



Michigan

Phoenix Elementary-Middle School (ARRA SIG recipient)

Detroit Public Schools

Eking Out Success with ARRA SIG Despite Logistical Barriers

Phoenix Elementary-Middle School, an ARRA SIG recipient, is home to 535 students, 14% of whom are African American, 58% Hispanic, 26% white, and the rest Asian American or other ethnicities. More than 99% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. In addition, 19% of students are students with disabilities, and 57% are English language learners (ELLs).

This Title I school did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2010 and was in corrective action under NCLB. Student achievement fell slightly on state tests in reading but rose slightly in math, as shown in the table below. This is second case study CEP has done of school improvement in Phoenix Elementary-Middle School; findings from the first were described in a 2011 CEP report, *Changing Tires En Route: Michigan Rolls Out Millions in School Improvement Grants*. We found many changes since the last visit.

Percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests at Phoenix Elementary-Middle, fall 2009 and 2010

Student subgroup	Reading		Math	
	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2009	Fall 2010
All students	48%	39%	39%	48%
African American	55%	39%	33%	47%
Latino	44%	39%	40%	48%
White	55%	42%	43%	49%
Economically disadvantaged	48%	39%	39%	48%
ELLs	42%	38%	39%	47%
Students with disabilities	22%	11%	22%	24%

Table reads: In fall 2009, 48% of all students at Phoenix Elementary scored at or above the proficient level on state reading tests. In fall 2010, this percentage fell to 39%.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, Fall 2010 MEAP Six Year Comparison Using Original Cut Scores.
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_31168_31530---,00.html

After a series of changes in leadership, Phoenix is continuing to implement its \$1.8 million ARRA SIG grant to the best of its capabilities. After former Principal Norma Hernandez took unexpected medical leave during the early months of 2011, administrator Shalonda Byas stepped in as acting principal for the duration of the 2010-11 school year. Because of her work in that

capacity, Byas was promoted to principal at nearby Farwell Middle School, also an ARRA SIG school. Christopher Sandoval took over as principal of Phoenix. However, Principal Sandoval has since resigned, and Alexander Cintron has now assumed the position of principal at Phoenix. Despite these challenges, Markita Hall, interim director for school improvement for the Detroit Public Schools, said Phoenix has seen some success in its school improvement efforts.

As documented in CEP's previous research on Michigan, school improvement efforts before ARRA SIG at Phoenix lacked coordination. Schools were "just doing" school improvement, former Principal Norma Hernandez said at that time, and plans to change Phoenix were just beginning to coalesce. In August 2010, Hernandez was instructed by Detroit school officials to apply for ARRA SIG funds. After a hurried application process in which Hernandez and Byas met for three days with a representative from Pearson Learning Teams (which was the school's external provider at that time but has since been replaced), Phoenix applied and received its considerable ARRA SIG grant.

Markita Hall identified three primary elements of Phoenix's ARRA SIG plans: building a culture of collaboration among faculty members, extending learning time, and utilizing the new external provider, Teachscape. Previous to ARRA SIG, Phoenix had a history of struggling to find time to coordinate strategies at the school level. Now, Hall said, Phoenix has developed Instructional Learning Teams (ILTs) whose primary function is to use data to make instructional decisions. Shalonda Byas agreed, noting that because Phoenix's ARRA SIG plans call for the development of different committees of teachers, it has the effect of encouraging collaboration among faculty members. These structural changes mean that teachers are working together to formulate and implement action plans that address issues within the school and to make decisions about research-based strategies that improve classroom practices.

Phoenix had been unable to extend learning time last year, and instead sought to make scheduling changes that devoted more instructional time to both English language arts and math. Hall referred to this strategy as "double dosing"—building blocks of time into the schedule to focus more intensely on these core subjects. This year, however, Hall noted that Phoenix has been able to extend learning time by one full hour every day. Because the ARRA SIG funds are completely supporting this increase in time, however, Hall said "this will be a loss once ARRA SIG funds are gone if Title [1] funding cannot support that."

