Successful Interventions for Underachieving Students

A Synthesis of Research on What Works In High-Performing/High-Poverty Schools

“Roots to Roadmaps”
Castleton Center for Schools

Castleton, VT

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Successful Interventions for Underachieving Students

How Are We Doing?

Validate Challenge to Improve

Who Are You?

Teachers
Principals
Instructional Coaches/School-based Support
District Office/Superintendents/School Boards
State Dept./Regional Offices/Universities/Consultants

Participant Outcomes

- Emerge with a substantially enhanced knowledge of what works for underachieving students living in poverty.
- Be compelled to take informed action to better meet the needs of their underachieving students.
- Network with colleagues engaged in improvement of high poverty schools
- Develop an awareness of high performing/high poverty (HP/HP) schools that demographically compare with their own setting.
Research on High Poverty / High Performing Schools

- 18 Studies / Reports / Data Analyses
- Representing Thousands of Schools Nationwide
- What They Did
- How They Sustain Remarkable Results

High Performing / High Poverty Schools: Common Characteristics

- Caring Relationships
- High Expectations and Support
- Commitment to Equity
- Professional Accountability for Learning
- Courage and Will to take Action

When I Turn 50

“When I’m 50 I will be married and I will have two kids and I will make it a point not to be like the other men I know. I will help my wife raise my kids and I will be a good Daddy. I will get myself a good job and buy my kids everything that they need. I am going to work at a store and be the manager. I am going to be very nice to people and help people who need help. I am only going to be married once. I am going to have a nice life.”

Victor R., Grade 4

Closing the Achievement Gap

Lessons from Illinois’ Golden Spike High Performing Schools

Source: Education Trust analysis of data from National School-Level Data Assessment Score Database.

Poverty vs. Achievement in Illinois Elementary Schools

Source: Education Trust analysis of data from National School-Level Data Assessment Score Database.

Data are from 2002.
Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School
Saint Paul, MN

2005 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

School Demographics

- **Student Population:**
  - Total Student Population (PK-6th): 375 Students
  - 40% African-American
  - 25% Hispanic
  - 20% Southeast Asian
  - 13% Caucasian
  - 2% American Indian

- **40% Mobility Index**
  - (Students who enrolled or left Dayton’s Bluff after October 1)

- **91% Free and Reduced Lunch Status**
  - (Income eligibility based on federal poverty guidelines)

- **35% English Language Learner Students**

- **12% Special Education Students**

*Note: Statistics taken from 2008-09 School Year*

Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary

2005 MCA-II Achievement Results


Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary

Improvement Over Time, Grade 5 Math

Lapwai Elementary

Lapwai, ID

2005 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

- 312 Students K-6
- 79% Low-income
- 84% Native American
- Outperformed the state in 4th grade reading and math 2003 – 2006
- Native American students outperformed the state in 4th grade reading and math 2003 – 2006

Idaho Department of Education: http://www.sde.state.id.us/Dept/, 2008

Making Gains at Lapwai

Grade 4


“If it can happen at Lapwai...it can happen anywhere.”

Brenna Terry
Lapwai School Board Member
2006

Taft Elementary School

Boise, ID

2003 Blue Ribbon Award Recipient
William H. Taft Elementary

- 330 Students Grades k-6
- 72% Low Income
- 18% ELL/Refugee
- 9% Hispanic

Osmond A. Church School

- 1,141 students in grades PK-8
- 97% Low-Income
- 41% Asian
- 35% African American
- 21% Latino

Making Refugee Students Welcome

“When 58 refugee students speaking little English were transferred to this urban elementary school, the principal set up a team-building summer camp.”

Kathleen Budge and William Parrett
April 2009
Port Chester Middle School

Port Chester, NY

2006 Dispelling the Myth Award Winner

- 759 students in grades 5-8
- 65% Latino
- 12% African-American
- 64% Low-Income


Port Chester Middle School

English Language Arts 2009

- Grade 6
- Grade 7
- Grade 8

New York Department of Education, 2009

Granger High School

Granger, WA

- 390 Student Grades 9-12
- 84% Hispanic
- 92% Low Income
- 100% Parent Attendance / Student Led Conferences
- 91% Graduation Rate

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2009
Granger High School Improvement Over Time
2001
- Graduation Rate 30%
- 10th Grade Reading Proficiency 20%
- 10th Grade Writing Proficiency 8%
- 10th Grade Math Proficiency 6%
- Parent Conference Participation 10%

2007
- Graduation Rate 91%
- 10th Grade Reading Proficiency 80%
- 10th Grade Writing Proficiency 74%
- 10th Grade Math Proficiency 46%
- Parent Conference Participation 100%

“How many effective schools would you have to see...
...to be persuaded of the educability of poor children? If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background...
We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us.”
Ron Edmonds... 1979

Today...in 2010...
“WE KNOW WHAT WORKS IN EDUCATION. THE RESEARCH IS PROLIFIC”

“Amazingly, then, the question today is not about what works, but about why we do not implement what we know works in all schools for all kids?”

