Restoring Excellence to the District of Columbia Public Schools

Report of the Strategic Support Team
of the
Council of the Great City Schools

Submitted to the
D.C. Public Schools

By the
Council of the Great City Schools

January 2004

(Send your comments to dcpscomments@cgcs.org)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council of the Great City Schools thanks the many individuals who contributed to this project to improve student achievement in the D.C. Public Schools. Their efforts and commitment were critical in presenting the district with the best possible recommendations.

First, we thank former Superintendent Paul Vance. It is not easy to ask one's colleagues for this kind of review. It takes courage and openness. It also requires a commitment to the city's children that is uncompromising.

Second, we thank Acting Superintendent Elfreda Massie. Her assistance and support during this review were critical. Her eagerness to spur student achievement was central to making this study happen.

Third, we thank the D.C. School Board, which provided the leadership and support to conduct this type of self-evaluation. Without the Board's cooperation, this review could not have occurred.

Fourth, we thank the members of the D.C. Public Schools staff who provided their valuable time and gathered all the documents and data that the Council needed to do its work. Staff's openness and enthusiasm were critical to our understanding of the challenges that D.C. faces.

Fifth, the Council thanks the many groups, organizations, and associations with which we met. We apologize that we were unable to meet with everyone we know had something valuable to say.

Sixth, the Council thanks the cities and school districts that contributed staff to this effort. They included Boston, Houston, Long Beach, and Sacramento. We also wish to thank the state of Pennsylvania for allowing its staff to join our team. The enthusiasm and generosity of these districts is another example of how the nation's urban public school systems are banding together to help each other improve student performance.

Seventh, the Council thanks Darla Marburger, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education, which provided $35,000 for this project.

Finally, I thank Council staff members Sharon Lewis and Janice Ceperich, whose skills were critical to the success of this effort.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

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INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE AND ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The Council of the Great City Schools, the nation's primary coalition of large urban public school systems, has prepared this report to summarize its recommendations to the District of Columbia about improving student achievement in its public schools.

This analysis, requested by former D.C. schools Superintendent Paul Vance and Acting Superintendent Elfreda Massie, was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council. The request came on the heels of the district's performance on the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Vance and Massie asked the Council to study why student performance in the D.C. schools was not improving and to propose ways to boost it. To carry out this charge, the Council assembled a Strategic Support Team (SST) composed of curriculum and instructional leaders who have worked to address some of the same issues as those faced by the D.C. Public Schools. Each of the team members came from urban school districts that have significantly improved student achievement over the last few years. Council staff accompanied and supported the team and prepared this report summarizing the findings and proposals of the SST.

The team made its site visit to the D.C. Public Schools on October 15-17. Its meetings began with a briefing by Superintendent Vance and Dr. Massie on the challenges the district faces and the efforts its leadership was making to meet them. That briefing was followed by two days of fact finding and a day devoted to synthesizing the team's findings and proposing preliminary strategies for improving the situation. Vance and Massie were debriefed at the end of the visit and voiced their support for the direction the team was suggesting. Additional time after the site visit was devoted to conference calls, data analysis, and the collection of further information.

We commend Paul Vance, Elfreda Massie, the school board, and staff for requesting this review. It is not an easy decision to subject oneself and the institution one leads to the scrutiny that an analysis like this entails.

PROJECT GOALS

Superintendent Vance and Elfreda Massie asked the Council to—

- Determine why reading and math achievement in the D.C. Public Schools was not improving.

- Propose ways to boost reading and math achievement in the school system.

THE WORK OF THE STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM

The Strategic Support Team made its site visit to the D.C. Public Schools on October 15-17, 2003. The team was composed of curriculum and instructional leaders from other urban schools systems that have made substantial progress in improving student achievement.

The team began its work with a detailed briefing on the academic status of the D.C. schools from then-Superintendent Paul Vance and Elfreda Massie, who was then chief of staff and is now acting superintendent. At that briefing, Vance laid out the charge to the team. The review that followed focused on the broad instructional strategies of the school system and included extensive interviews with D.C. school staff, board members, outside organizations, principals, teachers, and others. The team also reviewed numerous documents and reports and analyzed data on student performance. (See the appendices.)

Superintendent Vance and Chief of Staff Massie were briefed by the team on its preliminary findings and proposals at the end of the site visit. The team members then conducted conference calls after their site visit, gathered additional information, analyzed data, and refined their initial recommendations.

This approach to providing technical assistance to urban school districts that are struggling with instructional and operational problems is unique to the Council and its members and is proving effective for a number of reasons.

First, the approach allows the superintendent to work directly with talented, successful practitioners from other urban school systems that have established strong track records for performance and excellence.

Second, the recommendations developed by these peer teams have validity because the individuals who developed them have faced some of the same problems confronting D.C. It cannot be said that these individuals do not know what working in an urban school system is like or that their proposals have not been tested under the most rigorous conditions.

Third, using senior urban school managers from other communities is faster and less expensive than retaining a private firm. Team members know all the ways that school administrators can obscure reality. It does not take long for the teams to determine what is going on. This rapid learning curve permits services to be delivered in a faster and less expensive manner than could be secured with experts who are less versed on the folkways of urban education.

Finally, the teams comprise a pool of experts that the superintendent, school board, and staff can use to implement the recommendations or to develop other strategies.

Members of the Strategic Support Teams included the following individuals—

STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM MEMBERS

Frances Bessellieu Former Director of Reading Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools Dixie Dawson Math Coordinator Long Beach Unified School District Ricki Price-Baugh Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction Houston Independent School District Rebecca Brown Reading Director Sacramento City Schools	Maryellen Donahue Research Director Boston Public Schools Mary Ramirez Director of the Bureau of Community and Student Services Office of Elementary and Secondary Education Pennsylvania Department of Education. Mary Anne Lesiak Title I Consultant U.S. Department of Education

CONTENT OF THIS REPORT

This report begins with an Executive Summary of the issues facing the D.C. Public Schools as it struggles to boost student achievement and an outline of the proposals the Council and its SST are making. Chapter 1 presents a brief overview of student characteristics and student performance in the D.C. Public Schools. Chapter 2 summarizes the findings of the Strategic Support Team and its recommendations for improving student achievement. It also contains proposals for bringing the district into greater alignment with the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*. Chapter 3 provides a synopsis of the report's conclusions and discusses some of the pressures the D.C. school system will face in making the suggested reforms.

The appendices of this report include a number of items that may be of interest to the reader. Appendix A presents the results of the team's comparison of the D.C. schools with key instructional practices of some of the nation's fastest improving urban school systems. Appendix B lists the people the team talked with during its site visit. Appendix C lists the documents that the team reviewed. Appendix D presents brief biographical sketches of team members. Appendix E presents a brief description of the Council of the Great City Schools and the Strategic Support Teams it has conducted to improve urban education across the country.

The Council has now conducted nearly 80 Strategic Support Teams in more than 23 major cities in a variety of instructional and management areas. We have shied away from using a specific template to guide our fact-finding or our recommendations. Instead, reports by the organization are specifically tailored to each district and the particular challenges it faces.

In the instructional arena, the Council has been guided by its own research on why some urban school systems improve and others do not.[1] This research has focused on the key organizational and instructional strategies behind the academic gains of some of the fastest improving urban public school systems in the nation and how those strategies differ from those of districts that are not seeing much traction under their reforms.

Finally, we should point out that we did not examine everything that could possibly be analyzed in the D.C. schools. We did not spend time, for example, looking at non-instructional operations in the D.C. schools. We did not review staffing patterns or personnel credentials. And we did not look at the district's finances or a host of other issues that often find their way into the headlines. Our focus in this report is exclusively on student achievement and how to improve it.

PROJECT STAFF

Council staff working on this project included:

Michael Casserly Executive Director Council of the Great City Schools	Sharon Lewis Director of Research Council of the Great City Schools
Janice Ceperich Research Specialist Council of the Great City Schools	

[1]Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C., (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban Schools Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

Restoring Excellence to the D.C. Public Schools:

Report of the Strategic Support Teams of the Council of the Great City Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND KEY PROPOSALS

CHALLENGES

"DCPS is failing." These were the opening words of the report *Children in Crisis*, prepared in 1996 by the D.C. Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (also known as the Control Board) about the condition of the city's public schools.

The report detailed serious failures of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) to teach the system's children, manage its affairs, provide a safe environment for its students, and deliver basic education services. *Children in Crisis* and the media coverage it received shocked Washington and resulted in the exit of the school superintendent, the suspension of the school board's powers, the naming of a new chief executive officer, and the appointment of a new board of trustees to oversee reforms.

In many ways, the city's public school system has made substantial progress since 1996. It has substantially reduced the size of its central office. It has improved many of its operations. And it has built a stronger cadre of senior staff than it had before.[2]

Yet, the academic performance of the children in the district's charge is only marginally better than it was when the 1996 report was written. Some evidence, in fact, suggests that it is one of the lowest-performing big city school districts in the nation.

One message stands out clearly to those who worked on this project. **The D.C. school system is facing a critical choice. It can take the steps necessary to substantially improve student achievement, play a central role in the city's economic revitalization, and increase the public's confidence in its schools. Or it can keep things pretty much as they are.** The first path is steep and risky and requires energy, skill, and determination. The second path is easy and safe but lined with regrets about what might have been for the next generation of the city's children.

Other urban school systems have faced similar choices between progress and stagnation, including Cleveland, Boston, Houston, Fort Worth, Long Beach, Charlotte, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Detroit, and others. Some of these districts initiated major reforms on their own, while others had the choices made for them by external powers. But none

[2] See *Rebuilding the D.C. Schools*. Washington, D.C.: Council of the Great City Schools, 1998.

of the cities that took the tougher path has regretted it. In all of these cities, children are learning more than before. Test scores are up. And optimism is returning.

The message for the D.C. Public Schools is that greater payoffs often come from choosing the path of *most* resistance.

The instructional leaders from cities across the country who worked on this report were asked a simple question when we started our review. "Why is student achievement in the D.C. schools not improving any faster?" Our answer is also simple. "The district hasn't done anything to improve achievement."

The district did pursue the imperatives that the public seemed to want, however. It paid teachers on time (mostly). It counted, transported, and immunized students. It kept food from spoiling. It quieted the political noise from the school board. It brought in the Army Corps of Engineers to fix some of the buildings. It put into place a universal, full-day kindergarten program. It kept the books balanced (mostly). And it generally ensured that things ran on time.

While the school district was trying to solve the problems it thought the public wanted solving, it delegated the challenge of raising student achievement to the schools and individual principals. The result is a school district where all could claim that their work was consistent with the goals of the organization no matter what they were doing. The district has lost its instructional focus; its efforts have become fractured and incoherent; its instructional moorings have loosened; and its unity of purpose has splintered. To make matters worse, the district has piled one program on top or another for so many years that one cannot tell what the system is trying to do academically or why.

In short, the D.C. school district has abdicated its leadership responsibility for student achievement to the schools and has had trouble hitting its instructional mark over the years because so many people were aiming in different directions. The result is what one sees today: no plan for improving student performance, low expectations for children, no accountability for results, haphazard instruction, incoherent programming, and dismal outcomes.

It gives an organization like ours no pleasure in coming to this conclusion. But we want to do everything we can to improve the D.C. schools, even if it means being publicly critical. It also means that we have an obligation to propose specific steps for improvement, for it gives us even less pleasure to see one of our members flounder. It reflects poorly on everyone. We make our proposals in this spirit.

Ironically, the city is about to embark on another conversation about issues that probably won't do much to improve student performance, governance. The governance debate is necessary because legislation establishing the current hybrid school board is about to expire. But, if the conversation doesn't include a parallel discussion about how

to improve academic performance, then the city is likely to look back in another four years and wonder why things didn't improve.

The truth of the matter is that there is no magical governance structure that by itself is likely to produce better schools. There are cities with very traditional school structures—elected board, traditional superintendent, and independent taxing authority—that are seeing significant gains in student achievement. There are also cities with the same setup that have not seen any gains. Conversely, there are cities with non-traditional structures that are seeing important improvements and some that have seen little academic progress. In many ways, the organizational boxes don't mean as much to the improvement of achievement as what the people in the boxes do.

To improve student achievement, the people in all positions—however they are arranged—have to focus relentlessly and single-mindedly on instruction, something noticeably missing in most discussions about who gets to control the D.C. schools.

To address this void, Paul Vance, the outgoing superintendent of the D.C. schools, asked the Council of the Great City Schools to review the instructional program of the D.C. Public Schools and propose ways to improve it and to boost student achievement. The Council assembled a Strategic Support Team, composed of senior managers from other urban school systems that have made substantial gains in achievement, to do the work. The teams looked specifically at the district's curriculum and instructional program.

The team visited D.C. in October 2003 and has prepared a detailed list of recommendations for the acting superintendent, the school board, and the city. The proposals are summarized below.

KEY PROPOSALS

The Council of the Great City Schools benchmarked or compared the instructional program of the D.C. Public Schools against those of other urban school districts that were making rapid progress. The organization then drew up a set of recommendations to make D.C.'s instructional practices more like those of districts seeing progress. For D.C.'s progress to be more like these other cities, the district will have to take the following bold steps:

1. Develop a common and coherent vision for where the D.C. school system wants to go academically.

The D.C. Public Schools currently lack a comprehensive plan for improving student achievement. But developing one will require the school board and the superintendent to develop a shared vision for where they want the district to go and what they want the schools to look like. The district's leadership will need to—

- Convene the school board at the earliest possible date and begin establishing with the acting superintendent a clear vision for improving academic achievement in the school district.

- Charge the superintendent with drafting a concrete, five-year instructional plan for improving the academic performance of the district's schools.

- Express a sense of urgency for improving student achievement in the strongest possible terms.

- Commit to sustaining a new reform agenda for a prolonged period.

2. Set measurable goals for academic improvement.

The D.C. Public Schools currently lack a set of goals beyond those for attaining accreditation that would more rapidly improve student achievement across the district. The district needs to—

- Set measurable districtwide and school-by-school academic targets in reading and math that set the highest expectations and are tied to *No Child Left Behind*.

- Attach timelines and benchmarks to the attainment of goals.

- Ensure that the new instructional plan includes explicit goals for attendance, graduation rates, dropouts, course-taking patterns, and the like.

- Revise the school improvement plans to build in new academic targets that roll up to a set of districtwide goals.

3. Establish a new accountability system for attaining academic goals.

Academic goals for improving the D.C. Public Schools are of little use unless they are accompanied by the means to hold people responsible for attaining them. The district currently holds only one person accountable, the superintendent. To devise an accountability system that works across the system, the district will need to—

- Place the superintendent and central office instructional staff on performance contracts tied to the attainment of districtwide academic goals.

- Begin placing more emphasis in principals' contracts on school-by-school academic targets.

- Continue the latitude for principals to interview, select, and hire their own staff and shape their own budgets.

- Tie the evaluations of staff and principals to the attainment of the district's goals.

4. Standardize districtwide instructional strategies and curriculum.

The D.C. Public Schools currently have numerous programs to boost student performance, many of which are selected and implemented at the school level with little coordination or alignment—and little evaluation as to which ones work and which don't. To create instructional cohesion and focus, the district will need to—

- Standardize school district instructional decisions about curriculum and professional development.
- Place a moratorium on the acquisition of all new materials, programs, and comprehensive school reform models.
- Develop a comprehensive reading plan, including a core program, supplemental materials, and interventions.
- Adopt a single, core reading and math text for systemwide adoption and implementation.
- Begin phasing out all instructional programs that are not consistent with the new adoption and that do not work.
- Align the new curriculum with National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math frameworks.

5. Provide focused and sustained districtwide professional development on the implementation of the new curriculum.

The D.C. school system currently has a very disjointed professional development program that mirrors the incoherence of its instructional strategies. To be more effective, the district needs to—

- Standardize the professional development provided to teachers and organize the district's training around the implementation of the new comprehensive reading and math plan and the use of data.
- Limit school-by-school designed professional development to classroom management, character education, parent involvement, and instructional training that addresses a unique school academic challenge.
- Reorient the use of federal Title I and Title II professional development set-asides and allocations to pay for districtwide training.

6. Ensure that reforms are implemented at the classroom level.

The D.C. school system currently allows each school to pursue almost any programs or strategies it wants to. This approach has not proved to be effective. The district not only needs to take primary responsibility for raising student achievement districtwide but also needs to—

- Develop a plan that can be used by central office administrators, principals, content specialists, and teachers to monitor implementation of the comprehensive reading and math plan.

- Finish developing a standardized process that can be used by principals and content specialists to monitor curriculum implementation.

- Retain additional reading and math specialists to work directly in the schools to support training, school improvement planning, data-based decision making, coaching, and monitoring.

7. Use data to monitor progress and decide on instructional interventions.

The D.C. schools are becoming more sophisticated in and committed to the use of data to decide on instructional strategies. But it is unclear whether the district's data tools are aligned to and consistent with its curriculum. The district needs to—

- Begin implementing a series of quarterly or interim assessments that will benchmark how students are doing over the course of the school year.

- Replace the SAT-9 with a new criterion-referenced assessment.

- Use the results on the interim assessments to help shape, inform, and place professional development and instructional decision making.

- Begin putting the district's reform initiatives on a regular schedule of evaluation.

8. Begin system reforms at the elementary level but start reforming high schools.

The D.C. schools have a large and longstanding early childhood program that needs to be upgraded and tied to reading and math reforms at the early elementary school level. The district also recognizes that performance in its secondary schools is very low and has drafted a high school reform plan, but the plan lacks a strong academic focus. The district needs to—

- Overhaul the literacy component of the district's preschool and full-day kindergarten programs and align them instructionally with the full-day kindergarten program.

- Increase the required amount of time spent each day on language arts and math.

- Standardize the district's special education referral process so that it is not driven by subjective judgments and redefine the criteria for placements.

- Differentiate the instructional program offered in the district's summer school program so that it addresses the varying needs of students by subject, level of performance, and skill level.

- Begin the process of increasing the rigor of the district's high school courses.

9. Focus on the district's lowest-performing schools.

D.C. has a number of schools that are unusually low performing. Many urban school systems across the country are learning that they can improve their overall performance by targeting efforts on boosting the performance of its lowest-achieving schools. The district needs to—

- Continue but overhaul the district's "transformation school" program.

- Develop specific criteria by which schools enter and exit the transformation school process.

- Create a new set of incentives for encouraging the district's best teachers to teach in its transformation schools.

- Begin phasing in a set of individual education plans for every student enrolled in a transformation school.

- Intensify the instructional program in each transformation school.

These proposals represent a sharp change from the instructional practices now in effect. The recommendation most likely to catch the public's eye involves standardizing the instructional program.[3] We have made this proposal to provide more direction and cohesion to a very fractured and ineffective program; raise expectations uniformly for student achievement; mitigate the effects of high student mobility; ease the consequences of not being able to find enough top-flight principals; alleviate problems brought on by poor teacher training; and enhance the ability of the central office to support the instructional program.

The Council of the Great City Schools does not know of any major city school systems in the nation that is making sustained gains across the district with the site-based instructional approach used by D.C. The urban districts that are showing convincing gains, in fact, are doing the opposite of what D.C. is doing. They are decentralizing many

[3] This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3.

personnel, budgetary, and site-specific training needs to the school level—as we have proposed here—but are standardizing the curriculum and professional development in order to improve the bottom line, student achievement.

Finally, we encourage the city to get the school district out of the political morass it is now in. The district is being pulled and tugged in so many directions that it is having a hard time getting any traction. The system deserves to be pressured, but it cannot improve if it is constantly subjected to the ebb and flow of political demands that have little to do with the quality of instruction students receive.

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND ON THE D.C. SCHOOLS

LEADERSHIP

The District of Columbia Public Schools is governed by a school board of nine members, five of which are elected and four of which are appointed by the mayor of the City. The President of the Board is elected citywide. All members serve four-year terms. The board meets twice monthly and operates four committees, which meet once a month: the Committees on Facilities and Finance; Teaching and Learning; Special Education and Student Services; and Operations and Vision. Each committee has a chair and sometimes a co-chair.

Over the past twenty years the district has had seven superintendents or about one new CEO every 2.9 years.

- Floretta McKenzie 1981-1988
- Andrew Jenkins 1988-1990
- William Brown (Acting) 1990-1991
- Franklin Smith 1991-1996
- Julius Becton 1996-1998
- Arlene Ackerman 1998-2000
- Paul Vance 2000-2003
- Elfreda Massie (Acting) 2003-

Elfreda Massie was appointed acting superintendent in November 2003, when Paul Vance announced his resignation. The school board is currently discussing the process it will use to appoint a permanent superintendent.

The governance structure of the school system has undergone a number of revisions over the last several years. The city was placed under the aegis of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (Control Board) in 1996. The Control Board named a Board of Trustees in the same year that operated alongside the eleven-member elected school board for a time. (The elected board had three at-large members and eight members elected by ward.) The Board of Trustees was replaced on January 1, 2000, by the current board.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The D.C. Public Schools enrolled about 68,449 students in the 2001-2002 school year, the most recent year for which comparable national data are available for other major cities. (Statistics for the current school year, 2003-2004, show that the district enrolls 65,099 students.) Some 60.9 percent of the district's students were eligible for a free or reduced price lunch in 2001-2002, compared with about 39.7 percent nationwide. (Table 1)

A total of 84.4 percent of D.C.'s enrollment is African American, compared with 16.9 percent nationwide. In addition, 12 percent of the district's enrollment is composed of English language learners (ELLs) and 18.4 percent consists of students with disabilities. The district enrolls a higher percentage of students in both cases than the national averages. In general, the D.C. school system looks more like other major urban school systems across the country than it resembles the average school district in the nation.[4]

Table 1. Comparison of the D.C. Schools with the Great City Schools and National Averages, 2001-02[5]

	D.C. Schools	Great City Schools	National
Enrollment	68,449	7,274,284	48,521,731
% African American	84.4	37.0	16.9
% Hispanic	9.4	32.7	18.5
% White	4.6	23.1	58.9
% Other	1.7	7.0	5.7
% Free/Reduced Price Lunch	60.9	62.4	39.7
% English language learners	12.0	17.0	7.9
% with Disabilities	18.4	12.9	13.3
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	13.9	17.0	15.9
Number of Schools	165	10,270	96,193
Students per School	415	708	504
Current Spending per Pupil[6]	$10,874	$7,200	$6,991

The average school in D.C. enrolls about 415 students, significantly fewer than the average city (708 students per school) or the national average (504 students per school). The district also has more teachers per pupil than either the Great City Schools average or the national average. Finally, data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that D.C.'s current per pupil expenditure was $10,836 in FY2000.

