

STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE:
Case Studies of Educational Improvement and Title I in Secondary Schools

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Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Education
Office of the Under Secretary

2000

Research conducted by Policy Studies Associates, Inc.,
in collaboration with Manpower Demonstration Research Corp.
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This report was prepared for the U. S. Department of Education under Contract No. EA 94053001. The views expressed herein are those of the contractor. No official endorsement by the U. S. Department of Education is intended or should be inferred.

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Executive Summary	v
Chapter I. Overview of This Study	1
Purposes of the Study	1
Study Design	3
Relevant Research on Secondary Schools.....	9
Organization of the Report	11
Chapter II. Teaching and Learning to High Standards	13
Strategies for Promoting Effective Instruction	14
Examples of Strategies Used to Promote Effective Instruction	18
Barriers to Effective Instruction	21
Helping All Students Reach High Standards.....	22
Ability Grouping	25
The Role of Title I.....	27
Chapter III. Noninstructional Services That Support Student Achievement	31
Learning Communities.....	32
Building Student Engagement.....	34
Support Services	36
Career Awareness	39
Parent Involvement.....	40
Community Partnerships.....	44
Chapter IV. Policy Implications	45
Implications for Federal Policy	45
Implications for State Policy	46
Implications for Local Policy	47
Conclusions	48
References	49

Executive Summary

This study examines the role of Title I in 18 secondary schools (nine intermediate and nine high schools) that serve disadvantaged student populations, are engaged in comprehensive school improvement efforts, and, for the most part, have consistently high or improving student achievement. It is intended to describe school improvement and the role of Title I in secondary schools that are engaged in comprehensive reform efforts and to examine whether Title I is motivating, supporting, or hindering these efforts. The study was prompted by the changes to Title I incorporated in the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act, which refocused Title I on supporting schoolwide efforts to raise academic standards and student performance. The 1994 changes have also resulted in more high-poverty secondary schools receiving Title I funds, prompting an examination of secondary schools serving concentrations of disadvantaged students.

The purposes of the study were to:

- describe practices in improving or high-performing secondary schools that serve disadvantaged students,
- determine the function of Title I in these schools, and
- identify issues related to improvement in secondary schools with concentrations of disadvantaged students.

Schools included in the study were selected after a search that included reviewing files of recent Title I Distinguished Schools and National Blue Ribbon Schools and asking reform networks, researchers familiar with secondary schools, and organizations representing secondary schools to recommend schools that met these three criteria:

- engagement in a comprehensive school improvement effort—with elements supported by research—to raise student achievement,
- enrollment of a significant proportion of low-income students, and
- improving or consistently high student achievement, as demonstrated by objective measures.

The schools reflect geographic and racial or ethnic diversity and use varied approaches to school improvement. Among these are:

- use of alternative instruction and assessment that is meaningful to students outside the school context,

- integration of academic and vocational instruction to prepare students for challenging careers or postsecondary education,
- establishment of rigorous content standards and realignment of curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment to help students reach the standards,
- use of interdisciplinary, integrated curricula that help students understand the interrelationship and practical applications of what they are learning, and
- systematic use of up-to-date student outcome data to analyze educational needs, identify educational strategies that respond to those needs, and continually reassess and adjust those strategies based on objective measures of their success.

Data collection for the study consisted of three-day visits to each of the 18 schools during the spring and summer of 1998. During the site visits, experienced researchers interviewed key administrative and instructional staff, reviewed documents, observed classroom instruction, and followed students during the school day. Analysis of the results drew on findings and recommendations from previous research on secondary schools, including an earlier study of Title I in high-poverty secondary schools. The results summarized here reflect the experiences of only these 18 schools; it is not known to what extent the practices highlighted in this report are also found in similar schools that are not engaged in comprehensive reform or that have not experienced consistently high or improving levels of student achievement.

Teaching and Learning

The schools in the study relied on three major strategies to improve and maintain the quality of teaching in their classrooms, which were:

- providing teachers with multiple opportunities to expand their professional expertise,
- instituting school accountability systems that require students to demonstrate their intellectual growth, and
- using data collection and analysis to guide all of the school's decisions.

Professional development at many of the schools provided sustained opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their peers and explore different solutions to problems they experienced in their classrooms. Teachers were more likely to report that professional development had positive influences on their practice when it addressed a limited set of objectives in great depth and when it addressed particular needs identified by school staff. Also, based on teachers' comments, the most effective professional development activities were those that provided them with sustained assistance in addressing schoolwide

goals and objectives, instead of discrete needs identified by individual teachers. In most cases, professional development focused on enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills rather than their mastery of content.

Strong state and local accountability systems, when present, exerted tremendous influence on teaching and learning in these schools, and many schools also devised supplemental internal accountability systems. Schools in states such as Texas and Kentucky, which impose sanctions on low-performing schools and give cash awards or other recognition to high-performing schools, geared their instruction to the content on the states' assessments. In the absence of strong state accountability systems, local accountability systems, such as those in two districts in California, also exerted strong influences on schools' curricula. Schools operating without strong accountability systems adopted student accountability measures, such as graduation exhibitions for students or career ladders for teachers, to maintain a focus on schoolwide goals and objectives.

Systematic collection and analysis of timely data helped the schools in the study to assess programs and reforms, and eliminate activities that did not yield improved achievement. In these schools, all staff were involved in collecting and analyzing data and in making decisions based on the results. With the help of these data, staff in some schools made informed decisions to adopt block schedules, eliminate tracking, select reading materials, and adopt other innovations. Moreover, the use of data did not end with adoption; rather, schools continued to collect and review results from their innovations to assess whether they contributed to improved outcomes.

Schools in this study exhibited and experienced numerous obstacles to improving teaching and learning. Among the most prominent obstacles were:

1. Ability Grouping.

Most of the 18 schools employed some form of ability grouping that restricted low-performing students' access to challenging content and the best teachers.

2. Lack of Focus on Improving Teachers' Knowledge of Subject Matter.

Although most content standards call for teachers to teach more challenging material, most professional development in the sample schools concentrated on pedagogy, rather than on upgrading the content of classroom instruction.

3. Insufficient Time for Teachers to Plan and Develop Challenging Lessons.

Upgrading curricula to conform with state and local standards requires significant time and effort; however, most schools did not set aside enough time for all teachers to engage in that process.

4. Conflicting Priorities between School-Based Reforms and State or Local Standards-Based Reforms.

In a few cases, efforts to integrate content areas through thematic units ran afoul of state or local efforts to devise and employ subject-specific content standards.

Noninstructional Services That Support Student Achievement

Virtually all of the schools in the study provided noninstructional services to foster an environment that was conducive to student learning. Although they were unwilling to serve as social service agencies, schools nonetheless saw the value in helping students overcome some nonacademic barriers to their success. The goals of these services were to:

- increase student attendance at school,
- address students' noninstructional needs,
- give students opportunities for relationships with caring adults, and
- foster connections between schools, families, and the community.

All of the larger middle schools and almost half of the high schools in the study created smaller learning communities—also called teams or houses—to combat the impersonality of many large schools.

These learning communities typically included about 100 students and four to eight teachers who stayed together for at least two years, giving students a sense of continuity and teachers an opportunity to get to know their students' academic and personal strengths and weaknesses. Block scheduling within each community gave teachers flexibility in arranging the academic day; it also minimized the amount of time that students spent in transition between classes. Team leaders, who were exempt from most or all teaching duties, often helped coordinate team activities.

Schools in the study also sought to increase student attendance by engaging students in the life of the school. In several schools, students could select from varied extracurricular clubs and activities. In others, they could take part in community service projects. Students served as peer mediators in several schools, helping their fellow students resolve disputes peacefully. These opportunities allowed students to gain self-confidence, experience workplace environments, and establish links between the school and their community.

For students with personal or emotional problems that interfered with learning, schools offered access to support services that included academic, social, and career counseling and health services.

Academic counselors helped students choose courses of study; develop personal, academic, and career goals; and prepare college applications. Support groups allowed students with related problems (for example, drug and alcohol abuse or emotional scars due to physical or sexual abuse) to seek help and

understanding from each other and from trained professionals. Several schools had their own medical clinics for students from uninsured families; these clinics offered immunizations, physical exams, primary health care, and mental health counseling.

Schools in the study made strong efforts to communicate with parents and worked hard to keep parents involved with the school. To combat the drop-off in parent involvement in upper grades, schools adjusted the time and location of parent functions to increase attendance. They also communicated positive news about the school and individual students, rather than calling parents only when students misbehaved. Some schools provided services to parents, such as parent resource rooms at the school and field trips to cultural events around the city.

Role of Title I

The 1994 reauthorization of Title I authorized a new focus for the program: supporting state and local efforts to help all students achieve high academic standards. Through the expansion in the number of schoolwide programs, Title I could help support comprehensive school reform, enhance the professional expertise of classroom teachers, provide supplemental support to students who were struggling to reach the higher content and performance standards, and promote higher levels of parent involvement. This vision contrasted sharply with the version of Title I (then Chapter 1) observed in earlier research on secondary schools, in which Title I operated apart from the regular academic program and often had lower standards for its students.

In the schools in this study, Title I provided valuable academic assistance that helped students succeed in their regular classes. Schools used Title I to provide low-achieving students with extra instruction during and beyond the school day, through the use of in-class assistants, before- and after-school tutoring, summer programs, and computer labs that helped students complete class assignments. Title I also helped reduce student-to-teacher ratios in some schools, enabling teachers to craft individual lessons for their lowest-achieving students. Title I also paid for additional instructional materials and technology that would not have otherwise been available.

Title I played a limited role in supporting other elements of schoolwide improvement efforts in the sample schools, yet did not impede these efforts. In these 18 schools, Title I funds were not supporting extensive professional development related to standards, nor were schools using Title I to assist in comprehensive school reform efforts or to increase parent involvement. However, most schools had incorporated Title I into their improvement efforts. These schools used Title I to support low-achieving students in the ways described above.

District Title I coordinators exerted minimal control over the schools' use of Title I resources, making it difficult for the district to use Title I to leverage change at the school level. School principals and their designees, not district Title I directors, made most decisions about the use of Title I funds. Unlike elementary schools, many of the 18 schools had school-based Title I coordinators who were responsible for the operation of Title I in the school, including monitoring the allocation of funds, supervising Title I teachers, and evaluating program quality. In schools without such coordinators, principals were more responsible for the operation of the Title I program, including the selection of Title I staff, than were district Title I coordinators.

Chapter I. Overview of This Study

The 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) changed the way that local education agencies (LEAs) select the schools that receive Title I funds, resulting in an increase in the number of high-poverty secondary schools receiving funds. LEAs can elect to set grade-level priorities in allocating funds only after they serve all schools with at least 75 percent poverty rates, regardless of the grade levels they serve. As a result, more high-poverty secondary schools are receiving Title I funds. In 1993-94, only 61 percent of the highest-poverty secondary schools received funds, whereas 93 percent did in 1997-98 (Stullich, Donly, & Stolzberg, Jan. 1999). In addition, the IASA lowered the poverty threshold required for schoolwide program status, thus enabling more secondary schools—which typically have under-reported poverty levels—to become schoolwide programs. This program model gives schools greater flexibility in their use of federal resources, allowing them to focus on schoolwide improvements that benefit all students within high-poverty schools, including their lowest-performing students. Finally, IASA refocused Title I on supporting broader school improvement efforts, stating:

[W]hile Title I and other programs funded under this Act contribute to narrowing the achievement gap between children in high-poverty and low-poverty schools, such programs need to become even more effective in improving schools in order to enable all children to achieve high standards (Title I, Sec. 1001).

The combination of greater numbers of high-poverty secondary schools receiving Title I and changes to the program's scope and focus has stimulated new interest among policy-makers in the role that Title I plays in secondary schools.