Self Evaluation Rubric: Eight Components of High Performing, High Poverty Schools

How Are We Doing?

“WE KNOW WHAT WORKS IN EDUCATION. THE RESEARCH IS PROLIFIC”
**It Takes Skill and Will**

Swift, dramatic improvement requires an encounter with the ‘brutal facts’—those awkward, unpleasant truths that organizations prefer not to address—or even talk about.


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**Building Leadership Capacity**

- Do we have a data system that works for classroom and school leaders?
- Are we working to eliminate policies and practices that manufacture low achievement?
- Have we extended learning time for underachieving students?
- Have we reorganized time to better support professional learning?

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**Mini-Case: “Lily”**

Promise Elementary (66% low-income)

Lily (tenured) loves kids. She has wanted to be a teacher all her life. Now in her fifth year as a second grade teacher she continues to struggle with low-performing students. The “high-end” kids do well and achieve expected gains. Students that enter her class behind in reading and math almost always exit at comparable levels. Lily’s organizational management skills improve modestly each year. Parents like her, as do her colleagues. She works hard; just doesn’t seem to progress.
Building Leadership Capacity

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- Have we reorganized time to better support professional learning?

Reorganize Time, Space, and Transitions

- Must Increase Quality Instructional Time for Low Achieving Students
- Must Provide Time for Collaboration
- Must Ensure Successful Transitions for Every Student

"We tried to 'tinker' our way to success...it didn’t work...we simply had to change the way we do business."

Where’s the time for all of this?

The Full Year Calendar

Less Summer Vacation
Less Weekends, Holidays, & Summer Vacation

Less Professional Development Days & Early Dismissal/Parent Conferences

Less Class Picnic, Class Trip, Thanksgiving Feast, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hannukkah, Awards, Assemblies, Athletics & Concerts

Less State and District Testing

Bottom Line:
Roughly 13-15 8-hr Days of Instruction Per Subject Per Year

Go Back...Find The Time
- Get creative...support professional learning that does not distract from instructional time
- Reduce scheduled / unscheduled interruptions
- Schedule testing wisely
- Extend learning...day / week / summer
- Stop releasing students early
- Conduct parent / student led conferences outside school day
Summer School...

- Every summer for underachievers
- Regular communication between parent / school
- Targeted needs based instruction
- Curriculum / aligned to school year needs
- Provide for daily nutritional needs
- Weekly field trips / recreational activities
- Minimum of 3 weeks – more is better
- Plan for transition / remaining weeks of summer

Source: Borman 2007; Barr & Parrett, 2007

Building Leadership Capacity

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Focus On Learning

- Develop / Support Communities of Practice
- Develop / Support Teacher Leadership
- Use Data to Identify and Prioritize Needs
- Engage ALL Teachers in Collaborative Analysis of Instruction and Student Work

“We completely underestimate the importance of OUR learning. Now it drives almost everything we do.”

Teachers Make A Difference

- It takes two years for a student with an ineffective teacher to catch up.
- With two ineffective teachers in a row, a student may never catch up.
- A student living in poverty is 5 times more likely to have an inexperienced/ inadequately trained teacher

William Sanders

High Performing/High Poverty Schools: Common Characteristics

- Caring Relationships
- High Expectations and Support
- Professional Accountability for Learning
- Courage and Will to Take Action
Compelling Conclusions

*HP/HP Schools...*
- Build Leadership Capacity
- Focus on Learning: Student, Professional, System
- Foster a Safe, Healthy, and Support Environment

Any school can overcome the debilitating effects of poverty...
...demographics do not equal destiny!

We know how to improve *any* school...

*Every* school can become a high performing school

Teachers Make *The* Difference!
...They think ... we can learn this **** !!

What do we choose to do?
...our students are waiting
Successful Interventions for Underachieving Students

Focus on Learning

- Do we have a common instructional framework to guide curriculum, teaching, assessment, and the learning climate?
- Do we have common assessments and embrace assessment literacy?
- Have we ensured that all students are proficient in reading?
- Do we provide targeted interventions?

Focus On 1 Learning

- Establish A Common Instructional Framework Aligned to State / District Standards
- Support Grade Level/Departmental Collaborative Teams
- Set Achievement Benchmarks for Every Student

“It takes two years for a student with an ineffective teacher to catch up.”
Focus On Learning

- A Check Up...Not An Autopsy
- Confront Brutal Facts
- Build Data Proficiency
- Assessment for Learning
- Student Led Conferences

“If schools use data, establish goals, monitor progress, and meet regularly to collaborate, immediate and dramatic gains can be expected.”

