



urban Indicator

Spring 2009

Council of the Great City Schools High School Reform Survey, School Year 2006-2007

In response to a request by the Secondary Education Sub-Committee of its Achievement Task Force, the Council of the Great City Schools surveyed its membership in the fall of 2007 to gather information on a variety of high school reform issues.

An electronic file of the survey was emailed to the curriculum directors in each member district in October, 2007. Curriculum Directors were asked to collaborate with their colleagues leading high school level curriculum and reform efforts to complete the survey. Surveys were received from 53 of the 66 member districts for a response rate of 80 percent. The data analysis presented below is based on this sample and refers to the 2006-07 School Year.¹

Respondents were asked to provide information on a range of topics pertaining to the current state of high school reform efforts in the Great City Schools as well as questions regarding district-level policies and practices in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics instruction. Respondents were also asked about the evaluation of current programming and practices, the types of instructional supports being offered for struggling students, and the types of professional development activities being offered to teachers of mathematics and ELA at the secondary school level.

Overall, 68% of responding districts reported having a comprehensive, system-wide high school improvement plan in place. The remainder of this report provides further detail on the nature, implementation, evaluation, and perceived effectiveness of these high school reform efforts.

¹ The number of actual respondents for individual questions varied from 48 to 53. This variance was not large enough to generate meaningful differences in the analysis.

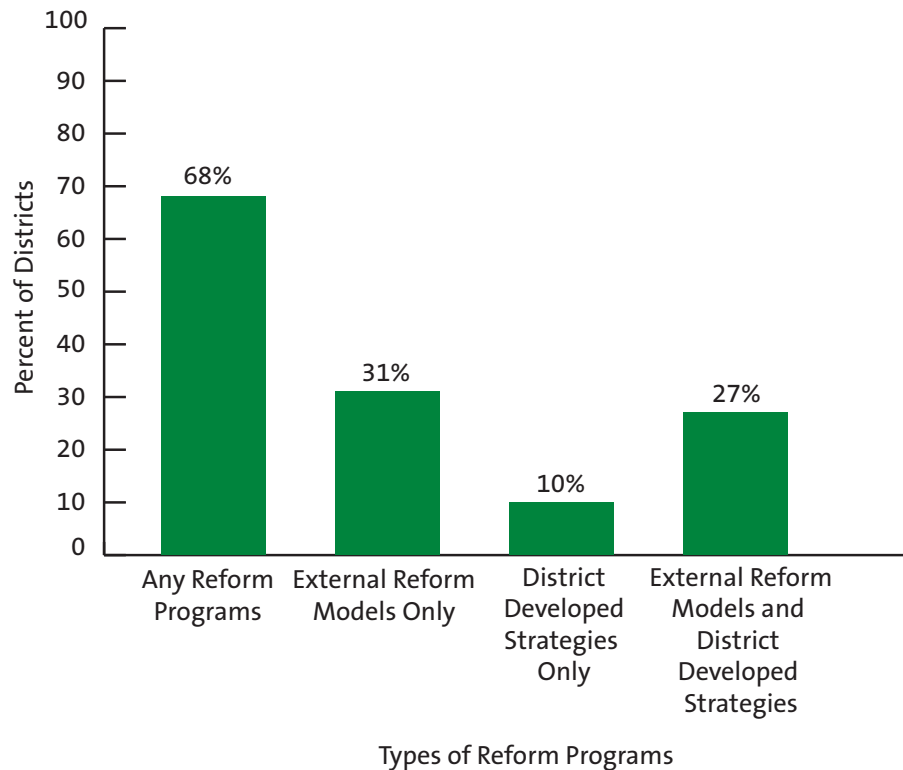
Survey Results

Implementation of High School Reform Strategies

We asked respondents about the specific high school reform models being implemented in their districts, and whether they were locally developed or “externally-developed” models (e.g., America’s Choice, Talent Development). The responses are shown in Figure 1.

