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The Center's staff is comprised of nationally recognized executives, educators, policy makers and organizers who have extensive experience working with city, county and state agencies, educational institutions, federal legislative bodies, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic institutions and the private sector.

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New Directions in Christina

ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR CHILDREN,
CHALLENGES AHEAD

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The findings, analyses and recommendations expressed in this study are those of the Community Training and Assistance Center.

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Credits

This study was conducted and prepared by the Community Training and Assistance Center of Boston, Massachusetts.

New Directions in Christina Team

Principal Report Authors	Field Operations Directors	Team Members	
William J. Slotnik	Peggie L. Brown	Sara Accornero	Iris Maney
Maribeth D. Smith	William M. Eglinton	Judith Clary, Ph.D.	Lynn Stinnette-Barbour
		Donald W. Ingwerson, Ph.D.	Julia D. Thomé
Contributing Authors		Robin LaSota	LaWanna White
Barbara J. Helms, Ph.D.		Juan J. Maya	
Helen J. Levine, Ph.D.			

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Executive Summary

and capacity in 2003 and a series of pre-reform steps to focus the district on student achievement. Broad-based implementation of the reform plan began in the 2004–05 school year. The core tenets of the reform plan promoted an expectation that improved student achievement would be the focus and end result of all district initiatives, that accountability structures and processes would be supported by data and consequences, and that the improvement agenda would apply to all schools and all levels of the district.

The reform was designed to build the capacity of the district to make and sustain improvements in the following areas:

- Student Achievement
- Strategic Management and Policy
- Leadership
- Human Resource Development and Management
- Stakeholder Satisfaction and Ownership

New Directions in Christina, the systemic reform base of the district's Transformation, was conceptualized as a four-year project powered by the use of student assessments and perceptual data to set student-focused priorities, evaluate progress, and make mid-course corrections. Although this time frame has been foreshortened to two years, there nonetheless exists a large body of data that tell the story of school accomplishments to date and demonstrate the results of changes in district systems. These data include student performance assessments, constituent interviews and surveys, and the artifacts of a new school planning process. They also reveal where challenges exist and where opportunities emerge for new leaders in the district, as well as for educational leaders in other districts embarking on similar reforms.

Assessment results drawn from three independent measures—the *Delaware Student Testing Program* (the Spring 2005 data being the latest available at this writing), the *Stanford Achievement Test, Versions 9 and 10*, and the Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress*—show positive movement in student performance in Reading and Mathematics, statistically significant for various groups of students at different grade levels and subjects. The most significant improvements were among African American and Hispanic students. These improvements were particularly heartening to district leadership, school staff and the community, contributing to the decision to expand upon the key reform elements, supported by mid-course corrections, in the 2005–06 academic year. This effort was bolstered by the commitment of the Board of Education to continue to address gaps between the performances of African American and Hispanic students and White and Asian students.

As the report will elaborate, the reform has accomplished changes in the way the district and schools align instruction with standards, assess students, manage data, conduct school planning, and involve stakeholders, particularly parents, in school improvement. To undergird these changes, district level actions, guided by a new organizational development unit and new instructional service delivery team, have changed the character of district support to the schools with an emphasis on providing assistance.

The Christina School District, the largest school district in the State of Delaware, has undertaken a significant systemwide reform effort in order to address a persistent pattern of underachievement as well as an achievement gap among groups of students in the district. This initiative began with an assessment of district readiness

During the same two year period, encompassing the 2004–05 and 2005–06 school years, the district and the Christina Education Association undertook research and dialogue on ways that compensation might be used to support student learning and teachers. Also, the district initiated, set in policy, and began implementing a new administrative compensation program.

A unique feature of the reform can be seen in the volume of stakeholder input. In two years, nearly 7,000 interviews and survey responses have been collected to take the temperature of the reform as a means of keeping it healthy and on track. In addition to this input, the Standard Bearer schools, the vanguard of the district's new school improvement planning process which focuses on identifying and addressing the causes of conditions that affect learning at the sites, elicited and used nearly 14,000 responses to a much more detailed and focused assessment of the quality of the schools.

The findings and recommendations, highlighted below and detailed in the report, are based on an analysis of student achievement data together with interview and survey data. Though the original time span of the reform initiative was shortened, the results and the diversity of school and community voices which have shaped the reform are critical to understand. *Few districts make so much progress in such a short period of time with a reform of this scale.* The recommendations are offered so that momentum is not lost and so that those whose commitments have already made a difference for students will be able to continue their efforts. In this regard, all of the recommended actions can be achieved and managed within existing budgetary constraints.

A. Primary Findings and Accomplishments

Increased Student Achievement

Evidence of increases in student achievement is provided by improvement of student scores on the *Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP)*; *Stanford Achievement Test, Versions 9 and 10 (SAT9/SAT10)*; and the Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)*.

Delaware Student Testing Program Results

- In the aggregate, *DSTP* performance for Christina students improved from 2004 to 2005 in grade 3 Math, grade 5 Math, grade 8 Reading, and grade 8 Math. This improvement was statistically significant.
- Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, *DSTP* Reading results show statistically significant increases in proficiency from 2004 to 2005 for Hispanic students in grade 3 and for African American, Hispanic, Asian and White students in grade 8.
- Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, *DSTP* Mathematics results for African American students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, Hispanic students in grade 3 and White students in grade 8 show statistically significant gains in proficiency from 2004 to 2005.
- Disaggregated by income, *DSTP* Reading results show that the percentage of low income students performing in the Below Standards categories decreased in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 although only the decrease in the eighth grade was statistically significant.
- Disaggregated by income, *DSTP* Mathematics results show eighth graders in both low income and not low income groups with statistically significant increases in the percent of students in the Above Standards group and statistically significant decreases in the percentage of students in the Below Standards group.

Stanford Achievement Test, Versions 9 and 10, Results

Findings from the nationally-normed *Stanford Achievement Test*, like those from the *DSTP*, show significant progress for all student groups, including those who have been traditionally underserved. While there is overall improvement of all students, there are some dramatic and significant increases in scores for African American and Hispanic students. In the context of this progress, there remains an achievement gap between Asian and White students and African American and Hispanic students. Two types of comparisons follow: the first *SAT9/SAT10* comparison is between grade level cohorts for the years 2004 and 2005 for grades 3, 5, 8, and 10; and the second is a comparison of individual student growth from 2004 to 2005.

SAT9/SAT10 Comparison of Grade Level Performance Results from 2004 to 2005

- *SAT9/SAT10* Reading scores increased significantly from 7 to 25 percentile points for African American students in all four grades tested. There is an increase of seven percentile points in grade 3, 20 percentile points in grade 5, 15 percentile points in grade 8, and 25 points in grade 10.
- Similarly, Reading scores for Hispanic students increase significantly from 14 to 31 percentile points from grades 3 through 10. Reading percentiles increase 18 points in grade 3, 14 points in grade 5, 19 points in grade 8, and 31 points in grade 10.
- *SAT9/SAT10* Mathematics scores had no significant increase for African American students in grade 3 but did increase significantly by 11 percentile points in grade 5, eight percentile points in grade 8, and 13 percentile points in grade 10.
- Mathematics scores for Hispanic students increased significantly by 12 percentile points in grade 3, 5 percentile points in grade 5, and 8 percentile points in grade 8. There was no significant increase in Mathematics scores for Hispanic students in grade 10.

SAT9/SAT10 Individual Student Growth Results from 2004 to 2005

Comparison of individual students from one year to the next suggests that improvement in Reading and Mathematics scores in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 is not just a result of a different set of students in 2005 compared to the set of students in 2004. The comparison of individual students shows improvements in percentile points in Reading from the grade 2 to 3, grade 4 to 5, grade 7 to 8, and grade 9 to 10. Along with White and Asian students, Reading percentile scores showed statistically significant improvements for African American and Hispanic students as they transitioned to a higher grade.

- Reading performance for African American students tested in 2004 and 2005 increased 15 percentile points from grade 4 to grade 5, 14 percentile points from grade 7 to grade 8, and 14 percentile points from grade 9 to 10. These results are statistically significant.
- Hispanic students also showed statistically significant growth in Reading ranging from an increase of eight percentile points from grade 4 to grade 5 to 17 percentile points from grade 7 to grade 8 to an impressive 23 percentile point increase from grade 9 to grade 10.
- In Mathematics, African American students in grade 3 experienced a statistically significant gain of 14 percentile points over their grade 2 performance. There are smaller increases of three to six percentile points from grade 4 to grade 5, grade 7 to grade 8, and grade 9 to grade 10.
- Hispanic students going from grade 2 in 2004 to grade 3 in 2005 increased Mathematics scores by 22 percentile points. The next dramatic change is from grade 7 to grade 8 where there is an increase of 10 percentile points. There are no significant changes in performance for grade 5 and grade 10 students in 2005.

Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress Results

- In Reading, all four ethnic groups had statistically significant gains from spring of grade 7 to fall of grade 8, a period where a summer loss is often seen.
- In Mathematics, all four ethnic groups showed statistically significant overall gains from fall of 2004 (grade 7) to winter 2006 (grade 8) as well as from fall 2005 to winter 2006.

Empowered School Improvement Planning

A comprehensive reform of school planning was implemented in two phases in sixteen schools during the 2004–05 and 2005–06 school years. These Standard Bearer schools base their planning on extensive constituent participation and a rigorous analysis of student achievement data and perceptual data on organizational conditions. The third and final phase of schools has been oriented on the Standard Bearer Schools model and will begin implementation in the 2006–07 school year. The district also introduced the management strategy of integrating the resultant school priorities into the district planning processes. Representative features of the new process include:

- Uses of analytical processes that are data-based, leading to root cause analysis as the basis for making improvements in student achievement and school effectiveness. For the first time, the school plans were increasingly based on identifying and addressing the causal factors affecting progress at the schools.
- Administration and analysis of multiple measures of student achievement, both quantitative and qualitative and both formative and summative in nature.
- Annual implementation of organizational assessment. For the first time, the district systematically gathered perceptual data from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other staff on areas of school performance, practice and culture which, as demonstrated in research, are critical to student achievement.
- Significantly improved efforts and successes in involving all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents and students, in school improvement planning. Starting from the previous point of minimal participation, 2,621 individuals in Phase I, 4,732 individuals in Phase II, and 6,389 individuals in Phase III have analyzed organizational conditions through the Standard Bearer Schools process—a participatory response total of 13,742.
- Use of the Standard Bearer Schools profiles as the basis for the development of a district profile, thereby enabling school priorities to impact district priorities and budgetary allocations.

A comparison of survey responses indicates that educators from the Standard Bearer schools (Phase I and II) were more positive, to a statistically significant extent, about conditions related to teaching and learning, organizational support and alignment, school planning, and human resource practices than their peers at the schools who had not yet begun the process (Phase III). The longer teachers and administrators have participated in a thoughtful planning process, the stronger their feelings on salient issues and the more sophisticated they become in detailing what support they need from the district.

Improved Standards Alignment and Academic Rigor

The district accomplished essential steps to implement fully the state standards, increase the rigor of the academic program and respond to issues emerging from the data on student achievement and organizational assessment. Representative features of the efforts include:

- The adoption of common standards-based Reading and Mathematics texts and instructional materials for use in the K-8 program. The introduction of pacing guides for Reading and Mathematics K-8 with training for teachers.
- The implementation of the Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)* that provides teachers with formative information on the progress of students toward meeting standards.
- The introduction of HOSTS Learning.
- The training of teachers in strategies for differentiating instruction.
- The analysis and subsequent revitalization of the K-12 framework for all curricular areas that describes the manner in which all students in the Christina School District will learn the standards.
- The three high schools in the district have increased the enrollments of students in more rigorous curricula. In 2003, 345 out of 4,363 (7.9 percent) high school students took at least one advanced placement course. In 2006, 905 students out of 4,990 (18.1 percent) high school students took at least one advanced placement course. Newark High School succeeded in being named to *Newsweek* magazine's top 500 high schools, a list generated with advanced placement tests as the key metric. It was the first time for any high school in the district to make this list.
- High course-level and graduation standards for all high schools.
- Full inclusion and academic support for all special education and other disadvantaged students into a college-prep curriculum.
- Small learning community cadre-assignment and block scheduling for all high school students.

Increased Parent Involvement

The district undertook a range of efforts to involve parents in school reform. The levels of participation in school improvement planning and in the demonstration study include:

- The Standard Bearer Schools model is predicated on involving 30 percent or more of the parents at each school in analyzing organizational conditions that affect student achievement. In the 2004-05 school year, 1,485 parents participated in school improvement planning. This breadth of participation increased to 2,445 parents in the 2005-06 school year.
- Through the demonstration study component of New Directions in Christina, every household with at least one child in the public schools was annually surveyed as part of the effort to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of the reform. During the two years of the initiative, there were 2,750 parent survey respondents and 179 related parent interviews.
- Survey and interview respondents indicate that there is greater awareness by school staff of the importance of involving parents in student learning.

Improved Organizational Support

- The district's new organizational development unit and the new instructional service delivery team in the curriculum and instruction unit have been critical indicators that the district is firm in the intent to change the system to support student achievement systematically and make the district a child- and data-focused organization.

- The district's initial forays into examining the areas of teacher and administrator compensation and working towards improvements are seen as necessary and timely by interviewees and survey respondents.
- The district-commissioned review of high schools and the launching of the High School Task Force have provided evidence that the improvement of the secondary schools is an emerging district and community priority.
- The attention to infrastructure—professionalizing the district's data capacity, expanding the district's research capacity, introducing project management methodologies, establishing linkages with private sector philanthropy and updating procedures at policy and operational levels—have strengthened internal capacities.
- Significant progress was made in the area of development. Under the fiscal umbrella of the newly created Christina Partners for Excellence, commitments and grants totaling more than four million dollars were generated from local and national foundations and corporations as well as from the U.S. Department of Education. Also, the full Delaware Congressional delegation supported set aside requests in consecutive years.
- The district has assumed a leadership role by placing an organizational emphasis on being transparent and making mid-course corrections. More than 140 district, school and community leaders were active in reviewing and responding to the findings from the student achievement data, the Standard Bearer Schools data, and the demonstration study's interview and survey data.

B. The Path Ahead: Recommendations

Issue One: Standard Bearers and Organizational Alignment

- *Fulfill the commitment to the schools to implement the Standard Bearer Schools process.* The school improvement planning process is now substantive, having moved away from a compliance-based approach to a school-based practice of identifying and addressing the root causes of student and school performance. The third phase of implementation began in Spring 2006 and now includes all of the district's schools, which need the promised support in implementing a new process.
- *Align the school plans, the district profile and the budget.* The district has established a coherent means for linking school improvement plans, district priorities based on those plans, and the budgetary planning process. The processes are significant and have all been put in place. Particularly in a period of fiscal limitations, staying focused on school priorities is a bottom line requirement of senior management.