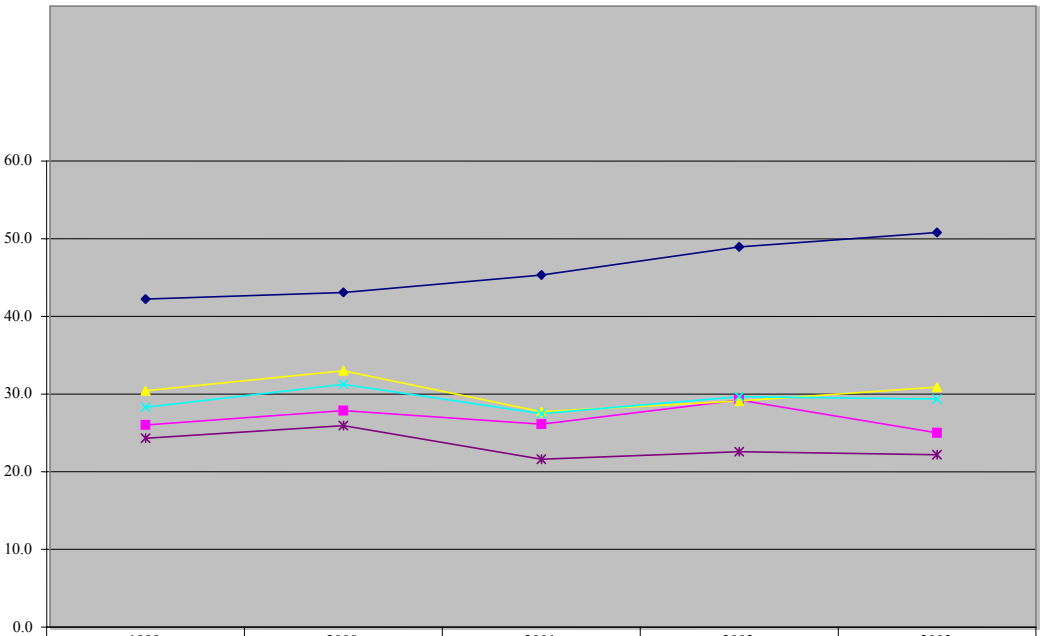
[4] Great City School figures are drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics on school districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools.
[5] Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary and Secondary School Universe Survey," 2001-2002.
[6] Data are for the 2000 fiscal year.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The Stanford Achievement Tests Ninth Edition (SAT-9) in reading and math have been administered to all students in grades 1-11 of the D.C. Public Schools since 1999. Student reading scores in grades 1, 3, and 4 showed small increases between 1999 and 2003, with the greatest gains among first graders, who improved 8.6 percentage points over the period. Reading scores among third graders increased 0.5 percentage points over the five years and scores among fourth graders improved by 1.1 percentage points.

Reading scores for second graders and students in grades 5-11 decreased over the five-year period.[7] Scores among second graders decreased by 1.0 percentage point. And reading scores dropped by 2.1 percentage points for fifth graders; 1.7 percentage points for sixth graders; 3.6 percentage points for seventh graders; 6.4 percentage points for eighth graders; 2.6 points for ninth graders; 0.5 points for tenth graders; and 1.5 percentage points for eleventh graders. Fewer than 25 percent of D.C. students in grades 5-11 scored at or above proficiency levels on the SAT-9. (Graphs 1-2)

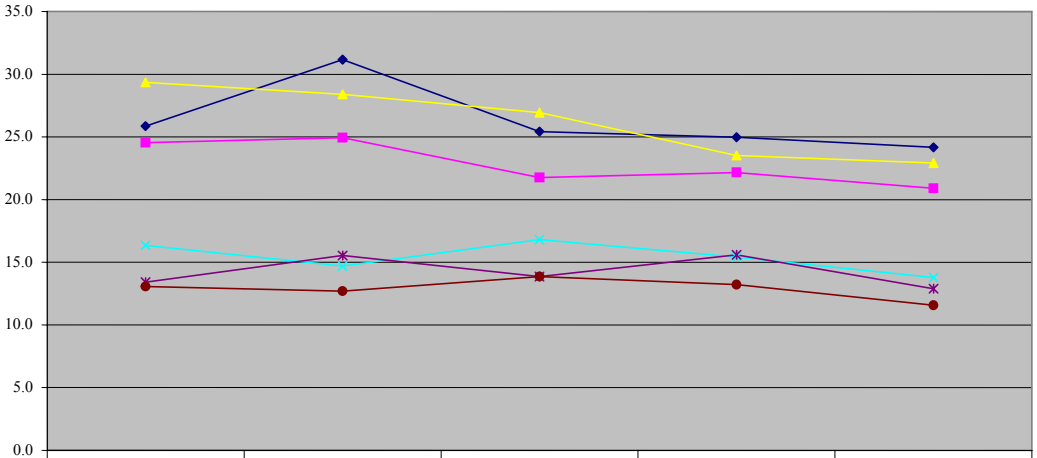
Graph 1. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficiency Level or Above on SAT-9 Reading, Grades 1-5[8]



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
1st Grade	42.2	43.1	45.3	49.0	50.8
2nd Grade	26.0	27.9	26.1	29.2	25.0
3rd Grade	30.4	33.0	27.7	29.1	30.9
4th Grade	28.3	31.3	27.5	29.7	29.4
5th Grade	24.3	25.9	21.6	22.6	22.2

[7] Data in Graphs 1-4 are reported as percentages of students at or above proficiency levels, as required under *No Child Left Behind*. The same data reported in Normal Curve Equivalents show some increases.
[8] The Board of Education permitted schools to choose whether they would test students in first and second grades in 2002-2003, so comparisons to other years may not be valid.

Graph 2. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficiency Level or Above on SAT-9 Reading, Grades 6-11



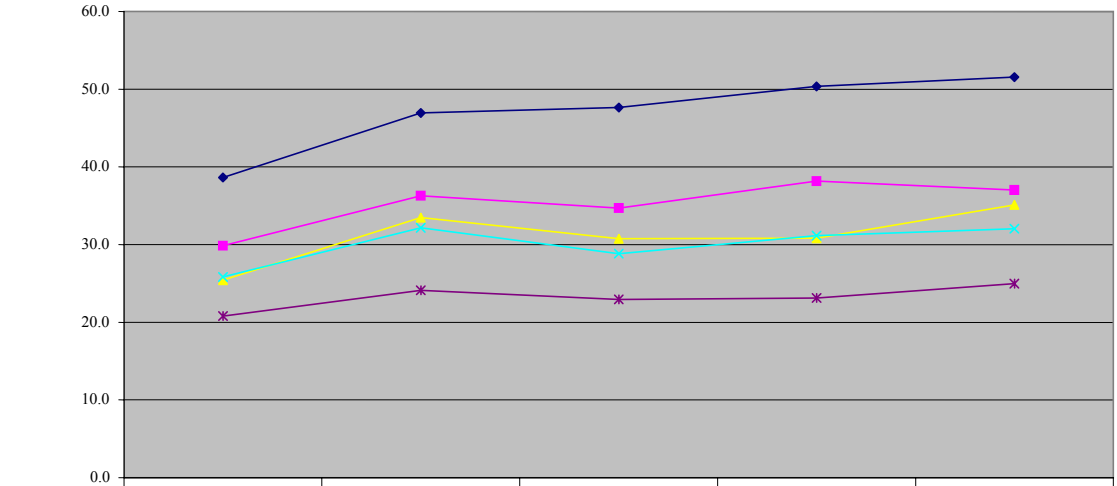
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
6th Grade	25.9	31.2	25.4	25.0	24.2
7th Grade	24.5	24.9	21.8	22.2	20.9
8th Grade	29.3	28.4	26.9	23.5	22.9
9th Grade	16.4	14.7	16.8	15.4	13.8
10th Grade	13.4	15.5	13.9	15.6	12.9
11th Grade	13.1	12.7	13.9	13.2	11.6

The trends are slightly more promising in math. Over the five-year period, math scores on the SAT-9 improved in every grade tested, except the eleventh. The greatest math gains were made among first graders, as was the case in reading. Students in grades 1-5 generally made greater gains in math than students in grades 6-10. Students in grade 11 declined.

Math scores in first grade increased by 13.0 percentage points between 1999 to 2003; second grade scores increased by 7.1 percentage points; third grade by 9.7 percentage points; fourth grade by 6.2 percentage points; fifth grade by 4.2 percentage points; sixth grade by 3.0 percentage points; seventh grade by 2.4 points; eighth grade by 1.0 point; ninth grade by 1.5 points; and tenth grade by 0.7 points.

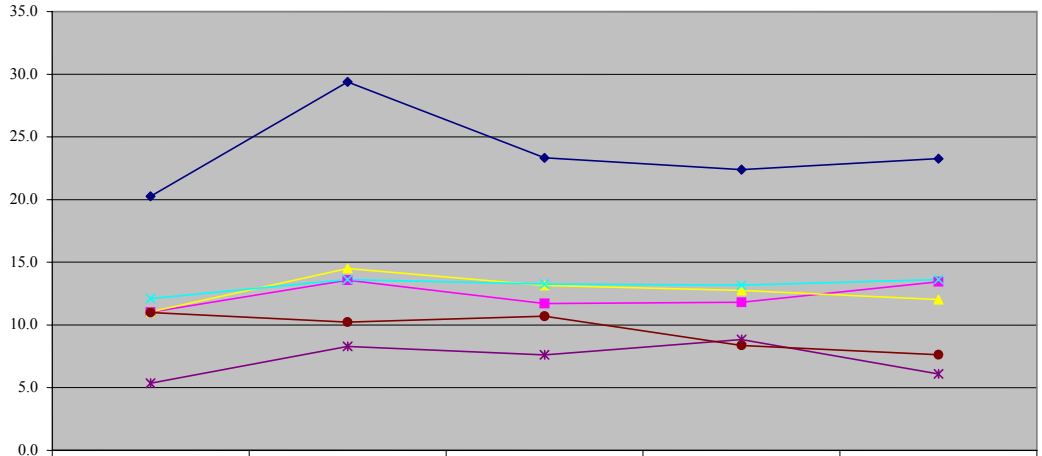
Math scores among eleventh graders declined by 3.4 percentage points between 1999 and 2003. Fewer than 25 percent of D.C. students scored at or above the proficiency level in math in grades 6-11. (Graphs 3-4)

Graph 3. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficiency Level or Above on SAT-9 Math, Grades 1-5



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
1st Grade	38.6	46.9	47.7	50.4	51.6
2nd Grade	29.9	36.3	34.7	38.2	37.0
3rd Grade	25.4	33.5	30.8	30.8	35.1
4th Grade	25.8	32.2	28.8	31.1	32.0
5th Grade	20.8	24.1	22.9	23.1	25.0

Graph 4. Percentage of Students Scoring at the Proficiency Level or Above on SAT-9 Math, Grades 6-11



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
6th Grade	20.3	29.4	23.3	22.4	23.3
7th Grade	11.0	13.6	11.7	11.8	13.4
8th Grade	11.0	14.5	13.2	12.8	12.0
9th Grade	12.1	13.6	13.3	13.2	13.6
10th Grade	5.4	8.3	7.6	8.8	6.1
11th Grade	11.0	10.2	10.7	8.4	7.6

SAT-9 trends are also available by race. The gaps in reading scores between racial groups are generally large, ranging from 15 points to 74 points depending on grade and subject. The gaps between white and African American students ranged from 36.5 percentage points in the first grade to 70.4 percentage points in the tenth grade in 2003. The gaps between white and Latino students ranged from 37.5 percentage points in first grade to 72.3 percentage points in tenth grade. (Tables 2-3)

Table 2. Reading Gaps (White minus African American) by Grade, SAT-9

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Change in Gap
Grade 1	47.0	40.4	44.0	39.5	36.5*	-10.5
Grade 2	61.4	55.7	59.4	54.4	64.0*	2.5
Grade 3	66.3	56.5	60.1	64.3	58.8	-7.5
Grade 4	68.6	61.4	65.1	62.7	64.4	-4.2
Grade 5	70.2	67.6	65.2	65.3	61.3	-8.9
Grade 6	72.6	60.0	69.2	63.5	63.9	-8.7
Grade 7	66.0	67.5	64.8	66.0	64.1	-1.9
Grade 8	63.2	54.4	59.3	64.2	65.9	2.8
Grade 9	66.9	68.6	61.4	66.2	71.4	4.5
Grade 10	70.3	64.1	69.3	69.4	70.4	0.1
Grade 11	56.6	67.4	57.1	66.9	65.7*	9.1

Table 3. Reading Gaps (White minus Latino) by Grade, SAT-9

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Change in Gap
Grade 1	38.1	48.7	39.7	38.7	37.5*	-0.6
Grade 2	31.9	54.0	61.0	55.7	70.1*	38.2
Grade 3	50.1	64.1	63.5	70.9	60.3	10.2
Grade 4	54.9	60.3	64.8	64.5	67.8	13.0
Grade 5	57.0	71.7	63.6	64.2	65.6	8.6
Grade 6	71.8	64.9	69.2	59.2	64.4	-7.4
Grade 7	62.5	68.3	61.7	64.2	59.1	-3.4
Grade 8	62.5	58.8	57.7	61.9	64.9	2.4
Grade 9	66.9	70.6	65.2	66.1	74.6	7.7
Grade 10	64.1	68.4	71.8	70.1	72.3	8.3
Grade 11	57.0	68.3	62.4	66.9	69.7*	12.7

Between 1999 and 2003, the gaps improved in some cases and worsened in others. For instance, the reading gap between white and African American students

* The reader should interpret the size of these gaps with caution since fewer than 100 white students were tested in these grades in 2003.

decreased in grades 1 and 3-7; and the reading gap between white and Latino students decreased in grades 1 and 6-7. In all other grades, the gaps grew wider.

Gaps in math scores are similar to those in reading. The difference in math scores between white and African American students in 2003 ranged from 28.4 percentage points among first graders to 69.8 percentage points among ninth graders. The gaps between white and Latino students ranged from 36.9 percentage points in first grade to 72.1 percentage points in ninth grade. (Tables 4-5)

Table 4. Math Gaps (White minus African American) by Grade, SAT-9

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Change in Gap
Grade 1	50.5	42.6	44.1	40.8	28.4*	-22.1
Grade 2	56.7	55.2	54.0	48.9	51.0*	-5.7
Grade 3	56.1	56.1	58.9	60.2	54.1	-2.0
Grade 4	65.9	55.8	62.8	57.8	58.8	-7.1
Grade 5	69.2	69.1	63.8	67.7	61.7	-7.5
Grade 6	71.4	58.9	67.3	62.1	64.2	-7.2
Grade 7	67.6	70.6	70.6	73.7	64.7	-2.9
Grade 8	65.6	66.6	70.7	71.7	71.5	5.9
Grade 9	60.3	65.9	65.7	71.5	69.8	9.5
Grade 10	54.7	55.4	60.5	59.7	50.5	-4.2
Grade 11	48.3	63.0	51.7	55.2	57.8*	9.5

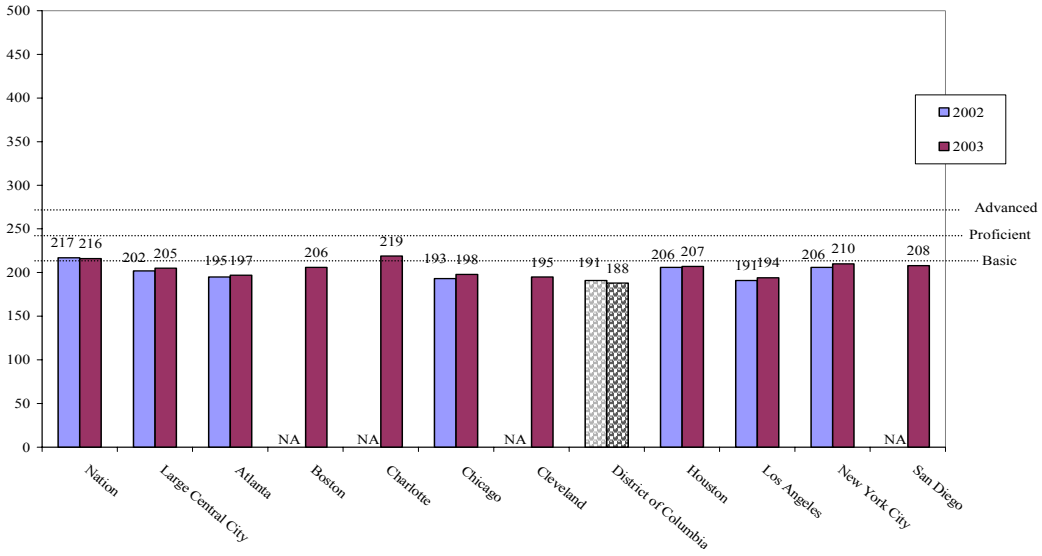
Table 5. Math Gaps (White minus Latino) by Grade, SAT-9

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Change in Gap
Grade 1	35.9	48.4	40.0	44.9	36.9*	1.0
Grade 2	23.8	52.7	53.2	47.0	63.0*	39.2
Grade 3	38.6	56.5	55.0	62.4	47.6	9.0
Grade 4	48.6	53.9	55.5	53.4	56.4	7.8
Grade 5	53.9	67.2	56.1	59.3	61.6	7.7
Grade 6	60.9	59.2	62.4	55.9	56.3	-4.5
Grade 7	66.9	71.0	65.1	68.4	58.4	-8.5
Grade 8	65.6	65.9	69.2	65.8	69.9	4.3
Grade 9	58.2	70.4	66.0	72.0	72.1	13.9
Grade 10	50.8	55.9	60.8	57.9	49.9	-0.8
Grade 11	43.7	58.0	54.3	54.3	56.3*	12.7

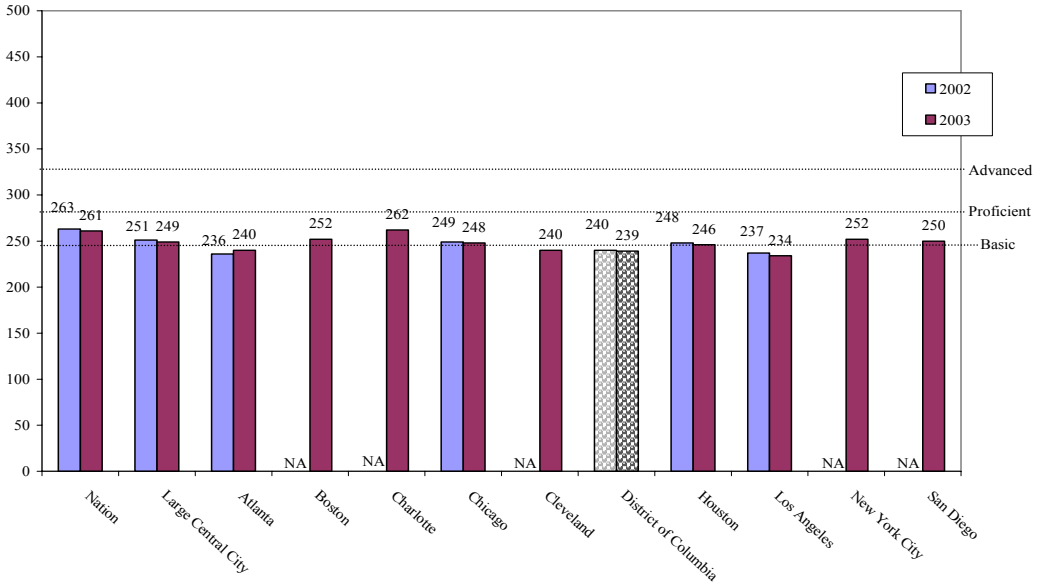
The final indicator on which we have achievement data for the D.C. Public Schools is NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The D.C. schools have been participating in NAEP for a number of years, but only recently has it become

possible to compare the district's scores with those of other major cities. The results are consistent with data from the SAT-9. The D.C. schools scored lower in 2003 than the nation or any other city reporting scores in reading and math. (Graphs 5-8)

Graph 5. Comparison of D.C. Schools 4th Grade NAEP Reading Scores with Other Large Cities and the Nation[9]

