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AUTHOR Wang, Margaret C.; Manning, JoAnn  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes one successful approach to restoring failing urban schools. The project involved six low-performing District of Columbia elementary schools. Its goal was to turn the schools around by implementing the Community for Learning comprehensive school reform model. It involved collaboration between the school district, school staff, and Temple University's Laboratory for Student Success. Staff and student turnover was significant during the project, which challenged implementation and required intensive implementation training and professional development support. Findings on program implementation and outcomes for the first 2 years indicated a positive pattern toward program outcomes, including changes in teacher and student classroom behavior, degree of program implementation, and student achievement. The two most salient ingredients to success were: focusing on each student's learning needs and tailoring the instructional program to address them and emphasizing the strengths of the school and the community instead of highlighting solely on what was wrong. The effort did not present a different curriculum, throw out everything old in favor of the new, or hire significant numbers of new staff. It used the schools' resources, preserving what worked and supplementing with improved practices. It built in elements that reinforced teachers' competence, which helped sustain change. (SM)

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The Case of the Washington, DC Schools**

by  
Margaret C. Wang and JoAnn Manning

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**Turning Around Low-Performing Schools:  
The Case of the Washington, DC Schools**

*Margaret C. Wang and JoAnn Manning*

As we enter the next millennium, the United States is experiencing marked transformations in a variety of critical realms. What was once a land of secure jobs, effective laws, and well-knit homes is rapidly becoming defined by the homeless, the jobless, and the lawless. This is especially true in urban communities across the country, where rates of poverty, crime, and unemployment far exceed those of suburban and rural areas. In the end, the schools are hardest hit. Their students are often woefully unprepared, lacking good nutrition, medical care, safe transportation, and adequate academic preparation. Urban schools in their current condition are clearly unable to withstand the social forces that affect them. For the nation and its cities to remain vital, schools must not only anticipate changes but also lead toward solutions. Otherwise, the current generation of children in urban communities, which are plagued with modern morbidities of our time, will be consigned to lives of academic, economic, and social marginalization.

Making these general statements about the severity of urban problems (e.g., widespread academic failure) is relatively easy; the real challenge is finding feasible, practical, affordable solutions to these problems. How can we transform our urban schools to achieve student success? We contend that information already exists from research and practical application of innovative school reform approaches that work and would be useful in the ongoing efforts to revitalize this nation's urban schools. Research and practical experience indicate that the capacity for school success is not mysterious. It is a capacity that can be developed and nurtured even in some of the most challenging circumstances. What is certain is that transforming low-performing schools to work better is difficult but does not, and cannot, take years. Genuine improvements can come about in short order, provided certain conditions are created for success.

In this chapter we describe one approach that is feasible and has shown to be promising in helping restore failing urban schools. This is an illustration of how schools can defy adversity and restore and nurture the expertise and talents of their teachers and students to achieve the vision of schooling success.

## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

During the summer of 1996, the superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DC Schools) asked the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, to assist the District in designing a comprehensive school reform initiative to help its lowest performing schools to significantly improve their capacity to increase student achievement. An implementation plan for a collaborative demonstration project to implement a comprehensive approach to whole-school reform was developed by the DC Schools and LSS. In September 1996, the plan was unanimously approved by the DC school board and the project officially began its implementation in October.

Five elementary schools were selected by the DC Schools to participate in the demonstration project. These schools were identified as some of the lowest performing schools in the District and had shown a continuous pattern of decline in student achievement. The schools were mandated by the superintendent to implement a research-based comprehensive school reform plan, with implementation assistance from LSS. The schools were not given a choice about their participation. The school staff had the option to ask for a transfer without losing seniority. None of the staff requested a transfer.

The superintendent who initiated the project was fired by the school board at the end of October. This is the month when the project began implementation. The project was implemented under three superintendents during its first 2 years of operation.

## THE PROJECT

The project began during the 1996–1997 academic year with five schools, and included a sixth school during the 1997–1998 academic year. The overall goal of the project was to demonstrate the feasibility of turning around the lowest performing schools by implementing a comprehensive school reform model, known as the Community for Learning program, to significantly improve student achievement.

### The Community for Learning Program

The Community for Learning (CFL) program was developed at the Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education (Wang, 1992, 1998). It is an implementation delivery framework designed to assist schools in implementing a comprehensive approach to school reform that is systemic and sustainable in achieving student success. CFL was field-tested with much success in several major cities, including Houston and Philadelphia (e.g., McComb, 1999; Oates, Flores, & Weishew, 1998; Wang, Oates, & Weishew, 1995). Implementation focuses on a coordinated process of uniting the expertise and resources of the school, family, and community to ensure a high standard of achievement of each student. A high degree of program implementation of CFL is expected to strengthen the capacity of schools to mobilize and redeploy school and community resources to support a comprehensive, coordinated, inclusive approach to achieving schoolwide student success. Education programs implemented in CFL schools are connected with broad-based efforts of students' families and the community to significantly improve student achievement and the expertise of adults—a *community for learning*. A synopsis of the design of CFL is provided in the Appendix.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

As a part of the implementation design, specific roles and responsibilities were delineated for the participating demonstration DC Schools and LSS.

