirable to work in, and so over time the worst employees end up in them. They're the teachers that aren't likely to get a transfer out because other schools don't want them, and so you end up with the bottom of the barrel in terms of human capital—the people you have in the

building. And if you can change that situation you will immediately see improvement. That's one theory of it.

I've been in many schools where they've attempted school improvement, and it's not like every teacher in the school is bad. But, what you have to understand is this: If you're a kid who is from a middle class family that has a lot of resources and a lot of other positive things going for you, maybe you can tolerate, as you go through your schooling years, having one or two or three mediocre teachers, if the rest are good. You've probably got enough positive forces in your life to compensate for that. But if you're a kid that's vulnerable and needs everything you can possibly get out of that school, then having even a few bad teachers can be hugely detrimental. So I think it's not always that everyone working in one of these schools is lacking in the skills and attitudes and work ethic that you want, but you have kids who are so vulnerable that you cannot tolerate having even a few bad teachers on your school staff. If you cannot make strategic changes in your staff, as we recommend in the practice guide, then you may have to take these drastic measures.

Although it is anecdotal, it seems like many schools that are successfully turning things around are doing so by finding ways to individualize or differentiate instruction—frequent progress monitoring, response to intervention, etc. Do you think that's an accurate observation?

The one practice that I was most adamant about including in the practice guide was the focus on instruction. Ultimately, the only thing that gets you the turnaround and improvement you need is when you get really competent differentiation of instruction, with due attention to rich content and alignment with standards. But there are a lot of antecedents to that. It means you have to have people there who know how to plan and deliver differentiated instruction with rich content. They have to have the time to do it. They have to have the leadership discipline to do it. You can't just say, "Tomorrow I'll start individualizing instruction and paying more attention to what each kid is learning." Some things have to be in place for that to happen. But ultimately, if that doesn't happen then I don't see how you get turnarounds or gains or improvement, no matter what other improvement measures you have put in place.

So in some ways all of the other recommended practices in the practice guide come down to that?

I think so. I think that's exactly right. But all the other things are essential in order to provide the culture, discipline, and skill to deliver the quality instruction.

What role can professional development play in achieving that?

Instructional planning and delivery skills can be very specifically taught to teachers. But then, the other side of that is it also takes planning time to do it well. I think it's difficult for each teacher to do it alone. If you can put instructional teams together—grade-level teams or subject area teams—you'll be more successful. And then they can't just be together to have a book club. They've got to be together to do the hard work of looking at their instructional objectives, developing differentiated lessons, developing the materials to go with that, learning how to detect which students need what, teaching that, examining results, and making adjustments. All of that is hard work that takes time. So there has to be both the time for teachers to do it and the discipline for them to do it well. Professional development can teach them how to do it, but it also takes leadership to provide the time, and the internal discipline to do it well.

When you say that these things take a lot of hard work and time, does that contradict the idea of a "quick" turnaround?

In a way you're right. Even though I can say that these are schools where the clock is ticking and time is running out and we can't talk about it being gradual improvement anymore, it's still true that in the schools I've worked with teachers have to work very hard to align instruction to curriculum and to differentiate that instruction. If they work really hard it still takes at least a year, probably more, to get that done in one subject area. So, if you're saying "Let's do reading, let's do math," it might take three to four years to get through those two subject areas, and then you've still got other subjects. So in one sense—all of that aligning and individualizing of instruction, it's not like you just turn a key and do it.

Fortunately, you would hope that in this day and age a lot of schools have already done the hard work of aligning curriculum to standards. They haven't necessarily done the work of aligning it to instruction or aligning it to individualized instruction. But we should be ahead of where we were 10 years ago or even five years ago when we always thought that the first thing that needed to happen was the school needed to align its curriculum to state standards. That should be done by now. We saw some gains when we took that step, and many of those schools have already improved. So, now we're looking at those that didn't. It's the next step.

The idea of quick wins is to dramatically change the culture of a school so that the staff realizes good things can happen. Again, that is a necessary antecedent to the hard work of instructional improvement. And frankly, in schools in need of dramatic turnaround, a strong infusion of hope, expectation, discipline, and candor can provide the jolt that gets early improvement, which the other work must build upon and sustain. ■

The Personal Approach

A small resort town in north central Washington focuses on strong relationships to improve student achievement.

Story by JACQUELINE RAPHAEL
Photos by RICHARD ULHORN

CHELAN, Washington—It's the start of the school year. A senior student and his mother are meeting with Chelan High School principal Barry DePaoli in his office. The student is not on track to graduate.

"Francisco, let me tell you my dream," the mother says to her son. "My dream is to see you in your cap and gown on the stage."

DePaoli smiles at the student. "Your mother loves you more than anybody else in the world. Now you know her dream. If that doesn't motivate you, something's wrong."

The student nods, and DePaoli goes to work. He arranges for additional tutoring and instructional support from Francisco's teachers. He suggests to classified staff that they show a personal interest in Francisco. And he gives Francisco his cell phone number and tells him to call when he needs access to the school's computer lab.

"He's been working here many weekends," says DePaoli, several months later. "With that level of commitment, I think he's going to cross the line." He glances up at the poster on his wall, filled with individual portraits of all 393 Chelan High School students.

"The reason I come to work every day," he adds, "is to make sure each and every one of those students shakes my hand at graduation."

Chelan's personalized approach to education has produced impressive academic results. In 2008, it was one of four Washington schools to be recognized as a national Blue Ribbon School for its dramatic student achievement gains. Three years ago, only 42 percent of its 10th-graders passed the math test, 54 percent passed the writing test, and 63 percent passed the reading test. Last year, 62 percent passed math, 80 percent passed writing, and 87 percent passed reading. Compared to schools with similar demographics, Chelan High School ranks among the highest performing schools in the state.

School staff members at Chelan don't feel they "turned around" by adopting a new instructional program—although they did that. They believe it was their slow and steady progress toward building a positive, supportive, and personalized school environment that is now coming to fruition.

