



Lessons from the Classroom Level: Federal and State Accountability in Illinois

**Center on Education Policy
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Key Findings

In the spring of 2008, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) continued its ongoing research on the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) by conducting case studies of six schools in Illinois. Our purpose was to learn more about the effects of NCLB and related state accountability policies on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement. The schools studied used a variety of instructional practices and included a mix of urban, suburban, and rural schools, as well as elementary and high schools.¹

This study takes a more in-depth look at classroom practices than most other studies of NCLB, including CEP's previous survey- and interview-based research. To collect data for this study of Illinois schools, we not only interviewed school administrators, teachers, students, and parents, but we also conducted formal classroom observations that documented the time spent on various types of instructional practices and teacher-student interactions in the six schools. These case studies show how administrators and teachers in different schools have responded to federal and state accountability policies designed to raise student achievement.

Key findings from the six case study schools include the following:

- ***Lack of alignment between the high school exam and state standards.*** Many study participants commented that there was a lack of alignment between the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), which is used for high school accountability in

¹ Illinois, a midwestern state, is one of three states in our larger study of federal and state accountability policies. The other states include Rhode Island, a northeastern state, and Washington State, a western state.

Illinois, and the state's high school academic standards because a major portion of the PSAE is drawn from the ACT, a national college entrance exam. Study participants noted that this aspect of the PSAE was particularly troublesome for the many high school students who do not plan to go to college and who therefore may not be motivated to perform well on the test.

- ***Test preparation.*** The administrators and teachers we interviewed reported using various forms of test preparation to familiarize students with the types of questions asked on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). Examples included requiring students to write essays in a format similar to the writing prompts on the test, giving students practice with answering “extended-response” questions, and directly teaching a few hundred vocabulary words that students may need to know to pass the test. Many study participants said they integrated test preparation into their instruction throughout the school year. Some teachers noted that they could only teach more creative, broader-themed, or project-oriented lessons after the state test was given.
- ***Use of instructional time in elementary classes by subject.*** In the four elementary schools in which we conducted 30-60 minute observations of 33 classrooms, both English and math teachers spent a large portion of time asking closed questions—those with just one or a few correct answers. Math teachers also spent a substantial portion of class time facilitating hands-on activities and overseeing students' seat work, while ELA teachers divided time more evenly among facilitating students' silent reading and reading aloud, leading small group instruction, overseeing students' seat work, and other types of instruction.
- ***Use of classroom time in higher- and lower-achieving schools.*** In both schools that had been identified for improvement under NCLB and those that had not, teachers spent a substantial portion of class time asking closed questions and facilitating seat work. But teachers in the higher-achieving schools (those not identified for improvement) used a wider range of instructional practices, such as hands-on activities, students' seat work,

students' reading aloud, and learning centers, than teachers in the identified schools. Teachers in the identified schools spent more time than those in higher-achieving schools teaching with overhead technology, leading small group instruction, and modeling problems.

- ***Use of data.*** Interviewees in all case study schools used data from state tests and other diagnostic tests to inform their instruction, and many said that their decisions about curriculum and instruction were driven by these data.
- ***Parental involvement.*** Study participants in several case study schools noted that strong parental involvement was an important, positive influence on student achievement, and several schools had taken steps to help engage parents in their children's academic progress.
- ***Elimination of the alternative test for English language learners (ELLs).*** Several study participants expressed concern about what they viewed as a last-minute decision by Illinois state officials to discontinue use of the IMAGE, an alternative test for English language learners that used simplified English. According to interviewees, the test was eliminated after the U.S. Department of Education had ruled that it did not meet NCLB assessment criteria because it was not aligned with state standards and was not comparable to the ISAT. Instead, ELLs were required to take the regular ISAT or PSAE tests with accommodations in 2008. Some study participants expressed concern that the regular tests were not an appropriate or accurate measure of these students' learning.

Background and Study Methods

The No Child Left Behind Act, like many state-initiated versions of standards-based reform, aims to raise student achievement and close achievement gaps between students of different races, ethnicities, and income levels. CEP's studies of student achievement have concluded that in most of the states with adequate data, scores on state reading and math tests have gone up

since NCLB was enacted in 2002, and that achievement gaps have narrowed more often than they have widened (Center on Education Policy, 2007a; 2008a). Other CEP studies of NCLB implementation at the local level have found that many schools have increased instructional time for English language arts and mathematics but have sometimes done so at the expense of other subjects and activities (CEP, 2007c; 2008b).

This study seeks to better understand and explain these trends by taking a closer look at changes occurring at the school and classroom levels. In particular, the study examines the changes that districts, schools, and teachers have made in curriculum and instruction to raise student achievement and respond to NCLB and related state accountability policies.

To gather data for this study, CEP researchers conducted interviews and in-depth classroom observations in six Illinois schools—four elementary schools and two high schools—with diverse economic, geographic, and demographic characteristics. The schools were located in five different school districts. Research for the study was conducted from March to May of 2008, during school year 2007-08.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

We focused on changes in policies and practices that affect curriculum and instruction in reading (or English language arts at the higher grades) and math, the only two subjects tested for NCLB accountability before 2008. These include the following changes, which have been commonly reported in other studies of the local effects of NCLB (Hamilton & Berends, 2006; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Center on Education Policy, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006; and Sunderman et al., 2004):

- Increasing alignment between instruction and state standards for curriculum content
- Focusing on tested content at the expense of other subject matter
- Ignoring, reducing, or deleting aspects of the curriculum that are not tested
- Targeting (through instructional time and resource allocation) students who are closest to scoring at the proficient level on state tests in an attempt to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) under NCLB

- Continually changing educational programs, particularly in high-poverty districts and low-performing schools, in response to calls for reform—a phenomenon sometimes known as “policy churn” (Sunderman et al., 2004, p. 4)
- Using data to drive decisions
- Addressing achievement gaps

SELECTION OF CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

CEP selected case study schools after consulting with officials in several school districts, and without state involvement. Several factors guided this selection. Although the schools chosen do not constitute a representative sample, we did take steps to ensure they represented different characteristics to help us gain a more nuanced understanding of the effects of NCLB in different types of public schools. We chose school districts in different kinds of communities (urban, suburban, or rural) and of various sizes. We selected several schools with a relatively diverse student population. Some of the schools were in the improvement phase of NCLB and some were not. Finally, we chose schools from both the elementary and secondary levels. It should be noted that the findings from the six case study schools are not generalizable to every school in Illinois. Like many states, Illinois has a tradition of local control of education, and schools in different districts may vary considerably.

In order to elicit straightforward responses from and avoid possible repercussions for the people we interviewed, we guaranteed anonymity to participating schools. The list below describes schools and districts participating in this study, identified by pseudonyms.² The information below about the AYP and improvement status of these schools represents their status in school year 2007-08, which was determined based on tests administered in spring of 2007.

- ***Diddley Elementary School*** is a Title I school in the Carrot Top school district, which serves a small town. A little more than half of the students come from low-income families. Approximately three-fourths are Latino, and less than 5% are African American

² School pseudonyms are based on famous musicians from Illinois and the districts are based on record labels from Illinois.

or Asian. The Carrot Top school district made AYP, and Diddley has made AYP since school year 2002-03. Under the state accountability system, Diddley is considered a high-performing, high-poverty school.