Purposes of the Study

This study examines school improvement and the role of Title I in 18 secondary schools (nine intermediate and nine high schools) that serve disadvantaged student populations, are engaged in comprehensive school improvement efforts, and, for the most part, have improving or consistently high student achievement. It is intended to describe school improvement efforts and the role of Title I in secondary schools that are engaged in comprehensive reform efforts, and to examine whether Title I is motivating, supporting, or hindering these efforts. The study was prompted by the changes to Title I incorporated in the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act, which refocused Title I on supporting schoolwide efforts to raise academic standards and student performance. The 1994 changes have also resulted in more high-poverty secondary schools receiving Title I funds, prompting an examination of secondary schools serving concentrations of disadvantaged students.

The purposes of the study were to:

- describe practices in improving or high-performing secondary schools that serve disadvantaged students,
- determine the function of Title I in these schools, and
- identify issues related to improvement in secondary schools with concentrations of disadvantaged students.

Title I secondary schools warrant the special attention paid by this study because the forces that shape them are different from the forces that affect elementary schools. As a result, secondary schools' comprehensive reform efforts are likely to be different than the efforts underway in elementary schools.

Secondary schools differ from elementary schools with respect to the developmental status of their students, the administrative structure of the school, and the goals and objectives of the educational program. Unlike elementary school students, who identify closely with and rely on their parents, students in intermediate and high schools are struggling to establish their own identity and often identify more closely with their peer groups than with their parents. Some students have already experienced failure in elementary school and have lost their confidence that they can succeed in school. Another difference between elementary and secondary schools is that secondary schools tend to be larger—and therefore more bureaucratic—institutions. Compared with elementary schools, secondary schools can have three or more times the number of teachers and administrators, who often are divided into grade level or interdisciplinary teams, academic departments, tracks, and programs. Thus, decision-making authority is often more fragmented in secondary schools.

Finally, senior high schools establish more explicit graduation standards than elementary schools, and those standards are determined largely by institutions external to the school. The number of credits that each student must earn to graduate is typically dictated by a combination of statewide minimum requirements and admissions standards for postsecondary institutions. Only certain courses meeting specific criteria qualify for academic credit toward graduation; courses that provide supplementary or remedial assistance for students do not count in meeting graduation requirements in core academic subjects.

The implications of these differences for intermediate and senior high schools are profound. First, secondary school students may view with disdain or embarrassment any attempt to separate or distinguish them from their peers, especially for remedial instruction. Second, schools are much more concerned with issues surrounding school safety and order, especially as students test the limits of authority. Third, efforts to make whole-school reforms can run up against a staff with divided loyalties and overlapping bureaucratic structures.

Finally, high schools don't have the flexibility they need to modify a student's schedule to provide supplementary academic assistance, because they are understandably reluctant to disrupt a student's progress toward completing the required number of credits. In many secondary schools, therefore, matters pertaining to teaching and learning sometimes are overshadowed by bureaucratic obstacles and a concern with maintaining discipline and high attendance.

Study Design

With this context and set of purposes in mind, the authors of this study adopted a design intended to generate rich descriptive information on Title I and secondary schools.

Site Selection

The study consisted of case studies of nine intermediate schools and nine senior high schools that met the following criteria:

- engagement in a comprehensive school improvement effort—with elements supported by research—to raise student achievement,
- enrollment of a significant proportion of low-income students, primarily indicated by receipt of Title I funding, and
- for most schools in the study, improving or consistently high student achievement, as demonstrated by objective measures.

The process of identifying potential sites for the study began with staff from the study team contacting a variety of organizations, reform networks, and researchers familiar with secondary schools to obtain their recommendations for schools that might meet the criteria listed above. These included, among others:

- National Association of Secondary School Principals,
- National Middle School Association,
- Council of Great City Schools,
- Coalition of Essential Schools,
- Southern Regional Educational Board's High Schools That Work Program,
- National Staff Development Council,
- Education Commission of the States,
- Clemson University Dropout Prevention Center, and
- Council of Chief State School Officers' Middle Grade School Initiative.

In addition, we obtained and reviewed the most recent lists of Title I Distinguished Schools, Blue Ribbon Schools, and New American High Schools recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. We also contacted Title I directors in all 48 contiguous states for additional recommendations and to determine which of the schools recommended by other sources received Title I funds. After narrowing the list of potential sites based on those conversations, we contacted principals at the sites still under consideration to introduce them to the study, confirm the basic characteristics of their school improvement efforts, obtain student achievement data, and probe their preliminary interest in participating in the study.

The final list of sites included nine intermediate and nine senior high schools, along with five alternate sites. Of the original 18 schools, six opted not to participate, typically because the proposed timing of the site visits to the schools conflicted with other school priorities. Those six sites were replaced by alternate sites that satisfied the same criteria. During or just prior to the site visits, two schools (East Hartford and Pine Bluff) were found to not be Title I schools; we learned that state or district administrators had relied on outdated information in answering queries about the schools' Title I status. However, both of those schools remained in the study because they satisfied the other criteria; one of the two—East Hartford High School—receives state compensatory education funds. Several of the schools are schools of choice (e.g., Fritsche, Ysleta, Timilty), but none of them have admissions criteria for their students.

More than a year after data collection for the study was completed, the Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) voluntarily admitted to the state that some of its high schools—including Ysleta High School—had been underreporting their dropout rates. The underreporting appears to be attributable to the absence of clear standards for tracking students' enrollment status and identifying dropouts, not an attempt to conceal a higher dropout rate. The district's reporting of student achievement scores has not been challenged. YISD has put forth a plan to resolve its data quality issues and to reduce the number of students dropping out of school. In the meantime, the state has rated the district as "unacceptable" because of its problems with data quality.

The 18 schools chosen for the study were:

- Agua Fria High School, Avondale, Arizona,
- Blanco Middle School, Langlois, Oregon,
- Eisenhower High School, Blue Island, Illinois,
- East Hartford High School, East Hartford, Connecticut,
- Fairdale High School, Fairdale, Kentucky,
- Fritsche Middle School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin,

- Hambrick Middle School, Houston, Texas,
- Highland High School, Bakersfield, California,
- Hoover High School, San Diego, California,
- Iroquois Middle School, Louisville, Kentucky,
- Madison High School, Portland, Oregon,
- Marshall Middle School, Chicago, Illinois,
- Minnesota Center (middle school), Cambridge, Minnesota,
- Peoples Academy (middle school), Morrisville, Vermont,
- Pine Bluff High School, Pine Bluff, Arkansas,
- Timilty Middle School, Boston, Massachusetts,
- Vidrine School, Ville Platte, Louisiana, and
- Ysleta High School, El Paso, Texas.

As a group, the schools reflect educational and geographic diversity. School improvement efforts at the 18 schools fell into several categories, including:

- use of alternative instruction and assessment that is meaningful outside the school context,
- integration of academic and vocational instruction to prepare students for challenging careers or postsecondary education,
- establishment of rigorous content standards and realignment of curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment to help students reach the standards,
- use of interdisciplinary, integrated curricula that help students understand the interrelationship and practical applications of what they are learning, and
- systematic use of up-to-date student outcome data to analyze educational needs, identify educational strategies that respond to those needs, and continually reassess and adjust those strategies based on objective measures of their success.

The schools, which represent 17 different school districts in 13 states from every geographic region of the country, are located in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Virtually all of the schools have demographically diverse student bodies. Key characteristics of the 18 schools are presented in the following table (only data available at the time the schools were selected are included).

Table 1: Characteristics of the 18 Schools in the Study

School City, State	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race/Ethnicity	Urbanicity	Student Performance
Agua Fria High School Avondale, Arizona	1,704	28%	52% white 39% Hispanic 6% African American	Suburban	In 1997, ninth- and tenth-graders met or exceeded the state averages in all subjects on the Stanford Achievement Test-Ninth Edition (SAT-9), except for tenth-grade math.
Blanco Middle School Langlois, Oregon	125	56%	96% white	Rural	In 1997, the percentage of Blanco eighth-graders who met or exceeded state standards in reading and math exceeded the state averages by substantial margins.
Eisenhower High School Blue Island, Illinois	1,162	39%	35% white 32% Hispanic 32% African American	Suburban	Eisenhower was named a Title I Distinguished School in 1997. From 1996 to 1997, 10th-graders' reading scores improved from a 7.9 grade equivalent to a 9.2 grade equivalent. Scores in writing and math made similar improvements.
East Hartford High School East Hartford, Connecticut	1,753	20%	48% white 27% African American 20% Hispanic	Urban/Suburban	From 1995 to 1997, East Hartford's scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) increased by 10 percent in math and 21 percent in language arts. In 1997, the percentage of 10th-graders achieving mastery in language arts exceeded the state average.
Fairdale High School Fairdale, Kentucky	1,050	52%	73% white 27% African American	Urban/Suburban	From 1995 to 1997, Fairdale's performance on the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) tests steadily improved. Rated as a school "in decline" in 1995, Fairdale earned a financial reward under the state's accountability system three years later.
Fritsche Middle School Milwaukee, Wisconsin	1,010	66%	45% African American 44% white 8% Hispanic	Urban	On the state's 1997 Knowledge and Concepts Examinations, Fritsche 8 th graders exceeded district averages in reading, math, and language arts.
Hambrick Middle School Houston, Texas	962	78%	42% Hispanic 36% African American 18% white	Urban	Hambrick's performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) have earned it the second-highest rating "recognized" under the state's accountability system

School City, State	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race/Ethnicity	Urbanicity	Student Performance
Highland High School Bakersfield, California	1,990	39%	50% Hispanic 36% white 8% African American	Urban/Suburban	Highland has twice been named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education, in 1989 and 1996. In 1996, the school's math scores on the SAT-9 were the highest in the district, and its combined scores exceeded the state and district averages in 1996 and 1997.
Hoover High School San Diego, California	1,634	95%	52% Hispanic 22% African American 19% Asian	Urban	A Title I Distinguished School in 1997, Hoover experienced steady improvements in student performance on the SAT-9 since 1995; from 1995 to 1996, reading scores improved in every grade. The annual dropout rate has declined from more than 12 percent to less than 3 percent.
Iroquois Middle School Louisville, Kentucky	850	66%	67% white 29% African American	Urban	Iroquois earned a financial reward under the state's accountability system.
Madison High School Portland, Oregon	1,042	37%	63% white 16% Asian 11% African American 8% Hispanic	Urban	Madison scored higher than two-thirds of the state's high schools on the state writing assessment in 1995.
Marshall Middle School Chicago, Illinois	690	86%	68% Hispanic 20% white 7% African American	Urban	Marshall's seventh- and eighth-grade reading scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) improved steadily from 1995 to 1997, equaling or exceeding district averages in each of the last two years.
Minnesota Center (middle school) Cambridge, Minnesota	155	28%	95% white	Rural	During the 1997-98 school year, the percentage of students meeting the state standard in reading equaled the state average, even though Minnesota Center has a more disadvantaged student population than the average district.
Peoples Academy (middle school) Morrisville, Vermont	536	32%	96% white	Rural	In 1997, the percentage of eighth-graders meeting or exceeding the state standard in reading exceeded the state average. Student performance in math skills exceeded the state average in 1996, the most recent data available at the time of site selection.
Pine Bluff High School Pine Bluff, Arkansas	1,475	43%	75% African American 24% white	Rural	According to data reported by the High Schools That Work network, Pine Bluff's performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has improved in all areas. For instance, the percentage of Pine Bluff students

School City, State	Enrollment	Poverty Level	Race/Ethnicity	Urbanicity	Student Performance
					achieving at the proficient level in math increased from 18 percent in 1993 to 41 percent in 1996.
Timilty Middle School Boston, Massachusetts	600	83%	46% African American 39% Hispanic 9% white	Urban	Timilty's reading and math scores on the SAT-9 exceeded district averages, and rose substantially from 1996 to 1997. They also rose from 97 to 98.
Vidrine School (Pre-K through 12 but only middle school studied) Ville Platte, Louisiana	564	58%	81% white 17% African American	Rural	In 1997, passing rates on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) in reading and math exceeded district and state averages.
Ysleta High School El Paso, Texas	1,797	90%	94% Hispanic	Urban	From 1996 to 1997, the percentage of 10th-graders passing the reading portion of TAAS increased from 79 percent to 85 percent; passing rates in math improved from 63 percent to 66 percent.