Finally, Teachscape took over this year as Phoenix's primary external provider, replacing Pearson Learning Teams. Teachscape is doing a full needs assessment, Hall noted, but because Phoenix is in year 2 of ARRA SIG implementation, the professional development provided by Teachscape will build on the school's first year of implementation rather than starting from ground zero. At Phoenix, Teachscape's peer and individual reflection model requires teachers to videotape and review classroom lessons, and discuss which practices and strategies were displayed and what they might do to improve the quality of teaching. Hall said this model was a better fit with the new culture of collaboration at Phoenix.

Indeed, it is this culture of collaboration that both Hall and Byas said is the greatest success resulting from ARRA SIG at Phoenix. Byas noted that all of the formal collaboration required as part of the ARRA SIG plan "called for staff to have to work together and bring their expertise to

the table.” Byas observed that these structural changes have prompted “staff to come up with action plans and then begin implementation and then assess and monitor and then show growth. It completely kept people focused.”

This renewed focus on improvement has had a number of other positive impacts. “[T]he biggest challenge was getting the teachers to use the data to drive instruction,” said Byas. ARRA SIG funds allowed Phoenix to hire an academic engagement officer, whose job is to help teachers improve instruction by coordinating curricula across the school and by organizing and assisting in professional development activities. Hall indicated that this assistance, as well as the specific mandates included in the SIG grant, required teachers “to look at the data and make decisions based on the data, and any decision that was made, they had to support it utilizing the data.” While the school did not make AYP last year, these successes have led to some moderate achievement gains.

As far as challenges are concerned, both Hall and Byas were quick to note that Phoenix is struggling to spend its grant money. Because of the logistical barriers in place in Detroit Public Schools, Detroit schools need to bid on services and products over \$1,000. This, said Hall, delays the process of getting schools the materials they need. Hall noted, “We’re struggling to get products and services in a timely fashion whereas in some districts they can send out for services and they would get the services within the next week or two or products within the next week or two.” These delays can slow down implementation and cause frustration for administrators trying to use ARRA SIG funds.

Marion Law Academy (non-recipient)

Detroit Public Schools

Implementing Reform Without ARRA SIG Funding

Located in Detroit, Marion Law Academy is a Title I school serving nearly 900 students. Law Academy houses 881 students, 99% of whom are African American, 87% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and 22% of whom are students with disabilities. Though Law Academy did not receive an ARRA SIG grant, the school is still required to implement the plan for school improvement that it outlined in its ARRA SIG application as part of a new Michigan state law. The school did not make AYP last year and, like Phoenix, is in corrective action under NCLB. As shown in the table below, student achievement on state reading tests remained relatively stable while performance in math rose slightly.

Percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests at Law Elementary, fall 2009 and 2010

Student subgroup	Reading		Math	
	Fall 2009	Fall 2010	Fall 2009	Fall 2010
All students	61%	61%	50%	57%
African American	62%	61%	50%	57%
Economically disadvantaged	62%	60%	51%	57%
Students with disabilities	44%	20%	39%	32%

Table reads: In fall 2009, 61% of all students at Marion Law Academy scored at or above the proficient level on state reading tests. In fall 2010, this percentage remained 61%.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, Fall 2010 MEAP Six Year Comparison Using Original Cut Scores.
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_31168_31530---,00.html

Principal Jeffrey Nelson has been at Law Academy since January 2009, when he was promoted from the position of assistant principal at a different school. Prior to applying for a school improvement grant, Law Academy was in the process of implementing its school improvement plan mandated under NCLB. Notified by the Detroit Public School system that it would need to apply for ARRA SIG in round 2, Law administrators spent most of the year planning. After the school did not receive the grant, administrators prepared to implement the strategies outlined in the application as part of Law Academy's new redesign plan.

Hall and Nelson each pointed to separate components of Law Academy's renewed commitment to school improvement. Hall noted that Law, like many of Detroit's public schools, would be receiving external support from Wayne County's Regional Educational Service Agency (Wayne RESA), an external provider funded by the state to provide principal coaches and school improvement facilitators. The school improvement monitor has been Wayne RESA's largest contribution so far, said Nelson, noting that their monitor "comes in, sits in on our meetings, ensures that we are following our fiduciary responsibility in terms of following the school improvement plan."