The School District of the District of Columbia agreed to:

- Designate a District official to serve as the coordinator of the project. The primary responsibility of this individual was to oversee the project's implementation in the collaborating demonstration schools and to serve as a liaison for the DC Schools' central administration, the demonstration schools, and LSS. The project coordinator also worked with the LSS program implementation staff and the school staff in designing and implementing professional development and technical assistance programs to meet the implementation needs of the staff at the demonstration schools.
- Provide a full-time facilitator for each of the five schools to assist the principals and teachers in achieving a high degree of program implementation.
- Provide LSS with School District-collected student achievement data and other relevant data to conduct evaluative analyses of program progress and impact on student achievement, and assist schools in using the database for making programming decisions and professional development plans.

The demonstration schools continued to receive the same support and resource allocation from the School District. No extra resources were given to or withdrawn from the schools.

The responsibilities of the school staff included the following:

- The demonstration schools were responsible for demonstrating a high degree of implementation of the CFL program.
- All school staff were to begin implementation of CFL by the beginning of the 1996–1997 academic year.
- The principals of the demonstration schools were to work closely with the project coordinator, their respective facilitators, and the LSS implementation staff in developing an implementation assistance plan that closely aligned the resources, organization support mechanisms, and personnel deployment of each school to ensure a high degree of program implementation by the school staff.
- The school staff were to participate in professional development workshops and planning sessions to learn about CFL, and develop implementation plans and strategies to achieve a high degree of program implementation.
- School staff were to participate in collecting program implementation and outcome data to document program implementation and outcomes.

The Laboratory for Student Success agreed to provide the following implementation support services to the DC demonstration schools at no cost to the School District for at least 3 years:

- Assist the School District and the five participating demonstration schools in conducting needs assessments for developing an implementation plan that determines the support needs of each school.

- Provide preimplementation training and continuing professional development support to each school through on-site assistance to teachers and professional development support for the principals and facilitators.
- Provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance that focuses on capacity building. This capacity-building role will vary from school to school, based on their needs and implementation progress.
- Assist the schools in collecting and analyzing implementation and program outcome data to inform the School District and schools of their implementation progress and program impact on student achievement and other program outcomes.
- Work with the District and demonstration schools in developing a plan to establish the demonstration and professional development capacity at each of the schools to assist the School District in replicating CFL in other, interested schools in subsequent years.

### **THE DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS**

The five schools began implementation during 1996–1997, the project’s first year. One additional school was added to the CFL network of demonstration schools during Year 2. This school was also identified as one of the low-performing schools by the District that required “special intervention.” However, it was the decision of the staff from this school, not the School District administration, to implement CFL as the core reform program for improving the achievement of the students.

Table 1 provides a synopsis of the demographic characteristics of the students in the six CFL demonstration schools. Figure 1 shows the geographic location of the schools.

As is typical of most, if not all, schools in large urban school districts, the six Year 2 CFL demonstration schools experienced a significantly large teacher and student turnover rate, and changes in their administrative staff, including the appointment of two new principals, one new



assistant principal, and three new facilitators. Furthermore, many of the replacement administrators and teachers were not appointed until several months after the schools had opened. As a result, although five of the six schools were entering their second year of implementation, they opened the school with many disadvantages and implementation problems. While the challenges faced by schools in overcoming these implementation problems are not unique, the degree of program implementation and program impact must be viewed in light of these ongoing implementation challenges. Table 2 shows the statistics that illustrate some of the challenges faced by the schools as they addressed the implementation needs resulting from the changes.

As shown in Table 2, during the 1997–1998 academic year, major personnel changes took place in all six demonstration schools. These changes resulted in the need for intensive implementation training and professional development support, despite the fact that five of the six demonstration schools were entering their second year of CFL implementation.

For example, for School F, the near-50% teacher turnover rate meant that the school began the academic year with an insufficient number of teachers. The school did not have a consistent number of teachers throughout the school year and did not have a full complement of teachers until June 1998. The staffing situation necessitated the continuous reassignment of students to classes, while coping with the pressure of providing on-the-job implementation training for new teachers.

School B began the school year with a new principal and a high percentage of new teachers (39%). The school was without a facilitator until December 1997, and an assistant principal was not appointed until February 1998.

School D began the academic year with several break-ins during the first 3 weeks after the school's opening. All of the school's computers and high-tech equipment were stolen.

School C began the academic year with a new principal and a high percentage of new students (more than 50%). The principal not only had to be a quick study of the design and implementation requirements of CFL, but also had to provide implementation and professional

development support to new and returning teachers faced with the larger number of new students while working on establishing and maintaining a high degree of program implementation.

School F, a new CFL school for the 1997–1998 academic year, started with a new principal who did not have a choice in using CFL as the school’s reform strategy. The school staff made the choice at the end of the 1996–1997 school year. This school is one of the designated targeted assistance schools, that had to implement one of the externally developed research-based school reform models identified by the School District. CFL was the consensual choice. The school, however, did not get a facilitator until April 1998.

#### **FINDINGS ON PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES**

The findings on program implementation and outcomes for the first 2 years of program implementation indicated an overall positive pattern toward program outcomes, including changes in teacher and student classroom behaviors, and the degree of program implementation and student achievement.

