



UNCHARTED TERRITORY

AN EXAMINATION OF RESTRUCTURING UNDER NCLB IN GEORGIA

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Summary of Key Findings

When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) went into effect in 2002, Georgia's statewide accountability system was already well underway. As a result, some schools faced the federal law's most serious consequences as early as 2004. That left Georgia policymakers with a dilemma on which there remains little federal guidance: what to do with sanctioned schools that still fail to progress?

Restructuring is the last consequence under Title I¹ of NCLB for schools failing to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward their state's student achievement targets for five or more consecutive years. The sanctions associated with restructuring, from replacing school staff to contracting with an outside organization to run the school, are intended to reshape underperforming schools dramatically. The law itself requires districts to choose one of five options for their schools in restructuring but leaves many of the details up to states, districts, and schools, including what to do with schools that remain in restructuring for more than two years.

As NCLB enters its eighth full school year of implementation in 2008-09, a growing number of states and districts face similar questions about how to handle restructuring schools that continue to fall short of AYP. When schools fail to progress under restructuring, what are the reasons and what can states and districts do to help? What additional sanctions and supports should states impose?

To explore these and other questions, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) has studied NCLB restructuring in five states. The most recent state added to this study is Georgia, which has developed a comprehensive approach to supporting and monitoring its restructuring schools, particularly those that must implement restructuring for more than two years. In the winter and spring of 2008,

we reviewed restructuring documents and interviewed decision-makers at the state level. We also conducted case studies of restructuring through interviews and document reviews in three school districts and five schools. Several key points emerged from our analysis.

- ***The number of Georgia schools implementing restructuring has declined since 2004, and a substantial number have exited.*** The number of Georgia schools in the implementation phase of NCLB restructuring dropped from 51 in 2004-05 (the first year the state had schools enter this phase) to 46 schools in 2007-08. Not only has the number of schools entering the implementation phase of restructuring decreased—just 9 did so in 2007-08—but many schools have also improved their performance enough to exit restructuring. At the end of school year 2006-07, 12 schools, or 24% of the schools implementing restructuring plans, exited, and the preceding year 29% of the schools in this phase exited.
- ***In 2006 and 2007, Georgia districts rejected the federal option to reopen restructuring schools as charter schools, and only one school was turned over to an outside management company.*** Rather, taking "any other" action to restructure governance was the most popular choice. Nearly all (93%) of Georgia schools implementing restructuring in 2007-08 used the last of the five restructuring options in federal law, the so-called any-other option. This allows schools and districts to take any major action, aside from the four other options specified in the law, that will produce fundamental change in the school's governance structure. The Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) views the any-other option as a vehicle for advancing its own standards-based curriculum reforms, which began in 2002.

¹ Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as amended by NCLB provides funds to school districts to educate low-achieving children attending schools in low-income areas.

- ***Restructuring plans in Georgia tend to focus on state priorities for school improvement.*** Some states leave the details of restructuring plans to individual districts. Georgia, however, requires plans to address a recently adopted set of standards for school quality. While each school's plan remains unique, district and school personnel interviewed for our case studies did report a fairly uniform set of strategies as part of their restructuring plans. These included training teachers to teach to the new state standards, analyzing student assessment results to determine individual strengths and weaknesses, designing small-group instruction that targets specific student weaknesses, and providing additional support services for struggling students.
- ***Georgia provides a significant degree of support and monitoring to restructuring schools.*** The small number of schools in restructuring, as well as the state's willingness to invest additional dollars in improving them, has allowed Georgia to provide intensive intervention in schools, particularly those that remain in restructuring for a number of years. Staff at schools that participated in CEP's case studies reported that state interventions had made a substantial difference in the quality of classroom instruction.
- ***Georgia imposes requirements beyond those in federal law on schools that have implemented restructuring for two years without making AYP.*** Under Georgia state law, districts with schools in years 7 and 8 of NCLB improvement must sign a contract with the state agreeing to make certain improvements in these schools, such as following a prescribed schedule for teaching state standards. In addition, the Georgia Department of Education sends personnel to these schools to provide on-site coaching and monitoring. These personnel include principal mentors who spend two full days a week at each of these schools, "math facilitators" who visit biweekly to train teachers and coach staff, and a monitor who assists with short-term improvement planning and verifies progress.
- ***Restructuring and outside intervention have done little to improve case-study schools with inadequate leadership.*** Four of our five case study schools made poor progress until an ineffective principal was replaced following a resignation, retirement, or dismissal, according to interviews with school and dis-

trict personnel. A fifth principal was amenable to changing her management style, and the district soon observed significant improvements in school culture and student learning at this school.

- ***Good working relationships among those involved in the restructuring process are crucial for success, case study schools and state officials have found.*** GDOE officials have realized that pairing principals with mentors who are compatible in style and background is essential to building the kind of trust that leads to changes in professional practice. And at schools that underwent improvements in instructional practice, principals first succeeded in building structures to improve communication with teachers, promote collaboration among teachers, and increase expectations and personal attention for students.

Methods and Background

For the past four years, the Center on Education Policy has conducted a series of analyses of the school restructuring process in five states as part of its comprehensive, multiyear study of the No Child Left Behind Act. Previously, we have issued four reports on restructuring in Michigan (CEP, 2004; 2005; 2007b; 2008b), three on California (CEP, 2006a; 2007a; 2008a), two on Maryland (CEP, 2006b; 2007c), and one on Ohio (CEP, 2008c). These reports are available at www.cep-dc.org. Future reports on Maryland and additional states, as well as a cross-state analysis, will follow.

This report adds a fifth state, Georgia, to our research on restructuring. We chose to focus on these five states because they had already begun implementing test-based accountability systems and calculating AYP under the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994, the federal law that preceded NCLB. As a result, these states had schools reach the restructuring phases of NCLB as early as 2003-04, sooner than most other states. As other states see more schools enter restructuring, they can learn from the experiences of these states in the vanguard.

This review of Georgia was conducted by Elizabeth Duffrin, a CEP consultant. Duffrin interviewed state department of education officials and regional administrators. She also conducted case studies of three districts with schools in restructuring, primarily by interviewing district administrators, principals, and

other staff on site. These case studies focused on the following three districts and five schools:

- Atlanta Public Schools, a large urban district, enrolls about 50,000 students. Two Atlanta schools participated in our case study: Long Middle School and Kennedy Middle School.
- Muscogee County School District, a midsize urban district, serves about 33,000 students from the city of Columbus and three small communities in west central Georgia. Eddy Middle School and Baker Middle School in Columbus participated in our case study.
- Stewart County School District is a rural district serving about 650 students from two counties. Stewart-Quitman High School participated in our case study.

CEP selected these districts because they represent a large urban, midsize urban and rural district. Atlanta has the largest number of schools implementing restructuring of any district in the state. It already had a major reform agenda and accountability system underway when NCLB went into effect. Muscogee County and Stewart County school districts relied more heavily on state support to carry out their restructuring efforts. Stewart County has the fewest resources and most remote location and faces an especially difficult challenge in turning around its struggling high school.

CEP selected five case study schools to capture a range of experiences with restructuring. In the Atlanta Public Schools, Long Middle entered restructuring implementation in school year 2007-08 while Kennedy Middle began its fourth year of restructuring implementation. Of Muscogee County's three schools currently implementing restructuring, Eddy has undergone the biggest turnaround while Baker continues to struggle, district officials reported. Stewart-Quitman High is the only restructuring school in Stewart County.

In addition to conducting interviews, Duffrin also reviewed state, district, and school data and documents, such as state restructuring and school improvement policies, state report cards, and state test score data. The interviews, observations, document reviews, and data analysis were conducted from winter to spring 2008.

Overview of Restructuring in Georgia

In Georgia, school restructuring focuses on state priorities for improvement. The GDOE requires school improvement plans to address a recently adopted set of standards for school quality. Among other standards, Georgia expects schools to organize instruction around the new state curriculum, analyze results of student assessments to determine individual strengths and weaknesses, and design small-group instruction that targets specific student needs.

FEDERAL AND STATE RESTRUCTURING REQUIREMENTS

The No Child Left Behind Act requires all states to test virtually all students annually in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8, plus once during high school. It also requires all schools and districts to meet targets for adequate yearly progress that place them on track for ensuring that 100% of students will be academically proficient by 2014. **Table 1** shows the percentage of students in various grades that had to score at or above the proficient level on state tests for Georgia schools to make AYP. Each subgroup of 40 or more students also had to meet these targets.

Consistent with policies approved by the U.S. Department of Education, Georgia schools that miss these proficiency targets can make AYP if their percentage proficient falls within a “confidence interval” of the target, a sort of margin of error that addresses the potential year-to-year variation that can occur in test results for reasons unrelated to student learning. Districts and schools can also make AYP if the average of their test results over three years meets the target.

To make AYP, schools must not only reach academic targets but must also comply with the federal requirement for 95% student participation in testing and meet a state graduation rate target of 65% for high schools and state attendance rate targets for elementary and middle schools. Under the “safe harbor” provision of NCLB, schools that miss test score targets overall or for a particular subgroup may still make AYP if that group meets graduation or attendance targets and decreases its percentage of students performing below proficient by at least 10% from the previous year.

Table 1. Percentage of Students That Must Score At or Above the Proficient Level on State Tests for Georgia Schools to Make AYP

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Grades 3 to 8				
Reading/language arts	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	73.3%
Math	58.3%	58.3%	58.3%	66.7%
Grade 11				
English/language arts	81.6%	84.7%	84.7%	87.7%
Math	62.3%	68.6%	68.6%	74.9%

Table reads: In 2004-05, 66.7% of students in grades 3 through 8 had to score at or above the proficient level on the state reading/language arts test for a school in Georgia to make adequate yearly progress as required by NCLB.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, 2007a.