- ***Goodman High School***, an urban Title I school, is also located in the Aritao Public School district. About three-fourths of its students come from low-income families. The student population is roughly three-fourths Latino and one-fourth African American, with small numbers of students from other racial/ethnic groups. Goodman is in the restructuring phase of NCLB improvement and is in Academic Watch Status under the state accountability system.
- ***Koloc Elementary School*** is a Title I school in the Cedille School District, which serves a mid-size city. More than three-fourths of the students are from low-income families. The student population includes almost equal proportions of white, Latino, and African American students. Although the Cedille School District is in year 4 of NCLB improvement, Koloc Elementary has made AYP since school year 2004-05.
- ***Prine Elementary School*** is a Title I school in the Aritao Public School district, an urban district. The majority of students come from low-income families, as determined by eligibility for free- or reduced-price lunch. The students are predominantly Latino (more than 90%), and approximately half are English language learners. Based on test data from spring 2007, Prine did not make AYP. The district is in the first year of NCLB improvement and is in Academic Early Warning Status under the state accountability system.
- ***Vedder Elementary School***, a rural Title I school the rural Whitehouse School District, serves a student population that is roughly 50% low-income. In addition, approximately half the students are white, and another one-quarter are African American or Asian/Pacific Islander. Both the Whitehouse district and Vedder Elementary made AYP based on spring 2007 testing.

- ***Voigt High School***, a Title I school in the Night Flight School District, serves the outer suburbs of a city. Less than 10% of Voigt’s students are low-income, according to school lunch data. Approximately half the student population is white, one-fourth is Latino, and close to 10% is African American. The Night Flight School District is in year 4 of improvement. Although Voigt High made AYP based on spring 2006 testing, it did not make AYP based on 2007 testing.

CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

To collect information for our case studies of the six schools, CEP researchers conducted numerous interviews. At the district level, CEP researchers spoke with the superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, assessment director, and Title I coordinator, where applicable. In each of the case study schools, we asked the principal to identify a staff member to act as study liaison. This person arranged for school-level interviews.

At the school level, we interviewed 14 district- and school-level administrators and conducted focus groups with 52 teachers, 72 students, and 28 parents. In addition, 6 other school representatives, including reading and math specialists, administrative interns, and Reading First coaches were interviewed. (Not every type of group was interviewed at every school.) Through these interviews, we hoped not only to gain detailed knowledge of district and school practices and policies but also to probe the assumptions and beliefs underlying the implementation of NCLB and test-driven accountability in general.

Appendix A provides more information about the interview process for this study.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

The study used classroom observations to document the salient features of instructional practices and teacher-student interactions. The study liaison in each school scheduled these observations in reading/English language arts and mathematics classes. CEP researchers visited each school for two to three days, depending on the school’s schedule.

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Through these classroom observations, we hoped to gain a better perspective of teachers' practices than many previous studies of school reform and NCLB implementation have done. Prior studies have been based largely on survey and interview data; although these are important research tools, they are based on self perceptions and can be influenced by respondents' beliefs. Indeed, some analysts have challenged the accuracy of survey and interview data on issues of classroom instruction, particularly when the questions address teachers' own instructional practices (Spillane & Zeuli, 1999; Hamilton et al., 2003). The classroom observations in this Illinois study were intended to address some of the limitations of earlier research, including CEP's own research, and to further explore and validate the findings from our interview data. We acknowledge, however, that the inferences that can be drawn from the classroom observations are limited in scope because our sample is limited.

CEP researchers conducted observations of 33 classes at the elementary school level. Observations of high school classes were not included in our analyses because their curricula and culture were different from each other and from the elementary schools in our study, and did not lend themselves to a standardized observation format. During all of the observations, the researchers recorded teaching practices using a time-sampling technique: classroom instructional practices were recorded at two-minute intervals for a period of 30-60 minutes. The researchers also took detailed notes after each observation. These notes provided important contextual information for interpreting the time-sampling data.

The researchers designed a time-sampling instrument to record three aspects of classroom teaching: instructional practices, class grouping, and noninstructional issues. This instrument drew from current findings about changes to instructional practices and curricular choices and was adapted from prior studies (Hamilton et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2007; University of Michigan School of Education, 2007). The researchers were trained to use the instrument to record teacher behaviors accurately during a classroom observation and to take detailed notes.

OTHER DATA SOURCES

Researchers also analyzed policy documents and other records, including curriculum and pacing guides where applicable, to understand how instructional policies have changed in response to NCLB's focus on student achievement. At the school level, we analyzed documents to determine how principals and teachers have attempted to comply with district policies and make AYP.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Like any study, this study has certain limitations. First are the inherent limitations of interview and self-reported data, noted above.

Second, the schools and districts studied may not represent the experiences of all Illinois schools, and their demographic characteristics may not reflect the student population in Illinois.

Third, our efforts to include classroom observations as a supplement to interview data have shown promise, but we are cautious about drawing inferences that may be misleading on a larger scale. Therefore, we have used a design in which the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups are dominant, and the classroom observation data are used to supplement and validate the qualitative data.

Lastly, these are educators' reports of how accountability affected their practice, but they cannot be interpreted as definitive. Rather, the study gives snapshots of how schools with different backgrounds have responded to state and federal accountability systems in terms of curriculum and instruction. The study also illustrates how NCLB's requirements have led to changes in educational practice in a sample of diverse schools and districts and examines NCLB in the context of reform efforts that may have been underway before the federal law took effect. To explore how NCLB, state, and local policies interact and how they affect student achievement requires the extra level of in-depth analysis offered in this report.

NCLB and Illinois

Illinois is a heavily populated Midwestern state that enrolled more than 2 million students in school year 2005-06. About 43.6% of the students in the state are racial/ethnic minority students, and 37.2% received free or reduced-price lunch (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2006).

ASSESSMENTS

Four types of assessments have been used for federal or state accountability in Illinois: the ISAT, which is administered at the elementary and middle school levels; the PSAE, which is administered at the high school level; the IMAGE for English language learners; and the Illinois Alternative Assessment for students with disabilities.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test is a criterion-referenced test that measures how well students are achieving relative to the Illinois Learning Standards, or ILS (Ponisciak, 2005). The ISAT was first piloted in 1999 and used statewide in 2001. Originally, the ISATs were administered in grades 3, 5, and 8 in mathematics, reading and writing, and in grades 4 and 7 in science, physical development/health, social science and fine arts (Lorber, 2008). The ISAT testing system was changed somewhat to comply with NCLB. For the 2009 testing cycle, reading and mathematics will be tested in grades 3 through 8, while writing will be tested in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8, and science will be tested in grades 4 and 7. The ISAT student performance levels include exceeds standards, meets standards, below standards, and academic warning (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004).