## **Year 1 Findings**

All of the 142 staff members in the five demonstration schools participated in the program's implementation during the 1996–1997 school year. Implementation was initiated in three cohort groups. The first cohort began implementation training in October 1996, the second cohort began training in January 1997, and the third cohort began training in March 1997.

The initial implementation of CFL in the five schools focused on addressing the following questions about CFL implementation and impact: (a) Is it feasible to establish schoolwide implementation of CFL during the first year of the program initiative? (b) To what extent does CFL implementation lead to positive changes in the patterns of classroom processes and behaviors of teachers and students? (c) Does implementation of CFL lead to changes in teachers' perceptions about their school learning environments? and (d) Can program implementation lead to improved student achievement after less than 6 months of program implementation?

The following highlight findings that specifically address the questions just listed:

- Preimplementation training was provided to all school staff in the five schools within a 6-month period. After receiving preimplementation training, school staff were able to initiate program implementation immediately. Many staff were able to achieve a moderate to high degree of program implementation within less than 6 months.
- On-site facilitators at each school were able to provide ongoing implementation support to meet the training and technical assistance needs of the individual teachers with support from the LSS. The phase-in process of training teachers in the three teacher cohorts made it possible to achieve the project's goal of initiating program implementation schoolwide during Year 1.

- As the degree of program implementation improved, a concomitant pattern of positive changes in the classroom processes and teacher and student classroom behaviors was observed.
- Changes in classroom instruction and learning processes were observed as a result of program implementation. Teachers substantially reduced time spent in whole-class instruction and focused class time on small-group instruction and working individually with students. Teachers spent more time interacting with students for instructional rather than managerial purposes.
- Teachers expressed more positive perceptions about their ability to provide for student diversity when survey results from preimplementation and postimplementation periods were compared. Among the two most salient changes were (a) an increase in teachers' perceptions of the feasibility and effectiveness in using individualized instruction and cooperative learning strategies to effectively respond to student diversity in their respective schools, and (b) teachers reported an increase in using instructional materials that stimulated varied student interests and encouraged collaborative learning and small-group instruction.
- Achievement scores suggested that students functioning in the program for a greater period of time (first cohort) performed better than their peers who had less time in the program (second and third cohorts). This was a positive trend that matched the expectation that program implementation and positive changes in classroom process would lead to improved achievement of students.
- Positive changes in student achievement were also reflected when comparing the fall 1996 and spring 1997 Stanford Achievement Test, 9th ed. (Stanford 9) test results. Furthermore, an overall pattern of positive changes in achievement among students in the

CFL schools was observed, when compared with students in the other elementary schools in the District.

- The school that had the fewest teachers in the first-cohort implementation group was the school that showed the minimal improvement in student achievement.
- There was a consensus among the principals and program facilitators that a kindred sense of accomplishment was evident among the staff. The staff in all five schools have expressed this sense of accomplishment despite being designated by the District as “targeted assistance schools” and implementing the changes required by the CFL design. They were pleased with what they had been able to achieve within a short period of time. Most important, they were most encouraged by the positive changes they observed and thought were not possible.

## **Year 2 Findings**

A major concern of school reformers is program maintenance after the initial implementation success of innovative programs. A detailed discussion of the Year 2 findings is provided under four headings: (a) degree of program implementation, (b) patterns of changes in classroom processes, (c) relationship between degree of program implementation and classroom process, and (d) student achievement.

### **Degree of Program Implementation**

In this section, a summary of the implementation progress across the six demonstration schools during the 1997–1998 school year is discussed. Because of school-specific variations (e.g., the percentage of new teachers and new principals, organizational structure, student turnover rate, and other site-specific factors), there were variations in implementation progress across the schools. However, overall across the six CFL demonstration schools, the degree of implementation data indicated an overall pattern of improvement in the degree of implementation across all

demonstration schools. The cross-site improvement in the degree of implementation from fall 1997 to spring 1998 was statistically significant at the  $p < .0001$  level.

The Degree of Program Implementation Assessment Battery was used to collect information on the extent to which the 12 critical dimensions of the instructional component of CFL (known as the Adaptive Learning Environments Model [ALEM]) were implemented in each class in all six demonstration schools. The ALEM critical dimensions were identified through a synthesis of the research base on effective classroom instructional practices and were refined through many years of field-based development and implementation in more than 200 schools with a wide spectrum of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics across different geographic regions (Wang & Zollers, 1990).

In analyzing the degree of program implementation data, the following questions were addressed: (a) To what extent did teachers in the CFL demonstration schools already demonstrate a high degree of performance in the 12 critical dimensions of ALEM prior to implementation training? (b) To what extent did teachers show implementation progress after initial training and ongoing data-based staff development support by the facilitators and the LSS implementation staff? and (c) What were the areas that required targeted assistance by LSS to ensure that a high degree of program implementation was achieved by the end of Year 2 by every teacher across all six demonstration schools?

The Degree of Program Implementation Assessment Battery is routinely used in all CFL implementation schools to assess program implementation progress. In general, formal assessments are conducted in the fall and spring of each year to collect information on the extent to which the 12 critical program dimensions are implemented in each CFL classroom. Based on the information from the fall data, a data-based staff development plan is developed and implemented to assist individual teachers in achieving a high degree of implementation of the 12 critical dimensions of the program.