Under NCLB, schools and districts that have not made AYP for two consecutive years are identified for improvement and are subject to sanctions. If a school continues to fall short of AYP targets and remains in improvement status, the sanctions progress from offering public school choice in year 1 of improvement, to providing tutoring services in year 2, to undertaking “corrective action” in year 3. After five consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must plan for restructuring (year 4 of NCLB improvement). After six consecutive years of not making AYP, schools must implement their restructuring plans (year 5 of improvement). The federal law does not contain any special provisions, other than the regular restructuring requirements, for schools that remain in restructuring beyond year 5 of improvement.

Schools and districts identified for restructuring must choose from the following menu of options in federal law, designed to completely revamp the school:

- Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school
- Reopening the school as a charter school
- Replacing all or most of the school staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP

- Turning operation of the school over to the state, if the state agrees
- Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school’s governance that produces fundamental reform

Georgia allows schools to use any of these options for restructuring except turning the school over to the state. This option is not permitted under Georgia state law, which requires each school district to remain under the autonomous control of a local board of education.

Perhaps because these options are designed to radically change schools, implementation is complex. When fully implemented, all require adjustments to schools’ financial operations, and some may require additional resources, particularly if the school must train staff to work together in new ways.

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN RESTRUCTURING

In 2003-04, Georgia became one of the first states to plan for school restructuring under No Child Left Behind. Georgia had already begun implementing test-based accountability systems and calculating AYP under a previous federal law, and many of its schools were already in school improvement. Those that had failed to meet test score targets for five or six consecutive years by 2003-04 were considered to be in year 4

of improvement under NCLB and were required to plan for restructuring. Schools that again failed to make AYP entered the implementation phase of restructuring the following school year.

Since then, Georgia's restructuring schools have countered a trend found in three of the four other states studied by CEP that began restructuring implementation in 2004. In California, Ohio, and Maryland, the number of schools undergoing restructuring has risen since 2004, as more schools entered and few exited. Georgia, by contrast, saw a decline in the number of schools implementing restructuring plans, as fewer entered this phase and a substantial number exited.

In 2004-05, 51 Georgia schools that received federal Title I funds entered restructuring implementation. In 2007-08, the total number of Title I schools in restructuring implementation had fallen to 46, including 9 schools that had begun their first year of restructuring that year. This reduction was achieved not only because fewer schools were entering restructuring, but also because many had exited. In 2005-06, 66 schools, or 29% of those implementing restructuring plans, improved their performance enough on annual testing to exit restructuring at the end of that school year. In 2006-07, 49 schools, or 24% of schools in restructuring implementation, exited. **Table 2** provides more details about the numbers of schools in restructuring and exiting restructuring.

The decline in the number of schools implementing restructuring coincides with an overall decrease in the number of Georgia schools in improvement. Between 2003 and 2007, that number dropped from 533 to 323 as more schools made AYP.

Due at least in part to rising test scores, Georgia has a smaller percentage of schools in restructuring than have three of the four other states studied by CEP. In 2007-08, Georgia had less than 4% of its schools in restructuring planning or implementation, compared with 5% in Ohio, 7% in Maryland, and 11% in California. It is unclear, however, to what degree the relatively low and declining number of restructuring schools in Georgia is due to improvements in student achievement and to what degree it reflects a lower state standard for proficiency.

Two recent studies determined that Georgia's standard for proficiency on state tests was among the nation's lowest in 2004-05. An analysis by Editorial Projects in Education found that Georgia was one of three states where the percentage of 4th-grade students scoring at or above the proficient level in reading was more than 60 percentage points higher in 2005 on state tests than on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Hoff, 2007). Of 36 states participating in NAEP in 2005, Georgia's definition of proficiency for 8th grade math was found to be the fifth lowest in a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2007).

Table 2. Number of Title I Schools in Restructuring Implementation and Number and Percentage That Exited*

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Schools implementing restructuring	51	66	49	46
Number of schools exiting at end of school year	0	19	12	NA
Percentage of schools exiting	0%	29%	24%	NA

Table reads: At the beginning of school year 2005-06, 66 Georgia schools were in the implementation phase of NCLB restructuring. Based on the tests administered during 2005-06, 19 schools, or 29% of the 66 schools, had improved their performance enough to exit restructuring at the end of the school year.

*Note: Because Georgia began to revise statewide assessments in 2006, it remains unclear whether changes in the testing system have affected the number of restructuring schools.

Source: Center on Education Policy analysis of unpublished data from the Georgia Department of Education.

Beginning in 2005-06, Georgia revised its state tests and scoring scales, but it remains uncertain whether the state has set a higher bar for proficiency. The revised assessments are aligned to new academic standards, which the state rolled out beginning in 2005-06 in certain subjects and grade levels. Because the newer and older assessments each measure performance on a different set of standards, test results from prior years are simply not comparable, according to Jeff Gagne, federal policy analyst and liaison for the GDOE. Georgia has shown some progress in math on NAEP since restructuring began, suggesting that student achievement has increased in that subject. Between the NAEP administrations of 2003 and 2007, the percentage of the state's students scoring at or above the proficient level in math grew from 27% to 32% in grade 4 and from 22% to 25% in grade 8 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). NAEP reading scores, however, remained flat in grade 8 and increased by just one percentage point in grade 4.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

In 2007-08, 65 Georgia Title I schools were in the planning or implementation phases of restructuring based on their 2006-07 test scores. Of these 65 schools, 45% were in urban areas, 28% in rural areas, 15% in suburban areas, and 12% in towns outside the suburbs. Imposing sanctions on non-Title I schools is not required by federal law. In 2007-08, however, Georgia required 11 of non-Title I schools to plan for restructuring and provided them with the same assis-

tance as Title I schools receive. Two districts, Atlanta Public Schools and Richmond County School System, which includes the city of Augusta, had the most schools in restructuring planning and implementation, a total of eight schools in each district.

For schools that remain in restructuring implementation for more than two years (year 7 of improvement or beyond), Georgia has added sanctions not required by the NCLB law. A school that fails to make AYP after implementing restructuring for two years enters a new restructuring phase called "contract monitoring." In this phase, a district signs a two-year improvement contract with the state in which it agrees that the district and its restructuring schools will follow state directives in the areas of leadership, curriculum, classroom assessments, and professional development. For example, teachers are required to teach certain state standards on certain days and are encouraged to use a computer database of sample lessons. In 2007-08, Georgia had 19 restructuring schools in contract monitoring, as shown in **table 3**.

FUNDING FOR RESTRUCTURING

Beginning in 2004, all states were required by federal law to set aside 4% of their Title I funds to assist districts and schools in improvement, including schools in restructuring. How states use these funds to monitor and assist restructuring is a state decision, and states have taken a range of approaches. Some states help schools design restructuring plans and explicitly sign off on those plans, while others do not collect any

Table 3. Number of Georgia Schools in Various Phases of Restructuring in 2007-08

	Restructuring Planning (Year 4 of improvement)	Restructuring Implementation (Years 5 and 6 of improvement)	Contract Monitoring* (Years 7 and 8 of improvement)
Number of schools	30 [†]	27 [‡]	19

Table reads: In 2007-08, Georgia had 30 schools in the planning phase of restructuring, 27 schools in their first two years of restructuring implementation, and 19 schools in the third or fourth year of restructuring implementation. Schools in this last category were operating under a contract between their district and the state under the terms of Georgia law.

*This phase of restructuring is not a federal requirement but rather is authorized under Georgia state law.

[†]Includes 11 non-Title I schools.

[‡]Includes one school that has closed.

Source: Center on Education Policy analysis of unpublished data from the Georgia Department of Education.

information on restructuring schools beyond what they collect from other schools in improvement. Georgia falls into the first group and requires restructuring plans to be approved before a school has access to its school improvement funds.

Georgia supplements federal Title I grants to schools in improvement with state funding, which allows the education department's School Improvement Division to provide monitoring, mentoring, and professional development to restructuring schools and their districts.

In 2007-08, the Georgia Department of Education set aside \$11.2 million in state funds and \$16.5 million in federal Title I school improvement funds, a total of almost \$28 million, to support 323 schools identified for NCLB improvement. These funds were used as follows:

- Almost \$11.5 million in federal funds was distributed to the 187 Title I schools in improvement, which were targeted for monitoring under the statewide accountability system. Of these schools, 65 were in restructuring planning or implementation.
- Almost \$9.8 million in state funds was used by the GDOE to hire school improvement specialists and leadership facilitators to work directly with schools in at least year 3 of improvement; 76 of these schools were in restructuring planning or implementation.
- Some \$4 million in federal funds went to Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) as part of Georgia's statewide system for providing technical assistance to schools and districts identified for NCLB improvement. Nearly all of these schools were in year 1 to 3 of improvement.
- Just over \$1 million was used by GDOE for state administration specifically related to school improvement, and the rest of the set-aside was rolled over to 2008-09.

The 2007-08 budget for school improvement was very similar to the previous year's, although the 2006-07 budget had been spread among somewhat fewer schools: 308 schools in improvement, including 177 Title I schools under state monitoring. The federal allocation for school improvement was \$500,000 less in 2006-07, but state funding was higher by almost the same amount.

Both the 2006-07 and the 2007-08 budgets represented an increase in funding for school improvement over 2005-06, when Georgia spent \$26.6 million—\$11.6 million in state funds and \$15.1 million in federal funds—for a much larger number of schools: 354 in improvement, including 208 Title I schools targeted for monitoring.