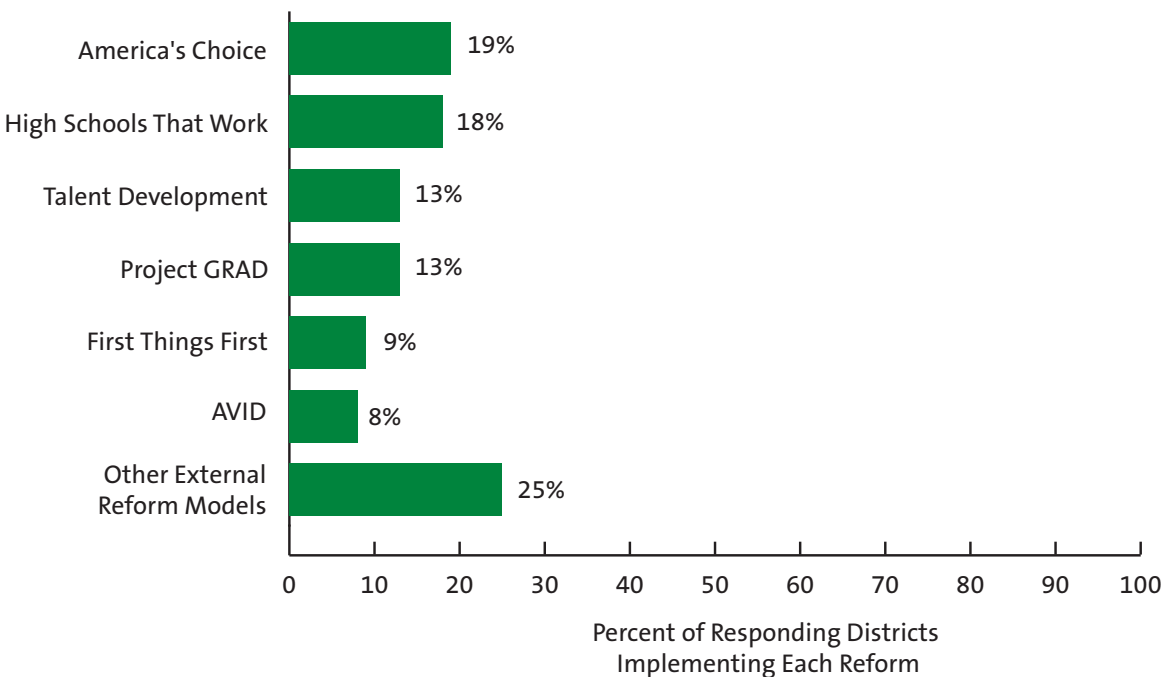
- Sixty-eight percent of responding districts have implemented some type of externally-developed high school reform model or set of district-developed strategies to improve student achievement.
- Thirty-one percent of responding districts implemented only external reform models, 10% had only implemented district-developed strategies, and 27% of responding districts implemented a combination of external models and district-developed strategies.

Figure 1. Implementation of High School Reform Programs



- A total of 58% of responding districts reported implementing an externally-developed high school reform model, and they did so in isolation or in combination with locally-developed initiatives.
- Some 19% of those using an externally-developed model reported implementing America’s Choice, 18% reported implementing High Schools That Work, 13% reported implementing the Talent Development model, 13% reported implementing Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), 9% implemented First Things First, and 8% implemented Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Twenty-five percent of responding districts implemented other external reform models, including College Board EXCEerator, GEAR UP, and others. (Figure 2)
- None of the respondents reported district-wide implementation of any one externally-developed model of high school reform.

Figure 2. Externally Developed High School Reform Models



We also asked districts about a variety of high school reform strategies and how these programs were evaluated. The responses are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

- Ninety-one percent of responding districts reported instituting block scheduling in a number of, but not all, high schools.
- As of the 2006-07 school year, 81% of responding districts had opened small schools or “schools within schools” in selected high schools across their districts. Forty-nine percent of these districts implemented stand alone small schools, 70% implemented “schools within schools,” and 40% of districts implemented both types of small school models (not shown).
- Seventy-eight percent of responding districts instituted formal 9th grade transition programs. Two thirds of districts (67%) use ninth grade academies to help incoming students make the transition to high school.
- A total of 53% of districts reported having made changes of some kind to the school day or year. Twenty-six percent extended the school day, 19% extended the school year, 26% offered twilight classes, and 23% instituted later start times.
- Among the high school reform strategies reported, small schools or “school within schools” were the initiatives most likely to be formally evaluated. Approximately 60% of districts implementing small schools or “school within schools” strategies reported external evaluations of these initiatives, and about 7% of these districts reported formal evaluations by the central office.
- About 30% of districts implementing 9th grade academies or 9th grade transitions programs reported undergoing external evaluations of these initiatives. Informal evaluations of these programs was also relatively common, with approximately 33% of these districts reporting only informal progress monitoring for 9th grade academies, and over forty percent reporting conducting only informal monitoring of 9th grade transitions programs. Finally, 30% of districts that implemented 9th grade academies reported no evaluation efforts whatsoever for these programs.

