



Idaho

Jefferson Middle School (ARRA SIG recipient)

Caldwell School District

ARRA SIG Transformation in a Suburban District

Jefferson Middle School is located in Caldwell, a suburb just west of Boise. Three-quarters (75%) of the school's 650 students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. By ethnicity, 52% are Latino, 45% are white, 1% are African American, and the rest are other ethnicities. English language learners constitute 13% of the student population, and students with disabilities comprise 10%.

When Jefferson applied for and received an ARRA SIG for an anticipated total of \$695,000, the Title I school had not made adequate yearly progress on state tests and was in the restructuring implementation phase of NCLB. In 2010-11, however, the school met all state achievement targets outright or, for some student subgroups, through NCLB's safe harbor provision, which allows the school to meet the target if the number of students who are not proficient decreases by 10%. (See the table below.) If Jefferson Middle makes AYP again based on 2011-12 scores, the school will exit school improvement under NCLB.

Percentage of Jefferson Middle School students in grades 6, 7, and 8 scoring proficient on state tests, school years 2009-10 and 2010-11

Student subgroup	Reading (State AYP target 85.6% proficient)		Math (State AYP target 83.0% proficient)	
	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11
	All students	84.3%	90.8%	75.5%
Latino	78.2%	87.7%	65.5%	73.6%
White	90.8%	94.8%	86.5%	88.7%
English language learners	59.1%	74.7%	45.1%	57.6%
Free or reduced-price lunch	81.5%	89.7%	70.6%	77.2%
Special education	46.3%	65.0%	35.8%	50.0%

Table reads: On the state reading test administered in school year 2009-10, 84.3% of all students at Jefferson Middle scored at or above the proficient level—below the state target of 85.6% that must be met for this group to make AYP. On tests administered in 2010-11, the percentage of proficient students in reading rose to 90.8%, which is above the AYP target.

Source: Idaho Department of Education Report Cards <http://apps.sde.idaho.gov/AYP/Home/Select>.

ARRA SIG built on prior initiatives in the Caldwell district.

The district's three-and-a-half month grant writing effort built on several initiatives developed by the Caldwell district that administrators said helped other district schools improve student achievement and exit school improvement under NCLB. For example, all teachers are observed twice a year on the district's standards. Then, district officials aggregate the observation data, choose professional development based on this data, and deliver the training districtwide in the Caldwell Academy of Leadership, explained Sherawn Reberry, the district's director of federal programs.

In addition, Caldwell has had instructional coaches in place in district schools for the past five to six years, Reberry said. These coaches work with teachers on instructional strategies. This coaching has continued and intensified through ARRA SIG at Jefferson. "Our coach is really visible and knowledgeable," noted Mary Rita Yamamoto, a veteran social studies teacher at Jefferson. "She observed my classroom last week and came right back in the next day with some really good feedback."

Finally, administrators said that the district and school had participated in state assistance to schools in improvement under NCLB and that this assistance also intensified with the ARRA SIG grant. In particular, Reberry said, the state's Capacity Builder, who provides assistance to schools in improvement as well as to those with ARRA SIGs, was working more intensely with Jefferson. "The previous administration I don't believe took advantage of the Capacity Builder in the same way," Reberry said.

The ARRA SIG also brought the district more technical assistance on how to use the WISE Tool effectively, Reberry noted. The tool has a special section on school improvement and transformation that the ARRA SIG schools use. "That enhanced my knowledge of the WISE Tool, and then I could in turn share this professional development with other buildings," Reberry said.

ARRA SIG brought changes in administration, technology, scheduling, and incentives.

Jefferson chose the transformation model because it stood out as the only feasible model; the school could build on past reforms while making important changes. A large change for Jefferson came with the model's requirement that the school replace their principal. Reberry explained that the past principal, who was placed on a leave of absence for 2010-11, had not always fully supported district goals and did not return to the district in 2011-12. The district also hired an ARRA SIG coordinator who worked as a three-quarters time employee in 2010-11 and a half-time employee in 2011-12.