OPTIONS CHOSEN BY RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

To help districts select from the federal restructuring options, the GDOE holds annual training sessions for district representatives. In 2007-08, that training followed a guide called *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind: What Works When?* (2006) that was developed by Learning Point Associates and commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education. The guide leads district leaders through a process that helps them decide whether widespread problems at a school justify major changes, such as a new staff or governance structure, or a more focused effort. It also helps them judge their district's capacity to support each potential choice.

Nearly all Georgia districts with restructuring schools, including the three in this study, have selected the fifth option, "undertaking any other major restructuring of the school's governance," as shown in **table 4**. In 2007-08, 43 of the 46 schools in restructuring implementation, or 93%, selected this option, similar to the 94% that chose this option in 2006-07. Schools that selected this option focused primarily on carrying out the statewide mandate to improve curriculum and instruction, said Wanda Creel, who was associate superintendent for school improvement services in the Georgia Department of Education at the time of this study. The state sees its own reform initiative as the main vehicle for improvement under No Child Left Behind. So many changes in curriculum and in instruction are taking place statewide, Creel explained, that if schools can learn the state-mandated approaches "they'll be doing what they need to do."

Other restructuring options are viewed as less feasible by GDOE officials. Creel's department does not encourage most districts to replace the school principal "unless the leader is really someone who does not have the capacity to learn," Creel said. A shortage of skilled principal candidates, especially ones with the experience to turn around a failing school, makes it preferable to focus on mentoring an ineffective leader, she

Table 4. Number of Georgia Schools Using Various Federal Restructuring Options in 2006-07 and 2007-08

Restructuring Option	2006-07	2007-08
All schools in restructuring implementation	49	46*
Undertaking any other major restructuring of the school's governance that produces fundamental reform	46	43
Replacing all or most of the staff who are relevant to the failure to make AYP	2	1
Entering into a contract to have an outside organization with a record of effectiveness operate the school	1	1
Reopening the school as a charter school	0	0
Turning operation of the school over to the state	0	0

Table reads: In Georgia, 49 schools implemented restructuring plans in 2006-07. Districts chose "undertaking any other major restructuring of the school's governance" as the official restructuring option for 46 of these schools.

*Georgia includes one closed school in its official count of schools implementing restructuring in 2007-08.

Source: Center on Education Policy analysis of unpublished data from the Georgia Department of Education.

explained. (The state provides principal mentoring as one of its supports for restructuring schools.)

Replacing all or most of the school staff is also considered untenable in locations with teacher shortages, according to Creel. Officials from Muscogee County and rural Stewart County cited the difficulty of attracting highly qualified teachers as one of their reasons for rejecting this restructuring option. Statewide, districts selected this option for two schools in 2006-07 and for one school in 2007-08.

The remaining restructuring options were barely used at all in 2006-07 and 2007-08. No restructuring school was reopened as a charter school during these years. The few that selected this option in previous years received support from the GDOE's charter school office. Obtaining state approval for a charter, however, is a somewhat cumbersome process that can take a full year, state officials observed. This option is not a particularly promising one, in Creel's view. "Not every one of our charter schools is successful after a couple of years, and so you don't necessarily want to encourage a school or a system to move toward a charter when you lose some control and it doesn't necessarily end up in a positive way," she said.

Entering into a contract to have an outside organization operate the school is another seldom-used option. It was selected for only one school in 2006-07, and for the same school again in 2007-08. Some school districts in Georgia have contracted with outside organizations in the past, but those efforts have not been successful, according to John Rhodes, who recently retired as the manager for quality assurance with GDOE's School Improvement Division and now serves as a consultant. However, the department does not actively discourage districts from selecting that option, he said.

State Assistance in Restructuring

The Georgia Department of Education takes a comprehensive approach to guiding districts and schools through the restructuring process. Specific procedures are set out for schools and districts to follow, and restructuring plans must address state goals and priorities. The longer a school remains in restructuring, the more intense the support and monitoring it receives from the state. But while Georgia's approach to restructuring is somewhat prescribed, it also endeavors to personalize the support schools receive. For instance, the state tries to match principals at restruc-

turing schools with mentors who best suit their personality and leadership style.

SUPPORT FOR PLANNING

Each fall, the Georgia Department of Education holds a one-day training session to help district leaders who oversee restructuring schools learn how to create a restructuring plan. The training relies heavily on the *School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind* guide (Learning Point Associates, 2006) and includes topics such as organizing a restructuring team and determining the district's capacity to support each of the potential restructuring options.

The GDOE also publishes a guide called the *School Improvement Fieldbook* that explains the requirements for all schools identified for improvement and the process for restructuring (Georgia Department of Education, 2007a). This guide includes a detailed template for restructuring plans and a checklist of requirements the state uses to approve them.

Each action listed in a restructuring plan must address one or more "School Keys," a set of research-based standards for Georgia schools aimed at improving student performance. The state issued a document describing the School Keys to every school in Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2007b). The Keys cover eight general areas: 1) curriculum; 2) assessment; 3) instruction; 4) planning and organization; 5) student, family, and community support; 6) professional learning; 7) leadership; and 8) school culture.

Restructuring plans are written collaboratively by a district representative and school staff, parents, and community members and are submitted to the GDOE for approval. Throughout the planning phase, schools and districts receive support and training in the restructuring process from a regional state administrator. Restructuring schools are required to form a leadership team to craft a restructuring plan and oversee implementation. The team must meet at least twice a month and include, at minimum, the school principal, a representative group of the school's teachers, a GDOE representative called the "leadership facilitator," and a district administrator.

Schools in the contract monitoring phase continue to participate in improvement planning but must also

follow additional state mandates, as explained above. Georgia schools have not yet reached year 9 or 10 of improvement. Those that do will enter yet another phase of restructuring called "contract management" and be managed jointly by the building principal and a state administrator who would remain in the school "every day all day long," said Creel. "This would be the closest we will have come to school takeover."

SUPPORT FOR RESTRUCTURING IMPLEMENTATION

Georgia's support for restructuring schools has expanded over the years after experience made it clear that schools needed more assistance and greater accountability. Following the enactment of NCLB, the GDOE created a new School Improvement Division in July 2003 to assist schools and districts identified for improvement. During the first year that Georgia schools underwent restructuring in 2004-05, the department did little to support them beyond sponsoring the training day for district leaders and reviewing each restructuring plan, recalled Kathy Carrollton and Kristy Kueber, both program managers with the School Improvement Division. "There wasn't a whole lot of guidance or support," said Kueber.

As a result, the process didn't make much of impact on schools, said Carrollton. "It's almost like they were just writing another plan instead of actually doing something that was really, really restructuring."

At the request of schools in restructuring, the department began to add supports the following year. These now include mentoring for principals, classroom coaching for teachers, and professional development both on and off the school site. It became clear, however, that in addition to the extra support, schools that had spent the longest time in restructuring also needed more oversight, Carrollton said. In 2007-08, the GDOE "added the monitoring arm so that we can make sure that there's an outside person holding them accountable for what is listed in the contract," she explained.

Much of the coaching and professional development that restructuring schools receive is aimed at supporting a statewide move toward standards-based instruction. This effort was spearheaded by State Superintendent Kathy Cox. After her appointment in 2002, she began to overhaul a state curriculum that an independent auditor had criticized as being too broad and lacking in rigor, said John Rhodes, a former state

program manager turned consultant. “For all the objectives to be taught [it] would take 23 years of schooling,” he recalled, citing the auditor’s critique.

The new standards-based curriculum—which mandates the teaching of fewer topics in greater depth—is being phased in gradually, with new subjects and grade levels added each year. State tests that count toward AYP have also been revised to match the new standards. To help schools teach the standards effectively, the state is promoting research-based strategies, such as using the results of student assessments to design instruction that meets students’ needs.

SUPPORT AND OVERSIGHT FOR RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS

State support and monitoring increases the longer schools remain in improvement. Each school that has been in improvement for three years or more is assigned a leadership facilitator who visits at least one day a week. Schools in contract monitoring are visited twice a week. The facilitator serves primarily as a coach for the principal and other instructional leaders at the school, Carrollton explained, “to teach them to monitor [classrooms], show them what to look for, and then [show them] how to provide the feedback and coaching that will improve the classroom instruction.”

If a school reaches year 6 of improvement, the state visits for a three-day, comprehensive review called the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS). State reviewers interview staff, review data and documents, and observe teaching in order to assess how well the school meets criteria in the eight areas described in the School Keys. For instance, one standard for instruction calls on teachers to engage students in “higher order thinking,” such as analysis rather than basic recall of facts. In each area, schools are rated according to a rubric in the School Keys. The GAPSS analysis then becomes the basis for further school improvement planning. (The process is repeated in schools that remain in restructuring for a fourth year.)

Schools in contract monitoring (years 7 and 8 of improvement) receive the most oversight and support. In its contract with the state, the district agrees to carry out certain responsibilities, such as assigning a system-level administrator to the school’s leadership team. The district also agrees to possible sanctions, such as the

removal of school or district personnel if the school fails again to make AYP. (The state has not taken this step, according to Creel.)

Under the guidance of the state and district, contract-monitored schools draw up 45- or 60-day action plans to improve areas identified as weak by the GAPSS analysis. A state contract monitor meets with school and district staff at the end of each plan cycle to monitor progress and determine next steps.

Contract-monitored schools receive the following additional supports:

- Two-day statewide training sessions several times a year on how to teach the new standards. Contract-monitored schools are required to send nine teachers from three departments—science, math, and English/language arts—to this training, as well as representatives from the special education department. (Staff in our case study schools regretted the loss of classroom time for teachers during the mandatory training but praised its quality.)
- An instructional coach in each subject for which it failed to make AYP, to be paid for with federal school improvement funds.
- A prescribed schedule for teaching state standards in core subjects. The GDOE provides the units and pre- and post-tests to monitor student progress.
- A math facilitator who visits twice a month to introduce the next set of standards that math teachers will be teaching. Math facilitators also observe lessons and provide feedback to both individual teachers and the school’s math instructional coach and leadership team. (The state realigned its resources this year to fund positions for 20 facilitators after noting that math is the weakest area for contract-monitored schools.)