Common Assessments & Assessment Literacy

- Teachers Understand Data
- Teachers Agree on Benchmarks and Common Assessments
- Teachers Use Assessment FOR Learning
- Teach—Assess—Meet Regularly to Discuss and Monitor
- Students Understand Goals / Targets

Student Led Conferences

- Getting clear on the philosophy and purpose
- Defining teacher, student, parent, administrator and support
- Selecting the most appropriate format
- Preparing students to lead
- Preparing parents and colleagues to participate
- Organizing the details
- Anticipating and handling unique situations
- Evaluating the conferences

Focus on Learning

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Reading And Poverty

- 61% of low-income families have no books in their homes
- 43% of adults with the lowest level of literacy proficiency live in poverty
- 55% of children have an increased interest in reading when given books at an early age.
- Children with a greater variety of reading material in the home are more creative, imaginative and proficient in reading. They are also on a better path toward educational growth and development.
- There is only one age-appropriate book for every 300 children in low-income neighborhoods, compared to 13 book per child in middle-income neighborhoods.

Elementary Students At Risk

- Reading One Year Below Grade Level
- Have Been Retained
- Attends School With Many Other Poor Students
- Low Socio-Economic Background
- Chance of graduating from high school near zero
- Increasing Achievement of At-Risk Students at Each Grade Level

Effective Reading Programs for Middle and High Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis

Best Evidence Encyclopedia
www.bestevidence.org
www.bestevidence.org/words/mha_read_sep_16_2008_sum.pdf

Instructional Focus On Reading

We will never teach all our students to read if we do not teach our students who have the greatest difficulties to read. Another way to say this is: Getting to 100% requires going through the bottom 20%.


All kids...
...want to learn how to read!

Reading is when you know what sounds the letters make and then you say them fast. They come out words, and then you are reading.
R. J., age 5

You can read when you look at car and then you look at can and know you drive one and open the other one and there is only one eensy line different.
Shelby, age 6

It’s when you read and nobody tells you the words. But you shouldn’t do it in the bathroom. My daddy does and my mom yells at him.
Paulette, age 5
Words go in your eyes and come out your mouth...but it’s not like puking or anything. You say the words and that means you’re reading.  
Loren, age 4

Mini Case: “Dee Dee”
Northland Middle (44% Low Income)
Dee Dee has taught 9th grade technical reading and writing for “ever”. Few students like the class – many decide to pay a $120 fee to take the required course online from a statewide digital learning academy. Long tenured, Dee Dee does the minimum. She never volunteers for activities and doesn’t seem to have much passion, if any, for her teaching, the kids, her colleagues or the school. She says she has 6 more years to retirement. Her kids earn A’s, B’s, and C’s as long as they go to class and turn in assignments. When they take the 10th grade State Reading and Writing test….30% of them every year don’t make proficiency.

Foster a Safe, Supportive and Healthy Learning Environment

- Have we ensured safety?
- Have we developed an accurate understanding of the influence of poverty on student learning?
- Have we fostered caring relationships and strengthened the bond between students and schools?
- Have we made an authentic effort to engage parents, families, and our community?

High Expectations and Support
A Culture of Poverty? Reality or Not?

- Oscar Lewis (1961) The Children of Sanchez

“...These studies raise a variety of conclusions about poverty. But on this they agree: There is no such thing as a culture of poverty. Differences in values and behaviors among poor people are just as great as those between poor and wealthy people.” –Gorski (2008)
High Expectations and Support
Confronting Common Myths

- Poverty is an issue that solely effects people of color.
- People in poverty are unmotivated and have weak work ethics.
- With government assistance people can get out of poverty.
- Education, as a way out of poverty, is readily accessible to everyone.
- People living in poverty are uninvolved in their children’s learning, largely because they do not value education.
- People living in poverty are linguistically deficient.
- People living in poverty tend to abuse drugs and alcohol more than people in other socioeconomic classes.

Another Approach...

- Living in poverty does not inherently result in a shared culture.
- Poverty affects “intervening factors” that in turn affect outcomes for people (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997)

Understanding Poverty and Learning

- Forms of Capital: Human, Social, Cultural
- Health and well-being
- Language and Literacy Development
- Material Resources
- Mobility

Sticks and Stones...

How do we talk about poverty in schools?

- The words/labels we use matter
- The danger of a deficit perspective
- Separating children’s developing sense of self from their living conditions

Address Student Mobility

- Access and Maintain Accurate Data
- Be Ready
  - Departures—Counseling / Exit Interviews
  - Arrivals—Welcome packets / Diagnostics / Appropriate Placements
  - Catch up—Tutoring / Extended Day
- Build Relationships—Peers / Parents
- Frequent Communication
- Address Transportation Issues
- Engage All Staff—School-wide Support

Underachieving Students Living in Poverty Need...

- High Expectations
- Early Intervention
- Needs based “catchup” plans
- Intensive Reading / Math Instruction
- Extra Instructional Time
- Relevant Rigorous Well Targeted Curriculum
- Parent Education / Home Support
- Summer Programs...Nutrition / Targeted Instruction, Acceleration / Enrichment
- Plans for Mobility / Transition / Behavior
- Alternative Schools / Programs
Foster a Safe, Supportive and Healthy Learning Environment

- Have we ensured safety?
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- Have we fostered caring relationships and strengthened the bond between students and schools?
- Have we made an authentic effort to engage parents, families, and our community?