The Prairie State Achievement Examination, which is also criterion-referenced, has been administered since 2001 to 11th graders in Illinois public schools, except to students with disabilities whose individualized education programs prohibit them from taking the test. Originally, the PSAE tested mathematics, science, reading, English, social science, and writing. The test has since been modified. Presently, the PSAE is a two-day test that measures achievement in English, reading, mathematics, science, and writing, and includes the ACT

English test and two ACT WorkKeys assessments in applied mathematics and reading for information. (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008c). The PSAE performance levels are the same as those used for the ISAT. Students must take, but are not required to receive a passing score on, the PSAE in order to graduate high school. The writing section of the PSAE is not used in the accountability process.

In addition, Illinois has developed alternative assessments for ELLs and students with disabilities. The IMAGE (Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English Test), a test in simplified English, began in 1996 as a reading and writing test for English language learners who were enrolled in a state-approved bilingual education program for less than three years and were permitted to take an alternative to the “regular” state assessment because of their limited English proficiency (Illinois State Board of Education, 2000). Eventually the IMAGE was also used for NCLB accountability purposes as an alternative reading and math test for ELLs who did not take the regular ISAT or PSAE tests.

In 2008, Illinois stopped using the IMAGE after the U.S. Department of Education determined that the test was not aligned to state academic standards and was not comparable to the state’s regular tests (Zehr, 2007). The state announced that for 2008, ELLs would be required to take the ISAT or PSAE with accommodations. At the time of our research, the state was still determining how ELLs would be tested in future years.

The state also has an alternative assessment system—the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA)—for evaluating students with severe cognitive disabilities (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008d). While traditionally this assessment was based on portfolios, the state has developed a performance assessment, to be used starting in 2008, to evaluate this group of students.

FEDERAL AND STATE ACCOUNTABILITY UNDER NCLB

In 2000, Illinois started the Standards-Aligned Classroom Initiative, which focused on integrating learning standards into classroom practices. In 2001, the state began to modify its accountability frameworks to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. Under NCLB, schools must make AYP or face appropriate consequences.

To make AYP in Illinois for 2008, at least 62.5% of students overall, as well as 62.5% of each subgroup counted for NCLB purposes,³ must meet or exceed the state target for proficient performance on the state reading and mathematics tests. Schools must also meet the NCLB requirement for 95% of students to participate in testing (averaged over three years) and must reach state-determined benchmarks for attendance or graduation rates. Alternatively, schools that meet the test participation and attendance/graduation targets can make AYP if they reduce by 10% the percentage of students performing below the proficient level (the NCLB “safe harbor” provision), or if their percentage proficient falls within a statistical band called a confidence interval, similar to a margin of error (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008a).

Consistent with NCLB, schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years or more are subject to a series of sanctions, shown in the federal column of **table 1**. In addition, schools that do not make AYP are categorized under the more detailed Illinois state accountability system and subject to additional consequences, shown under the state column of table 1 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2008b).

³ In addition to all students in a school or district, 10 subgroups are counted for NCLB accountability in Illinois: white, African American, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, multi-racial/ethnic, English language learners, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. Only subgroups with 45 or more students across all grades in a school are counted for AYP purposes in Illinois.

Table 1. Federal and State Accountability Consequences in Illinois

Misses AYP for:	State	Federal
1 year	No consequences	No consequences
2 years	State Academic Early Warning Status – Year 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised school improvement plans approved by local board. External support team School & district analysis Optional: Extended day/year programs 	Federal School Improvement 1 Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Title I schools must offer public school choice
3 years	State Academic Early Warning Status – Year 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised school improvement plans approved by local board and state superintendent or designee External support team School & district analysis Optional: Extended day/year programs 	Federal School Improvement 2 Status Title I schools must offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public school choice Supplemental educational services
4 years	State Academic Watch Status – Year 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised school improvement plans approved by local board and state superintendent or designee School improvement panel appointed by state superintendent External support team School & district analysis Optional: Extended day/year programs 	Federal Corrective Action Status Title I schools must offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public school choice Supplemental educational services Optional for Title I schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended school day/year and/or incentives for high-quality teachers and/or external curriculum modifications
5 years	State Academic Watch Status – Year 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement panel continues All state requirements and options continue from previous year 	Federal Restructuring Planning Year <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School plans for restructuring the following year if no improvements occur
6 years	State Intervention Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional superintendent removes local school board OR State superintendent appoints an independent authority to operate school or district State board non-recognizes school or district, dissolving the entity OR State superintendent reassigns pupils and reassigns or removes administrative staff 	Federal Restructuring Status Title I schools must offer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public school choice Supplemental educational services Restructuring options for Title I schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify the school as charter school OR Replace principal and staff OR Select an outside management entity OR State takeover and management

Source: Illinois State Board of Education, 2008b.

To exit NCLB improvement status (or state Early Warning or Academic Watch status), a school or district must make AYP for two consecutive years.

Influences of Federal and State Accountability on Curriculum and Instruction

CEP researchers found a diverse range of reactions to the impact of standards-based accountability and NCLB on schools across Illinois. Within our small sample, we observed differences between urban and rural schools and between high schools and elementary schools, but we also found variations in responses from schools in similar districts and with similar demographics. Still, some common themes emerged, including increased efforts to align curriculum to standards and curriculum mapping, inclusion of more test preparation in daily instruction, and greater use of common assessments for benchmarking purposes. Finally, study participants in several schools expressed concern about whether the current approach to standards-based accountability allowed for sufficient attention to the needs of the whole child, stimulating pedagogy, and authentic assessment that acknowledges growth over time rather than a single snapshot of achievement on one test.

ALIGNMENT TO STANDARDS

Interviewees at the two high schools in our study described the Illinois state standards as being very broad and somewhat vague, which made it relatively easy to “fit” curriculum with the standards. In other words, a high school could justify that its existing curriculum is aligned to the standards because the standards are vague. Interviewees at one high school also expressed concern that the state test is also not aligned with state standards—particularly, the parts of the 11th grade PSAE that consist of national ACT exams. “The standards definitely did not drive the test because the state purchased the test,” said one administrator at Voigt High School. “ACT is a national organization. Their test is used nationwide, so they’re certainly not considerate of the Illinois standards.” Moreover, the ACT is a college entrance exam, study participants noted, and many students may not be prepared to take a college preparatory exam and are not motivated to do well on it.

Study participants in some of the elementary schools we visited, by contrast, noted that the Illinois standards at this level are relatively prescriptive, and they did not express concerns about the alignment of the ISAT test to the standards. At most of these elementary schools,

interviewees reported taking steps to align curriculum and instruction to specific standards. For example, staff at Koloc Elementary used “power standards” to guide the focus and pace of instruction. According to one administrator, the power standards are a condensed or simplified version of the state standards that are “more understandable to the students and to the parents” and are easier for teachers to track and incorporate into lesson planning. “[Teachers] have checklists so that every time they hit a standard, they mark it so they know the standards were touched upon,” the administrator said, adding that teachers talk about the standards more often and do not rely on textbooks to provide the curriculum. As one teacher noted, “if I can’t find the power standards in what I’m doing, then I know I shouldn’t be doing it.”