Figure 3. High School Reform Strategies

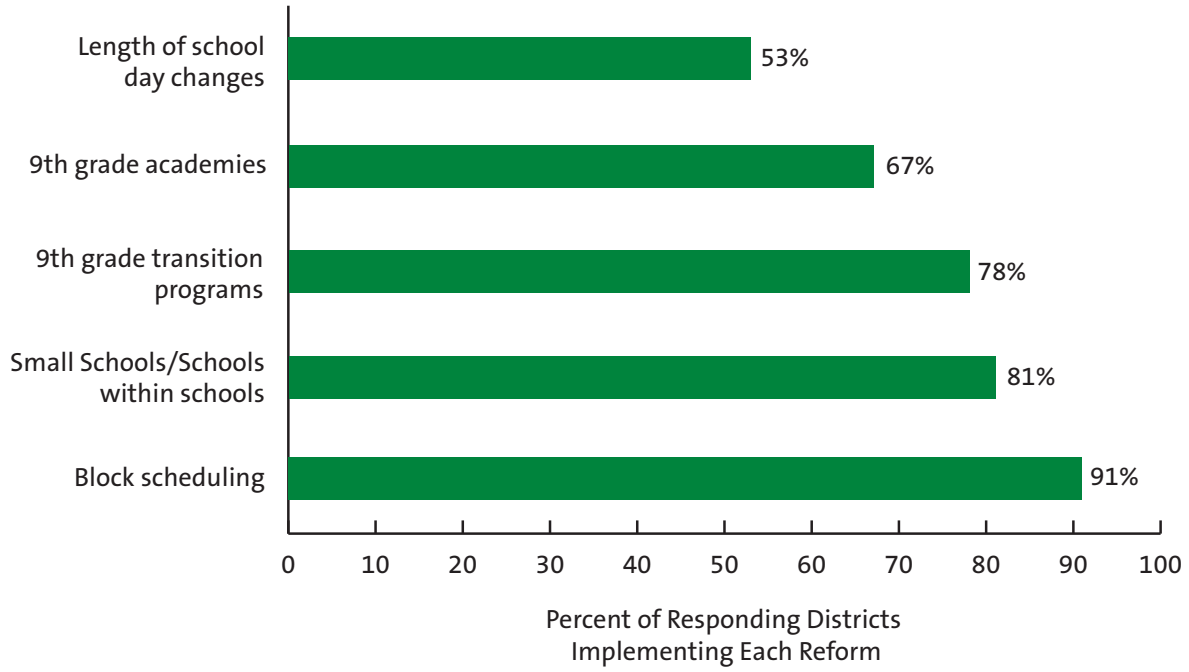
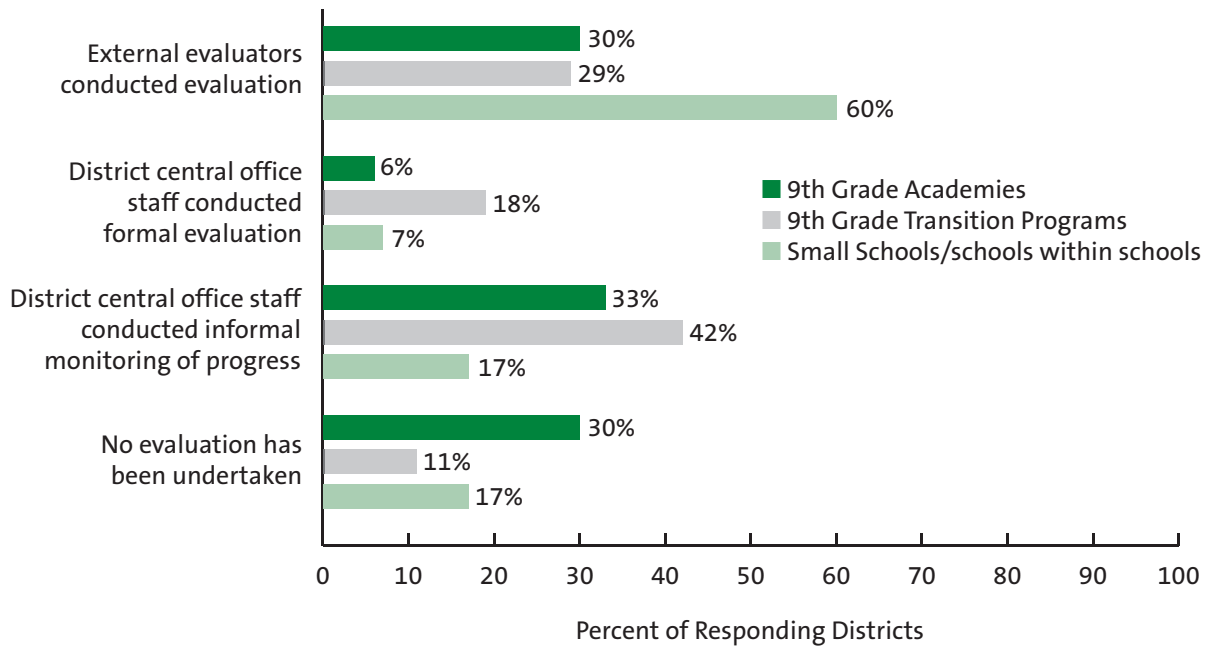