It’s All About Relationships

- Engage Parents as Authentic Partners
- Hold Frequent Meetings with Food/Childcare
- Offer Parent Education
- Support Learning at Home
- Conduct Home Visits / Caring Outreach
- Initiate Student Led Conferences
- Initiate Student Advisories
- Join the National Network of Partnership Schools
  www.csos.jhu.edu

Initiate Student Advisories

“Take care of them like they were your own.”

- Faculty / Student Ratio—20:1
- 30 Minutes / Day – 4 Days / Week
- Four-year Commitment
- Reading, Math, Portfolios, Homework, Careers
- Performance-based Graduation Requirements

“It’s now cool to do well at Granger H.S.”

Compelling Conclusions
**HP/HP Schools...**

Build Leadership Capacity

Focus on Learning: Student, Professional, System

Foster a Safe, Healthy, and Support Environment

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We must combat hopelessness... and instill in every child the self-confidence that they can achieve and succeed in school.

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What under-achieving children living in poverty want at school more than anything... ...A caring relationship with an adult

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Teachers Make The Difference!

“...I had to get that teacher off my back!”

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What do we choose to do? ...our students are waiting

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For PDF version of “Successful Interventions for Underachieving Students” handout, please visit [http://csi.boisestate.edu/](http://csi.boisestate.edu/) and click on the “Resources” link.
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- ✓ Primary recommendation or conclusion from the study
- * Noted strategy or practice from the participating school(s) or district(s)
High Performing/High Poverty Schools: Common Characteristics

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Family

District

School

Classroom

Community

Caring Relationships

High Expectations and Support

Commitment to Equity

Professional Accountability for Learning

Courage and Will to take Action

NORMS, VALUES & BELIEFS


Focus on Learning (Student, Professional, System)

Build Leadership Capacity

Foster Healthy, Safe, Supportive Learning Environments

ACTIONS
Against All Odds

Cloud is a confident and successful 7th grader. He is getting good grades and scored at the proficient level on his latest state reading test. But for this student at Lapwai Middle School in Lapwai, Idaho, things weren't always so optimistic.

As a 4th grader, Cloud was reading at a 2nd-grade level. He didn't like school, was oppositional in his classroom and hated to read. He spent many recesses in detention instead of playing football on the playground.

Then good things began to happen that were to make a big difference. At school, teachers studied student achievement data and used it to make instructional decisions. They initiated a high-performance reading program and collaborated to share ideas on what was working best. Cloud and his classmates increased their reading time in school to 90 minutes per day. At home, his parents encouraged him to have a positive attitude and read with him each night. Within a year, he gained two grade levels. Two years later, he continues to read at grade level. Cloud's entire perspective about school has changed.

A Success Story
Lapwai Elementary School, located on the Nez Perce Reservation in northern Idaho, serves a K-6 population of 302 students, 84 percent of whom are Native Americans. Seventy-nine percent of the students live at or below the poverty level. The remarkable success of this school in teaching minority children represents just one of dozens of schools nationwide that have reversed a history of underachievement and low performance.

To accomplish this feat, the superintendent of the Lapwai School District, Harold Ott, established what he called "a different approach to the daily business of educating our students." Eight components of improvement clearly drove the success this school accomplished.

In 1999, only 16 percent of Lapwai's 3rd graders were achieving at or above the state's proficiency level in reading and only 17 percent were doing so in math. Dissatisfied with a tradition of low performance, a team of teachers and administrators received school board support to aggressively address the achievement of their students.

The staff started from a position of shared core values, characterized by collaboration, determination, an openness to consider dramatic changes and a relentless energy to help children achieve. They studied school data and crafted a course of action that set measurable goals focused on achievement, attendance and community engagement and satisfaction. The staff expanded the leadership team by adding community members and high school students and embarked on a complex agenda.

The staff also secured significant external funding from the state and federal governments and a charitable foundation to support their program improvements. The additional funds represented an increase of approximately 10 percent to Lapwai's annual budget of $5 million. They included 3-year awards from the J.A. & Kathryn Albertson Foundation ($1.2 million), a $150,000 Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant and a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant ($700,000).
Well Positioned
First, they tackled their curriculum to align it to state standards and assessments. They made time for this work by adjusting the daily schedule to gain two hours of common planning and professional development each Friday. They worked with the school board to establish policy to guide the district's efforts to monitor and manage their newly aligned curriculum.

The leadership team focused its work on the implementation of effective reading and math programs and interventions. They initiated full-day kindergarten, reduced class sizes, initiated looping, extended afterschool tutoring and increased daily instructional time in reading and math for all students. The teachers and administrators participated in assessment-literacy-learning teams, which focused on both the assessment of learning and, more importantly, assessment for learning. Content benchmarks and clear learning targets became the norm.