Exceptions to this view emerged at Vedder and Prine Elementary Schools. At Vedder, students have done well on the ISAT even though staff reported giving relatively little attention to aligning curriculum and instruction to standards and tests. Teachers attributed Vedder’s success to its “tradition of excellence” rather than to the state accountability and testing system. As one teacher explained, “I think we’ve been successful for a long time, and those state tests were not the guiding force. We were focused on providing a quality education, and the tests just happened.”

Another Vedder teacher commented, “We’re aligned, but we also have the academic freedom to make the choices to meet those goals, as we feel we need to.” Teachers said they used this academic freedom to focus on meeting the needs of students. As one teacher explained, “We don’t just say, ‘Oh, we have to do this, this, this, this.’ We incorporate lots of different strategies and ideas. We incorporate what they want but to give them that extra supplemental that they need to make them more well-rounded students, to be able to think and process.”

Teachers at Vedder reported feeling a sense of ownership about the curriculum and engaging in a continuous cycle of improvement that with recent changes in leadership includes a greater focus on curriculum mapping, a process discussed below.

At Prine, a significant concern was the lack of K-8 articulation. Teachers reported that there was a lack of curriculum alignment among teachers in the same grade level; many teachers taught various content at different paces and did not know what other teachers at their grade level were teaching. Teachers commented that they have not been able to do any kind of comprehensive curriculum mapping for their grade level and that this creates large gaps in classroom teaching.

CURRICULUM MAPPING AND COMMERCIALY PRODUCED CURRICULUM

At many of the schools in our study, educators had engaged in curriculum mapping—a process used to specify which core skills and content will be taught at various points during the school year, how they will be taught, and how student progress will be assessed to achieve alignment. At Diddley Elementary, administrators generally viewed NCLB in a positive light because it provided the impetus for more cohesive planning through curriculum maps.

The schools in our study took different approaches to curriculum mapping, depending on the culture of the school and how its staff interpreted the state standards. At Voigt High School study participants described a fairly rigorous process of curriculum mapping. The teachers we interviewed explained they worked on teams divided by course subject and department. Alongside administrators, they developed common assessments based on the Aritao Public School and Illinois state standards, which they administered quarterly during the school year. A school administrator described a “triangulation method” that first asked teachers to identify all the skill sets they believed were needed to improve their students’ scores on the state test and tried to incorporate these skills in weekly increments. This list of skills was then compared to the state standards to make connections where standards met the skill needs of the students. Next, according to this administrator, “we looked at ACT’s college readiness standards and pretty much anywhere where we had three hits across the board—the teacher identified a need which related to state standards which also showed up on ACT; that became, by default, an essential learning outcome. And that’s how our whole curriculum was aligned.”

Generally, curriculum mapping was described as a useful activity not only for improving day-to-day instruction but also for articulating learning goals across grades levels. At Diddley, for

example, teachers met at the end of the year to report to their colleagues at the next grade level what they taught and what they felt they missed. Teachers at Vedder Elementary had similar discussions, described by one teacher as “a spiral effect, so we build on each year and it’s not just a 3rd grade or a 5th grade problem. Everybody works together on this.”

Not all schools reported positive experiences with curriculum mapping. At Goodman High School some administrators and teachers said they were disappointed that their earlier efforts at alignment were going to be abandoned with the adoption of a new district-adopted curriculum. According to school administrators, the new curriculum will result in new textbooks and new curricula in English, math, and science. The administrator explained that Goodman is under “academic watch” status, which means the district takes an active role in both school operations and curriculum. The new curriculum requires schools to select a curriculum provider from a short list that will supply the curriculum in English, math, and science along with all related materials. “It’s not necessarily a scripted curriculum, but it’s very highly structured,” said one administrator.

Several schools in our Illinois study had adopted commercially produced curriculum materials. At Prine Elementary, one administrator described the commercial literature and math materials used by the school as an example of a “set” curriculum to prepare students for the ISAT. Administrators and teachers at Vedder also noted the role and use of commercial materials in aligning their curriculum to state standards and the ISAT. Teachers at Diddley reported that the selection of a new social studies series was influenced by the push to use social studies content as reading material during the large blocks reserved for reading in the schedule.

Some teachers mentioned that the selection of new textbooks was influenced by how well the textbooks’ content aligned with state standards and frameworks, since the topics they must teach and the order in which they must teach them are heavily dependent on the ISAT and the testing schedule. Nevertheless, teachers at several schools noted that the sequence of topics in the textbooks did not always match the testing schedule. Some found it necessary to supplement the textbooks with outside material and to change the order of the topics presented.

TEST PREPARATION

Overall, administrators and teachers at the schools studied said they did not engage in extensive test preparation in the weeks before the ISAT. At Koloc Elementary, for example, interviewees said they integrated test preparation into the curriculum throughout the year. An administrator described this philosophy:

I always tell my teachers, if you're teaching the curriculum all year long, you're teaching your kids how to practice extended responses; you're reading, then you're building reading stamina through the course of the year. That way, you do not need that push of reading the paper or practice tests . . . or to try to cram everything the last few weeks prior to the test.

This is not to say that teachers in these schools do not emphasize preparation for the ISAT. Many teachers described teaching test-taking skills at the elementary level to familiarize students with the format of multiple-choice exams. Students in our focus groups noted the stress they felt about tests with high stakes. When asked about the ISAT, a 3rd grader said, “It’s important because if you don’t do well you might not get to the next grade,” while a 5th grader at the same school said the test affects “what middle school, high school, and college you get to go to.” Several teachers viewed test preparation as a way to alleviate some of student’s exam-related stress, as captured by the following comment:

I think if you can know the format and just let them be comfortable with it, then their learning will come out. I got to observe another school giving tests, and a little girl shut down on a math extended response portion. She [said], “I don’t know what to do. I haven’t seen this before.” And it’s not that she wasn’t smart, and it’s not that she couldn’t do it, but she just didn’t know how.

Some teachers in our study reported changing the focus of their instruction leading up to the ISAT by emphasizing test-taking skills and using direct instruction strategies. At times this

conflicted with their teaching philosophy but they felt it was necessary. One teacher described the dilemma in this way:

Well, when you feel judged by the test, you have to do some direct teaching to the test, and 3rd graders have never seen a multiple choice test before . . . [Y]ou have to be a good reading teacher and teach great comprehension strategies, and you can do that in authentic way, but when it comes down to it, they have to look at a multiple-choice test.

Interviewees at Diddley Elementary described their resistance to teaching to the test, but acknowledged that their students need to be familiar with the types of questions and extended response prompts they will see on the ISAT. Consequently, many of the assessments used throughout the curriculum are similar to the ISAT.

Several teachers across the schools in our study reported referencing the ISAT when they want to highlight specific skills or test-taking strategies—a strategy that students said became even more apparent two to three weeks before the test. Teachers said that this strategy has helped students feel less overwhelmed. One teacher described how her instruction changes throughout the school year:

For me, September through December, the first half of the year, I'm really working on good reading strategies. Maybe if the students have to take a test with me, I might go over the answers in a way that would help them have strategies for multiple-choice tests. In January, I start getting nervous, and then I really kind of go—February, I feel like I'm doing a lot more direct instruction, and students are doing a lot less independent work just so they can get that practice and see those kinds of tests. So I really spend a lot of my time in late January and February, and then by March it's done.