Degree of program implementation data are also used by the school staff to document improvements over time and to identify specific areas of improvement. Teachers are encouraged to use the degree of implementation measures on a periodic basis to check their implementation progress and to determine their own professional development and/or implementation support needs.

Table 3 shows the results of the cross-site mean degree of implementation scores for fall 1997 and spring 1998 for each of the six demonstration schools.

The fall and spring changes were statistically significant for 11 of the 12 dimensions. The two areas that had the lowest percentage of indicators implemented to a high degree across the demonstration schools included managing assistance from support staff and conducting diagnosis and testing to assess student learning needs. Other areas that did not meet the high degree of implementation criterion included establishing/communicating rules and procedures, record keeping, and using curriculum-embedded tests to assess student learning needs. Although all of these areas showed close-to-criterion degree of implementation levels (i.e., 80% of the indicators of a given dimension were in place), they were targeted as the focus of an ongoing professional development program at each school.

### **Patterns of Changes in Classroom Processes**

One of the expected improvements in the degree of implementation of CFL is a concomitant pattern of change in classroom processes. Classroom observations were conducted in all six demonstration schools during the fall and spring to obtain information on teacher and student classroom behaviors and to examine the pattern of classroom process changes resulting from program implementation.

Figure 2 shows the patterns of changes in student behaviors between fall and spring in terms of how students spent their class time, including time spent with teachers on instructional versus managerial interactions, time spent with peers in sharing ideas versus causing disruption, and

time spent interacting versus doing seat work and watching and listening. In general, findings suggested an overall pattern of active and task-oriented classroom behavior from the students. Results of the teacher observations between fall and spring were consistent with the student observation findings. Changes were observed between fall and spring in terms of teachers spending more time instructing rather than managing students, and increasing the amount of time spent conducting small-group lessons and working with individual students.

### **Relationship Between Degree of Program Implementation and Classroom Process**

To determine the extent to which the positive changes in the patterns of classroom processes and behaviors could be attributed to changes in the degree of program implementation, a multiple correlation analysis was performed. Using the results from the classroom observation study performed for the pre- and postimplementation periods and the degree of implementation measures, the degree of implementation was found to be significantly correlated with classroom processes and student behaviors ( $p < .05$ ).

The incremental increase in the degree of implementation and concomitant changes in classroom behaviors and the instructional/learning process were significant in two ways. First, these findings validate the CFL program design in terms of its feasibility and positive impact on the classroom process and how teaching and learning take place in CFL classrooms. Second, and perhaps more important, these findings provided reassurance to school staff that their efforts in achieving a high degree of program implementation resulted in observable, positive changes in their classrooms.

The correlation between program implementation and changes in classroom process was also verified by the informal observations reported by the school staff. In addition, the teachers, facilitators, principals, and project coordinator have consistently shared their observations of the correlation between degree of program implementation and the patterns of positive changes observed in classroom processes and student behaviors. The positive changes in classroom process



were cited by the school staff as most reinforcing—according to teacher reports, implementing CFL made an observable difference in the classroom environment and the teaching and learning process.

### **Student Achievement**

Student achievement gains between fall and spring testing districtwide were analyzed for each of the CFL schools. Findings are shown in Table 4. Only students with both fall and spring scores were included in this analysis. Student achievement gains were analyzed to address the following questions: (a) Did the CFL schools meet the improvement standards stipulated by the superintendent for the 1997–1998 academic year? (b) What was the pattern of progress across the four performance standard levels according to the norm established for the Stanford 9 (below basic, basic, proficient, or advanced)? and (c) Were there differences in the patterns of progress between CFL schools and other targeted assistance schools?

For the 1997–1998 academic year, the superintendent stipulated that all of the schools must show at least 10% gain between fall and spring testing as measured by Stanford 9 for both reading and math. All of the six schools implementing CFL exceeded this District-mandated improvement standard.

For example, for School A, the reading Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) score for the fall Stanford 9 testing was 34.8. School A would have met the 10% gain standards established by the superintendent if the reading NCE score had shown a 3.5 gain. The reading NCE gain for School A was 13.3, which was significantly higher than the School District's improvement standard of a 10% gain. Similarly, the change in percentile rank for reading for School A was 19, a significantly greater change than the 3-percentile rank gain that School A had to make to meet School District standards. This example of "exceeding the standards gains" was observed for every school, even for Schools B and D, which showed the least gains among the CFL demonstration schools.

Although the CFL demonstration schools began the 1997–1998 academic year with lower scores when compared with the other targeted assistance schools (targeted assistance schools are

designated by the School District as low-performing schools requiring special intervention by the School District; the CFL schools were designated as Level 1 targeted assistance schools, the lowest performing schools among the targeted assistance schools), the CFL demonstration schools made equal gains in reading, and a slightly lower (1.3 NCE score) gain in math. The 1.3 NCE difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 3 shows the NCE gains in math and reading made by each CFL demonstration school. Figure 3 also shows the cross-site means in comparison with the mean of other targeted assistance schools (see the last two columns shown in Fig. 4).

Figure 4 shows the changes in percentile rank for each demonstration school in both math and reading. Although the CFL demonstration schools were still below the 50th percentile (based on Stanford 9's national norm) in both reading and math, significant progress was made in all schools. The mean scores for students from four demonstration schools moved from the bottom fourth to close to the 50th percentile. This included the two schools that began the year with percentiles in the low teens.