Nelson identified a few other school-specific strategies: infusing technology into the classroom, providing in-service professional development on Response to Intervention strategies, and enhancing staff and student morale. Law administrators were able to address their technology goals with the assistance of a grant from the state of \$179,000. These funds were used purchase technology from Apple, including iPads, iPods, MacBooks, and others, to help enhance classroom instruction. When probed, Nelson suggested that it is this improvement he is most excited to see in action, although as of our interview logistical barriers had gotten in the way of securing the equipment.

Law has approached its other strategies from a more homegrown perspective by taking advantage of its available resources. Wayne RESA's coaches offer professional development opportunities, and Nelson and his administrative colleagues have attempted to boost professional morale and court teacher buy-in by redesigning the school's mission statement to more accurately reflect the school's new direction. As Nelson said, "We wanted our vision and our mission and belief statement to reflect the fact that we wanted to train our students to be able to operate in a global, digital society [so] that they leave us being ready to embrace the world of work and leave us with the knowledge and the skills that they need to be successful."

Nelson pointed to two substantial challenges: recruiting and retaining strong staff members, and using available funds. "We simply do not have enough teachers to do what we need to do to move forward and be successful with our school improvement plan," he said. Additional funding would be necessary to improve staffing deficiencies. Further, when funding is available, it can be very difficult to access. Nelson noted that one of his largest challenges is using funds to purchase materials and services. Purchases regularly require approval from Detroit Public Schools as well as the Michigan Department of Education, he said, *before* they go through the bidding process.

This process, which Nelson said the school has to go through to order the “minutest” of items, severely delays receipt of goods and slows down the implementation process. Further, late payments by DPS’s central office mean that vendors are frequently wary of working with Detroit schools, and schools “end up having to pay more than [they] would have had [they] been given the approval two months ago.” Nelson finds this kind of bureaucracy “very, very discouraging” and notes that it is one of the largest barriers to getting school improvement efforts underway.

Arthur Hill High School (ARRA SIG recipient)

Saginaw Public Schools

Aligning Improvement Strategies Based On Data with ARRA SIG

CEP interviewed administrators at Saginaw’s Arthur Hill High School with the intention of illuminating Arthur Hill’s experiences implementing its considerable ARRA SIG grant (\$1,649,328). The high school is eligible for but does not receive Title I funds. Located in northeastern Michigan on a bay of Lake Huron, Saginaw is an urban district in rural surroundings. Arthur Hill High School, an ARRA SIG grant recipient, is home to approximately 1,300 students, 77% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Sixty-seven percent of the school’s students are African American, 17% are Hispanic, and almost 15% are white. Arthur Hill made AYP in 2010 and is no longer in improvement under NCLB. The table below shows improvements in student achievement, although students are far from 100% proficient.

Percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests at Arthur Hill High School, spring 2010 and spring 2011

Student subgroup	Reading		Math	
	Spring 2010	Spring 2011	Spring 2010	Spring 2011
All students	38%	47%	23%	33%
African American	31%	42%	21%	28%
Economically disadvantaged	36%	42%	18%	26%

Table reads: In spring 2010, 38% of students at Arthur Hill High School scored at or above the proficient level on state reading tests. In spring 2011, this percentage rose to 47%.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, 2008-2011 MME Gap Analysis Using New Cut Scores.
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_35150_47475---,00.html

Principal Nathaniel McClain was brought on board as the lead administrator at Arthur Hill in 2007, when the school was facing tremendous challenges and on the verge of sliding into stage 5 of NCLB action. McClain’s primary responsibility at that time was to coordinate instructional efforts. Teachers, he observed, were working from a plethora of different instructional models and needed to use a more collective approach. By the time administrators applied for ARRA SIG in 2009, Arthur Hill was building momentum toward school improvement and had made AYP two years running.