A Close-Knit School Community

Scenic Chelan, with 3,800 residents, sits at the tip of Lake Chelan, a gorgeous 50-mile long, 1,500-foot deep lake filled with pristine, glacier-fed water. Nestled beside Washington's Cascade Mountains and surrounded by apple orchards and wineries, its many visitors enjoy abundant year-round recreational opportunities, including boating, fishing, skiing, and golf.

As in many resort communities, a division of sorts exists in Chelan: Some of its residents own the resorts, apple orchards, and wineries, while others work in the service industry that is connected to those industries. At the high school, too, the student body is divided: 40 percent of the students are Hispanic, and most of the rest are white. About half are eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

Students say that those differences don't matter and have not divided their school.

"We're all mixed up together," says Cindy Avila, a senior and vice president of Associated Student Body (ASB) student government. "There's a real closeness among us."

"I know there are student groups, but they're … blurry," says senior Rachel Yaun, who will speak on behalf of her class in English at the upcoming graduation, while Dia Galvan will speak in Spanish. "We can talk to anyone. People are really open."

"We're pretty small and tightly knit," adds junior Derek Brunner.

Previous page: Students Victoria Wright, Derek Brunner, and Cindy Avila identify what they like best about Chelan's unique personalized approach to education. The Lake Chelan Valley in central Washington state encompasses the communities of Chelan, Manson, and Stehekin.
This page: (left) Principal Barry DePaoli; (below) math teacher Ken Barnes works with a student.

About eight years ago, staff from Chelan's elementary, middle, and high school started working together more closely. The school district began to examine instruction across all grade levels, identifying and filling in holes. In reading, curricula were aligned to strongly emphasize reading comprehension skills. In math, the district undertook a curriculum mapping process that brought increased academic rigor and consistency to instruction, particularly in the elementary grades. The district also started to replace retiring teachers with instructors who were gifted at connecting with students on a personal level. Slowly, test scores started climbing.

On the Students' Level

Because of the school's emphasis on personalization, staff members rarely stay secluded in their classrooms or offices. Instead, they are often in the cafeteria asking students about their jobs and future plans. Or, they're supervising an after-school club or extracurricular activity, or coaching a sport. Teachers also makes themselves eminently available to students.

"Everyone I know has their teacher's home number, and it's okay to call them at night or on the weekends," says Yaun. This is not an isolated circumstance: Students say most of the teachers, administrators, and classified staff spend time well beyond school hours helping students in one way or another.

Teachers also work hard at engaging students in their learning.

"They switch it up all the time," says Yaun. In her English class, students are "reading one day, dancing the next."

"We reenacted a Greek play in a park," adds Avila, who's in the same class. "Most of our classes aren't just 'sit down and do your work' classes."

These students may be responding to Chelan's implementation of a research-based instructional approach called Powerful Teaching and Learning (PTL), designed to mitigate the effects of poverty. Developed by Duane Baker and others at Seattle Pacific University, PTL strategies include scaffolding instruction, flexible grouping, cooperative learning, project-based learning, and service-learning. The program complements Chelan's personalization efforts perfectly.

Steve Bovingdon, the English department chair and a PTL coach for the district, says it has transformed his teaching: "PTL suggests that if you don't have strong relationships with students, you're not going to get a high level of student learning. At Chelan, we have a building full of people who care very deeply about students."

DePaoli is especially well-known for the respectful and caring way he conducts his relationships with students and staff. By the time he became principal in 2008, he knew the Chelan school community well, having served as a teacher, middle school principal for five years, and combined middle/high school principal for two years. His first priority was to establish trust throughout the building.

Rarely do high school students become effusive about a principal, but DePaoli gets high marks.

"Not only does he know every student in the building," says senior Annalise Nelson, "but he knows their class schedules and their parents' names."

According to senior and ASB president Victoria Wright, DePaoli is a unique school leader who doesn't expect the students' respect simply because he's the principal.

"He really works at getting on our level, talking to each student one-on-one," she says. "He's a lot more like a friend than a principal."

"Even students who don't do well academically respect Mr. DePaoli," says Brunner. "He's always striving for new ways to get students interested in what they're doing here. I don't really know what it is he does, but he sure does his job well."

Math teacher Ken Barnes says even when DePaoli brings students into his office to suspend them, "By the time they leave, they're feeling pretty good about themselves."

DePaoli admits he often gives a ride home to students he has had to expel.

"If you respect students, even when you're disciplining them, you give them an opportunity to improve. I learned this working at the alternative school."

Empowered To Raise Expectations

Slowly, over time, Chelan High School's focus on personalization created fertile ground for new ideas among the staff. As teachers began trusting themselves and their influence on students, they became more likely to take risks in order to help students succeed. They began using Chelan's positive, supportive environment to challenge all students, on a highly personal level, to succeed academically—and then the teachers started making it happen.

Nowhere is that more clear than in the math department, which holds high expectations for itself and the students. Each of its three instructors teaches a full course load, teaching at all math levels, and puts in countless extra hours before and after school. Each coaches a sport. One already has National Board certification and the other two are in the process.

"We're all pretty tired at the end of the day," says Marty Rothlisberger, in his eighth year at Chelan. When Rothlisberger first arrived, he spent a lot of time with Ken Barnes, trying to figure out how to help students perform better on the statewide assessment.

"We didn't accept that some kids would do well and others wouldn't," he says, noting that all three math teachers get genuinely frustrated if every student in the school doesn't excel in math.

Newcomer Tom Robinson, in his second year at Chelan, says that at this school—unlike larger ones—teachers think more about the connections among their individual courses.

"You can teach to get students through the course you're teaching them, or you can teach to make them successful at what's coming down the road," says Robinson. "Here, we all work hard to understand what students will be expected to do in the next course. If I teach my students Algebra I, I want to know what Marty expects of them in Geometry, and Ken in Algebra II. I don't just want them to get through algebra."

The math department combines a strong personal investment in student success with the belief that all students can meet high standards. On a small scale, Rothlisberger demonstrated this a year ago after he noticed some students weren't completing homework. With DePaoli's approval, he sent their parents a letter offering to stay after school with these students until they finished their homework. That small but significant innovation, says DePaoli, changed many student and parent attitudes.