ARRA SIG funding increased technology and accompanying professional development dramatically, according to participants. "We changed some curricular areas when we brought in some supplemental materials through a program called Compass Learning," said new principal

Moss Strong. The program includes smart-board technology, software and web support for creating group and individual lessons as well as assessments, and professional development for teachers.

“It’s a good deal,” said teacher Yamamoto. “It’s easy to get into, easy to use, and the kids seem to dive right into it. They like it.” Students are able to access the technology both within in the classroom and at home. Through the new technology the school has created an assessment system that tracks student progress quarterly and identifies students for extra help in the district’s Response to Intervention system, a national movement that provides early identification and remediation of learning problems. The assessments were administered each semester in 2010-11 but are quarterly in 2011-12.

In 2011-12, to make time for more remediation and enrichment based on assessments, Jefferson introduced a class period called “flex time.” The school made room for this class by cutting down on transition time between classes, which also extended learning time as required by the grant. During flex time, students can make up work, get extra tutoring in areas of need, or choose an enrichment activity. All participants believed this new class would improve student achievement in the coming year.

Part of getting students to buy into the remediation time was the incentives provided through ARRA SIG. “Kids will work so hard for the smallest things,” said Principal Strong. She explained that the school has incentives for achievement on quarterly assessments and for progress toward meeting personal goals to improve on the state test. “We set a realistic goal that each kid could reach,” said Strong, explaining that an advanced student who had less room to improve might have a smaller goal than a student scoring below the basic level. Students earn plastic wrist bands for these goals, as well as attendance at extracurricular events like dances. They can enter into drawings for larger incentives, many of which are donated by local businesses and community members.

Teachers also receive incentives through the ARRA SIG. Some are tied to developing proficiency in using the new technology. For example, teachers might earn document cameras and mimeo pads (similar to iPads) for completing training and criteria set out in their professional development. Teachers also got a bonus last year for increases in student achievement. Yamamoto emphasized that teachers should be paid at a level appropriate for the highly educated professionals that they are. She added that teaching is a group effort and that student success is a reward in and of itself. “If I am successful at my job, that means every teacher that’s been with that student from the parent up has been successful with their jobs also,” Yamamoto said. Seeing student success like high school graduation is the real incentive: “That’s what feeds us,” she said.

Participants pointed to increased student achievement and improved school climate as early successes of ARRA SIG.

Participants believed ARRA SIG had made positive changes in the school. “I don’t know that money is always the answer to everything, but you know it helped in this case being able to put in some new tools,” Reberry said.

The first success mentioned by participants was increased student achievement. “We have achieved some great things in a short amount of time, as we made AYP last year, our first year of creating the changes, and not just by a little bit. The kids showed drastic improvements,” said Principal Strong.

Yamamoto noted that students themselves have a new awareness of their increased abilities. “Some of these kids had never really thought of themselves as college material,” she said. “It’s opening their minds up to the possibilities. These kids not only are going graduate high school, they at this age are starting to think, ‘Maybe college is something I could do.’”

Part of achieving these increases in student achievement was improving the school culture. “If a kid loves school, that student’s achievement is going to go up,” Moss explained. Student incentives, a focus on learning, less transition time, and more adult supervision have all contributed to the improved culture, participants said.

“Our discipline has gone from horrible to great,” Yamamoto said. “Principal Strong is just a natural at it. The kids turned on a dime. They were tired of the old school climate. Our kids weren’t happy. They weren’t smiling. As soon as this stronger leader came in, the kids’ shoulders went down. They were smiling, happy, and relaxed. It was a huge change, and the kids were ready for it, and they wanted it.”

Staff morale is also up, participants said. “I think they hit it hard last year,” Reberry said of the staff at Jefferson. “They understood how they had been defined as a school, and they really wanted to work hard to change. I just think the teachers did an excellent job of stepping up to the plate, asking questions, doing what they needed to do, and focusing on students learning. I really see the staff has come together.”

Participants are already planning for the challenge of sustaining their efforts.