Figure 4. Evaluation of High School Reform Strategies

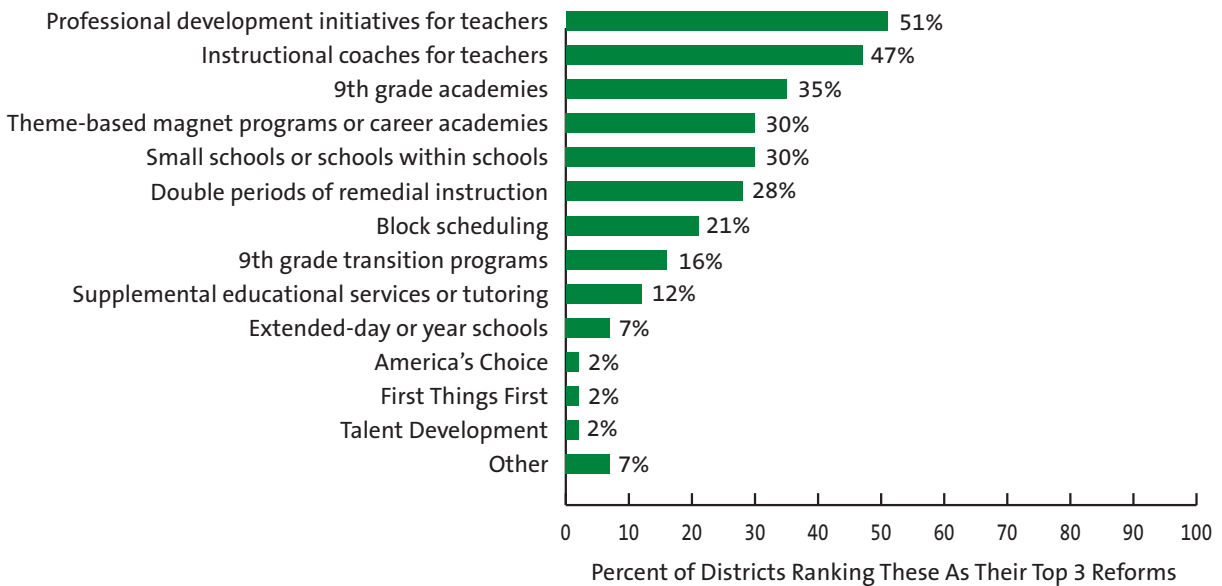


Perceptions of Effective High School Reform

We asked districts to identify which high school reforms were, in their opinion, the three most effective strategies for improving student achievement. The responses are shown in Figure 5.

- Respondents reported that, in their opinion, the three most effective high school reform strategies used by their districts to improve student achievement were professional development initiatives for teachers, instructional coaches, and 9th grade academies. Many districts also ranked theme-based magnet programs or career academies, small schools, and double periods of instruction among the most effective strategies.

Figure 5. District Perceptions of Effective High School Reform Strategies



Ninth Grade Student English Language Arts and Mathematics Placements

We asked districts to report the criteria used to place entering 9th graders in ELA and mathematics classes and the role that the district central office plays in the placement process.

- The majority of districts used multiple criteria to place entering 9th graders in ELA and mathematics classes.