### **Degree of Implementation and Student Achievement**

One central concern about the effectiveness of any innovative program is whether program implementation leads to improved student achievement. Toward this end, a correlational analysis of the degree of program implementation and student achievement across the CFL demonstration schools was performed. The correlation was found to be statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

### **Comparative Analysis of Student Achievement Based on Performance Standards Established by Stanford 9**

Two sets of comparative analyses of student achievement were conducted. The first examined the changes in the percentage of students in CFL demonstration schools whose scores fell within each of the four performance standards as measured by the Stanford 9 achievement test in

reading and math. The percentage of positive progress made by students between fall and spring testings was analyzed to examine: (a) the change in the distribution patterns of the achievement scores across the four performance standards levels for each school, (b) the change in the distribution pattern for students whose scores placed them at the bottom 20% based on the fall 1997 testing, (c) the change in the distribution pattern for students whose scores fell within the middle 60% range based on the fall 1997 testing, and (d) the change in the distribution pattern for students whose scores fell in the top 20% based on the fall 1997 testing.

The second set of analyses focused on comparing student progress across the four performance standards for students attending the CFL demonstration schools and students attending other targeted assistance schools.

#### **Student Achievement Patterns in CFL Demonstration Schools**

Student progress in math and reading is summarized in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. As shown in Table 5, for example, although the schools varied in the amount of progress made, a pattern of positive progress was reflected in the results across all four performance standards in math achievement by all six CFL school. The math test results listed under the “All Students” section in Table 5 show, for example:

- A decrease in the percentage of students who scored in the below-basic performance level for the spring testing compared to fall testing (e.g., School E showed the greatest decrease in the percent of students who scored at the below-basic level—a decrease of 37%. School B, which showed the least gain among the six schools, showed a decrease of 6.4% in the below-basic level).
- An increase in the percentage of students who scored in the basic, proficient, and advanced levels (e.g., 63.5% of students in School A scored at the basic performance level or above during the spring testing, compared to 47.5% during the fall testing).

Another finding in the pattern of progress in student achievement in math and reading was the gains made by students who scored at the top 20% across all CFL demonstration schools. All students in the top 20% of each school were performing at the basic performance level or higher for both math (see Table 5) and reading (see Table 6). In fact, many of these students were performing at the proficient or advanced levels (for math, e.g., 100% of the top 20% of the students performed at the proficient or advanced level for School A; 95% for School B; 94% for School C; 34.5% for School D; 97.6% for School E; and 73.1% for School F).

The significant progress made by students in the top 20% was reflective of the design focus of the CFL program. A major lack in education reform programs that aim to improve student achievement in schools with a high concentration of children from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds is a deliberate strategy for nurturing the academic talents of children at the top range of the achievement distribution. Improvement efforts to increase student achievement tend to focus on the lower levels of student achievement. A key design principle of CFL is the ability of staff to adaptively respond to the diverse learning needs of all students, including those at both the bottom and the top range of the achievement distribution. All students should be provided with the most powerful instruction and learning opportunities to ensure maximum progress in achieving educational success.

Figure 5 shows the pattern of achievement for mathematics across the four performance levels for fall and spring testing. As shown in Fig. 5, whereas 65.1% of the students attending the CFL demonstration schools were performing at the below-basic performance level at the beginning of the school year, 52% were achieving at the basic performance level of achievement or higher at the end of the school year. Also, whereas only 3.7% of students were performing at the proficient and advanced levels across the CFL schools, 15% of the students were performing at the proficient and advanced performance levels.

Table 6 shows the student achievement patterns in reading. A similar overall pattern of improvements in reading was achieved across all schools. More students moved from the below-basic performance level to more advanced levels of performance.

As shown in Fig. 6, a similar pattern of changes was observed in reading achievement for students attending the CFL demonstration schools. Figure 6 shows a decrease from more than half of the students performing at the below-basic level in reading at the beginning of the school year to 60% performing at the basic level of performance and higher at the end of the year. Also at the end of the school year, approximately 18% of the students attending CFL demonstration schools were achieving at the advanced performance level compared to 11.6%.

Tables 7 and 8 show the results of a comparative analysis of the changes in student progress across the four performance standards levels assessed by Stanford 9. The mean change in the percentage of students who scored at each of the four levels in the CFL demonstration schools and the other targeted assistance schools were compared across the following categories: (a) all students, (b) students whose fall 1997 scores are in the bottom 20% of the distribution of the achievement scores in their respective schools, (c) students whose fall scores were in the middle 60% range, and (d) students whose fall scores were in the top 20% range.

As shown in Tables 7 and 8, CFL students made greater positive changes across all performance standards levels in math (Table 7) and across all levels in reading (Table 8). The mean percent of positive changes for the CFL demonstration schools for math was 34.1%, whereas the mean positive percent of positive change for the other targeted assistance schools was 30.5%. For reading, the CFL demonstration schools on average made a 21.5% positive change, compared to a mean of 17.9% for the other targeted assistance schools.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from the Year 2 implementation of the project confirmed the complexity of implementing and maintaining school reform efforts in large, urban school systems with a high concentration of students from economically and educationally disadvantaged circumstances, including high levels of student mobility and turnover rates of teachers and principals.