Confident of continued successes, participants said the district and school were thinking ahead to ensure that these successes could be sustained after the grant ended. For example, at the district level, the grant coordinator position is being gradually phased out rather than ended abruptly. Also, this person is being trained as a trainer in the new technology through a different district grant and will train any new teachers through a separate funding stream.

The other thing participants mentioned that might be difficult to sustain without ARRA SIG were the incentives for teachers and students. Strong said she hoped that once a strong culture of achievement was fully established in the school, incentives would not be as needed. “Overtime, you build internal motivation. Incentives are external,” Strong explained. “When you achieve success, and you see the positives that come out of success, it becomes internalized. Then, I don’t think you need all the external incentives to get there.” She also noted that as the school is improving, the community is becoming more involved and willing to help. “I think we can also be really creative with our incentives that don’t cost a lot of money.”

Lakeside Elementary School (ARRA SIG recipient)

Plummer-Worley Joint School District

ARRA SIG Transformation in a Small, Rural, Native American-Majority District

Lakeside Elementary in the Plummer-Worley Joint District is currently one of two school buildings serving a small, rural community in the northern part of the state, which includes the Coeur d' Alene tribal lands. At the time the school received its ARRA SIG award, the student population of 229 was 66% Native American, 31% white, and 3% other ethnicities. About 60% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (an indicator of poverty), and 14% received special education services. None were English language learners.

Lakeside was eligible for ARRA SIG due to low student achievement. This Title I school was in year 2 of school improvement under NCLB when it received the grant in the 2010-11 school year, and moved to year 3 of improvement for 2011-12. For the school overall and for most subgroups, the percentages of students scoring proficient on state tests increased at the end of the 2010-11 school year. As shown in the table below, white students met the goal in reading but not in math. All other subgroups, with the exception of Native Americans, met all goals based on NCLB's safe harbor provision, which involves decreasing the percentage of students who are not proficient by 10% or more. Native Americans did not meet state achievement targets in either reading or math; in math, the percentages of Native American students meeting state targets decreased.

Percentage of Lakeside Elementary School students in grades 3 through 6 scoring proficient on state tests, school years 2009-10 and 2010-11

Student subgroup	Reading (State AYP target 85.6% proficient)		Math (State AYP target 83.0% proficient)	
	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11
All students	66.3%	74.8%	65.1%	70.6%
Native American	60.2%	61.8%	61.9%	57.9%
White	NA	94.3%	NA	81.4%
Economically disadvantaged	66.7%	73.7%	66.0%	69.7%

Table reads: On the state reading test administered in school year 2009-10, 66.3% of all students at Lakeside Elementary scored at or above the proficient level—below the state target of 85.6% that must be met for this group to make AYP. On tests administered in 2010-11, the percentage of proficient students in reading rose to 74.8%, enabling this group to make AYP using safe harbor.

NA: Too few students per grade to report.

Source: Idaho Department of Education Report Cards <http://apps.sde.idaho.gov/AYP/Home/Select>.

The transformation model, the school's only choice for ARRA SIG, brought big changes.

Superintendent Judi Sharrett, who with assistance from school personnel wrote Lakeside's application for an ARRA SIG award of approximately \$526,000, said that the transformation model was the only viable model for the school, especially given the short timeline. There would

have been no time, she explained, to replace staff as required for the turnaround model or to contract with a charter company as required for restart, particularly because of the school's remote location and the difficulty of recruiting staff and other providers to the district. Closure was also not an option because the district has only one elementary school and few buildings large enough to house new schools.

Still, replacing the principal as required in the transformation model was a challenge, Sharrett said. "The grant gave us no time and had no respect for timelines or legal obligations and notifications. We were lucky the way it worked out. It could have put us in court for a long time." Sharrett said she learned of the need to replace the principal the last week of April 2010, when it was too late to provide contractual due process. However, the elementary principal, who was on a continuing contract, agreed to become the school improvement director for the district. In 2011-12, this position was eliminated, and the former principal became the instructional coach at the high school.

