



# **Expanding Restructuring and Taking on High Schools**

## **An NCLB Follow-up Report in Michigan**

Center on Education Policy

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## **Expanding Restructuring and Taking on High Schools: An NCLB Follow-up Report in Michigan**

Since 2003-04, more than 100 Michigan schools have exited restructuring, the final stage of school improvement under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In this stage, the federal law requires schools to use one of five options, ranging from replacing staff to “any other major restructuring of school governance.” Federal guidance emphasizes the need for schools to make dramatic changes in response to restructuring, but leaves it to states, districts, and schools to flesh out most of the details (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). During the last year, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has also given some states opportunities to pilot new approaches to accountability within NCLB, such as differentiating sanctions based on schools’ needs and using growth models to determine whether students have met AYP targets (Erpenbach, 2008). Michigan has used the general flexibility of the law as well as the new growth model pilot to create its own approach to supporting Title I schools in various phases of school improvement, including those in restructuring. This approach involves school audits, Process Mentor Teams to assist schools, coaching for school leaders, and extra professional development for principals and coaches.

The Michigan approach has been successful with many elementary and middle schools. In the past two years, however, more high schools have entered restructuring, and none has exited, except for one Detroit high school that exited because its student population changed rather than because it made adequate yearly progress. How has Michigan worked with restructuring schools in the past, and what will the state do to address the new high school challenge?

In this follow-up report (the fifth in a series on Michigan), the Center on Education Policy (CEP) examined these questions by reviewing restructuring documents, analyzing state test data, and interviewing decisionmakers at the state and local levels in the fall and winter of 2008. We also conducted case studies of restructuring through interviews and document reviews in four school districts—Detroit Public Schools, Flint Community Schools, Harrison Community Schools, and Willow Run Community Schools—and in nine schools within these districts. Several key findings emerged from our analysis.

## Key Findings

- ***Growth model helpful in elementary and middle schools, but not applicable to high schools.*** Under a pilot program of the U.S. Department of Education, Michigan received federal approval to change its NCLB accountability system to use a growth model to determine whether schools make AYP. Under this new model, schools that do not make AYP the traditional way can count students as meeting targets when they make significant progress, even though they did not meet the actual targets. As a result of this change, 111 Title I and non-Title I schools, or about 3% of all the state's schools, made AYP when they would not otherwise have done so without the growth model. All 111 schools serve elementary and middle school students. Schools that serve only high school students, however, were not affected because high school students are only tested once, so their growth over time cannot be tracked.
- ***More high schools in restructuring.*** In 2008-09, more than two-thirds of the 71 Title I schools<sup>1</sup> in restructuring in Michigan serve high school students; two years ago, Michigan had just one Title I high school in restructuring. None of the restructuring schools that made AYP based on 2007-08 testing served high-school-age students. Similarly, three of our four case study districts have seen elementary and middle schools move out of restructuring and high schools move in. Officials cite several possible reasons for more high schools in restructuring, including new academic standards for high schools, a new high school test first administered in 2006-07, rising targets for making adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB, changes in the state's method for calculating graduation rates, and a lack of alignment between the curriculum of alternative high schools and state standards. Several interviewees noted that previous reform efforts had neglected high schools, and many reported modeling some high school restructuring strategies on successful strategies from elementary and middle schools.

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<sup>1</sup>Title I schools are those that receive federal funds to serve disadvantaged students in low-income areas through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act.

- ***Benefits from restructuring for elementary and middle schools.*** Thirty-four of the 63 Title I schools in restructuring in Michigan in 2007-08 served elementary and middle school students. Based on 2007-08 testing, 9 of these 34 schools made adequate yearly progress, and 5 exited restructuring entirely. State officials interviewed attributed these successes to state supports—including school audits, Process Mentor Teams, coaching for school leaders, and extra professional development for principals and coaches—combined with district and school-level restructuring efforts tailored specifically to schools’ needs. District- and school-level educators interviewed for this study typically appreciated state supports for restructuring, but all said there were additional efforts being made at the school and district level that were important to raising student achievement.
- ***Additional assistance for schools in improvement and high school needs but decreases in local funding.*** Partly in response to the growing number of high schools in restructuring, Michigan used newly appropriated school improvement funds under Title I, section 1003(g), to hire the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA). MAISA will use its \$4.2 million grant to train school teams on data-driven needs assessment, help schools select research-based interventions to address identified needs, and support faithful implementation of these interventions through instructional coaches. Scheduled to begin in spring 2009, the project will serve schools in years 1 and 2 of NCLB improvement. If successful, the project will expand to all Title I schools in improvement. These funds were appreciated by our case study districts: however, three of the four districts reported experiencing financial problems due to state and local budget shortfalls. District officials in Detroit, Flint, and Willow Run all said that declining enrollment and the accompanying losses in revenue meant that some reforms had to be scaled back or discontinued, which has made improving schools a challenge.