Issue Two: Parent and Community Engagement

- *Own the responsibility to involve parents.* Starting from the point of having minimal parental involvement in the schools just two years ago, the district has taken steps to involve greater numbers of parents in school improvement as evidenced, for example, by the Standard Bearer Schools process. Important next steps for the district include: defining clearly the leaders and units at school and central levels that will be responsible for involving parents; delineating what specific organizational supports the schools can expect from the administration as they work to involve parents' and identifying how practitioners centrally and locally will be held accountable for involving parents. Doing so will enable parents to know what to expect from the schools and what the schools expect of parents.

- *Ensure that community and school voices will continue to be heard.* The Christina School District has made major strides in the past two years in becoming a more public institution. It has become central to district operations to annually conduct surveys of all households with children in the schools and of all administrators, teachers and other staff at the schools. The survey responses have then been analyzed and used as the basis for improving practices at the schools and central administration. Conducting this activity and taking action based on findings is now an expectation that both external and internal communities have of the district. Their voices need to be heard.
- *Build bridges with teachers and the union.* Teachers are both instructors and a core part of the educational community. As part of the reform effort, Christina teachers have developed new skills in areas ranging from using data to improve and differentiate classroom instruction to conducting school improvement planning. Overall, they have been key contributors to the district's improved results in student achievement. It will be important to use the initial collaborative building blocks (e.g., joint task forces, increased participation in school planning, site specific professional development) as a foundation for broadening the working relationship between the central administration and the teachers.

Issue Three: Standards and Reform

- *Stress the linkage of standards and classroom teaching.* Standards-based teaching is different from standards-referent teaching. Data indicate that successful steps have been taken so that alignment between standards, assessment and instruction becomes the baseline of practice for the district. While these changes have contributed to positive movement in student achievement, there continue to be differences between perceptions of teaching effectiveness and actual student achievement results. The beginning turn around in performance of the two lowest performing ethnic groups and of low income students demonstrates that students benefit from the standards-based approach.
- *Build the reform of the secondary schools on the progress of the elementary schools.* The district's gains in student achievement have resulted from focused and coordinated efforts in leadership, community involvement, pedagogy, planning, data usage and analysis, and mid-course improvements. While the district overall has shown progress, the high schools in particular need to build on the improvements made at the feeder schools and focus the reforms on strategies that help all students succeed in a rigorous curriculum.

Issue Four: Professional Development and Data Usage

- *Broaden the understanding and usage of multiple academic measures.* Far ahead of many districts, Christina has been a leader in providing its educators with an array of high quality assessments. It has also increased the district's overall data capacity. The next challenge is to build the capacity of the central administration and the sites to use the multiple measures in concert to better understand student, teacher and school performance, and to inform practice at site and central levels of the district.
- *Strengthen the professional development for principals.* Christina's site level administrators need more professional development that is tailored to the data on student and teacher performance at their respective schools. If the principals are to become the chief executive officers of their buildings, a frequently stated goal in the district, they will need increased levels of assistance in guiding the specific reforms underway in their schools.

Issue Five: Mid-Course Corrections

- *Ensure that mid-course corrections will continue to be driven by performance data.* One of the greatest strengths of the Christina reform has been the use of data on student and school performance, as well as on organizational conditions, to regularly drive improvements. The district needs to ensure that future managerial constructs include vehicles for making transparent mid-course corrections.
- *Establish operational standards for central service delivery to the schools and community.* While much has been made of the pace of reform in Christina, the real concern is the ability of the central administration to respond to the needs of the schools and community. The progress the district has made in such areas as using data in decision-making, making multiple assessments available, differentiating instruction, and implementing a new planning process needs to become the service delivery norm for all commitments the district makes to the sites and the community.
- *Change the role of Christina Partners for Excellence (CPE).* Since the inception of this corporate and community entity, there have been significant changes of leadership within both the district and Delaware's corporate community. Further, the essential building blocks for educational reform have been put in place and the student achievement results are positive. From this point onward, the role of CPE needs to expand so that corporate and community leaders take on the mantle of becoming the conscience of the reform. By so doing, CPE will be able to help advance the momentum of reform and address gaps resulting from either changes in leadership or stagnancy in district performance.

Under the impetus of New Directions in Christina and the Transformation, the district has made substantive progress in improving student achievement, increasing community participation, changing school conditions to be more supportive of the classrooms and student learning, and changing district systems for greater student impact. This is significant progress by any district's standards and all the more noteworthy given the short time span of the reform initiative in the Christina School District. The challenge ahead is to ensure that the educational and organizational progress of the recent past is firmly engrained as the foundation for the future. The stakes are simply too high in Delaware's largest district for any other outcome to be acceptable.

CHAPTER I

New Directions in Christina: An Overview

A. Need, Readiness and Capacity for Large-Scale Reform

The Christina School District is the largest district in Delaware, serving nearly 20 percent of the state's students. As Delaware's primary urban district, it has a long, highly charged history with school desegregation, the vestiges of which are intertwined with issues of geography, economics, and student achievement. Christina's status as the only non-contiguous district in Delaware has created a physical divide and, for many, an educational divide in terms of expectations for children and schools. Like other urban districts, student performance has broken out along lines of race and income, and school performance breaks out along zip codes. As with all school districts in the country since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, closing the achievement gap in Christina is not only a matter of overcoming organizational inertia, but also a mandate to provide the best learning opportunities for all children.

For lasting effect, education reforms need to be implemented at a scale that enables entire school systems to function systematically on behalf of students, but few reforms are conceptualized with sufficient leverage to change large systems. With the potential for such a transformation in mind and as a precursor to advocating systemic reforms, the Superintendent of Schools commissioned the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC) in the fall of 2003 to conduct an in-depth assessment of the district's readiness and capacity—analyzing its readiness to pursue a pathway of systemic reform and the capacity to do so.

This assessment found the Christina School District to be laden with an array of educational initiatives, some of which were described anecdotally as successful and supported by a breadth of talented personnel and good intentions. Little evidence of systematic evaluation and accountability structures could be found, however. The amalgam of programs had also produced several unintended outcomes: a significant measure of confusion regarding implementation priorities at both the district and schools; a lack of data-based school and district planning; little community involvement; activity in the absence of an educational strategy with an associated implementation plan; and a lack of concrete student outcomes that disheartened the staff and community and fed both an undercurrent of low expectations for some students and a trend toward private schooling for others.

The findings from the assessment presented district leadership with both a challenge and an opportunity. *There was genuine openness to meaningful change in support of student achievement; yet, the change needed to be system-wide and customized to the specific needs of the Christina district.* Creating a transformation of quality and scale became one of taking on the tasks of improving and aligning leadership capacities, curricular and instructional

supports, appropriate assessments, data systems, budgetary allocations, and professional development services with clearly articulated goals for student achievement. It also meant making a commitment to involving parents and the community, a practice about which the district appeared to have made minimal commitment. Simply put, meeting a standard of excellence in education required significant and thoughtful changes throughout the entire Christina district and community.

B. The Construct and Focus of New Directions in Christina

The core tenets of the reform plan in Christina promoted an expectation that student achievement would be the “bottom line” or the outcome of all district initiatives, that accountability structures and processes would be supported by data and consequences, and that the reform would apply to all schools and all levels of the district. In summary, to build capacity; to structure accountability; and to leave no child, school, division, staff member, or parent out of the effort.

The assessment of readiness and capacity, and its subsequent community-wide presentation, gave birth to a rare, highly comprehensive agenda for change. The reform would build the capacity of the district to make and sustain improvements in the following areas:

- Student Achievement
- Strategic Management and Policy
- Leadership
- Human Resource Development and Management
- Stakeholder Satisfaction and Ownership

The district and community plan included a sixteen-part operational blueprint for changing systems in support of student achievement;

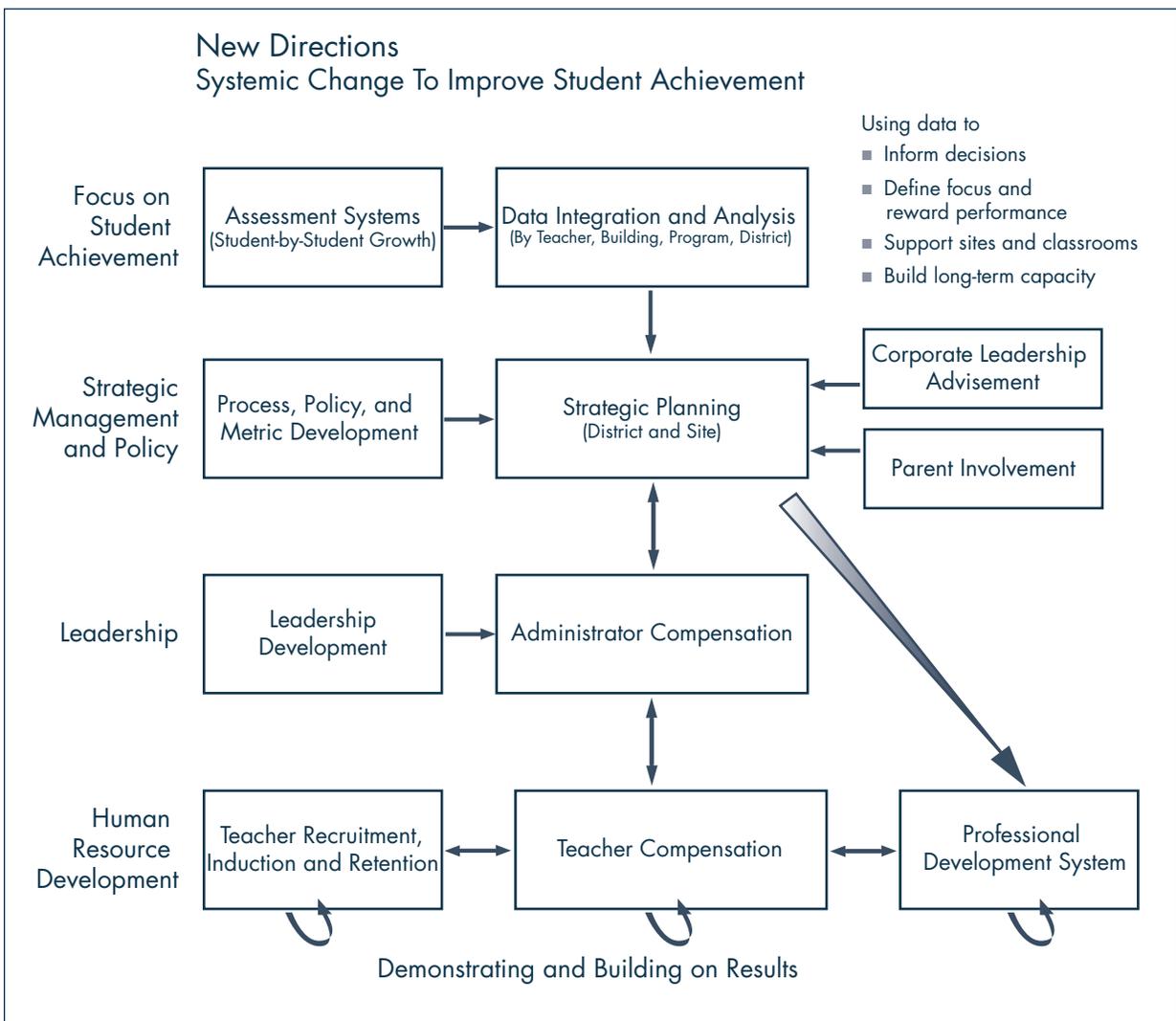
examining supports and rewards for educational professionals in the district; and conducting a demonstration study for evaluating effectiveness and making mid-course corrections. Several leading foundations and corporations supported Christina’s approach to reform and its potential for students, making significant contributions of time and funding to its success.

New Directions in Christina, the systemic reform base of the district’s Transformation, was conceptualized as a four-year project powered by

the use of student assessments and perceptual data to set student-focused priorities, evaluate progress, and make mid-course corrections.

The graphic¹ below demonstrates how the district conceptualized New Directions in Christina and its role in systemic change.

Although this time frame has been foreshortened to two years, there nonetheless exists a large body of data that tell the story of school accomplishments to date and demonstrate the results of changes in district systems. These data include



student performance assessments, constituent interviews and surveys, and the artifacts of a new school planning process. They also reveal where challenges exist and where opportunities emerge for new leaders in the district, as well as for educational leaders in other districts embarking on similar reforms.

C. Accomplishments for Children, Challenges Ahead

The following analyses and discussions of the reform in Christina are based largely on data collected from the spring of 2004 to the spring of 2006 and constitute a report of accomplishments and systemic change occurring in the district as well as bringing to light several challenges that need to be addressed in order to deepen the outcomes of the reform.

In addition to detailed examinations of student achievement data, interviews were conducted with central administrators, principals, and a random sample of teachers, as well as parents, students and members of the community. Surveys were sent to all administrators, teachers, and parent households as well as to a sample of high school students. The demonstration study survey results were used to validate the interview findings but also served to increase parent and community participation. CTAC’s *Organizational Assessment Survey*, of greater depth and length, was administered by the Standard Bearer schools and is described in detail later in this report. Table 1 shows the number of interview and research survey respondents.

Through this process of collecting perceptual data, the district has increased staff, parent, and community involvement in school and district improvement, a key objective of the reform. The effort to collect the site surveys uncovered a communication gap between many of the schools and their parents just as the response rate to community surveys demonstrates the challenge of district-community engagement. As discussed later in this report, planned and targeted strate-

Table 1 Interview and Survey Participation

Assessing the Impact of the Reform: Demonstration Study	
Interviews	Number of Respondents
2004-05	292
2005-06	317
Total	609
Surveys	
2004-05	3,414
2005-06	3,451
Total	6,865

gies, district commitment and school leadership are required to create and maintain parent and community participation.

The latest round of interviews with teachers shows several elements of the reform that have taken root in the classroom—standards-based teaching for all students, multiple measures, accountability for student outcomes, and professional development focused on student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap.

“Since accountability has become important, [my] teaching improved. I’m a much better teacher with the standards focus...I was floundering a bit because I didn’t know what to do. It will eventually hit the high school. Our scores have improved.” Elementary school teacher

“Achievement is rising. Students are achieving better in a variety of ways. There have been a lot of changes.” High school special education teacher

“Inservices are geared to improving student achievement recently. In the past, our professional development was not so focused on student achievement and classroom issues. But in the last two years, the core subject teachers feel a purpose to the meetings. Learning about differentiated instruction is very effective.” Middle school social studies teacher

“The achievement gap is narrowing. It’s just exposure. . . . City kids need earlier intervention, full-day kindergarten. They are sponges—they soak it up—but they are behind. You see the biggest gains from the kids at the low reading level.” Elementary school teacher

Responses from teachers also show the reform is challenging a culture of low expectations and accountability for all of the community’s children. Furthermore, it is evident from respondents that the implementation of the reform has confronted some of the classic barriers that come with change: lack of time and a concern for leadership consistency.