Another innovation that has helped many students go further in their math coursework started with one teacher's data analysis project for National Board certification. The teachers observed that although the department had offered a number of remedial classes over the years, the failure rate was high, and students weren't really benefiting. So, the teachers came up with a new system: They eliminated all remedial classes and put all freshmen, including struggling students, into Algebra I.

The results still surprise them. Many of the students pass and earn full credit. Some fail, but often these students were failing the remedial classes, too. Others make progress but do not fully meet the standard, so the math teachers designed a system in which they give those students "basic algebra" credit, similar to a prealgebra credit.

"The students end up way ahead of where they would have been with a remedial class," says Rothlisberger.

"And, they've spent the year surrounded by high-achieving peers, exposed to high-level instruction," adds Barnes. Some of the students are able to retake the course and pass, yielding a much higher success rate than the remedial track did. "They come in with more confidence," says Barnes. "The first three chapters are pretty easy for them because they've seen it all before. That gets their momentum going."

These teachers don't look at the state test to measure the results of their experiment. Instead, they point to the fact that eight years ago it was a struggle to get 10 students into Precalculus, but last year 50 took it and 23 went on to take Calculus.

"We take these kids who have struggled with math before and we give them hope," says Barnes. "We have a real 'you can do this' attitude."

Over time, Chelan has become a school with "a ton of teachers who care about kids, who make them feel valued," says Rothlisberger. "And now all the test scores—in reading and math—have gone up. It takes the whole staff to pull something like that off."

DePaoli puts it this way: "If you were to ask me what makes this such a good school today, I'd say it's the combination of extremely dedicated professionals who are good at their craft, and a really positive and supportive building culture." ■

Looking for Evidence *By Basha Krasnoff*

Under the increasingly high-stakes accountability frameworks established in the NCLB law, state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) are required to assume a more proactive role in directly supporting the improvement of chronically underperforming schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). It seems reasonable to expect that external pressure from SEAs and LEAs to turn around a failing school would play an important role in the success of a turnaround effort, but Mintrop and Trujillo (2005) suggest that the external performance expectations characteristic of NCLB accountability systems alone have not been sufficient to spur substantial improvement in many schools. With 10,000 schools currently designated in need of improvement and 2,300 of them in restructuring status, there is a pressing need for research to inform school turnaround efforts (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007).

The current base of turnaround literature primarily documents successful efforts to turn around failing organizations in non-education settings. There is limited research on how to apply the turnaround practices found to be effective in other settings to chronically underperforming schools. In education, turnaround refers to a district-managed restructuring effort intended to make quick, dramatic, and sustained improvement in student academic achievement, usually by replacing the school leader and any staff associated with a school's chronic low performance (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). The general literature on district support for school improvement indicates that districts optimize the conditions for change at the school level by signaling to staff that real change is a priority for the district (Rice & Malen, 2003).

School turnaround research is generally qualitative, consisting primarily of case studies of large districts managing turnaround efforts in multiple schools. While there are no experimental or quasi-experimental studies to provide evidence of causal validity, researchers have attempted to construct analytical frameworks based on what they and others have observed across many turnaround implementations. Similar sets of conditions and actions have been documented that seem to influence the implementation of turnaround initiatives (Calkins, Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Duke, 2006; Herman, et al., 2008; Rhim, et al., 2007). In particular, two factors related to the environmental context of the school undergoing turnaround efforts and the actions of the school turnaround leader have been identified.

Multiple environmental factors outside the school influence its ability to turn around. Operating within a multilayered system that is driven by public and private agendas, public schools are highly regulated by federal and state statutes and regulations and local district policies and procedures. These are the environmental contexts that influence a school's prospects for successful turnaround (Cross, 2004). One environmental factor deemed critical to turnaround success is the pressure for speedy results. Researchers speculate that fast, focused results during the initial year are important to help establish credibility, create momentum for change, and break down resistance (Kotter, 2001).

Timing, another environmental factor, is critical at all stages of planning, implementing, and sustaining a turnaround. Researchers suggest that if the turnaround process is to succeed beyond the initial stages, an entire year should be devoted to planning the turnaround strategy. According to Malen and Rice (2004), schools that make major staff and leadership changes over the summer often struggle with chaos and poor results the following year. During the implementation stage, turnarounds seemed more likely to succeed when only a few restructuring strategies have been implemented very early in the process. Then, to sustain first-stage improvements, there must be a longer-term strategy that incorporates the changes into sustainable structures (Roberto & Levesque, 2005).

Sufficient latitude to implement substantial changes must be afforded to chronically failing schools undergoing turnaround. Research indicated that schools have a higher chance of successfully improving student performance when the district allows as much freedom as possible from regulations about scheduling, transportation, discipline, and curriculum (Kowal & Hassel, 2005). Giving turnaround principals the authority to hire and fire personnel and alter working conditions was identified in multiple cases as the kind of autonomy necessary to achieve school turnaround (Duke, et al., 2005). On the other hand, studies showed that when some leaders were not formally granted the freedom to act, they achieved results anyway, by working around the rules and seeking approval only after their strategy proved successful.

Decades of research have documented that strong leadership is a crucial determinant of school success (Walters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The specific capabilities that distinguish effective turnaround leaders from ineffective ones are not known; however, research documenting turnarounds across public and private organizations concludes that having the right kind of leadership at the right juncture of the turnaround effort is critical. There is also some evidence that the qualities of successful turnaround leadership change over the course of the turnaround effort (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003).

During the initial phase of turnaround, when speedy results are crucial, successful leaders require competencies and skills that provoke and facilitate dramatic change. The literature suggests that turnaround leaders draw on a unique capacity to spend all initial energy on speedy, urgent, trial-and-error activity to quickly determine what changes will work and then take incisive actions to get results in one specific problem area (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom 2004). An early victory in one specific problem area plays an important role in the ultimate success of the turnaround because it serves as a powerful symbol for the entire school community that dramatic change and success are possible (Galvin & Parsley, 2005). Then, as the organization shifts to sustaining these changes, leaders are more likely to exhibit the classic leadership competencies typically associated with organizational success.