NEW APPROACHES TO RESTRUCTURING

The GDOE further refined its approach to restructuring this year by insisting that districts take a more active role in the planning process. Schools had previously developed plans without system-level input, said Creel. Now, rather than simply approving a school’s restructuring plan, district representative must be actively involved with its creation. A representative from the

district must also participate in the leadership team meeting held every 45 to 60 days at each contract-monitored school to review the district's short-term action plan. District representatives must participate with the state in completing a GAPSS analysis of each school in years 6 and 8 of improvement.

The hands-on involvement is meant to help district leaders understand a school's specific challenges. It also helps central office personnel identify where their own practices and policies might need rethinking, Creel explained. For instance, some districts, including Muscogee County, realized that in order to help their restructuring middle schools make AYP, the district needed to improve special education in the feeder elementary schools.

Creel said the GDOE has also become increasingly aware of the importance of finding a good match between restructuring school leaders and the facilitators hired to mentor them. A trusting relationship is essential for mentoring to have an impact at the school, she explained, and personalities and personal backgrounds sometimes play a role in that relationship. Creel gave an example:

We have a strong African American female as a principal in a school [who is] very opinionated and feels that she has a great deal of knowledge and experience. We've had males, both white and African American, working with her, and they are extremely knowledgeable but could not make the inroads with her. But we put in another strong African American female that could talk her talk and yet allow her to express herself, and now they're just clicking. She thinks that our leadership facilitator can do no wrong.

In a similar vein, "a strong leader in a South Georgia town" did not feel that the facilitator assigned to her school "had any new ideas that could be offered, and [she] really didn't want to participate with our services," said Creel. "We found a strong person, a strong male, who had been a former superintendent, who she had a great deal of admiration and respect for, and they're a dynamic team and making tremendous gains."

Matching a leadership facilitator's professional background with the school has also become a higher priority, Creel added. Since the majority of schools in improvement are middle and high schools, the state hires facilitators with experience at these levels rather than those with elementary school backgrounds. "Not that

those people couldn't be valuable," said Creel, "but you've got to be able to walk in with the credibility [to] a middle school and high school and say, 'I've lived it, now let's work together to make it happen in your school.'"

Common Themes from Restructuring Districts and Schools

The three school districts and five schools that were the subject of our case studies have taken somewhat different approaches to restructuring. Atlanta is using federal restructuring to pursue a reform agenda it instituted prior to NCLB. Muscogee County and Stewart County are attempting to build on the success they experienced with America's Choice, a national school reform model that had been promoted by the Georgia Department of Education and implemented by many districts throughout the state. Still, some commonalities emerged when we analyzed case study interviews and school and school district data.

Although none of the five districts had selected "replacing all or most of the school staff" as its official restructuring option, four underwent a change in principal just before or during restructuring that in most cases significantly improved the functioning of the school. The same four schools also experienced substantial staff turnover as principals raised expectations. Some turnover was voluntary, and some followed dismissals or involuntary transfers. Despite the difficulty of finding qualified replacements, district and school staff agreed in all four cases that the turnover had benefited school climate and made it more possible to improve classroom instruction. At a fifth school, the district saw significant improvements in school climate and student learning after a principal changed her management style to offer teachers more input on decision making.

Leadership changes at case study schools set a new tone that helped reforms take root. In all but one case, the improvement was dramatic. Principals increased opportunities for faculty collaboration, raised expectations for students, and stepped up accountability for both students and teachers. Student discipline improved and teacher morale increased. In some instances, changing the atmosphere of the school also required leaders to change the physical appearance of the school to create a clean and welcoming environment.

Restructuring schools followed some common state priorities for school improvement. Analyzing student assessment data to make decisions about instruction was a common strategy, as was grouping students for instruction based on their weaknesses with specific skills. All case study schools provided extra help for struggling students through tutoring or after-school programs.

Four of the five schools studied were in their third or fourth year of implementing restructuring, so they were also in contract monitoring. These schools praised the extra services the state provided to contract-monitored schools, which included on-site professional development and leadership coaching and statewide workshops on teaching to standards.

Most of the case study schools were optimistic that the latest reforms under restructuring would allow them to make AYP. Staff in several schools, however, pointed to difficulty in finding and retaining qualified teachers as a potential obstacle. The superintendent at one school, a rural high school, worried that dwindling student enrollment would further erode available resources before the school could complete a successful turnaround.

Restructuring in Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta Public Schools is the sixth largest district in Georgia. The district has 58 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 20 high schools, 6 charter schools, and 4 alternative programs. Seven of its schools are in the implementation phase of restructuring, the most of any district in the state. The Atlanta school system is predominantly minority and low-income: 76% of its students are from low-income families, 84% are African American, 10% are white, and 5% are Latino.

DISTRICT RESTRUCTURING PRIORITIES

By the late 1990s, Atlanta's thriving economy was spurring population growth and political pressure for quality schools. In 1999, the district appointed a new superintendent, Beverly Hall, formerly the superintendent of Newark Public Schools in New Jersey, to reform the historically underperforming district. Her turnaround effort focused on improving student performance through better classroom instruction, professional development for teachers and principals, and tougher accountability.

Changes in state tests beginning in 2005-06 have affected the year-to-year comparability of test results in Georgia, making it inadvisable to draw conclusions about achievement trends based on data that are not comparable. Nevertheless, the percentages of students scoring at or above the proficient level in the Atlanta district—the data that matter for AYP purposes—have risen under Hall's tenure and have outpaced the state average gain in grades 3 to 8, as shown in **table 5**. Elementary schools, the target of Hall's earliest reforms, have progressed further than middle and high schools. Of the seven schools undergoing restructuring in 2007-08, two were high schools and five were middle schools.

Under the federal any-other option, restructuring in Atlanta is largely a continuation of district initiatives but with stepped-up monitoring and support, explained Kathy Augustine, the district's deputy superintendent for curriculum and instruction. "[Even] before No Child Left Behind, we were very focused on a standards-driven curriculum and teachers teaching to standards, using a variety of research-based practices," she said. The two restructuring high schools were reconfigured as part of the district's High School Redesign Initiative, a step that would have taken place with or without NCLB, according to Augustine. George Washington Carver High was phased out as a comprehensive high school and replaced with five small schools with career themes such as entrepreneurship and technology. Teachers and principals received professional development on using the smaller environment to increase academic rigor and student engagement. Another under-enrolled high school, Crim, was closed and reopened as a citywide alternative school serving mainly former dropouts and older students who needed to make up credits to graduate.

Middle schools in restructuring are continuing with reforms Hall launched to improve curriculum and instruction at that level. For instance, teachers had been trained on how to organize their curriculum around state standards rather than marching students through a textbook. School staff members were learning how to analyze student test results and tailor instruction to students' needs. Several middle schools had already adopted a comprehensive school reform model called Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) that incorporates research-based instructional programs such as Success for All reading and MOVE IT Math.

Table 5. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests in Atlanta Schools and Statewide

	Reading/Language Arts				Math			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
State AYP target, grades 3-8	60%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	50%	58.3%	58.3%	58.3%
State average, grades 3-8	84%	87%	85%	87%	79%	81%	82%	80%
Atlanta Public Schools' average, grades 3-8	73%	79%	77%	82%	65%	69%	72%	73%
Long Middle	66%	67%	75%	78%	49%	52%	50%	50%
Kennedy Middle	59%	65%	64%	69%	36%	43%	38%	30%

Table reads: In 2004, 66% of the students in Long Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is above the state target of 60% proficient needed to make AYP in reading in grades 3 through 8 but below the state average of 84% and the Atlanta district average of 73%.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, Adequate Yearly Progress Web page, www.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2008.aspx.

Atlanta provides extra supports for struggling schools, including those in restructuring. Math specialists and reading specialists called “model teacher leaders” spend one or more days a week in low-performing schools, providing staff with professional development, modeling lessons, and observing teachers in the classroom. The lowest-performing schools, including some in restructuring, receive these specialists’ services two days a week; however, the support is not tied directly to school improvement status.

Professional development for school leaders has also been a priority under Hall’s administration. The district also removes principals from schools that fail to progress. During Hall’s tenure, some 100 principals have been replaced as a result of retirements, removals, or resignations, according to Augustine. “Getting the right leader, a strong instructional leader is essential,” she said.

Principal removals are tied to schools’ status under the district’s own accountability system rather than their NCLB status, Augustine said. Atlanta’s school accountability system predates NCLB and is in some ways more demanding, she explained. For example, all Atlanta schools regardless of their achievement level must decrease the number of students in the bottom quartile of state tests and increase the number at the top. The advantage of NCLB, Augustine said, is that it

requires schools to focus on students who might otherwise be overlooked, such as those with learning disabilities or limited English proficiency. “It’s making sure that everybody really pays attention to all children.”

Restructuring brings increased monitoring and support to struggling schools, which Augustine said is a benefit. Although Atlanta does its own in-depth review of classroom instruction at each school, the state’s quality review for schools in years 6 and 8 of school improvement provides helpful reinforcement, in her view. Hearing similar feedback from a second source “takes away any doubt that teachers may have about what the strengths are and what the weaknesses are,” she said. “So I think that support is very good.” (The state GAPSS review also analyzes school leadership, organization, and other facets beyond the classroom.)