“We have a really good team. Our frustration is the lack of time. It would be really great to have more time to work with the standards as a group of teachers. We take a leap of faith that the curriculum is aligned with the standards.” Elementary school teacher

“I have observed some teachers don’t hold high expectations for students. I hear comments such as, ‘They can’t learn. These students are a lost cause.’” High school chemistry teacher

“We are losing our superintendent. I would hope that the support from the Christina school district board would continue to follow the same suit, so we know our path.” Middle school teacher

For many interviewees, the reform has been advancing. As it progressed, new issues and new ideas became evident. Deeply ingrained attitudes and weak organizational practices do not change uniformly overnight nor do children who have fallen several years behind catch up magically. The pace of planned change can feel overwhelming, and of course, unexpected changes

or “bumps in the road” add to the complexity of and trust for the reform. These issues are discussed in later chapters.

D. The Content of the Report

Chapter II presents assessment results drawn from three independent measures—the *Delaware Student Testing Program* (the Spring 2005 data being the latest available at this writing), the *Stanford Achievement Test, Versions 9 and 10*, and the Northwest Evaluation Association’s *Measures of Academic Progress*—and shows positive movement in student performance in Reading and Mathematics, statistically significant for various groups of students at different grade levels and subjects. The most significant improvements are among African American and Hispanic students.

As the report elaborates in Chapter III, the reform has accomplished changes in the way the district and schools conduct school planning, involve stakeholders and particularly parents, align instruction with standards, assess students, and manage data. To undergird these changes, district level actions, guided by a new organizational development unit and new instructional service delivery teams, have changed the character of district support to the schools with an emphasis on providing assistance.

Chapter IV focuses on the path ahead. It presents recommendations in five areas that build on the accomplishments to date, are research-based, address root causes of current challenges, and are achievable and manageable within existing budgetary constraints.

This report should serve as the launch point for deeper work in closing the achievement gap and making Christina a premier school district.



III CHAPTER

Accomplishments: Student Achievement

A core tenet of the reform plan promoted an expectation that improved student achievement would be the focus and end result of all district initiatives. The analyses of student performance in this section focus primarily on assessments from Spring 2004 and 2005, years that relate specifically to the implementation of the reform. Assessment results are drawn from three independent measures—the *Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP)*, the *Stanford Achievement Test Versions 9 and 10 (SAT9/SAT10)* and the Northwest Evaluation Association’s *Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)*. Results show positive movement in student performance in Reading and Mathematics, statistically significant for various groups of students at different grade levels and subjects. The most significant improvements were among African American and Hispanic students.

What follows in this section is, first, a description of the demographic composition of the district; secondly, a description of three comprehensively administered assessments in use in Christina; and lastly, the findings from an extensive analysis of student achievement by assessment, grade level, type of comparison (i.e., cohort, individual student growth), ethnic group, and income group on the different measures.

A. Description of Student Demographics

Information about the makeup of the district comes from the Delaware Department of Education. The total population of the district over a three-year period is relatively stable at just over 19,000, as is the percentage of low-income students—approximately 40 percent. Students in the Christina School District are primarily African American (41.8 percent) and White (42.3 percent) in 2005–06. The next largest ethnic group is Hispanic (11.4 percent in 2005–06).

Table 2 Christina School District: Student Demographic Information²

	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
Total Enrollment	19,407		19,417		19,233	
Female	9,035		9,051		9,033	
Male	10,372		10,366		10,200	
Special Education Enrollment	2,934		2,878		2,930	
American Indian	26	0.1%	35	0.2%	42	0.2%
African American	7,543	38.9%	7,788	40.1%	8,031	41.8%
Asian American	781	4.0%	806	4.2%	828	4.3%
Hispanic	1,930	10.0%	2,095	10.8%	2,189	11.4%
White	9,127	47.0%	8,693	44.7%	8,143	42.3%
Low Income	7,078	36.5%	8,254	41.4%	7,302	39.9%
Not Low Income	12,329	63.5%	11,163	56.6%	11,931	63.1%

Asian students comprise approximately 4 percent of the district's students while less than one percent of the students are American Indian.

Tracking ethnicity and income is critical because of a persistent achievement gap in the district related to ethnicity and income. In Christina, the size of the special education population is impacted by the inclusion of state programs in the district such as the Delaware School for the Deaf.

B. Description of Student Assessments

For analyses of student achievement, CTAC analyzed student achievement data from three independent sources: the *DSTP*, the *Stanford Achievement Test (SAT9, SAT10³)*, and the *MAP*. The first two measures make up Delaware's state testing program, which has been ongoing since 1997. They provide criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessment information. In an endeavor to increase the measures of student progress and provide formative data to teachers—a critical component of closing the achievement gap—Christina introduced the *MAP* in grades 7-10 in 2004 and with the 2005 school year, extended its administration to grades 2-10.

Delaware Student Testing Program is based on the Delaware State Standards and contains a subset of the *Stanford Achievement Test* with items directly

related to the *DSTP* standards in Reading and Mathematics. The *DSTP* is designed as a measure of student progress in the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics content standards⁴ and identifies student strengths and weaknesses relative to these standards. The state provides the student assessment results of the *DSTP* in the form of scale scores on a scale of 150–800, the range of which varies by grade and subject level. The *DSTP* is the primary tool of the statewide accountability system and is used to meet NCLB requirements. It is administered in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, referred to as accountability grades. Student performance is reported in scale scores as well as five proficiency levels: Distinguished Performance, Exceeds the Standards, Meets the Standards, Below the Standards and Well Below the Standards. It is this report of student performance by proficiency level that is of the greatest interest and the most meaningful to principals, teachers, parents, and the community. For this reason, it is the first assessment that is analyzed herein to show improved student performance in Christina from 2004 to 2005.

Stanford Achievement Test Versions 9 and 10 (SAT9/SAT10) is included within the *DSTP* and is given in grades 2–10. Scores are reported in scale scores, percentiles, and normal curve equivalents. It is a norm-referenced measure which allows comparisons to similar students in a national norm group.

MAP is a computerized test, given at three points during the school year—fall, winter, and spring—which provides teachers and administrators with information regarding individual student progress across the school year. The *MAP* is aligned with the Delaware content standards and administered in three areas: Reading, Language Usage and Mathematics. Scores from the *MAP* are called RIT scale scores⁵ and show a student's current achievement level along the curriculum scale.

C. Findings from a Comparison of Proficiency Levels on the *DSTP* — 2003-04 and 2004-05

The goal of improvements on standards-based assessments is to *increase* the numbers in the categories that indicate performance at or above standard—Meets Standards, Exceeds Standards, and Distinguished Performance—and, concomitantly *decrease* the number of students in categories or levels that indicate below standard performance—Well Below Standards and Below Standards. For the purpose of this comparison, the five levels have been aggregated to three levels: Below Standards (combining Well Below and Below Standards proficiency levels), Meets Standards, and Above Standards (combining Exceeds Standards and Distinguished Performance).⁶ The *percent difference* between 2004 and 2005 is examined in each of the three categories, disaggregated by ethnic group (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Asian, and White⁷) and income group (i.e., low income, as defined by participation in the free/reduced lunch program, and not low income) within grade for Reading and Mathematics. In comparing performance from one year to the next and looking for improvement, one would hope to see increases in the percent of students in the Meets Standards and Above Standards categories and decreases in the percent of students in the Below Standards category or levels.

Findings are presented in the following sequence: the finding, discussion and presentation of data. Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

- In the aggregate, *DSTP* performance in the Christina School District showed statistically significant improvement in Grade 3 Math, Grade 5 Math, Grade 8 Reading, and Grade 8 Math in 2005 (See Table 3).

The percent of students falling below standards has decreased markedly and the percent scoring in the upper categories has increased. For example, the percent of students scoring below standards (either Well Below or Below) in Grade 8 Reading decreased by 11.5 percent which was distributed between increases of 10.3 percent in the Meets Standards level and 1.2 percent in the Above Standards (either Exceeds Standards or Distinguished Performance) category. By comparison, Grade 3 Reading had a 1.7 percent decline in the percent of students below standard with a 1.6 percent increase in the Meets Standards and less than one percent in Above Standards.

The percent change in Mathematics was not as dramatic but was sufficient to be statistically significant in grades 3, 5, and 8. For example, in eighth grade, the percent of students scoring in the Below Standards categories decreased by 5.4 percent which was spread across the upper levels such that there was one percent increase in students performing at the standard or Meets Standards category and a 4.4 percent increase in students performing in the Exceeds Standards and Distinguished Performance categories.

- Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, *DSTP* Reading results show statistically significant increases in proficiency from 2004 to 2005 for Hispanic students at grade 3 and for African American, Hispanic, Asian and White students at grade 8. (See Table 4)

In Reading, third grade Hispanic students showed a 16.7 percent decrease in the percent scoring in the Below Standards categories while there was an 8.8 percent increase in the Meets Standards category and 7.9 percent increase in the percent of students performing in either the Exceeds Standards or Distinguished Performance categories. In grade 8, the African American student group had

Table 3 Percentage Increase or Decrease from 2004 to 2005 in Reading and Mathematics

Grade	Subject	Below Standards	Meets Standards	Above Standards
Grade 3	Reading	-1.7%	+1.6%	+0.1%
	Mathematics	-4.9%	+2.5%	+2.3%
Grade 5	Reading	-1.1%	-1.4%	+2.5%
	Mathematics	-3.3%	-1.2%	+4.5%
Grade 8	Reading	-11.5%	+10.3%	+1.2%
	Mathematics	-5.4%	+1.0%	+4.4%
Grade 10	Reading	+1.6%	-0.6%	-1.1%
	Mathematics	-0.1%	+2.6%	-2.5%

Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

Table 4 Percent Increase or Decrease from 2004 to 2005 in Reading by Ethnic Group

Grade	Racial/ Ethnic Group	Below Standards	Meets Standards	Above Standards
Grade 3	African American	-1.9%	-1.2%	+3.1%
	Asian	+1.6%	+15.1%	-16.7%
	Hispanic	-16.7%	+8.8%	+7.9%
	White	+1.2%	+0.9%	-2.2%
Grade 5	African American	-3.5%	+0.9%	+2.7%
	Asian	+9.3%	-7.9%	-1.6%
	Hispanic	-4.5%	-9.4%	+4.8%
	White	+0.2%	-0.7%	+0.6%
Grade 8	African American	-15.3%	+13.7%	+1.7%
	Asian	-25.0%	+23.0%	+1.9%
	Hispanic	-12.9%	+10.9%	+2.0%
	White	-7.1%	+6.4%	+0.7%
Grade 10	African American	+1.3%	-0.7%	-0.6%
	Asian	+15.8%	-21.3%	+5.5%
	Hispanic	-4.7%	+3.3%	+1.4%
	White	-0.9%	+3.0%	-2.0%

Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

a 15.3 percent decrease in students performing below the standards while there was a 13.7 percent increase in the students performing at the standards and a 1.7 percent increase in the percent of students in the two upper categories. Asian, Hispanic and White student performance in eighth grade Reading showed statistically

significant decreases in the percent of students performing in the lower categories, increases in the percent of students meeting the standards and small but positive increases in the percent of students performing in the upper two categories. White students continued to achieve at a steady level.

- Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, DSTP Mathematics results for African American students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, Hispanic students in grade 3 and White students in grade 8 show statistically significant gains in proficiency from 2004 to 2005 (See Table 5).

In third grade, the percent of Hispanic students performing in the below standards categories decreased by 15.5 percent while the percent scoring in the two upper categories increased by 8.5 percent and the percent of students meeting the standards increased by 7.0 percent. In fifth grade Mathematics, the percent of African American students performing below the standards decreased by 5.2 percent. There was no change in the percent of students in the Meets Standards category but a 4.5 percent increase in the percent scoring in the upper two categories (Exceeds Standards and Distinguished Performance).

- Disaggregated by income, DSTP Reading results, show that the percentage of low

income students performing in the Below Standards category decreased in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 although only the decrease in the eighth grade was statistically significant. (See Table 6)

The eighth grade showed a decrease of 13.6 percentage points—an impressive drop—for low income students and a statistically significant decrease for not low income students. While most groups showed improvement in the percentage of students in the Above Standards level, these were quite small. The eighth graders in both income groups made a significant increase in the percent scoring in the Meets Standards category.

- Disaggregated by income, DSTP Mathematics results show eighth graders in both low income and not low income groups with statistically significant decreases in the percent of students in the Below Standards group and increases in the Above Standards. (See Table 7)

Table 5 Percent Increase or Decrease from 2004 to 2005 in Mathematics by Ethnic Group

Grade	Racial/ Ethnic Group	Below Standards	Meets Standards	Above Standards
Grade 3	African American	-6.7%	+3.8%	+3.1%
	Asian	0.4%	+7.4%	-7.8%
	Hispanic	-15.5%	+7.0%	+8.5%
	White	-1.7%	NC	+1.9%
Grade 5	African American	-5.2%	+0.6%	+4.5%
	Asian	+3.0%	-5.6%	+4.5%
	Hispanic	+8.5%	-13.0%	+2.6%
	White	-3.2%	+0.3%	+3.0%
Grade 8	African American	-6.4%	+3.0%	+3.3%
	Asian ⁸	-18.6%	+4.5%	+14.1%
	Hispanic	+1.2%	-4.1%	+2.9%
	White	-6.3%	+0.8%	+5.5%
Grade 10	African American	-5.6%	+6.9%	-1.4%
	Asian	+5.0%	+3.2%	-8.2%
	Hispanic	-7.3%	+6.2%	+1.2%

Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

Table 6 Percent Increase or Decrease from 2004 to 2005 in Reading by Income Group

Grade	Income Group	Below Standards	Meets Standards	Above Standards
Grade 3	Not Low Income	-2.3%	+0.1%	+2.1%
	Low Income	-1.2%	+3.4%	-2.2%
Grade 5	Not Low Income	-2.3%	-1.3%	+3.5%
	Low Income	-0.1%	-1.5%	+1.5%
Grade 8	Not Low Income	-9.1%	+7.7%	+1.4%
	Low Income	-13.6%	+12.8%	+0.8%
Grade 10	Not Low Income	+2.7%	-1.0%	-1.8%
	Low Income	-0.2%	+0.1%	+0.1%

Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

Table 7 Percent Increase or Decrease from 2004 to 2005 in Mathematics by Income Group

Grade	Income Group	Below Standards	Meets Standards	Above Standards
Grade 3	Not Low Income	-2.7%	-1.2%	+3.9%
	Low Income	-8.0%	+7.1%	+0.9%
Grade 5	Not Low Income	-5.9%	-1.6%	+7.4%
	Low Income	-1.1%	-0.9%	+2.0%
Grade 8	Not Low Income	-6.3%	+0.3%	+6.0%
	Low Income	-3.8%	+1.5%	+2.3%
Grade 10	Not Low Income	+0.8%	+3.3%	-4.1%
	Low Income	-1.9%	+1.6%	+0.2%

Numbers in blue represent statistically significant results at $p < .05$.