## New Developments in Restructuring at the State Level

During the past year, the state of Michigan has made noteworthy changes in the accountability system used for NCLB. Partly as a result of these changes, the number of schools identified for restructuring has changed since the previous year. In addition, the state has continued providing various types of assistance to schools in restructuring.

### CHANGES IN IDENTIFYING SCHOOLS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN MICHIGAN

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test virtually all students annually in English language arts (ELA) and math in grades 3 through 8, plus once during high school. It also requires all schools and districts to meet state targets for adequate yearly progress that place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students will be academically proficient by 2014.

In 2007-08, Michigan's targets for the percentage of students, both in the aggregate and by subgroup, who must score at the proficient level or above rose in all grades and subjects; these targets are displayed in **table 1**.

**Table 1. Michigan AYP Targets in Math and ELA for 2006-07 and 2007-08**

AYP Targets for ELA							
Grade	3	4	5	6	7	8	11
<b>2006-07</b>	50%	48%	46%	45%	43%	41%	52%
<b>2007-08</b>	60%	59%	57%	56%	54%	53%	61%

AYP Targets for Math							
Grade	3	4	5	6	7	8	11
<b>2006-07</b>	59%	56%	53%	50%	46%	43%	44%
<b>2007-08</b>	67%	65%	62%	60%	57%	54%	55%

Table reads: To make adequate yearly progress in school year 2006-07, 50% of students in a school or subgroup had to perform at the proficient level on the state English language arts test; in school year 2007-08, this target rose to 60% proficient.

*Source: Michigan Department of Education.*

To make AYP, schools must also meet a 95% test participation requirement and reach other state-determined targets in such areas as attendance and graduation.

In addition to the challenge of rising proficiency targets, high schools faced the challenge of a new formula for calculating the graduation rate. In the past, the state measured a high school's yearly graduation rate by calculating the percentage of entering seniors who graduated by the end of the year. Now, the state divides the number of graduates in a given year by the number of students who entered the high school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade four years earlier in order to determine the percentage of students who graduated "on time." The graduation target remained 80%, but the new formula resulted in fewer high schools meeting the target, according to Paul Bielawski, special assistant in the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability.

In contrast, elementary and middle schools saw a change in the accountability system that made it easier for schools to make AYP. Under a federal pilot program, the U.S. Department of Education approved Michigan's request to use a new "growth model" to determine AYP (Erpenbach, 2008). "One of the complaints about the old system was that you could move a kid all the way from the bottom to almost proficient and still not make AYP," said Joseph Martineau, director of assessment and accountability in Michigan. The state now counts students as "proficient" when they make "significant" growth toward proficiency. Martineau explained that not all growth is significant. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) has calculated the growth needed to count as significant for each test, and these calculations have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education as placing students on a trajectory toward proficiency within three years.

The new calculations resulted in 111 Title I and non-Title I elementary and middle schools making AYP that would not otherwise have done so, according to Michigan's Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability. These 111 schools comprise about 3% of Michigan's 3,763 schools. Of the 111 schools, just one (or 1%) was a Title I school in restructuring. (Seventy-one Title I schools are in restructuring in 2008-09.) These percentages were similar to those reported by six other states participating in the U.S. Department of Education's growth model pilot in 2007; these percentages ranged from 0 to 14% (Klein, 2007).

High schools cannot use the growth model because Michigan tests high students only once and would have no way of determining growth. This makes things tough on high schools, but Martineau said there is a strong argument that the current system of not calculating growth in high schools may be appropriate: “High school is the end game. People are supposed to come out of high school prepared for college.”