Participants all agreed that ARRA SIG funding brought big changes to the school. Although there had been ongoing effort to improve the curriculum and climate, prior to the ARRA SIG participants noted a lack of resources and focus. "Before the grant, our school improvement efforts seemed very disorganized," said Liesa Anderson, a former teacher who is now the instructional coach at Lakeside. When we had turnover of principals or administration, they would come in with their own ideas and try to implement them, but it didn't always feel like we were headed in the right direction. Now we know where we're headed. We're clear on that picture. It's just provided us that foundation and the framework that we needed. We were lacking that before,"

Additional staff and planning time focused on curriculum and school climate change.

Lakeside's grant has brought several new support positions to the district. "I call it building a bigger boat," said Sharrett. These positions and other grant activities were designed to focus mostly on the elementary school but also to help the secondary 7-12 school. "You can't tear things apart, you know, in a district like ours. You have to look at the whole," Sharrett noted.

As shown in the table on the next page, the grant originally brought three new positions to the district, but these positions were combined for the 2011-12 school year. Participants said this change helped focus the reform efforts in each building. "It was muddy as a staff last year," Anderson said. "What did that person do? What were this person's responsibilities? What was each job like? So, it felt like we didn't get as much benefit out of the positions as we might have if we were to separate each position into one building."

ARRA SIG-funded positions in Lakeside Elementary

2010-11	2011-12
<p>School Improvement Director (1 FTE) Oversees all district improvement efforts</p> <p>Instructional Coach (0.8 FTE) Models and observes instruction in classrooms, provides professional development</p> <p>Community Coordinator (0.5 FTE) Provides outreach to parents and assistance in improving school climate</p>	<p>Elementary and Secondary Instructional Coaches (2 FTE) Model and observe instruction in classrooms and provide professional development, outreach to parents, and assistance in improving school climate</p>

FTE = Full-time equivalent

ARRA SIG supported additional school improvement efforts including the following:

- ***Five all-staff professional development days.*** These were furlough days bought back by the ARRA SIG grant in which the staff met to align their curriculum with common core standards.
- ***A new reading curriculum.*** Staff adopted a new reading curriculum and worked to align instruction throughout the school.
- ***A full-day “solutions” class.*** Expanding on a previously used strategy, staff were shuffled to dedicate an all-day classroom with a teacher and paraprofessional to provide the following supports:
 - Four-week instructional units for students with intensive, ongoing behavior problems
 - Shorter-term instruction for students who need to be temporarily removed from their regular classroom
 - Lunch reflection for students who need to reflect on their behavior problems during regular classes
- ***Master scheduling.*** In contrast to past practice, in which each teacher had more flexible scheduling, the school now has a more cohesive master schedule with the following features:
 - Classes take place at predictable times for students, as well as for parents and administrators visiting classrooms.
 - Reading occurs earlier in the day for younger students when they are more rested.
 - Reading is consistently taught for 90 minutes a day.
 - Time is set aside for differentiated instruction in small-groups based on students’ skill levels.
 - Less time is wasted and the requirement of extending learning time for the transformation model is met.

Finally, the Idaho State Department of Education is providing a variety of supports to the school through the state's ARRA SIG funding. Participants particularly appreciated the state's capacity builders, who work with building and school leadership teams to keep the grant on track. "Our capacity builder has been a great resource," Anderson said. "She's always helpful and shares, 'Have you thought about this? What else might you try?' trying to get us to be more reflective in our practice."

The state's WISE tool was also praised by participants, although they noted that using the tool initially was difficult. The tool is an online system for choosing and tracking progress on a number of school improvement indicators and is required for both ARRA SIG plans and school improvement plans under NCLB in Idaho. "I think that it's useful," said Monique English, the new Lakeside principal. "But, I think in the reality of paperwork, it's a time cruncher. It's definitely one of those things that once you get used to using it, and you're doing it, the paperwork part is less of a burden."

Participants said ARRA SIG has improved climate.