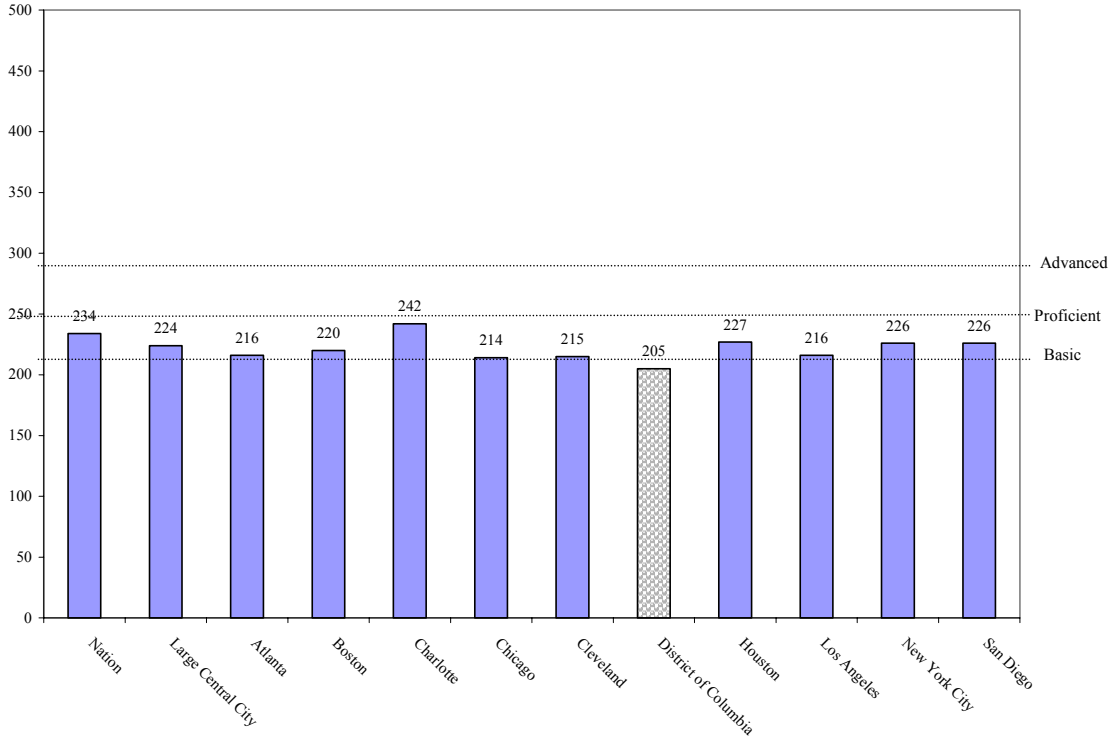


Graph 6. Comparison of D.C. Schools 8th Grade NAEP Reading Scores with Other Large Cities and the Nation

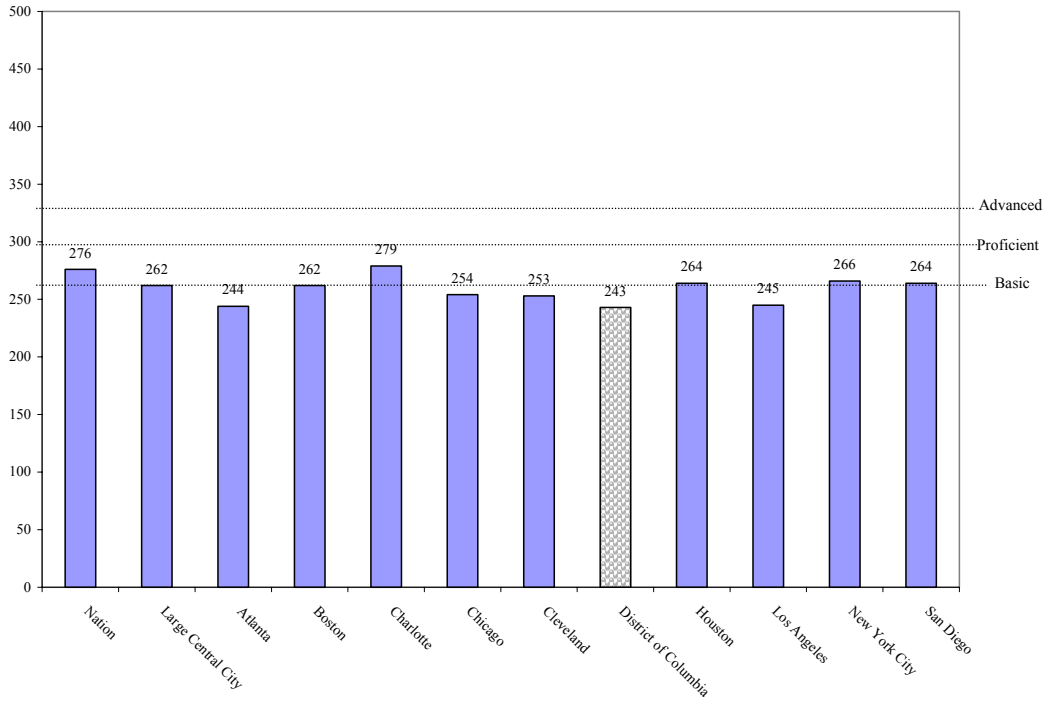


[9] The NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) was administered only in reading and writing in 2002 and in reading and math in 2003.

Graph 7. Comparison of D.C. Schools 4th Grade NAEP Math Scores with Other Large Cities and the Nation



Graph 8. Comparison of D.C. Schools 8th Grade NAEP Math Scores with Other Large Cities and the Nation



Finally, the scores for D.C. public school students on the SAT college entrance exams have declined somewhat over the last couple of years, as the numbers of students tested increased from 1,684 in 2000-2001 to 1,994 in 2002-03. Only four of the district's 18 high schools have average SAT verbal or math scores that exceed 400.[10] (Table 6.)

Table 6. Trends in SAT Scores

SAT Mean Scores				
	Number Tested	**Verbal**	**Math**	**Combined**
1999-00		414	408	822
2000-01	1,684	402	396	798
2001-02	1,730	400	396	796
2002-03	1,994	404	396	800

ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS

The D.C. school district has 165 schools, 129 of which are Title I schools that serve 42,940 of the systems' 65,099 students. All but three of these Title I schools are "schoolwide" schools that use Title I funds to upgrade instruction for all students. Data from the 2002-2003 testing cycle indicate that the district did not have any schools that were in level I school improvement under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, meaning that they had not made adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two consecutive years in raising student achievement. Fifteen D.C. schools were in level II school improvement, meaning that they are required to offer school choice and supplemental tutoring services to their students. At this time, no D.C. schools are in corrective action or restructuring status, the later stages of sanctions under the Act. (Table 7)

Table 7. Preliminary AYP Status of D.C. Public Schools, 2003

AYP Status	D.C. Schools
Warning	--
School Improvement I	0
School Improvement II	15
Corrective Action I	0
Corrective Action II	0
Total	15

[10] Banneker, Ellington, School without Walls, and Wilson High Schools.

CHAPTER 2. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Support Team.[11] Our findings are subdivided into ten sections. These sections are defined around themes that the Council of the Great City Schools has identified as critical to the academic improvement of urban school systems nationwide.[12] The themes include political preconditions and governance, goal setting, accountability, curriculum, professional development and teacher quality, reform press (or the ability to get reforms into the classrooms), assessments and use of data, low-performing schools, elementary schools, and middle and high schools. The Team's findings are further subdivided into positive areas and areas of serious concern.

The recommendations to accelerate student performance and to improve systemwide achievement are presented using the same categories that the team used to present its findings. The proposals are based on practices that research is demonstrating make a difference in improving student performance systemwide in urban school districts and what the Team believes that D.C. needs to do to be more like districts that are making strong achievement gains.

A. Political Preconditions and Governance

Urban school districts that have improved significantly over the last several years have a number of things in common. These commonalities also set them apart from urban school systems that have not seen significant improvement. One of these key features involves the political unity of the school board, its focus on student achievement, and its ability to work with the administration on improving academic performance. The Strategic Support Team did not conduct a special analysis of the board or its governing structure, but did observe a number of things that bear on the ability of the district to improve student achievement. The Team found things that were worthy of recognition and things that hamper the district's instructional reforms.

Positive Findings

- The school board has an increasing sense of urgency about raising student achievement in the school district and a growing consensus that academic performance must be improved. The board's Teaching and Learning Committee, for instance, has been focused recently on finding effective instructional models across the country.

- Although few people interviewed could cite it, the district has adopted a straightforward mission statement emphasizing student achievement--

[11] The SST recognizes that the D.C. schools will need support to implement the recommendations outlined in this chapter. The Council of the Great City Schools would be pleased to provide it, if asked.

[12] Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C. (2002). *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban Schools Systems Improve Student Achievement*. MDRC for the Council of the Great City Schools.

> *To develop inspired learners who excel academically and socially in dynamic schools that instill confidence and generate enthusiasm throughout the District's many, diverse communities and make DC Public Schools the first choice of youth and families.*

- The school board's Teaching and Learning Committee has defined four priority areas for the district to focus on over the next several years. These priorities include improved literacy in grades k-5; stronger teacher induction efforts; stronger principal evaluation; and high school reform.

- The school board supports the new acting superintendent and is meeting weekly with her, as it did with Superintendent Paul Vance.

- The acting superintendent has the skills, experience, and commitment necessary to begin putting an academic reform plan into place for the D.C. schools.

- Former Superintendent Paul Vance and Acting Superintendent Elfreda Massie initiated this study, and the members of the school board, particularly the president of the board and those on the Teaching and Learning Committee, were receptive to this academic review of the school district.

- The American Federation of Teachers and its local affiliate, the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU), seem particularly eager to help the leadership of the district with a new instructional plan that would boost student performance in the district. (An AFT-sponsored reading program is being implemented in three of the district's schools.)

- The district has some very talented staff people at the central office and in the schools who want the district to do better than it is.

Areas of Concern

- The district—either at the board level or the administrative leadership level—has no vision or strategy for raising student achievement across the system. There is a strategic business plan for the district, which is quite thorough, but there is no strategic plan for how the district works to improve student performance. (The superintendent told the SST that a review of the district's instructional program had not been done for many years, nor had a strategic plan for improving instruction been developed recently.) In general, the district's leadership is more reactive than strategic. The board has a sense of increasing urgency about student achievement, but has not voiced it in a strong and public way.

- The large number of political stakeholders in the district's schools—Congress, the city council, the U.S. Department of Education, the mayor, the school board, and others—makes it difficult to achieve a single vision for how student performance should be improved.

- The upcoming debate on school board governance is likely to distract the district, its leadership, and the city from coming up with an instructional plan to improve student performance. The preliminary proposal from the mayor, for instance, has some academic components (e.g., set uniform standards for early childhood education, accelerate the district's special education reform plan, reestablish vocational education programs) but focuses mostly on governance, financial, and control issues that by themselves are unlikely to do much to improve student achievement across the board.[13]

- The district's leadership has not clearly articulated its role in the improvement of academic performance. The central office plays a limited role in improving student achievement, leaving the task largely to individual school principals. The result is a system that is not coherent and is aiming in too many different directions at the same time.

- The district's annual budget and business plan are disconnected from any instructional priorities or strategies, partly because there is no real strategy for improving student achievement.

- A scan of the school board's agendas indicates that the board does not spend a lot of time on student achievement or how to improve it. This priority has been left to the Teaching and Learning Committee. The board devotes itself to a good bit of operational detail. It is not clear that the board has received much training on its role in supporting student achievement.

- There is a meaningful split between old and new staff and a serious inability to "honor the past" while recognizing the need for serious reforms. Staff members are not on the same page about how to improve student achievement and many members lack any sense of outrage about the poor state of student achievement now found in the district.

- There is a general sense of low expectations for student performance and excuse making for that performance. The Strategic Support Team heard this skepticism about whether the students could learn at high levels expressed in many forms as it interviewed staff and teachers throughout the district's schools, although the team did not hear it from parents.

- The number of retirees working at the central office signals short-term leadership and a vacuum in future leadership. Staff members are perceived as temporary, allowing teachers, principals, and others to wait out or resist reforms. There are also a number of staff members who are simply interested in protecting the status quo.

[13] Executive Office of the Mayor. "A Rationale for School Governance Reform." October 27, 2003.

- The district acts as both a local and a state educational agency, but the state function does not provide the district with the kind of support (e.g., technical assistance, professional development, testing, and finances) that it needs.

- Local constituency groups are losing confidence in the district's ability to reform its instructional program. There is a sense that central office leadership has become disconnected from the community.

Recommendations

✶ Convene the school board at the earliest possible date (probably in retreat form) and begin establishing with the acting superintendent a clear vision for improved academic achievement for the students in the D.C. schools. The board should charge the acting superintendent with drafting a preliminary instructional plan based on this shared vision that begins to put the board's broad goals into place. The board should review the draft plans prepared by the staff until everyone is in general accord with the academic direction of the school system. (A1)

This process need not occur in a single meeting. A series of discussions that are facilitated by an external person that the board trusts and respects might be more in keeping with the scope of the task.[14] The board should also come to some agreement about the extent of the community input it will seek. Some districts hold community forums, summits, or town hall meetings. Others conduct hearings or school-based forums. Others handle the task internally. No one method is necessarily better than another.

Finally, the mayor and the city council have a role in this process of setting an instructional vision, regardless of the governance discussion. The school board should find a way to ensure that the perspective of the mayor and city council are considered.[15]

✶ Charge the acting superintendent with developing a concrete, five-year instructional plan for improving academic performance in the district schools. This plan should go back to the board for approval and should be reviewed regularly throughout the year. (A2)

✶ Articulate in the strongest possible terms—at the school board and superintendent leadership levels—a clear sense of urgency for and commitment to raising student performance for all the children in the D.C. Public Schools. (A3)

[14] The board might want to consider using the expertise of the Center for the Reform of School Systems (crss.org) to assist in its vision and goal-setting process.

[15] The Council of the Great City Schools is not making explicit recommendations in this report on the governance of the D.C. Public Schools. The organization would prefer to see this report serve as the basis for reforming the district's instructional program regardless of how the schools are governed.

- ✶ Begin the search for a permanent superintendent for the district's schools (including consideration of Elfreda Massie) who will be in general agreement with the vision and broad goals articulated by the board, rather than searching without a vision for a superintendent who brings his or her own. (A4)

- ✶ Revise the details and tactics—but not the overall goals—of the instructional plan once a new superintendent has been retained. The school board and the superintendent need to work out the final details together and be in harmony about the direction of the school district and the overall theory of action. (A5)

- ✶ Devise a communications and engagement plan and present it to the community for discussion. It will be important for the school board, the mayor, the city council, the superintendent, Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and others to be willing to speak out in favor of the instructional plan that they have had a hand in developing. (The district also needs a more convincing plan for how it is going to strengthen communications between the central office and the individual schools.) (A6)

- ✶ Begin restructuring the agenda of the school board meetings over time to ensure that some portion of each gathering is devoted to an update on the status of the instructional strategic plan, efforts to boost student performance, and the results of those efforts. (A7)

- ✶ Conduct a formal review of the plan at least annually and modify it as necessary. (A8)

B. Goal Setting

Urban school systems that have seen significant gains in student achievement often see this improvement because they have a clear sense of where they are going. This clarity is exhibited in academic goals for the district at large and for individual schools. These goals are measurable and are accompanied by specific timelines for when specific targets are to be attained. The Strategic Support Team looked specifically at the goal-setting process in the D.C. Public Schools.

Positive Findings

- The district has developed a five-year *Business Plan for Strategic Reform*. The Strategic Support Team generally thought that this document was a good conceptual starting point for the district's work. The plan contains goals for higher student achievement, increased graduation rates, lower dropout rates, and the better measurement of performance. (These goals are not well-known throughout the district, however.)

- The district has been in the process of developing a plan for improving academic performance, but the plan is not adequate to the challenge, represents very disconnected strategies, and has never been formally approved.[16]

[16] Office of Academic Services. *Plan of Action*. August 10, 2003.

- Some schools in D.C. have set their own student achievement targets.

Areas of Concern

- Some schools in the district have set their own academic target but these school targets do not add up to any districtwide goal for improving student achievement. School goals are disconnected from any larger academic objective, not well understood, and inconsistently measured and reported on in the school improvement plans.

- Neither the district's instructional goals, as articulated in the business plan, nor its school-by-school academic targets reflect goals and benchmarks established under *No Child Left Behind*. (To meet adequate yearly progress targets under NCLB this year, D.C. schools must have 41.9 percent of their students reading at or above proficiency in grades 3-8 and 28.1 percent in grades 7-11. D.C. schools must also have 48.7 percent of their students doing math at or above proficiency levels in grades 3-8 and 33.2 percent in grades 7-11. The minimum subgroup size is 40 students, meaning that the average test scores of subgroups smaller than this will not be used to determine whether AYP is made.) These targets are not reflected in some schools' targets, nor are they well known throughout the district.

- The Business Plan sets its reading benchmarks in "grade equivalent" scores rather than in performance levels.

- Individual school improvement plans are not necessarily tied to any larger strategy or program for improving districtwide achievement. There is no district improvement plan that individual school plans link to.

- Principals receive their funding in lump sum allocations and have wide discretion in the use of funds.

Recommendations

✶ Charge the superintendent with naming a "Project Management Committee" composed of senior staff members who will be responsible for working through the details of the instructional plan, monitoring its status, and reporting weekly on its progress. The committee might be composed of the superintendent's cabinet, but could include various task forces and work groups focusing on specific components or themes raised in this report. (B1)

✶ Charge the superintendent with reorienting all central office staff around the goal of raising student achievement. The superintendent might want to schedule site visits to cities that have seen gains in student reading and math achievement (e.g., Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Norfolk, Sacramento, Long Beach, Houston, Fort Worth, Boston, and others.) We also encourage the district to talk with the CEO, board, and staff of the Detroit Public Schools. (B2)

- ✶ Ensure that the new instructional plan has both districtwide and school-by-school academic achievement targets for at least reading and math. The goals at both the district level and at the schools need to be measurable, aligned with the Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks articulated under *No Child Left Behind*, and accompanied by timelines and interim benchmarks. (B3)

- ✶ Make certain that the new instructional plan includes indicators such as SAT scores, NAEP scores, special education referral rates, attendance, graduation rates, AP course taking, numbers of students taking core sequences of English and math (including algebra), as well as scores on the district's regular achievement test. (Additional discussion of testing is found in section G of this chapter.) Targets should be disaggregated by the groups articulated in NCLB (including major racial/ethnic, language, disability, and income groups.) (B4)

- ✶ Include in the plan the specifics that any good strategic plan has—staff responsibilities, budgets, action steps, monitoring process, and evaluation process. (The district's Business Plan is a good starting place.) The district might want to look at the "balanced score card" method that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools use to track the progress and results of their academic reforms. (B5)

- ✶ Begin building school-by-school academic targets for all student groups into the school improvement plans that each school must develop, and ensure that these targets reflect districtwide goals. Like the districtwide goals, the school goals and their interim targets should be measurable, consistent with NCLB's AYP targets, and accompanied by specific timelines. Each school improvement plan should be aligned with the district's plan and should allow the system to meet it broader targets. (B6)

- ✶ Charge the district's individual department heads with developing unit plans that are consistent with and aligned with the larger district instructional plan. (B7)

- ✶ Put all districtwide and school-by-school goals, targets, and benchmarks on a single wall-sized chart so the superintendent and the Project Management Committee can closely monitor the progress of reforms in the district. (B8)

C. Accountability

It is not sufficient for a school system, particularly an urban one, to have goals if no one is held accountable for attaining them. Urban school systems that have seen substantial improvement have devised specific methods for holding themselves responsible for student achievement, usually starting at the top of the system and working down through central office staff and principals. The Strategic Support Team observed the following things about accountability in the D.C. Public Schools.

Positive Findings

- The district has a formal process for evaluating principals and a somewhat less stringent process for evaluating teachers.

- The district is working on developing districtwide, school, and student accountability report cards, pursuant to *No Child Left Behind*.

- The district has recently hired a new director for its office of educational accountability.

- District staff members are working on a method for tying the district's Business Plan to its instructional programs, but the process has not yet been completed.

Areas of Concern

- No one in the central office is held accountable for student performance—not the superintendent, the board, or senior instructional staff. No one's evaluation is tied to student performance either. The district generally lacks any defined roles and responsibilities for instruction or achievement.[17] Finally, there is little sense at the central office that staff should respond to school requests or needs.

- Principals are the only group in the district really held accountable for student achievement.[18] Still, the principals' evaluation form is weighted heavily towards items that are more procedural and operational than academic.[19] There have also been recent attempts by the principals to reduce the weight placed on student performance even further.

- There are also no clear criteria related to student performance that guides the hiring of principals in the district. Although the district intends its principals to be instructional leaders, it provides little professional development, screening, or monitoring to ensure that they are.

- The Local School Restructuring Teams (LSRTs) have considerable authority that would otherwise be found with the principals in other school systems.

- Teacher evaluation procedures have no meaningful tie to student achievement. It is also clear that principals use teacher evaluation procedures inconsistently and without much effect.

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[17] When asked who in the district was responsible for student achievement, parents responded, "No one."
[18] Principals are represented by the Council of School Officers, Local #4, American Federation of School Administrators, AFL-CIO.
[19] Principals are evaluated on a 120 point scale. Twenty eight (28) points are devoted to instructional leadership; 20 points for organization, management, and accountability; 16 points for school climate; 16 points for professional development; 16 points for parent and community involvement; 12 points for effective communications; and 12 points for special education. *Evaluation of Principals in the District of Columbia Public Schools*, August 15, 2003.

- No one at the central office or in the individual schools is held accountable for the high referral and placement rates of students with disabilities. The district's criteria for referrals actually drive the rates higher.

- Staff members, principals, and teachers interviewed often expressed very low academic expectations for students.

- The district has 15 schools in school improvement II status that must offer their students transfers to higher-performing schools and provide supplemental tutoring services, under the terms of NCLB.[20]

- Budget and instructional planning run parallel with each other and are not tied together around specific academic priorities.