As these improvements and interventions took effect, the leadership team shifted its effort to build district and classroom capacity to better use data. Through grade-level and schoolwide professional development activities, Lapwai educators became both proficient and comfortable in allowing data to guide decisions. As the state implemented a new testing program, the school district was well positioned to make immediate use of the additional student performance data.

The team also focused on improving community collaboration, engagement and satisfaction. The superintendent launched a monthly Lapwai Educational Summit. Held in the Nez Perce executive tribal chambers, this group of community leaders, parents, educators and students gathered for one morning each month to consider progress, offer input and focus on engaging the community in improving achievement and school success for the students of Lapwai.

A multicultural coordinator was hired to work closely with the students' homes and families. Enhancing cultural understanding and appreciation through teaching Nez Perce language and history also bolstered their work. Through these and other efforts, Lapwai Elementary succeeded in connecting more parents and community members to the school and more educators to the community.

Most importantly, the administrators stayed their course and maintained relentless commitment. The results were impressive. In spring 2004, 91 percent of 3rd-grade students (compared to 16 percent in 1999) and 89 percent of 4th-grade (versus 32 percent in 1999) now perform at or above state proficiency in math. Seventy-three percent of 3rd-grade students (17 percent in 1999) and 77 percent of 4th-grade (27 percent in 1999) now perform at proficient or advanced in reading. Eighty-two percent of Lapwai kindergartners now read at or above grade level.

Student attendance has increased five percentage points to 94 percent. Parental satisfaction has increased dramatically. Last March 79 percent of voters said yes to the community's first large bond in more than 20 years for building a secondary school.

Each of these gains and accomplishments resulted from five years of focused leadership and relentless work by the Lapwai superintendent and staff. Between 1999 and 2004, the superintendent did not turn over and the building principals have remained in place as well as most of the teaching staff. Access to additional funds permitted the district to hire its first curriculum director who continues to date in this role. The school board membership has changed frequently during these years, yet a constant focus on student achievement has remained in place. When school board members have departed through natural attrition, they have consistently been replaced with new members committed to the improvement of learning for Lapwai students.

Eight Components
No silver bullet exists to guide this work. Nonetheless, an emerging pattern of school improvement that encompasses eight essential components of intervention has become common to schools like Lapwai that have reversed low-performance trends.

The components overlap and are fluid. They are present in no common sequence, yet they consistently appear.

- Ensuring effective district and school leadership.

Effectively leading high-poverty/high-minority school districts and schools may well be the most challenging work in public education. Virtually every study regarding schools that are successfully teaching low-achieving poor and minority students emphasizes the importance of focused, data- and results-driven district and school leadership.

Leaders in these districts and schools eliminate failed policies and practices such as retention, tracking, ineffective classroom teaching and misaligned curriculum that continue to produce unacceptable results. They create a climate of shared vision and high expectations for every student.

Leadership focuses on establishing successful interventions (particularly in reading) for low-performing students, establishing specific measurable goals, and developing aggressive timelines to achieve them. Leaders support and participate in the development of professional learning communities. They diligently work to recapture lost time and resources to accommodate necessary restructuring and seek to re-allocate funds to support improvement efforts of priority.

The leadership of the Lapwai Board of Education and district demonstrated each of these characteristics in their successful journey to improve.

- Understanding the culture of poverty.

Children of poverty, particularly minority students, have many cultural and family supports and experiences that enrich and strengthen their resiliency. For these children, the start of school often precipitates a collision of values and cultures. Far too many children arrive at school suffering from poor health, nutrition, inadequate housing and limited vocabularies and language skills.

As in Lapwai, educators must work to better understand the pervasive influences of poverty and to address the specific challenges these families and students bring to school. To accomplish
this work, the superintendent in Lapwai focused early efforts on creating a districtwide culture of caring and open communication with the community. When the superintendent arrived in summer 1999, one of his first actions was to write a letter to all Lapwai households inviting them to drop in and visit his office. Between July 1 and August 31, 83 parents and community members took him up on his offer to discuss what they liked about the school district and what improvements they wanted to see.

These meetings helped create the superintendent’s first action agenda and laid the groundwork for the creation of a monthly Lapwai Educational Summit for parents and community members. These actions also prompted the building administrators and teachers to increase their communication and authentic interactions with Lapwai’s parents and families. The leadership and teaching staff of the Lapwai district clearly demonstrate that to address specific challenges of poverty, one must first establish trusted communication and relationships with parents and families.

- Targeting low-performing students, particularly in reading.

Lapwai’s efforts began with a goal of every student achieving reading proficiency. Students who are behind require access to programs that work, teachers with high expectations and better connections between home and school. This shift in focus and priority requires new or different instructional approaches and changes in the allocation and distribution of resources.

Lapwai’s success with low-performing students has resulted due to a relentless focus on individual student needs followed by the selection and implementation of proven, targeted instructional strategies and interventions. Many of these interventions (such as reading, math and language programs and the curriculum director position) were originally funded externally but now have become part of the general fund operating budget.

- Starting as early as possible and extending instructional time.