While the school made some progress in achievement on state tests last year, the primary success mentioned by all study participants was improved school climate, in terms of both student engagement and staff collaboration. "Kids are more engaged," Anderson said. "And, I think changing our curriculum has helped that process. We're very intentional, and I think that's the biggest key."

Principal Monique English called ARRA SIG "the backbone of our school improvement" and said it provided the resources staff needed to be more successful and work as a team. "I just think we made huge gains last year. The building feels like it made a 180 degree turn, compared to how it felt last year. That's exciting."

Participants see challenges ahead.

Despite early successes, study participants anticipated challenges ahead. These include the potential for staff turnover, the move to a new building, and the sustainability of the instructional coach positions after the grant ends.

"We tend to have a revolving door for staff even though it's been a little better in the last two years due to the budget crisis," Sharrett said. She explained that layoffs in other urban and suburban districts meant fewer positions to tempt her staff members, who often live far from the school. "When people have to drive 100 miles a day to teach or be an administrator, I think it's probably pretty safe to say that they've always got their eye out for a job closer to home." In the future, the district could lose some of the staff who benefited from ARRA SIG, Sharrett feared.

Another challenge ahead is the new elementary building the district will be getting in the middle of the 2011-12 school year. Although the levy for the new building failed, the district is going ahead with the construction with state help because the old building was declared an "imminent hazard" by inspectors. English believes that the building's up-to-date construction will be an incentive for teachers but fears the change will be temporarily disruptive. "As great as it's going to be, moving into the new building is going to be challenging," English said, noting that she and

the leadership team are in the process of planning the transition. “There’s going to need to be a lot of structures put into place and time to teach the kids new routines as well as the teachers.”

Finally, district and school staff did not know whether the instructional coach positions would continue to be funded after ARRA SIG money ends. Sharrett’s plan was to use state and/or tribal funds to keep the instructional coaches. However, she noted, “That funding’s unpredictable, and you can’t really count on it.”

Wilder Elementary School (Non-Recipient)

Wilder School District

School Improvement Efforts in a Small Rural School Without ARRA SIG

Wilder Elementary is similar in many ways to Lakeside Elementary, discussed above, but Wilder did not receive an ARRA SIG grant. One of just two schools in the Wilder School District, Wilder Elementary serves 212 students in grades kindergarten through 6 in a rural, farming community with many migrant workers about 40 miles east of Boise. About 88% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (an indicator of poverty). About 85% of the school’s students are Latino, 14% are white, and 1% are African American. English language learners (ELLs) make up slightly more than half the student population (56%). The majority of these students speaks Spanish as a first language and come from families who have emigrated from Mexico. About 12% of students are identified as students with disabilities.

Initially, Wilder Elementary applied for ARRA SIG funding but ultimately did not receive an award. District officials said they were told by state officials to revise their application but declined to do so. The Title I school was originally eligible due to low student achievement. When invited to apply for the grant, Wilder was in year 4 of school improvement under NCLB. A year later, without the assistance of an ARRA SIG, Wilder met all state targets through safe harbor. The table below gives more detail about student achievement on state tests in Wilder.

Percentage of Wilder Elementary School students in grades 3 through 6 scoring proficient on state tests, school years 2009-10 and 2010-11

Student subgroup	Reading (State AYP target 85.6% proficient)		Math (State AYP target 83.0% proficient)	
	2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11
All students	71.7%	83.3%	72.3%	79.7%
Latino	70.9%	85.3%	71.6%	79.6%
White	NA	NA	NA	NA
Economically disadvantaged	71.7%	83.3%	72.3%	79.7%

Table reads: On the state reading test administered in school year 2009-10, 71.7% of all students at Wilder Elementary scored at or above the proficient level—below the state target of 85.6% that must be met for this group to make AYP. This group nevertheless made AYP under NCLB’s safe harbor provision. On tests administered in 2010-11, the percentage of proficient students in reading rose to 83.3%, enabling this group to again make AYP under safe harbor.

NA: Too few students per grade to report.

Source: Idaho Department of Education Report Cards <http://apps.sde.idaho.gov/AYP/Home/Select>.