Successfully turning around a chronically underperforming school necessitates significant organizational change. This requires willingness on the part of leadership to implement strategies that deviate from current organizational policies. The case study literature is replete with examples of actions successful turnaround leaders took to implement real change that created conflict in the organization. In his examination of turnaround change in schools, Fullan (2005) explained that the deviation from organizational policies creates "productive conflict" because requiring that things be done differently communicates that the status quo is no longer acceptable.


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Each year, as increasing numbers of schools are identified as chronically underperforming, more districts are being required by law to implement restructuring strategies. It would serve these districts and schools well to have documentation of successful school turnaround processes and analyses of the critical factors across schools. Without a solid body of evidence directly based on school turnaround efforts, it is impossible to identify with any validity the kind of conditions, knowledge, skills, and competencies that are essential to successfully turn around chronically underperforming schools. ■

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See RESEARCH, *page 37*

A Writer's Voice: The Where and How of Turnaround Success *By Karin Chenoweth*

Karin Chenoweth is a senior writer at the Education Trust and the author of *"It's Being Done": Academic Success in Unexpected Schools* (Harvard Education Press, 2007).

Educators who want to lead improvement in their schools sometimes are stymied by not knowing where to begin. After all, principals in low-performing schools must attend to a great deal—discipline, school environment, curriculum, instruction, textbooks and supplies, teacher quality, teacher evaluation, scheduling, relationships with parents, relationships with districts. And that doesn't even touch the day-to-day crises with late buses, lunch deliveries, and broken furnaces.

In the past few years, writing about successful high-poverty and high-minority schools for the Education Trust, I have been lucky to speak at length to quite a few educators who have been part of turning around low-performing schools.

I have yet to meet a successful principal who has tried to tackle everything alone. Rather, they approach the complex issues involved in running schools by mobilizing the collective skills and knowledge of their staff. They lead their entire schools through a process of improvement that requires the hard work of every grown-up in the building. In other words, they don't try to be superhuman. But they do hold onto what one principal I know calls the "superhuman belief" that all students are capable of learning and that it is the job of educators to figure out how to teach each of them.

Sometimes these school leaders began with functional but mediocre schools; sometimes they faced completely broken, dysfunctional schools. In the first category is P.S./M.S. 124 in Queens, New York. "We weren't a failing school; we were marginal," is how the current principal, Valarie Lewis, describes the school as it was back in 1999, when she was a teacher. With more than 80 percent of its students meeting the requirements for free lunch, P.S. 124 today performs at levels normally associated with some of the wealthiest schools in New York City and the state.

In the broken, dysfunctional category was Granger High School, in the Yakima Valley of Washington. I spoke to a number of people about what the school used to be like, and the general consensus was "dangerous." The town of Granger had the highest crime rate in the Yakima Valley, which is plagued by the presence of gangs. About 90 percent of Granger High's students, most of whom are Latino, qualify for free and reduced-price meals, and academic achievement back in 2001 was startlingly low—far less than half of the students graduated, and only 20 percent of students met state proficiency in reading. Writing and math proficiency rates were in the single digits.

That was when Richard Esparza became principal. Seven years later, in May 2008, 90 percent of the students graduated, and 90 percent of graduates had concrete plans for postsecondary education ranging from technical school to four-year university. Reading and writing proficiency rates were near the state levels. And the last time I checked, Granger had the lowest crime rate in the Yakima Valley.

On the surface, P.S. 124 and Granger have very little in common. One is a high-performing elementary-middle school, the other a rapidly improving but not yet high-performing high school. One is mostly African American and Asian, the other mostly Latino with some American Indian students. One has more than 1,000 students, the other about 330 students. One is urban, the other in the middle of a rural, agricultural area where most families pick apples, hops, and grapes for a living.

But the things the schools have in common are what permitted them to make the kinds of gains they have made.

Both had leaders who believed that all students could achieve and insisted that teachers take responsibility for their students' academic achievement. "I come from poverty," Esparza told me. "I come from where the students come from. I figure if I can make it, anybody can make it."

With that as the foundational belief, both schools had faculty willing to change what they were doing—and leaders who encouraged the departure of any faculty member unwilling to change. "No one has the right to waste a day in the life of a child," says Lewis. In both schools, educators spent a great deal of time thinking deeply about what they want students to learn and how to teach them. They also thought carefully about the kind of school environment to cultivate for students. Both schools involved students' families in direct ways—P.S. 124 by teaching the curriculum to parents on Saturdays; Granger by setting up a system where all students' parents or guardians have attended parent conferences twice a year for seven years.

Those are just a few of the things that have allowed once low-performing schools to achieve academic success.

Sustaining such success is another question, requiring supportive districts that appoint principals willing to build on the success of their predecessors. I haven't met a high-performing principal who thinks he or she is indispensable, but they all know that a successor can easily dismantle carefully built structures that supported high achievement. This is why it is important to understand those structures.

I explore many of those issues in a book that will be published in the fall by Harvard Education Press. The title is *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons From Unexpected Schools.* In the meantime, to read more about Granger High School, see this posting on Britannica blog. To read about P.S. 124 and a number of other high-performing, high-poverty, or high-minority schools, look under "School Profiles" in the reports and publications section of www.edtrust.org.

If you would like to hear directly from leaders in what I call "It's Being Done" schools, consider participating in one of Ed Trust's free webinars. To participate, e-mail jvelasco@edtrust.org and put "Webinar RSVP" in the subject line. You will receive instructions on how to link in. ■

RESEARCH

Continued from page 36

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Digging Deeper

By the Numbers: Student Enrollment Affects Adequate Yearly Progress *By Richard Greenough*

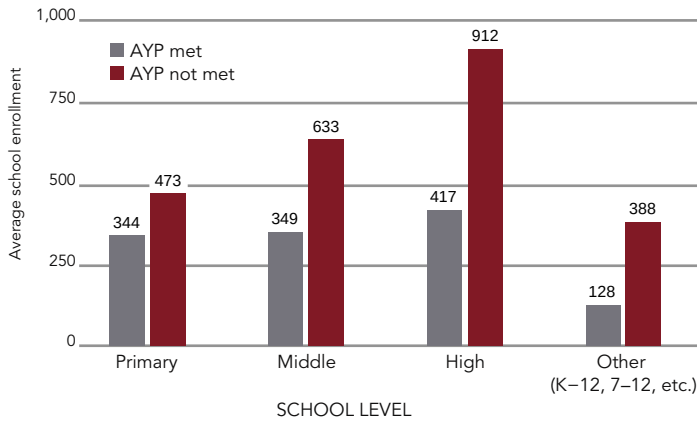
Across the Northwest region, the bigger a school is the more likely it is to miss the "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) targets under the No Child Left Behind Act. This is an often overlooked but not surprising fact, given that larger schools are more likely to meet the minimum number of students required for AYP determinations on subgroups such as economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, or racial/ethnic minority students.