Coordinating the district’s school improvement efforts with state interventions for restructuring schools has sometimes proved a challenge, according to Augustine. “We just had to figure out how the tools they wanted us to work with fit with our tools, so that we would not confuse people,” she said. State and district leaders have been able to resolve most issues, she added.

The NCLB accountability system does have some serious disadvantages in Augustine’s view. Paperwork

required for schools that fail to make AYP has proved a burden that detracts from efforts to actually improve instruction, she asserted. “People spend more time developing a report than practicing what they’ve learned in professional development workshops,” she said. And like many other district and school administrators interviewed for this study, she finds the benchmarks set for students with disabilities and English language learners to be unrealistically high.

The district has also been frustrated by “one-size-fits-all” criteria for making AYP, Augustine said. For example, Crim High School must graduate a certain percentage of freshmen within four years in order to make AYP even though it is an alternative school.

Yet, on the whole, Atlanta district officials have found the GDOE responsive to their concerns. For one, the state agreed to ask the U.S. Department of Education for some adjustments to the criteria for alternative schools to make AYP. “I think this is an example of a state department of education that is rather progressive,” Augustine remarked. “My experience most of the time with state departments is that they make the rules without the customer in mind.”

USING DATA ANALYSIS AT LONG MIDDLE SCHOOL

Long Middle School, one of two Atlanta schools participating in our case studies, is in its fifth year of school improvement and its first year of restructuring. The school enrolls about 550 students in grades 6 to 8. Nearly 90% qualify for federal free or reduced-price lunch and 15% are students with disabilities. Almost all (96%) are African American. Many had lived in nearby public housing that was demolished earlier this year. Others live in single-family homes in the low-income, working-class neighborhood surrounding the school, six miles south of downtown.

Long has consistently made AYP in reading/language arts, and scores of proficient or above on the state test have risen steadily from 66% in 2004 to 78% in 2007 (see table 5 above). But during those same years, math scores stagnated at about 50% proficient, causing the school to repeatedly miss AYP in that subject.

Still, the school’s climate has undergone a dramatic improvement during those years, according to school and district staff. The changes came about largely under

the leadership of Principal Elizabeth Harris, who was appointed in 2005-06 after the district decided to replace the previous principal. Harris moved quickly to have the dirty school building cleaned and painted and to get student discipline under control.

Michael Pitts, a regional district administrator who oversees Long Middle, praises Harris’s efforts to transform school culture but believes that she undercut her effort to raise math achievement by trying to improve instruction in too many subject areas at once. For the restructuring plan, he advocated a tighter focus on math, and Harris said she agreed.

Restructuring itself was not the impetus for further reforms at Long, Harris explained. But the demands of restructuring did align neatly with priorities at the district and school level, she found. “Completing this restructuring plan was very easy,” she said. “[It] just allowed me to write down what we needed to do to improve the school.”

Staff also had input on the plan, which was drawn up in 2006-07 by a committee that included administrators, lead teachers, and a teacher representative from each grade level. The team first identified Long’s strengths and weaknesses based on a staff survey and review of student data.

Professional development and data analysis are two of the main restructuring strategies that Long is pursuing, Harris said. The school is continuing with the math and reading programs it started as one of Atlanta’s Project GRAD schools but is concentrating on improving the implementation. A state math facilitator provides professional development for the math department and more frequent classroom coaching for individual teachers. Each department also participates in a half-day training session every other month focused on its particular content area.

Analyzing student assessments to improve instruction, a strategy promoted by both the district and state, also became a focus at Long under restructuring. Students are tested monthly to measure their progress on state standards, and teachers know precisely where each child is falling short, explained 7th grade math teacher Gregory Leap. “I can now say that a student needs improvement in [standard] M7A1A, which is ‘translate verbal expressions to algebra.’ It’s that detailed now.”

Using the test results, teachers are learning to design instruction that meets a variety of needs in their classrooms. Students who fail to master a standard are retaught in a small group while others move on to new material. Those who land just above or below the proficient level are pulled out of class for an extra 50 minutes of small-group math instruction during the regular school day.

Long Middle's restructuring efforts include several strategies designed specifically to boost math achievement. The school's math facilitator runs workshops for parents to help them assist their children with math homework. Math classrooms were given priority for new technology, including individual remotes that allow students to respond to multiple-choice questions. Leap said the technology gives him instant feedback on whether each student understands the material, and it keeps students' attention. "All their little icons pop up [on a computer screen]. No one wants to be that one student that's not answering."

To reinforce basic math skills, the school added 30 minutes of math problem-solving to the school day for all students. A math coordinator plans the lessons, and every teacher participates. The idea is to free up time during regular math classes for students to concentrate on grade-level material. But the strategy is also aimed at building team spirit among the faculty, Harris explained. "So it's not where you're pointing fingers and saying, 'If the math teachers had done this then we'd make AYP,'" she said. "We see that everybody has got to support one another."

Replacing teachers was not formally part of Long's restructuring plan. After her first year, however, Harris said it was clear that a weak math department was largely responsible for the school's failure to make AYP in that subject. Within two years, she had replaced 9 of 10 math teachers. Those without tenure were not recommended for renewal, she said. She surmised that others retired or transferred to avoid the higher expectations. "Some people just said, 'This is too hard, too much work. I'm not going to do this.'"

State test scores in 2008 will determine whether the staff changes have made an impact on student achievement, said Pitts. He acknowledged that one of Harris's biggest challenges has been "trying to get that staff to believe that those kids can do high-level work."

Long Middle received increased support from the state during 2007-08. In addition to the math facilitator, a leadership facilitator spent two days a week observing classrooms and providing feedback. For example, Leap said the leadership facilitator advised him to be less "helpful" and give kids more time to struggle with questions and find solutions. Harris said she appreciated the facilitator as "someone to bounce ideas off of that can give me input on what they've seen in other schools." The facilitator even arranged for state personnel to conduct an unofficial review of Long's math department at Harris's request, she said.

Harris thinks Long is in a good position to finally meet its AYP goal in math. She cited three main reasons for her optimism: instruction more carefully targeted at student weaknesses, extra instruction for students near the proficiency cutoff, and a stronger faculty. "I've got now a group of math teachers that I feel very confident in," she said.

LEADERSHIP CHANGES AT KENNEDY MIDDLE

Kennedy Middle's restructuring plan made little impact on the school until the district appointed a skilled administrator to lead it, interviewees reported. The school serves about 450 students, many of whom reside in public housing in a neighborhood about a mile west of Atlanta's downtown. Nearly all students are low-income (95%) and African American (99%). The percentage with disabilities is 14%.

Kennedy launched its restructuring plan in 2004 after failing to make AYP in math. In 2005, the school again fell short of math and reading targets but made sufficient progress to earn AYP through the "safe harbor" or "confidence interval" provisions. Test scores slipped again in 2006, however, leaving Kennedy 20 percentage points below the AYP target in math. In 2007, math scores suffered yet another decline, and the school entered contract monitoring.

Poor leadership had been an issue at Kennedy for some years, according to school and district staff. In 2005, the district changed the school's principal, but the school's restructuring efforts continued to fall short. That school year, a restructuring plan was submitted with no input from teachers, said Millicent McCaskill, then a teacher leader and now the school's dean for math and science education. That action violated a state rule that school staff and parents have a voice in the plan.

The state spotted the violation while putting Kennedy through the GAPSS quality review required for all schools entering year 6 of school improvement. The review involved interviews with staff and an online teacher survey. It quickly became apparent that teachers had no knowledge of the restructuring plan, McCaskill recalled, and the state ordered a rewrite. McCaskill said she recruited a team of teachers to draft a plan over five or six Saturdays. The entire staff was invited to provide input on the completed draft.

The plan included professional development for teachers on how to tailor instruction to a variety of learning levels and other teaching methods recommended by the state. But a large number of teachers simply refused to attempt the new strategies, even with support, McCaskill said. The district had paid for two part-time model teacher leaders. Schools undergoing restructuring received help twice a week rather than once. McCaskill, who served as Kennedy's model teacher leader for math, said that teachers who rejected her help were not held accountable by the principal.

Replacing school staff was not the district's official restructuring choice for Kennedy. Instead the district chose the any-other restructuring option. However, replacing the principal and a large proportion of the faculty was a key to moving the school forward, according to Sharon Williams, executive director for School Reform Team 1, the regional district administrator who oversees Kennedy. In December 2006, Williams recommended that the principal be replaced. She said she would have taken this step even without restructuring, although the state sanction added urgency to the decision.

The district selected Kennedy's assistant principal, Lucious Brown, as the new principal. Following his appointment, Brown replaced most of his administrative team, whom he and Williams agreed were ineffective.

Under Brown's administration, improving discipline was the first order of business, Williams recalled. Class-skipping was rampant: kids were sneaking down the back stairwells and out the door. McCaskill remembered seeing food fights from her office and "people running after children trying to get them into class." Brown set up classroom procedures for curbing disruptions and a system for alerting the office immediately when students cut class. He also set up a committee to

agree on a discipline policy. With everyone working together, the school gradually became calm and orderly, said teacher Valerie Wilder.

Making the school a more inviting place was another priority. Grants paid for local art students to landscape the grounds and cover the bare walls with murals. School climate also improved as teachers were held to a higher standard, according to Williams and McCaskill. For example, teachers were no longer permitted to grade papers or take cell phone calls during staff meetings. Brown sat his faculty down to reestablish a vision and mission for the school "to elicit support and buy-in," said Williams. Teachers "really bought into it because they felt like they were being listened to," she explained.