Recommendations

✶ Encourage the school board to establish a process of self-evaluation tied to the attainment of the goals they have approved in the strategic instructional plan.[21] (C1)

✶ Place the superintendent on a performance contract tied to the attainment of the district's academic goals and targets. (C2)

✶ Place all senior staff, particularly instructional staff, on performance contracts tied to attainment of districtwide achievement goals. (C3)

✶ Place all principals on performance contracts tied to their individual school-by-school targets developed as part of the strategic instructional plan. Principals should retain authority to hire staff and develop budgets around broad instructional priorities. This will mean overhauling the principal evaluation process to put more—not less—emphasis on student achievement. (C4)

✶ Rebuild the district's school improvement planning process to ensure that the plans not only have school-by-school targets but also include disaggregated student performance data, teacher evaluation data, activities designed to attain goals, extra professional development requirements, strategies for improving parent involvement, and analyses of reading and math scores on specific test items for each student group. (C5)

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[20] The district sent letters to the parents of about 9,503 students on August 1 indicating that they could transfer to another higher-performing school in the same ward. The district identified 969 seats in 34 other schools to receive students. Three hundred and fifty seven students (357) requested a transfer and 197 did eventually move from one school to another within the district. The district and its 19 supplemental service providers expect to serve about 2,000 students this year. The district's supplemental services program consists of the Hill Academy and Community Technology Center, D.C. Public Schools After-School for All, and the D.C. Public Schools Literacy Arcade. The district has budgeted approximately $2.8 million of its Title I funds for choice and an identical amount for supplemental services.

[21] The Sacramento school board members went so far as to sign a public pledge that they would step down if they could not improve student achievement. They did and they are still there.

- ✶ Consider the use of bonuses and other incentives for performance that meets or exceeds district and school targets. Incentives do not necessarily need to be financial. The district might consider promotions, stipends for extra classroom materials, professional memberships, attendance at national conferences, public recognition or awards for excellence or progress toward excellence, and other possibilities. (C6)

- ✶ Revisit all staff roles and responsibilities and revise relevant job descriptions as necessary to emphasize the goal of raising student achievement. (C7)

- ✶ Charge the superintendent or chief academic officer with meeting regularly with assistant superintendents and principals about school-by-school academic data and improvement plans. (C8)

- ✶ Restructure the school board's procedures for requesting information from staff. Currently, board members request information and data from individual staff members. We would encourage the board to send all requests for information and data through the superintendent or his or her designee. Board members should receive status reports on their requests if they do not receive a response within a reasonable time. Copies of responses should go to all board members. (C9)

D. Curriculum and Instruction

Urban school districts that have seen substantial improvement in student achievement have a curriculum that is focused, coherent, and clearly articulated. Also, these districts have core supplemental and intervention materials that schools can use. The Strategic Support Team looked at the curriculum that the district was using, particularly to teach reading and math, and found a number of things, positive and negative.

Positive Findings

- The district offers universal pre-k and all-day kindergarten classes for all students and has a strong commitment to early childhood education.

- The district requires elementary schools to teach reading/language arts for 90 minutes per day and math for 60 minutes per day.

- The district has adopted a series of English Language Development (ELD) materials to serve English language learners across the city. In general, the bilingual office of the district is strong and very committed to serving English language learners, although the unit often functions very independently of other instructional operations of the district.

- The district has strong new leadership in its special education unit and is working on a comprehensive plan for improving services to students with disabilities and for integrating services better with the general education program.

- The district operates its federal Title I program out of its instructional unit, making it easier to coordinate services. The Title I director reports to the chief academic officer of the district.

- The district has made some fledgling attempts to develop a pacing guide for its teachers.

- The district would like to place literacy and numeracy coaches in the schools, but has been restricted in doing so because of budget cuts.

- The district's school improvement plans include components for "positive behavior support" to address discipline issues. The positive behavior support model is consistent with the instructional proposals in this report.

- The district has applied to the U.S. Department of Education for a $2.2 million Reading First grant and has been approved.

Areas of Concern

- The instructional unit of the district is poorly organized and staffed to get the academic results that it wants. The principals do not report up through the chief academic officer. School operations and transformation schools, as well, do not report through the chief academic officer. And the early childhood, special education, and bilingual education units do not report to the chief academic officer.

- The office that oversees the operation of schools and is responsible for the evaluation of principals does not work closely with the instructional office and vice versa. The instructional unit has very little access to or interaction with the district's principals.

- The district's state and local functions are not well differentiated. (The mayor's office oversees some state like functions.) The district is having a difficult time serving an oversight function with so many charter schools and improving instruction at the same time.[22]

- The district has no uniform, comprehensive plan for reading or math programs that it uses to drive instruction systemwide. The district uses an old edition of the Houghton Mifflin reading series in many of its schools but there is no uniform use of or training in the program. Moreover, the district did not obtain all the supplemental materials and professional development that came with the program. Schools and principals are often left to develop or secure materials and training on their own.

[22] The city has approximately 40 charter schools, including some chartered by the school board and some chartered by other authorities.

- In general, the district has too many disparate programs and school reform models to implement effectively, monitor appropriately, evaluate effectively, or provide professional development for. This situation is largely the result of the district having no cohesive plan for improving student achievement, no instructional model, and little fidelity to the curricula it has. Finally, the district has no inventory of all the books and materials used, so it doesn't really know how varied its instruction is.

- The tendency of Congress to earmark funds for specific programs in the D.C. Public Schools has further fractured the system's instructional program. These earmarks are usually done at the behest of companies wishing to do business in the district but are not necessarily scientifically based and are not always coordinated with the district. Examples of earmarks include—

(a) Voyager Universal Literacy	$2.0 million
(b) RealWorld Schools	$1.0 million
(c) Kid Biz	$300,000
(d) Lightspan/Edutest	--

- The district has no content specialists at the central office responsible for guiding the systemwide reading and math programs. (The district does have science, music, social studies, arts, and health specialists, however.) Reading and math specialists were cut in a recent round of budget cuts. The district has also approved the hiring of reading and math coaches for the schools, but they have not been hired because of budget problems.

- The district's content standards are not rigorous enough to move large numbers of students to proficiency levels of performance on either the SAT-9 or the NAEP. There is also little grade-to-grade articulation in the district's reading and math curriculum.

- The minimum time required each day for teaching reading and math is too short, under the circumstances.

- The content of the district's algebra courses is not uniform across the district. Students, moreover, are permitted to take either algebra or its "equivalent." Principals have some latitude to determine what algebra equivalence means. The chief academic officer indicated to the SST that only about 15 percent of ninth graders had successfully completed a real algebra course.

- The district does not have a course catalogue that describes what it offers to students.

- The district's pacing guides exist only in preliminary form and are divided into quarterly segments. They are not viewed by the SST as being of high quality yet. In their current form, the district's pacing guides are actually standards alignment

guides or resource guides that lack any real pacing. Not all standards are reflected in the pacing guides, moreover, and the district has no mechanism for determining whether anyone uses them or uses them appropriately. Teachers are not required to use pacing guides and many indicated that they pay no attention to them. Finally, the pacing guides do not reflect differentiated instruction for special education students or English language learners.

- There is a very weak link between the district's regular-day instructional program and its afterschool and supplemental service providers, including those who are providing Title I services under NCLB.[23]

- It is also not clear whether the district's own supplemental service program under NCLB is aligned with its regular-day instructional program.[24]

- The district's instructional interventions are not clearly linked or aligned to the core instructional program.[25]

- The supplemental instructional materials used in the classrooms are not clearly aligned to the district's curriculum. Supplemental materials are clearly obtained without considering whether they fill in gaps between a school's core program and the district's curriculum or whether they meet student needs.

- The district's gifted and talented program is very small and operates entirely on external grants. The program's method for identifying gifted and talented students does not reflect good practice. (The district designates students as gifted and talented if they have scored in the proficient range or above on the SAT-9.) Finally, the gifted and talented program does not operate in any grades between kindergarten and fifth grade.

- The district spends most of its Title I funding on teacher salaries, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration models (CSRDs), after-school and summer school programs. (The district reports large school-by-school carryover amounts each year.

[23] Approved NCLB supplemental service providers include Alliances for Quality Education; Calvary Bilingual Multicultural Learning Center; DCPS After-School for All; DCPS Literacy Arcade; DC Scores; The Fishing School, Inc.; Friendship House Association; Heads Up; Hill Academy & Community Technology Center; Howard University, School of Education; Huntington Learning Center; Kaplan K-12 Learning Center; Lightspan, Inc.; Mosaica Education, Inc.; Power Communicators; Princeton Review; Sylvan Education Solutions; U.S. Dream Academy; and Wellness, Inc.

[24] The Hill Academy and Community Technology Center (HACTC) provides academic enrichment in math, science, and language arts and provides student support systems, community service learning projects, and performance art training. The D.C. Public Schools After-school for All program provides focused reading instruction using technology. The D.C. Public Schools Literacy Arcade uses on-line resources to provide students with guided support in writing.

[25] The district uses Waterford in eight schools, Voyager in 18 schools, and a Houghton Mifflin intervention in many others.

- The district identifies a disproportionately large number of students as disabled—over 18 percent. Part of this is due to the district's referral and placement criteria, which are based on teacher judgments and the district's norm-referenced test. The district is averaging some 300 referrals a month and 3,000 due process hearings a year. (See section on Assessments and Data Use.) Some of the problem also relates to how the district uses its Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) pre-referral process, which is a steppingstone into special education. Finally, part of the reason for the over-identification of students as disabled is rooted in an ineffective district reading program.[26]

- Teachers report that they often do not have curriculum or materials designed specifically for special education children.

- The new director of special education indicates that a disproportionate number of Teach for America teachers and Teaching Fellows are placed into special education classrooms. (The SST could not secure data confirming this point, however.)

- The district has no English language development curriculum for its English language learners. (The district has purchased a number of programs, however, including "Avenues" for its elementary school ELL students; "High Points" for its middle school ELL students, and "Visions" for its high school ELL students.)

- The district's criteria for exiting from bilingual education are clearly defined, but students are actively discouraged from exiting.[27] English language learners may spend several years in bilingual education programs without exiting in a timely fashion. (The SST was told by the bilingual education director that elementary school-age children exit the bilingual program in 7.2 years on average and that secondary school-age children exit in 5.0 years on average. Some ELL students are pulled out for Avenues instruction.)

- The bilingual education office keeps its own data base on English language learners that has not been integrated into a central data system.

Recommendations

✶ Recentralize school district instructional decisions about curriculum and professional development. (D1)

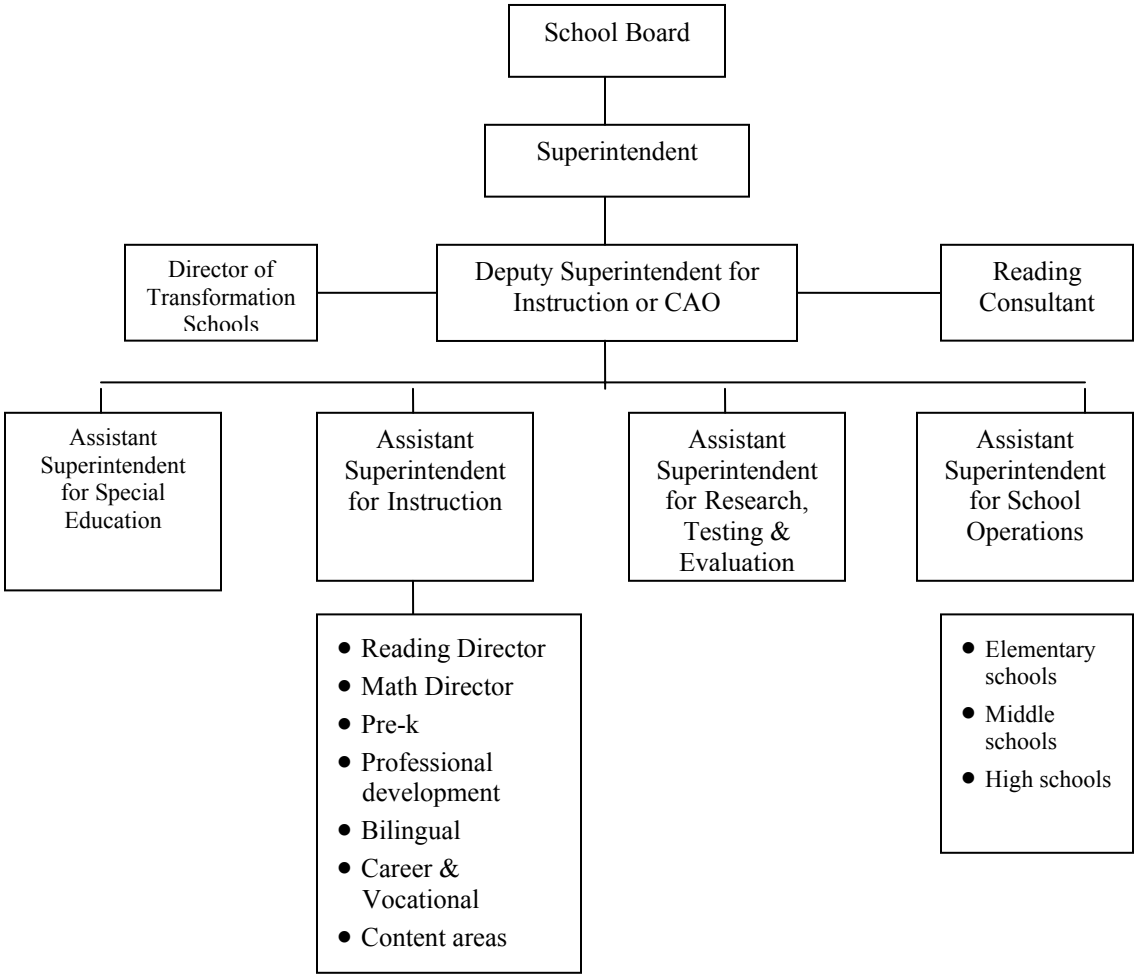
[26] An extensive set of recommendations has been made to the district by the DC Appleseed Center in a report, *A Time for Action: The Need to Repair the System for Resolving Special Education Disputes in the District of Columbia*, 2003.

[27] For a student to exit from bilingual/ESL services, evidence must be presented that the student meets at least two of the following criteria: a score indicating the designation of Fluent English Proficient (FEP) on the LAS reading and writing subtest; portfolio work samples indicating that the student is working at level 4 or 5 in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and math on the NEP/LEP Student Assessment matrix or a score at the proficient or advanced level in reading and math on the SAT-9.

- ✶ Consider a new organizational structure for the curriculum and instructional staff in the central office. (Figure 1) The new organizational structure includes a temporary "reading consultant," reporting to either the superintendent or the chief academic officer, whose responsibilities would include designing and overseeing reading reforms, and an assistant superintendent for research, testing, and evaluation. (D2)

- ✶ Hire a reading and a math director (reporting to the assistant superintendent for instruction) and five reading specialists (three elementary, one middle, and one high school) and three math specialists (two elementary and one secondary) at the central office to provide professional development, school improvement planning assistance, data review, coaching, and lesson plan development directly to schools. Specialists would report to their respective directors. The district should be able to pay for both of these positions out of its federal Title I allocations. (D3)

Figure 1. Proposed Organizational Chart for Curriculum and Instruction Department[28]



[28] An alternative to the proposed structure might be to have principals in closer proximity to the superintendent.

- ✶ Place a systemwide moratorium on the acquisition of any additional instructional programs and materials. The district should do a systemwide inventory of all the programs in use. (D4)

- ✶ Begin phasing out all Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration models currently being used throughout the district. (D5)

- ✶ Develop specific and concrete criteria for selecting, evaluating, and retaining all new models, materials, packages, and programs districtwide. (D6)

- ✶ Limit the site-by-site acquisition of curricula and materials. There is no hard and fast rule about how other cities do this. The district might decide that there are circumstances or schools that ought to have more flexibility in purchasing goods and services. Some districts grant this flexibility for schools that are achieving well on their own, while other districts argue that granting flexibility for some but not all schools creates inequities or the perception of inequities. Either way, the completely decentralized system now in place in the D.C. school district does not work for students. (D7)

- ✶ Consider commissioning an external review and upgrade of the district's academic standards. The district might consider Achieve (www.achieve.org) to do this review. The SST also suggests that the standards be redesigned around NAEP frameworks in reading, writing, math, and science. (D8)

- ✶ Begin revising and upgrading the district's curriculum (first in reading, then math) to ensure general alignment with NAEP frameworks (grades 4, 8, and 12) and with other assessments the district uses.[29] The curriculum also needs to ensure grade-by-grade articulation. (D9)

- ✶ Approve a formal school board policy requiring two and a half hours per day for language arts (reading, writing, speech) and ninety minutes a day for math, grades K-6. (D10)

- ✶ Develop a specific plan for rolling out instructional reforms so that central office staff, principals, teachers, schools, and external stakeholders know what to expect. The district should have many of these reforms in place for the 2004-05 school year. (D11)

[29] NAEP's reading framework is organized along two dimensions, the *context for reading* and the *aspect of reading*. The context for reading dimension is divided into three areas that characterize the purposes for reading: reading for literary experience, reading for information, and reading to perform a task. The aspects of reading include forming a general understanding, developing an interpretation, making reader/text connections, and examining content and structure. NAEP's mathematics framework includes five content areas: 1) number sense, properties, and operations; 2) measurement; 3) geometry and spatial sense; 4) data analysis, statistics, and probability; and 5) algebra and functions. The math frameworks stress conceptual understanding, procedural knowledge, and problem solving. The complete framework is available at www.nagb.org.

- ✶ Revisit the district's new business plan to make sure that the system's budget coincides with the emerging instructional priorities. (D12)

- ✶ Postpone textbook adoptions in content areas until the district has decided on its core reading and math curricula plan. (D13)

- ✶ Define more centrally how federal Title I funds will be used to support districtwide instructional priorities in reading and math. (D14)

Reading

- ✶ Develop a comprehensive reading plan that includes a core program, supplemental materials, and interventions. (Develop as a component of the overall instructional plan.)[30] (D15)

- ✶ Adopt a single, uniform core reading program for systemwide adoption and implementation. The SST would suggest using either the newest Houghton Mifflin reading series (Nation's Choice) since the earlier version is already widely available in the schools; Open Court (SRA McGraw Hill); or Trophies (Harcourt Brace). If the district considers another package, it should ensure that it incorporates the components and instructional methodologies (direct, explicit, and systematic) of reading identified by the National Reading Panel as critical to reading success.[31] (D16)

    a. *Phonemic awareness*: the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. This component is important because it improves children's word reading, reading comprehension, and spelling. Phonemic awareness can be developed by asking children to identify and categorize phonemes, blend phonemes into words and segment words into phonemes, delete or add phonemes to form new words, or substitute phonemes to make new words. Instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes using letters and when instruction focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation.

    b. *Systematic phonics for decoding*: the ability to tell the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. This component is important because it leads to understanding of the alphabetic principle—the systematic and predictable relationship between written letters and spoken sounds. Phonics instruction is effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade; includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence; and provides teachers with precise directions for teaching these relationships.

[30] Consult the "Consumers Guide to Evaluating a Core Reading Program" by Deborah Simmons and Edward Kamenuei for the selection of the core reading program.

[31] *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. National Reading Panel, 2000.

c. *Comprehension*: the ability to understand what is being read. This component is important because it is the reason for reading. It can be developed by teaching comprehension strategies through explicit instruction, engaging students in cooperative learning, asking questions about the text, summarizing text, clarifying words and sentences that are not understood, and predicting what comes next.

d. *Fluency development*: the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. This component is important because it frees students to understand what they read. Fluent readers are more likely than less fluent ones to focus their attention on making connections among the ideas in a text and between these ideas and their background knowledge. Fluency in young readers is developed by modeling fluent reading and by having students engage in repeated oral reading.

e. *Vocabulary building*: the ability to understand and use words orally and in reading. This component is important because beginning readers use their oral vocabulary to make sense of the words they see in print and need to know what words mean before they can understand what they are reading. Vocabulary can be developed directly when students are explicitly taught both individual words and word meaning strategies, and indirectly when students engage daily in oral language, listen to adults read to them, and read extensively on their own.

✶ Actively involve a committee of stakeholders in providing input about the selection of a reading program. The committee should include teachers and external reading experts, but the ultimate selection should rest with the superintendent. (D17)

✶ Reanalyze districtwide and school-by-school reading and math data to ensure that the new reading program and its interventions are targeted on the skill deficits identified. (D18)

✶ Begin revising the district's reading and math pacing guides in week-by-week or twice monthly intervals. The district might want to use a consultant to get this process started. The pacing guides should be revisited once a year to determine whether fine-tuning is necessary. (D19)

✶ Conduct an analysis of the gaps between the NAEP reading frameworks and the reading program that the district selects to demonstrate alignment with NAEP. Use this information and student achievement data from the interim assessments (see next recommendation) to purchase supplemental materials to fill the gaps, if necessary. (D20)

✶ Ensure that the new reading program has embedded assessments that can be used to assess student progress at least quarterly during the school year.[32] (D21)

[32] The district has been piloting a series of quarterly diagnostic tests in 45 of its schools—12 using the NWEA Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and 33 using Edutest. The team did not see evidence, however, that these instruments had been adequately linked to the SAT-9 or to district standards.

- ✶ Ensure that the comprehensive reading plan has intensive interventions for students who begin to fall behind, according to the embedded or interim assessments.[33] Interventions should include the following— (D22)

  a. *Individual and small group tutoring* before, during, and/or after school. Tutorials should be based on individual child assessment data and item analysis of specific reading skill levels. Consider paying teachers to tutor students before, after, or during school (during their preparation periods) and using community volunteers.

  b. *Prevention and intervention services* to cut down on the rate of placements in special education. These services would provide specific, group-oriented, intensive reading interventions for students at risk of not reading.

  c. *Professional development* and training for teachers on specific interventions, lessons plans, data use, and reading strategies for children at varying academic levels. (See subsequent section on professional development.)