## **CHANGES IN THE NUMBER AND TYPES OF MICHIGAN SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING**

In 2008-09, Michigan had 71 Title I schools in restructuring—up from 63 the previous year. Of the 71 schools, 19 were in the fourth year of school improvement, 35 in the fifth year, 7 in the sixth year, 6 in the seventh year, 3 in the eighth year, and 1 in the ninth year.

Of the 19 schools in the fourth year of school improvement, one was held in this status because it made AYP in 2007-08, and the other 18 were new to restructuring. All but one of these 18 schools served high-school-age students. This is new for Michigan, which two years ago had just one high school in restructuring. Of these 18 new restructuring schools, nine were alternative schools, one was a middle/high school combination, one was a middle school, and the rest were traditional (not alternative) high schools. In addition, nearly half of these new restructuring schools (7 of 18) were charter schools, which in Michigan can include alternative schools or those serving traditional populations. If the 17 schools serving high schoolers had not entered restructuring, the total number of schools in restructuring in 2008-09 would have dropped to 54.

Of the 63 Title I schools in restructuring in 2007-08, 9 schools (14%) met AYP targets based on 2007-08 testing, a smaller percentage than previous years, as shown in **table 2**. Of these schools making AYP, all served elementary or middle school students, and none served high-school-age students. A smaller percentage of schools than in previous years moved out of restructuring as well. Of the 25% of schools, or 16 schools, that moved out of restructuring, 5 exited because they had made AYP two years in a row; all were elementary or middle schools. One exited because it no longer gets Title I funds. Another 10 schools (all in Detroit) exited because the student population changed by more than 50%. This change in population was due to declining

student population in the district, which resulted in multiple school closures. According to a state policy approved by the U. S. Department of Education, schools with more than a 50% change in student population are considered new schools for accountability purposes and can start fresh with a clean slate for AYP purposes. The remaining students from the closed schools were redistributed into schools that remained open. This resulted in 10 schools in which more than 50% of the student body was new to the school. None of the 10 schools made AYP based on the previous year's testing.

**Table 2. Status of Schools in Restructuring Planning and Implementation in Michigan**

<b>Year*</b>	<b>Number of Schools in Restructuring</b>	<b>Percentage (and Number) That Made AYP Based on Testing During School Year</b>	<b>Percentage That Exited Restructuring After End of School Year<sup>†</sup></b>
<b>2003-04</b>	76	32% (24)	0% (0)
<b>2004-05</b>	109	85% (93)	24% (26)
<b>2005-06</b>	90	64% (58)	57% (51)
<b>2006-07</b>	46	48% (22)	35% (16)
<b>2007-08</b>	63	14% (9)	25% (16)
<b>2008-09</b>	71	NA	NA

Table reads: In 2003-04, 76 schools were in restructuring. Based on 2003-04 tests, 32% of these 76 schools made AYP, but none moved out of restructuring.

\*Michigan made the following changes in yearly testing and accountability; therefore, it is difficult to determine how much of the changes in numbers of schools in restructuring are attributable to these policy changes and how much to gains in student achievement:

- For 2004-05 testing, Michigan added a confidence interval that made it easier for schools to make AYP than in 2003-04.
- For 2005-06 testing, Michigan revised the content standards for its existing tests, added tests in additional grades, and changed its elementary and middle school test administration from spring to fall.
- For 2006-07 testing, Michigan changed the 11<sup>th</sup> grade test from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program to the Michigan Merit Examination, on which fewer students were able to meet targets.
- For 2007-08 testing, Michigan added a growth model in grades 3 through 8, making it easier for elementary and middle schools to make AYP, and moved to a cohort model to calculate graduation rates.

<sup>†</sup>Column includes schools that exited restructuring because they had closed or had changed their population sufficiently to be considered a new school for AYP purposes.

Source: CEP, 2008, and unpublished data from the Michigan Department of Education, November 2008.