Despite the seemingly insurmountable odds, the progress in program implementation and student outcomes that was achieved during the first year of the project's implementation was maintained and continued to progress in each participating school. All six schools met the District standard of achievement gains and showed greater achievement gains than the other District-designated targeted assistance schools.

In addition to the outcome data presented, the overall climate of the schools changed. The children's learning was displayed on every wall. Students were bursting to open their classroom doors to visitors, and the principals and teachers were visibly elated by the results of their efforts.

The ability of the CFL demonstration schools to maintain the initial gains they made during Year 1 of the program, in spite of the turbulent start and implementation challenges the schools faced, was particularly noteworthy. The resilience of the school staff to overcome the many challenges they face in bringing about changes in the learning of children in their schools was indeed encouraging. Nevertheless, though the "value added" analysis of improvement and the continuous upward trend in student achievement patterns was impressive, particularly in light of the continuing pattern of decline prior to CFL implementation, developing strategies to provide the support required to ensure high achievement standards that were comparable to the national and regional norms remained a challenge.

## DISCUSSION

The DC story described in this chapter is one example of what can be expected when systematic attention is attributed to the lessons from decades of research and practical applications. The remarkable transformations of the six schools described in this chapter were no miracles. What have we learned from the DC experience? The two most salient ingredients to their implementation successes were: (a) focusing on each student's learning needs and tailoring the instructional program to address them, and (b) using a school's (and a community's) strengths instead of focusing solely on what is broken. Although these are key elements in many other comprehensive school reform programs (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1998), what distinguished the DC implementation was what it did not do:

- Thrust a different curriculum on the school.
- Throw out everything old in favor of something new.
- Hire hordes of new staff.

Instead of starting from scratch, they used the schools' resources—financial, human, and instructional capital—preserving what worked and supplementing with improved practices. They built elements that reinforced each teacher's competence, which helped sustain the changes and continued to keep the momentum.

One flaw in some promising school reform programs is their dependence on the skills and charisma of a uniquely inspiring individual. Leadership is indisputably essential for reform to succeed, but programs must be able to replicate even without a colossus at their helm. If all teachers and staff members receive ongoing professional development, and feedback to build their competence, then they as individuals—and thus the whole institution—become more resilient. With this strength embedded in the school, improvements can be sustained through personnel changes,

budget problems, student population shifts—all inevitable stresses faced by schools in communities with high concentration of families living in poverty.

Schools that do the best job of bolstering resilience and academic success among their students share similar critical features, as evidenced in the six DC Schools described in this chapter. They all hold high expectations for student success, employ effective classroom management practices, offer feedback to students with praise, help teachers use powerful strategies that tailor instruction to the individual learning needs of the students, provide a professional climate and supportive working conditions, and stress a learner-centered approach to foster students' problem-solving skills and their ability to be responsible for their learning and behavior. They also recognize that factors that breed confidence and competence are not only found in schools, but also within the family, among peers, and in the community, all of which can be strengthened by what goes on in schools.

What is needed to turn low-performing schools around is restoration, not new construction. We can work with the features and structures that are already in place, making needed changes to achieve the vision of stronger and more functional schools with systemic improvements. It has taken a long time and a great deal of research to build a successful reform prototype. With the knowledge on how to replicate effective prototype reform approaches, a high degree of implementation can result in significant improvements in student achievement and, significantly, they can occur during the same academic year the program is put in place—the turnaround that the six DC Schools were able to demonstrate; genuine improvement does not need to take years.



**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Students**  
**(1997–1998 Academic Year)**

School	Free or Reduced Price Lunch	Race (African-American/other)	Attendance Rate	Mobility Rate
A	86.8%	92.0%	92.0%	19%
B	87.5%	89.9%	89.9%	28%
C	93.1%	99.8%	98.1%	16%
D	94.1%	99.6%	96.3%	12%
E	97.6%	99.6%	93.0%	18%
F	94.3%	98.4%	96.3%	20%

**Table 2**  
**Changes in the Composition of the Schools**  
**(1997–1998 Academic Year)**

School	New Principal	New Assistant Principal	New Facilitator	New Teachers	New Student
A				30%	47%
B	Aug. 1997*	Feb. 1998*	Dec. 1997*	39%	51%
C	Aug. 1997*	—		16%	51%
D		—	Feb. 1998*	13%	39%
E**	Aug. 1997*	—	April 1998*	0%	43%
F		—		48.2%	30.9%

— Indicates no change.

\* Indicates date of appointment.

\*\* First year implementation school for the 1997–1998 academic year.