Some study participants described specific strategies for exposing students to the ISAT format. For example, one teacher had students practice writing a five-paragraph expository essay. Another teacher introduced writing on grid paper to prepare students for the math portion of the

test, which requires them to provide extended responses. An administrator described a classroom where the walls were covered with posters with instructions on how to complete different test items, such as giving extended responses and working with formulas. This administrator also mentioned a teacher who identified and taught 300 words that students need to know to pass the standardized test.

Schools engaged in other activities to reduce students' test-related stress. One school holds a daily morning meeting, and on the day of the test, students sing songs and receive treats. Another school sponsors an ISAT motivational rally where students are allowed to chew gum as a way to improve their thinking.

High school teachers also reported incorporating test preparation and practice into their curriculum and instruction. One school administrator said that the school even considered buying software that would plug their locally developed assessments into a template that mirrors the ACT test. High school administrators also talked about conducting test preparation activities throughout the year, such as using practice problems that mirrored test problems or holding a Saturday study program. They added that with the incoming new curriculum, the focus on test preparation activities will continue. They explained that the same formative assessments, modeled after the ACT, will be used across the district, regardless of the chosen provider. Parents also reported that teachers provided extra test preparation opportunities for their children—including voluntary Saturday classes for students who choose to participate.

Some teachers and administrators discussed the need to break from test-driven instruction and incorporate more creative, project-based learning. One administrator observed that data from benchmark assessments lets teachers know when they are on target with their instruction; when this occurs, teachers can “feel comfortable to branch out and do that creative stuff that they went to school to do.”

Many of the interviewees noted that the focus of instruction changed after the administration of the state test. After the ISAT is administered, teachers at Diddley take a week to dispense with standards-aligned lesson plans and be more creative in their teaching; as one administrator noted,

“you’re going to hit the standards anyway, but you’re going to get kind of in the robotic routine. And that is not fun for kids.”

A teacher at Prine also reported teaching a richer curriculum after the test:

[After the test] I [can] take a deep breath, and I think, “Now I can actually dig in and get to teach some more thematic things.” Like I’m doing book clubs now. I did this at the very beginning of the year, but I would never do that the third quarter, because there’s just no time for it.

Some teachers questioned the choices of subject matter stressed on the ISAT, as well as the reliance on the test as a single measure of achievement. Said one teacher:

I’m pretty sure we’ve talked about this in curriculum mapping. We still feel the narrative is important and the persuasive and they still all do it. But what they are tested on is the expository, and you sometimes wonder who they talk to in order to come to these conclusions. Why do they know that’s best for us to learn when like you said they’re not in the classroom, we are? We actually see the needs of the students and the needs of the students at our particular school.

Rather than relying solely on test scores as a single measurement of achievement, teachers reported using the state test scores to identify students whose results are inconsistent with their classroom performance; this helps them think about other factors that may have contributed to the scores. Teachers expressed concern that the test does not measure the progress of individual students who enter below grade level and improve in learning throughout the year. As one teacher said, “That’s not an indicator of what those children can do, and it’s not going to be an indicator necessarily of how they’re going to achieve in life either. There’s a lot more in life than just going through the text and passing these tests.”

Elementary Instructional Variation

To learn more about classroom instructional practices, we did detailed observations of the use of instructional time in 15 math classes and 18 English language arts classes in the four elementary schools in our study. (Observations of high school classes were not included in our analyses because their curricula and culture were different from each other and from the elementary schools in our study, and did not lend themselves to a standardized observation format.) We examined the data from these classroom observations to discern common patterns, as well as differences among schools, in the use of instructional time.

As shown in **figure 1**, both math and ELA teachers spent a considerable amount of time asking closed questions (those with just one or a few correct answers) to assess their students' knowledge. Closed questions were the most common use of instructional time in both math and ELA classes. Math teachers also spent considerable portions of class time overseeing hands-on activities and seat work, and using overhead projectors and boards to model problems and review materials. ELA teachers divided instructional time more evenly among various instructional practices, including overseeing students in silent reading, leading small-group activities, and overseeing seat work and learning centers.

Figure 1. Time Spent on Different Types of Instructional Practices by Subject

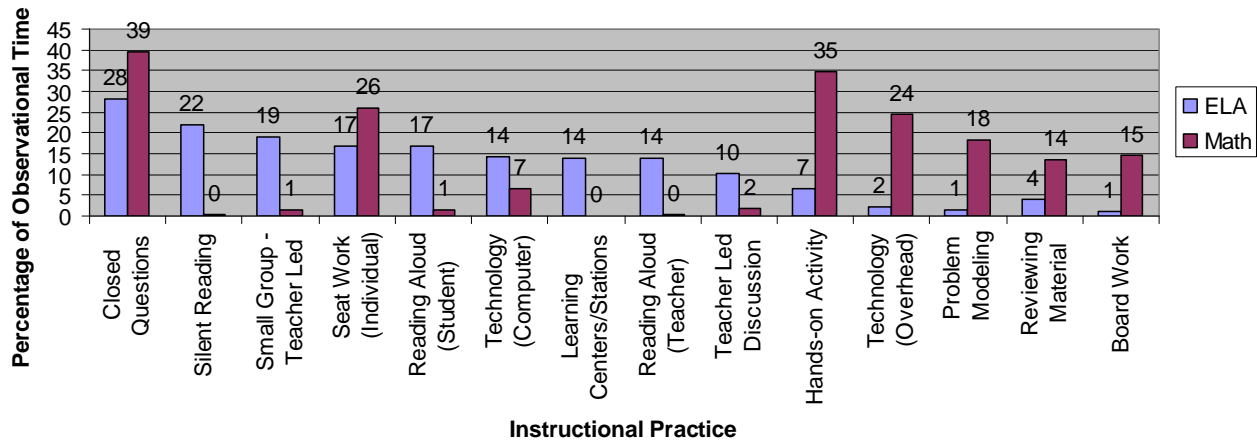


Figure reads: English language arts teachers spent an average of 28% of observed classroom time asking closed questions, while mathematics teachers spent an average of 39% of observed time on this activity. The percentages were derived by dividing the amount of time teachers were observed engaging in a certain practice by the total classroom observation time.

Note: Percentages shown may total more than 100% because more than one instructional practice can be observed and recorded in the two-minute intervals used in classroom observations.

Source: Center on Education Policy, Illinois classroom observation data, 2008.

We also examined variations in the use of instructional time between schools based on whether they had been identified for improvement under NCLB. According to Spring 2007 test results, Prine and Koloc Elementary Schools were identified for improvement, while Vedder and Diddley Elementary performed at higher levels and were not identified for improvement. **Figure 2** illustrates the commonalities and differences in instructional practices between schools identified for improvement and higher-performing schools that were not identified for improvement. These findings are based on observations of 19 classes in the identified schools and 14 classes in the schools that were not identified.