Administrators identified three strategies as the most salient elements of their ARRA SIG plan: hiring qualified support staff (called a “SIG team”) to embed professional development and support, working with their new external provider EdWorks, and updating the school’s technological resources. In addition to these main foci, however, administrators continually mentioned smaller, discrete initiatives supported by ARRA SIG funds, including extending learning time by 30 minutes each day (five minutes per class) and offering extra academic support to students with a Saturday School program and other similar strategies. It was clear that administrators at Arthur Hill are working hard to take advantage of this funding opportunity.

Priscilla Arocha-Roby, assistant principal for curriculum and instruction at Arthur Hill, noted that the professional development component is implemented by a strong coaching staff. ARRA SIG funds support salaries for number of coaching positions that administrators refer to collectively as their “SIG team.” These positions include a “SIG coach” to lead the charge, a math coach, literacy coach, professional development coach, technology coach, positive behavior coach, and an as-yet unfilled data coach position, among others. This investment embeds professional development and support into teachers’ instructional practices on a daily basis with constant reinforcement and organizational assistance. By combining this focus on professional development with the organization of new professional learning communities that build in opportunities for instructor reflection, Arthur Hill administrators see staff organizing themselves around sustaining student growth.

Arthur Hill’s external provider EdWorks also provides regular professional development, specifically in terms of the literacy strategies instructors are using across the curriculum. Additionally, McClain noted that EdWorks has helped instructors learn how to use available data to drive instructional decisions, both within their own classrooms and in terms of coordinating efforts across instructors. Mainly, however, EdWorks has helped administrators at Arthur Hill with a framework to envision and achieve improvement milestones throughout the duration of the ARRA SIG funding. “I think the structure they provide in coordination with the coaching is real critical because it gives us the parameters that we need to operate within,” said McClain.

Indeed, these two foci, continual professional development and coordinated efforts with EdWorks, have driven Arthur Hill’s successes with ARRA SIG. Because of the available funds, Arthur Hill has been able to compensate teachers for their time in professional development, which Professional Development Coordinator Sharon Richardson said has helped to encourage teacher buy-in and enthusiasm. This, in turn, has helped to contribute to a cultural shift among both teachers and students and has built a schoolwide sense of momentum towards improvement. McClain called it a “more responsive culture” and noted that between the support offered to instructors by ARRA SIG-funded coaches and the ARRA SIG-required practice of regular assessments, staff work as a team to stay organized and focused on school improvement. Arocha-Roby said that “teachers have commented that they’ve been able to teach more this year. They’ve been able to do projects that before they hadn’t been able to do all year long, much less in the first two or three weeks of school.”

Despite these successes, McClain cited a few concerns and challenges in implementing ARRA SIG at Arthur Hill. First, McClain echoed the frustrations stated by his administrative colleagues in Detroit—the money may be available, but bureaucratic hoops regularly keep local educators

from spending it efficiently. Similarly to Detroit, educators in Saginaw need to go through a bidding process in order to purchase supplies and materials, and this can severely limit ARRA SIG implementation. It's cumbersome, noted Arocha-Roby, and streamlining the process would make it much easier to put ARRA SIG into action. Further, McClain has more policy-oriented concerns. "Once you get the money, you just want to be able to use it as efficiently [so that] people aren't under the impression that you don't know what to do with it," he said. "The state has given you all this money, and they're like, 'Why do you have something for carryover, or a significant amount for carryover? It shouldn't be if their need is that great. All of that money should be spent.'"

Additionally, McClain repeatedly expressed anxiety about sustaining these improvements after the ARRA SIG funding has run its course. He suggested that there quite simply is no way Arthur Hill will be able to offer the breadth and depth of support programming it currently operates. Arocha-Roby clarified that administrators at Arthur Hill, in conjunction with EdWorks staff, are trying to reinforce the message taught in by cognitive coaches in professional development: "You know you've done your job when you've coached yourself out of a job." And although EdWork's goal has been to help educators at Arthur-Hill think about how they plan to sustain growth and to wean them off continual support while keeping momentum, McClain has his doubts. "The biggest challenge for me . . . would be the sustainability," he said. "I just don't like getting started and having the support and having the funding and the momentum, only to have that taper off because the grant cycle has run its course. If we're truly interested in changing the lives of our kids—and I've seen [what] ARRA SIG can do with additional resource and people who are competent in positions . . . then we have to fund it accordingly or we're just blowing smoke."