**Table 3**  
**Degree of Program Implementation: Cross-School Means**  
**(1997-98 Academic Year)**

Program Dimensions	Percentage of Performance Indicators Implemented		
	Fall 1997 Mean	Spring 1998 Mean	ANOVA F
Arranging Space and Facilities	72.13	91.31	34.36**
Creating/Maintaining Instructional Materials	51.45	79.96	25.61 **
Establishing/Communicating Rules and Procedures	52.55	77.09	32.07**
Managing Assistance from Support Staff	39.14	48.33	1.28
Record Keeping	44.45	76.30	25.79**
Diagnosis/Testing	63.04	81.52	10.48*
Prescribing	37.90	78.06	44.20**
Monitoring and Diagnosing	56.96	86.81	63.79**
Interactive Teaching	54.10	83.51	37.24**
Instructing	75.30	93.75	29.69**
Motivating	64.35	86.67	28.22**
Developing Student Self Responsibility	40.99	78.64	91.97**
<b>Total</b>	<b>54.35</b>	<b>80.14</b>	<b>55.62**</b>

\* Change in scores from fall to spring is significant at  $p < .001$ .

\*\* Change in scores from fall to spring is significant at  $p < .0001$ .

**Table 4**  
**Student Achievement Changes**  
**Stanford 9 Test Results**  
**Fall 1997 and Spring 1998**

School	NCE						Percentage Rank					
	Reading			Math			Reading			Math		
	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change
A	34.8	48.1	13.3	28.4	47.9	19.5	28	47	19	20	46	27
B	26.1	33.1	7.0	22.4	34.9	12.5	18	26	8	14	29	15
C	32.7	46.7	14.0	30.3	41.7	11.4	27	46	19	24	39	14
D	26.4	34.9	8.5	21.4	35.2	13.8	19	28	10	13	29	16
E	25.2	38.0	12.8	22.8	41.2	18.4	17	35	18	15	42	27
F	35.8	46.4	10.6	29.5	49.0	19.5	30	44	15	22	48	26
CFL Schools***	30.2	41.2	11.0	25.6	41.3	15.7	23	38	15	18	38	20
Other Targeted Assistance Schools	33.4	44.4	11.0	27.4	44.4	17.0	26	41	15	19	42	23

\* Only students with both fall and spring scores are included.

\*\* All change in scores from fall to spring are statistically significant at <.0001.

\*\*\* Mean difference in NCE and percentile rank for math between CFL and other targeted assistance schools is not statistically significant

Table 5

**Stanford 9 Math Test Results  
Performance Standards Levels**

Performance	School																	
	School A			School B			School C			School D			School E			School F		
	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change
<u>All Students</u>																		
Below Basic	52.5	36.6	-15.9	69.4	63.0	-6.4	56.8	44.8	-12.0	72.8	61.1	-11.7	74.9	37.9	-37.9	60.0	38.2	-21.8
Basic	41.4	40.1	-1.3	28.6	32.2	3.6	36.7	35.8	-0.9	25.5	32.2	6.7	23.6	37.4	13.8	34.6	45.9	11.3
Proficient	6.1	18.3	12.2	1.9	4.8	2.9	5.0	19.4	14.4	1.7	5.7	4.0	1.5	18.2	16.7	4.4	13.0	8.6
Advanced	0.0	5.1	5.1				1.5	0.0	-1.5	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	6.6	6.6	1.0	2.9	1.9
<u>Bottom 20%</u>																		
Below Basic	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	76.9	-23.1	100.0	100.0	0.0
Basic													0.0	10.3	10.3			
Proficient													0.0	2.6	2.6			
Advanced													0.0	10.3	10.3			
<u>Middle 60%</u>																		
Below Basic	53.4	28.3	-25.1	81.0	71.2	-9.8	62.8	40.0	-22.8	83.3	68.3	-15.0	85.1	38.1	-47.0	64.7	29.8	-34.9
Basic	46.6	65.8	19.2	19.0	28.8	9.8	37.2	56.0	18.8	16.7	31.7	15.0	14.9	58.5	43.6	35.3	67.7	32.4
Proficient	0.0	5.8	5.8				0.0	4.0	4.0				0.0	3.4	3.4	0.0	2.4	2.4
Advanced																		
<u>Top 20%</u>																		
Below Basic				4.9	0.0	-4.9				12.3	0.0	-12.3	22.0	0.0	-22.0			
Basic	69.2	0.0	-69.2	85.4	74.4	-11.0	65.8	5.6	-60.2	79.0	65.5	-13.5	70.7	2.4	-68.3	72.5	26.8	-45.7
Proficient	30.8	74.4	43.6	9.8	25.6	15.8	26.3	94.4	68.1	8.8	29.3	20.5	7.3	75.6	68.3	22.5	58.5	36.0
Advanced	0.0	25.6	25.6				7.9	0.0	-7.9	0.0	5.2	5.2	0.0	22.0	22.0	5.0	14.6	9.6