## FUNDING AND STATE ASSISTANCE FOR RESTRUCTURING

States have two sources of federal funding to assist districts and schools identified for improvement under NCLB, including restructuring schools. The first is the 4% set-aside of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(a) of Title I.<sup>2</sup> Due to overall increases in Title I funding, Michigan's school improvement set-aside increased from about \$17 million in 2007-08 to roughly \$20 million in 2008-09. The second source is a separate appropriation of funds for school improvement authorized by section 1003(g) of Title I, for which Michigan received \$4.2 million for school year 2008-09.

Since 2003-04, MDE has used a small portion of its 4% set-aside to offer grants of \$5,000 to \$45,000 to schools in various stages of NCLB improvement. To receive the funds, districts and schools must apply for grants specifically stating what will be done to improve schools, and the grant applications must be approved by MDE officials. In some cases, grant funding was withheld until districts and schools wrote plans that satisfied MDE.

As in previous years, the majority of the school improvement set-aside in 2008-09 went to the state's intermediate school districts (ISDs), which are regional service agencies that provide technical assistance to schools and districts. The services required for schools in various stages of improvement, including restructuring, are described in more detail in **box 1**. Several state officials said these services were important factors in helping elementary and middle schools exit restructuring, although district and school-level restructuring efforts helped too. While last year most services began when schools entered year 3 of school improvement, for 2008-09 process mentor teams begin in year 1 of improvement, targeted audits in year 2, and comprehensive audits in year 3. "We felt that we needed to help schools start looking at data and prevention," explained Betty Underwood, the state's director of the Office of School Improvement.

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<sup>2</sup>Although all states were required to set aside 4%, some were not able to do so because of a hold-harmless provision in Title I, as amended by NCLB. This situation is explained in more detail in two CEP reports (2006; 2007) available at [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org).

### **Box 1. Michigan's Requirements and Services for Schools in Various Stages of Improvement, Including Restructuring**

In addition to the federal requirement to write a restructuring plan, Michigan has developed several more requirements and services for schools in restructuring or in earlier phases of improvement. They include the following:

- **School audits.** Schools that are in year 1 of improvement because they missed AYP targets for all students (rather than just for subgroups) must undergo a comprehensive audit. Schools that miss AYP targets for subgroups only must undergo targeted audits beginning in year 2 of improvement. Auditors are typically experienced educators who receive special state training in using an audit instrument based on Michigan's School Improvement Framework, which was drawn from national and state research about characteristics of successful schools. To conduct the audits, two to three auditors spend two days interviewing and observing at each school. Auditors then report their observations and findings to MDE, the school, and the school's Process Mentor Team.
- **Process Mentor Teams.** Process Mentor Teams use the information from the audits and other school data to assist schools. Each team consists of three people: a district-level person, a representative from MDE, and a person from the district's ISD. Process Mentor Teams begin in year 1. They meet with schools in the planning phase of restructuring eight times a year and with other schools four times a year to collaboratively set short-term goals, review data, and advise the school on processes and procedures to help accomplish short-term goals between visits.
- **Leadership coaches.** The ISDs provide schools in year 3 of improvement and above with leadership coaches. Trained in a week-long residential summer academy, these coaches continue to receive training nearly every month throughout the year. Coaches are contracted to be on-site and assist the principal for 100 days, focusing on school governance and school leadership, the key principals in the School Improvement Framework's leadership strand.
- **Principal fellowships.** Principals of Title I schools in year 3 and above were also invited to attend the same residential summer academy as the leadership coaches. The principal fellowships were meant to bring principals and coaches together to create a common frame for improvement efforts. The fellowships also provided professional development to help bring improvement efforts to fruition; teacher leaders from schools attended several days of this professional development as well.

*Source: Center on Education Policy, based on information from the Michigan Department of Education.*

In mid-November of 2008, MDE forged a partnership with the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, an umbrella organizations for the state's ISDs. With the \$4.2 million available under section 1003(g) for 2008-09, as well as the \$17 million the state expects to receive under this section for 2009-10, MAISA plans to expand services to schools in improvement. "We're still in the process of defining what the Title I Accountability Grant

[Michigan's name for the section 1003(g) funds] will include," said Charlotte Koger, the grant administrator and program manager for Title I at MAISA.

While MDE and MAISA are still ironing out details, officials from both organizations said that the Title I Accountability Grant will supplement and expand on the current system of school improvement in Michigan. "The focus of the Title I Accountability Grant is more on the supports closer to the classroom," said Koger. "The current system stops short of that and instead focuses on leadership and governance."