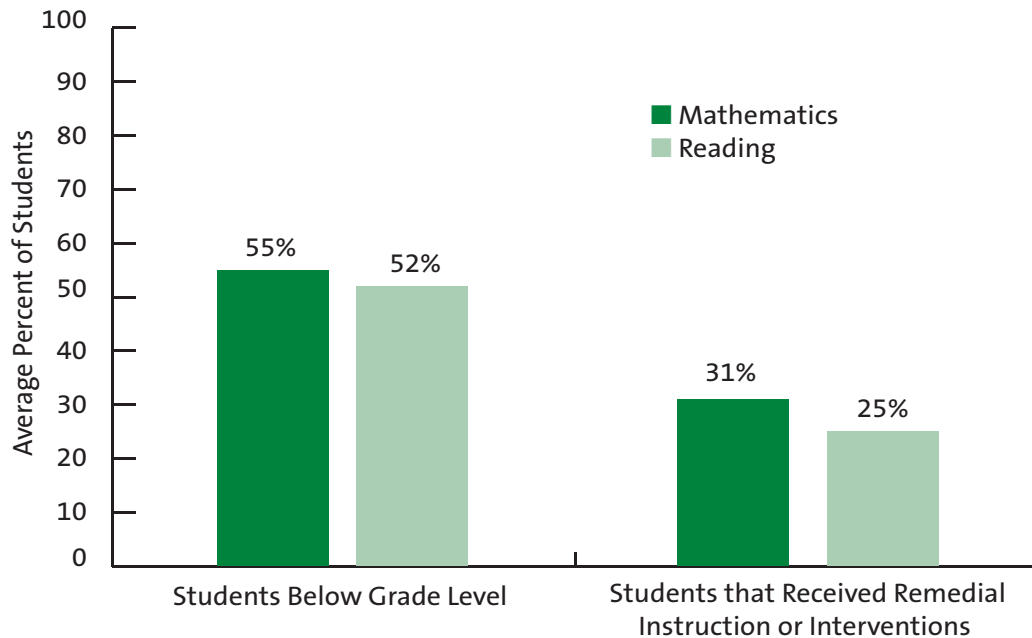
- Districts most frequently used 8th grade report card grades to place entering 9th graders in ELA (68%) and mathematics classes (76%). Districts also frequently used state assessments as part of the 9th grade placement process. Seventy-four percent of districts used state mathematics assessments as criteria for placement. Approximately 64% of districts used state ELA assessments. Fewer districts (47%) used the district language arts and mathematics assessments as placement criteria.
- About half of the responding districts report that the central office provides information about students' literacy and math levels, but that final placement decisions are made at the school level. In 12% of the responding districts, central office staff makes recommendations about placements but final decisions are made at the school level. Thirty-four percent of districts reported no role for central administration in placement decisions.

High School Readiness and Instructional Supports

We asked respondents to estimate the proportion of students who begin high school behind grade level in reading and math, and to describe the types of support they provided to struggling students. We also asked responding districts about the extent to which they had evaluated their supports for these students and the manner in which their evaluations had been carried out. The responses are shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8.

- The districts report that slightly more than half of entering 9th grade students arrive performing below grade level in reading and math, while 1 in 5 entering 9th grade students is more than two years behind grade level. (Figure 6)
- Of entering 9th grade students, some 25% received support in the form of remedial literacy instruction or interventions. A slightly higher percentage of students (31%) received remedial math instruction or interventions. (Figure 6)
- The choice and management of literacy supports for struggling readers is generally determined at the school level rather than by the central office. Some 68% of districts reported that the choice of supports or interventions used for struggling students is made at the school level.

Figure 6. Ninth Grade Student Achievement Levels and Supports



- Responding districts also reported that the most common forms of supports for struggling students are double periods of instruction, after school or summer programs, and specialized reading and math courses. (Figure 7)
- The responses indicated that formal evaluations are more common for literacy initiatives than mathematics. Thirty-one percent of districts had external evaluators conduct evaluations of literacy initiatives, while 22% of districts reported formally conducting their own evaluations of these initiatives. Twenty-nine percent of districts conducted only informal monitoring of these strategies.
- On the other hand, only 10% of respondents reported external evaluations of the effects of math initiatives for struggling students. Eighteen percent of responding districts conducted formal district-directed evaluations of the effects of their initiatives for struggling students. Forty-one percent of districts reported conducting only informal monitoring of their math supports for struggling students.
- Over 30% of districts reported conducting no evaluation for math initiatives for struggling students, compared with 18% of districts that reported conducting no evaluations of their literacy supports. (Figure 8)

Figure 7. Most Common Forms of Literacy and Math Supports for Struggling Students