Data Collection

A team of two experienced researchers visited each site for three days during spring of 1998, with one year-round school visited during summer of 1998. During each visit, the team interviewed the principal, other school administrators, counselors, parents and community partners, and the district's Title I coordinator using semi-structured interview protocols. In addition, they conducted focus groups with at least two groups of teachers (including all or most Title I instructional staff) and one group of students, and observed a minimum of six classes. Finally, each visitor spent half a day observing a low-achieving student during school hours to observe his or her classes and interactions with adults in the school. For both the student focus groups and the student observations, Title I targeted assistance schools were asked to select Title I students from different genders and races. In Title I schoolwide programs, schools were asked to select students who were low-achieving.

After returning from the visit, site visitors wrote case studies of each school, which were incorporated in this report. Principals at each school had the opportunity to review the case studies for accuracy and completeness, but the descriptions and conclusions in the case studies are entirely those of the site visitors.

Relevant Research on Secondary Schools

Available research on secondary schools played a key role in the process of selecting schools for the study and in framing the study's research questions and data collection methods. This section reviews some of the findings that helped guide data collection.

During the 1980s, secondary schools were the subject of several major studies (Bottoms, Presson & Johnson, 1992; Boyer, 1983; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, 1990; Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990; Louis & Miles, 1990; Sizer, 1984). In their examinations of intermediate and senior high schools, these studies highlighted problems, efforts already underway in some schools to address those problems, and additional steps necessary to improve secondary schools. Beyond finding schools with either improving or above average student achievement, we sought schools that reflected what that research found to be key ingredients in successful secondary schools.

What is perhaps most remarkable about these and other studies that have taken a careful look at secondary schools is the extent to which they generally agreed about the traits that characterize successful secondary schools. Although they differed on some of the details, most agreed that successful secondary schools are those that:

- have “clear and simple missions focus[ed] on students” (Hill et al., 1990, p. 56),

- are concerned primarily with results rather than process,
- hold all students to high standards, exposing them all to challenging curricula by minimizing or eliminating ability grouping,
- work to improve classroom instruction so that it challenges and motivates students to strive for excellence, and
- seek and obtain parental and community support for and involvement with the school.

To achieve its goal of highlighting effective practices in high-poverty secondary schools, the current study sought out and selected schools that met these criteria. Although few of the selected schools rate highly on all or even most of these criteria, all of the schools excel in at least one of these areas, and they are making efforts to achieve the other standards for success.

To further guide the development of research questions for the current study, we reviewed the findings from the only other study that has focused exclusively on the role and operation of Title I in secondary schools (see Zeldin, Rubenstein, Bogart, Tashjian, & McCollum, 1991). Using a case study design similar to this study's, the earlier study identified 20 Title I (then Chapter 1) secondary schools that had exhibited large gains in student performance on standardized tests compared with other Title I secondary schools in their states. In addition to documenting the contribution of Title I in these schools, the report also examined the extent to which Title I and dropout prevention services overlapped in the schools.

Key findings from Zeldin et al. (1991) revealed that secondary schools with high-performing Title I programs did not necessarily possess the traits of effective secondary schools identified by the research. In particular:

- Title I often operated as a distinct program that did little to help students succeed in their core academic classes. Title I staff rarely collaborated with regular classroom teachers or with dropout prevention program staff, even though they often served many of the same students.
- Title I programs made frequent use of the "replacement" model, which allowed them to substitute students' core academic classes with Title I classes that often had lower standards and expectations than non-Title I classes. These classes sometimes were tailored to the particular needs of low-performing students.
- Schoolwide programs were not widely used among the secondary schools in the study. Only one of the 20 schools in the study operated a schoolwide program. Schools attributed the lack of schoolwide programs to the 75 percent poverty threshold, which was widely deemed to be too high for most secondary schools.

Zeldin et al. (1991) concluded with several suggestions for improving the operation of Title I in secondary schools, including:

- To minimize the stigma that students experience when they are singled out for remediation, secondary schools should do more to integrate Title I services with regular instruction.
- Title I staff should work more closely with staff in other programs (dropout prevention, health, parent outreach, and education) that address the needs of their students.
- To maximize students' motivation and interest in school, Title I instruction should help them improve their skills by using challenging content and age-appropriate materials; Title I teachers should also give their students extensive opportunities to apply what they learn in a practical way and to express themselves verbally and in writing.

Organization of the Report

This report presents our findings across all 18 schools, including the traits that contribute to their success, the schools' use of Title I funds and ways in which the program does or does not contribute to their success, and policy conclusions based on these schools' experiences. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter II discusses the case study schools' approaches to teaching and learning, focusing on the strategies they use to maintain high standards for all of their students. Chapter III describes the schools' efforts to provide students with noninstructional support that creates a comfortable and safe learning environment and that helps students overcome barriers to learning. Chapter IV offers conclusions about Title I's role in these schools.

Chapter II. Teaching and Learning to High Standards

Research and everyday experience confirm that good teaching, especially in schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students, makes a difference. Virtually every successful adult can point to at least one teacher whose intellect, enthusiasm, and faith inspired him or her to excel.

In their efforts to improve student achievement, administrators have designed more complex courses and more stringent accountability systems. If students fail to master the new content, they may not earn their high school diplomas, and their teachers and principals may suffer additional consequences. To help their students succeed in this environment of higher expectations, diverse student populations, and intense accountability, teachers must be able to (1) understand and be able to teach more challenging content, (2) use a wider repertoire of instructional strategies, and (3) administer and interpret results from more complex assessments.

For many, good teaching is easier to recognize than to define, and standards for good teaching vary by grade level and subject area. However, one group of scholars (Newmann & Wehlege, 1995) has developed standards for instruction that, when carried out in classrooms, have measurably improved student achievement. Their research was based on findings from 24 schools involved in restructuring as well as reanalysis of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). Their four standards for effective instruction were:

- Students engage in higher-order thinking by synthesizing and explaining information and reaching their own conclusions about the topics they study.
- Teachers introduce students to established branches of learning—accepted facts, concepts, and theories—with enough depth that students develop a complex understanding of the subject matter, including alternative explanations for different phenomena.
- Students interact with the teacher and each other to expand their understanding of existing branches of learning.
- Classroom learning has value beyond the classroom, enabling students to make connections between what they learn and their lives outside of school.

This chapter explores the efforts of the 18 schools in this study sample to translate these principles into effective teaching.

Strategies for Promoting Effective Instruction

As a group, the schools included in this study maintain a focus on promoting and supporting the type of teaching reflected in the Newmann and Wehlege standards. They recognize that teaching represents schools' core function, and they allocate time and resources to so that effective teachers can maintain their high expectations and less effective teachers can improve their practice. They have invested in efforts to align their curricula with the state or local standards that their students are expected to master, and they have used regular professional development to address the areas that need the most improvement. These schools have used three different approaches to continue their commitment to good teaching, which are:

- providing teachers with multiple opportunities to expand their professional expertise,
- instituting school accountability systems that require students to demonstrate their intellectual growth, and
- using data collection and analysis to guide all of the school's decisions.

Professional Development

In many of the schools visited for this study, professional development enables teachers to explore issues in depth and develop effective solutions that are consistent with their day-to-day experience. In this way, professional development “engage[s] teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems, and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a mark on perspective, policy, and practice” (Little, 1993, p. 133). Thus, these schools apply the same standards of effective teaching in both their classrooms and their professional development programs. School leaders encourage teachers to conduct their own research, expand their knowledge of pedagogy, and reflect on their practice with their peers, all with a focus on improving their performance in the classroom. Professional development strategies that teachers identified as being the most beneficial to them were those that provided sustained support toward achieving a limited set of objectives identified by school staff. Teachers in these schools determine priorities for professional development collectively, ensuring that they address the teachers' professional needs and the school's reform agenda. With this approach, teachers develop the expertise and judgment to translate broad standards and curriculum guidelines into daily lessons that work for their students.

In some schools, outside experts make significant contributions to teachers' professional growth, not as instructors but as resources. At Houston's **Hambrick Middle School**, a team of university professors collaborates with 20 teachers to develop and refine new lessons that promote higher-order thinking by students and incorporate state standards. One professor holds monthly sessions to provide guidance as teachers develop their units, and another visits each classroom once a month to provide

reactions as teachers use the lessons. To communicate the importance of these and other opportunities for professional growth, the principal includes ratings of teachers' use of new knowledge and skills from professional development in her annual evaluations. A partnership between **East Hartford High School** and the University of Connecticut gives the high school access to professors and well-trained teacher candidates. The professors participate in curriculum development efforts, but the biggest resource has been the teacher-candidates. Not only have the candidates received valuable hands-on experience while helping to improve teacher-student ratios, but they in turn also have shared their training to spark changes throughout the school. Explaining his transformation from "a sage on the stage" to a more interactive style of teaching, one science teacher said, "The way I did that was through student teachers. The student teacher got students into a group, and I thought that was cheating. But it works."

Other schools in this study have relied strictly on their own staff to foster a collegial atmosphere conducive to professional growth. In Kentucky, **Fairdale High School's** Critical Friends Group brings together teachers from all disciplines to discuss and give their thoughts and ideas on lesson plans. Three staff members received training in moderating these discussions, and they maintain a supportive environment in which to address issues central to teaching. At each meeting, as many as 30 teachers gather to raise issues about classroom management or instruction that have come up in their classes, or they submit lesson plans that they believe did not work well in class. The group focuses on providing constructive professional reactions, adhering to their motto: "Don't work on the teacher, work on the work." Several teachers reported that the group discussions helped them refine lesson plans so that students produced higher quality work. The strength of this approach is that it addresses practical concerns associated with day-to-day teaching while engaging teachers in a dialogue about the larger purposes of their work.

Competing priorities and lack of resources prevented some schools from effectively using professional development to spur school improvement. Whereas the examples above reflect schoolwide dedication to certain priorities to be addressed by professional development (for example, developing more challenging lessons), other schools in our sample were not able to establish clear priorities, so professional development contributed little to school improvement. In these schools, professional development resources were spread thinly across departments or programs, all with separate priorities, thereby rendering professional development ineffective. In a few schools, this meant that there were no resources available to carry out school or district priorities. For instance, in one school, the district wanted teachers to use the theory of multiple intelligences as a guiding principle in developing instructional units, but teachers complained that they lacked the planning time necessary to work with the theory's implications for teaching and learning and develop new lessons.

Assessment and Accountability

State and local accountability systems that are based on high standards and either impose strong sanctions or mete out meaningful rewards prompted many of the schools to upgrade and align their curricula with state or local standards. In Texas and Kentucky, where low-performing schools are subject to sanctions and high-performing schools receive financial rewards, the four schools in those states all adapted their curriculum to keep it aligned with state content standards. Decision-making in these schools tended to be driven by results of the assessments. Also, ability grouping was less prevalent in these schools than in schools that were not held accountable for teaching specified content. For schools in states like California and Illinois that have weak or nonexistent accountability systems, local standards and assessments carried significantly more weight. For example, freshmen English classes at **Highland High School** in Bakersfield, Calif., were geared toward helping students pass the district's writing competency test, which is required for graduation.