Current school improvement efforts began several years ago in Wilder.

According to staff, efforts began about five years ago with the hiring of current principal Jeff Dillon and intensified with curricular changes about three years ago. As a 14-year veteran of the school, Lynette Rivers, now the new intervention specialist, called efforts before Principal Dillon “a real struggle” due to a revolving door for principals. Prior to Dillon, the school had seven principals in 14 years. “Now we finally have got somebody that’s been here for five years, and we’ve brought in our experts from Boise State in math and reading.”

The experts Rivera is referring to include Mary Ann Cahill and Anne Gregory from Boise State University in English language arts and Tom Farley, an independent math and science consultant. Before working with the consultants, Dillon said, the school had no universally agreed upon curriculum. Cahill calls the new research-based English language arts curriculum “a blended approach” that teachers and consultants developed together. “Now we use Reading A-Z, which is a leveled reading program, and the Fountas and Pinnell phonics program.” This approach is supplemented by trade books and instructional strategies from Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), a national program designed to increase language development for English language learners while simultaneously teaching them the academic content their peers are learning.

“I came on board with the same issues that literacy was having, the absence of curriculum,” noted Farley, who said that four years ago math was a walk through the textbook and science often nonexistent. He also worked with teachers to create common expectations and practices. “Our math curriculum is now, and has been for this year, tied tightly to the common core standards, so that we can do a better job of tracking what we expect kids to know and be able to do here in Wilder.” In both English language arts and math, local assessments, given several times a semester, help teachers track students’ progress and adapt and develop instruction.

Much of the curricular work takes place during two-hour weekly Wednesday afternoon professional development meetings for all staff. These meetings are continuing to hone teachers’ skills in the new curriculum and help teachers reach students of all levels through Response to Intervention (RTI), a national approach to early identification and remediation of learning difficulties. “We’re learning how we can take strategies from that professional development and use it in our classrooms with kids of all different levels. I mean, we have kids in 2nd grade that are [reading at] kindergarten level, so we have to learn to adapt and work with all of those kids,” said Rivera, who praised the professional development for raising both teachers’ expectations of students and staff morale.

These changes did not come easily for all staff. Once the English language arts and math consultants were on board, they and the principal began observing teachers weekly, so that many teachers were being observed and given feedback for improvement up to three times a week. Some were put on official one-year improvement plans. In response to continued poor student performance, said the district worked in multiple ways to change the staff, said Superintendent Daniel Arriola, “We started to really target attrition through retirements and/or resignations and/or nonrenewal of contracts focused on effective classroom teaching for our students and to

counter the excuse that our kids cannot achieve, our parents don't care because their poor," he said. Administrators estimated that about half of the staff left due to unwillingness to participate in the new initiatives.

"I think at first it was kind of shocking," Rivera said of the staff changes, but she noted that those who left the school were "the ones that weren't willing to change and adapt." Ultimately, she agreed with the administration that the change was for the best. "We've got these new teachers in, and they're willing to work hard and do the best for our kids. So, now we have a much better staff morale than we've ever had."

Wilder decided not to pursue ARRA SIG.

With encouragement from officials at the Idaho State Department of Education, Wilder initially submitted an application for an ARRA SIG that would have continued and enhanced the reforms already in place in the school. The state rejected the application and suggested revisions. District and school administrators said these revisions would not work at Wilder, especially the changes that administrators perceived as requirements to adopt a more scripted, state-approved curriculum, to use state experts rather than the current consultants, and to replace the principal. "I felt that we were doing what we should be doing with the dollars we were already receiving through all of the federal programs," explained Arriola. "We had our partnership with Boise State, we had our partnership with Tom Farley in math/science, and I felt we had turned the corner. So, I was not open to proceeding with the grant. It was somewhat tense at times."

Despite a lack of ARRA SIG funding, administrators and consultants have worked to implement many key aspects of their grant plan. "We just used the funds we had. We sat down with the superintendent and our budget and said, 'Look, okay, what's it going to take to get done what we need to get done?'" explained Dillon. The table below shows key elements of school improvement in the grant and their current level of implementation.