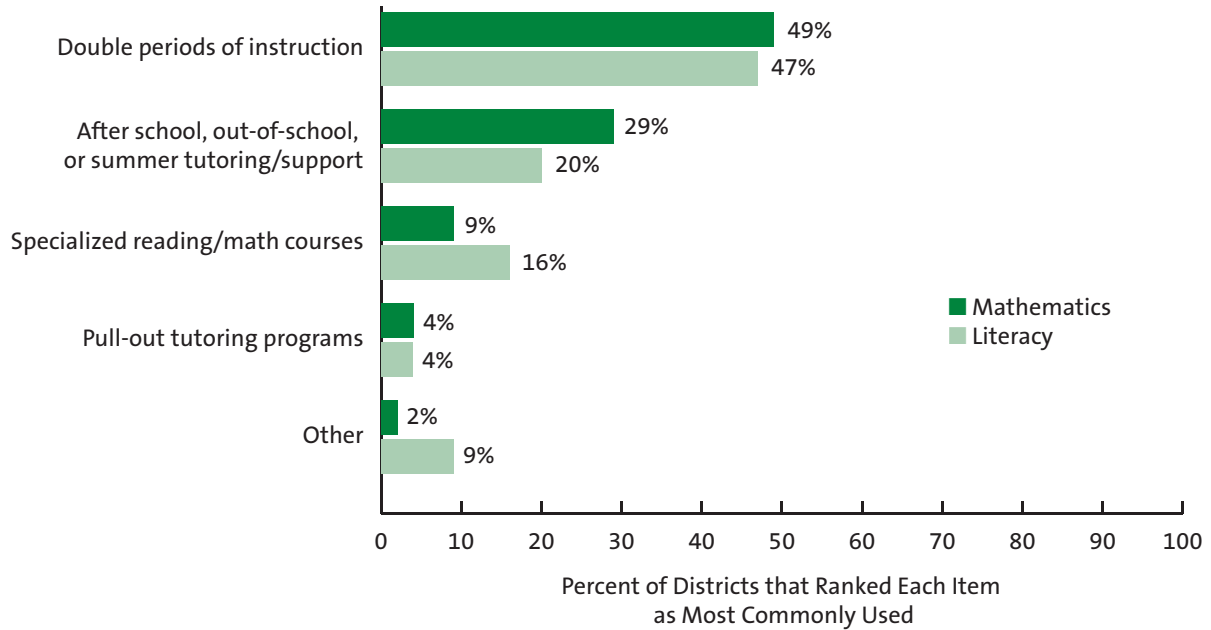
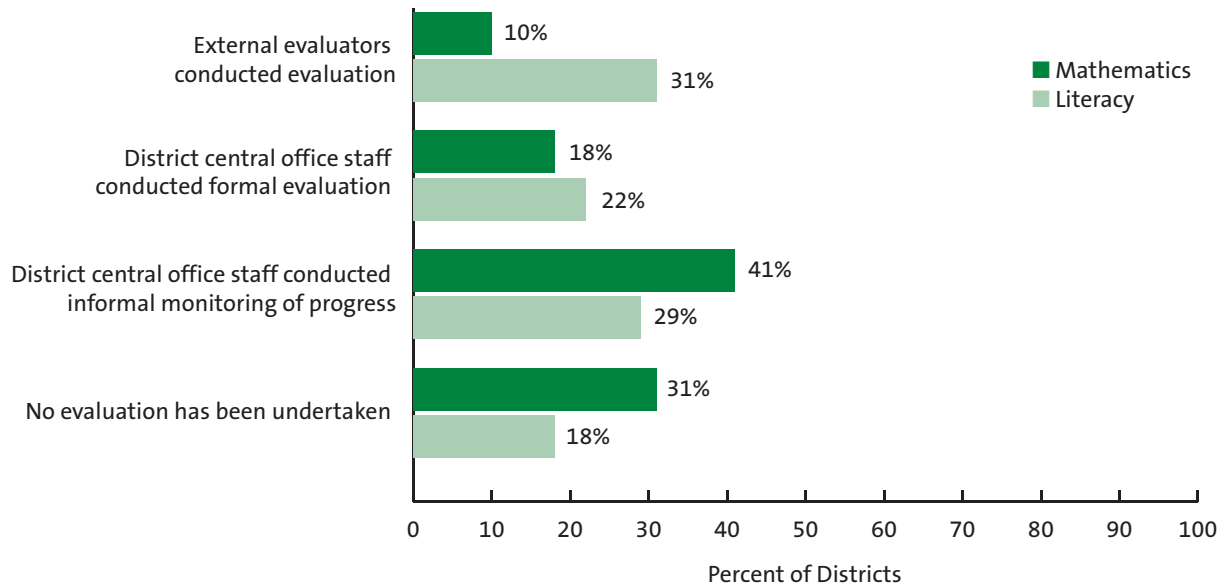