- ✶ Attempt to minimize the number of intervention strategies that the district uses before and after school, during Saturday academies, and over the summer. The ideal intervention program would be tied directly to the core reading and math programs that the district adopts. Other intervention programs should be brought into the mix only if they align with student needs.[34] This recommendation will be hard to implement, since the district also has a large number of afterschool supplemental service providers approved under NCLB. It will be critical for the district to ensure that its intervention programs and its supplemental service providers are heading in a direction that will explicitly address the skill deficits of the children. (D23)

- ✶ Begin convening groups of the district's best teachers to write and expand the number of lesson plans available across the district. (The teachers union has a project that can help with this.) The process should occur after successful implementation of the comprehensive plan (second or third year) and should include a feedback loop for teachers to revise, comment on, and improve the suggested lesson plans. (The district might consider putting its lesson plans on its website or intranet. Lesson plans should include several direct or explicit models of instruction. (D24)

- ✶ Consider implementing a program to encourage and monitor outside reading or reading at home. (D25)

[33] In summary, the district's new reading program should have a comprehensive core component, supplemental materials (if necessary), imbedded or quarterly assessments, and intervention strategies for students who are not keeping pace. Some programs will also come with their own pacing guides.

[34] Well-regarded reading intervention programs that the district might consider include PALS for k-2; Open Court Intervention Kit (for supplemental assistance), Soar to Success, Language!, Corrective Reading, Language for Learning, and others for grades k-5; and Read 180, Corrective Reading, Wilson Reading, Language! and others for the middle school grades.

Mathematics

- ✶ Adopt a single, uniform math program for systemwide adoption and implementation.[35] (D26)

- ✶ Ensure that the math program is as closely tailored to align with the NAEP math frameworks as possible. (D27)

- ✶ Select a small number of interventions for use before and after school, on Saturdays, and over the summer that will address skill deficits of students.[36] (D28)

E. Professional Development and Teacher Quality

Another feature that improving urban school systems have in common is a high-quality and cohesiveness professional development program. These programs are often defined centrally, built around the district's articulated curriculum, delivered uniformly across the district, and differentiated in ways that address the specific needs of teachers. These faster-improving districts also find ways to ensure that some of their better teachers are working in schools with the greatest needs.

Positive Findings

- The district has seven professional development or training sites that can accommodate nearly 1,200 people at one time. Many urban school systems have just one site that cannot handle all the staff members taking a professional development course.

- The district has 15 hours of professional development systemwide and half a day per month at the individual schools.

- The district provides new teachers with four days of induction/training before they begin their job. The training covers curriculum, paperwork, procedures, and other topics.

- The district also offers a Professional Development Institute four times a year and has an academy for aspiring and emerging leaders and administrators. The district also has programs for aspiring leaders and emerging leaders operated in conjunction with the University of the District of Columbia and a Principals' Leadership Academy operated with the Council for Basic Education.

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[35] The district might consider such math programs as Mathematics (Houghton Mifflin) and Math Advantage (Harcourt Brace). The district should follow the same basic approach for math as was proposed for reading: use an effective, scientifically-tested program, interim assessments, supplemental materials to fill gaps, and a select number of targeted interventions.

[36] Well-regarded math intervention programs that the district might consider include Saxon Math, Larson's Leapfrog, 24 Math Challenge, Afterschool Math Club, and others.

- The district actively collaborates with the Washington Federation of Teachers on professional development content.

- The district is working on a plan to streamline its professional development activities.

- The D.C. Teaching Fellows program is generally considered to be a national model. The program recruits and trains mid-career professionals to enter the classroom. (The district also makes extensive use of Teach for America teachers.)

- The district has replaced nearly 100 principals over the last three years in an attempt to boost the quality of leadership at the school building level.

- Principals hire their own teachers from a district-approved pool.

Areas of Concern

- The school district lacks a coherent professional development plan tied to its curriculum, its instructional programs (unless provided by the vendor), or its data about student performance.

- The district's professional development program is a fractured series of "events" that are not continuous, in-depth, differentiated, or systemic.[37] The training generally lacks quality or focus and presents little motivation for teachers to attend. The district's professional development efforts, moreover, are largely vendor-driven, meaning that they are as disparate and disconnected as the programs themselves. Finally, there is little systemic coordination of the many professional development efforts going on across the district.

- Principals are expected to be the instructional leaders of their buildings and the district has largely turned over to them the responsibility for boosting student achievement. However, the district provides very little professional development to principals on effective instructional practices or on the standards and curriculum.

- Decisions about how to spend federal Title II monies for professional development and class size reduction are left mostly to individual principals.

- The district monitors teachers' attendance at its 15 hours of "seat time" (as the district refers to its professional development) but the district does not monitor any school-based training conducted for the half days each month.

- The district's teachers report being poorly trained to use curriculum, the disparate materials that the schools obtain, supplemental materials, and intervention strategies.

[37] One teacher referred to this as "microwave professional development."

- The district reports that it has trouble monitoring the hiring of teachers at the building level because teachers are sometime hired using someone else's position control numbers. Principals, on the other hand, report that they face central office delays in the hiring of staff at the building level and a lack of urgency to fill vacant teacher positions.

- The school district does not have a centralized substitute-teaching pool. Substitutes who are secured by the individual schools do not receive training from the district on its standards, curriculum, or core programs.

- No formal evaluations of the district's professional development efforts have been conducted in order to determine whether any of them have an effect on student achievement.

- Professional development efforts for principals and teachers do not to include much material on the use of data to inform instruction.

- It is unclear whether the central office has either the number or the quality of staff needed to provide a systemic and effective professional development program for the district.

- The district fills about 450 teacher vacancies per year, but teacher hiring is often not done until mid-August, resulting in many qualified candidates taking jobs in other school districts that could make earlier hiring decisions. (Teachers do not have to give more than 10 days notice that they are leaving.)

Recommendations

✶ Write a comprehensive strategic plan for professional development that is aligned with the instructional plan described in the previous section and with the adopted reading and math programs.[38] (The plan should be reviewed and modified annually.) The professional development plan should stress the knowledge, attitude, skills, and habits of teachers, principals, and staff and include the following elements— (E1)

a. Short term and long term training goals and objectives.
b. Standards and new core reading and math curricula (then supplemental materials and interventions) by grade level.
c. Specific follow-up and support components.
d. Attendance requirements and consequences for not attending.
e. Expectations for teacher performance and monitoring.
f. Differentiation by teacher experience, content area, and grade.
g. Use of pacing guides.
h. Use of supplemental materials and intervention strategies.

[38] The district should aggressively negotiate for substantial amounts of initial professional development from the companies providing the reading and math programs. Professional development should then evolve to become more district-provided and more driven by data on student performance.

i. Use of embedded or interim assessment data and how to modify instruction and interventions based on data.
j. Lesson plans.
k. Formative evaluation of professional development quality.
l. Evaluation that is tied to student performance.

✶ Begin implementing a single, uniform, and systemwide professional development program for reading instruction during the summer of 2004. This training should be conducted during the six days devoted to centralized professional development. In addition to teachers, all principals and central office instructional staff should be required to attend this training.[39] (E2)

✶ Allow individual schools to select their own professional development only when it involves issues of classroom management, character education, and parent involvement, or when specialized training is required to address a unique school challenge or need. This training should be conducted during the four days devoted to school-based professional development. (E3)

✶ Ensure that the professional development plan is built around a whole series of articulated sessions rather than single, independent, disconnected training sessions. Training in reading should be built around the components and instructional methods described earlier. The plan should address how the district will roll out and maintain its professional development initiatives for teachers and principals and support teachers in the classroom. (E4)

✶ Explore the use of alternative forms of professional development, e.g. study groups, chat rooms, seminars, workshops, videoconferencing, teacher mentoring, subsidized university coursework, independent study, lesson plan development, and the like. (E5)

✶ Utilize the professional development component of the new *PeopleSoft* module to track participation in and coordination of training. (E6)

✶ Design and provide training for central office staff in customer service (for example, how to support schools or increase parent involvement). (E7)

✶ Use a differentiated staffing pattern to support math instruction in grades 3-5 if well-qualified math teachers are in short supply. (E8)

✶ Coordinate federal Title I professional set-asides and Title II funds to support the efforts proposed in this section. (E9)

[39] The SST suggests eliminating the term "seat time" for professional development.

✶ Renegotiate provisions of the teacher contract during the next cycle to require teachers who are leaving the district to give earlier notice.[40] (E10)

F. Reform Press

Urban schools that are improving student achievement are not waiting for their leadership-initiated reforms to trickle down into the schools and classrooms. Instead, they have figured out specific ways to drive instructional reforms into the schools and classrooms, and they find ways to monitor the implementation of reforms to ensure their integrity and comprehensiveness. The Strategic Support Team looked at ways that the D.C. Public Schools can press their reforms into the schools.

Positive Findings

- The district has developed a general "school improvement planning" process and guide, but it is not clear that all schools follow it.

- The district is working with *Data Works* to develop a process for monitoring classroom teaching (i.e., "walk-throughs") in high schools and transformation schools.

Areas of Concern

- The school district lacks any mechanism for driving any of its reforms into the classroom or ensuring faithful implementation of its curriculum or any programs that it might adopt. For all intents and purposes, each school and teacher operates independently.

- The district does have a uniform guide for developing school improvement plans, but the guide does not address or suggest strategies or interventions for boosting student achievement. School improvement plans are rejected by the central office only if they do not meet specified procedures or guidelines.

- The district does not monitor the instructional time used each day for the teaching of reading and math. So, although the district requires 90 minutes of instruction each day in reading and 60 minutes in math (amounts that are probably insufficient), it cannot tell whether anyone follows the mandate.

- The district has no mechanism for determining whether teachers make any use of or follow the pacing guides. Classroom instruction is not regularly monitored by principals or anyone else.

- Individual schools determine the programs they want to implement even if the programs have not proved to be successful.

[40] The Council is generally in accord with recommendations made in this area by The New Teacher Project in its report *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-quality Teachers Out of Urban Schools*.

- The district has no mandatory or optional planning time for its teachers.

- The budgets of individual schools are largely shaped at the school level with the Local School Reform Teams and do not necessary link to the school improvement plans or any districtwide instructional initiative. (The district does not provide training to LSRTs.)[41]

- The district essentially has no way to support classroom teachers and their instructional practices.

Recommendations

✶ Finish developing an instructional monitoring process for all grade levels to measure fidelity of the implementation of the new reading and math program. The monitoring procedure or walk-throughs should focus on procedural or classroom appearance issues initially, then on effective instructional practice, lesson components and rigor, use of pacing guides, student progress on unit or interim assessments, and the like. (See the "Implementation Checklists" developed by Sacramento and Houston.) (F1)

✶ Provide explicit training to principals on the use of the walk-throughs and on instructional leadership. (F2)

✶ Charge principals with forming instructional leadership teams in their schools to help implement and monitor the new curriculum. (F3)

✶ Use Title I funds to hire school-based reading and math coaches to support classroom teachers or require principals to use their Title I funds to hire reading and math coaches. (Try part-time teachers and retired teachers. Hire reading coaches first, then math.) (F4)

a. Charge reading and math coaches with working with teachers on instructional planning, conducting walk-throughs, monitoring implementation of the new reading and math curriculum, and assessing progress on school improvement plans.

b. Establish weekly contacts with reading and math coaches to maintain focus, quality, and direction. Regular contacts could be done regionally, by grade level or subject area (reading and/or math).

c. Establish a process for evaluating the effectiveness of reading and math coaches.

[41] LSRTs are headed by the individual school PTA president and include three teachers (picked by the teachers), a union representative, four parent representatives, and the principal. The LSRTs sign off on the school improvement plans and have considerable discretion over school budget matters.

✶ Convene regular district-wide meetings of principals and central office reform leaders to establish some unity of direction, share implementation problems and solutions, and determine school needs. (F5)

G. Assessments and Data Use

One of the most noticeable features of faster-improving urban school systems involves their regular assessment of student progress and their use of data to decide on the nature and placement of intervention strategies and professional development before the end of each school year. These districts use data, moreover, to monitor school and district progress and hold people accountable for results. The Strategic Support Team looked specifically at the D.C. schools' student assessment program, how it linked with the state testing effort, and how the district was using data to improve its achievement.

Positive Findings

- The school district has good leadership and staff in its research and testing units. Staff members are knowledgeable and have generated well-regarded reports this year about student achievement.

- The reports and data generated by the district are accessible to the public through the district's website and other means. The district is generally transparent about many of its operations. The district's website has a good deal of student assessment data.

- The district has maintained some stability in its student testing program over the years. The district has administered the SAT-9 for five years. The district is now reviewing options for replacing the SAT-9 with a newer version of the same test or securing a new test altogether.

- Principals have access to five years of SAT-9 data on the district's intranet.

- The district tests all students in grades 1-11, more than any other major urban school system in the country.

- The district uses the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) as its English proficiency test, although it is not aligned with the curriculum.

Areas of Concern

- There is no demonstrated alignment between the district's curriculum and the SAT-9. In other words, the district does not know whether the SAT-9 measures what the curriculum purports to teach. There is also no demonstrated alignment of the district's standards with the SAT-9.

- There is also no demonstrated alignment between the SAT-9 and any of the various reading and math programs used throughout the district. In other words, the district cannot tell whether the programs teach what the SAT-9 measures.

- The district lacks a criterion-referenced test to assess student performance against an external standard. The SAT-9 is a norm-referenced assessment that measures against a national peer group.

- Some of the district's curriculum packages come with embedded quarterly assessments, but the district does not use them or encourage schools to use them. As a result, the district has no way of knowing—until the end of the school year when it is too late—how well students are progressing through the curriculum or if the curriculum is even being followed. No data on student performance other than the annual SAT-9 results are reported to the central office.

- The district's research department does not routinely conduct evaluations of any of the system's major programs, i.e. summer school, transformation schools, or reading programs.

- The district administered reading tests to about 38,000 of its 43,000 students enrolled in grades 3-11 or about 88 percent. Rates differ by grade level. The district tested the about the same percentages of ELL students as districtwide averages, but lower percentages of students with disabilities.

- The district lacks a uniform screening tool to assess the reading readiness of its preschool or full-day kindergarten students.

- The district also lacks any uniform diagnostic tool or assessment to inform instruction or to identify, refer, and place students with disabilities. Referrals are made to an extraordinary degree based on student behavior and teacher judgments.

- The district's research unit is now generating a great deal of performance data, but the district does not know what to do with it—how to use it to guide instruction, select supplemental materials, inform professional development, or intervene in schools that are falling behind. The district, for all intents and purposes, does not use data to make instructional decisions.

- The research and testing unit, which reports to the acting chief academic officer, has two assessment coordinators to handle NAEP and the SAT-9; two senior research associates to handle federal Title I and Title VI data; one student accounting coordinator to handle student membership counts; one full-time and one part-time consultant to handle data analyses and the district's on-line assessment pilot project; and two research assistants to answer phones and respond to internal and external data requests.

Recommendations

- ✶ Begin developing districtwide benchmark, interim, or quarterly tests aligned to the curriculum, and a new district test to determine whether students are learning according to the pacing guides or are slipping behind and where instructional interventions need to be targeted.[42] (G1)

    a. Begin the process with in-house staff and curriculum groups and then retain outside assessment consultants if necessary.

    b. Ensure that assessment results are returned to the district or scored by the district within ten days to two weeks after testing.

    c. Make sure that results are disaggregated by school, group, classroom, and student in a way that identifies deficits in specified skills.

    d. Charge the instruction department with analyzing benchmark test results and deciding where and what kinds of support and/or specific interventions are needed by school, subject, grade, group, and classroom. (This process should involve curriculum specialists, assessment staff, the superintendent, coaches, monitoring staff, and early childhood specialists.)

    e. Provide additional professional development and other supports to teachers who have repeated difficulty teaching specific skills to students.

    f. Disseminate results back to schools and train principals, coaches, and teachers how to interpret and use results. (Part of the school-based professional development days each quarter could be used for this purpose.)

- ✶ Administer interim or benchmark tests somewhere around October, January, and March (depending on pacing guides). The instruments should be designed or modified to be highly predictive of the end-of-the year assessments. (The district should also publish a testing calendar including interim assessment dates.) (G2)

- ✶ Replace the SAT-9 with a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment that is consistent with NCLB requirements. The curriculum unit needs to be involved in the decision. The test ought to be aligned with NAEP reading and math frameworks and include multiple choice, short response, and extended response questions. The instrument should also allow the district to compare results over time and to conduct cohort growth studies. The district has a number of options— (G3)

    a. Secure one of the state criterion-referenced tests that are generally aligned with or consistent with NAEP frameworks in reading and math. Examples include tests

[42] The new reading and math programs may come with embedded quarterly assessments. If so, they will need to be carefully reviewed to ensure alignment with NAEP and a new district assessment. If they do not, then the district should look at assistance from such groups as Measured Progress.

from North Carolina, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Ohio (grades 4-8) and Delaware (math). Louisiana, Ohio, and Delaware have similar item types. The exams would then have to be customized to make them as consistent with the district's curriculum as possible.

b. Contract with Achieve, Measured Progress, Inc. (Progress Towards Standards), or one of the standard-based test developers to custom-design a criterion-referenced exam that is consistent with the NAEP frameworks and the district's reading and math curriculum.

c. Supplement and/or customize an off-the-shelf norm-referenced exam linked to NAEP standards that could yield results by performance levels.

✶ Continue end-of-year tests in reading and math for students in grades 1 and 2, even though NCLB does not require it. The district needs to have a way of determining student skills in reading and math prior to the third grade. (G4)

✶ Consider using diagnostic reading and math instruments at the beginning of the school year to determine elementary school students' skills.[43] Results can be used in the regular classroom and for making decisions about appropriate interventions. (G5)

✶ Also, consider using an objective assessment tool for special education referrals and tie the results to service levels.[44] (The district should also start collecting and reporting exit data on students with disabilities, especially those with behavior disorders, and exit data for English language learners.) (G6)

✶ Begin the long-term task of building a districtwide data warehouse to store, in easily accessible form, data on student assessment results, attendance, discipline, program participation, course enrollment, and grades. Results should be universally and electronically accessible to teachers and staff. (G7)

✶ Develop a schedule for evaluating the district's major programs every three to five years. Program evaluations should be built into every new district initiative (new reading program, extended-day programs, coaches, and professional development.) Ensure that programs are evaluated both for how well they are implemented and what kinds of results they achieve. The research unit should be charged with working out a schedule and methodology with various unit heads. (G8)

✶ Transfer the evaluation monies from relevant external grants to the research unit to fund the program evaluations. The research department might also think about

[43] The district might consider any number of diagnostic tools, including PALS, the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), Dibels, Running Records, the North Carolina Reading Assessment (pre-k), the Test of Phonological Awareness, the High Frequency Word Assessment, the Development Reading Assessment, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, and others depending on grade level and age.

[44] The Woodcock Johnson or the TPRI might do what the district needs, but there are other instruments as well.

forming regular collaboratives with local universities (particularly Howard University and George Washington University) to increase capacity to evaluate programs. (G9)

✶ Conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys so that the school board, superintendent, and senior staff have a clear understanding of community and school staff perceptions. (G10)

✶ Ensure that the school-based literacy and math coaches receive staff development on the use and interpretation of data. This training should be conducted jointly with the curriculum department. (G11)

✶ Revise school and student report cards to be consistent with requirements under NCLB. (G12)

H. Early Childhood and Elementary Schools

It is often difficult for urban school districts to improve everything at once. The districts experiencing success in improving student achievement did not take on the entire system at once. Instead, these districts started their reforms at the early elementary grades and worked up to the middle and high school grades. The Strategic Support Team looked at the sequence of reforms in the D.C. schools and their focus on the elementary schools.

Positive Findings

- The district has a universal pre-k and an all-day kindergarten program, something that most other urban school districts across the country do not have.

- The district has expanded and upgraded the operations of its Head Start program over the last several years.[45]

- The district has seen consistent improvements in reading and math scores among first graders over the last several years.

Areas of Concern

- The district has no real sequence for pursuing any kind of instructional reforms.

- The district's early childhood programs lack any convincing reading readiness efforts that are linked to the district's kindergarten and/or first grade curriculum or to the first-grade SAT-9 test. The programs do not reflect recent research on language development, phonemic awareness, screening, or progress monitoring. Staff members are not as well-versed on early reading research as the district needs.

[45] *Quality Improvement Plan*. DCPS, Office of Citywide Early Childhood Initiatives, Head Start Programs.

- The district's early childhood and kindergarten programs do not routinely use any uniform or objective diagnostic tools that would tell schools about the reading and pre-reading skills of its youngest students.[46] The head of early childhood programs indicated to the SST that she uses a reading benchmark of 45 words per minute as a measure of literacy by the end of first grade. There is no mechanism in the district, however, to tell whether this standard is met.

- The district has not conducted any evaluations to see whether its pre-k, Head Start, or full-day kindergarten programs are effective.

- The district's early childhood reports lack information on pupil performance, instructional practices, or linkages to the district's standards and curriculum. The reports provide child counts and other compliance data but little information on what the district is doing programmatically.

- There is no clear articulation between the district's preschool and kindergarten programs and its early elementary grade curriculum. There is also little connection between or linkages among any of the district's various early childhood efforts, including Head Start.

- The district makes use of "Creative Curriculum" in its Head Start programs, a package that emphasizes play and social skills more than educational content.[47] There is also no clear connection between this program and "Letter People," another program used by the district in some of its preschool classrooms.

- The district does not have any systemic program of professional development to accompany its early childhood initiatives.

- The district does not have a gifted and talented program in its elementary grades.

Recommendations

✶ Begin reforms at the elementary school level first and then work up through the grade levels to middle and high schools rather than trying to reform all grades at once. (H1)

✶ Review the district's pre-k curriculum (both Head Start and other) to ensure that it is infused with literacy and numeracy components and to explicitly link or spiral it to the new kindergarten and first grade curriculum by skill component. (The district might want to consider a core reading program that has an explicit pre-k and kindergarten component that is already linked to first grade material. The district might also want to consider using "Language for Learning" for its pre-k program.) (H2)

[46] The Head Start program uses the "Early Screening Inventory" in many of its classrooms, however.
[47] Training in the program is provided by the vendor.