Fifth grade not low income students also showed a statistically significant decrease in the Below Standards group and an increase in the Above Standards category. Grade 3 low income students also showed an increase in students in the Meets Standards category; however, this result was not statistically significant.

D. Findings from a Comparison of SAT9 and SAT10 — 2003-04 and 2004-05

Within the *DSTP* Reading and Mathematics assessments are subtests of the *SAT9* (2004) or the *SAT10* (2005). These tests, unlike the *DSTP*, are standardized, norm-referenced tests which allow

comparison of groups over time. Also unlike the *DSTP*, which reports results in terms of percent of students in each proficiency category, this test compares students with other students in a national norm group based on percentile scores. For example, students who score at the 70th percentile, score as well as or higher than 70 percent of the students in the same national reference group.

The figures, presented as bar charts, compare the performance of students in Grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 in 2004 and 2005 based on the mean national percentile of each group. In each grade, the data have been disaggregated by ethnic group and income group. The number at the bottom of each

bar is the number of students in the group represented by the bar. The height of the bar indicates the mean national percentile for the group. While caution should be exercised when making comparisons, as there are slight differences between the *SAT9* and the *SAT10*, appropriate conversions have been used with each test to make the scores statistically comparable.

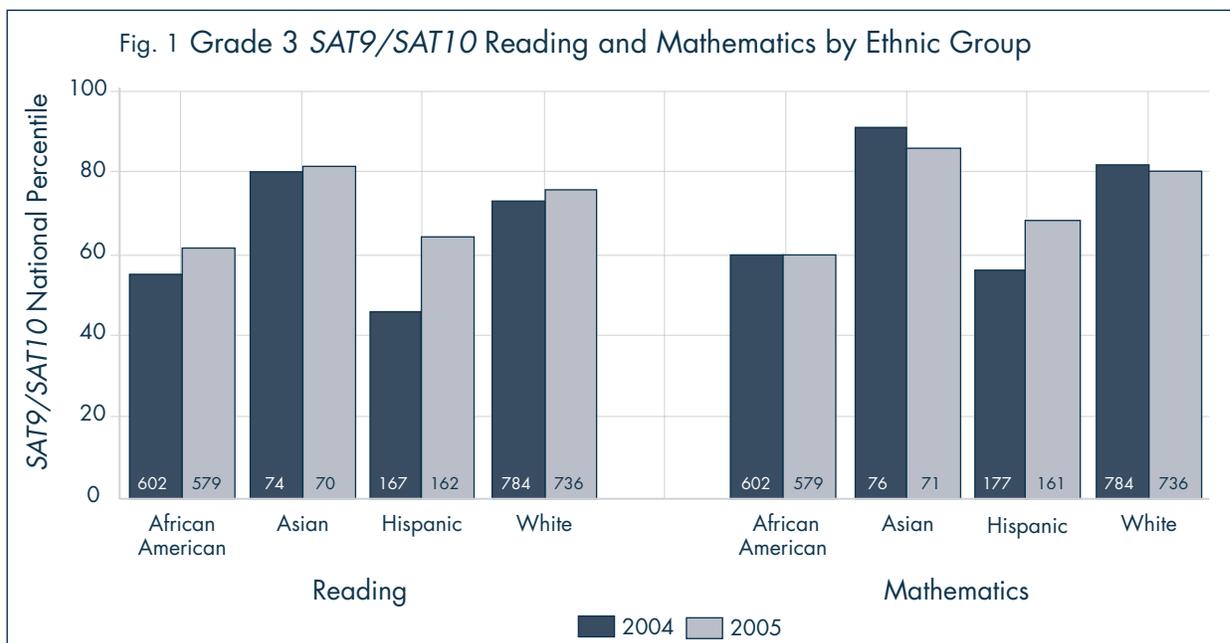
When *SAT9/SAT10* Reading results are disaggregated by ethnic group, results are similar to those seen on the *DSTP*. African American and Hispanic students, generally, show the largest increases. One general finding across grades and subject is that, while there are many instances where the achievement gaps are narrowing, they nonetheless remain statistically significant. Results are presented by grade for Reading and Mathematics disaggregated by ethnic group and income group.

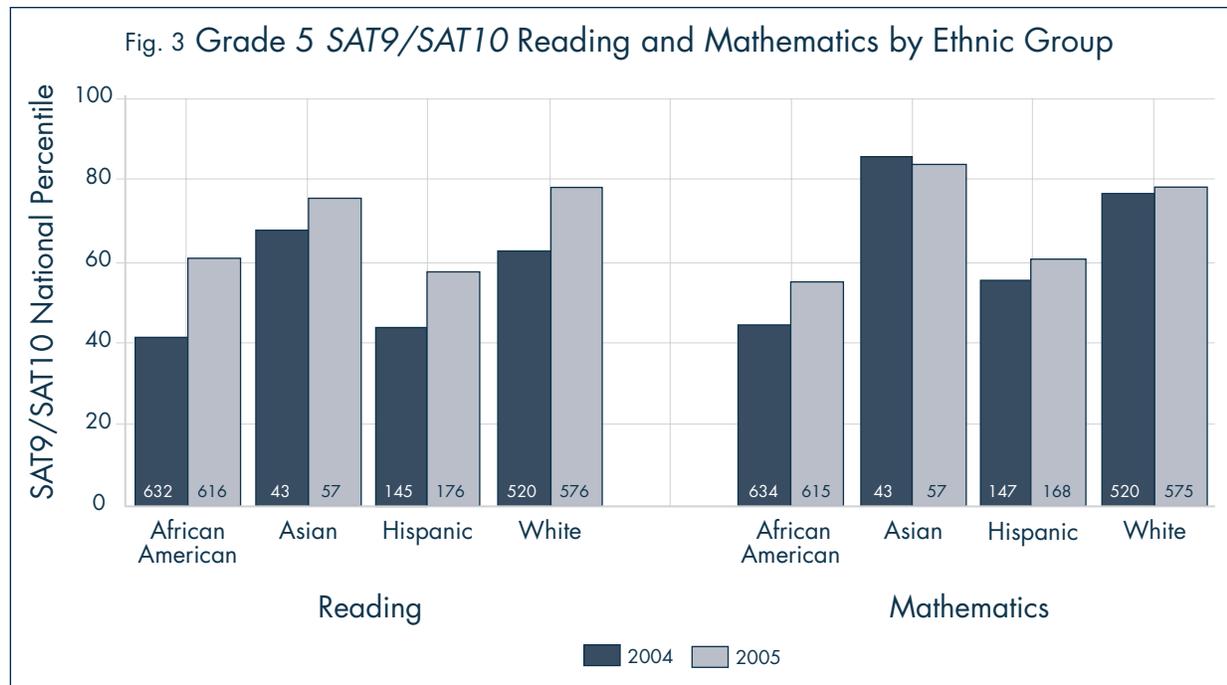
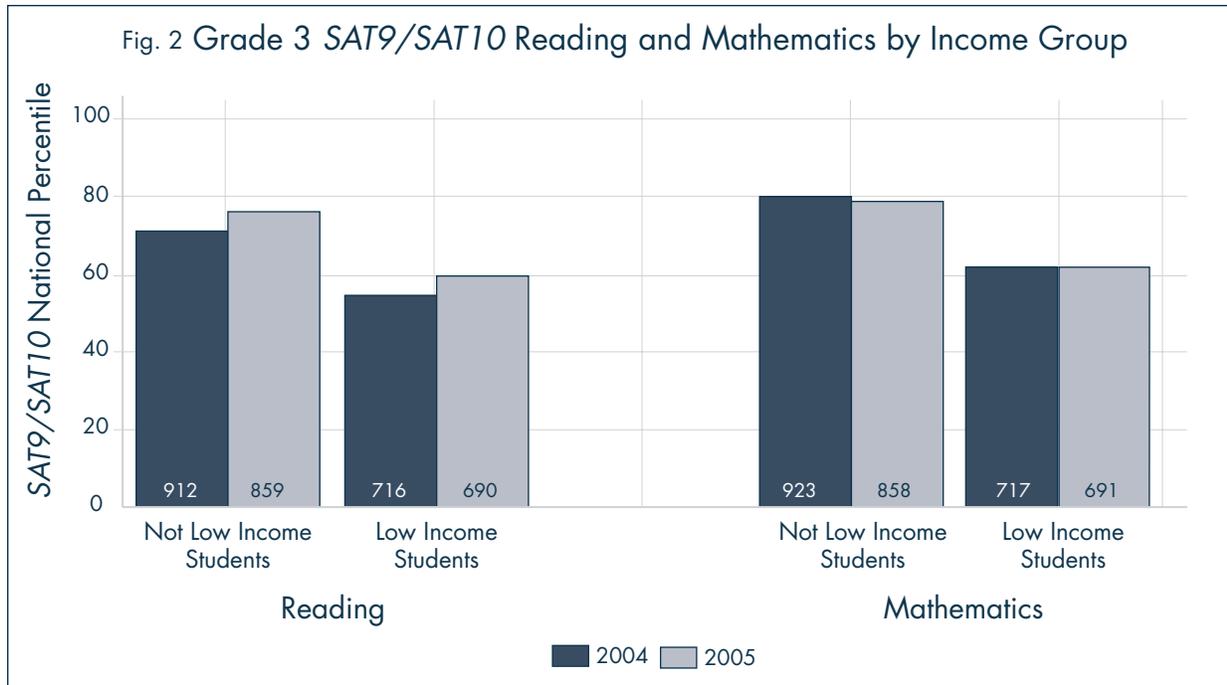
Grade 3 *SAT9/SAT10* Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic Group and Income Group

- The 2005 third grade African American students had a six percentile point increase (55th percentile to the 61st percentile) over the third graders in the 2004 group and the 2005 Hispanic group show a significant increase of

18 percentile points (46th percentile to 64th percentile) over the 2004 Hispanic group. (See Figure 1)

- In Mathematics, on the *SAT9/SAT10*, third grade Hispanic students in 2005 performed 12 percentile points above the 2004 Hispanic student group, though there is no change in performance between the 2004 African American student group and the 2005 African American student group. The Asian student in 2005 actually had a slight decline of five percentile points from the performance of their 2004 classmates.
- Performances of third graders on the *SAT9/SAT10* Reading test show increases for students categorized as not low income, from the 72nd percentile for students in 2004 to the 77th percentile for students in 2005. Students in the low income category have shown an increase from the 54th percentile in 2004 to the 60th percentile in 2005. (See Figure 2)
- Third grade Mathematics performance has remained basically the same for both income groups for both years—not low income 80th percentile; low income 62nd percentile.





Grade 5 SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic Group and Income Group

- All ethnic groups in fifth grade showed improvement from 2004 to 2005. In particular, marked increases occurred in Reading for the African American students from the 41st

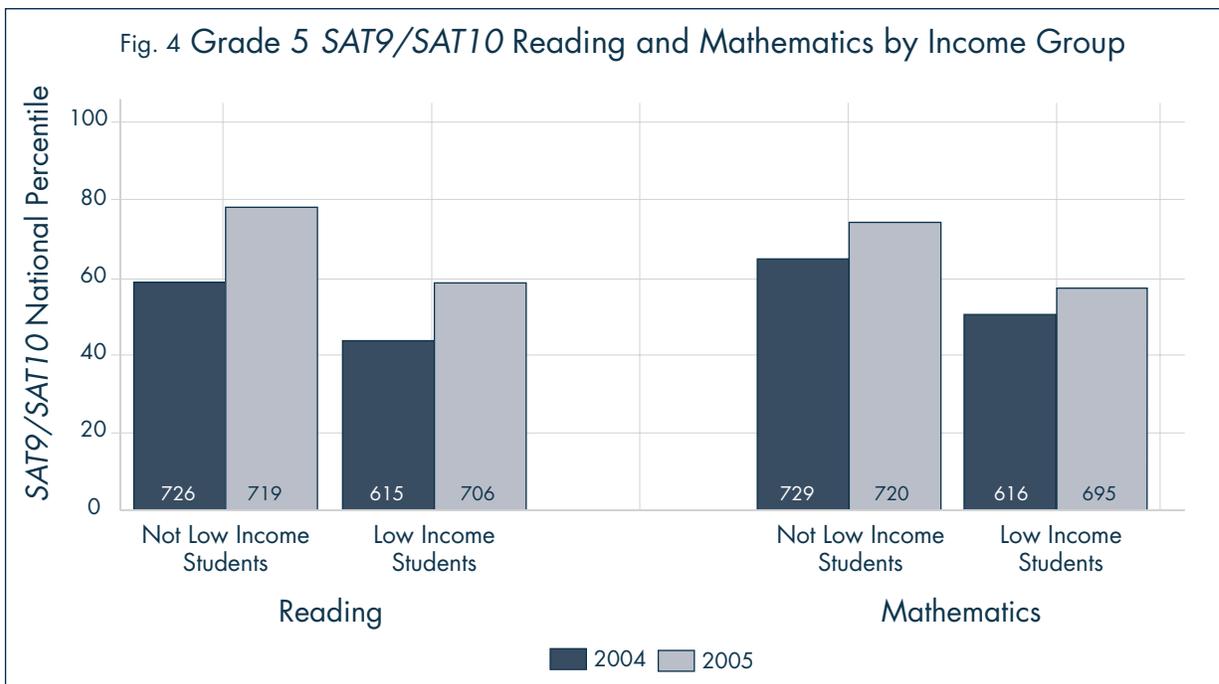
percentile to the 61st percentile and the Hispanic student group with an increase from the 45th percentile to the 59th percentile. The Asian group had a smaller increase of eight percentile points while the White student group increased by 14 percentile points. (See Figure 3)

- Mathematics performance of the fifth grade African American students in 2005 was 11 percentile points (46th percentile to 57th percentile) above that of the 2004 students—the largest improvement of the four ethnic groups. The 2005 Hispanic student group outperformed the 2004 Hispanic student group by five percentile points (57th percentile to 62nd percentile) and the 2005 Asian and White student groups showed little to no change.
- An analysis of the performance of fifth graders on the *SAT9/SAT10* Reading test by income shows a similar pattern with both groups showing large gains in 2005. The not low income student performance increased from the 61st percentile to the 78th percentile while the low income student group increased from the 43rd percentile to the 59th percentile. (See Figure 4).
- Fifth grade Mathematics performance overall has increased. The performance of the not low income group has increased from the 70th percentile to the 76th percentile. The low income group has increased from the 51st

percentile in 2004 to the 58th percentile in 2005.