A few of the schools in this study have developed their own assessments and accountability systems to induce more challenging instruction. While the external assessments and accountability systems mandated by states or districts exert tremendous influence on these schools' curricula, the standards and assessments provide virtually no guidance about how content should be taught or how teachers can help students understand the content of the curriculum. State assessments and accountability systems, in short, provide only targets that schools must figure out how to reach on their own. Some of these schools have chosen, therefore, to develop their own assessments that offer more guidance to teachers about organizing their instruction in ways that cultivate students' intellectual growth. In developing the assessments, teachers draw from state and district content standards so that the assessments measure the extent to which students have mastered the content required by those standards.

Hoover High School in San Diego has turned to portfolios and public presentations to promote active learning in all classrooms. Every six weeks, students submit a portfolio consisting of samples of work they have completed. Teachers assess portfolio contents against the school's own learning outcomes to make sure that course work is promoting independent learning. To graduate, each student must successfully present and defend a senior exhibition of original work to a panel of two community members and a teacher. During the 45-minute presentation, the student must explain how the exhibition demonstrates Hoover's learning outcomes, including the ability to conduct research, use technology, organize data, communicate clearly, and work with others. "Business people are blown away [by the exhibitions]," the principal said.

At the time of our visit, **Agua Fria** was the only high school district in Arizona to voluntarily participate in that state's career ladder program for teachers. Career ladder is a performance-based incentive and professional development program that rewards teachers based on their instructional performance and the academic progress of their students. According to a program coordinator, "It focuses

on student achievement instead of [teachers'] participation in staff development. . . . We focus more on changes in what happened with students in the classroom." Teachers wishing to join the program attend a two-day orientation session, and then participate in additional professional development activities. To advance to the next level on the ladder, teachers must design and carry out a six-week instructional unit that is evaluated by a three-member peer review team; many units undergo several revisions before being approved. Student achievement in their classrooms is also a factor for teachers in determining advancement up the career ladder. As teachers advance on the career ladder, they earn higher salaries.

Analysis of Data

Several of the schools visited for this study have learned that basing their decisions on a systematic analysis of data about their schools enables teachers to employ practices that improve students' performance and discard those that do not. The importance of data as the basis for decisions, now widely recognized in the corporate world with the emergence of "continuous improvement" management strategies, has not been absorbed by most schools. Certainly, schools administer frequent assessments, but many closely guard the results and rarely analyze them in any formal way. Moreover, they almost never explore other sources of data beyond test scores. By contrast, in several of the schools we visited, leaders do not make decisions before the school community has had a chance to look at a range of data and decide the next course of action.

Since 1991, **Fritsche Middle School** in Milwaukee has based its decision-making on the central question: How do you know what you've achieved unless you measure it? School staff regularly collect data from annual surveys of the entire school community (including former students), telephone calls, attendance sheets, discipline referrals, and other sources. Data collection is not random; each time the school adopts a new program or strategy, it determines ahead of time what data it needs to make critical decisions about whether or not to continue it. Faculty committees review results regularly and use them to justify new programs as well as to change or cancel existing programs. To track the data it needs, Fritsche developed its own record-keeping system that lets it disaggregate the data based on its needs. Using this system, Fritsche has used data to institute several new programs that have yielded improved student outcomes (see box, right).

The Vidrine School in Louisiana reserves two faculty meetings each month to give staff the opportunity to review data about the school and its students. Based on those analyses and a comprehensive needs assessment, the school adopted changes such as more consistent classroom management policies, a new reading program, and a study skills class to help students prepare for college admissions and high school equivalency tests.

Data-Driven Decision-Making at Fritsche

After researching block scheduling for two years, Fritsche tested the concept with a single team of three teachers, then with 16 more teachers. Results showed fewer discipline referrals, higher attendance, and higher achievement in classrooms with block schedules. After one year, none of the teachers from the pilot program wanted to return to traditional 48-minute periods. Eighty percent of the staff voted to continue using block schedules for two years.

In another instance of data collection and use, the school's review of attendance and achievement data for sixth-graders showed that many students with high attendance were still performing poorly in class.

Teachers held a focus group with some of these students to determine why, and they learned that students had trouble remembering their assignments. Each team was given \$1,500 to design tutoring programs to help these students. After one semester, the number of students with failing grades was cut in half.

Examples of Strategies Used to Promote Effective Instruction

The commitment of schools in the study to promoting high-quality teaching has yielded some outstanding lessons and units. Visitors found examples of these lessons in classes representing different subject areas, grade levels, and teaching styles. Among the characteristics shared by these lessons are:

- subject matter that reflects challenging state or local content standards,
- instructional strategies that both reinforce and build on what students already know,

- opportunities for students to learn and apply new skills while solving complex or real-life problems,
- teams of students working together on a common assignment, and
- final products that require students to synthesize what they have learned.

Strategies to promote effective instruction fell into three categories: (1) instruction that integrates vocational and academic content, (2) interdisciplinary instruction, and (3) experiential learning. Here we offer examples of each type.

Integrating Vocational and Academic Content

Integrating vocational and academic content "enables students to make a connection between abstract academic studies and actual problems, tasks, and situation encountered in the workplace" (Bottoms et al., 1992, p. 5). This finding is consistent with Newmann and Wehlege's fourth principle that classroom learning should have value beyond the classroom. The High Schools That Work network of schools has shown that schools that employ this strategy demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement (Bottoms et al., 1992). Also, infusing academic course work into vocational education helps raise the standards in those classes and avoids stigmatizing vocational students.

At **Pine Bluff High School** in Arkansas, the Advanced Integrated Model (AIM) project gave academic and vocational teaching staff shared planning time to develop integrated units and review information about effective practices. Supported in part by the High Schools That Work network of schools, a core team of teachers that included the head of the English department and three others from vocational departments met weekly to brainstorm ideas for integrated units. An example of a past project was the Romantic Landscapes Project, which combined English, horticulture, and computer-assisted design (CAD) classes. Students read and compared neo-classical and Romantic literature. They then used a computerized landscaping software program to design a garden influenced by Romantic design concepts. Teachers evaluated the final designs based on their use of those concepts.

Interdisciplinary Instruction

Interdisciplinary instruction breaks down many of the artificial barriers between content areas, giving students the opportunity to study a subject from different perspectives. By permitting students to see how different disciplines relate to each other, they achieve the depth of understanding of the topics they study that Newmann and Wehlege's research shows to be important.

Social studies classes at **Marshall Middle School** in Chicago incorporate some math concepts into their Perfect City Project, which requires students to design a perfect city. Among other assignments, teams of students must draw a map of their city to scale, justify the location for their city in writing, and construct graphs and charts depicting demographic information about their city. A parallel project in math requires students to use mathematical concepts to design and build a bridge using toothpicks and other building supplies. Each team of students is given a budget and checking account with which to purchase their building materials. To encourage teams to use their time efficiently, the prices of building supplies increase each day. Part of the assignment requires students to incorporate their bridge into their design for a perfect city.

An aeronautics unit designed by a Title I teacher and a special education teacher at **Blanco Middle School** in Oregon combined math, reading, language arts, science, and geography. Students read a novel about Amelia Earhart in reading, and, for language arts, they kept a journal about flying. In science they learned about the physics of flying, and they used math to calculate distances on scale maps, which were also used to study geography. The unit culminated with students taking 25-minute flights in pairs at a local airport and then completing a simulated air race to four different airports in which students had to overcome obstacles such as thunderstorms. The winners received prizes and certificates.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning takes students outside of the classroom to learn by doing original work or research. More than traditional field trips, where students spend most of their time listening to others, these experiences assign students real responsibilities for completing an important task or collecting and analyzing data to be used for other purposes. This approach, like integrating vocational and academic content, makes classroom learning relevant beyond the school walls.

The Blanco Environmental Enhancement Project (BEEP) at **Blanco Middle School** is a seven-acre plot that teachers use for a comprehensive science curriculum. Students spend 27 weeks learning about watersheds, soils, plants, and wildlife at BEEP. At the end of their time in BEEP, students develop a land use proposal with the knowledge they have gained. A partnership with the state parks and the fish and wildlife bureaus gives students even more opportunities for outdoor learning. Students have helped staff from these agencies with river restoration projects, tree planting to prevent erosion, salinity testing of rivers to measure the effects on frogs, and soil studies. Speaking for other students, one student said, "We like these things because it's hands-on, you get to be outdoors. It helps you remember what you learned."

Madison High School students embarked on a stern-wheeler trip sponsored by United Grain, during which they learned about the company's operation, the history of the Portland, Ore., waterfront, and processes for mixing and selling grain. Several groups of students then developed emergency

evacuation plans for the company and presented their proposals to the company's chief executive officer, who selected the plan that best met the evacuation criteria.

For an eighth-grade science unit on caves at Louisville's **Iroquois Middle School**, students spent a day working with an earth scientist in a cave. The scientist conducted a hands-on science lesson with students and then helped them collect information on the climate and geology of the cave. Back at school, students used what they had learned to transform their classroom into a cave, complete with climate control and stalactites and stalagmites.

Barriers to Effective Instruction

Most of the schools in the study encountered some form of barrier to effective instruction. Some barriers were surmountable, but others continue to vex efforts to use effective classroom practices.

Lack of Focus on Improving Teachers' Content Knowledge

None of the schools in this study had a strong, consistent focus on upgrading teachers' abilities with the content they are responsible for teaching. Many of the new content standards require teachers to teach new or more challenging content, yet many teachers are not familiar enough with that content to develop adequate lessons. Rather than addressing those deficiencies, professional development opportunities in these schools typically set aside time for teachers to develop integrated instructional units and enhance their pedagogical skills, not their mastery of content. Certainly, many teachers in these schools have strong backgrounds in their content areas, which was reflected in some of the instruction we observed. However, most of them developed that expertise on their own, not at the school's or district's initiative. While virtually all of the schools expended time and money on aligning their curriculum with state and local standards, there was not usually an accompanying focus on expanding teachers' knowledge of the content, so they could develop more challenging or interesting units.

Insufficient Time Available to Plan and Implement Challenging Lessons

In some of the schools, teachers receive only a handful of professional development days, and the agendas for some of those days are determined by the district. One team of Title I teachers all but stopped developing interdisciplinary units because funding cuts forced the school to cancel the team's weekly planning sessions. To give teachers additional time, some schools have resorted to redesigning their school day. **Timilty Middle School** in Boston received a waiver from the school system to extend its school days on Monday through Thursday so that it can send students home early on Fridays, giving teachers time to

plan together and attend workshops presented by school staff. Chicago's **Marshall Middle School** takes a similar approach, opening its doors ten minutes early every day so that once a month it can dismiss students early and give teachers a half day for professional development. These early release days at Marshall are used for four different activities: house planning, departmental meetings, schoolwide workshops related to its professional development priorities, and development of the school improvement plan.

Conflicting Priorities

Most of the schools we visited have adapted well to standards-based reform efforts originating in their states or districts. They have reviewed the new standards and taken steps to align their curriculum with those standards. Staff at a small number of schools, however, said that content-based standards conflict with the school's efforts to integrate content across disciplines. A principal at one school where staff invested substantial time in developing integrated units before the district issued content-based standards said, "It's like giving birth and then having to give up your child." Another school virtually abandoned its efforts at cross-departmental collaboration after the state released content-based standards, citing the pressure to "cover" all of the content in standards documents for each discipline. At the same time, standards can encourage teachers to focus on areas that students will need to master rather than attempting to cover all topics in cursory fashion.