- ✶ Consider instituting an early reading screening or diagnostic tool in the district's early childhood programs to help identify students who are already behind. (Examples include PALS, IDGI, DIBLES, TPRI, "Get it, Got it, Go.") (H3)

- ✶ Establish a districtwide goal and monitor each pupil's progress in the following areas: (H4)

    a. Demonstrating knowledge of 100 "high frequency words" at pre-k, kindergarten, first and subsequent grades.
    b. Identifying all 26 letters (upper and lower case) by the end of pre-k.
    c. Identifying at least 13 phonemic sounds by the end of kindergarten.
    d. Demonstrating print awareness by the end of pre-k.
    e. Reading 60 words per minute by the end of first grade.

- ✶ Begin the district's gifted and talented program in the elementary schools rather than waiting until the fifth grade. (H5)

- ✶ Standardize the district's special education referral process and the criteria and tools teachers use to refer students, particularly those with behavior problems, to special education. (The district should set explicit goals for reducing referral rates, districtwide and school-by-school. School goals should be included in individual school improvement plans in schools with unusually high rates.) (H6)

- ✶ Develop and implement new guidelines and procedures for referrals to the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). The new guidelines should place priority on problem solving, research-based intervention strategies, differentiated instruction, and curriculum-based assessment for progress monitoring. (H7)

- ✶ Provide training and on-going support to TAT members and relevant school staff on the new guidelines and intervention strategies for learning issues associated with ADHD.[48] (H8)

- ✶ Restructure the district's summer school program so that instruction is differentiated by the skill levels of attending students, i.e., intensive instruction for students at risk of not progressing; strategic instruction to raise students to grade level; and advanced instruction to accelerate learning for students who have already made good progress. (H9)

I. Middle and High Schools

While many urban school systems that are seeing gains in student performance focus initially on their elementary schools, they do not ignore their middle and high

[48] In the reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act set to be completed in the fall of 2003, there is a provision in the approved House bill and the proposed Senate bill allowing up to 15% of total funds to be allocated to "pre-referral intervention services," aiming to reduce the referrals to special education by providing targeted intervention before referrals occur.

schools. There is no national consensus on how to improve high schools, particularly in the nation's urban schools, but the faster moving districts have put a number of tactics in place to ensure that students who did not learn the basic skills in the elementary schools do so before they graduate. The Strategic Support Team looked at the strategies that the D.C. school system was using to improve its middle and high schools.

Positive Findings

- The district has formed a high school reform committee and drafted a reform plan.[49] The plan called for the establishment of a series of academies in the district's high schools. Each academy had a proposed sequence of study.

- The district administers the PSAT to all ninth and tenth graders in the school system, although it doesn't actually do anything with the results to improve course-taking patterns.

- Three district high schools provide newcomer programs for students new to the country.

- The district has a goal for each high school to offer at least five AP courses. Approximately 1,400 students take the AP exams each year. (The district's Challenge Index was 0.605.)

- The district's leadership has replaced a large number of principals over the last several years, particularly at the secondary grade levels.

- The high schools in the district are small by big city standards, although several are still very large.

- The district has begun a gifted and talented program almost from scratch over the last three years. The district's program staff director is working to create a cohesive program with stronger professional development.

Areas of Concern

- The reform plan drafted by the district to improve its high schools is inadequate to the task. The plan lacks an academic focus and places undue emphasis on expanding and improving career, vocational, and technical education. (Nine high schools would implement 18 different National Academy Foundation programs.) The plan is not based on any extensive analysis of the district's student performance data or on an analysis of high school course rigor. The reform plan also lacks details and is not tied to the goals that the district would have to meet under NCLB, nor is designed to raise SAT-9, SAT, or NAEP scores. Finally, the plan is not linked to an analysis of the competitive job market in the D.C. region.

[49] *High School Reform: Road Map to Improving Student Achievement*. (Draft) D.C. Public Schools.

- Average student performance in D.C.'s secondary schools is very low and has not improved much, if any, over the last few years. (See Chapter 1.)

- There is no districtwide strategy for improving the academic skills of middle and high school students who did not attain basic reading and math skills at the elementary school level.

- The district has not conducted an analysis of the rigor of its middle and high school courses. It is also not clear whether the district's AP courses are as rigorous as AP courses elsewhere. (About 42 percent of AP students earn a score of three or above on their AP exams.)

- Participation rates in algebra, particularly at the ninth grade level, are low.[50] It was also unclear how much the district's efforts to improve its algebra courses focused on applications and functions in addition to algorithms

- AP courses and the district's gifted and talented program are funded by external sources, rather than being integral components of the D.C. school system's instructional program.

- The district does not have any end-of-course exams in core subjects at the high school level. The district also does not have an exit exam for high school graduation.

- The district does not have a systemwide program for character education to help address various discipline issues in the secondary schools.

- The district uses both middle school and junior high schools models, making it more difficult to articulate ninth grade curriculum.

Recommendations

✶ Include in the instructional strategic plan an explicit component for middle and high school reform, including— (I1)

a. Measurable objectives on dropout rates, attendance, course enrollment patterns, course completion, PSAT and SAT participation rates, and high school graduation rates.

b. Measurable goals for increasing the number of ninth grade students enrolled in algebra and decreasing the number of ninth graders in pre-algebra courses.

c. Goals and timelines for placing AP or IB courses in every high school.

[50] The district's *Quarterly Management Report* (June 2003) indicates that only 10% of ninth graders have completed Algebra I by year's end (p.7).

d. Strategy for tracking and evaluating the success of the reforms.

- ✶ Begin double-blocking reading and math coursework for middle and high school students who have not attained basic skills at the elementary grade level. (I2)

- ✶ Establish a summer bridge program for incoming high school students. (I3)

- ✶ Move all pre-algebra courses down to the eighth grade level and begin phasing out all algebra-equivalent courses in the ninth grade. Algebra should be required for all students. (I4)

- ✶ Establish a partnership with local universities to provide temporary high school math teachers with coursework in teaching algebra. (I5)

- ✶ Consider the option of starting to implement end-of-course exams at the high school level in key subjects. (This recommendation is controversial because there is mixed data on the effects of high school end-of-course exams. Some research indicates that these tests help boost overall performance; while other research suggests that they increase the dropout rate. It is worth the district debating and considering the option, however.) (I6)

- ✶ Use the results from the PSATs to identify ninth and tenth grade students who have scored well and to counsel increasing numbers of students to take a more rigorous sequence of English, math, and science courses. (I7)

- ✶ Begin the process of examining the rigor of all high school courses in key subject areas (e.g. math, English, sciences and history). Rigor should be "back mapped" from the content of AP courses in core subjects at the twelfth grade, then the eleventh grade, and so forth down to at least the ninth grade. Middle school courses should then be spiraled to the ninth grade benchmarks. The district should then undertake the process, over several years, of increasing the rigor and content of courses in grades 9-12 to match the results of the back-mapping. The district should use professional development to begin raising the level of course rigor a little at a time. (I8)

- ✶ Begin de-emphasizing career and vocational education and increase the focus on rigorous academic courses. (Career and vocational programs should remain in place, of course, but it is clear that some staff in the district use these programs to further lower expectations for students in the district.) (I9)

J. Low-performing Schools

Finally, urban school systems that are seeing substantial improvement in student performance have a targeted strategy to intervene in and boost achievement in their lowest-performing schools. This is often done differently from city to city, but it is done in almost every case. The Strategic Support Team looked at D.C.'s strategies to boost achievement in its lowest achieving schools.

Positive Findings

- The district understands the importance of focusing on its lowest-performing schools. The district's transformation schools, which focused on nine low-performing schools, were evidence of that.

- The transformation schools were placed under the aegis of a single staff person who was responsible for coordinating services to them. (The person has since retired.)

- The district's weighted student formula sends resources to schools with the greatest needs and is adjusted to ensure a basic level of services for all schools.

- The district is double-dosing or double-blocking reading and math instructional time in its transformation schools. It has also placed a number of extended-day programs into these schools.

- The district has curtailed the decision-making authority of the LSRTs in the transformation schools.

- The district has a fairly large summer school program (Summer STARS, serving about 10,000 children) to help students gain skills, but the program is not offered in every grade and attendance is voluntary.

- The district used its federal Reading Excellence Act funds ($4.2 million) for reading coaches, parent coordinators, supplemental materials, and interventions in its transformation schools.[51]

Areas of Concern

- The district has not conducted a formal evaluation of its transformation schools, but there is some reason based on the data reviewed by the team to be concerned about how well they are working.

- The person responsible for overseeing the transformation schools and their efforts has retired and not been replaced.

- The central office provides limited support to transformation schools (mostly in the form of additional counselors and other supports) after it reviews school climate, discipline rates, resource levels, attendance and the like. The district does not dictate to these schools what programs to use.

- The criteria used to identify transformation schools and to determine when schools can exit from that designation are not clearly spelled out.

[51] The schools used a number of improvement strategies, including America's Choice, Waterford Reading, Modern Red Schoolhouse, Earobics, FOSS Science Kits, Houghton Mifflin Reading, the Letter People, etc.

- The district's transformation schools strategy lacks incentives for the best teachers and principals in the district to teach in these schools; a strategy for moving extra resources to them; a coherent curriculum; intensive professional development for teachers and principals in those schools; and additional mid-year student assessments of progress.

- The district makes extensive use of Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration models to improve achievement in it low-performing schools.[52] Reading Excellence Act funds were used in part to pay for reform models. These models, however, are often not content-based and do not have a good track record for boosting student achievement. (They also cost the district a large sum of money.)

- The weighted student formula sends extra money to schools with larger numbers of students with special needs, but there are no requirements that schools or principals spend the extra resources on those children. There was considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that they do not. This appeared to be the case especially for special education students and the dollars they generate through the weighted formula.

- The transformation schools process lacks any meaningful professional development component.

- The district has conducted no studies of any of its poor but higher-performing schools to learn why they are achieving at the level they are. The void means that the school system has no mechanism to figure out why some schools are doing better than others and how best practices could be shared.

- The transformation school initiative lacks any student-by-student component or sufficient data that would guide interventions for specific, low-achieving children in each setting.

Recommendations

✶ Continue the district's transformation schools program, but revise it according to the following recommendations. (The district also ought to look at models for boosting student achievement in low-performing schools in other cities. Examples include Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Cleveland, and San Diego.) (J1)

✶ Name a specific person to head the transformation schools effort and have the person report directly to the chief academic officer or the deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction. (The previous project director left and has not been replaced.) (J2)

[52] The models were put on hold in September in all but the transformation schools.

- Conduct a detailed data analysis and evaluation of the current transformation schools program and use results to inform program revisions. The analysis should also include an examination of the practices of higher-performing schools in the district with approximately the same demographics. (J3)

- Develop specific criteria for deciding which schools are to be included in the program and how and when they will exit. Exit criteria should also include strategies for how the schools will be supported after they leave the program. (The district should have no more than twenty schools in the program at any given time.) (J4)

- Conduct a special inventory of programs and materials in these schools and jettison those that do not align with the district's new reading and math courses. (J5)

- Consider incentives and bonuses for the district's best teachers to teach in the transformation schools. (J6)

- Begin developing and phasing in mini-assessments (administered every six to twelve days) in the transformation schools. These assessments should not be any longer than six to eight items linked to the quarterly exams that ensure that students in the lowest-performing schools are progressing. (J7)

- Begin developing and phasing in individualized student improvement plans for students in the lowest-performing schools. (J8)

- Establish a "Rapid Support Team" composed of the director of instruction and the heads of math, reading, Title I, and accountability to give extensive support to the lowest-performing schools. (J9)

CHAPTER 3. SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Strategic Support Team working on this project found talented and committed people working in the D.C. Public Schools who are making an effort to improve education for children in the city. Their work is done outside the public's view and without much recognition or acknowledgement. Their efforts are also undertaken without much support from a system that is happy to take credit for the work but otherwise shows indifference toward their efforts.

The system, for its part, doesn't really work like a system. It is too fractured and unfocused to be characterized as a functioning organization with a focused instructional direction or strategy.

The district's schools do not have to be this way, however. Any number of major urban school systems across the country are pulling themselves together and beginning to improve student achievement. None of these urban school systems can be said to have attained perfection. But they have taken similar steps that have made their headway possible.

We have borrowed from the lessons learned in these cities to inform the recommendations we are making to the D.C. schools. We are proposing that the school district and leadership create a unified instructional direction for itself and its children. We are proposing that the district replace the fractured instructional practices currently in use with a cohesive and comprehensive reading and math plan. We are proposing that the district make clear to its principals, teachers, and staff what it expects children to know and be able to do. We are proposing that the central office be reoriented to provide convincing support to its schools. And we are proposing that the district's instructional efforts be guided by data collected, analyzed, and used before it is too late in the school year to do anything about the results.

The Council of the Great City Schools and its Strategic Support Team recommend that the school district overhaul its instructional program and replace it with a system that has a unified direction, clear goals, strong accountability, cohesive curriculum, consistent professional development, faithful program implementation, and useful and regular data. This means that the district needs to—

- ★ Develop a coherent and common vision for where it wants to go.
- ★ Set measurable goals for academic improvement and high expectations for performance.
- ★ Establish a new accountability system for attaining academic goals.
- ★ Standardize cohesive, districtwide instructional strategies and curriculum.

- ★ Provide districtwide professional development on the implementation of the new comprehensive reading and math plan and central office instructional support for principals and teachers.

- ★ Ensure that reforms are implemented at the classroom level.

- ★ Use data to monitor progress and decide on instructional interventions.

- ★ Begin reforms at the elementary level but start reforming high schools.

- ★ Focus on the lowest-performing schools**.**

The Council, in summary, is suggesting that the school district take responsibility for the instruction of its children. The district should establish its instructional and professional development programs, since these activities shape the school system's bottom line, student achievement, but should retain decentralized staffing and budgeting.

The Strategic Support Team has anchored its recommendations in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The district—in its role as a state and local school system—has an opportunity to do something that most cities cannot do directly. NAEP is the most trusted and well-respected measurement tool that the nation has. It is a norm-referenced exam and not flawless, but many observers in Congress, the national press, and the community trust NAEP to provide an objective assessment of how the nation's schools are doing. The D.C. schools take NAEP as part of the national assessment process every two years and as part of the Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA). The school district should treat NAEP as the states will eventually have to under *No Child Left Behind*—that is, as the gauge against which it ultimately measures its progress. The D.C. schools should then replace its SAT-9 test with a criterion-referenced tool that is consistent with NAEP.

Restructuring the instructional program of the D.C. schools will not be easy, of course. In addition to requiring hard work, the reforms will be resisted on a number of fronts and for a variety of reasons.

First, some people will complain that the reforms are being driven from the "top down." This observation will be partially correct in that we are proposing that the district's leadership take responsibility for the academic performance of the city's children by standardizing the instructional program. Any large, complex organization, public or private, has to control its core functions in order to boost its bottom line. The current system in D.C. does the opposite by allowing all schools to set their own agendas and define their own bottom lines. The result has been an abysmal failure.

The "top down" approach presents a serious challenge to the reforms being proposed in this report, however. Historically, many urban school districts, including D.C.'s, have choked off progress by being obsessed with regulatory compliance rather

than instructional leadership and support. This heavy-handed, bureaucratic behavior led school reformers and critics across the country to peg the central offices of major city school systems as more of a problem than a solution and to bypass them in favor of charter schools and other alternative structures.

The criticism was warranted in many cases because urban school systems were not doing anything that went beyond compliance or spurred student achievement. Research, however, is beginning to show that the faster-improving urban school systems are abandoning a school-by-school approach to improvement as too slow and too haphazard. They are more likely, instead, to be using a standardized and often prescriptive reading and math curriculum. The approach has allowed these cities to focus more tightly on the implementation of a single plan, provide professional development on what the district expects to be taught, monitor progress, and assess results.

The risk involves the possibility that the district will standardize bad practice and do even greater harm. This is possible if the district develops or adopts curriculum or materials that are not "scientifically-based" or hires a superintendent and staff members who don't know what they are doing, or reverts to an autocratic, compliance-driven posture towards its schools.

This trade-off between a uniform districtwide instructional program and the current system that allows principals and teachers to decide what to teach will also be described as a choice between a centralized and a decentralized system. What is being proposed, however, is a hybrid that vests curricular decisions at the central office but vests hiring, budgeting, and other decisions at the school level. It is neither site-based nor centralized in the traditional sense.

There will also be skepticism from school-level staff—and others outside the school system—about whether the central office can redefine itself to support principals and teachers at the building level. The skepticism is well-deserved. The central office has not been an effective instrument of progress or support to school staff in the past. The only real way to counter this charge is to prove the skeptics wrong.

Second, there will be attempts to exempt some high-performing or specialty schools from the standardized instructional approach being proposed here. Most districts find ways to exempt schools if they are doing fine on their own. There is little research on this issue, and we have hesitated to make a solid recommendation to the district on this point because we did not want to create a situation where schools in some sections of town were exempt and schools elsewhere were not. We urge the district to be flexible.

Third, some observers will object to the reforms because they take away the creativity and decision-making authority of teachers. This complaint will also be partially correct. But we would argue that the current level of creativity and instructional decision making has not produced much for students citywide. The creativity of some teachers may work in their individual classrooms, but the goal of the district should be to raise student performance for all children regardless of which classrooms they attend.

Teachers in other cities have often discovered that they were more effective when they were all pulling in the same direction and could work with each other on the most promising approaches to implementing the curriculum.

Fourth, there will be controversy if staff members are removed, as some should be. But if the superintendent is going to be held explicitly accountable for the academic performance of the children in the district, he or she should have the latitude to pick his or her own team without board or city council interference. This will also be true for principals. They should be allowed to choose their own teams if they are going to be held accountable for results.

Fifth, there will be complaints that the curriculum will become too narrow. This is a legitimate concern that the district needs to guard against. There is no simple remedy to this problem. But it is important that students master the basic skills, receive grade-level instruction, and see opportunities for acceleration, something that is not currently happening. Eventually, instruction will not become narrower but broader and more differentiated.

Sixth, there will be a temptation on the part of the school district to buy one of the more effective reading programs and assume the literacy problem has been solved. It is clear to everyone who has worked to reform urban education, however, that one cannot buy reform off the shelf and expect to get sustained gains. To be effective, good reading and math programs have to be supported with intensive professional development, timely data, and faithful implementation.

Finally, the district will be faced with distractions and fatigue as it works to reform. There will be forces at work that will attempt to take the district off-message. Staying focused on raising student achievement for a prolonged period will be critical if instructional reforms are to work. As the district starts to see progress, it ought to celebrate every small victory. Anyone who has ever tried to remake an urban school system knows that it is not easy or fast.

People who have done this work know that improving urban education is possible. Every city that has chosen to take the steeper path towards reform and improvement has not regretted it. Student achievement is getting better and the public's confidence is growing stronger.

There is no reason to believe that the District of Columbia can't see the same progress.

APPENDIX A. TIMELINE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations and proposals made in this report to the D.C. Public Schools present a general framework for reforming the instructional components of the school system. This appendix lists the recommendations and proposes a suggested timeline within which the recommendations might be carried out. The team recommends, for instance, that the first recommendation be carried out within the next six months. This timeline is meant as a general guideline only.