Grade 8 *SAT9/SAT10* Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic Group and Income Group

- The 2005 eighth grade African American student group outperformed the 2004 eighth grade group by 15 percentile points (40th percentile to 55th percentile) and the 2005 Hispanic students outperformed the 2004 eighth grade class by 19 percentile points (35th percentile to 54th percentile). Furthermore, both 2005 groups have passed the 50th percentile point. The 2005 Asian student group performed 22 percentile points above the 2004 group and eight percentile points above the 2005 White group. (See Figure 5).
- Asian eighth graders showed the largest improvement over the 2004 eighth graders in Mathematics—16 percentile points (68th percentile to 84th percentile). The 2005 African American and Hispanic student groups both show increases in performance of approximately eight percentile points while White students increased by four percentile

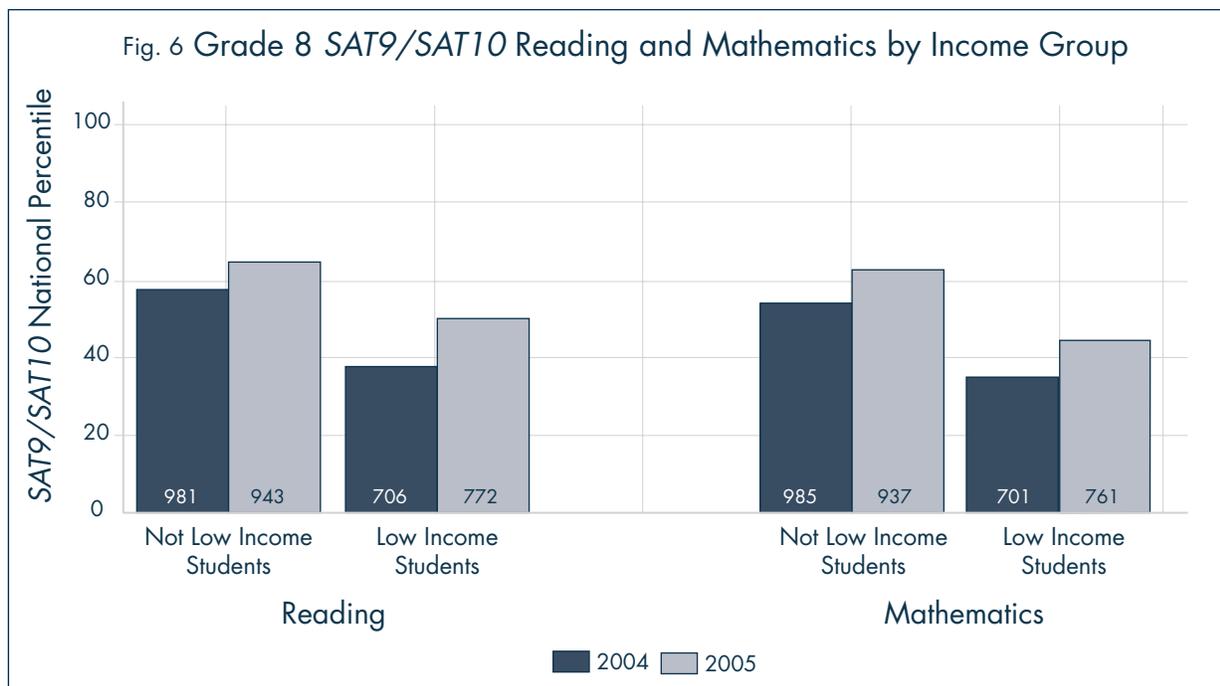
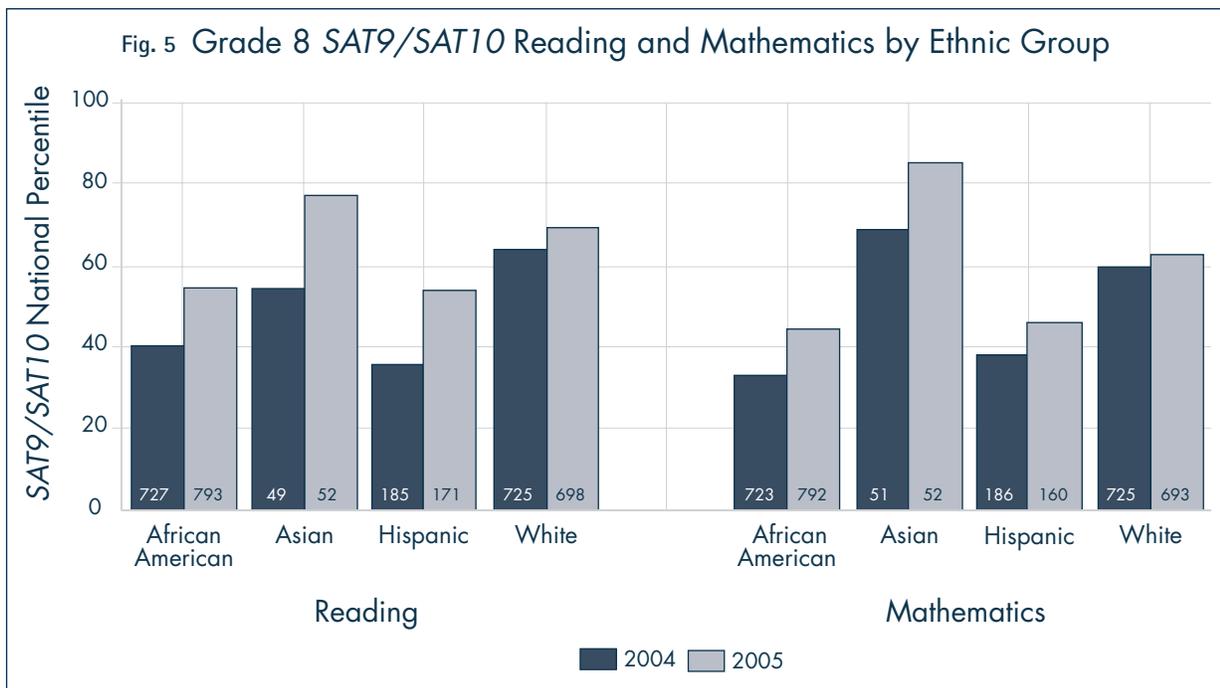


points. However, the mean national percentile for both the African American and the Hispanic groups continues to be below the 50th percentile.

- Overall Reading performance by grade 8 students improved over performance in 2004. Not low income students showed an increase

from the 59th percentile in 2004 to the 68th in 2005. The low income student group shows an even larger increase from the 38th percentile in 2004 to the 53rd percentile in 2005. (See Figure 6).

- Mathematics performance increased with both groups scoring seven to eight percentile points



higher in 2005. In spite of an increase from the 35th to the 43rd percentile, the mean national percentile for the low income group remains below the 50th percentile.

Grade 10 SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic Group and Income Group

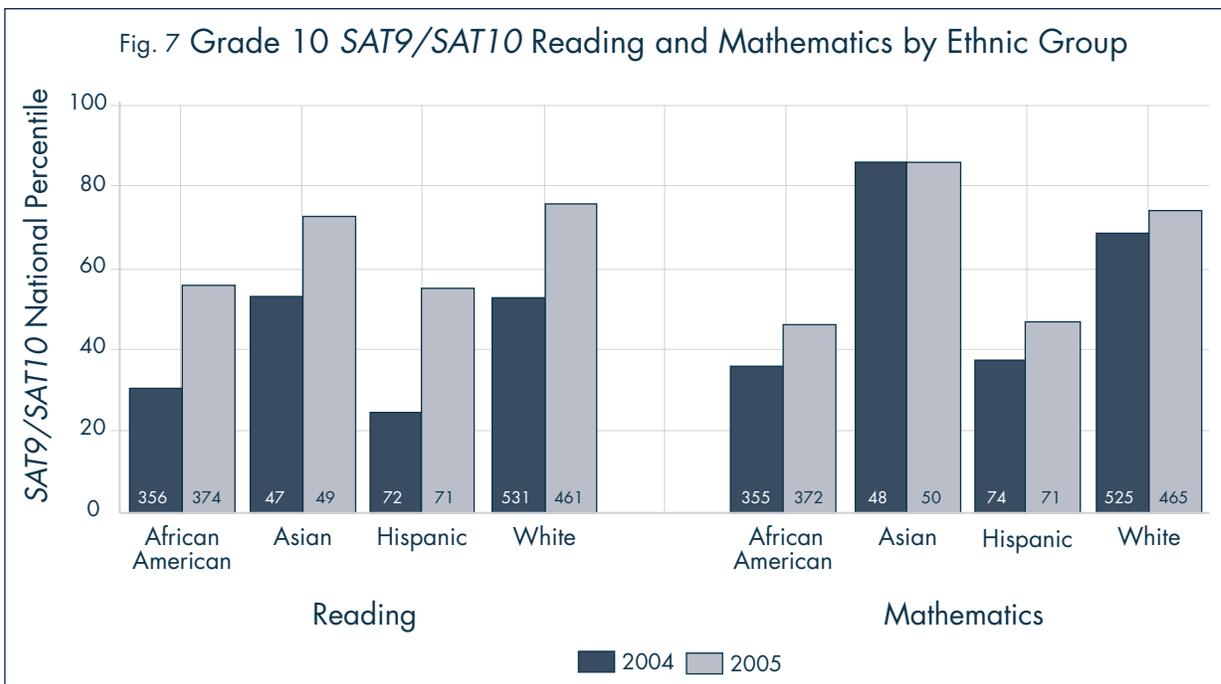
- Reading performance of Christina’s tenth grade students shows marked improvement by all groups in 2005. African American and Hispanic students had mean percentile scores between 26 and 31 percentile points higher than the 2004 student groups. The Asian and White student groups also showed significantly higher performance. (See Figure 7).
- Mathematics performance of the 2005 African American and Hispanic students in grade 10 increased by approximately 13 percentile points, however, both groups still have a mean national percentile below the 50th percentile.
- Performance in Reading by tenth grade students showed a marked increase in 2005 for both income groups. The not low income group had an increase of 23 percentile points from the 49th percentile to the 72nd percentile.

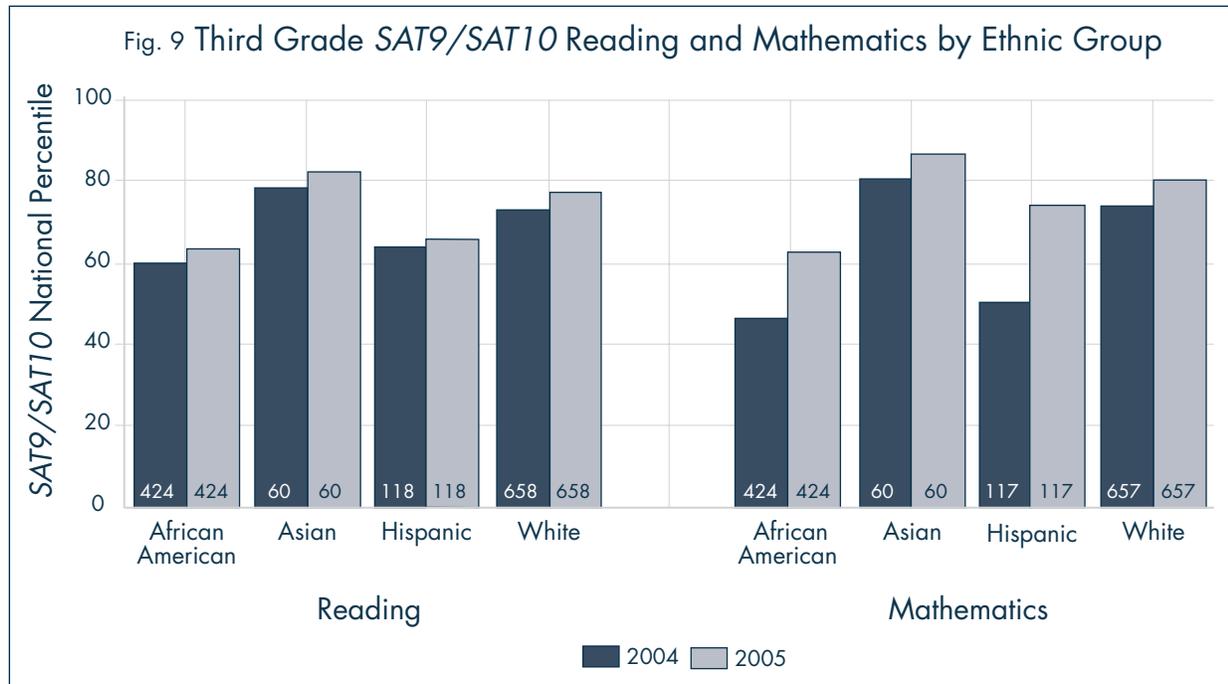
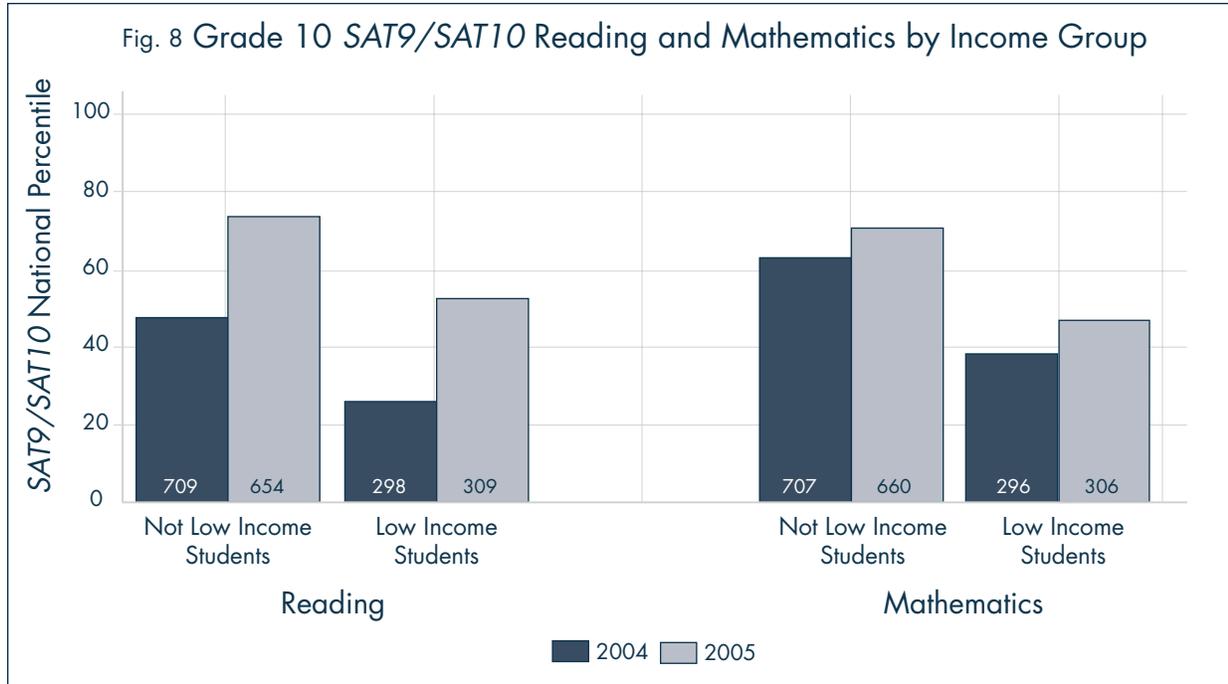
Similarly, the low income group had an increase of 26 percentile points from the 26th percentile to the 52nd percentile. (See Figure 8).