Betty Underwood of the state school improvement office added that the Title I Accountability Grant also provides greater focus on schools in years 1 and 2, aimed at preventing these schools entering the later stages of improvement.

Currently MAISA envisions three primary activities for the Title I Accountability Grant: refining and implementing a data-driven needs assessment, selecting evidence-based interventions attuned to a school's needs, and implementing the selected interventions through continued use of data and support from coaches in ELA and math.

MAISA officials expect the data-driven needs assessment to be more focused on student-level data than is Michigan's current comprehensive needs assessment. This fall, 19 ISDs have piloted the data-driven needs assessment, called Data for Student Success, in several schools. By this spring, Koger said, "we would like to have all schools in years 1 and 2 of school improvement have at least one day of training in Data for Student Success. As part of that day, they will develop a plan for ongoing data needs." Schools could then schedule up to four more sessions to further develop their data skills, Koger added.

Ultimately, MAISA expects the data-driven needs assessment to lead schools to select new evidence-based interventions. While it is difficult for MAISA to anticipate what the assessments might suggest, MAISA has already identified a number of interventions used successfully by ISDs, ranging from small tweaks in instruction to complete overhauls. For example, Koger said, "It may be something small, like teachers needing to give students more time to practice new

skills. Or, it may be adopting the Michigan Mathematics Program Improvement initiative,” which consists of a comprehensive set of instructional practices in math.

Instructional coaches will oversee and support implementation of these evidence-based interventions. At the time of our interviews in fall 2008, Koger said it was too early to determine how many coaches would be needed or how frequently coaches would be in schools. However, she added, it will be important to distribute coaches equitably and use them to fill gaps, rather than replacing coaches already working in districts. For example, Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, the ISD that serves Detroit, already provides instructional coaches to schools. Title I Accountability Grant coaches would not supplant these coaches, Koger said; instead, the system of new coaches might be based on lessons learned in Wayne County. In addition, Koger noted that other agencies in Michigan have developed systems of instructional coaches that could serve as models for the new coaches. These coaching models include the Michigan Mathematics Program Improvement initiative; Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi), a project to aid struggling students in general and special education; and Reading First, a K-3 federal reading initiative.

While working on these three primary activities, MAISA will partner with other organizations to identify the special needs of high schools, alternative schools (which serve primarily high-school-age students), English language learners, and students with disabilities. For example, MDE has a core team that meets monthly to work on high school issues, and MAISA officials will join those meetings.

Michigan has created a more rigorous high school curriculum, which is a positive step, but the state also needs to decrease the dropout rate, said Sam LoPresto, special projects director at MAISA. “We’ve got a more rigorous curriculum, but we’re losing kids,” he added. “We have to get the kids interested in new content and higher levels of achievement. We don’t have all the answers yet.” He expects some of the unique work in high schools to focus on improving student motivation and building positive relationships between the adults in the school and students.

After the spring semester, MAISA expects to assess the Title I Accountability Grant activities and expand on successes. “[W]e’re piloting these services with schools in years 1 and 2 of school improvement,” said LoPresto. The intent is to build them up so that in the second or third year of the grant all schools will have these services.”

## **Restructuring at the District and School Level**

In the fall and winter of 2008, CEP interviewed personnel from four Michigan districts and nine public schools in restructuring to determine what had changed since we last did case studies in Michigan about a year ago. The schools we studied included the following:

- Cerveney Middle School, Cleveland Intermediate/High School (which was formerly a middle school), and Beckham Academy in the Detroit Public Schools district
- Holmes Foundation Middle School, Northwestern High School, and Central High School in the Flint Community Schools district
- Hillside Elementary in the Harrison Community Schools district
- Willow Run Middle School and Willow Run High School in the Willow Run Community Schools district

## **COMMON THEMES FROM DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING**

Several common themes emerged from our Michigan case studies. The state’s initiatives for improving schools—audits, Process Mentor Teams, principal fellowships, and leadership coaches—were appreciated by all districts and schools. For example, Principal Fred White in Flint said, “Going through the principal fellowship was great. We used some of the best strategies and strategists from across the country.” At the same time, district- and school-level educators also pointed to the additional efforts being made at the school and district level as important factors in raising student achievement, especially in schools that had exited restructuring.