Recommendations	Six Mos.	One Year	Two Years	Three Years
1. Convene the school board at the earliest possible date (probably in retreat form) and begin establishing with the Acting Superintendent a clear vision for improved academic achievement for the students in the D.C. schools. The board should charge the acting superintendent with drafting a preliminary instructional plan based on this shared vision that begins to put the board's broad goals into place. The board should review the draft plans prepared by the staff until everyone is in general accord with the academic direction of the school system. (A1)	√			
This process need not occur in a single meeting. A series of discussions that are facilitated by an external person that the board trusts and respects might be more in keeping with the scope of the task. The board should also come to some agreement about the extent of the community input it will seek. Some districts hold community forums, summits, or town hall meetings. Others conduct hearings or school-based forums. Others handle the task internally. No method is necessarily better than another.				
Finally, the Mayor and the city counsel have a role in this process of setting an instructional vision, regardless of the governance discussion. The school board should ensure that the perspective of the mayor and city council are considered.				
2. Charge the Acting Superintendent with developing a concrete, five-year instructional plan for the improvement of academic performance in the district schools. This plan should go back to the board for	√			

approval and should be reviewed regularly basis throughout the year. (A2)				
3. Articulate in the strongest possible terms—at the school board and superintendent leadership levels—a clear sense of urgency for and commitment to raising student performance for all the children in the D.C. Public Schools. (A3)	√			
4. Begin the search for a permanent superintendent for the district's schools (including consideration of Elfreda Massie) who is in general agreement with the vision and broad goals articulated by the board, rather than searching without a vision for a superintendent who brings his or her own. (A4)		√		
5. Revise the details and tactics—but not the overall goals—of the instructional plan once a new Superintendent has been retained. The school board and the Superintendent need to work out the final details together and be in harmony about the direction of the school district and the overall theory of action. (A5)		√		
6. Devise a communications and engagement plan and present it to the community for discussion. It will be important that the school board, the mayor, city council, the superintendent, Congress, the U.S. Department of Education, and others to be willing to speak out in favor of the instructional plan that they have had a hand in developing. (The district also needs a more convincing plan for how it is going to strengthen communications between the central office and the individual schools.) (A6)	√			
7. Begin restructuring the agenda of the school board meetings over time to ensure that some portion of each gathering is devoted to an update on the status of the instructional strategic plan, efforts to boost student performance, and the results of those efforts. (A7)	√			
8. Conduct a formal review of the plan at least annually and modify it as necessary. (A8)		√		
9. Charge the superintendent with naming a "Project	√			

Management Committee" composed of senior staff members who will be responsible for working through the details of the instructional plan, monitoring its status, and reporting weekly on its progress. The Committee might be composed of the Superintendent's cabinet, but could include various task forces and work groups focusing on specific components or themes raised in this report. (B1)				
10. Charge the superintendent with reorienting all central office staff around the goal of raising student achievement. The superintendent might want to schedule site visits to cities that have seen gains in student reading and math achievement (e.g., Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Norfolk, Sacramento, Long Beach, Houston, Fort Worth, Boston, and others.) We also encourage the district to talk with the CEO, board, and staff of the Detroit Public Schools. (B2)	√			
11. Ensure that the new instructional plan has both districtwide and school-by-school academic achievement targets for at least reading and math. The goals at both the district level and at the schools need to be measurable, aligned with the Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks articulated under *No Child Left Behind*, and accompanied by timelines and interim benchmarks. (B3)	√			
12. Make certain that the new instructional plan includes indicators such as SAT scores, NAEP scores, special education referral rates, attendance, graduation rates, AP course taking, numbers of students taking core sequences of English and math (including algebra), as well as scores on the district's regular achievement test. (Additional discussion of testing is found in section G of this chapter.) Targets should be disaggregated by groups articulated in NCLB (including major racial/ethnic, language, disability, and income groups.) (B4)		√		
13. Include in the plan the specifics that any good strategic plan has—staff responsibilities, budgets, action steps, monitoring process, and evaluation process. (The district's Business Plan is a good starting place.) The district might want to look at the "balanced score card" method that the Charlotte-	√			

Mecklenburg schools use to track the progress and results of their academic reforms. (B5)				
14. Begin building the school-by-school academic targets for all student groups into the school improvement plans that each school must develop and ensure that these targets reflect districtwide goals. Like the districtwide goals, the school goals and their interim targets should be measurable, consistent with NCLB's AYP targets, and accompanied by specific timelines. Each school improvement plan should be aligned with the district's plan and should allow the system to meet it broader targets. (B6)		√		
15. Charge the district's individual department heads with developing unit plans that are consistent with and aligned with the larger district instructional plan. (B7)		√		
16. Put all districtwide and school-by-school goals, targets, and benchmarks on a single wall-sized chart so the superintendent and the Project Management Committee can closely monitor the progress of reforms in the district. (B8)		√		
17. Encourage the school board to establish a process of self-evaluation tied to the attainment of the goals they have approved in the strategic instructional plan. (C1)	√			
18. Place the superintendent on a performance contract tied to the attainment of the district's academic goals and targets. (C2)	√			
19. Place all senior staff, particularly instructional staff, on performance contracts tied to attainment of districtwide achievement goals. (C3)		√		
20. Place all principals on performance contracts tied to their individual school-by-school targets developed as part of the strategic instructional plan. Principals should retain authority to hire staff and develop budgets around broad instructional priorities. This will mean overhauling the principal evaluation process to put more—not less—emphasis on student		√		

achievement. (C4)				
21. Rebuild the district's school improvement planning process to ensure that the plans not only have school-by-school targets but also include disaggregated student performance data, teacher evaluation data, activities designed to attain goals, extra professional development requirements, strategies for improving parent involvement, and analyses of reading and math scores on specific test items for each student group. (C5)		√		
22. Consider the use of bonuses and other incentives for performance that meets or exceeds district and school targets. Incentives do not necessarily need to be financial. The district might consider promotions, stipends for extra classroom materials, professional memberships, attendance at national conferences, public recognition or awards for excellence or progress toward excellence, and other possibilities. (C6)			√	
23. Revisit all staff roles and responsibilities and revise relevant job descriptions as necessary to emphasize the goal of raising student achievement. (C7)			√	
24. Charge the superintendent or chief academic officer with meeting regularly with assistant superintendents and principals about school-by-school academic data and improvement plans. (C8)		√		
25. Restructure the school board's procedures for requesting information from staff. Currently, board members request information and data from individual staff members. We would encourage the board to send all requests for information and data through the superintendent or his or her designee. Board members should receive status reports on their requests if they do not receive a response within a reasonable time. Copies of responses should go to all board members. (C9)		√		
26. Recentralize school district instructional decisions about curriculum and professional development. (D1)	√			

27. Consider a new organizational structure for the curriculum and instructional staff in the central office. The new organizational structure includes a temporary "reading consultant," reporting to either the superintendent or the chief academic officer, whose responsibilities would include overseeing reading reforms, and an assistant superintendent for research, testing, and evaluation. (D2)	√			
28. Hire a reading and a math Director (reporting to the assistant superintendent for instruction) and five reading specialists (three elementary, one middle, and one high school) and three math specialists (two elementary and one secondary) at the central office to provide professional development, school improvement planning assistance, data review, coaching, and lesson plan development directly to schools. Specialists would report to their respective directors. The district should be able to pay for both of these positions out of its federal Title I allocations. (D3)	√			
29. Place a systemwide moratorium on the acquisition of any additional instructional programs and materials. The district should do a systemwide inventory of all the programs in use. (D4)	√			
30. Begin phasing out all Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration models currently being used throughout the district. (D5)	√			
31. Develop specific and concrete criteria for selecting, evaluating, and retaining all new models, materials, packages, and programs districtwide. (D6)	√			
32. Limit the site-by-site acquisition of curricula and materials. There is no hard and fast rule about how other cities do this. The district might decide that there are circumstances or schools that ought to have more flexibility in purchasing goods and services. Some districts grant this flexibility for schools that are achieving well on their own, while other districts argue that granting flexibility for some but not all schools creates inequities or the perception of inequities. Either way, the completely decentralized system now in place in the D.C. system does not	√			

work for students. (D7)				
33. Consider commissioning an external review and upgrade of the district's academic standards. The district might consider Achieve (www.achieve.org) to do this review. The SST also suggests that the standards be redesigned around NAEP frameworks in reading, writing, math, and science. (D8)		√		
34. Begin revising and upgrading the district's curriculum (first in reading, then math) to ensure general alignment with NAEP frameworks (grades 4, 8, and 12) and with other assessments the district uses. The curriculum also needs to ensure grade-by-grade articulation. (D9)		√		
35. Approve a formal school board policy requiring two and a half hours per day for language arts (reading, writing, speech) and ninety minutes a day for math, grades K-6. (D10)	√			
36. Develop a specific plan for rolling out instructional reforms so that central office staff, principals, teachers, schools, and external stakeholders know what to expect. The district should have many of these reforms in place for the 2004-05 school year. (D11)		√		
37. Revisit the district's new Business Plan to make sure that the system's budget coincides with the emerging instructional priorities. (D12)		√		
38. Postpone textbook adoptions in content areas until the district has decided on its core reading and math curricula plan. (D13)		√		
39. Define more centrally how federal Title I funds will be used to support districtwide instructional priorities in reading and math. (D14)		√		
40. Develop a comprehensive reading plan that includes a core program, supplemental materials, and interventions. (Develop as a component of the overall instructional plan.) (D15)	√			

41. Adopt a single, uniform core reading program for systemwide adoption and implementation. The SST would suggest using either the newest Houghton Mifflin reading series (Nation's Choice) since the earlier version is already widely available in the schools; Open Court (SRA McGraw Hill); or Trophies (Harcourt Brace). If the district considers another package, it should ensure that it incorporates the components and instructional methodologies (direct, explicit, and systematic) of reading identified by the National Reading Panel as critical to reading success. (D16)		√		
42. Actively involve a committee of stakeholders in providing input about the selection of a reading adoption. The committee should include teachers and external reading experts, but the ultimate selection should rest with the superintendent. (D17)	√			
43. Reanalyze districtwide and school-by-school reading and math data to ensure that the new reading program and its interventions are targeted on the skill deficits identified. (D18)		√		
44. Begin revising the district's reading and math pacing guides in week-by-week or twice monthly intervals. The district might want to use a consultant to get this process started. The pacing guides should be revisited once a year to determine whether fine-tuning is necessary. (D19)		√		
45. Conduct an analysis of the gaps between the NAEP reading frameworks and the reading program that the district selects to demonstrate alignment with NAEP. Use this information and student achievement data from the interim assessments (see next recommendation) to purchase supplemental materials to fill the gaps, if necessary. (D20)		√		
46. Ensure that the new reading program has embedded assessments that can be used to assess student progress at least quarterly during the school year. (D21)	√			
47. Ensure that the comprehensive reading plan has intensive interventions for students who begin to fall	√			

behind, according to the embedded or interim assessments. (D22)				
48. Attempt to minimize the number of intervention strategies that the district uses before and after school, during Saturday academies, and over the summer. The ideal intervention program would be tied directly to the core reading and math programs that the district adopts. Other intervention programs should be brought into the mix only if they align with student needs. This recommendation will be hard to implement, since the district also has a large number of after-school supplemental service providers approved under NCLB. It will be critical for the district to ensure that its intervention programs and its supplemental service providers are heading in a direction that will explicitly address the skill deficits of the children. (D23)		√		
49. Begin convening groups of the district's best teachers to write and expand the number of lesson plans available across the district. (The teachers union has a project that can help with this.) The process should occur after successful implementation of the comprehensive plan (second or third year) and should include a feedback loop for teachers to revise, comment on, and improve the suggested lesson plans. (The district might consider putting its lesson plans on its website or intranet. Lesson plans should include several direct or explicit models of instruction. (D24)			√	
50. Consider implementing a program to encourage and monitor outside reading or reading at home. (D25)			√	
51. Adopt a single, uniform math program for systemwide adoption and implementation. (D26)			√	
52. Ensure that the math program is as closely tailored to NAEP math frameworks as possible. (D27)			√	
53. Select a small number of interventions for use before and after-school, on Saturdays, and over the summer that will address skill deficits of students. (D28)		√		
54. Write a comprehensive strategic plan for		√		

professional development that is aligned with the instructional plan described in the previous section and with the adopted reading and math programs. The professional development plan should stress the knowledge, attitude, skills, and habits of teachers, principals, and staff. (The plan should be reviewed and modified annually.) (E1)				
55. Begin implementing a single, uniform, and systemwide professional development program for reading instruction during the summer of 2004. This training should be conducted during the six days devoted to centralized professional development. In addition to teachers, all principals and central office instructional staff should be required to attend this training. (E2)		√		
56. Allow individual schools to select their own professional development only when it involves issues of classroom management, character education, and parent involvement, or when specialized training is required to address a unique school challenge or need. This training should be conducted during the four days devoted to school-based professional development. (E3)		√		
57. Ensure that the professional development plan is built around a whole series of articulated sessions rather than single, independent, disconnected training sessions. Training in reading should be built around the components and instructional methods described earlier. The plan should address how the district will roll out and maintain its professional development initiatives for teachers and principals and support teachers in the classroom. (E4)		√		
58. Explore the use of alternative forms of professional development, e.g. study groups, chat rooms, seminars, workshops, videoconferencing, teacher mentoring, subsidized university coursework, independent study, lesson plan development, and the like. (E5)		√		
59. Utilize the professional development component of the new *PeopleSoft* module to track participation in and coordination of training. (E6)		√		

60. Design and provide training for central office staff in customer service (for example, how to support of schools or increase parent involvement). (E7)		√		
61. Use a differentiated staffing pattern to support math instruction in grades 3-5 if well-qualified math teachers are in short supply. (E8)			√	
62. Coordinate federal Title I professional set-asides and Title II funds to support the efforts proposed in this section. (E9)		√		
63. Renegotiate provisions of the teacher contract during the next cycle to require teachers who are leaving the district to give earlier notice. (E10)			√	
64. Finish developing an instructional monitoring process for all grade levels to measure fidelity of the implementation of the new reading and math program. The monitoring procedure or "walk-throughs" should focus on procedural or classroom appearance issues initially, then on effective instructional practice, lesson components and rigor, use of pacing guides, student progress on unit or interim assessments, and the like. (See the "Implementation Checklists" developed by Sacramento and Houston.) (F1)		√		
65. Provide explicit training to principals on the use of the "walk-throughs" and on instructional leadership. (F2)		√		
66. Charge principals with forming instructional leadership teams in their schools to help implement and monitor the new curriculum. (F3)		√		
67. Use Title I funds to hire school-based reading and math coaches to support classroom teachers or require principals to use their Title I funds to hire reading and math coaches. (Try part-time teachers and retired teachers. Hire reading coaches first, then math.) (F4)		√		
68. Convene regular district-wide meetings of principals and central office reform leaders to establish some	√			

unity of direction, share implementation problems and solutions, and determine school needs.(F5)				
69. Begin developing districtwide benchmark, interim, or quarterly tests aligned to the curriculum, and a new district test to determine whether students are learning according to the pacing guides or are slipping behind, and where instructional interventions need to be targeted. (G1)		√		
70. Administer interim or benchmark tests somewhere around October, January, and March (depending on pacing guides). The instruments should be designed or modified to be highly predictive of the end-of-the year assessments. (The district should also publish a testing calendar including interim assessment dates.) (G2)			√	
71. Replace the SAT-9 with a standards-based, criterion-referenced assessment that is consistent with NCLB requirements. The curriculum unit needs to be involved in the decision. The test ought to be aligned with NAEP reading and math frameworks and include multiple choice, short response, and extended response questions. The instrument should also allow the district to compare results over time and to conduct cohort growth studies. (G3)		√		
72. Continue end-of-year tests in reading and math for students in grades 1 and 2 even though NCLB does not require it. The district needs to have a way of determining student skills in reading and math prior to the third grade. (G4)	√			
73. Consider using diagnostic reading and math instruments at the beginning of the school year to determine elementary school students' skills. Results can be used in the regular classroom and for making decisions about appropriate interventions. (G5)			√	
74. Also consider using an objective assessment tool for special education referrals and tie the results to service levels. (The district should also start collecting and reporting exit data on students with disabilities, especially those with behavior disorders, and exit data for English language learners.) (G6)		√		

75. Begin the long-term task of building a districtwide data warehouse to store, in easily accessible form, data on student assessment results, attendance, discipline, program participation, course enrollment, and grades. Results should be universally and electronically accessible to teachers and staff. (G7)				√
76. Develop a schedule for evaluating the district's major programs every three to five years. Program evaluations should be built into every new district initiative (new reading program, extended-day programs, coaches, and professional development.) Ensure that programs are evaluated both for how well they are implemented and what kinds of results they achieve. The research unit should be charged with working out a schedule and methodology with various unit heads. (G8)		√		
77. Transfer the evaluation monies from relevant external grants to the research unit to fund the program evaluations. The research department might also think about forming regular collaboratives with local universities (particularly Howard University and George Washington University) to increase capacity to evaluate programs. (G9)		√		
78. Conduct regular customer satisfaction surveys so that the school board, superintendent, and senior staff have a clear understanding of community and school staff perceptions. (G10)			√	
79. Ensure that the school-based literacy and math coaches receive staff development on the use and interpretation of data. This training should be conducted jointly with the curriculum department. (G11)		√		
80. Revise school and student report cards to be consistent with requirements under NCLB. (G12)		√		
81. Begin reforms at the elementary school level first and then work up through the grade levels to middle and high schools rather than trying to reform all grades at once. (H1)	√			

82. Review the district's pre-k curriculum (both Head Start and other) to ensure that it is infused with literacy and numeracy components and to explicitly link or spiral it to the new kindergarten and first grade curriculum by skill component. (The district might want to consider a core reading program that has an explicit pre-k and kindergarten component that is already linked to first grade material. The district might also want to consider using "Language for Learning" for its pre-k program.) (H2)		√		
83. Consider instituting an early reading screening or diagnostic tool in the district's early childhood programs to help identify students who are already behind. (H3)		√		
84. Establish a district-wide goal and monitor each pupil's progress. (H4)	√			
85. Begin the district's gifted and talented program in the elementary schools rather than waiting until the fifth grade. (H5)		√		
86. Standardize the district's special education referral process and the criteria and tools teachers use to refer students, particularly those with behavior problems, to special education. (The district should set explicit goals for reducing referral rates, districtwide and school-by school. School goals should be included in individual school improvement plans in schools with unusually high rates.) (H6)		√		
87. Develop and implement new guidelines and procedures for referrals to the Teacher Assistance Team (TAT). The new guidelines should place priority on problem solving, research-based intervention strategies, differentiated instruction, and curriculum-based assessment for progress monitoring. (H7)	√			
88. Provide training and on-going support to TAT members and relevant school staff on the new guidelines and intervention strategies for learning issues associated with ADHD. (H8)		√		

89. Restructure the district's summer school program so that instruction is differentiated by the skill levels of attending students, i.e., intensive instruction for students at risk of not progressing; strategic instruction to raise students to grade level; and advanced instruction to accelerate learning for students who have already made good progress. (H9)	√			
90. Include in the instructional strategic plan an explicit component for middle and high school reform.(I1)	√			
91. Begin double-blocking reading and math coursework for middle and high school students who have not attained basic skills at the elementary grade level. (I2)		√		
92. Establish a summer bridge program for incoming high school students. (I3)	√			
93. Move all pre-algebra courses down to the eighth grade level and begin phasing out all algebra-equivalent courses in the ninth grade. Algebra should be required for all students. (I4)			√	
94. Establish a partnership with local universities to provide temporary high school math teachers with course work in teaching algebra. (I5)			√	
95. Consider the option of starting to implement end-of-course exams at the high school level in key subjects. (This recommendation is controversial because there is mixed data on the effects of high school end-of-course exams. Some research indicates that these tests help boost overall performance, while other research suggests that they increase the dropout rate. It is worth the district debating and considering the option, however.) (I6)				√
96. Use the results from the PSATs to identify ninth and tenth grade students who have scored well and to counsel increasing numbers of students to take a more rigorous sequence of English, math, and science courses. (I7)		√		
97. Begin the process of examining the rigor of all high school courses in key subject areas (e.g. math,			√	

English, sciences and history). Rigor should be "back mapped" from the content of AP courses in core subjects at the twelfth grade, then the eleventh grade, and so forth down to at least the ninth grade. Middle school courses should then be spiraled to the ninth grade benchmarks. The district should then begin the process, over several years, of increasing the rigor and content of courses in grades 9-12 to match the results of the back-mapping. The district should use professional development to begin raising the level of course rigor a little at a time. (I8)				
98. Begin de-emphasizing career and vocational education and increase the focus on rigorous academic courses. (These programs should remain in place, of course, but it is clear that some staff in the district use these programs to further lower expectations for students in the district.) (I9)			√	
99. Continue the district's transformation schools program, but revise it. (The district should look at models for boosting student achievement in low-performing schools in other cities. Examples include Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Cleveland, and San Diego.) (J1)	√			
100. Name a specific person to head the transformation schools effort and have the person report directly to the chief academic officer or the deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction. (The previous project director left and has not been replaced.) (J2)	√			
101. Conduct a detailed data analysis and evaluation of the current transformation schools program and use results to inform program revisions. The analysis should also include an examination of the practices of higher performing schools in the district with approximately the same demographics. (J3)		√		
102. Develop specific criteria for deciding which schools are to be included in the program and how and when they will exit. Exit criteria should also include strategies for how the schools will be supported after they leave the program. (The district should have no more than twenty schools in the	√			

program at any given time.) (J4)				
103. Conduct a special inventory of programs and materials in these schools and jettison those that do not align with the district's new reading and math courses. (J5)		√		
104. Consider incentives and bonuses for the district's best teachers to teach in the transformation schools. (J6)		√		
105. Begin developing and phasing in mini-assessments (administered every six to twelve days) in the transformation schools. These assessments should not be any longer than six to eight items linked to the quarterly exams that ensure that students in the lowest-performing schools are progressing. (J7)			√	
106. Begin developing and phasing in individualized student improvement plans for students in the lowest performing schools. (J8)			√	
107. Establish a "Rapid Support Team" composed of the director of instruction, the heads of math, reading, Title I, and accountability to give extensive support to the lowest performing schools. (J9)		√		

APPENDIX B. BENCHMARKING D.C.

The chart below presents the average scores of the curriculum and instructional Strategic Support Team on a draft tool developed by the Council of the Great City Schools to benchmark school districts against the practices and characteristics of faster-improving urban school systems on domains that the organization's research shows are instrumental in boosting student achievement districtwide. Scores range from 1.0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest).