Key elements of Wilder's ARRA SIG application and current implementation status

Element in original ARRA SIG application	Current implementation status
Year-round school (to correspond with many students' winter celebrations in Mexico, which are longer than the current vacation time, and to reduce the lost learning time during the three-month summer vacation)	Not implemented
Two intervention specialists	Fully implemented in 2010-11 (two intervention specialists); partially implemented in 2011-12 (one specialist)
Continue two English language arts consultants and one math/science consultant	Implemented
Full-time elementary principal with no other administrative duties	Partially implemented (full-time for half of 2010-11; half-time principal, half-time federal programs director for the other part of 2010-11; and three-quarters time principal for 2011-12)
Full-time coach for English language learner (ELL) instruction	Partially implemented (English language arts consultants help with ELL instruction)
Hands-on math lab materials	Not implemented
Class size reduction	Fully implemented

Note: Wilder Elementary initially applied for but did not receive an ARRA SIG award. The elements in the left column were included in the improvement plan in the school's application. The right column shows the implementation status of these elements at the time of CEP's study.

While no one interviewed for this study regretted the decision not to continue the grant application process, all agreed that the application process had been time-consuming and ultimately unsatisfying. Dillon estimated staff spent about 250 hours on the application. Teachers and parents were included in the process.

Participants saw early successes.

All participants cited steady growth in student achievement as an indication of the success of their efforts. “Our principal showed us where we were four years ago with our state tests and where we’ve come. I mean we have to be doing something right to have such huge gains,” said Rivera.

The other success all participants noted was the improvement in the teaching staff. “The level of professionalism among the teachers has changed dramatically,” said consultant Mary Ann Cahill. “That first year, we felt like we were running group therapy sessions, because they still had so much animosity. Now, they see themselves as professionals. They are proud of what they’ve done, and they treat each other with respect.”

Anticipated challenges include working with the state, moving to inclusion for special education, and working within their rural setting.

Like many districts in Idaho in school improvement under NCLB, Wilder works with a state capacity builder to create a school improvement plan using the WISE tool. Delays in processing this plan and differences in beliefs about school improvement left little room for meaningful state input. Farley called the rewriting the district is currently doing “sentence engineering,” implying that the school’s plans will not change in important ways to meet the state requirements.

Wilder also faces difficulty moving to an inclusive model of special education, a nationally encouraged model of serving as many special education students within the regular classroom as possible rather than pulling these students out of the classroom for remedial instruction. Because of the district’s size, it does not have a special education administrator. Instead, its special education teachers are employed and supervised by the Canyon-Owhyee School Service Agency (COSSA) which provides similar services to five rural Idaho districts. Dillon said the school is still struggling to implement inclusion. “Last year, we said to the special education teachers, ‘You will be in the classroom with the students.’ And every time I turned around, they’re pulling kids out, pulling kids out. This year, once again, I said, ‘You’re going to be in the classroom with the kids. But, sure enough, I turn my head and, boom, I hear they’re coming out of the classroom again. It’s like holding a bubble underwater.’”

In general, participants said Wilder faces unique challenges due to its rural setting. While Wilder has always served a low-income population, administrators feared that with statewide economic difficulties, their student population would face even more economic challenges and become even more mobile as families struggle to find work. “Poverty’s driving our families out,” Dillon noted. “Last year I tracked the kids that left and the kids that come in; 30% of our student body

changed. Also, when I looked at those students, of the kids that left our building, 90% of those kids were at grade level. Of the kids we received, only 30% were at grade level.”

Wilder’s rural setting also means that many teachers do not live in the community, and administrators did have some worries about losing good teachers to other districts in the future. “I think what’s helped Wilder a lot in the last couple years is the economic downturn,” noted Cahill, “because new teachers can’t get jobs in Boise and Meridian, which are the big places.” So, while an economic upturn would be good for Wilder’s families, it would increase the employment options for teachers.

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