State services started earlier this year than in the previous year, according to our interviewees. “Last year we had concerns about state services,” said David Solis, Flint’s director of state,

federal, and local programs. “The state had such a short period of time to get things up and running. The communication wasn’t always as good as it should be. This year, the right and left hand are working well together.”

Mirroring a broad trend at the state level, three of the four case study districts had elementary and middle schools move out of restructuring, while high schools moved in. District and school officials frequently said they were modeling some of their high school restructuring on successful strategies from middle and elementary schools. Several officials said that part of the problem with high schools was that these schools had been neglected by previous reform efforts.

While Title I funds have increased in Michigan, three of the four districts still experienced financial problems. District officials and principals in Detroit, Flint, and Willow Run all said that declining enrollment and the accompanying losses in revenue meant that some reforms had to be scaled back or discontinued, which has made improving schools a challenge.

#### **FINANCIAL AND STAFFING CHANGES IN DETROIT THREATEN ACADEMIC GAINS**

Located in southeastern Michigan, Detroit is the state’s largest public school district. The district has experienced continuing budget shortfalls and fiscal management issues, and has been designated as a “high-risk” district after an Inspector General’s audit found that the district had misspent Title I funds. These events led the district and state to develop a consent agreement aimed at preventing a state fiscal takeover (Dawson, 2008). In early December, however, state officials reported the district had not abided by the conditions required by the consent agreement. The state therefore declared a “fiscal emergency” in the district and announced plans to appoint an emergency financial manager with the power to negotiate contracts, hire and fire staff, and close schools. The names of up to three candidates for this position were slated to be submitted to the governor for selection in January 2009. If the district does not successfully challenge the determination, an emergency financial manager will be appointed, state officials said.

After closing more than 30 schools in the summer of 2007 due to enrollment losses, fall 2008 enrollment declined to about 94,000 from about 105,000 students in 2007-08, well below the

projected 98,356 students on which the 2008-09 budget had been based (Mrozowski, 2008). Detroit's students are 90% African American, 7% Latino, and 2% white. Of these students, 17% are students with disabilities and 87% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a measure of poverty (Council of the Great City Schools, 2008).

Detroit's school closures and resulting student reassignments substantially changed the populations of schools across the city, making it difficult to assess student achievement by school. As noted above, 10 Detroit schools exited restructuring because their student populations changed by more than 50%, enabling them to start with a clean slate for AYP purposes.

Another case study school, Cerveney Middle, successfully exited restructuring. It took multiple strategies over time to make that happen, said Principal Gladys Stoner. "There's a whole list of things, and they all sort of work hand-in-hand," she said, starting in 2005-06 with her appointment as principal. The following year she was one of a handful of Detroit principals of restructuring schools who were allowed to handpick an entirely new staff. In addition to replacing staff, she created a building leadership team and grade-level teacher teams that had common planning time built into the school day. Since assuming the principalship, Stoner said she has focused on reducing behavior problems and improving school climate. At the same time, she has worked with a leadership coach, and her teachers have received content coaching in English language arts and math from Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA).

Last year Stoner lost some of her chosen faculty due to seniority bumping after 34 Detroit schools were closed. "The progress, I think, is slower than it would have been had the other staff been left intact, but we're still moving forward," she said.

This year, Stoner and her leadership team have continued to try new practices to raise student achievement. For example, students who miss achievement targets on biweekly assessments receive tutoring three days a week from a program called Schools Without Failure. "Our goal is to continue educational growth because even though we made AYP, we're still not where we need to be," said Stoner.

Meanwhile, Cleveland Intermediate/High School and Beckham Academy both failed to make AYP due to the performance of students with disabilities. Cleveland Principal Donna Thornton is using some of the same strategies employed by Cervený: grade-level teams and small learning communities for the middle school students. Cleveland also uses block scheduling to reduce the amount of time middle schoolers spend changing classes, and gives every middle schooler a daily “double dose” of math and science by eliminating electives. Using Title I funds, Cleveland pays a local nonprofit, Project SEED, to provide curriculum, professional development, and co-teaching support for teachers who teach math to struggling students.