As shown in figure 2, we found that teachers in both groups of schools spent considerable time asking closed questions and facilitating student seatwork. However, teachers in the two higher-performing schools on average spent relatively more time overseeing a wider range of instructional practices, including hands-on activities, students' reading aloud, review of

materials, students’ silent reading, students’ board work, and learning centers. These practices were often used simultaneously. We found that teaching practices in the two schools identified for improvement were less diverse and included more time for teaching with overhead technology, leading small groups, and modeling problems. Because our sample of classroom observations was so small, it was not appropriate to conduct an inferential analysis of the significance of mean differences as a way to determine true differences between the two groups of schools. However, the findings described above suggest that instructional practices do vary among schools with different levels of achievement under current accountability policies.

Figure 2. Comparison of Instructional Practices in Schools Identified and Not Identified for Improvement

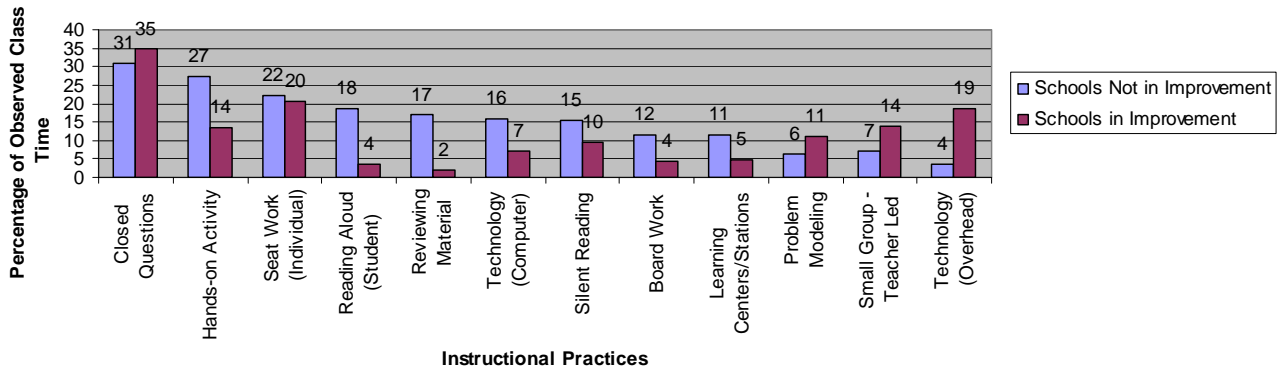


Figure reads: Teachers at schools identified for improvement spent an average of 31% of observed classroom time asking closed questions, while teachers at schools not identified for improvement spent 35% percent of observed time on this activity. The percentages were derived by dividing the amount of time teachers were observed engaging in a certain practice by the total classroom observation time.

Note: Percentages shown may total more than 100% because more than one instructional practice can be observed and recorded in the two-minute intervals used in classroom observations.

Source: Center on Education Policy, Illinois classroom observation data, 2008.

Use of Data

Participants in all case study schools recognized the importance of using data to inform classroom instruction and improve student achievement. Interviewees reported using data from a variety of diagnostic assessments in reading, math, and other areas. Many reported that their decisions about curriculum and instruction were driven by these data. An administrator at Goodman explained this process:

We identified students who were within 3 scale points of meeting or exceeding [the benchmark] in reading and science . . . We gave teachers the students' performance data so that they recognize their students and we say, "work with all of the students but if you have anything extra, here is where to focus it because these students are within striking distance of really moving our numbers dramatically."

A teacher also commented on the practice of using data at Goodman:

Everything we do is driven by [data]. We try to collect it as best as we can and make adjustments and we are always looking at it because that is where you get the real truth. You can talk to someone and they can say, "I think I did better" or "I know I feel I did better" . . . but the data is what really drives us all.

A teacher at Diddley made a similar observation:

[Data] is used at our grade-level meetings. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of student reading skills, and we talk about how we can modify their work. If one teacher is having a particular problem with a student, trying to raise their score, we get ideas from one another on what kinds of activities to use.

Some study participants also discussed the problematic nature of data use. For instance, some teachers noted that the organization, breakdown, or distribution of data is not always helpful, as the following comment from a teacher at Koloc indicates:

The district tries, but we have a difficult time extracting useful data in a useful format out of our data warehouse system, and if you were to ask us right now to track this student's scores over the last three years we would have to actually drive to the school and pull out the paper file because we put the stickers on it. We can't pull that out of our data system.

In addition, teachers expressed reservations about the timing of some of the data. “We don’t know if we’re going to get [the data] before schools starts in the summer, or if it will be partway through the year,” said a teacher at Whitehouse. A teacher at Koloc added: “Last year the 2nd graders took the Stanford test and none of them came back. We haven’t even seen the results. It was supposed to be a quick test, too.”

In some case study schools, including Prine, teachers noted that they relied on classroom observations and other evidence, in addition to test data, to diagnose students’ individual needs and make decisions about instruction. This was particularly evident with teachers who taught bilingual students. One teacher explained the importance of daily observations of students:

Personally, I think that the data are important, but I think it's much more useful and a lot better to look at what I see, not from a number matched to a name but from what I see every day with the kids, six hours or however long we are here every day. I know the kids. I know what they need. What the data tells me is how they perform on a test, not what they actually know.

Additional Influences on Student Achievement

In our interviews, many teachers, administrators, students, and parents wanted to focus on actions they were taking, outside of formal accountability policies, to increase student achievement. Therefore, we present findings related to the participants' perceptions about additional influences on student achievement.

EXPANDED RESOURCES

Some study participants noted that grant funding had helped to expand resources for professional development and other activities aimed at improving student achievement. For instance, a teacher at Diddley described the importance of Reading First and other grants:

I think one of the biggest things was getting the Reading First grant. We had that for three years I think. That started it. We were given so much money for trainings and materials. Then in the summer we did the [researched-based literacy materials from a commercial publisher]. So we had tons of . . . material from doing the bridges program a couple of summers. That was all grants and that was a huge amount.

In the Aritao Public School District, many study participants reported that the transition to the new curriculum would require additional funding for such activities as training teachers to use different instructional strategies. At Goodman, some administrators noted that grants, such as one from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have helped them derail some of the costs of changing to the new curriculum.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Strong parental involvement was viewed as an important contributor to improving student achievement at some of the case study schools. According to study participants, parents at Prine participated in training to support student achievement, and parental involvement was cited as an important part of the school’s success in creating a strong sense of community. As one administrator noted, “We have a very active group of parents that are kept informed and are very active as far as wanting to learn and will engage in any type of training or inservice that we have for them.”

Diddley, a school that serves many low-income, highly mobile families, has a strong parent teacher association that collaborates with the school on a variety of activities, according to administrators and teachers. For example, at a well-attended picnic held at the beginning of the school year, parents received “homework kits,” which included supplies their children would need to do homework.

One administrator acknowledged that more needs to be done to realize more collaborative relationships with parents. “We have really tried to include the parents more and more. We still have a ways to go with that but we are really looking to reach out to helping educate the parents about what is happening as well.”