Under Brown's leadership, Kennedy began to follow its restructuring plan, district staff explained. Like Long Middle, Kennedy retained the reading and math programs it had adopted as a Project GRAD school but worked on improving the implementation. Teachers got more professional development on strategies recommended by the state and common planning time to design lessons. Administrators began to monitor instruction more closely to improve compliance. For students who needed additional help, the school recruited tutors from universities and government agencies.

Analyzing data was another important strategy for school improvement. Weekly assessments tied to state standards allowed teachers to identify material that needed to be retaught. The principal tracked test results throughout the school to see where teachers needed more support. Students also learned to set goals and monitor their progress. Counselors and teachers began to sit down with each student individually to confer about their grades and standardized test scores and set goals for the year, McCaskill said. "We asked them, 'What are things that you need to do? What do you want us to do to help you succeed?'"

In 2007, Kennedy posted a five-point increase over the previous year in the percentage of students scoring proficient in reading/language arts. But math scores tumbled by eight points. A substantial number of teachers were still refusing to meet expectations, according to Brown and Williams. At the end of the school year, Brown said he transferred 16 teachers, out of a teaching staff of 62. Another five resigned to avoid the increased workload, said Williams.

Finding highly qualified replacements for those teachers, especially in a shortage area like mathematics, has not been easy, however, Williams explained. Some teachers are simply inexperienced and may ultimately benefit from the intensive professional development now underway at the school. But several in the department are “really poor” and a drag on achievement, she said. “And you can put in all the structures in the world in terms of organization, but if you have teachers that really don’t have the content, you can’t get it done.” She said she encouraged Brown and the math facilitator to work intensively with the lowest-performing teachers while keeping documentation for possible dismissal.

In 2007-08, Kennedy reached year 7 of improvement and entered contract monitoring. School staff interviewed by CEP unanimously praised the extra services. “It’s a good/bad thing,” said Brown “It’s a bad thing to be on the list, but it’s a good thing to receive all the support.”

The increased support from the state has already made a difference in classroom instruction, said math teacher Corey Alexander. As a third-year teacher, Alexander said he appreciates the guidance on teaching standards that the state provides to contract-monitored schools. He also likes the convenience of being able to download high-interest activities tied to each standard to supplement the regular math program, a service also provided by the state.

Every week or two, a state math facilitator drops by to introduce teachers to math standards in upcoming lessons and to observe lessons and provide quick feedback “as to what you’re doing well and what needs to be done,” Alexander said. The facilitator’s comments reinforce the more regular feedback Alexander gets from the district’s model teacher leader and the school’s math and science dean, with whom the facilitator works closely on plans for improvement.

Kennedy’s leadership facilitator, who serves as a principal mentor, spent one day a week in the school while the school was implementing restructuring and is now on hand for two days a week since the school landed in contract monitoring. Brown explained the facilitator’s role in this way:

She provides professional development. She assists with the walk-throughs. She provides observations for teachers. She co-teaches. She comes up with

interventions and strategies along with us. She’s an integral piece with the design [school improvement] team. And she lets me know if I need to do something. It’s almost like an extra hand.

As at other contract-monitored schools, teachers and administrators must attend overnight conferences several times a year on teaching to state standards. Kennedy staff attended the school’s first such conference earlier this year, where they learned, among other things, how to explain the state standards to kids. “It’s always important for kids to know what they’re learning and why they’re learning it,” said 8th-grade English teacher Valerie Wilder, “because otherwise they don’t take it seriously.”

To keep on pace with improvements, contract-monitored schools are required to draw up short-term action plans that assign tasks to specific individuals. These plans are created under the guidance of a district representative—Williams, in Kennedy’s case—and a contract monitor assigned by the state. The monitor visits Kennedy every 45 days to verify progress and help craft the next plan. But his spontaneous visits also keep the school on its toes, Brown reported. “He’ll just call you and say, ‘Oh, I’m in the area,’ and he’ll just pop in. So we don’t get prepared [for the visits]; we stay prepared.”

Restructuring in Muscogee County School District

Muscogee County School District serves the city of Columbus and three small communities (Midland, Upatoi, and Bibb City) in west central Georgia. About 61% of the district’s 33,000 students are from low-income families. About 59% are African American, 30% white, 5% multiracial, 4% Latino, and 2% Asian. In grades that count toward AYP, about 14% of the students have disabilities, and 2% are English language learners. The district has 64 schools, including 35 elementary, 12 middle, 8 high schools, and 9 program centers that include alternative schools. The three middle schools currently implementing restructuring are located in Columbus, a midsize city 100 miles southwest of Atlanta on the Chattahoochee River, adjacent to the Alabama border.

DISTRICT APPROACH TO RESTRUCTURING

Muscogee County has seen modest population growth in the past decade. Its largest employers include the school district, an insurance company, and Fort Benning Military Reservation. Per capita income was in the top 25% of Georgia counties in the 2000 census. The three restructuring schools, however, are located in a low-income section at the south end of Columbus.

Over the past four years, the school district has hovered just below the state average in reading and mathematics on state tests for grades 3 to 8. In 2007, 86% of Muscogee students in these grades scored proficient in reading and 75% did so in math, as shown in **table 6**. In these grades, the only subgroups that failed to make AYP in 2007 were students with disabilities and English language learners. The English language learner subgroup missed AYP by just 0.3 percentage point in reading. But the percentage proficient for students with disabilities in elementary and middle school grades fell 7 points below the AYP target in reading/language arts and 13 points below in math.

In 2003-04, eight Muscogee schools reached year 4 of improvement and planned for restructuring. Four subsequently made AYP, and the other four entered restructuring the following year. Three of these schools remained in restructuring in 2007-08: Baker Middle and Eddy

Middle were in year 8 of improvement, and Marshall Middle remained in year 7 after making AYP in 2007.

District officials chose the any-other restructuring option for these three schools. One of the governance reforms suggested by the state appealed to Muscogee district officials, said Harriet Steed, the district's Title I director. The approach was to hire one or two school improvement specialists at each restructuring school to lead reforms in math, language arts, or both subjects depending on the school's need. A similar strategy had been successfully employed in the late 1990s when the district adopted the America's Choice reform model for some of its low-performing schools.

The state GAPSS analysis helped the district further focus its improvement planning, said Peggy Connell, Muscogee's chief academic officer. After the GAPSS pointed to leadership as a weakness at both Baker and Marshall, the district replaced leadership teams at those two schools. At Marshall, the long-time principal retired, and leadership changes were easily accepted. At Baker Middle, an ineffective principal was replaced mid-year, and teachers turned out in force at school board meetings to oppose it.

Special education was a weak area for all three restructuring schools as well as for other schools in the county

Table 6. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests in Muscogee County Schools and Statewide

	Reading/Language Arts				Math			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
State AYP target, grades 3-8	60%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	50%	58.3%	58.3%	58.3%
State average, grades 3-8	84%	87%	85%	87%	79%	81%	82%	80%
Muscogee Co. district average, grades 3-8	82%	87%	83%	86%	75%	77%	77%	75%
Eddy Middle	68%	74%	73%	80%	50%	52%	53%	59%
Baker Middle	68%	69%	71%	74%	57%	54%	50%	46%

Table reads: In 2004, 68% of the students in Eddy Middle School scored at or above the proficient level in reading/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is above the state target of 60% proficient needed to make AYP in reading in grades 3 through 8 but below the state average of 84% and the Muscogee County district average of 82%.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, Adequate Yearly Progress Web page, www.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2008.aspx.

failing to make AYP, Connell said. “Like most systems in Georgia, [we] had not been doing any inclusion at all, and so we’re playing catch-up,” she explained. “Some of those students with disabilities had been in self-contained classrooms all of their elementary careers and not taught the curriculum that regular students were taught, so they really are far behind.”

The district provided restructuring schools with intensive training on how to work with students with disabilities in the regular classroom. The district also used Title I funds to pay a mentor to coach special education teachers at the three restructuring schools. Steed had the mentor write a detailed plan for improving special education at Baker, which has the largest number of students with disabilities.

Districts with schools in contract monitoring must undergo a performance review from the state. Following Muscogee’s review, the state recommended that the district work more closely with elementary schools on strengthening the special education program. Although elementary schools were making AYP, many had too few students with disabilities to count as a subgroup. Middle schools, which enrolled these schools in larger numbers, were suddenly expected to close sizable learning gaps in order to make AYP. Now the district is providing those elementary schools with training on inclusion similar to what it provided the restructuring schools, according to Steed.

In 2006, the three restructuring schools reached year 7 of improvement and entered contract monitoring. Connell, Steed, and a third district administrator each assumed oversight of one restructuring school. During the school year, they attend weekly leadership meetings to monitor progress, participate in teacher selection, and act as expeditors, said Steed, who monitors Eddy. “If there’s something that might be a barrier to them, I’m their advocate for making sure that we remove the barriers that might be preventing them from moving forward.” For example, restructuring schools are given priority for central office services, such as placing purchase orders.

To stem teacher turnover, the district superintendent barred teachers at contract-monitored schools from transferring. At the same time, the district’s central office began an aggressive recruiting effort for restructuring schools and gave them top priority for new hires, Connell said. The staff stabilized at Marshall and Eddy,

but Baker, the most troubled of the three schools, continues to lose teachers due to resignations, retirements, and dismissals, Connell reported.

The difficulty in attracting highly qualified teachers, special education teachers in particular, is one of the biggest obstacles to improving student achievement in Muscogee’s restructuring schools, Connell has found. “Trying to find good teachers who want to be at schools that are challenging is an issue.”

Since the three restructuring schools faced similar challenges, district administrators decided it made sense to bring them together to discuss common problems and share solutions. In 2006-07, school instructional leaders began to meet monthly. One common concern that arose was the lack of communication with alternative schools, to which students with serious discipline infractions could be referred for all or part of a year. Home schools were still held accountable for these students’ progress, and most were progressing poorly. The district agreed to pay to send staff from alternative schools to the same statewide training sessions that contract-monitored schools attend.