Helping All Students Reach High Standards

Maintaining high standards with a content-rich curriculum usually means that some students will struggle to learn the material and need extra academic support to achieve the standards. The 18 schools in this study are helping these students through the use of systematic strategies, most of which blend into students' regular school schedule. The two most common approaches to providing this extra assistance—each used by seven schools in the study—both involve providing extra instruction to low-achieving students during the school day. They are: hiring certified teachers or instructional aides to provide in-class assistance to low-performing students and establishing a computer or reading lab that is available to students on a drop-in basis or as a regular part of their course schedule (often in place of a study hall). Other popular approaches include reducing class sizes, extending learning time beyond the normal school year or day, and offering alternative educational programs. Virtually all of these efforts are funded in part or in full by Title I or other compensatory education funds. The ultimate objective for all schools is to keep students from falling behind or to help them catch up after having fallen behind in earlier grades.

Extra Instruction during the School Day

A common strategy that these schools use to help low-achievers is setting aside time during the school day to provide extra instruction. Much of this supplementary instruction revolves around helping students meet state or local performance standards on standardized tests or succeed in their regular classes. More than tutoring, these sessions introduce new material or provide new learning opportunities for students. The basic message for students in these classes is that failure is not acceptable.

The Title I teacher at Oregon's **Blanco Middle School** pre-teaches accelerated math to low-achieving students to prepare them for their regular math classes. Students miss computer science, math, or physical education classes to attend sessions with fewer than 10 students to learn the math skills they will be expected to know later in their regular math classes. According to one student, the classes "help us plug holes in our math skills" before they fall behind in class. In El Paso, Texas, **Ysleta High School's** Academic Enrichment course for tenth-graders prepares students to pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, which is required for graduation. All tenth-graders, except the top 15 percent of the class, rotate through three three-week sessions preparing them for the math, writing, and reading portions of the test, respectively. The academic top 15 percent of tenth-graders attend an advanced reading and math rotation. According to students, "They [the teachers] keep at you until you get it. If the kids don't learn, it's their fault, not the teachers."

Study schools also use resources dedicated to helping low-achieving students for in-school tutoring. The **Vidrine School** in Louisiana reduces class time on Fridays to create time for a weekly 45-minute activity period that the school uses for tutoring, make-up tests, and visits to the library. The principal groups students that need help in each academic area (as determined by their teachers) and assigns groups to teachers for tutoring during the activity period. This approach has virtually eliminated course failures attributed to missing tests, because students can use this time to make up missed tests. The Tutorial Assistance Program (TAP) lab at Illinois's **Eisenhower High School** gives Title I students access to one-on-one assistance with course work, aided by information resources and technology. At least three teachers or aides staff the lab continuously, working with the Title I students who come in during their study hall periods to get help with their class assignments and homework. The lab houses 15 multimedia computers and an extensive collection of instructional and reference software and materials to help students produce reports and find information they need.

Arizona's **Agua Fria High School** takes a multi-faceted approach to providing in-school assistance. Title I students performing in the bottom quartile take a reading class, which is offered as an elective. The curriculum is "aligned with state academic standards," but one Title I teacher said, "It's been difficult finding materials. . . . [A lot of] materials are outdated and low level." As a result, some teachers have been working with a professor from Arizona State University to develop standards-based materials. Title I students who do not need to attend the direct instruction reading class receive other

services. Most students in this group receive Title I tutorial services, which are offered during the school day and before and after school. Some Title I freshmen participate in SMART (Students Making A Real Try), which includes one-on-one tutoring during their study hall period.

Small Classes

Many of the teachers in these secondary schools believe that small class sizes benefit low-achieving students because teachers can spend more time working with them one-on-one or in small groups. According to one study (Pate-Bain, Achilles, Boyd-Zaharias, & McKenna, 1992), in addition to the benefits for low-achievers, small classes can also help teachers to:

- find more opportunities to cover the curriculum in greater depth,
- spend less time on administrative functions, leaving more time for teaching, and
- improve their monitoring of student behavior.

Unfortunately, most of the research on the benefits of small class sizes has focused on the primary grades, so little is known about whether they are beneficial in secondary schools. In spite of the lack of evidence for secondary schools, teachers in this study cited the same benefits as have been found in the elementary grades, especially the advantages for low-performing students who need more attention from teachers. As a result, several schools, including Chicago's **Marshall Middle School**, Boston's **Timilty Middle School**, and El Paso's **Ysleta High School**, have made reducing class size a priority and use compensatory education funds to reduce class sizes in core subjects.

Extended Learning Time

Other schools have chosen to extend learning time beyond the traditional school year. To help students make the transition from middle to high school, both Illinois's **Eisenhower** and Connecticut's **East Hartford high schools** offer summer transition programs for incoming ninth-graders at risk of performing poorly in high school. These programs are designed to help ease students' anxiety about entering large high schools. Eisenhower's Title I summer program piggybacks on the district's summer program but uses short hands-on interdisciplinary units that introduce students to high school-level content. Each of three week-long units explores a single topic or theme in-depth. East Hartford's program also lasts for three weeks, during which at-risk eighth-graders review the study and academic skills they will need to succeed in high school. Faculty tutors assigned to each participating student continue to mentor and tutor the students during the school year.

As part of its year-round schedule, the **Minnesota Center** middle school offers week-long intersession programs during school vacations. Teachers identify and recommend six to eight students from each grade who need extra instruction during the intersession periods. The goal of the intersessions, which are funded through Title I, is to help students catch up at key points in the school year, instead of waiting until it is too late to help them. Teachers work with students individually or in small groups during the intersessions.

Alternative Schooling

Finally, many of the schools house self-contained alternative education programs for students who have not succeeded in traditional school settings. These programs are designed for students who have either dropped out or fallen far behind in earning graduation credits, often because they have job or family responsibilities that keep them from attending school regularly. The programs allow students to earn credits at their own pace, either in an accelerated fashion or intermittently as their schedules permit.

Hoover High School's Pathways Program in San Diego is open every school day from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m. and serves about 70 students every year. Students can earn up to three credits every six weeks by completing assignments from an Individualized Learning Plan and conducting two hours of independent study outside of class. Students prepare dinner every night. During this time they have open discussions, view presentations of student work, or listen to guest speakers. "We've saved a lot of kids through the program," noted the principal. The Quality Credit Union (QCU) at **Ysleta High School** in El Paso targets seniors who need additional credits to graduate and other students who have fallen behind because of suspensions, illnesses, or other reasons. Its computer-based curriculum allows students to complete assignments at their own pace. The program has expanded its appeal, however, and now most Ysleta graduates have earned at least one credit from QCU.

Ability Grouping

Most research suggests that grouping students according to their ability restricts the access of students in lower-level classes to challenging content and the best teachers (for example, Oakes, 1990), hampering their ability to reach high academic standards. In middle and high schools, ability grouping traditionally has taken the form of tracking, with students assigned to specific course sequences based on their past performance. In many cases, classes for low-achieving students teach only low-level skills and require little effort by students. Pressure on schools to eliminate ability grouping in favor of more equitable strategies for educating students who achieve at different levels has had some success, but the practice continues, often in subtler fashion. In a 1993 survey, more than half of all secondary schools reported that they were moving away from tracking, and only 15 percent still had traditional tracking

arrangements in place (Carey, Farris, & Carpenter, 1994, as cited in Burnett, 1995). At the same time, 86 percent of schools in the same study still were assigning high- and low-achievers to different core classes. Clearly, the pressures that have promoted ability grouping for decades have been slow to dissipate.

Use of Ability Grouping

Most of the schools in this study employ some form of ability grouping, in many cases prompted by district policies. Reasons for using ability grouping or tracking varied among the schools that used it. One high school principal cited the fourth- and fifth-grade reading levels of some of the incoming freshmen as the reason for placing them in lower-level courses. Another principal explained that his school had to offer an honors level track to compete with several top private schools in the area.

Some of the schools maintain traditional tracks for students in different ability groups, while others employ heterogeneous grouping in some areas and ability grouping in others. For instance, in a middle school in our sample, most students are heterogeneously grouped for all of their core classes, except for students with limited English proficiency (LEP) who are assigned to separate teams. Despite efforts to use the same core curriculum with LEP students, several teachers expressed the belief that classes for LEP students have lower standards. In accordance with a district mandate, another middle school had two "advanced work" sixth-grade homerooms for students planning to apply to the district's high schools with competitive admissions policies.

Ability grouping at the high school level is typically more overt. At one school in the study, freshmen select either a college-prep curriculum that begins with Algebra I and proceeds to upper-level math classes, or a parallel curriculum that begins with pre-algebra and proceeds to an algebra survey course. Another high school assigns students to different math, English, and social studies levels based on their performance in the eighth grade. Students can be assigned to lower-level classes in one subject and upper-level classes in another, depending on their strengths and weaknesses.

Among the schools that employ ability grouping, many have made strides to raise standards for classes enrolling their lowest-performing students, but expectations in some classes have not been raised high enough. The first high school mentioned above eliminated its general track, in which the math sequence began with consumer math. However, because the pre-algebra-to-algebra-survey sequence fulfills the district's two-year math requirement for graduation, many students graduate without any upper-level math classes. Even though Algebra I is widely recognized as a prerequisite for college admission, several other high schools also lacked an Algebra I requirement. At the second high school, classroom observations revealed significant differences between math and social studies classes serving high- and low-achieving students. Students in an upper-level freshman math class were using graphing calculators to

study algebraic functions, but students in the lower-level class were learning about means and medians. In social studies, students in the lower-level class were filling out a worksheet on World War I (for example, How many casualties were there during the war?), while the upper-level class had an engaging discussion on the effectiveness of Gandhi's nonviolent methods in India.

Alternatives to Ability Grouping

Several schools have found that heterogeneous grouping benefits all students regardless of their past performance. When the staff of **Fritsche Middle School** in Milwaukee looked at the performance of their graduates, they found that students in the Program for the Academically Talented (PAT) fared well in high school, but other students struggled. They experimented with a few teams using the advanced PAT curriculum in heterogeneous classrooms; after a brief period of adjustment, passing rates in Algebra I for students in the pilot classrooms had tripled. Now "everybody is PAT." Kentucky's **Fairdale** and San Diego's **Hoover** high schools also employ heterogeneous grouping but with a twist. Core classes enroll students of all abilities so that they are responsible for the same material and can learn from each other. However, the schools allow any students wishing to earn honors credit the opportunity to complete additional assignments for a class. Teachers and students acknowledged the difficulties in working with mixed-ability groups, while they recognized the technique's educational value. Many teachers take time after school to help those students needing additional support.

The Role of Title I

When Congress reauthorized Title I in 1994, it envisioned that the program would not only continue to provide supplementary assistance for disadvantaged students but also play a greater role in improving teaching and learning and raising standards for all students. Moreover, Congress changed Title I's traditional supplementary role, giving it a new emphasis on helping students achieve state standards in their core classes rather than master discrete basic skills. Congress also expanded Title I's contribution to professional development.

The Title I programs in these 18 schools operate in marked contrast to the programs described by Zeldin et al., but they have not yet achieved the vision set forth by Congress in 1994. First, these Title I programs operate in tandem with regular classroom instruction, supporting students' efforts to master state or local content standards. Second, the lower poverty thresholds for schoolwide programs have prompted many of these schools to adopt schoolwide programs since 1994; more than half of the schools we examined operate Title I schoolwide programs, in contrast to the one school included in the earlier study. Finally, most schools in this study have found ways to minimize or eliminate the stigma associated with student participation in Title I. Supplementary assistance for Title I students is often incorporated into

their regular schedules. At the same time, school and district officials did not report and the research team did not observe that Title I had made a substantial contribution to raising standards in these schools or had contributed to comprehensive school reform. Title I's influence, if any, may have been on the broader policy context that gave rise to new state assessments aligned with challenging content standards.