At Whitehouse, which serves a more advantaged population, a high level of parental involvement has been an important contributor to achievement, according to administrators and teachers. As one administrator explained:

In this area, if a family is very serious about academics they usually will seek this district out. Also, most of our ESL kids, their parents are here as professors at the university, or have come from their country to get their doctorates and then they go back. So even they are very academic focused. So what I’m trying to say is we have a lot more family and parent involvement.

A teacher echoing a similar point noted, “Because we are next to a university, we have quite a few students whose parents see education as important.”

Parents at Voigt noted that the administration does a wonderful job of informing them about school activities and academics through newsletters and other means, as explained in the following comment:

[With the parent’s newsletter] I’m also connected. And those newsletters come out regularly. You get the emails regularly. Any changes, any additions or any circumstances, we always know when we need to know. We’re never out of the loop on almost anything that has to happen or that will happen.

In addition, parents have access at home to their children’s grades, as another parent explained:

We are able to access our students’ grades online, and I frequently go, at least once a week, and look at my son’s class work, and what he’s getting, his grades, his tests, his quizzes. I have home access. All we need is to sign up, get a password. My home computer, I can see everything he’s doing in class, and if there’s ever a question regarding something, I just email the teacher.

Not all study participants were satisfied with the level of parental involvement, as the following comment from an administrator at Koloc indicates:

It is very frustrating for those of us, like the Title I people who have all this money for parent programming. We have the parent programs and nobody comes. I write a newspaper article once a month, and every month I put it in there that we are having a big training over at school this week. “Don’t forget to come Saturday. You get something free.” We always give them free stuff when they come. Sometimes we get 12, 15 people to come out of 100 that sign up, but we don’t give up. We keep doing it. We keep trying, beating our heads against the wall.

ELIMINATION OF THE IMAGE TEST AND ITS IMPACT ON ELLS

Several teachers and administrators in our case study schools commented about a change of state policy that requires English language learners take the ISAT with accommodations, instead of the IMAGE, the alternative assessment in simplified English that ELLs used in prior years. In spring 2008, in the midst of our fieldwork in Illinois, state officials informed districts and schools that the state would no longer be administering the IMAGE because the U. S. Department of Education had ruled that it was not comparable to the ISAT, was not aligned to state standards, and did not meet NCLB requirements. State officials said that continuing to use the IMAGE would put the state in jeopardy of not having the state’s standards and assessment system approved by the federal government and could result in the withholding of federal funds.

Several district administrators commented that the state knew the IMAGE did not meet the federal criteria, however, could not come up with an appropriate alternative to ISAT or PSAE for ELLs. Some district- and school-level administrators also said they did not anticipate this change in testing requirements to happen during the school year and felt that the ISAT test does not accurately measure achievement for ELLs.

Many teachers were also upset at what they perceived as a last minute change from the IMAGE to ISAT. “I actually found out the day before it went on my master,” said one teacher. Another teacher reported being “in shock.” An administrator criticized the lateness of the announcement:

[It] was so late that parents were upset. Students were really upset. Teachers were upset because we felt it was not fair to the students . . . And all of a sudden, it’s like they’re given a test that—and just extra time is provided. I mean that’s not enough to say that a student is functioning at this level. It’s the same with special ed. To have special ed students take the exams at their grade level is ludicrous.

Many teachers expressed concern that the ISAT was being given to ELLs who had recently arrived in the U.S., were just learning to read, and may have had limited exposure to formal education in their home countries. Another teacher noted that ISAT scores do not accurately

reflect ELLs' real abilities, adding that "they may not be performing in English the way that we know that they're able to function in their native language." Another teacher concurred, emphasizing that "you're teaching them how to do something in a book, but then when they get the test, it looks different, and I know that it threw a lot of my kids off, because a lot of them know how to do this stuff, but it looks different, and they couldn't perform." These teachers also commented on the pressure they feel to "produce some kind of growth" despite factors such as a lack of prior educational experience and limited language ability.

The decision to have English language learners take the ISAT or PSAE with accommodations, instead of the IMAGE, has impacted both the Cedille School District and Koloc Elementary, which enrolls a large number of ELLs. An administrator at Koloc described the significance of this change:

One of the problems with the change to helping all the ELLs in the ISAT, you don't get credit or you don't even get a safe harbor target until you have failed to meet the AYP target for a year. So you have to have failed before you get any assistance. So now the schools that have been making it, now they've put a subgroup of ELL taking the ISAT. Boom, they don't make it. Well, okay, next year when the [percentage proficient] bar goes up another seven and a half points, now you have the safe harbor target, but that really is going to disadvantage schools. We have one middle school that will go with restructuring next year. The only group that they haven't met [AYP] with is special ed. Well, I think some of the same things will happen with bilingual until two or three years down the road when they get to be Title-approved, and foreign language-speaking students have a test that they can read. The damage will be done.

After Koloc staff became aware of the change, the reading coaches worked closely with the bilingual education classrooms to strengthen writing skills and support the already strong instruction in guided reading. Several study participants said they considered it unfair to give an English-based test to students who are struggling with the language and noted that the test

accommodations allowed for these students were not helpful. One administrator described the problem in this way:

[M]any of the bilingual kids are so low, and they're low because of language experience; they're not low because they're not intelligent or because they're a slow learner or anything like that. It's just they don't have a feel for the language. It's hard to learn English because of all the double meanings, figurative language, and idioms.

TEACHER COLLABORATION, HARD WORK, AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Many study participants emphasized that in order for teachers to comply with state accountability requirements and raise student achievement, teachers needed to have opportunities to collaborate and needed to be motivated themselves.

Vedder Elementary provided examples of teacher collaboration and assistance for new teachers. Vedder has had a mentoring program for new teachers for several years. Experienced teachers receive one to two years of training through the union. In addition, a nearby university conducts mentor training and offers a class in clinical supervision for a teaching fellows program. New teachers at Vedder regarded the mentoring program as an opportunity to receive needed help and input. “There are a lot of people watching lessons,” said one new teacher, referring to the mentor’s observations and the other regular observations built into the school’s schedule. Another new teacher noted that other teachers who are not in the mentor program are also “very willing to help and share information.”

Koloc also benefits from having a number of instructional support staff who assist with improving instruction. These include reading and math coaches, who have been added over the last two years and have “made a huge impact” according to one administrator.

Several teachers at Vedder attributed the school’s success in part to teacher motivation and a shared concern for the achievement of students—a quality that one teacher called “collective

accountability.” Administrators and teachers also described a culture of excellence, high academic standards, and high teacher motivation, as the following comment illustrates:

You won't find a teacher in this building that will leave for lunch, or will just actually sit down and take a lunch. They work through their lunch. I was here all summer last summer and the summer before. This building is crawling with teachers all summer, every weekend. I work evenings and weekends, and there are always teachers in the building late. It's just that kind of a setting and that kind of a culture.

At Prine, teachers reported feeling the pressure of high-stakes testing, particularly when ISAT results are used not only for federal accountability, but also to determine which students will be required to attend summer school or repeat a bridge grade such as 6th grade. Teachers clearly felt accountable for their students' achievement. “Yes, it's very stressful,” said one teacher. “I mean, like my first year teaching 3rd grade, I was so nervous the entire year, because they call you down and tell you who goes to summer school and who doesn't. It's a little bit better each year, but still . . .”