Title I middle and high schools that missed AYP in the 2008 determinations are three times as large in enrollment as Title I schools that met AYP. At the elementary level, Title I schools that missed AYP are 47 percent larger than those that met it.

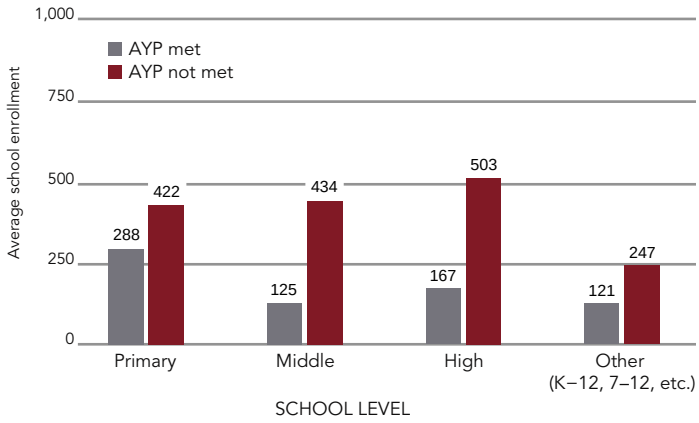
For non–Title I schools, which are larger on average than Title I schools, the differences are slightly less dramatic but still impressive. At the middle and high school levels, non–Title I schools that missed AYP are twice as large as those that met AYP, and at the elementary level they are 38 percent larger.

It is important to recognize and account for the correlation between school size and not meeting AYP when examining other patterns in AYP results. Great caution should be used in comparing schools that do not meet the minimum subgroup sizes for the same groups. In addition, since the same school may meet minimum subgroup sizes one year and not the next, identification of "turnaround" schools should use underlying assessment data rather than AYP met/not met determinations. ■

Average Enrollment of Non–Title I Schools, by AYP Status and School Level, in the Northwest Region, School Year 2007–2008



Average Enrollment of Title I Schools, by AYP Status and School Level, in the Northwest Region, School Year 2007–2008



END NOTE

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Lapwai Elementary, located on the Nez Perce Reservation in Lapwai, Idaho, has received national attention for its remarkable record of increasing student achievement. As chronicled in *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons From Unexpected Schools* (see Voices, page 36), the high-poverty, Native American school raised student proficiency rates from around 20 percent in the 1990s to 80 percent proficiency in reading and 86 percent proficiency in math today. Principal Teri Wagner reflects on the journey:

> "I walk into the same classroom that I taught in all those years ago and every child is sitting there reading a book independently at their grade level. That sounds ordinary but to me it's extraordinary because I've seen the difference. It's those children's parents that I taught and now their children are successful and have choices and will be able to do anything they want to do. That is quite a story. It took too long, but it is an extraordinary story and there are the same stories that are being told all over the country. So, it really can be done."

Read how Lapwai did it in our Web exclusive interview with Wagner.

Believing in Kids: How One High-Poverty Elementary Found a Way To Boost Proficiency

NWREL Connects Experts and Practitioners at IES-Funded Workshops

In this age of No Child Left Behind, student proficiency percentage scores are ubiquitous. However, according to one national expert, these statistics can offer a skewed and even misleading picture of educational improvement over time and are especially problematic as indicators of progress toward equity in educational opportunity.

Dr. Andrew Ho, a researcher from the University of Iowa, presented his research at a daylong workshop on March 25, 2009, in Seattle, Washington. Ho's presentation was one of three events this spring sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and other partners. The aim of these events was to share the latest findings from IES-sponsored research with teachers, administrators, and policymakers.

Using the analogy of six blind men describing an elephant, Ho demonstrated how our perception of proficiency can be influenced by what part of the distribution of student data we emphasize. Just as one man might touch the elephant's trunk and another its tail and arrive at wildly different ideas about the animal, educators examining the same data may come to different conclusions by selecting various cut scores.

The failure to see the bigger picture contained in the data has serious consequences for school accountability decisions and policy making. For example, achievement gaps might be increasing at one point in the distribution (at the "basic," "proficient," or "advanced" cut score) but decreasing at another point. Both could be "correct" views of the data, but neither by itself leads to a sound understanding of changes in achievement gaps. Instead, Ho argues that plotting averages of test scores or changes over time at certain percentiles will foster a more complete understanding of trends and gaps.

Drs. Michael Coe and Bob Rayborn of NWREL's Center for Research, Evaluation, and Assessment invited Ho to present his work to the region and collaborated with the Washington Educational Research Association to sponsor the event. Additional presentations are planned for Alaska, Idaho, Montana, and Oregon. "Andrew's work provides an elegant, comprehensive understanding of the problems with the current terms of discussion about student achievement," says Coe. "He presents a suite of improved methods for reporting and interpreting student achievement data."

Ho's session was attended by data analysts from 18 of Washington's largest school districts, representatives from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and other education professionals. "As Dr. Ho was talking, I realized we need to be more cognizant of the need to report data in different ways," said Lynn Caulkins, a data specialist from the Edmonds (WA) School District. Debbie Tito, director of assessment for the Renton (WA) School District, commented, "I'm really excited about going back to my school district and pulling just one cohort—for example, ninth-grade reading—and applying averages to see if it tells our story differently. I'm intrigued by the notion that we think we're monitoring the achievement gap but we're not, because we're not doing it properly."