Important Source of Supplementary Assistance

Among the schools in our sample, Title I provides supplementary academic assistance that helps students succeed in core subject classes. In contrast with the findings from Zeldin, et al., Title I in these 18 schools does not operate distinct from the regular program; instead, it supports and reinforces the goals of regular classroom instruction. In schoolwide programs, Title I is most often used to hire additional teachers to reduce class sizes and to purchase computer equipment and instructional materials that help students complete class assignments. Principals and teachers expressed strong convictions that smaller class sizes give teachers the opportunity to provide low-achieving students with the attention they need to perform at a higher level. In schools with Title I targeted assistance programs, Title I plays a central role in helping eligible students succeed in their core classes. A prime example of the way many targeted assistance schools structured their Title I program is the TAP lab at Illinois's **Eisenhower High School**, which provides one-on-one tutoring, technology, and informational resources that are all designed to help students complete their regular coursework.

Limited Role in Schoolwide Improvement

Among most of the schools included in this study, Title I plays a supportive and often complementary role in the implementation of other elements of schoolwide improvement efforts, but it is neither a central player in these efforts nor an impediment to them. At both schoolwide and targeted assistance schools, Title I is valued because it allows schools to purchase materials and staff that support school improvement efforts. As one principal commented, "Everyone wants it. . . more materials, more money." Yet, schools with a strong emphasis on parent involvement or professional development rarely turn to Title I to provide significant support for their efforts. For instance, Chicago's **Marshall Middle School** applied for a grant instead of using Title I to establish its parent center. Several of the schoolwide programs spend less than 2 percent of their Title I allocation on professional development, and only one spends more than 15 percent (Louisiana's **Vidrine**). Among targeted assistance schools with major reform efforts underway (for example, the Coalition of Essential Schools at Kentucky's **Fairdale** and the academies at California's **Highland**), none is using Title I to support the principles or components of their reform efforts.

In two schools, Title I plays a more central role in school improvement efforts that seek to raise standards for all students. The Title I coordinator for Oregon's **Madison High School** oversees a data-driven tracking and accountability system that directs her attention to students who need additional academic support. Her database tracks at-risk students' performance in math classes and on annual diagnostic tests in math. When a student's performance begins to drop, she discusses possible interventions with the student's teachers and parents. The Title I computer lab's network maintains files on each student that include all of their class assignments. This allows the Title I staff to monitor students' completion and performance on each assignment. The system also administers tests that indicate whether a student is prepared to take the district's Graduation Standards Test or requires additional assistance before taking the test. After students attend Oregon's **Blanco Middle School's** Title I accelerated math classes (described earlier), math teachers can cover more advanced material in their classes, with the knowledge that students who are most likely to struggle with the material have already been exposed to it.

School principals and their designees, not district Title I directors, were most responsible for the operation of Title I programs in their schools. Unlike elementary schools, many of the schools in the study had school-based Title I coordinators who had primary responsibility for the operation of Title I in the school; these administrators, who manage Title I funds and oversee Title I staff and programming, typically were accountable to their principals. In schools without such coordinators, principals exerted more influence on the program than district Title I coordinators. According to both school staff and the district Title I directors, the role of the district Title I office is to keep schools informed of changing requirements and opportunities, but they rarely exert any influence over policy or personnel in these secondary schools. This gives schools the flexibility they need to serve their unique student population, but makes it difficult for the district to use Title I to leverage change at the school level because the district has little authority to coordinate the activity of Title I teachers across the district.

Chapter III. Noninstructional Services That Support Student Achievement

Although schools should educate students and not work as human service agencies, secondary schools are increasingly being called on to provide noninstructional services to support student learning. More than ever before, students are faced with problems that detract from their ability to succeed in school. Many students come to school hungry, tired, sick, or alienated from family and friends. Some live in families and communities in which they are in physical danger and are affected by substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and violence. Often, secondary school students must work as well as attend school, which causes conflicts of time and interest for them. Also, as students who have experienced failure in school for many years enter secondary school, they are at greater risk of dropping out.

In an effort to help students address these needs, the secondary schools in our study offer many noninstructional services to support student achievement. These services share four main goals:

- ***To increase student attendance at school.*** Students who need human services often have poor school attendance, which results in poor academic achievement. Efforts to increase school attendance lay the groundwork for better teaching and learning.
- ***To address students' basic human needs.*** By providing mental and physical health care services, schools enable students to come to school prepared to learn. Until these basic needs are met, students often are unable to focus on learning.
- ***To give students opportunities for meaningful relationships with caring adults and with groups of peers.*** Most educators agree that students need at least one adult at school with whom they can share concerns and successes and to whom they can turn in times of need. Students who have a meaningful relationship with a caring adult and with peers at their school are more likely to attend school and to seek help before a potential problem interferes with their academic progress.
- ***To foster connections between schools, families, and the community.*** Students need to believe that by attending school they gain membership in a larger community that will support them upon graduation. Students whose parents are involved in their education have greater academic success.

This chapter describes how schools have used noninstructional services to foster an environment in which students can focus on learning. It is organized around the central strategies that the schools in our sample use for this purpose.

Learning Communities

To increase student success, all of the middle schools in our study with more than 200 students, and almost half of the high schools in our study, create an environment that is conducive to learning by creating a series of small learning communities—also called teams or houses—within the schools. Learning communities strive to alleviate the problems described by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1990, p. 10):

Many middle-grade schools are large, impersonal institutions. Schedules typically place students in six to seven different classes each day, each with different classmates and a different teacher. The subject matter of one class typically has nothing to do with the next, which creates a fragmented learning experience for students. Opportunities for teachers to develop sustained personal relationships with students, essential to teaching them well, and to provide guidance during the at-times turbulent period of early adolescence are often nonexistent.

Learning communities, which the Carnegie Council recommends, generally contain about 100 students and four to eight teachers. Students take their core classes (language arts, math, science, social studies) with students and teachers from their team, lessening the alienation and isolation that students at large schools may feel. In most schools with learning communities, staff and students stay together for at least two years, giving students a sense of consistency and teachers the opportunity to get to know their students' needs and abilities.

Small learning communities can increase student achievement. First, by creating conditions in which students want to attend school, learning communities set the stage for teaching and learning. Second, because students have close relationships with a small group of students and teachers, they are more easily held accountable for their academic performance. Finally, as the Carnegie report said, "[T]eaming creates the kind of learning environment that encourages students to grapple with ideas that may span several disciplines and to create solutions to problems that reflect understanding, not memorization" (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1990, p. 40).

Strategies Used in Learning Communities

Schools have adopted block scheduling in conjunction with the formation of learning communities. Though block schedules vary, all organize a part of the school day into larger blocks of time than the traditional 45-60 minute period. This allows teachers more flexibility and often leads to a "decreased reliance on the standard lecture-discussion-seatwork pattern and an increase in creative teaching strategies" (Irmsher, 1996, p. 2). Because block scheduling gives teachers more time with students, teachers have a chance to provide more individual instruction, ensuring that students with special needs are less likely to fall through the cracks. Block scheduling has been linked with increased mastery

and retention of material and a reduction in suspension and dropout rates (Carroll, 1994, as cited by Irmsher, 1996, p. 2).

Teams reduce teachers' sense of isolation from their peers by giving them increased and shared responsibility for students, curriculum, instruction, and environment. Increased responsibility, along with more opportunities to collaborate, fosters a more collegial environment for teachers. According to the principal of Connecticut's **East Hartford High School**, "Teams are very positive for new teachers. They've become uplifting. It's a built-in support system." One teacher noted, "[During] my first year on a team, I learned how a math teacher teaches, how a science teacher teaches, how an English teacher teaches. That was one of the best learning experiences."

Several schools have a team leader who works with each team. The Carnegie Council (1990, p. 40) recommends that schools should have team leaders who are "responsible for creating an environment conducive to team teaching" and who "work with teams to develop ideas, to obtain resources, and to solve problems." At Boston's **Timilty Middle School** a cluster leader works with all teams at a specific grade level. The cluster leader has his or her own office; is the first administrator whom teachers turn to for help with curriculum, instruction, resources, discipline, or support; and is held accountable for the performance of teachers and students on his or her team. The cluster leader meets with each team daily, serving as a link between all teams on a grade level, which enhances horizontal communication and alignment.

Opportunities for Relationships with Caring Adults

[Adolescents] really need to be able to talk to adults they know. Even in a big school, all children ought to have a friend on the faculty who sees them every day, who knows their name, and who can observe them closely. If you have seven classes a day and 200 students, you're just not going to notice that some kid comes in with a bruise on his arm. But if it's your job to check on a child every day, eventually you're going to catch on to something like that and be able to intervene (Psychologist Mary Pipher as quoted by Scherer, 1998, p. 10).

As Mary Pipher describes in the preceding passage, students need to have meaningful relationships with caring adults at school. Staff members who have relationships with students notice when those students don't come to school, when they are not succeeding academically, and when their basic physical needs are not met. Through conversations, staff members are able to learn about students' academic and noninstructional problems and to leverage resources to address those problems. Staff members are also able to reinforce good behavior, ensuring that students' academic achievements don't go unnoticed. These relationships provide students with adult role models who are responsible, successful, and caring. When many aspects of students' lives are constantly changing, relationships with caring adults give students stability and continuity.

Although some schools in the study sample rely on learning communities to give students the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with caring adults, others establish formal programs to meet this need. Approaches differ based on school resources and staff and student interests. Several schools work to structure their Title I program to meet this need, while others focus noninstructional services in that direction, often establishing advisory or mentor programs.

At Arkansas's **Pine Bluff High School**, the Teachers-as-Advisors program matches 20 students with each teacher. The students and their advisor have monthly meetings during which students receive guidance on career paths, skills for employment, help in problem solving and goal setting, and instruction in study skills. The advisory program also holds a college information night, a financial aid workshop, and a study skills seminar to involve parents in their children's postgraduation plans. Students and teachers continue their advisory partnership for all three years of high school.

Students at Boston's **Timilty Middle School** participate in a 12-year-old mentoring program called Promising Pals. The program is designed to "enhance literacy and writing skills [and] provide an opportunity for [students] to meet positive role models, share interests, and realize their own responsibilities in making positive and lasting contributions to the world." Through the program, students are paired with adults in the community with whom they exchange letters. At the end of the school year, the schools hosts a Promising Pals celebration for all participants. In 1998, the celebration drew a gathering of 600, including the mayor, lieutenant governor, state attorney general, and state commissioner of education.

A partnership between **Madison High School** and the Oregon Council for Hispanic Achievement has led to Projecto Adelante, an after-school program for Hispanic students that provides academic and social support and fosters connections with parents. The program has two full-time staff members who each have a caseload of students with whom they develop supportive relationships. Staff help students apply for college and scholarships, plan for their next school year, and organize trips and social events, including an end-of-the-year Hispanic Banquet. Projecto Adelante also works to connect students with programs and opportunities outside the school.

Building Student Engagement

Extracurricular Activities

Several schools in the study emphasize student participation in school-related activities as a way to increase student achievement. Extracurricular activities can produce positive results, such as increased attendance, self-esteem, and interest in academics. Through extracurricular activities, students can establish friendships, refine their skills in a specific area, and develop a relationship with a coach or

sponsor who cares about their academic and social progress. Students can thus become more connected to the school and more interested in attending school. They also get to know more teachers to ask for help when necessary. These relationships can translate into greater student interest in academics. A study of after-school activities for poor urban students found that students who participate in after-school programs have higher achievement in math, reading, and other subjects (Posner & Vandell, 1994, as cited in U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 1998, p. 13).

According to the director of student activities at El Paso's **Ysleta High School**, almost all of the school's students are involved in at least one after-school club. Students can choose from more than 54 clubs, 16 sports activities, and 9 performing arts activities. Every year the student council sponsors a fair to introduce students to the clubs and organizations.