Saginaw High School (non-recipient)

Saginaw Public Schools

Implementing District Strategies Without ARRA SIG Funds

Located just three miles from Arthur Hill High, Saginaw High School is home to approximately 800 student, 80% of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, although the school does not receive Title I funds. Among its students, 96% are African American, almost 4% are Hispanic, and less than 1% are white. Saginaw High did not make AYP in 2010. Although Saginaw applied for ARRA SIG in both of Michigan's application rounds, it did not receive this funding. The school did not make AYP last year and is in restructuring implementation under NCLB. As shown in the table below, student achievement has improved slightly at Saginaw High School.

Percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests at Saginaw High School, spring 2010 and spring 2011

Student subgroup	Reading		Math	
	Spring 2010	Spring 2011	Spring 2010	Spring 2011
All students	20%	24%	6%	9%
African American	20%	24%	6%	10%
Economically disadvantaged	20%	22%	5%	8%

Table reads: In spring 2010, 20% of students at Saginaw High School scored at or above the proficient level on state reading tests. In spring 2011, this percentage rose to 24%.

Source: Michigan Department of Education, 2008-2011 MME Gap Analysis Using New Cut Scores.
http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-22709_35150_47475---,00.html

Before Saginaw applied for ARRA SIG funds, administrators and teachers focused on school improvement primarily through intervention-based strategies. Working in teams to identify barriers to success early in students' academic trajectories, administrators and teachers at Saginaw had a tradition of building learning opportunities for students. Even before the ARRA SIG application process, Saginaw High offered both before- and after-school tutoring opportunities for struggling learners.

In the wake of the ARRA SIG application process, Saginaw administrators have focused their strategic efforts in two primary capacities: extending learning time and aligning curricula and assessments to reflect needs identified in data. Extending learning time proved to be the easier of Saginaw's efforts: administrators added an 80-minute math block and an 80-minute literacy block during the week, broken down into 40 minutes per day, five days a week. One 40-minute block per week is used for "organizational skills," whereby students can get assistance from teachers on homework on any subject. Teacher Teri Lieber observed that this extended time is "reinforcing" knowledge for students and adding continuity for students throughout the school day. Teacher Shannon Rammler noted that this extended time has also been helpful for teachers, who now have more of an opportunity to observe what students are doing in other subjects. This gives staff members a chance to have a dialogue and view firsthand how they can help support colleagues in other content areas.

Saginaw's curriculum and assessment alignment, however, is the result of several discrete initiatives working in tandem to create more focus for the schools' larger academic objectives. Using PLATO software to help organize its data analysis efforts, administrators are helping teachers make more instructional decisions in response to evidence of need, and then to align their formative assessments with this needs-based instruction in order to capture the effects of their instructional efforts. The result is an educational agenda that is a "constant system of monitoring and adjusting instruction based upon data" which helps "drive our planning and our decision-making," said Ramont Roberts, principal of Saginaw's Freshman Success Academy.

When asked about successes at Saginaw, teachers Lieber and Rammler were quick to point to a new peer education initiative. Academically successful older students are able to take a class about the skills involved in working as a peer mentor and learn how to best assist struggling younger students. During the extended learning blocks, peer mentors work as tutors and identify

mentees. Though instructors were initially dubious, the program has done well at Saginaw and seems to be reaching many students who would not otherwise have received assistance.

In regards to challenges, educators at Saginaw expressed initial disappointment about not being selected for ARRA SIG funding, but said they have bounced back energized. Educational director Don Durrett noted that additional funding would have been helpful, but he feels proud of the work Saginaw teachers have done to keep school improvement efforts underway. Additional funding would go a long way, Roberts observed, to implement professional development, enhance Saginaw's technological resources and hire additional staff. Lieber said these limitations (combined with energetic leadership) have forced educators at Saginaw to get creative and work as a team to find ways to boost student achievement. As Shannon Rammler note, "we're energized."

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