In schools like Lapwai, where minority students are achieving proficiency, leadership has increased the instructional time in reading and/or math for their low-performing students. This begins with assessing the school readiness of young children and intervening individually as needed. It continues with providing quality preschool, all-day kindergarten and other targeted strategies for the children that require them.

Once in elementary school, these students will often need additional instructional time in core subjects as provided through looping, extended-day and summer programs. Lapwai provided all three.

- Instituting curriculum and instructional improvements.

Improved schools like Lapwai Elementary vertically align their curricula to articulate with state standards and assessments and ensure that all students are enrolled in rigorous academic programs. They also use assessment data to identify the most effective teachers of underachieving poor children by subject and grade level and invite them to share successful instructional lessons through collaborative planning and lesson study.

- Building data and assessment literacy.

An understanding of how to use data at the classroom level was critical to fostering a culture of assessment literacy at Lapwai Elementary. Teachers collaborated to develop clear targets and assessments to use as sequential subject matter benchmarks. Student data then informed instructional decisions regarding mastery of content.

- Engaging parents, schools and the community.

Schools like Lapwai have sought to create what Gloria Ladson-Billings, author of several books on diversity in schools, refers to as “cultural congruence.” For classroom teachers, this means actively connecting content to social and cultural characteristics and backgrounds of students and their families and eliminating classroom practices that place diverse students at risk.

Lapwai found a direct connection between improving relationships, community support and student achievement.

- Supporting effective teaching.

Teachers must reflect a sincere belief that every student will achieve. Teachers must collaborate to use assessment data to guide professional decisions. They also must create caring environments in which the students and their families feel welcome.

As in Lapwai, teachers can provide a surrogate family atmosphere that encourages comprehensive learning. It is the teacher, especially when supported with the preceding interventions, who will make the critical difference for minority children. As Kati Haycock, director of The Education Trust, emphatically concludes: “Teachers matter a lot.”

**A Replicable Model**

One might question that if substantial improvement in achievement can occur in a school of primarily Native American students, historically the group with one of the lowest graduation rates of any student subgroup, can it occur anywhere?

The Lapwai superintendent believes his primary purpose is to serve as “a messenger of hope” to the students and their families. This message, supported by clear evidence of substantial achievement gains, has permeated the community. A revived sense of hope and vision
for the children of Lapwai, in the words of the superintendent, “has been far more important than any infusion of external funding.”

This shift of community trust and support will continue to sustain Lapwai’s successes. As of fall 2004, only the funding from the 21st Century grant remains, yet student achievement continues to advance.

While Lapwai Elementary has experienced significant gains, the district’s middle and high schools also have progressed. Between 1999 and 2004, Lapwai 10th graders’ reading achievement elevated from 38 percent to 67 percent scoring at the advanced and proficient levels on state-required assessments. During the same time, reading achievement of 8th grade students increased from 35 percent to 53 percent of students scoring proficient or advanced. Language usage has grown to a 66 percent proficiency pass rate for grades 7 through 10.

By design, the early work of improvement focused on the elementary level, building trust and getting families better connected with school. Most external funding was targeted for elementary interventions. The secondary schools have proven more difficult to affect due to the typical circumstances found at this level: content-driven classrooms, diminished home-school connections and the challenges of adolescence.

**Profound Influence**

While the work of school improvement manifests differently in districts and schools, the importance of effectively leading the confluence of the eight components is critical to influencing achievement gains for minority students. The work of Rick Dufour, Michael Fullan, Kati Haycock and Richard Stiggins profoundly complement and influence Lapwai’s progress toward the successful implementation of these components.

Successfully educating underachieving minority students presents a most formidable challenge to public school educators, yet it is not insurmountable. Any school district can attain and sustain these successes if they employ the pattern of improvement components, as did Lapwai, in their classrooms and schools.

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**If you’re leading a diverse school community, shouldn’t your membership organization give you broad perspectives on school leadership?**

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Making Refugee Students Welcome

*Kathleen Budge and William Parrett*

When 58 refugee students speaking little English were transferred to this urban elementary school, the principal set up a team-building summer camp.

"Within five minutes of the bell ringing, classrooms were running smoothly. The kids knew exactly what the expectations were. They came into the classrooms ready to learn."

Loren Cross, a 3rd grade teacher at William Howard Taft Elementary School in Boise, Idaho, marveled at how well the 58 students who'd recently immigrated from many different countries and who spoke 14 different languages successfully transitioned into the "Taft family" last fall. Taft made that transition possible through initiatives tailored to address the challenges refugee students and their families faced as they entered an unfamiliar school. Taft also mastered its own challenges; between spring and fall of 2008, the school, which serves 355 students, went from serving only one English language learner to serving more than 60.

The summer before school opened, these 58 new students had attended Tiger Pride Summer Camp, a two-week nonacademic team-building experience designed to develop a sense of belonging and introduce students to the traditions of their new school. The camp made a tremendous difference in easing students into their new environment. But its success depended on the relationships of mutual trust that teachers had built through summer home visits with families.