Community Service

Several schools encourage students to perform community service to promote academic achievement and self-confidence, obtain experience in a work environment, and develop links with their community. According to one study, "the infusion of community service into the curriculum leads to an >increase in student achievement and a significant decrease in rates of truancy and vandalism'" (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1986, as cited in Garman, 1995, p. 2). Students at the **Minnesota Center** middle school regularly engage in community service, in part to repay the community for the services it provides to the school. Students have planted trees at the local high school, washed fire trucks, and helped the local historical society record newspaper clippings. Besides fostering a spirit of community and volunteerism, teachers view the school's participation in community service as active learning opportunities to teach specific content. For example, in preparation for the tree planting, biology classes studied trees.

For the past five years, **East Hartford High School** has been recognized for the most community service hours logged by any high school in Connecticut. This year, students earned a J.C. Penney Youth Award for operating a bowling league for persons with disabilities. Other student efforts include a walk against hunger, a fair at the Hartford Civic Center for disadvantaged children, blood drives, food drives, a rabies clinic, and an annual senior citizens prom. The latter activity prompted students to organize ballroom dancing lessons for themselves so that they could learn how to dance the steps that the senior citizens liked to dance. A local tuxedo rental company provided free tuxedos for all of the boys participating in the event, and a floral company provided corsages and boutonnieres. A local civic group prepared dinner for everyone, and students served it. The prom, which is in its ninth year, is organized by students under the supervision of the activities coordinator.

Cross-Cutting Priorities

Although not all schools offer a wide variety of activities and clubs, several schools in our study have worked to embed particular activities into the life of the school. For example, the peer mediation program at Milwaukee's **Fritsche Middle School** ties into the school's mission to "build peace" and is considered a cornerstone of student growth. Every year, approximately 60 students serve as peer mediators, conducting close to 500 resolved mediations annually. Mediators, who are selected based on strong leadership skills (not grades) and who must reflect the diversity of the student body, receive two full days of conflict resolution training. Students may be referred for mediation by students, teachers, administrators, security guards, and parents. Mediations are conducted by a team of two mediators in a private setting. The school has numerous events that emphasize the importance of peace and thus, by extension, mediation. During the 1998 school year, the school held a peace fair, a peace month, and a summer institute on nonviolence.

Support Services

In addition to restructuring the school environment and offering students opportunities to become involved in school-related activities, the schools in the study offer support services from licensed practitioners and other experts. The services, which range from academic counseling to health care, are intended to help students handle stresses that interfere with their ability to succeed in school.

Academic Counseling

Most schools in our study employ counselors on staff who provide academic and social guidance. The counselors are generally responsible for helping students choose their classes, informing them of academic programs available to them, ensuring that seniors have met graduation requirements, and assisting students in making postgraduation plans.

At several schools in our study,

Getting Students Involved: East Hartford High School's Student Assistance Center

Many students and faculty consider the Student Assistance Center at Connecticut's **East Hartford High School** to be the hub of the school. The center is a cluster of small rooms filled with comfortable furniture, located next to the library. Posters, photos of students, and student work line the walls.

Along with graduate-school interns and volunteers, a full-time director keeps the center open for 8-10 hours a day. During that time, students and teachers conduct peer mediation, conflict resolution, tutoring, discussion groups, and career counseling. The center's director said, "Students who lack self-esteem, a connection with the institution, and connection with their peers get in trouble, so we get them involved."

The director places a priority on involving all types of students, from students who just want a comfortable place to hang out or chat with an adult to those students with serious problems. Any student who stops by is likely to be asked to help out on a center project in some capacity. This climate makes it easy for anyone in the school to seek services without feeling embarrassed or stigmatized.

counseling departments work with students to develop academic plans. At **Highland High School**, students comply with a California law that requires every sophomore to explore career goals and develop an academic plan to meet these goals. Counselors review students' performances during the ninth grade and help them understand what they need to do to reach their career goals. For example, they explain college entrance requirements and financial aid opportunities. In succeeding years, counselors refer to the plan regularly to make sure that students are on track to graduate and pursue their postsecondary plans.

All students at the **Minnesota Center** middle school meet with their parents and teachers at the beginning of the school year to set academic and personal goals. Although parents and teachers aid students in setting goals, students are chiefly responsible for setting their own personal goals and articulating them at the conference. Students reported a range of personal goals—from home-related issues such as keeping their rooms clean or watching less television—to goals more closely associated with academics such as reading a greater variety of books. Teachers keep copies of students' goals and remind students of them periodically during the year.

At San Diego's **Hoover High School**, a national program known as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) gives extra support in the college application process to students from populations traditionally underrepresented in college. Teachers and advisors meet with students in the AVID program for one class period every day to help with college and financial aid applications, college essay writing, and preparation for college entrance exams. The program also includes field trips to universities.

Support Programs

Among the services offered at our study's schools are special programs designed to support particular groups of students. Several schools have programs aimed at meeting the needs of teen mothers, a population at high risk of dropping out of school. In addition, several schools in our study (at both the high- and middle-school levels) offer varied support groups for students. These groups, led by graduate students, social workers, or licensed counselors, allow students to meet formally with a trained adult and other students who have similar problems or experiences.

At Illinois's **Eisenhower High School**, a school support team develops comprehensive intervention strategies for troubled students. The team, composed of an administrator, social worker, counselors, and school psychologist, meets once a week to discuss students referred to them by any member of the school staff or by a parent. A referred student and his or her parents are invited to the meeting where the team discusses the reasons for the students' problems and develops a plan to address those problems. At each meeting, the team reviews about 10 cases; about 100 students at any time are involved in a team-devised intervention.

School-Based Health and Human Service Centers

Many adolescents do not succeed in school because of unaddressed health problems. Chronic illness, poor eyesight and hearing, and mental health problems often go unaddressed because students do not have access to health care. Several schools in our study address this situation through on-site health and social service centers. Most centers are collaborative ventures between the school and local health care providers, who often staff the centers. Two centers in our study have professional personnel, including a doctor, a dentist, a nurse practitioner, medical assistants, social workers, and counselors. All have partnerships with local service providers; partners include hospitals, departments of public health, corporations, foundations, mental health agencies, police departments, businesses, universities, youth service organizations, community-based social service agencies, juvenile and divorce courts, and community ministries. Most of the centers are available for family and community use as well as student use.

All of the centers at high schools offer a range of health services, including immunizations, physical exams, and medical care for poor eyesight, hearing problems, diabetes, asthma, and other primary health conditions. They also offer mental health counseling and support groups. All make referrals for services not available at the clinic. Several also offer reproductive health services, including family planning, pregnancy tests, and diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Kentucky's **Fairdale High School's** Youth Services Center also offers a 24-hour teen crisis hotline.

Staff, students, and parents report great satisfaction with the centers, which are used often. Approximately 50 students a day receive free confidential services at San Diego's **Hoover High School**. The center at Connecticut's **East Hartford High School**, along with a center at a local middle school, logs 3,600 visits annually, serving 3,000 students.

Career Awareness

To augment the integration of vocational and academic content in the curriculum, many schools offer career awareness programs. These programs are designed to inform students about career opportunities and help them apply their secondary education to get on the right path to reaching their career goals through career assessments, academic planning, workshops, job-site observations, and internships.

Career Counseling

Operating at both the middle- and high-school levels, several schools have fairly comprehensive career counseling opportunities. At Milwaukee's **Fritsche Middle School**, students construct a career portfolio. The portfolio, which is started in sixth grade and maintained throughout middle school, contains an interest inventory, descriptions of report card progress, essays on trips to local businesses, and worksheet assignments. School counselors distribute materials to teachers about careers and make presentations to students about career exploration. Eighth-graders at Louisville's **Iroquois Middle School** complete a career assessment that matches their expressed interests with specific careers. With the help of parents, teachers, and the class dean, students use their assessment to develop transition plans that outline the course work needed to prepare for a career. Iroquois hosts a guest speaker each month who discusses the educational background necessary in their career, the nature of tasks in their job, and employer expectations.

Job Observations and Internships

Some high schools in the study extend opportunities to students for job observations, internships, and cooperative apprenticeships. Approximately one-quarter of twelfth-grade students at San Diego's **Hoover High School** participated in its internship program for a semester or a summer during the 1997-98 school year. Students are awarded academic credit for internships, which are generally unpaid and consist of at least 25 hours of work. Students are required to keep a weekly journal and complete self-evaluations and reflective writing assignments at the end of the experience. The school also has coordinators to set up

job observations. Students are encouraged to observe at least two different jobs for approximately two to eight hours, after which they are required to write an analysis of the experience.

Connecticut's **East Hartford High School** has a Career Services Center open to all students. The center has a full-time aide, numerous reference books, and several computers that provide access to interactive career and college advising. The center maintains career portfolios for all students that contain a career interest inventory, career objectives, and the high school courses needed to reach those objectives. Each student visits the center in tenth grade to make plans around specific career preparation options that are open to each 11th-grader. The center also schedules job observations and organizes presentations by alumni about their careers.

The school counselor at Louisiana's **Vidrine School** administers a career interest survey to all eighth-graders to stimulate their thinking about potential careers. She then helps students identify careers they would like to explore and sets up job observation opportunities for students. Students observe jobs for three-quarters of a day and return to school to meet and share their experiences. Following the observations, the counselor helps students align their coursework with their career by developing a five-year plan with each student.

Parent Involvement

Research suggests that involving parents and family members in their child's education is important because students whose parents are involved in their education "achieve higher grades and test scores, have better attendance at school, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior, graduate at higher rates, and have greater enrollment in higher education" (Henderson & Berla, 1994, and Becher, 1984, as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 5). One study found that 27 percent of students whose parents were involved in their high school education completed college, compared with 8 percent of students whose parents were not involved (Eagle, 1989, as cited in Center for Workforce Preparation, 1994, p. 2).

Despite the value of involving parents and families, it is a challenge for most schools. Across all grades, parents often do not have enough time to be involved in school, are uncertain about how they can be positively involved, and may not speak English. Unfortunately, barriers increase as students proceed through school, with parent involvement declining in the upper grades (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 41).

All of the schools in our study noted the importance of parent involvement as well as the difficulties in achieving and maintaining it. All of the schools work to establish regular contact through written communication and attempt to provide opportunities for parents to participate in activities at the

school. Some schools have established parent liaisons or parent resource centers; others ask parents to participate in decision-making groups.

Communication

Research shows a clear link between parents who stay informed of their children's progress in school and high student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 1996, p. 11). Most schools in our study have adopted varied communication strategies to keep parents informed of school activities and their child's progress. Parent-teacher conferences are standard practice at most schools; however, many staff complain that they do not see the parents they most need to talk with at these meetings. To reach parents, **Fairdale High School** faculty members in Kentucky take a bus to meet with parents in a community center located in a housing project where many students live. Similarly, **Fritsche Middle School**, which draws students from all over the city of Milwaukee, hosts parent conference nights at a high school and a community center to accommodate parents who do not live near the school.

Center Opens School's Doors to Parents

In conjunction with Youth Guidance, a community-based organization, Chicago's **Marshall Middle School** applied for and received a grant from the Kraft Foundation to open a parent center in the school. Youth Guidance furnishes a full-time coordinator, and a parent serves as a part-time assistant. The parent center operates a parenting education program, refers parents to social services, and coordinates the school's efforts to increase parental involvement and volunteering.

Title I supports a small portion of the center's activities, including parent workshops offered once a month on topics of interest. When parents pick up their child's first report card, they indicate workshop topics that interest them; topics have included child development, conflict resolution, and changes in immigration law. Parents complete evaluation forms after each workshop. Every two months, the center publishes a parent newsletter in English and Spanish to remind parents about school events and workshops and to suggest ways for them to volunteer at the school.