- Mathematics performance by tenth graders also showed some improvement. Not low income students showed a slight increase of six percentile points from 2004 to 2005. The low income student group showed an 11 percentile point improvement this year.

E. Findings from a Comparison of Performances of Same Students over Two Years (2003-04 and 2004-05) on the SAT9/SAT10

In the following analyses, SAT9/SAT10 scores in Reading and Mathematics from the 2005 administration for students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 are compared to the scores that these students received in 2004 while in grades 2, 4, 7, and 9. Only students with scores on both administrations are included in the analysis. Each grade level is disaggregated by ethnic group and income group. This type of analysis is useful as an indicator of how schools contribute to student growth when students are present in the school for at least two





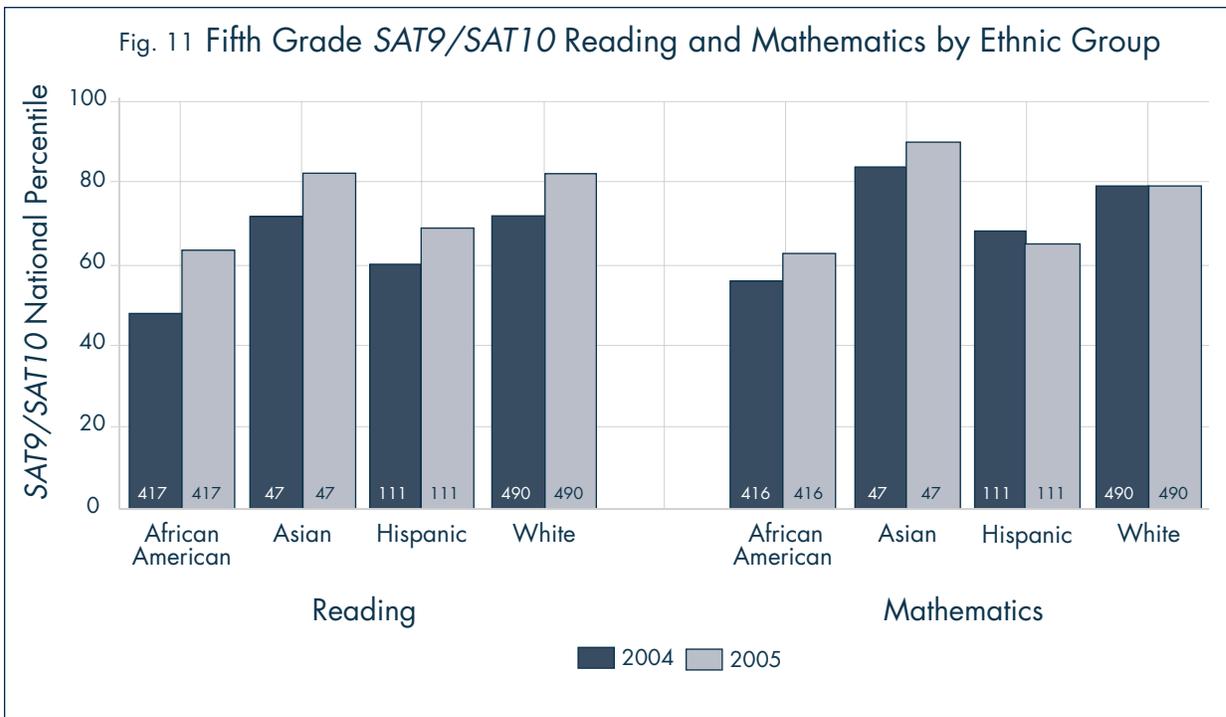
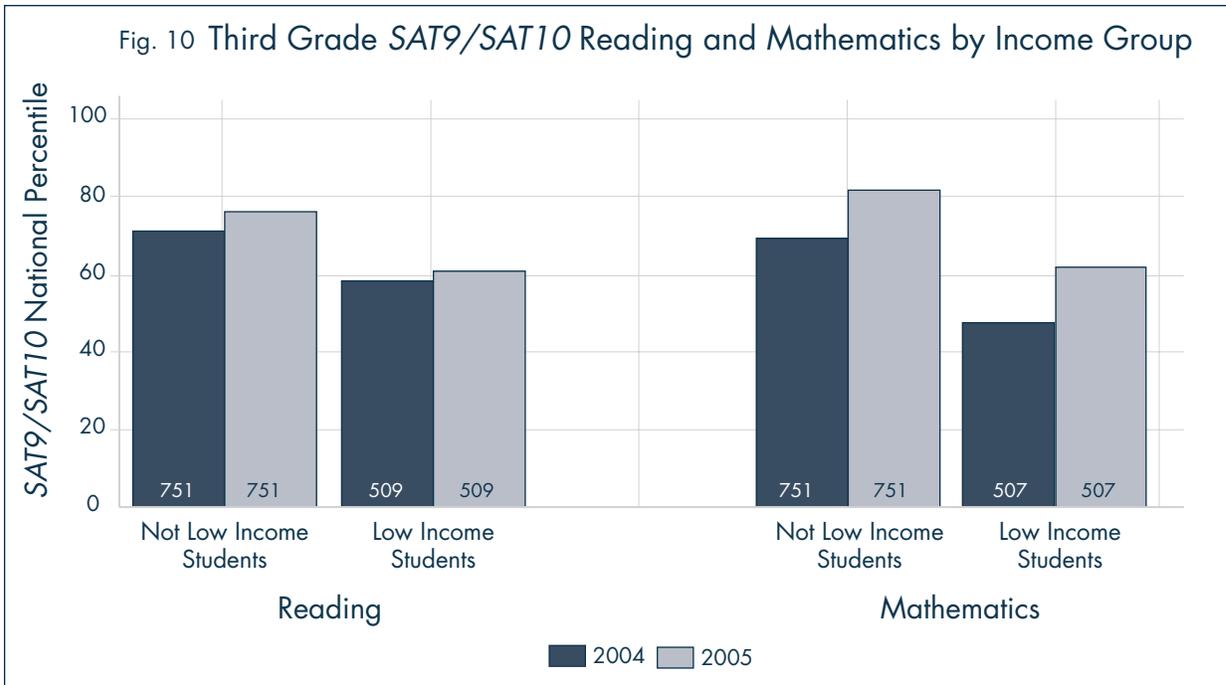
test administrations, the variable of recent student mobility having been removed from the data.

Third Grade SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic and Income Groups

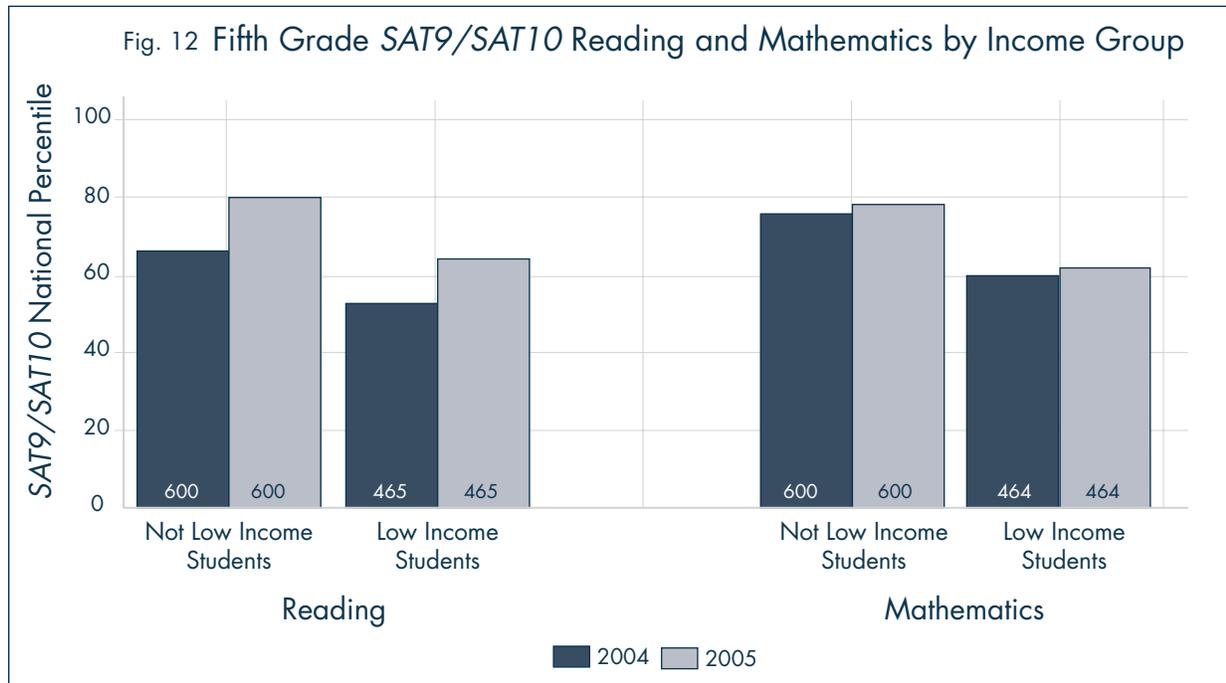
- In Reading, African American, Asian, and White students had gains ranging between

three and four percentile points. (See Figure 9).

- In Mathematics, all four groups had statistically significant gains with the African American and Hispanic students showing the largest mean gains of 14 and 22 percentile points,



- Students in both income groups had small gains of three to four percentile points in Reading from 2004 to 2005. (See Figure 10).
- Larger gains were seen in Mathematics. The low income group had a gain of 14 percentile points compared to a gain of 10 percentile points in the not low income group. Both results were statistically significant.

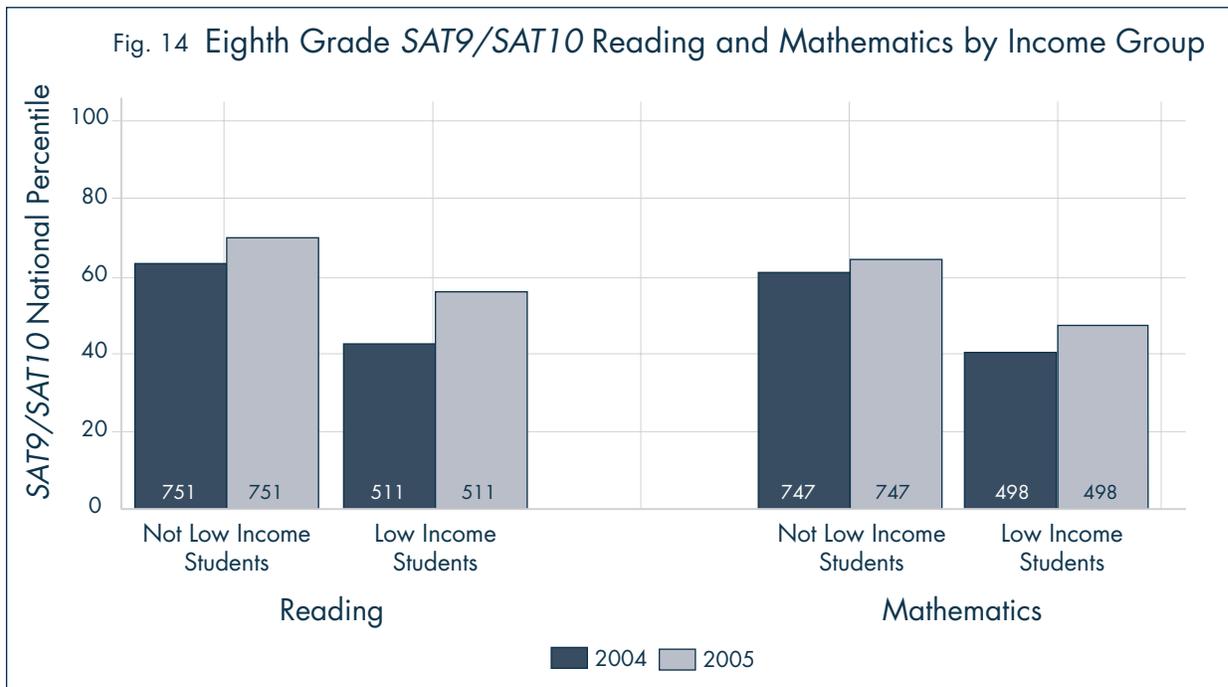
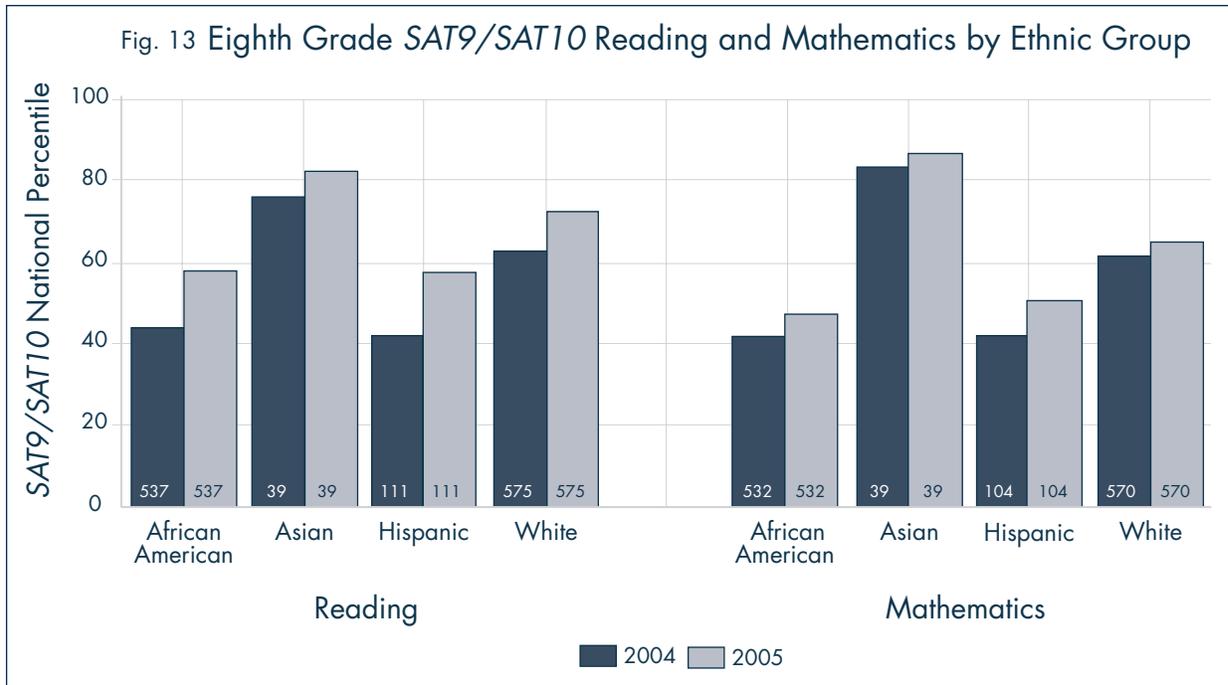