Preconditions for School Reform							
School Board Role							**D.C. Score**
1. Board is fractured and most decisions are made with split vote.	1	2	3	4	5	Stable working majority on the board and board in general consensus on hold to run the district.	2.8
2. Board spends the majority of its time on the day-to-day operation of schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Board spends the majority of its time on policy issues.	1.6
3. Board devotes a majority of its time discussing non-academic issues.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets raising student achievement as first priority and devotes majority of its time to those efforts.	1.8
Shared Vision							
4. Board did not set initial vision for the district and encourages superintendent to set vision.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets initial vision for district and seeks superintendent who matches initial vision.	1.8
5. Board does not set annual measurable goals for superintendent/district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board sets initial goals then Board and superintendent jointly refine vision and goals.	1.3
6. Board and superintendent experience repeated turnover.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent have stable and lengthy relationship.	1.0

Diagnosing Situation							
7. Board and superintendent often make decisions without analyzing factors affecting achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent jointly analyze factors affecting achievement.	1.8
8. Board and superintendent do not assess strengths and weaknesses of district prior to reform initiatives.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent assess strengths and weaknesses of district prior to reform implementation.	1.5
9. Board and superintendent act quickly on reform initiatives without considering district options and strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent have a plan and act methodically and consider district options and strategies before moving forward with reform.	1.5
10. Board is heavily involved in day-to-day operation of district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board entrusts superintendent to run district.	1.2
Selling Reform							
11. Board and superintendent have no concrete or specific goals for district.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent identify concrete and specific goals for district.	1.4
12. Board and superintendent do not seek input from the community when developing a reform plan.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent meet regularly with community leaders and listen extensively to community needs.	2.8
13. Board and superintendent move forward with reform plans without community input.	1	2	3	4	5	Board and superintendent sell goals and plans to schools and community before moving forward.	2.2
14. Board and	1	2	3	4	5	Board and	1.8

superintendent continue to give excuses for poor student performance and do not exclaim an urgency or quest for high standards.						superintendent exclaim urgency, high standards, and no excuses.	
Improving Operations							
15. Central office business operations function to the exclusion of student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office revamps business operations to be more effective to schools.	1.0
16. Central office is not viewed as a support to schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office develops new sense of customer service with schools.	1.0
17. Central office operates on a schedule that does not consider schools' immediate problems.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office is designed so that it moves to fix schools' immediate problems.	1.4
Finding Funds							
18. District moves forward with its reforms without attracting new funds.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a plan to build confidence in reforms in order to attract funds.	2.6
19. District pursues and/or accept funds unrelated to reforms & priorities.	1	2	3	4	5	District pursues and only accepts funds to initiate reforms and launch priorities.	1.5
20. District does not make budget adjustments shifting funds into instructional priorities.	1	2	3	4	5	District shifts existing funds into instructional priorities.	1.2
Educational Strategies							
Setting Goals							
21. District sets more general goals and lack specific targets for principals.	1	2	3	4	5	District sets specific performance goals and principals.	1.4
22. District moves forward with reforms without considering best	1	2	3	4	5	District spends time considering what works elsewhere and	1.0

practices of similar districts.						incorporates "best practices" in their reforms.	
23. District goals lack specific timelines for meeting goals and targets.	1	2	3	4	5	District goals are "SMART" – **S**tretching, **M**easurable, **A**spiring, **R**igorous, and have a **T**imeline.	1.2
24. District focuses its attention on the "problem of the day".	1	2	3	4	5	District focuses relentlessly on goal to improve student achievement.	1.2
Creating Accountability							
25. District focuses on the state's accountability system.	1	2	3	4	5	District develops an accountability system that goes beyond state requirements.	1.2
26. District has no formal mechanism for holding senior staff accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District puts all senior staff on performance contracts.	1.0
27. District has no formal mechanism for holding principals accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District puts principals on performance contracts tied to goals.	3.2
28. District has no formal mechanism for holding the superintendent accountable for student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	District puts superintendent on performance contract tied to goals.	1.6
29. District has no formal mechanism for rewards & recognition for principals and senior staff.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a highly publicized system for rewards & recognition for principals and senior staff.	1.6
Focus on Low Performing Schools							
30. District treats all schools the same and has no	1	2	3	4	5	District creates system for improving	2.8

formalized method of focusing on lowest performing schools.						the performance of lowest performing schools.	
31. District has no formalized process to drive schools forward. School Improve Plan exists on paper only.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses school improvement planning process to drive school forward.	1.8
32. District lacks detailed interventions for lowest performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District has bank of detailed interventions for lowest performing schools.	2.0
33. District provides the same support and funds to all schools regardless of need.	1	2	3	4	5	District shifts extra help, funds and programs into lowest performing schools.	2.6
34. District lacks plan to improve quality of teachers in lowest performing schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District improves quality of teachers in lowest performing schools.	1.2
35. District has no formalized process for monitoring schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District closely monitors schools throughout the year.	1.0
Unified Curriculum							
36. District has multiple curricula with contrasting instructional approaches.	1	2	3	4	5	District adopts or develops uniform curriculum or framework for instruction.	1.0
37. District's reading and math curriculum permits teachers to decide how to teach students.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses more prescriptive reading and math curriculum or tight framework.	1.2
38. District does not provide additional time for teaching reading and math.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides additional time for teaching reading and math.	2.6
39. District does not differentiate instruction for low-performing students.	1	2	3	4	5	District differentiates instruction for low-performing students.	1.4

40. District curriculum relies heavily on textbooks and is not tied to state standards and assessments.	1	2	3	4	5	District curriculum is explicitly aligned to and goes beyond state standards and assessments.	1.6
41. District aligns a "cluster of grades", e.g. grades 3-5, to its reading and math curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District has clear grade-to-grade alignment in curriculum standards.	2.0
42. District uses a reading program that is not scientifically-based.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses scientifically-based reading curriculum.	3.0
43. District has no way to ensure that classroom teachers are covering the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District has a formalize system (pacing guides) to ensure that teachers are covering the curriculum standards.	1.0
Professional Development							
44. District has no formalize way to monitor implementation of the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5	District closely monitors curriculum implementation through frequent visits to classrooms by curriculum leaders, principals, and other administrators.	1.0
45. District permits a majority of a school's professional development to be determined locally with very little, if any, time for district activities.	1	2	3	4	5	District has uniform professional development built on curriculum needs with a moderate amount of time allocated for school needs.	1.2
46. District focuses the majority of its professional development on topics not related to classroom practice.	1	2	3	4	5	District focuses the majority of its professional development on classroom practice.	2.2

47. District has no way to support classroom teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	District has formalized way to provide classroom teachers supports when needed.	1.2
Pressing Reforms Down							
48. District reforms are not implemented in a majority of the classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5	District monitors reforms to ensure implementation in all classrooms.	1.2
49. District has no way to determine if reforms are being implemented.	1	2	3	4	5	District has system of encouraging and monitoring implementation of reforms.	1.4
50. Central office leaves instruction up to individual schools.	1	2	3	4	5	Central office takes responsibility for quality of instruction.	1.2
Using Data							
51. District does not have a system in place to monitor system or school progress.	1	2	3	4	5	District has comprehensive accountability system that uses data extensively to monitor system and school progress.	1.4
52. District does not have a formalize way to assesses student progress throughout the school year.	1	2	3	4	5	District assesses and reviews data on student progress throughout school year.	1.0
53. District does not disaggregate data.	1	2	3	4	5	District goes beyond the requirements of NCLB in disaggregating school, staff, and system data.	1.2
54. District does not use student assessment and other data to shape intervention strategies.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses annual and benchmark data to decide on where to target interventions.	1.2

55. District does not provide training or provides one time only training in interpretation and use of test score results.	1	2	3	4	5	District provides ongoing training in interpretation and use of test score results to all principals and teachers.	1.0
56. District provides professional development to schools and teachers where they "think" it is needed.	1	2	3	4	5	District uses data to target professional development.	1.0
Starting Early							
57. District has no strategy of where to start the reforms or how to roll them out to all students PK-12.	1	2	3	4	5	District starts reform efforts in early elementary grades and works up.	1.0
Handling Upper Grades							
58. District has not given any thoughts about how to teach older students.	1	2	3	4	5	District has fledgling strategies to teach older students.	1.6
59. District has no interventions at the middle and high school levels.	1	2	3	4	5	District has some research-based middle and high school interventions.	2.0
60. District does not provide additional time for teaching basic skills to students who are behind.	1	2	3	4	5	District doubles up on teaching basic skills to students who are behind.	2.6
61. District lacks plan to introduce AP courses in all high schools.	1	2	3	4	5	District offers AP courses in most if not all district high schools.	2.4

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

- Peggy Cooper Cafritz, President, Board of Education
- Carrie Thornhill, Board of Education, Teaching & Learning Committee
- Julie Mikuta, Board of Education, Teaching & Learning Committee
- Elfreda Massie, Chief-of-Staff
- Paul Vance, Superintendent
- Robert Rice, Acting Chief Academic Officer
- Adam Porsch, Director Performance Management
- Heather Sondel, Director Advanced Programs
- Mary Gill, Chief Citywide Early Childhood Ed. Initiatives
- Lisa Tabaku, Executive Director Bilingual Education
- Ralph Neal, Assistant Superintendent, Student Services
- William Wilhoyte, Assistant Superintendent of Senior High School
- William Caritj, Assistant Superintendent Ed. Accountability
- Vera White, Associate Superintendent
- Ray Bryant, Chief Special Ed. Reform
- Wilma Bonner, Exec. Dir. Academic Programs & LEA
- Gerald Knight, Professional Development Specialist
- George Springer, President, Washington Teachers Union
- Janie McCullough, Director Labor Management Partnerships
- Timothy Williams, Principal, Raymond Elementary School
- Alfonzo Powell, Principal, Backus Middle School
- James Wilson, Principal, Anacostia Senior High School
- Patricia Long Tucker, Principal, Banneker Senior High School
- JoAnn Finney, Teacher, Orr Elementary School
- Barbara Levine, Teacher, Eaton Elementary School
- Ron Morris, Teacher, PR Harris Educational Center
- Sarah Bax, Teacher, Hardy Middle School
- Pamela Tucker, Teacher, Anacostia SHS
- Anita Ford, Teacher, Cardozo SHS
- Lisa Moore, Teacher, Wilson SHS
- LeGrande Baldwin, Transformation schools, Consultant
- Iris Toyer, Parent
- Senora Simpson, Grandparent
- Doreen Hodges, Parent

APPENDIX D: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

- Academics Home – description of DCPS curriculum department
- Instructional Strategies
- Using a Pacing Chart: Introduction and Organization of a Pacing Chart
- Introduction to Standards for Teaching and Learning
- Pacing Chart, DCPS, Mathematics Grade 8
- Standards-Based Unit Planner Outline
- List of Adopted Textbooks by Grade Level
- District Calendar (plus AP Exam and SAT Calendar)
- Sample Reporting Forms
- Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook
- Promotion Guidelines
- Memorandum from Chief Academic Officer, Subject: Professional Development for Principals and Teachers, Utilization of Curricular Pacing Charts
- The Curriculum Design Process
- Standards for Teaching and Learning Pacing Charts (English as a Second Language,
- English /Reading Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Visual Arts, and World Languages)
- Supplemental Information & Policy Recommendations from Academic Services
- Blue Ribbon Panel Final Report
- Proposed Policies for Board Action
- Essential Elements: Algebra I, K-3 Reading Plan
- Minutes of Teaching and Learning Committee 9/22/03
- Talent and Development & Advanced Programs
- Power Point – Transformation Schools
- The Transformation Schools *An Update*
- Business Plan for Strategic Reform, DC Public Schools, *Developing a Business Plan: Implementing Strategic Reform*
- DCPS Average Mathematics Scores on the Stanford 9
- 2003 Elementary Schools: Mean SAT-9 Scores (NCEs)
- DCPS SAT 9 NCE Means 2003 by School and Grade
- DCPS SAT 9 2003 by School and Proficiency Level – Reading
- DCPS SAT 9 2003 by School and Proficiency Level – Math
- City-wide Summary Reports – Academic Performance Data System
- Truancy Distribution by Levels/Categories 2000-2001
- Truancy Distribution by Levels/Categories 2001-2002
- Truancy Distribution by Levels/Categories 2002-2003 (District and Private/Out of State Area Schools)
- Chapter IV Identification and Evaluation Policies and Procedures Manual, Office of Special Education
- SY 2002-2003 Referrals by Source
- SY 2002-2003 Referrals by School and Outcome
- SY 2002-2003 Referrals by School

- Proposed Organization structure for the Office of the Chief Academic Officer and relevant job descriptions for staff.
- Office of Academic Services, *Plan of Action*, August 10, 2003.
- *Quarterly Management Report*, District of Columbia Public Schools, June 2003.

APPENDIX E: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF THE STRATEGIC SUPPORT TEAM

Frances Bessellieu

Frances Bessellieu is a consultant to the U.S. Department of Education's Reading Excellence and Reading First programs. In this role, she works with State education officials nationwide in implementing comprehensive, scientifically-based reading programs, and advises senior Department staff on related policy issues. Before coming to the Department, Frances spent two years as Director of Reading for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) in North Carolina. Her key accomplishments at CMS included implementing a new process for selecting and sustaining scientifically-based reading curricula for grades PreK-12 and introducing these curricula, using new methods to assess children's reading skills, coordinating professional development for thousands of teachers in the district, and employing new methods of program evaluation. During her tenure, teachers' skills in reading instruction increased, district-wide reading achievement rose, and the achievement gap between subgroups of students decreased. Frances has also served as Lead Teacher in Direct Instruction and Behavior Management for New Hanover County, NC and spent several years teaching students with behavioral, emotional, cognitive and hearing difficulties in Southeastern North Carolina. In 1999, she earned an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

Rebecca Brown

Rebecca Brown is the School Improvement Coordinator, Elementary Language Arts, for the Sacramento City Unified School District. She is responsible for the district's 40 Language Arts Training Specialists (Reading Coaches) and 23 Reading First Schools. Since beginning her tenure with SCUSD 13 years ago, Rebecca Brown has been an elementary classroom teacher, reading coach, mentor teacher in BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment), and summer school principal. Rebecca has a B.A. from UCLA in Spanish and Spanish Literature, and graduated Summa Cum Laude with a M.A. from California State University, Sacramento, in Education, Educational Administration.

Michael Casserly

Michael Casserly is the Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of 61 of the nation's largest urban public school districts. Casserly has been with the organization for 26 years, twelve of them as Executive Director. Before heading the group, he was the organization's chief lobbyist on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and served as its director of research. He led major reforms in federal education laws, garnered significant aid for urban schools across the country, initiated major gains in urban school achievement and management, and advocated for urban school leadership in the standards movement. And he led the organization in the nation's first summit of

urban school superintendents and big city mayors. Casserly has a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and a B.A. from Villanova University

Dixie Dawson

Dixie Dawson is a K-12 mathematics consultant for the Long Beach Unified School District. She is responsible for strategic planning for mathematics professional development and implementing a standards-based mathematics curriculum. She coordinates and develops yearly end-of-course math exams for all grades K – 8 and all high school math courses. These exams have lead to a dramatic improvement in student's math scores over the last five years. Her major accomplishments include developing Math Institutes for first and second year teachers, basic facts/integer testing for K-8, end-of-course exams, pacing charts for each grade and high school math course, Assessment Portfolios, and Portfolio Student Workbooks. The Student Workbooks have common assessments including authentic assessments for each grade and high school course. Scoring checklists have been developed for each authentic assessment. She has also developed math videos and computer PowerPoint programs that are used by teachers and students in the district to improve student achievement. Dixie has also taught the pre-service classes for Teaching Math in a Diverse Classroom, Elementary Math Methods and Computer Literacy for Teachers for the local university. She has presented at the Education Trust Conference in Washington DC and California State Conference on Standards and Assessment Symposium on the use of portfolios and common assessments to implement a Standards Based Curriculum. Dixie has served as a high school math teacher, district computer chairman, and 6-12 Math Consultant. She is a member of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Phi Delta Kappa and California Mathematics Council. She completed a master's degree in Education at Pepperdine University in Los Angeles and a BS in Mathematics from Northwest Missouri State College.

Maryellen Donahue

Maryellen Donahue is the Director of the Office of Research, Assessment, and Evaluation for the Boston Public Schools. She has been in the school system for over thirty years. A third of that time was spent as an elementary classroom reading teacher. The rest of her career in Boston has focused on research, evaluation, and assessment. In 1985, she became the Manager of Testing and in 1987 she moved to her current position where she develops, supervises, and coordinates all district testing, program evaluation, and research activities for the school system. She has served as the President of the National Association of Test Directors and is an active member of the American Educational Research Association. Dr. Donahue is the author of numerous reports and studies on accountability, school improvement, standards, and implementation issues in performance assessment.

Mary Anne Lesiak

Mary Anne Lesiak is a program analyst in the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood and Reading Group in the Office of Student Achievement and School Accountability. In this role, she coordinates the Early Reading First grant program, designed to support local efforts to enhance the oral language, cognitive and early reading skills of preschool-aged children, particularly those from low-income families. Prior to this position, Mary Anne spent three years teaching history, language arts, and computer technology in the District of Columbia. In addition, Mary Anne has served as an adjunct instructor at American University. Mary Anne has a master's degree in teaching from American University and a B.A. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland.

Sharon Lewis

Sharon Lewis is the Director of Research for the Council of the Great City Schools, where she is responsible for developing and operating a research program on the status and challenges of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Ms. Lewis maintains a comprehensive database on urban public schools and is considered a national expert on assessment. She has served as an international educational consultant to the U.S. Department of Defense schools, and has been a State of Michigan delegate to the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China. Ms. Lewis has served on numerous state and national committees including the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing; the National Academy of Sciences, NAEP Evaluation Committee; the National Academy of Sciences, Appropriate Use of Test Results Advisory Council, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Educational Statistics Advisory Panel, the U.S. Congress Technical Advisory Board on Testing in Americas' Schools; the National Center for Education Study on the Inner Cities; and the Technical Review Committee of the Michigan Assessment Program. She also worked for 30 years in the Detroit Public Schools and served as its Assistant Superintendent for Research and School Reform.

Ricki Price-Baugh

Ricki Price-Baugh is the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum in the Houston Independent School District. She is responsible for strategic planning and the design, implementation, and evaluation of the district's curriculum and instructional initiatives for eight departments: English/language arts, fine arts, early childhood education, foreign language, health/physical education, mathematics, science, and social studies. Since beginning her work thirty years ago in the Houston schools, Dr. Price-Baugh has served as a teacher, department chair, resource coordinator, project manager, and director of curriculum services. Her major accomplishments include a districtwide effort to align curriculum, textbook, and assessment systems, and a substantial increase in student achievement scores in the district. She is a certified curriculum auditor for Phi Delta Kappa and is a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Dr. Price-Baugh has her doctoral degree from

Baylor University, a master's degree in Spanish literature from the University of Maryland, and a B.A. (magna cum laude) from Tulane University.

Mary Ramirez

Mary I. Ramírez is the Director of the Bureau of Community and Student Services in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education. Her responsibilities include oversight of the Divisions of Nonpublic and Private Schools Services, Student and Safe School Services, and Migrant Education. Ms. Ramírez also supports such federal and state programs as alternative education, character education, mentoring, homeless children and youth, refugee children, pregnant and parenting teens, correctional education, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Ms. Ramírez previously served as the Director of ESOL/Bilingual programs in the School District of Philadelphia, where she was responsible for overseeing Pre-K-12 Early Childhood, ESOL/Bilingual, Career and Technical education, library, CSRD, field-based learning, summer and gifted programs for over 200,000 students. Under Ms. Ramírez' leadership, the Philadelphia School District established effective instructional practices, a Newcomer Center, ELL assessment initiatives and systemwide program evaluation. Ms. Ramírez holds a Master's degree in bilingual studies from La Salle University (earned under a U.S. Department of Education Title VII fellowship) as well as principal, supervisor and superintendent certifications. Ms. Ramírez is also an adjunct professor at La Salle University and a doctoral candidate in educational leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. Ms. Ramírez has edited a column in the NABE NEWS titled *Administration of Bilingual Education Programs,* which features efforts to improve bilingual education across the country. She also served as the chair of the NABE bilingual teacher of the year award, and was the local co-chair of the NABE 2002 conference held in Philadelphia. Ms. Ramírez has been an active member of many professional organizations including the PA Department of Education PSSA Writing Assessment Committee, the Governor's Institute for Data Driven Decision Making steering committee, ETS Hispanic Equity Network, ASCD, PA-ASCD, Council of Great City Schools Technical Assistance Teams and has been on the boards of Research for Action, Delaware Valley Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Philadelphia Association of Hispanic School Administrators, PennTESOL-East and the Pennsylvania Educational Research Association .

APPENDIX F: ABOUT THE COUNCIL

Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 61 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Its Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent of Schools and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides regular oversight of the 501(c)(3) organization. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public education and assist its members in the improvement of leadership and instruction. The Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior school district managers with responsibilities in such areas as federal programs, operations, finance, personnel, communications, research, technology, and others. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Strategic Support Teams Conducted by the Council

City	Area	Date
Albuquerque		
	Facilities and Roofing	2003
	Human Resources	2003
	Information Technology	2003
Broward County		
	Information Technology	2000
Buffalo		
	Superintendent Support	2000
	Organizational Structure	2000
	Curriculum & Instruction	2000
	Personnel	2000
	Facilities and Operations	2000
	Communications	2000
	Finance	2000
	Finance II	2003
Cleveland		
	Student Assignments	1999, 2000
	Transportation	2000
	Safety and Security	2000

	Facilities Financing	2000
	Facilities Operations	2000
Columbus		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Human Resources	2001
	Facilities Financing	2002
	Finance & Treasury	2003
	Budget	2003
Dayton		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Curriculum & Instruction	2001
	Finance	2001
	Communications	2002
Denver		
	Superintendent Support	2001
	Personnel	2001
Des Moines		
	Budget & Finance	2003
Detroit		
	Curriculum & Instruction	2002
	Assessment	2002
	Communications	2002
	Curriculum & Assessment	2003
	Communications	2003
Greensboro		
	Bilingual Education	2002
	Information Technology	2003
	Special Education	2003
Jacksonville		
	Organization & Management	2002
	Operations	2002
	Human Resources	2002
	Finance	2002
	Information Technology	2002
Los Angeles		
	Budget and Finance	2002
Miami-Dade County		
	Construction Management	2003
Milwaukee		
	Research & Testing	1999

	Safety and Security	2000
	School Board Support	1999
New Orleans		
	Personnel	2001
	Transportation	2002
	Information Technology	2003
Norfolk		
	Testing & Assessment	2003
Philadelphia		
	Curriculum & Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Food Service	2003
	Facilities	2003
	Transportation	2003
Providence		
	Business Operations	2001
	MIS and Technology	2001
	Personnel	2001
Richmond		
	Transportation	2003
	Curriculum & Instruction	2003
	Federal Programs	2003
	Special Education	2003
Rochester		
	Finance and Technology	2003
San Francisco		
	Technology	2001
St. Louis		
	Special Education	2003
Washington, D.C.		
	Finance and Procurement	1998
	Personnel	1998
	Communications	1998
	Transportation	1998
	Facilities Management	1998
	Special Education	1998
	Legal and General Counsel	1998
	MIS and Technology	1998
	Curriculum and Instruction	2003