The state requires contract-monitored schools to follow a set schedule for teaching state standards in each subject. This requirement proved an advantage in Muscogee because students from highly mobile families living in public housing tended to circulate among the three contract-monitored schools. Covering the same material at the same time made for a smoother transition as students entered a new school, according to some of our teacher interviewees.

Of the three schools, Baker is proving the toughest to turn around, Connell said, but the extra help from the state makes a difference. The state leadership facilitator, who is in Baker and Eddy every day, has been especially helpful, Connell said:

[The leadership facilitator] e-mails me with her daily report for the schools ... I can jump on anything that I know I need to take care of ... I don't have one person able to do all of that, and so that is a great help. [Leadership facilitators] observe all day long [and] go to the leadership team meetings. They're there for faculty meetings, and they have a good read on how the faculty and the students are doing, and they give that back to us.

To give Baker further support, Connell asked district representatives from special education and human resources to attend the school's weekly meeting to provide guidance with inclusion issues and teacher recruitment. Connell or another district administrator spends an hour each week observing classrooms and presents feedback to the principal. The principal then shares that information with the school's two improvement specialists, one for math and one for reading, who work with teachers.

State officials have been open to input on what further supports are needed at restructuring schools, Connell said. When Muscogee district officials said they needed a way to give schools more immediate feedback on the results of practice tests, the state put together an online testing system. Students at the three restructuring schools take computerized practice exams every nine weeks, and school and central office staff get instant feedback on their progress. The tool proved so useful that Muscogee recommended it to all of its schools.

The constant scrutiny that contract monitoring has brought to the three schools is forcing them to focus on improvements in a way they had not done previously, said Steed. "There's no choice now," she observed. "I am very sorry that we had to get to this point, but that contract has made a difference in those three schools."

ENCOURAGING TEACHER TEAMWORK AT EDDY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Eddy Middle School has made significant test score gains since it first implemented restructuring in 2004, although several subgroups still missed AYP targets in 2007. The school serves some 600 students; 90% are low-income, and 90% are African American. The percentages of African American students and low-income students scoring at or above proficient in math fell short of AYP by less than two percentage points in 2007. The subgroup of students with disabilities, who make up 18% of Eddy's enrollment, missed by a wider margin, falling short by more than 20 percentage points in reading/language arts and more than 30 points in math.

Still, Eddy has shown improvement. The percentage proficient rose by 12 points in reading/language arts and 9 points in math between 2004 and 2007. Students with disabilities made similar gains in math and gained 20 percentage points in reading.

Peggy Connell said that Eddy's teachers felt resentful about the restructuring process at first. But their attitude changed dramatically over the last two years, she observed, as achievement in the school rose and teachers gained more input into important decisions about school programs. "The atmosphere there is easier, is much more open, and they discuss things, I think honestly, with each other and are able to admit their weaknesses and also celebrate their strengths."

Teacher Debra Terrell-Porch said the school always had a cooperative spirit, but the collaboration required during restructuring, especially under contract monitoring, helped the faculty function more effectively as a team. "We meet as a grade level. We meet as a department level. We meet as a department by grade. We're all on the same plane."

The state's curriculum maps for teaching the same standards at the same time in contract-monitored schools also facilitated collaboration, she said. She and the other 7th-grade language arts teacher find they can better support each other when they plan lessons jointly. "I may be stronger on one point, [while another teacher] may be stronger on another point," she explained.

Principal Cleo Griswold said restructuring changed her own approach to leadership. Eddy's GAPSS analysis recommended that she delegate more authority and responsibility to teachers. "I was the type of leader that wanted to do everything [myself]," she said. "Now, I have teacher leaders. I try not to micromanage." Giving her faculty more authority over the instructional program made them more willing to come to her with innovative ideas that they wanted to pursue, she said. "Before, maybe three years ago, they might not have done that."

Following state guidance, Eddy focused its efforts on helping teachers teach to standards, analyzing student data, and using the data to target student needs. The school improvement specialists Eddy was required to hire—one for math and one for reading/language arts—were a crucial part of that effort, Griswold said. The specialists lead workshops to introduce new teaching strategies, lead discussions with groups of teachers on analyzing assessment data, and help them design lessons based on that data. The specialists also model lessons in the classroom and coach teachers as they tried out new techniques. "To have these two people, who truly understand [English/language arts] and truly, truly understand math makes a world of difference," said Griswold.

State online assessments also help teachers to track student performance on standards at intervals throughout the school year. Teachers use the results to design small-group instruction. “[Students] can move in and out of the groups, depending on when they master the standard,” Terrell-Porch explained. “So, it’s more individualized instead of just giving out a lot of whole-group instruction.” Students also get individualized help through computer skill-building programs that address their weak areas.

Following a strategy Griswold says was recommended by the state, teachers were asked to keep data books on students, particularly “targeted” students who scored just above or below the cut score for proficient performance. The data books track students’ progress on state standards, daily attendance, participation in tutoring programs, and the teacher’s contact with parents. Terrell-Porch said the books help her ensure that she’s “gone above and beyond for the targeted student” and “that each standard has been taken care of.” Data is submitted every two weeks to the principal, who also keeps tabs on both targeted students and those with disabilities.

Targeted students attend an after-school program twice a week with 50 minutes each of math and language arts. (Other students enroll at their parents’ request.) In addition, Griswold said she plans to assign small groups of targeted students for mentoring from her auxiliary staff, such as the art and music teacher.

An evening school from 4 to 8 p.m. for students who are suspended, disruptive, or frequently tardy or who simply perform better in a smaller setting is another restructuring strategy that Eddy Middle has adopted to provide more individualized support to students. Pairs of teachers take turns staffing the school, which serves up to 10 students at a time.

The pressure of contract monitoring focused everyone’s attention on the reforms needed to make AYP, Griswold acknowledged:

When you’re under contract, it’s like you’re under a microscope. Whatever we do here, everybody sees it. We have a contract monitor, who comes to work with us. We have a leadership facilitator, who’s here twice a week. We have a math facilitator, who’s here seven times a month. I think we all understand this is serious. It’s very, very serious what we have to do.

STRUGGLING WITH TEACHER TURNOVER AT BAKER MIDDLE

Baker Middle made some progress under restructuring but in the past two years slid back on some state test results. Baker serves some 450 students, of whom 96% are low-income, 85% African American, 9% Latino, and 3% white. About 6% are English language learners, and 20% are students with disabilities.

A staff of relatively young, inexperienced teachers, provisionally certified staff, and long-term substitutes has put a damper on the school’s progress, said Peggy Connell. Teacher turnover is high. Despite the district’s policy that prevents teachers from transferring out of contract-monitored schools, teachers continue to resign from Baker. Teacher Clinton Grandy estimates that two-thirds of the colleagues who taught at the school the year it planned for restructuring have since moved on.

About 100 students from Baker’s attendance area have opted to attend other schools under NCLB’s public school choice provisions. Student enrollment has also dwindled as families have moved out of Baker Village, a low-income housing development nearby that is undergoing remodeling. Baker’s enrollment has declined by more than 200 since 2002 when the school enrolled 650 students.

In 2007, Baker made AYP in reading/language arts but not in math. Schoolwide math scores actually declined between 2005 and 2007, as did test scores for students with disabilities, a subgroup that did not make AYP in either subject in 2007.

After a state review pointed to leadership as one of the school’s weak areas, the district replaced Baker’s principal in the middle of 2006-07 and installed an interim principal. Teachers had strong feelings about the principal’s leaving, said Connell. “They either loved her or they didn’t like her at all; there was nothing in between. So we had a group that would come to the board meetings and protest her move.” A former assistant principal from another school, Mary Avery, was appointed as Baker’s new principal in May 2007. The assistant principal was also replaced the following summer.

Connell hopes the school will move forward more quickly under new leadership. So far, teachers’ responses to restructuring and contract monitoring have been mixed, she said. “You have some teachers

that won't do anything. I think their expectations—I'm speaking generally, obviously everyone is not like this—but they don't have [as] high expectations for the students as we want them to have."

As a step toward hiring teachers better suited for the challenge, central office directed its restructuring schools to adopt a new hiring tool, which assesses candidates on "intangible qualities," such as their interpersonal skills and expectations for student performance, Connell said. The district has considered offering incentive pay for teachers at restructuring schools to spur recruitment, she added, "but we don't know if that's the answer either."

The school is trying various strategies to make AYP. Avery pointed to several she sees as particularly promising. Baker has adopted double periods for math—one regular class and a second skill-building class. Auxiliary teachers, such as the art, music, and physical education teachers, each spend one period a day assisting in a math class. Math and reading skills are also reinforced in an after-school program, a Saturday tutoring program, and after-school detention, which doubles as a tutoring period for students with missing homework or failing grades.

In addition, students receive two to three 30-minute sessions each week with a computer skill-building program designed to teach Georgia's math and reading standards. The program tests students and assigns practice questions tailored to their individual level. The school is also continuing with the America's Choice reform model and a district program that helps teachers learn to teach reading skills in every content area.

As at Eddy, students just above or below the proficient mark on state tests get special attention. "We identify their weakness," said 6th grade teacher Phyllis Brown. "When it comes to after-school tutoring, they get priority. We make sure we conference with them more."

Brown said that restructuring has changed her own teaching practice. Whereas before she relied on whole-group instruction, she now works more frequently with small groups of students or individual students according to their needs. She credits coaching from the school improvement specialists, professional development at the school, and the statewide training required for contract-monitored schools for changing her teaching "tremendously."