Study participants also discussed the high levels of expectations they had for their students, particularly at Goodman High School. At Goodman, one teacher noted, “the students will only work as hard as you make them . . . [I]f you give them low standards, they'll meet your low standards. If you give them high standards, they'll work harder.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, test-driven, standards-based accountability has influenced curriculum and instruction in these Illinois case studies. Participants discussed a number of factors that they felt impacted student achievement in their schools, including alignment of curriculum with state standards, a focus on test preparation, the use of commercially produced curriculum, the use of data to inform instruction, and strong parental involvement. In addition, CEP's time-sampling

observations of elementary classes revealed that teachers spent notable amounts of class time asking closed questions, overseeing students' seat work, and (in math classes) facilitating hands-on activities. Observations also revealed that teachers spent more class time on a wider range of instructional activities in the two higher-achieving elementary schools studied than in the two schools that had been identified for NCLB improvement.

With the changes Illinois school systems face in the next school year, including the use of a new curriculum and the elimination of the IMAGE, further effects on student achievement and additional influences on curriculum and instruction may be seen.

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Appendix A — Additional Information about Study Interviews

To collect qualitative data for this study, CEP researchers interviewed a variety of individuals, using the interview formats described below.

District- and school-level administrators. Researchers conducted interviews of 45 minutes to an hour in length with both district- and school-level administrators. At the district level, the researchers spoke with the superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, assessment director, and Title I coordinator, where applicable. Researchers also interviewed principals, assistant principals, and reading and/or math coaches.

Teachers. Researchers conducted focus group interviews with 3rd- and 5th-grade teachers in the participating elementary schools and 11th-grade teachers in the high schools. Teachers from these grade levels were chosen because these levels have been tested for state and federal accountability purposes in Illinois for several years, unlike other grades where testing has been phased in since enactment of NCLB.

Students. CEP researchers interviewed students in focus groups of three to seven students at each school. Students were selected from grades 3, 5, and 11 because these levels have been consistently tested for state and federal accountability purposes.

Parents. A study liaison at each school arranged for focus group interviews with parents. Any parent with a child enrolled at the school, no matter the grade level, was invited to participate. Most of the interviews were conducted on school grounds in the early evenings to best accommodate working parents' schedules.

Appendix B — Classroom Observation Instrument

Below are the definitions of the grouping practices, instructional strategies, noninstructional practices, and test preparation activities included in the classroom observation instrument used for this study.

GROUPING PRACTICES

Whole class—Teacher delivers instruction to the whole class. Also used when the whole class is working on the same assignment but on their own.

Large group—Teacher works with students in groups larger than five.

Small group—Teacher works with students in groups of five or fewer.

Pairs—Students work in pairs.

Individual—Students work on individual and *different* assignments. This shows a highly individualized curriculum.

One-to-one—Teacher works one-on-one with students providing direct instruction to that student.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Assessment—Any formative or summative assessment given during observation.

Board work—Students are asked to “go to the board” (chalk board or smart board) to solve a problem or do some kind of instructional activity.

Cooperative learning (roles)—This is more than just grouping students in small groups. Students should all have some kind of role to play.

Demonstration—Teacher uses a demonstration as the instructional strategy. Examples of this might be creating a shape using tangrams, conducting an experiment, or performing a piece of literature (such as a monologue or poem).

Formal problem solving—These are “formal” techniques and strategies taught to help students solve problems. Some examples include “draw a picture or diagram,” “solve a simpler problem,” and “work backwards.”

Group writing assignment (including pairs)—Students are working on some form of written assignment as a group. This does not include when students are working on “writing work” as a group (for example, creating a fictional story, screenplay).

Hands-on activity/materials/manipulatives—The activity must be integral to the lesson; game pieces do not count. Do not include calculators here but do include protractors, rulers, etc. Group

games are a hands-on activity unless it is a noninstructional game such as Candyland, Risk, or Monopoly (unless using money is the objective).

Homework—Students work on homework during instructional time.

Learning center/station—These are more likely to be used in elementary schools; the teacher sets up several different learning centers or stations, and students may travel from one to another depending on the amount of time it takes to complete each center.

Presentation/lecture—Teacher delivers instruction primarily through lecture with very little discussion.

Presentation/lecture with discussion—A discussion follows a lecture format. This is distinguished from classroom discussion because there is a lecture component to it.

Problem modeling—This can be led by a teacher or student; teacher shows students step-by-step how to solve a particular problem. General problem solving techniques such as “solve a simpler problem” are categorized as formal problem solving.

Read aloud—When teachers and/or students take turns reading aloud from a text. Who is participating (teacher and/or students) is designated.

Review of work—Used only if the teacher states that students are reviewing a concept previously learned. For example, the teacher may state that the students need to review a concept such as the associative property in mathematics before beginning the new unit’s concepts. Does not include when students are reviewing a concept that was learned earlier in the week; this is meant to designate instructional time that is spent on reviewing material learned earlier in the school year or from a prior year. Working on “skill and drill” worksheets (often mathematical facts) is included here.

Seat work—Students are given worksheets or an assignment to do on their own. Also includes when students are asked to do some problems on their own after they have worked through some examples as a whole class.

Silent reading—When students are asked to read silently during observation.

Small group discussion (include pairs)—Students are broken into groups and discussion is the main task of the group.

Structured note taking—While students may take notes at any time during the class, this will only be coded when students are prompted by teacher to “take notes,” “take out their notebooks,” or “copy down this information.”

Student-led classroom discussion—Student(s) actively lead a whole group discussion

Student presentation—This includes formal student presentations only, such as presenting a poem, short story, or piece of art work. This can also include when students are to present group findings.

Teacher-led class discussion—Teacher invites students to discuss an idea, topic, assignment. Questions can be closed or open but discussion is an integral part of the instructional strategy.

Use of film, video, DVD, or audio—Read-along texts are included.

Writing work—Can include essays, fictional writing, or research papers. Does not include students taking “essay” exams. That is included under assessments.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN INSTRUCTION

Can be either teacher or students utilizing some form of technology directed by teacher. Calculators are included only if they are being used for instructional purposes. Specifically, look for the use of computers, overhead projectors, Elmos, smart boards, LCD projectors, calculators (if used as instruction).

TYPES OF QUESTIONS TEACHERS ASK

Closed questions—Teacher asks questions that have only one answer or very limited answers; there are “correct” and “incorrect” answers.

Open-ended questions—Teacher asks questions that encourage students to explore possibilities and ideas. These questions have more than one answer or can be interpreted differently.

NONINSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Administrative task—Examples include taking attendance, collecting or passing out materials, checking to make sure homework is completed. Also includes when students move into different instructional groups such as small groups or pairs if instructional time is lost.

Classroom management—When student behavior interrupts instruction.

Interruption—Could include announcements, fire drill, assemblies.

Other—For example, “game time” would be an example of an “other” practice if the game is not related to instruction (e.g., Life, Trivial Pursuit, Battleship); classroom celebrations.

TEST PREPARATION ACTIVITIES

Teaching general test-taking strategies

Teaching problems of questions found on state assessment

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