Fifth Grade SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic and Income Groups

- All four of the ethnic groups showed statistically significant mean gains in Reading. African American students had the largest gain from the 49th percentile to the 64th—15 percentile points. White and Asian students had gains of 11 percentile points and Hispanic students eight percentile points. (See Figure 11)
- In Mathematics, African American and Asian students experienced small gains of 4-5 percentile points while Hispanic students had a negative gain or loss and White students showed no change. None of these changes was statistically significant.
- Both income groups had significant gains in Reading. The not low income group gained by 13 percentile points, while the low income group gained by 11 percentile points. (See Figure 12).
- Both groups had minor gains—two percentile points—in Mathematics.

Eighth Grade SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic and Income Groups

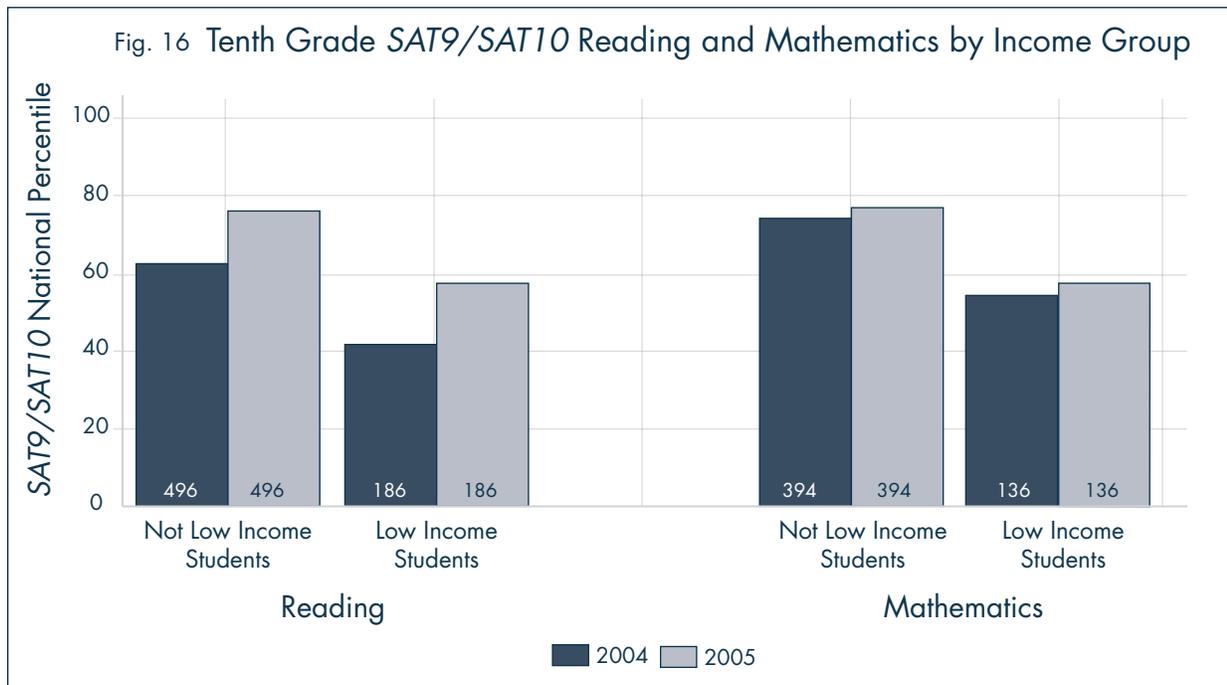
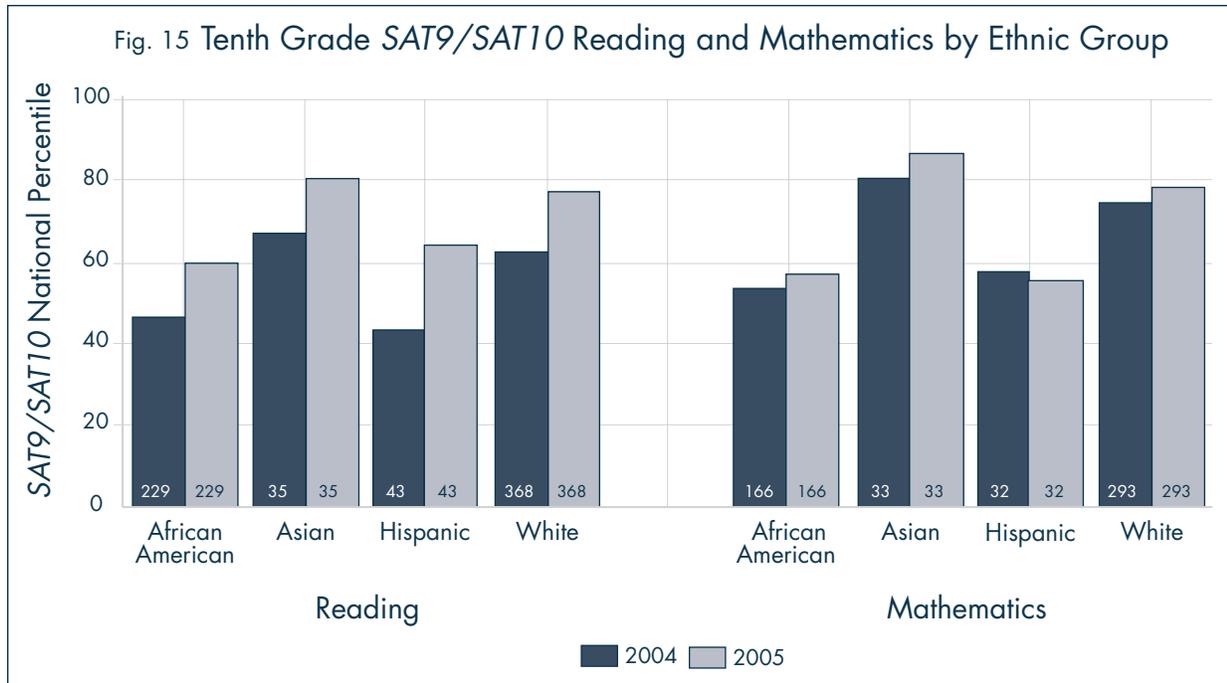
- All four groups had significant gains in Reading. Particularly strong gains were achieved by the Hispanic students: from the 41st to the 58th percentile—a gain of 17 percentile points. The African American students gained from the 45th to the 59th percentile—14 percentile points. Both groups achieved above the 50th percentile. (See Figure 13).
- In Mathematics, while somewhat smaller gains were made by three of the groups, the Hispanic students gained from the 41st percentile to the 51st—10 percentile points and exceeded the 50th percentile.
- Both income groups had significant gains in Reading from 2004 to 2005. The low income group had a gain of 14 percentile points while the not low income group gained by nine percentile points. (see Figure 14).
- In Mathematics, the low income group had a gain from the 40th to the 47th percentile, still



scoring below the 50th percentile. The not low income group had a marginal gain from the 61st to the 65th percentile.

Tenth Grade SAT9/SAT10 Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic and Income Groups

- Significant gains (greater than 10 percentile points) were achieved by all four ethnic groups in Reading. Hispanic students showed the greatest gain from the 42nd to the 65th percentile—23 percentile points. The other



three groups gained between 12 and 14 percentile points. (See Figure 15).

- In Mathematics smaller gains were achieved—three percentile points.
- Both income groups showed statistically significant gains from 2004 to 2005 in Reading.

Specifically, the not low income group experienced a gain of 13 percentile points while the low income group had a gain of 16 percentile points. (See Figure 16).

- In Mathematics both groups showed slight gains of two to three percentile points.

F. Sample of Findings from MAP — 2004-05 to 2005-06

The Northwest Evaluation Association's *Measures of Academic Progress* was implemented in grades 7-10 beginning in the fall of 2004. *MAP* is given three times a year: fall (September), winter (February) and spring (May) and has separate scales in Reading, Mathematics and Language Usage. Additional grades 2-6 were added in the fall of 2005.

As an example of the kind of information available with the implementation of this formative assessment, line charts tracking the performance of a cohort of students who started taking the *MAP* in the Fall 2004 administration when they were seventh graders and who have scores for five⁹ of six administrations in Reading, Mathematics or both into their eighth grade year are presented here. Results are disaggregated by grade and by ethnic group. The black line marked "National Norm" represents the mean RIT score of the 2005 national norming group for the grade and season (fall or spring). NWEA does not provide a score for Winter National Norm so the score indicated is interpolated from the fall and spring norms.

Grade 7 (2004-2005) to Grade 8 (2005-2006) MAP Reading and Mathematics by Ethnic Group

All four ethnic groups show positive trends in both Reading and Mathematics across the five administrations—Fall 2004 to Winter 2006—of the NWEA *MAP*.

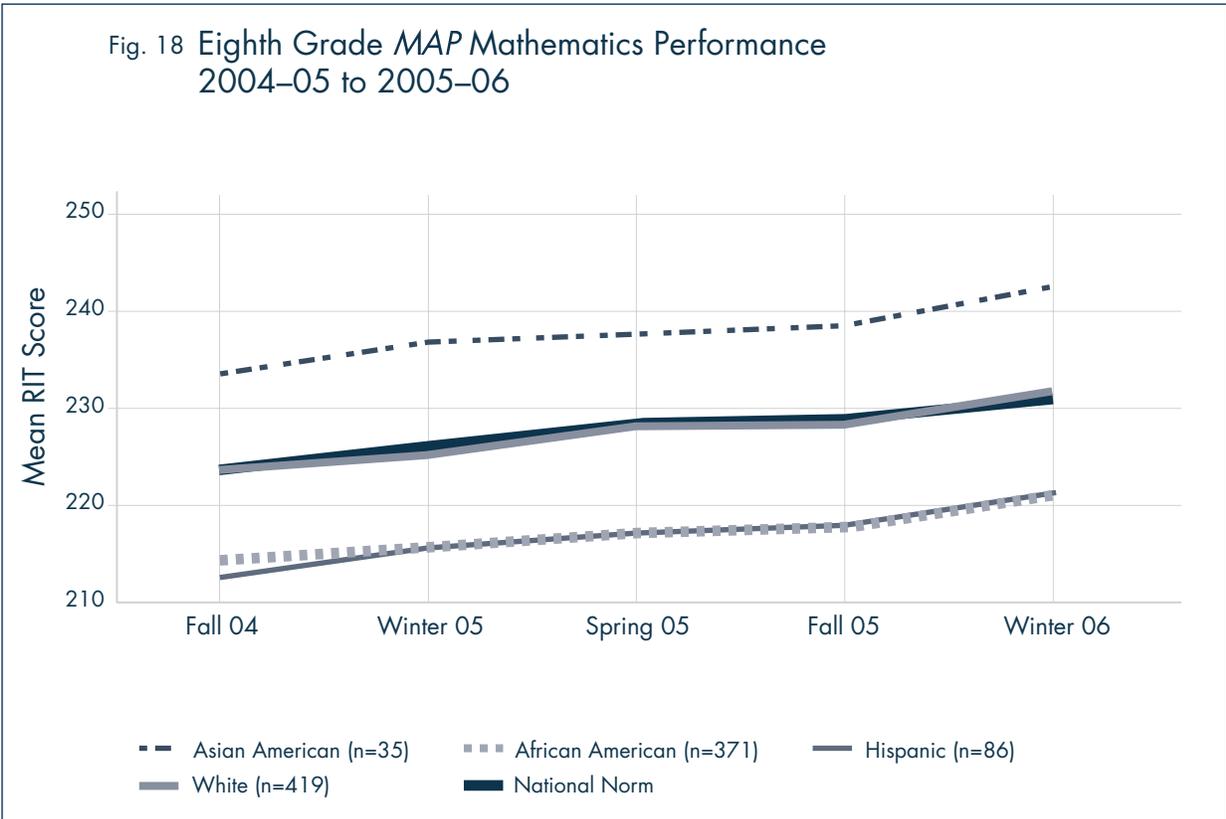
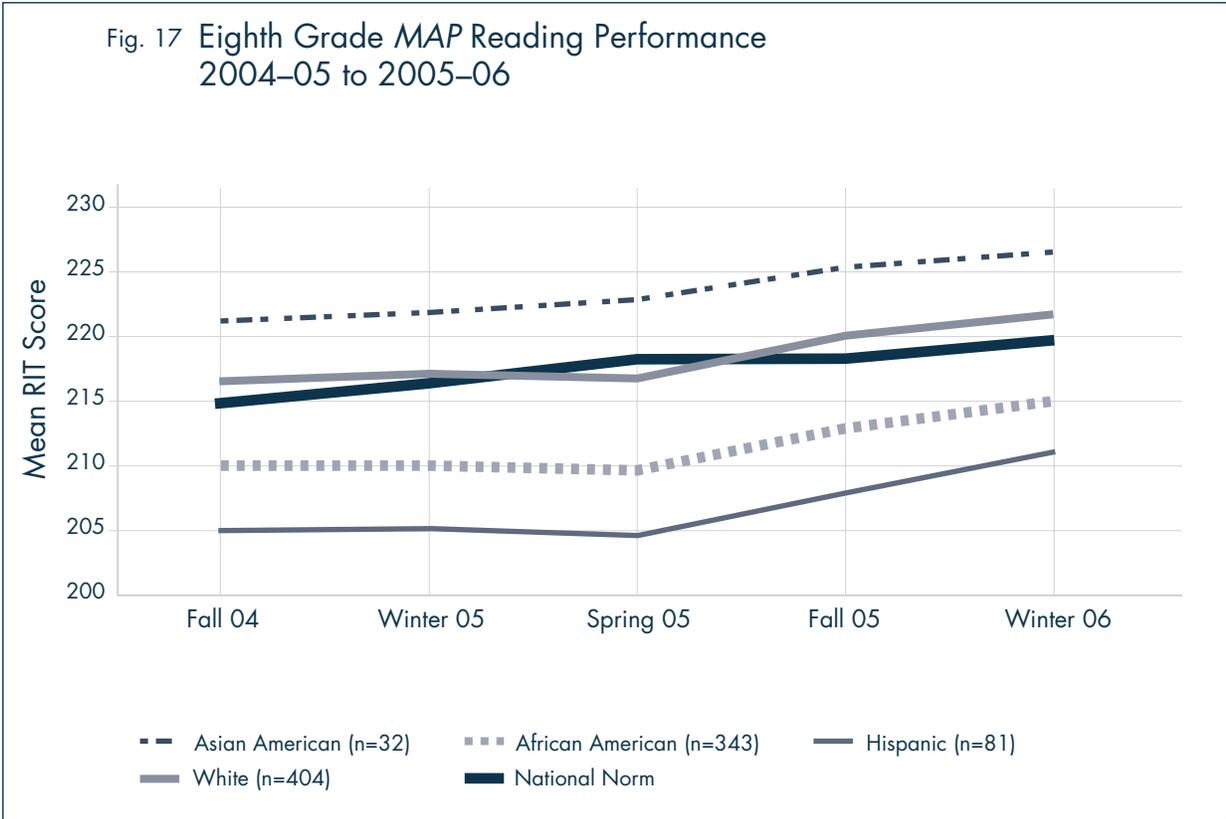
- In Reading, all four ethnic groups had statistically significant gains from spring of seventh grade to fall of eighth grade, noteworthy because this is a period where a summer loss is often seen. (See Figure 17).