Avery said she has seen growth in her faculty as a whole during the past year. Teachers who used to keep to themselves have become more comfortable sharing ideas and supporting each other to improve instruction. "They are beginning to open up and to have dialogues," she said. "As a teacher, you have to be a problem-solver, and I think they are just becoming that."

Restructuring in Stewart County Public Schools

The Stewart County Public Schools district serves 650 students from two rural counties in southwest Georgia that together cover more than 600 square miles. Its three schools—elementary school, middle school, and high school—are located in Lumpkin, the Stewart County seat, 140 miles southwest of Atlanta. Low-income students make up 88% of the population; 96% of the school's students are African American, and 3% are white.

Stewart County has suffered a steep population decline in recent decades, aggravated by the loss of a mobile home manufacturing plant that was once a major employer. "Many of the people that do work earn minimum wage; they basically live in poverty even though they're working," said Superintendent Floyd Fort. "They might work at the chicken processing plant. They might work at the sawmill. There's a lot of welfare."

Stewart County's elementary school and middle school have fared better in state testing than its high school, which it shares with neighboring Quitman County. As of 2007, Stewart County Elementary had made AYP for four consecutive years, earning it status as a "distinguished" school under the state accountability system. Stewart County Middle has missed AYP targets just once since NCLB went into effect. Quitman County Elementary/Middle was also in the distinguished category in 2007. In 2007, Stewart-Quitman High, which had yet to make AYP, missed AYP targets by more than 11 percentage points in English/language arts and 24 points in mathematics. (See **table 7**.) The school also fell 22 points short of the 65% graduation rate required for AYP. In 2007, Stewart-Quitman High entered its second year of contract monitoring.

Table 7. Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above the Proficient Level on the Georgia State Tests for Stewart-Quitman High School and Statewide

	Reading/Language Arts				Math			
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2004	2005	2006	2007
State AYP target, grade 11	81.6%	81.6%	84.7%	84.7%	62.3%	62.3%	68.6%	68.6%
State average, grade 11	88%	90%	91%	92%	74%	74%	75%	76%
Stewart-Quitman High School	56%	74%	72%	73%	50%	37%	47%	44%

Table reads: In 2004, 56% of the students in Stewart-Quitman High School scored at or above the proficient level in English/language arts on the Georgia state test. This is below the state target of 81.6% proficient needed to make AYP in English/language arts in grade 11 and below the state average of 88%.

Source: Georgia Department of Education, Adequate Yearly Progress Web page, www.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2008.aspx.

The district put together its first high school restructuring plan in 2003-04. When selecting a restructuring option, replacing the staff didn't seem to be a viable one, Fort said. "Being a small rural community, there's not a line of teachers sitting out there waiting to come in here." The district considered converting its high school to a charter school and even went so far as to fill out a charter application.

In the end, the district settled on the any-other option. The middle school had shown progress on state tests after adopting the America's Choice school reform model, Fort explained. Among other reforms, the model taught teachers how to organize instruction to teach state standards rather than follow a textbook series that didn't necessarily align with state assessments. The district thought that a similar effort at the high school would produce good results, Fort said.

School leadership proved a roadblock, however, according to Fort. A new principal at the high school was unable to provide the guidance necessary to transform teaching. The middle school had also stagnated following the retirement of a successful principal. A state GAPSS analysis of the high school during 2005-06, its sixth year of improvement, pointed to the need for stronger instructional leadership.

Fort recalled the words of a graduate school professor: "You can have a good school [with] a sorry superintendent. But you can't have a good school without a great principal." Ford added that during his 20 years of

experience, "I found that out to be true to a T. The schools that we have that are successful have good instructional leaders."

In 2006, the district created a new organization for both schools. The middle school administrator was replaced with an experienced principal from out of state. The new principal also became the curriculum director for both schools. "Getting an instructional principal in a building, that was the first move that started to pay dividends in turning the school around," said Fort.

In 2007, the high school principal was replaced with a veteran social studies teacher from the school. Known as a strict disciplinarian, he took responsibility for order and building management. "He's done a good job of getting control of the school where the adults in charge are not the students," Fort noted.

Support from the Georgia Department of Education has also been instrumental in moving the school forward, said Fort. The tiny school—with just over 200 students—could not possibly have afforded the level of support it received, he explained. Fort cited six individuals from the Georgia Department of Education who are in regular contact with the school to monitor its progress and provide support services. He recently requested more help with professional development in science and was told that the specialist who visited monthly will now visit weekly. "Short of coming down here and teaching students, I think right now they're providing all the guidance that we have time to undertake," said Fort.

In addition to the state support, an instructional specialist from a Regional Educational Services Agency, which typically works with schools in years 1 through 3 of improvement, works on-site at Stewart-Quitman once or twice a week to provide professional development, coach teachers in the classroom, and assist with analyzing the results of student assessments. “Our teachers are inundated with professional learning,” Fort remarked.

Professional development for teachers has been a top priority under restructuring. Teachers are learning how to teach to state standards and how to analyze student test data to ensure that those standards have been met. (The district uses the state’s online assessment system to track student progress throughout the school year.)

English teacher Joan Jones said that the professional development under restructuring has moved the faculty away from a traditional teaching style where “kids sat in a straight line.” Now their repertoire of teaching strategies includes having students work on activities in pairs or small groups on standards they have not yet met. The RESA specialist has also modeled new methods for teaching reading comprehension, such as modeling for students how good readers pause to question or summarize their reading.

Under restructuring, teachers are collaborating regularly on lessons and curriculum, Jones added. The faculty in each department from grades 6 through 12 now meets once a week; before, high school teachers might have met once a month, and “sometimes it happened, sometimes it didn’t,” she said.

Extra supports for students are also part of the restructuring effort. The school provides morning and after-school tutoring for students to help them pass the state graduation test, part of which counts toward AYP. Students who need to make up credits can log onto the computer for a virtual high school course. And the school has made a big push to improve student attendance with incentives for good attendance and extra attention for those frequently absent. “We had individual teachers target one or two students in their homeroom and establish a little bit more [of a] relationship,” said math teacher Shirley Perrymond. Teachers would say, “‘I want to see you tomorrow.’ If they were out, ‘We missed you yesterday. What happened?’”

Overall, restructuring has proved a mixed blessing, Perrymond said. “The State of Georgia [sent] a lot of support people, and that can be a positive,” she said, but added that teachers can feel overwhelmed by the extra pressure and paperwork. She also said that she wished the money spent on state support staff could be used instead on additional teachers. “In schools like ours, what we actually need is more people who are going to [work with] students in those classrooms.”

Recruiting skilled teachers to Stewart-Quitman High remains a challenge. Teacher shortages are especially acute in math, special education, and science, according to Fort. He attributes the low pass rate on the science graduation test to the difficulty of finding highly qualified science teachers. Under restructuring, the district has stepped up recruiting efforts and has used some of its federal funds to pay for signing bonuses or even for immigration fees. “My entire science department was recruited from the other side of the world,” said Fort, “My foreign language teacher is from another country, and half of my math department is from another country.”

Higher accountability under restructuring has exacerbated the school’s already high teacher turnover rate, Fort said. “We don’t have but just two or three teachers here now who were here five years ago,” he said. But overall, that has helped rather than hurt the school, he explained. “A lot of the teachers just weren’t getting the job done. As my former superintendent, who’s down from near Okefenokee Swamp, said, ‘We had to drain the swamp.’”

Now the school’s “biggest and probably by far the most daunting challenge” is preserving student enrollment, Fort explained. The tiny school may shrink further when Quitman County opens its own high school in 2009, unless the employees of a recently opened prison can be convinced to buy homes in Stewart County and enroll their children in the district. First, the school needs to work its way off restructuring, Fort noted. “We are working very, very hard to change our image.”

Conclusion

Restructuring has the potential to transform chronically failing schools in Georgia. But without skilled leadership at the school level and adequate outside support and monitoring, the process can easily become a compliance exercise that produces paperwork and little else. The Georgia Department of Education discovered in its first year of implementing restructuring that bureaucratic demands without intensive support failed to inspire much fundamental reform at the school level. Support without monitoring, especially for schools in chronic trouble, did not always bring about the intense focus required to reform teaching or accelerate student achievement. Georgia's stepped-up efforts to monitor and support schools in restructuring appear to have contributed to substantial reforms at some case study schools.

It remains unclear whether the relatively small number of Georgia schools in restructuring is due to the success of state interventions and reforms or simply the result of a low bar for proficiency on state tests. Nevertheless, the small number, as well as the state's willingness to invest additional dollars in supports for schools in improvement, has allowed Georgia to provide a degree of support and monitoring not found in many other states whose restructuring efforts CEP has studied.

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced a pilot that would allow 10 states to impose different consequences on schools depending on the number of AYP targets they missed. Georgia is one of the states selected to participate in this pilot. Such a change could allow states to better focus their resources. Still, under current federal law, all schools are held accountable for reaching the goal of having 100% of students, including English language learners and students with disabilities, reach proficiency on state tests by 2014. That mandate may force states to either lower the proficiency bar or face an unmanageable number of schools requiring intervention.

Some schools, especially those serving a large number of low-performing or low-income students, are at a severe disadvantage in meeting the rising bar for AYP. These schools often face difficulty in attracting skilled leadership and highly qualified teachers. Professional development for principals and teachers was a large part of the solution to reforming schools that participated in our case studies. However, district officials

found that no amount of training and mentoring could succeed with individuals who did not wish to improve their professional practice. Despite shortages of qualified teachers in some locations, staff changes were often unavoidable, although not always successful. Increasing the pool of talented applicants to high-need schools is essential if all schools are truly to approach the ambitious goals in the federal law.

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