In 1998, the center started sponsoring parent field trips, including one to the Art Institute of Chicago. The parent center also serves as a clearinghouse for information on social services available to families. To further this effort, staff are preparing a parent-friendly guide to community- and school-based resources.

Most schools send newsletters, calendars, and other information home to keep parents informed. At **Peoples Academy** in Vermont, teachers e-mail homework reminders and weekly progress reports to parents. Louisiana's **Vidrine Middle School** has a monthly newsletter that contains articles written by students about classes they are taking. Teachers at Houston's **Hambrick Middle School** and the **Minnesota Center** middle school send "good news" postcards to parents with positive comments about their students' academic achievement, improved behavior, or other accomplishments, such as showing kindness to a fellow student. About the postcards, a parent noted, "It makes me feel good when I receive a [positive] note. Even though my child may have behavior problems, there's something good going on, and I hear about it."

Several parents at rural schools noted that parent involvement in their schools is inevitable because of the schools' size and prominence in the community. One parent at **Vidrine Middle School** said, "I never doubt that I'll find out about what's going on. I see my kid's teachers at the bank and at the grocery store, and I'll probably see [the principal] in church." A student at **Peoples Academy** noted, "Oh my gosh, my dad is always here, [he] always knows what I am doing."

Community Liaisons

Some schools have parent coordinators that work collaboratively with a core group of parents.

At California's **Highland High School**, a full-time community counselor (assigned by the district because of the school's high concentration of at-risk students) works to keep parents in touch with the school. The counselor focuses on bringing Hispanic parents who don't speak English into the school to participate in school affairs. The counselor often arranges transportation for parents who want to come to the school. Milwaukee's **Fritsche Middle School** also has a full-time parent coordinator who expands opportunities for parents to become familiar and involved with the school. Candidates for Fritsche's parent coordinator were identified and interviewed by parents. The coordinator recently submitted a proposal to a private foundation requesting support to establish a parent center at the school.

Parent Involvement in Decision Making

At several schools in our study, state or district policy mandates parent involvement in school decision making. Under the Chicago school reform legislation enacted in 1989, parents in **Marshall Middle School** have a majority of seats on the local school council, which selects the school's principal and approves the school budget and school improvement plan. Kentucky's Education Reform Act (KERA) mandates that each school have a site-based decision-making council with at least two parents. One Kentucky school in our study goes beyond the requirements of the law: **Fairdale High School** has eight parent members on its site-based decision-making council.

Although not all of the schools have governing bodies that include parents, most of them take parent perspectives into consideration in decision making. Oregon's **Madison High School** published a parent survey in its February 1998 parent newsletter that asked parents to comment on instructional issues. Faced with difficult decisions because of budget cuts, Madison asked parents questions such as, "If we are forced to make additional staffing cuts, do you prefer that we cut elective programs to have smaller class sizes in required courses? . . . or maintain the few remaining electives and have larger class sizes overall?"

Activities for Parents

The schools in our study offer varied activities in which parents participate or observe. They attempt to involve parents socially as well as academically in the education of their children. For example, during the 1997-98 school year, Milwaukee's **Fritsche Middle School** hosted an annual parent-student breakfast, which included a hot breakfast buffet, entertainment, door prizes, and information on the school's educational program and the district's new proficiency standards. One hundred students and their parents attended. The school also hosted a multicultural fashion show (which the superintendent attended) and a health fair. At California's **Highland High School**, parent showcases allow parents to become involved in their children's learning. The showcases, which are sponsored by the Title I and English as a Second Language programs, are held in the school library twice a year. There, students perform skits, readings, and presentations about the work they have done that semester. All presentations are bilingual in English and Spanish so that all parents can understand them.

In addition to offering special activities and events for parents, some schools have regular parent volunteers. California's **Hambrick Middle School** reports one of the highest number of parent volunteer hours for schools in their district. Parents are involved in fundraising, the daily operation of a school snack bar, the library, and classrooms. They are encouraged not only to volunteer but also to attend classes and observe their children. According to one parent, the attitude of staff and administration is notable. She reports, "At other places, teachers don't want you around much. . . it makes it harder for them. At other places they want you seen and not heard. Here, they want you heard." At Oregon's **Blanco Middle School**, a senior citizen organized reading partners to read once a week with a small group of students. **Peoples Academy** in Vermont has a volunteer coordinator who advertises volunteer opportunities in the town newspaper.

Some schools address the needs of parents through training and workshops. Louisiana's **Vidrine School** offers parents training on the phonics program used at the school, on preparing students for the state tests, on developing computer literacy, and on working with students who have attention deficit disorder. The school also has a parent resource room, supervised by the Title I curriculum coordinator, which houses a lending library of materials for parents to help their children learn at home. The library includes parenting videotapes.

Community Partnerships

Recognizing the community's stake in well-educated citizens and the school's stake in a supportive community, many of the schools in our study nurture partnerships with businesses and community organizations. As discussed earlier, several schools collaborate extensively with social service agencies to provide support services to students and their families. In addition, schools work with community partners to enhance the school's instructional program. At Milwaukee's **Fritsche Middle School**, local business partners have helped enrich the school's school-to-work program. Partners, which include United Airlines, MCI, and Bank One Corporation, provide guest speakers for classes as well as opportunities for job observations and field trips. The school's business partners are enhancing the development of a new industrial technology, multi-communications lab. As these partnerships continue to grow, Fritsche plans to have each of the school's academic teams establish a meaningful relationship with one business partner.

Connecticut's **East Hartford High School** has a partnership with the local police department. In an effort to prevent problems before they occur, a senior police officer in the community policing program assigned officers to be present in the school from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day in order to establish a friendly presence. He said, "My philosophy is, my officers view the school as their school." The officers, three of whom are women, work with the principal and the school security team to enforce the principal's zero-tolerance policy on crime.

Chapter IV. Policy Implications

The findings presented in the preceding two chapters suggest avenues for federal, state, and local leaders to improve the performance of secondary schools serving large concentrations of disadvantaged students. At the federal level, these findings indicate that, if federal policy makers want Title I to play a prominent role in promoting higher standards and improved achievement in secondary schools, they will have to find ways to give the program more leverage in those schools. At the state level, these schools' experience indicates that states should lend more direct support to teachers' efforts to develop high-interest lessons that reflect the state's high content standards. At the local level, study findings suggest that districts should reexamine their policies of assigning students to core classes based on their previous performance. They can also promote more effective teaching by providing more focused professional development opportunities for teachers, using data to guide decision making, and developing assessments that help guide instruction. Above all, however, these schools demonstrate that all middle and high school students, regardless of their past performance, can learn challenging content when their schools provide them with high academic standards, a rich curriculum, well-prepared teachers, and both instructional and noninstructional support services.

Implications for Federal Policy

Findings

Teachers and administrators in the schools and districts in this study did not view Title I as a central vehicle for raising academic standards and promoting effective teaching in these secondary schools. In most of the schools we visited, Title I is a small component of the school's instructional program. Even in the schools included in this study, with their strong school improvement activities, most did not use Title I for professional development, comprehensive school reform, alternatives to ability grouping, or other uses that would have had broad effects on their operations. Instead, other than reduced class sizes in schoolwide programs, Title I provided services that amounted to only a small portion of a student's school day. Title I may have had a more indirect role in promoting comprehensive reform by engendering or supporting the emergence of states' standards-based accountability systems, which directly influenced district- and school-level decision-making. Establishing the degree of Title I's influence on those statewide systems, however, is beyond the scope of this study, which focused on district- and school-level decision making.

In schools operating in a standards-based reform context, the services that Title I provides play an important role in helping low-achieving students meet the standards set for all students. Although Title I has not played a direct role in raising standards in these schools, it does give students the support

and resources they need to meet the standards that are in place. Schools in this study use Title I to help students successfully complete class assignments and satisfy accountability requirements to a much greater extent than was reported in Zeldin et al. (1991), which emphasized Title I's role in students' acquisition of basic skills. In schools that established high standards and expectations for all students, Title I played a crucial role in enabling low-achieving students to reach those standards; in other schools, Title I assistance reinforced low standards and expectations for low-achieving students. Current academic support services provided with Title I resources include tutoring, access to technology and information, pre-teaching of content from students' core classes, and monitoring of students' progress in their core classes.

Title I does not pose any obstacles to these schools' efforts to improve the performance of low-achieving students. School administrators and teachers frequently cited the flexibility that Title I gives them to address the academic and nonacademic needs of their students. This was equally true in targeted assistance schools and in schoolwide programs. School staff attribute Title I's close alignment with the core curriculum as the major reason that it does not pose any obstacles to their efforts to help their students meet state or local performance standards. Because these schools offer virtually no replacement classes, as did the schools in the 1991 study, the content that students learn in Title I classes does not conflict with the content they learn in their core classes.

In schools that group students according to their ability, students in low-level classes often have restricted access to challenging content and the best teachers. With a few exceptions, most classes that serve only low-achieving students tend to teach lower-level content and have low expectations for what students can do. For instance, in one school, students in a lower-level English class read only excerpts of *Romeo and Juliet* and watched the movie, while the regular English class read the whole play. In another school, students in an upper-level freshman math class were using graphing calculators to study functions, but students in the lower-level class were learning about means and medians. Heterogeneously grouped classes give low-achieving students more opportunities to tackle and master more difficult content. However, low-achieving students in heterogeneous classes may require additional instructional support.

Implications for State Policy

Findings

State standards and accountability mechanisms exert the greatest influence on how these schools structured their Title I services. In states with the strongest accountability systems (for example, Texas, Kentucky), schools included in this study use Title I to help all of their students fulfill the requirements imposed by the state systems. Title I instruction, like other instruction in these schools, focuses on the material assessed on the state tests, and it targets students who have performed poorly on those assessments in the past.

Strong standards-based reform environments can, in some cases, narrow teachers' opportunities to use effective teaching practices. When states issue separate standards for each content area, they tend to promote teaching that focuses on one subject area at a time rather than teaching that integrates related content. Subject-specific instruction goes against some of the principles of effective teaching highlighted earlier in this study, which promote cross-curricular integration. Most of the schools in this study have adapted easily to content-based standards, but some reported that these standards have stifled innovative and effective teaching practices. Although states should expect teachers to cover the content delineated in their standards, they should at the same time foster opportunities for teachers to present that content in ways that engage students.

Implications for Local Policy

Findings

Systematic analysis of student outcome data, focused professional development, and school-based assessment and accountability systems contribute to improved instructional practices. Systematic data analysis by an entire school staff can yield consensus on schoolwide strengths and weaknesses. This consensus in turn makes it easier to gain the support of the entire school community. Professional development that offers sustained assistance can help teachers address their weaknesses and improve their instruction. School-based assessments and accountability systems can establish benchmarks leading up to state performance standards and can offer guidance to teachers on appropriate instructional strategies to use.

Noninstructional services provided by these schools play an important role in helping disadvantaged students succeed in school during what is often a difficult time in their lives. Smaller learning units give students the opportunity to become attached to caring adults and peers. In-school and out-of-school enrichment and counseling activities also promote student engagement with school. Partnerships with government agencies, businesses, and nonprofit organizations can help expand the services available at or through the school.

Conclusions

The picture of Title I and educational improvement painted by the 18 schools in our study is encouraging, although efforts to improve student performance are still in progress. Title I in these schools is increasingly integrated with core curricula, which in turn are becoming more challenging because of states' efforts to raise standards for all students. Title I is helping students meet the more challenging standards expected of them, opening up new opportunities from which they may have been excluded in the past. Although it has not played a major role in promoting other elements of comprehensive school reform in these 18 schools, such as professional development, Title I is not a barrier to the promising reform efforts underway in these places, and it has supported some noninstructional services that are playing a major role in keeping students in school and engaged with their schoolwork.

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