Content coaches from Wayne RESA are also working with Cleveland teachers on math and English. As of December 2008, however, Thornton did not have a principal leadership coach. When Wayne RESA did not reassign her the same coach from last year, Thornton refused to accept their initial replacement coach. She wanted input on who the new coach would be. “I am insistent on making that decision,” she said. In January 2009, a potential new coach had been identified and was going to meet with Thornton.

Beckham Academy has continued last year’s efforts to identify and support students with disabilities despite drastic changes in leadership and staffing. Former principal William Batchelor retired at the end of 2007-08; anticipating the transition, a number of teachers left. This year, just before state testing, the school lost an additional seven teachers due to declining enrollment. “Getting the staff, that’s the main thing now. Getting the right personnel and getting the machine working like it did before,” said veteran teacher Bill Roby.

## **FOCUSING ON MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN FLINT**

Located in southeastern Michigan, Flint Community Schools lost about 2,000 students and 200 teachers last year. Currently, the district serves about 13,500 students, most of whom (81%) are African American. About 16% are white, and the rest are Latino, Asian, and other ethnicities. In 2008-09, two middle schools and three high schools are in restructuring, while all elementary schools that were in restructuring have exited.



District officials in Flint noted that past district, regional, and state initiatives were often aimed at elementary schools, and that this may be one reason why elementary schools have exited restructuring but middle and high schools have not. For example, “the past professional development was often geared toward K-6 administrators. It was what you call ‘front-loading,’” said Cheryl Tate, the district’s executive director of secondary education. “The thinking was that if you get students ready in elementary school, you’ll be okay. So, now we have to change the mindset of the teachers and of society.”

To address middle and high school issues as well as declining enrollment, Flint has been experimenting with school configurations. In 2006-07, the district closed four traditional middle schools, redistributed students, and created “foundation academies” for 8<sup>th</sup> graders within existing high schools. Space issues, as well as community concerns about mixing age groups, led the district to go back to traditional middle schools for 2008-09, according to David Solis, director of state, federal, and local programs.

During 2008-09, Flint middle schools will receive all state services—audits, Process Mentor Teams, principal fellowships, and leadership coaches. The middle schools will also engage in several district and school-level strategies. At Holmes Foundation Middle School, which participated in CEP’s study, these additional strategies include the following:

- A new scripted approach to English language arts and math
- Classroom teacher observations and feedback by the school principal and other administrators
- Benchmark assessments and data review for instructional decisions every 10 weeks in ELA and math

Additional initiatives are likely to be added as the year progresses, said Assistant Principal Sandra Hodges.

Because Flint uses Title I funds only through 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it was unclear at the time of our interviews whether high schools in restructuring would get state services. High school and district officials appeared interested in receiving the services but realized that funding might not

be available for these whole-school services. “I would love to get some of that money and do some things with the Process Mentoring Team,” noted Northwestern High School Principal Fred White, former principal of Southwestern Foundation Academy, which participated in process mentoring last year.

While all Flint officials interviewed said they wished state services were available in grades 10 through 12, a few noted that if only one grade could have the services, 9<sup>th</sup> probably made the most sense. “Most high schools lose the greatest number of students at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level,” said Janice Davis, principal of Central High School. “If they can make it past 9<sup>th</sup> grade, then we certainly have a better chance of having those students actually graduate. So, the support we can offer at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level is going to help to support and build our high school overall.”

Additional high school strategies at Northwestern and Central High Schools include the following:

- A new algebra curriculum with new instructional strategies in 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Intervention classes for students struggling in reading and math
- Benchmark assessments and data review for instructional decisions every five weeks in ELA and math
- District reading and math coaches (at Northwestern)
- In-school (as opposed to out-of-school) suspension, so that students with behavior problems continue to receive instruction (at Central)

In addition to struggling to raise academic achievement, Flint High Schools struggle with declining enrollments. Most of this is due to students leaving the region or state, but some also has to do with competition from charter and private schools, said Principal White of Northwestern. This is a mistake in his opinion. “People think that because they take kids out of public schools their academics [are] going to improve,” but traditional public schools often do as well as or better than charter schools across the state, he said.