Figure 8. Evaluation of Literacy and Math Supports or Initiatives

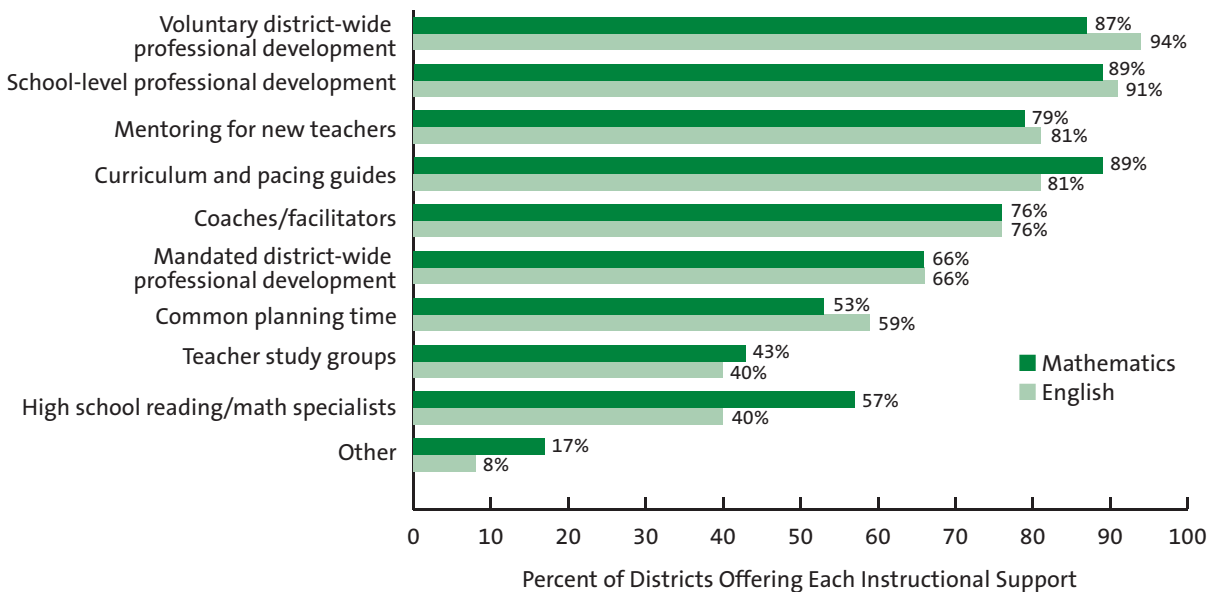


Supports for Teachers of Secondary ELA and Mathematics

We asked districts what kinds of instructional supports are offered to ELA and math teachers in high schools. The responses are shown in Figure 9.

- Voluntary district-wide professional development or school-level professional development is the most frequent means of support for ELA teachers’ instructional practices (94% of reporting districts).
- Additionally, districts offered mentoring for new teachers (81%), curriculum and pacing guides (81%), or literacy coaches or facilitators to high school teachers (76%). (Figure 9)
- Most often instructional supports for teachers of mathematics take the form of pacing guides for math course offerings (89%), school-level professional development (89%), or voluntary district-wide professional development (87%).
- Slightly less frequently, instructional supports are offered in the form of mentoring for new math teachers (79%), or math coaches or facilitators (57%). (Figure 9)

Figure 9. Instructional Supports for Teachers



Discussion

A variety of approaches to high school reform are being implemented in the Great City Schools. Sixty-eight percent of responding districts reported having a comprehensive, system-wide high school improvement plan in place. The survey results suggest that districts are using a combination of national reform models, such as Talent Development and America's Choice, and district-developed strategies and models. Additionally, a sizeable number of districts reported implementing ninth grade transition programs or academies, block scheduling, and changes to the length of the school day or year in order to improve student outcomes. None of the responding districts reported having implemented any one of the national reform models or district-developed strategies district-wide.

According to this survey, implementation of reform initiatives does not appear to be accompanied by extensive efforts to monitor or evaluate their effectiveness. While formal evaluation of small schools and school-within-school initiatives *is* common across the majority of districts that implemented them, the presence of evaluation efforts for other initiatives is less common. For example, although over two thirds of reporting districts have set up 9th grade academies, approximately a third of these districts have conducted informal monitoring of these initiatives, and 30% of these districts report having conducted no evaluation of these programs at all. This is particularly interesting given the finding that urban districts consider 9th grade academies to be one of the three most effective high school reform strategies. On the other hand, 60% of districts implementing small schools and "school within schools" conducted formal evaluations of these programs. This may very well be due to the external funding commonly used to support these initiatives.

The collection and use of student assessment data for the placement of ninth grade students in ELA and mathematics courses appears to be widespread. Almost two thirds of districts report using state assessment results in ELA as part of the criteria for the placement of entering 9th graders, while almost half also use the district language arts assessment for placement decisions. Although the central administration of the district often provides this information about student achievement levels and even support options for schools, ultimately most decisions about student placement and the supports made available to struggling students are made at the school level.