An April 22 workshop given by Dr. Diane Halpern, a psychology professor at Claremont McKenna College, described how teachers can support girls in math and science classrooms through strategies such as project-based learning, use of technology, and group work on real-world problems. Halpern's keynote was followed by panels of teachers, directors of enrichment programs, and women who've forged successful careers in science, technology, engineering, and math.

"Finding ways to encourage girls and students in other underrepresented groups to remain in science, math, and engineering classes—and eventually pursue careers in those fields—is of considerable importance in the region and the nation as a whole," according to Dr. Liza Finkel of NWREL's Center for Classroom Teaching and Learning. In presenting the workshop, the center partnered with the Pacific Northwest Girls Collaborative Project and Lewis & Clark College Graduate School of Education.

Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Research Forum for Northwest Region Leaders convened principals, superintendents, and improvement facilitators from schools in corrective action or facing restructuring. At the April 30 gathering, Drs. Rebecca Maynard and Sam Redding presented the four major findings contained in their IES practice guide on school turnarounds. "This practice guide provides actionable recommendations based on research about chronically underperforming schools that *have* made significant improvement in student outcomes within three years," says Deborah Davis, a unit director in NWREL's Center for School and District Improvement, who organized the workshop. Davis points out the research is especially important to the Northwest since nearly 300 schools here are in "corrective action" or "first year of restructuring planning" because, according to 2007–2008 data, they have not made adequate yearly progress for five or more years.

NWREL plans to offer additional workshops that connect practitioners to evidence-based research. Check out the events section of www.nwrel.org for future listings. ■

NWREL Offers Recovery Act Resources

The infusion of $115 billion in new short-term federal education aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) presents both a breathtaking opportunity and a sobering challenge. States, districts, and schools are faced with the unique chance to introduce effective and long-lasting changes that could ultimately improve student achievement for generations to come.

How then to decide where to invest these one-time funds, especially when facing a fast-track time line? Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is offering guidance through the online Northwest Education Recovery Clearinghouse. Located at www.nwrel.org/nwarra/, the Clearinghouse offers principles for investing, links to federal and state resources, and an opportunity to get answers to specific questions. The site is frequently updated and provides easy access to critical information.

"The Recovery Act site will help those who receive funding make good spending decisions," says Deborah Davis, unit director in NWREL's Center for School and District Improvement. Davis is part of the team responsible for keeping the site's content current. "The goal is to minimize the funding cliff by making decisions that lead to sustainable improvements," she says. "In most cases there is a two-year time frame for spending, so people want to know how to spend funds in such a way that there is long-term impact." Davis notes that NWREL offers expertise through "shovel-ready" projects and award-winning materials that can help schools and districts build capacity to maximize and sustain ARRA investments.

ARRA team members Jeff Jones, Deborah Davis, Lisa Todd, and Jennifer Klump

After conversations with superintendents, principals, and state policymakers, NWREL developed these guidelines for using Recovery Act awards effectively:

- Build sustained capacity for improvement through specialized training or recertification of existing school staff or the creation of district- and school-level specialists in key areas such as improved instruction, more effective use of data, or dropout prevention. Some of these may be one-time, "just in time" investments that can accomplish their goal within one to two years, such as technology upgrades or training in technology integration. Others, such as training programs or the creation of specialists, may require a larger up-front investment but can be sustained at lower costs in the long run.
- Optimize and upgrade the use of existing resources for the long haul. Invest in human capital by maintaining talent and developing in-district expertise. Improve classroom space, laboratories, and technology access.
- Increase the efficiency of essential services to reduce long-term fixed costs. Upgrade systems such as HVAC, lighting, and computers and software for both classroom and administrative functions. Integrate services to streamline central office functions with strategies such as cooperative purchasing and combining administrative functions.
- Create a more evidence-based decision structure for planning, implementing, and evaluating district programs. Consider evaluating all major programs, new and old, so that if and when funds are more limited the most effective programs can be kept and others reduced or eliminated. Create policies, procedures, and expertise for prioritization, budgeting, and roll-out of new programs.
- Consider investments in innovative programs with potential major benefits for students. These should be programs that will demonstrate their promise in their first years of operation, making a case for future support by government or other sources.

In addition to resources, the site offers several quick and easy ways for educators and administrators to contact NWREL with specific questions about understanding and taking advantage of ARRA. Users of the site can e-mail requests or call NWREL directly for assistance. Education Resource Advisor Jennifer Klump, who handles the Northwest Lab's Reference Desk, is fielding the inquiries.

"I think that carrying on with NWREL's goal of providing useful and reliable information easily, as I do on the Reference Desk, can be a valuable service for our region," says Klump. "One thing we've always known is that people will contact NWREL looking for reliable information rather than just doing an Internet search and trying to make sense of it on their own. Also, if people are interested in maximizing their investments, I will be able to direct them to services and products to guide them in that."

NWREL stands ready to help our constituents use the funds wisely to stimulate learning for future generations. ■

Early Algebra Training for K–8 Teachers Available This Summer

NWREL's mathematics professional development program, which helps teachers introduce algebraic reasoning in the elementary grades, has been drawing national attention. An article in *Education Week* titled "Kiddie Algebra" highlights how teacher Melissa Romano in Helena, Montana, taps into her second-graders' intuitive number sense to build algebraic concepts. According to the article, Ms. Romano's typical math lesson now involves a lot of interaction based not only on what "the correct answer" is, but also on the processes students use to solve a problem.

"During one recent class, she gave her second-graders a problem about geese flying in V formation. She used flocks of different sizes—three geese, five geese, seven geese. If the geese fly in a perfect V, she asked them, how many end up flying on each side?

Over the course of the class period, the pupils learned that with odd-numbered flocks, they could solve the problem by dividing the total number of geese by two, and subtracting one, for the lead goose. Ms. Romano moved on to ever-larger numbers: 49, 105. Eventually, she and children worked out a formula they could use to solve the problem: $\frac{x-1}{2}$

Some students ended up making calculations into the hundreds. When others struggled, Ms. Romano encouraged them to draw pictures to illustrate their thinking. All told, the teacher spent 60 minutes working on variations of that single problem."