A Sudden Transformation

Newly arrived immigrant students have brought dramatic changes to schools like Taft in many urban areas, but Taft's transformation was sudden. When the city of Boise was designated by the federal government as a site for refugee resettlement, Boise School District experienced unprecedented growth in its English language
learner (ELL) population, which grew by 123 percent in the past six years. Families arrived from Sudan, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Liberia, and many other nations. The district now serves 3,352 ELLs who speak 88 languages.

Taft principal Susan Williamson learned in April 2008 that the school district had designated her school as an ELL site. Forty refugee students were slated to be administratively transferred to Taft from other schools in the district by June (and an additional 18 enrolled in September).

These students came from 16 different countries and spoke 14 languages. Their family backgrounds and experiences varied. Some were well-educated in their countries of origin and literate in their languages; others, as the second generation born and raised in a refugee camp, had never consistently attended school.

The teachers, staff, and neighborhood community of Taft are no strangers to challenges. Taft's student body is 73 percent low-income, and when Williamson arrived at the school 10 years ago test scores were low, morale was dismal, and student behavior was out of control. Under her leadership, student achievement increased significantly and Taft became recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School.

Nonetheless, ensuring that a group of newcomers, half of whom had minimal English language proficiency, would achieve at high levels posed a formidable expectation. Some teachers felt apprehensive about sliding back from the school's hard-earned gains and were anxious about their ability to work with English language learners. The district assigned Taft a certified ELL teacher and a paraprofessional and offered the services of an ELL consultant and the director of the district's ELL program. These services helped, but the school knew it would have to put forth effort to forge trusting relationships.

An Antidote to Displacement

With fewer than 45 days remaining in the 2007–08 school year, a small team began taking action to welcome the refugee students. The team learned as much as possible about these youth and their families. It gathered information from the students' former schools and the many agencies that serve the refugee population in Boise.
Using hours typically set aside for faculty meetings and two half-day professional development opportunities, teachers and staff devoured information about the needs of English language learners—and refugees in particular. Teachers continued previously initiated training in sheltered instruction using a model called the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol.¹ The district's ELL program coordinator stepped in to provide additional targeted support, including professional development related to legal issues and terminology, curriculum guidance and supplemental ELL materials, and leads for finding interpreters. Second grade teacher Tracy Zarate was reassigned as Taft's ELL teacher, teaching small groups formed around students' needs and often preteaching vocabulary and important concepts.

To help Taft's current students learn about their new classmates, Fidel Nshombo, a Congolese refugee and a resident of Boise, spoke at a schoolwide assembly in the spring about his experiences. Fidel explained that refugees are different from immigrants in key ways. An immigrant voluntarily leaves his or her country of origin, whereas a refugee is compelled to leave, often fleeing a desperate situation.

Refugees are by definition displaced. For these students and their families, the move to Taft represented another displacement—an uprooting from the school they had initially come to know in Boise, even for a short time. The Taft team understood the importance of fostering a new sense of place and belonging in students.

Taft's 5th graders conducted research on the various countries that the soon-to-arrive students had left. They produced a newsletter called Cultural Connection that they distributed to Taft students and their families. Bulletin boards depicting the countries and cultures of the incoming students lined the hallways, and teachers made frequent links between classroom instruction and these cultures.

Establishing Trust

The team worked diligently to foster communication and relationships with refugee students’ families. After only a handful of parents—many of whom were resistant, fearful, or angry about the transfer to Taft—attended an initial meeting, the team knew it had to actively reach out to build trust. So team members set—and met—a goal to visit each student's home before the refugees were invited to summer camp.
To facilitate these home visits, Robert and Debbie Weisel, founders of CATCH, a local organization that seeks to bridge the gap between schools and refugees, were enlisted. Many refugee families already knew and trusted Robert and Debbie; their involvement paved the way for families to accept overtures from Taft staff. Robert, himself the son of a refugee, is well connected with Boise agencies and networks serving this population. He provided Principal Williamson with what she called "Refugee 101" informal training that greatly advanced her understanding of complex issues related to educating refugees.

During a second round of home visits, Taft staff members gave families a packet of information translated into their native languages and containing a letter of welcome, photographs and names of every Taft staff member, and a collage depicting activities, traditions, and services available at Taft. "The big turnaround in trust came after the home visits," Loren Cross explained.

Many in the Taft family made extraordinary efforts to cement that trust. For example, one refugee parent didn't want his children to walk to school because he feared they would be kidnapped. So Cross and other faculty members walked his children to school and back every day the first week of school; Cross continues to walk with them at least once a week.

**Happy Campers!**

To help students feel part of a community from day one, the team created an intensive introductory summer experience. A summer camp would help students meet new friends, put families at ease, and give Taft's teachers an opportunity to become acquainted with the new students and teach them about schoolwide practices and expectations that were the foundation of Taft's continued success. Williamson recruited Cross to coordinate the half-day camp, and several other teachers and staff members joined the effort.