**Table 6**

**Stanford 9 Reading Test Results  
Performance Standards Levels**

Performance	School																	
	School A			School B			School C			School D			School E			School F		
	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change	Fall	Spring	Change
<u>All Students</u>																		
Below Basic	34.8	22.5	-12.3	59.9	61.2	1.3	50.5	28.6	-21.9	59.8	55.7	-4.1	62.6	35.9	-26.7	38.3	34.7	-3.6
Basic	45.1	48.9	-3.8	31.7	32.4	0.7	33.2	42.2	9.0	32.0	36.9	4.9	28.6	44.1	15.5	46.8	46.8	0.0
Proficient	19.0	20.9	1.9	7.2	5.9	-1.3	14.2	21.9	7.7	7.7	7.4	-0.3	8.8	18.2	9.4	12.8	15.8	3.0
Advanced	1.1	7.7	6.6	1.2	0.6	-0.6	2.1	7.3	5.2	0.4	0.0	-0.4	0.0	1.8	1.8	2.1	2.6	0.5
<u>Bottom 20%</u>																		
Below Basic	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	88.2	-11.8	100.0	100.0	0.0
Basic													0.0	8.8	8.8			
Proficient													0.0	2.9	2.9			
Advanced																		
<u>Middle 60%</u>																		
Below Basic	26.6	4.6	-22.0	63.4	69.5	6.1	51.7	14.4	-37.3	100.0	88.2	-11.8	69.1	30.4	-38.7	28.8	25.2	-3.6
Basic	69.0	80.9	11.9	36.6	30.5	-6.1	48.3	68.6	20.3	0.0	8.8	8.8	30.9	67.6	36.7	71.2	73.9	2.7
Proficient	4.4	14.6	10.2				0.0	17.0	17.0	0.0	2.9		0.0	2.0	2.0	0.0	0.9	0.9
Advanced																		
<u>Top 20%</u>																		
Below Basic																		
Basic	13.5	0.0	-13.5	57.6	67.6	10.0	18.4	0.0	-18.4	60.4	62.0	1.6	55.9	8.8	-47.1	24.3	10.5	
Proficient	81.1	61.1	-20.0	36.4	29.4	-7.0	71.0	61.1	-9.9	37.7	38.0	0.3	44.1	82.4	38.3	64.9	76.3	11.4
Advanced	5.4	38.9	33.5	6.1	2.9	-3.2	10.5	38.9	28.4	1.9	0.0	-1.9	0.0	8.8	8.8	10.8	13.2	2.4

**Table 7**  
**Comparison of Student Performance Between CFL and Other Targeted Assistance Schools\***  
**Stanford 9 Math Test Results: Performance Standards Levels**  
**(1997–1998 Academic Year)**

Performance Standards	Percent of Students					
	Fall	CFL Schools Spring	Change	Other Targeted Assistance Schools Fall	Spring	Change
<u>All Students</u>						
Below Basic	65.1	48.0	-17.1	57.8	42.6	-15.2
Basic	31.2	36.9	5.7	35.9	38.6	2.7
Proficient	3.3	12.6	9.3	5.7	16.3	10.6
Advanced	0.4	2.4	2.0	0.5	2.5	2.0
Percent Positive Changes			34.1			30.5
<u>Bottom 20%</u>						
Below Basic	100.0	96.4	-3.6	99.6	99.4	-0.2
Basic	0.0	1.6	1.6	0.4	0.6	0.2
Proficient	0.0	0.4	0.4			
Advanced	0.0	1.6	1.6			
<u>Middle 60%</u>						
Below Basic	72.8	48.0	-24.8	61.9	38.1	-23.8
Basic	27.2	49.6	22.4	38.1	57.4	19.3
Proficient	0.0	2.4	2.4	0.0	4.5	4.5
Advanced						
<u>Top 20%</u>						
Below Basic	7.0	0.0	-7.0	3.6	0.0	-3.6
Basic	74.2	31.9	-42.3	64.9	19.3	-45.6
Proficient	16.8	57.1	40.3	28.8	68.4	39.6
Advanced	2.0	11.0	9.0	2.6	12.4	9.8

\* Targeted assistance schools are schools designated by the school district as low-performing schools requiring “special intervention” to significantly improve student achievement. CFL schools were identified as the lowest performing schools (Level I targeted assistance) among the targeted assistance schools.

**Table 8**  
**Comparison of Student Performance Between CFL and Other Targeted Assistance Schools\***  
**Stanford 9 Reading Test Results: Performance Standards Levels**  
**(1997–1998 Academic Year)**

Performance Standards	Percent of Students					
	Fall	CFL Schools Spring	Change	Other Targeted Assistance Schools Fall	Spring	Change
<u>All Students</u>						
Below Basic	51.2	40.5	-10.7	39.3	30.3	-9.0
Basic	36.2	41.7	5.5	45.0	49.3	4.3
Proficient	11.5	14.7	3.2	14.3	18.2	3.9
Advanced	1.1	3.2	2.1	1.5	2.2	0.7
Percent Positive Changes			21.5			17.9
<u>Bottom 20%</u>						
Below Basic	100.0	98.2	-1.8	99.2	95.4	-3.8
Basic	0.0	1.3	1.3	0.8	4.6	3.8
Proficient	0.0	0.4	0.4			
Advanced						
<u>Middle 60%</u>						
Below Basic	52.1	35.1	-17.0	32.4	18.5	-13.9
Basic	47.2	59.4	12.2	64.5	74.4	9.9
Proficient	0.7	5.5	4.8	3.1	7.1	4.0
Advanced						
<u>Top20%</u>						
Below Basic						
Basic	39.2	26.8	-12.4	30.0	17.7	-12.3
Proficient	55.2	57.0	1.8	62.6	70.9	8.3
Advanced	5.6	16.2	10.6	7.4	11.3	3.9

\* Targeted assistance schools are schools designated by the school district as low-performing schools requiring “special intervention” to significantly improve student achievement. CFL schools were identified as the lowest performing schools (Level I targeted assistance) among the targeted assistance schools.



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