Source: Cavanagh, S. (2009, February 10). Kiddie Algebra. *Education Week, 28*(21), 21–23.

A December 28, 2008, article in *The Oregonian* by Betsy Hammond reports how schools in Lebanon, Oregon, are introducing algebra as early as the first grade and how this approach is starting to pay off. "More than 80 percent of Lebanon eighth-graders passed the state math test, compared with 66 percent at schools with similar demographics. No other large or medium-size Oregon district outdid its peers by 15 percentage points," writes Hammond.

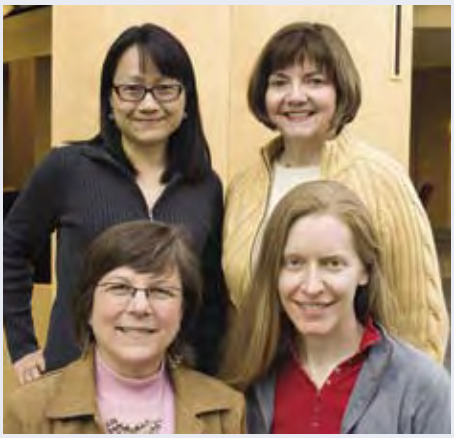
What do the Helena School District and Lebanon School District have in common? As the *Education Week* and *The Oregonian* pieces point out, elementary teachers in these communities attended NWREL's mathematics institutes on developing children's number sense and algebraic reasoning.

This summer, K–8 educators have the opportunity to attend these popular professional development institutes July 7–10 in Pasco, Washington, or August 10–13 in Spokane, Washington.

The four-day institutes are separated by grade bands into three different workshops. In addition to the previously offered workshops for educators serving grades K–2 and 3–5, NWREL staff are introducing a new workshop for teachers of grades 6–8 this year. While the overall objective of the summer institutes is to provide instructional strategies for building connections between number sense and algebraic reasoning, each workshop has a different content focus:

- Participants in the K–2 session will learn how children develop concepts for addition and subtraction.
- In the grades 3–5 session, teachers will learn how children construct concepts for multiplication and division.
- The new offering for educators of grades 6–8 will focus on rational numbers and proportional reasoning.

Linda Griffin directs NWREL's Mathematics Education Unit, which has trained about 700 teachers in algebraic reasoning and number sense since 2004. She encourages team attendance at the institutes. "We like to see any combination of teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators from the same school or district participate together in hopes that the work they begin at the institute can be sustained through continued collaboration upon returning to school," she explains.



Mathematics Education Unit training facilitators (clockwise from top left) Melinda Leong, Claire Gates, Lisa Lavalle, and Linda Griffin

Clock hours are available for the summer institutes. To learn more, go to www.nwrel.org/math/institutes/ or contact Cathy Clark Thomas at 800-547-6339, ext. 662, or clarkc@nwrel.org.

Schools and districts can also contract with NWREL for on-site training and technical assistance in K–8 number sense and algebraic reasoning, as well as many other areas related to mathematics teaching and learning. Visit www.nwrel.org/math/ for descriptions of available services and to find contact information for each service. ■

Recreating Secondary Schools Program To Host Second Annual Conference in June

After a successful inaugural event in 2008, NWREL is holding the second annual From Structure to Instruction: Sharing Best Practices and Lessons Learned From High School Redesign Efforts. High school leadership teams from across the country will convene in Las Vegas, June 21–24, to learn effective approaches and develop plans for transforming large, comprehensive high schools into more personalized learning environments.

Participants at last year's conference praised the opportunity to network with practitioners from all over the country; learn from "excellent speakers with functional information"; attend a variety of "well-organized, relevant, absolutely incredible" sessions; and participate in "up close and personal" coaching sessions for "individualized help" with "practical items and strategies."

During an intensive four days, teams of teachers, administrators, and district staff will gather information in interactive workshops given by technical assistance providers and practitioners with "in the trenches" experience in high school restructuring. "What makes this conference unique is that after attending topical workshops, teams can opt to participate in team planning with coaches of their choosing. In the coaching sessions, teams can pursue questions about how to apply the information they gathered or how to solve problems they are encountering in their school improvement efforts. This is not your typical 'sit and get' seminar event," explains NWREL's Diana Oxley, author of *From High School to Learning Communities: Five Domains of Best Practice* and one of the event's organizers.

This year's conference features preconference sessions on Sunday. These half- and whole-day sessions offer in-depth information and assistance in a small-group format on topics such as interdisciplinary curriculum design, scheduling, and district support. Concurrent presentations on common redesign issues follow, Monday through Wednesday. On Tuesday and Wednesday, practitioners and technical assistance providers offer tailored coaching to help teams solidify their plans and troubleshoot anticipated barriers. All sessions are in workshop format.

Sessions are organized into six strands:

1. Competence in Core Subjects—Making Change Really Happen
2. Participating in Professional Learning Communities—Supporting SLC Strategies
3. Combining the Core and CTE—Creating Relevance and Rigor in Career and Technical Education
4. Equity and Access for All—Working With Special Education, Diverse Students, and Homogeneous Grouping
5. Sorting Shifting Leadership Roles—Sharing Leadership Across the Building
6. Keys to the Kingdom—Creating a Flexible Master Schedule and Changing Classroom Practices

Keynoting this year's event are Dr. Martin Haberman and Ako Kambon. Haberman, who founded the National Teacher Corps, is widely known for his work in developing teacher education programs focused on serving students at risk and in poverty. His presentation will address the ideology and behaviors of effective teachers in the most challenging settings. Kambon, president of Visionary Leaders Institute and a leader in educational team building, will look at the profound differences of urban classrooms today and how teaching and leadership strategies must and can align with those differences to achieve academic excellence.

The event is organized by NWREL's Recreating Secondary Schools Program, which has a seven-year track record of helping high schools around the country transform into more personal learning communities. Conference planners collaborate with a national advisory group of practitioners. ■

Dates: June 21–24, 2009 (full and half-day preconference workshops on June 21)

Location: University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Participants can lodge across the street at the newly renovated Embassy Suites Las Vegas for the group rate of $134 per night.