One of the most important findings of this survey was the apparent discrepancy between student academic needs and the available supports or interventions for struggling students. According to estimates provided by the districts, slightly more than half of all entering 9th grade students performed below grade level in reading and math. However, districts reported that only a quarter of entering 9th grade students received support in the form of remedial literacy instruction or interventions, and only 31% received remedial math instruction or interventions during the 2006-07 school year.

As is the case with the evaluation of some key reform strategies, relatively few districts reported conducting formal evaluations of math supports designed to support struggling students. Only 10% of districts reported external evaluations, and 30% of districts didn't evaluate these initiatives at all. On the other hand, external evaluations for literacy supports were more common. About 30% of districts reported external evaluations and over 20% conducted internal formal evaluations.

The most commonly used academic supports or interventions in both ELA and mathematics were double periods in the content areas, after-school and out-of-school programs, summer school programs, and tutoring. Pull-out interventions were reported as rarely being used. There also appear to be a variety of district-developed literacy strategies being used to support struggling students.

Finally, in the opinion of the responding districts, professional development and support for teachers are key to effective high school reform. Districts identified professional development initiatives for teachers as the most effective high school reform strategy. Interestingly, despite many districts using external reform models, such as America's Choice and Talent First, most did not rate them among the most effective reform strategies in their district. Nearly all districts reported offering district-wide, voluntary professional development opportunities in ELA, and 87% report offering these voluntary professional development opportunities in math. Two-thirds of the districts reported that there is mandated district-wide professional development. About 90% of districts reported offering teachers school-level professional development, 80% reported offering mentoring for new teachers, and 75% reported providing schools with math or literacy coaches. Between 80 (ELA) and 90 (Math) percent of districts reported providing teachers with curriculum and pacing guides.

Clearly, there is no magic bullet to high school reform and improvement. It requires hard work, determination, and continuous re-evaluation and refinement of our efforts at reform. The data from this survey show that the membership of the Great City Schools are implementing a wide variety of strategies designed to improve teaching and learning and set the conditions for secondary school success. At the same time, the findings underscore the need for urban districts to gather reliable evidence regarding the effectiveness of these reforms in their particular districts.

Surveys were received from the following districts:

Albuquerque	Jackson
Anchorage	Long Beach
Atlanta	Los Angeles
Austin	Louisville
Baltimore	Memphis
Boston	Miami-Dade County
Broward County	Milwaukee
Buffalo	Minneapolis
Charlotte-Mecklenburg	Newark
Charleston County	Norfolk
Christina (DE)	Oakland
Cincinnati	Oklahoma City
Clark County	Omaha
Cleveland	Orange County
Columbus	Philadelphia
Dallas	Pittsburgh
Dayton	Providence
Denver	Richmond
Des Moines	Rochester
Detroit	Sacramento
East Baton Rouge	Salt Lake City
Fresno	Seattle
Guilford County	St. Louis
Hillsborough	St. Paul
Houston	Toledo
Indianapolis	Wichita

Albuquerque
 Anchorage
 Atlanta
 Austin
 Baltimore City
 Birmingham
 Boston
 Broward County
 Buffalo
 Charleston
 Charlotte
 Chicago
 Christina
 Cincinnati
 Clark County
 Cleveland
 Columbus
 Dallas
 Dayton
 Denver
 Des Moines
 Detroit
 East Baton Rouge
 Fort Worth
 Fresno
 Greensboro
 Houston
 Indianapolis
 Jackson
 Jacksonville
 Kansas City
 Little Rock
 Long Beach
 Los Angeles
 Louisville
 Memphis
 Miami-Dade County
 Milwaukee
 Minneapolis
 Nashville
 Newark
 New Orleans
 New York City
 Norfolk
 Oakland
 Oklahoma City
 Omaha
 Orange County
 Palm Beach
 Philadelphia
 Pittsburgh
 Portland
 Providence
 Richmond
 Rochester
 Sacramento
 St. Louis
 St. Paul
 Salt Lake City
 San Diego
 San Francisco
 Seattle
 Shreveport
 Tampa
 Toledo
 Washington DC
 Wichita



Council of the Great City Schools
 1301 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
 Suite 702
 Washington, DC 20004
www.cgcs.org



The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban school systems. The mission of the Council is to advocate for urban public schools and to assist them in their improvement. To meet that mission, the Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management.

The Research Department of the Council of the Great City Schools publishes *Urban Indicator*, which explores timely and pertinent issues facing urban education.

INDICATOR STAFF

Michael Casserly
 Executive Director

Shirley Schwartz
 Director of Special Projects

Jason Snipes
 Research Director

Amanda Horwitz
 Research Manager

Renata Uzzell
 Research Manager