## **MAINTAINING ACHIEVEMENT IN HARRISON**

Harrison Community Schools is a rural district in central Michigan serving about 1,800 students. Most students (97%) are white, about 60% are low-income, and 21% are students with disabilities. Hillside Elementary entered restructuring based on 2002-03 testing and exited in 2005-06. Since then, only the subgroup of students with disabilities has had difficulty meeting AYP targets. This subgroup fell short of targets in English language arts based on 2006-07 testing but met targets this year due to NCLB's safe harbor provision, which allows a subgroup or school to make AYP if it decreases the percentage of students scoring below the proficient level by 10% or more from the previous year and meets other state benchmarks, such as attendance or graduation rates.

Hillside's successes are the result of a number of coordinated strategies, said Principal Barb Elliot, including the following:

- Twice monthly meetings of professional learning communities by grade level
- A series of school, classroom, and student goals developed with the help of SMART, a professional development program offered by Quality Leadership by Design in Wisconsin
- Inclusion classes and Response to Intervention, both reforms focused on improving the achievement of students who have disabilities or are at risk of being identified as having a disability.

Some initiatives started when the school was in restructuring have not lasted. The governing board, a group of appointed district and state officials, was quickly disbanded. Principal and staff said this structure was not effective because it was too removed from the day-to-day activities of the school. Hillside also lost its school improvement consultant, Nancy Colflesh. In the past, Hillside used school improvement funds to hire Colflesh to oversee the initiatives and work with staff to improve collaboration. While Elliot said Colflesh is missed at Hillside, the principal also believes that the professional learning communities are now self-sustaining.

This school year has also brought new supports to Hillside. With increased Title I funding, Elliot said, the school hired an additional full-time Title I teacher and an additional half-time teacher, who are being used much as coaches are. “They go in and model good instructional practice and, then a conversation can take place afterwards—what did you see that worked, what didn’t, how could you use this in other areas of your teaching?” Elliot explained.

Looking to the future, Elliot said the major challenge at Hillside was improving the performance of students with disabilities. “Traditionally in special education, you worked at the students’ level and gave them a lot of time, but there needs to be more of a sense of urgency.” She said she has hopes that inclusion classes and Response to Intervention will bring this urgency and improve achievement for this subgroup.

### **EXPANDING MIDDLE SCHOOL SUCCESSES IN WILLOW RUN**

Willow Run Community Schools is a suburban district in southeastern Michigan with about 2,000 students. About 61% are African American, 36% white, and the rest Latino, Asian, and other ethnicities. In addition, 69% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Willow Run Middle School entered restructuring in 2003-04 and exited in 2007-08. During the latter year, Willow Run High School entered restructuring. Although the high school increased the percentage of students scoring proficient on state tests in ELA by 2 points and in math by 11 points, it did not make AYP for 2008-09. All other district schools met all AYP targets.

Willow Run High School is working to improve student achievement by adopting reforms begun at the middle school, including benchmark assessments every three weeks to help teachers shape classroom instruction and additional periods of math for struggling students in lieu of electives.

In addition, in 2007-08 the district consolidated the middle and high schools under one principal in order to create a more seamless curriculum as well as save money. The building is particularly conducive to this arrangement, since the new middle school built in the summer of 2004 is connected to the high school by a library and swimming pool.

In 2008-09, the district created further coherence between the middle and high school by adopting a 6-12 curriculum. This allows the district to build on the middle school successes, Principal Larry Gray said. “The people in the middle school have done a great job of reaching kids but somehow we lose students in the high school,” he explained. In periodic staff meetings for grades 6-12 and monthly departmental meetings, “we’re able to make the connection from the middle schools,” said Gray. “We talk about what works for students in middle school and about the adjustments that we have to make for high school.” To work with the new curriculum, the high school also has the assistance of a math coach employed by the district’s ISD, as well as reading, science, and social studies specialists from the district.

All of the school and district officials we interviewed expressed hope about continuing to improve the high school and maintain achievement in the middle school. Steady declines in district enrollments and the accompanying losses of revenues pose an additional challenge, however. “Enrollment is a difficulty; we’re struggling to maintain a balanced budget,” said Penny Morgan, the district’s academic services facilitator. “Students are going out of state . . . Factories are open down south versus the ones in Michigan closing.”

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