Registration: Register by May 20 for the early bird rate of $550 per person. After May 20 the cost is $650 per person. Team participation is strongly encouraged—teams of three or more people from the same institution pay the discounted rates of $495 and $585 respectively. The final day to register is June 19, 2009.

Web site: www.nwrel.org/slcconference/2009/

E-mail; phone: hays@nwrel.org; 503-275-9621

This national conference is organized by the Recreating Secondary Schools Program of NWREL. It is NOT affiliated with the USDOE/OESE SLCP Program or with the technical assistance provided through its contract with NWREL. All activities will be underwritten by registration fees and contributions by participating organizations and businesses.

2008 Annual Report Now Online

NWREL's annual report for fiscal year 2008 was released earlier this year and is available online in PDF format at www.nwrel.org/annual-report/. The report highlights stories about how the Portland-based nonprofit research, development, and service agency is making a difference in building educational skills and knowledge throughout the Northwest region and beyond.

Whatever the activity—conducting ELL program reviews, providing training and coaching to help recreate secondary schools, helping service organizations with training and resources, conducting evaluations of Reading First programs, supporting vocational education grant programs on Indian reservations, or spreading the word about effective practices through our award-winning magazine—NWREL's ultimate goal is to improve teaching and learning by applying research-based knowledge.

Last year, more than 23,000 people received training, technical assistance, or other services from NWREL, approximately 40 percent of whom were from schools and local education agencies and another 42 percent from nonprofit and community organizations. This reflects a broadening of NWREL's reach to include a wider array of clients who are important to supporting learners and lifelong learning. The majority of these activities (59 percent) were in the form of workshops and other meetings that prepare educators and community people to work more effectively with learners, while another 17 percent included data collection and information-gathering activities that result from NWREL's growing capabilities in applied research.

The stories in the annual report are concrete demonstrations of how NWREL is building knowledge and sharing lessons, encouraging high expectations for learning, helping educators meet demanding standards, promoting dialogue and connecting people, facing educational challenges together with school leaders, acting as critical friends and coaches, building community capacity and, through it all, making a difference in the lives of students and educators. ■

Conference Call

Visit NWREL's online calendar of events at www.nwrel.org/events/ for complete details on upcoming workshops and conferences.

6+1 TRAIT® WRITING INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP

May 13–15, 2009, Welches, OR
October 14–16, 2009, Cannon Beach, OR
The introductory institute is designed to address grades 3–12 in one session, and grades PK–2 in another. Participants—classroom, special education, and ELL teachers; literacy coaches and trainers; curriculum specialists; and school and district administrators—will explore proven teaching strategies and classroom-tested resources, learn how to build a learning community that shares a common vocabulary and vision of quality writing performance, and much more.

6+1 TRAIT® WRITING FOR PRESENTERS

June 30–July 2, 2009
Gleneden Beach, OR
This advanced institute is for those who wish to conduct their own in-district trait workshops. Participation in an introductory trait institute and classroom experience teaching the traits are prerequisites. The institute will include the examination of the research supporting the 6+1 Trait Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment, lesson design and curriculum mapping, and how to incorporate adult learning strategies into professional development workshops.

6+1 TRAIT® WEE WRITERS' INSTITUTE

July 13–14, 2009
Chicago, IL
Learn the 6+1 Trait Writing model using the renowned children's literature your youngest students (grades PK–2) know and love. Get comfortable with the traits vocabulary so that you can share with your students a common language to talk about writing each day and provide them with a solid foundation for writing throughout their school lives. This workshop provides a variety of practical activities that are flexible, creative, take no more than a few minutes to prepare, and can be implemented in the classroom immediately.

HIGH SCHOOL LEARNING COMMUNITIES NATIONAL CONFERENCE

June 21–24, 2009
Las Vegas, NV
See page 43 for details.

MATHEMATICS INSTITUTES FOR TEACHERS OF GRADES K–2, 3–5, AND 6–8

July 7–10, 2009, Pasco, WA
August 10–13, 2009, Spokane, WA
See page 42 for details.

Flashback

AUTHOR FACILITATES WORKSHOP ON USING WEE CAN™ WRITE

Teachers of "wee" writers from Oregon and Washington came to NWREL in January for the 6+1 Trait® Wee Writers' Institute. The sold-out event was facilitated by Carolyn McMahon, coauthor of the best-selling line of Wee Can™ guidebooks offering 6+1 Trait writing activities for teachers of grades PK–2. Participants spent a fun but intensive two days learning practical ways to enrich writing experiences across the classroom curriculum content areas, as well as creative ideas and activities based on classic literature that children love.

EVENT FOCUSES ON THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL MATHEMATICS ADVISORY PANEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SEAS

A symposium was held in late January for SEA representatives from Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma to discuss implications and next steps regarding the 2008 report *Foundations for Success: The Final Report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel.* NMAP members presented the report's findings and recommendations in seven areas that can impact student success in preparation for algebra. The two-day event held in Portland was sponsored by the Northwest Regional Comprehensive Center (housed at NWREL) in collaboration with the Mid-continent Comprehensive Center (MC3).

PEOPLE FROM ACROSS NORTH AMERICA LEARN TO DELIVER TRAIT WORKSHOPS

Educators from nine states plus Canada gathered in Portland for the 6+1 Trait® Writing Institute for Presenters, March 4–6. After participating in this advanced three-day institute, 26 new presenters can now instruct other educators in their communities on how to use the internationally popular trait-based model for teaching and assessing student writing.

NWREL BOARD MEETS IN WHITEFISH FOR ANNUAL RETREAT

In March, the Board of Directors spent an intensive three days in Whitefish, Montana, examining NWREL's role in supporting state and local education agencies with the investment of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. A highlight of the meeting was a talk given by Montana's newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau. She offered

a view of the state's K–12 education system and its challenges and spoke of the significance of the ARRA dollars to the state. "This is the moment schools have been waiting for," she said. "We will use additional federal dollars to rejuvenate education with innovative programs that will increase student achievement. We will all be required to tell our state's story of how these dollars helped students. If this opportunity is squandered, another moment like this may never arrive. It is an important time in our education system, and I know our system is up for this challenge." ■

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Doing More With Less