Planning a two-week summer camp on such a short time line required fiscal ingenuity and partnerships with the local YMCA and parks and recreation programs. Because the school's remaining Title I funds were not enough to operate the camp, the school successfully turned to community partners for funding and volunteers.

The refugee students came to Taft for lunch and a tour of the school in preparation for the camp. Camp staff paired each new student with a chosen student from Taft.
Many of these "buddy" students were selected because they had leadership ability and would be good role models; others were included because they too could benefit from new friendships. Photos of each "buddy pair" were made into buttons and delivered to each new student's home with a reminder about the upcoming camp.

The Tiger Pride camp concentrated on team-building activities, including creative arts, hip-hop dance, African drumming and other music making, physical education, and many team sports. As students rotated through activities, staying in their buddy pairs, the kids bonded.

Speaking different languages presented few barriers to students' burgeoning friendships. They used both hand signals and spoken words to communicate. By the second week, students were joking and laughing with one another.
During the first few weeks of the school year, the camp's success became patently clear. The families seemed much more at ease with their children's impending changes. Tracy Zarate, Taft's ELL teacher, knew the camp was a success when she witnessed new students reminding others of things they had learned in camp. "I have never seen a group of children so enthusiastic and eager about learning," she remarked.

**Ongoing Efforts: Whatever It Takes**

Taft's "whatever it takes" attitude made what could have been a difficult transition for its new students into a smooth success. By doing a quick study on refugee realities and plunging in wholeheartedly to create a welcoming environment, teachers and staff learned many lessons about successfully welcoming a wave of diverse non-
English-speaking students. These lessons included small, practical things like the fact that, in written communications for parents, it’s better to use pictures and symbols or spell out details in simple language (because abbreviations or acronyms lead to confusion), or the importance of knowing siblings or others in the family who can help translate.

The Taft faculty continues outreach to Taft's newest families through ongoing home visits. With the input of a parent—once one of the most resistant to the transfer of her child—the Taft team launched the Tiger Pride Family Learning Academy for the newcomer parents and their children. This parent academy is still going strong, using all volunteers.

Thanks to creative efforts to foster a sense of belonging in vulnerable students, the 2008–09 school year is unfolding better than anyone expected.

Endnote


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William H. Parrett is the Director of the Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies and Professor of Education at Boise State University. He has received international recognition for his work in school improvement, small schools, alternative education, and for his efforts to help youth at-risk. His professional experiences include public school and university teaching, curriculum design, principalships and college leadership, media production, research and publication.

Parrett holds a Ph.D. in Secondary Education from Indiana University. Parrett has served on the faculties of Indiana University, the University of Alaska and Boise State University. As Director of the Boise State University Center for School Improvement & Policy Studies (1996 to present), Parrett coordinates funded projects and school improvement initiatives which currently exceed $7.9 million. His research on reducing achievement gaps and effective schooling practices for youth at risk and low performing schools has gained widespread national recognition.

Parrett is the co-author of, Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools, 2nd edition, (Corwin Press, 2008, Honorable Mention, National Education Book of the Year 2009), The Kids Left Behind: Catching Up the Underachieving Children of Poverty (Solution Tree, 2007), Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools (2003), Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk & Violent Youth (2001), How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work (1997), Hope at Last for At-Risk Youth (1995), Inventive Teaching: Heart of the Small School (1993), The Inventive Mind: Portraits of Effective Teaching (1991), and numerous contributions to national journals and international and national conferences.

Parrett’s media production, Heart of the Country (1998), is a documentary of an extraordinary principal of a village elementary school in Hokkaido, Japan, and the collective passion of the community to educate the heart as well as the mind. Since its release, the production was nominated for the Pare Lorentz Award at the 1999 International Documentary Awards (Los Angeles, CA); has won the Award of Commendation from the American Anthropological Association, a Gold Apple Award for best of category at the National Education Media Network Festival (Oakland, CA), a National CINE Golden Eagle Award (Washington, D.C.), and a Judges’ Award at the 24th Northwest Film Festival (Portland, OR). In addition, Heart of the Country was an invited feature and screened at the Cinema du Reel festival in Paris (1998) and the Margaret Mead Film Festival (1998) in New York City. This work has received critical acclaim for its cinematography and insight into the universal correlates of effective teaching and learning and the power of community participation in public schools.

Parrett has also served as visiting faculty at Indiana University, the University of Manitoba, Oregon State University, Hokkaido University of Education (Japan), Nagoya Gakiun (Japan), Gifu University (Japan) and Heilongjiang University (People’s Republic of China). His consultancies include state departments, boards of education, state and regional service providers and school districts in 41 states and 10 nations.

Throughout his career, Parrett has worked to improve the educational achievement of all children and youth, particularly those less advantaged. Toward this goal, as director of the CSI&PS, he has overseen the acquisition of over twenty million dollars in external funding to create programs and interventions designed to help educators, schools, communities, and universities benefit from research and best practice. These efforts have positively impacted the lives of thousands of young people.