- In Mathematics, all four groups showed statistically significant overall gains from fall of 2004 to winter 2006 as well as from fall 2005 to winter 2006. (See Figure 18).

The advantages of the *MAP* include the alignment with the state standards, the provision of individual student progress information to teachers, and the fact that student and school information can be compared with national norms. Other information may be inferred from these two charts. For example, during the first year of *MAP* administration, progress is flat in Reading, suggesting that it took some time to align the curriculum and the assessment.

G. Summary Findings from Student Achievement Data

The foregoing analysis of student achievement in Reading and Mathematics in Christina from 2004 to 2005 is based on several measures: (1) proficiency levels on the *Delaware Student Testing Program*; (2) grade-to-grade performance in 2004 and 2005 on the embedded *Stanford Achievement Test*; (3) individual student growth on the *SAT9/SAT10* from 2004 to 2005; and (4) a sample of progress on the *MAP* over several administrations in two years. Overall, students in Christina made statistically significant gains on the state test that measures their understanding of standards-based content in Reading and/or Mathematics in grades 3, 5, and 8. Tenth grade African American students also made significant gains in Mathematics. Hispanic and African American students showed statistically significant growth and greater improvement than Asian and White students in several areas. While there are decreases in the achievement gap, it continues to exist among the four major ethnic groups and is consistent across multiple measures.



CHAPTER

Accomplishments: Systemic Change and Participation

Overview

The Christina reform has focused on making the school system function more systematically on behalf of students. This chapter examines changes in school improvement planning, perceptions of the practitioners, parent involvement, academic focus, management and service delivery, and professional support and rewards.

A. School Improvement Planning

Understanding the Seminal Role of School Planning

A romantic view of education would indicate that schools, by their very nature and mission, would be engaging places for all students to learn, yet, this is rarely true. The very best of schools are the result of thoughtful leadership and planning, meaningful in-depth analysis of student performance, scientific analysis and reflection, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Many, if not most, school plans are compliance-driven and riddled with piecemeal improvement strategies, which are rarely evaluated for their impact on student outcomes. Low parent participation in school planning is the norm. Understanding the seminal role of planning in school effectiveness is the hallmark of outstanding school and district leadership.

Survey and interview data in Christina initially showed a range of attitudes about school planning—from school planning as a necessary ordeal to school

planning as a guidebook for the year's work—but prevailing thought is emerging that planning can and, with new processes, will be better.

“The old PEP team had one parent. We need to revitalize and re-establish the team. Part of the problem is turnover.” Elementary school principal

“Parent and community involvement is minimal. We encourage parents to be a part of the SIP committee but it is difficult to get parents involved at the secondary level.” Secondary school principal

“Our site council meets monthly on education issues. The cycle has changed and we can now get the data earlier and use it to plan.” Elementary school principal

“Parents are not very involved in school planning. A couple of parents are on the PEP committee. This year we have more involvement than last year. We expect [it] to increase.” Elementary school principal

“My issue with school improvement plans is that they are voluminous tomes that sit in a corner. I don't know if they are living, breathing documents here. I have not been here long enough to identify the difference.” Central administrator

“There is a district expectation that schools will involve parents in planning. We also want them involved in board policy and site councils.”
Central administrator

At the district level, past practice had been to collect and sometimes review school plans, but rarely to consider school plans as components of the district planning process. Survey data indicated that 43.8 percent of teachers do not agree that “district administrators make decisions based on student needs and achievement” or that “the needs of the school shape the district's overall improvement agenda.” School and district planning go hand in hand and require clarity in expectations, roles, responsibilities, and accountability. Thus, a second focus of the reform has been that of improving the process of school planning and integrating the school and district planning processes.

Building Capacity for Effective School Planning

High quality school plans are the result of high quality planning processes. Developing the capacities of school leaders and faculties to engage in effective planning processes is an important role of the district. As part of the systemic reform, the Christina School District undertook a comprehensive reform of school planning with key tenets in mind. Schools must: (1) plan based on multiple measures, both quantitative and qualitative and both formative and summative in nature; (2) administer organizational assessment surveys in order to take the temperature of the school in several areas research has identified as critical to student achievement; (3) improve their efforts to involve all stakeholders, particularly parents, through the survey as well as through other means; and (4) engage in analytical processes that are data-based and lead to a determination of causes of underachievement prior to developing solutions. Concomitantly, the district would develop a process that would bring the school planning priorities into the district planning process as well as a service delivery model that would place the schools at the center of district activity.

Supported by training and technical assistance in school planning, the district selected Standard Bearer Schools, a planning process developed by CTAC. In these schools, the standard being borne is that all planning will be driven by a rigorous analysis of perceptual and qualitative data on school conditions and quantitative data on student achievement. This analysis involves all the major constituencies at the school and focuses on identifying and addressing the root causes of current levels of student and school performance.

In the Standard Bearer Schools process, participants administer the *Organizational Assessment Survey*, a tool to gather perceptions about the school in the following areas: Climate; School Planning; Teaching and Learning; Curriculum and Instruction; Assessment and Testing; Principal Effectiveness; Parent Involvement; Student Involvement; and District Office Support. The

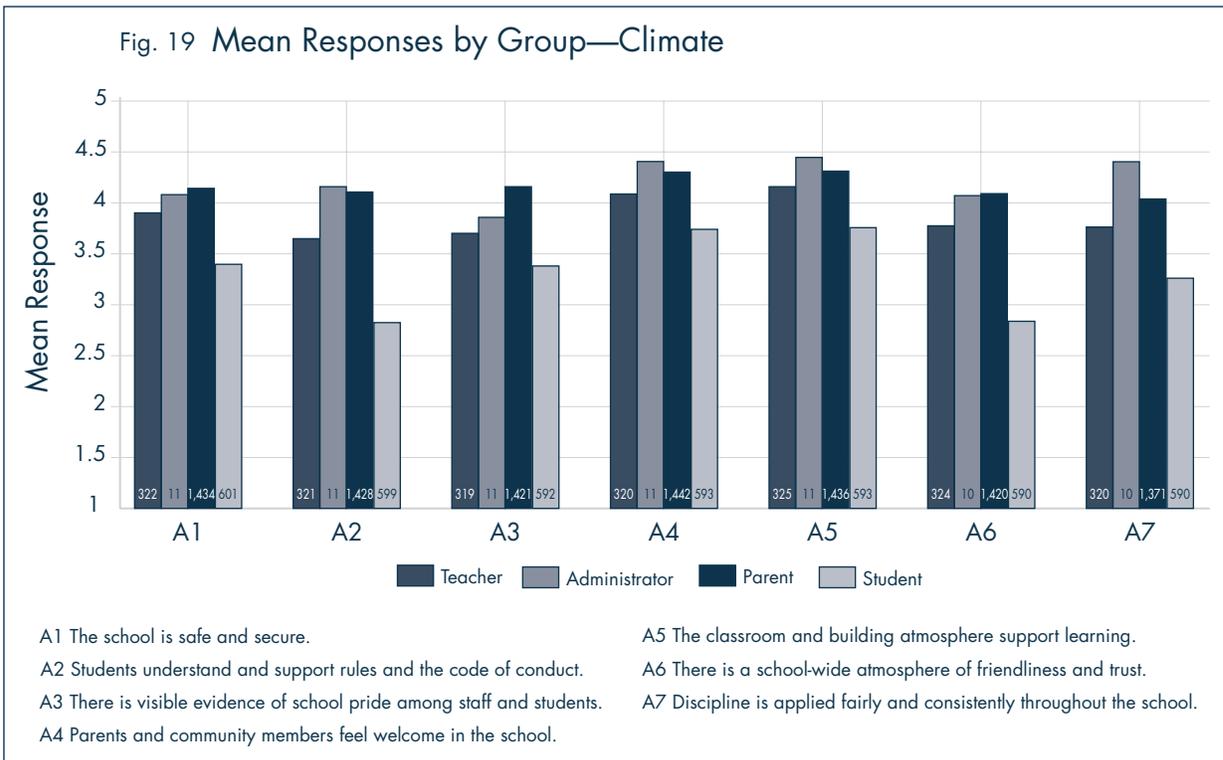
survey asks for a response to a set of statements. Information comes back to the school by respondent role—teacher, principal, student, parent, and other staff—providing comparative data on how the school is perceived by various stakeholders in areas important to its effectiveness. The Standard Bearer Schools process emphasizes the involvement of all stakeholders, encouraging a breadth of response to the OAS and helping schools seek strategies to include the voice of parents and students beyond the school council. Secondly, technical assistance is provided for a thorough analysis of all of the school’s quantitative measures of student achievement. These two types of measures form the School Profile.

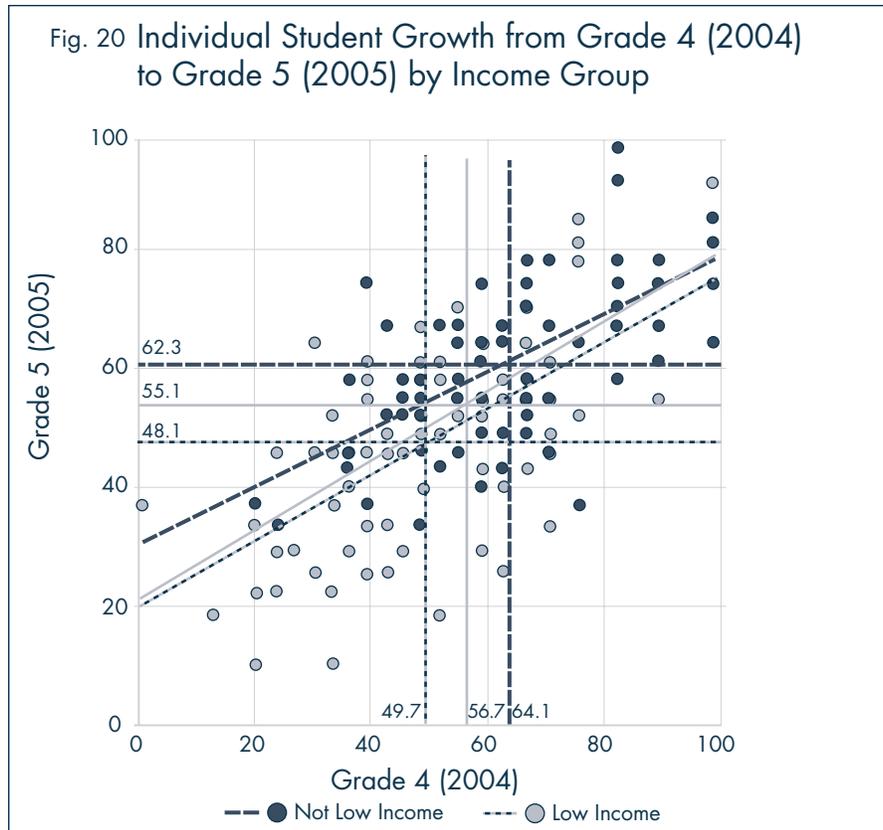
A major goal of the School Profile is to provide these data in a highly accessible, visual format so that all stakeholders can understand and probe the data. The following example (Figure 19) is the Climate section from an organizational assessment, reported as mean responses by respondent role. It enables the school team to identify relative responses and low mean responses, which can be used to probe the actual percentages of

respondent agreement in each of five possible responses from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Student achievement data are presented in the School Profile in several formats, so that the principal and teachers are able to review assessment data from several perspectives. As an example of one of the many such presentations, the following figure (Figure 20) is a scatterchart showing individual student growth of a cohort over a two-year period with the x axis representing fourth grade performance and the y axis representing fifth grade performance on the *SAT9/SAT10*. Two different income groups of students are presented (“low income” and “not low income”).

With these pieces completed and with technical assistance, principals, faculties, school leadership teams and communities learn to analyze the data and go through CTAC’s Ten Steps to a Data-Based School Plan. This process leads to a completed school plan and is broken into ten steps to be manageable during the learning phase, but the steps are adaptable and even recursive in actual implementation. These include: (1) set and





assess standards; (2) examine and analyze data; (3) identify critical issues; (4) probe for causation; (5) determine priorities for improvement; (6) develop strategies; (7) review current school plan; (8) revise the plan; (9) share decisions and revise again as need; and, (10) implement the new plan. Some of the steps, such as the first one, are mandated. Please note that the Christina School District refers to their school improvement plan as their Pathways to Excellence Plan (PEP).

The Standard Bearer Schools model emphasizes the need and provides the knowledge and skills for administrators, teachers, parents and other staff to look for root causes before seeking solutions to problems or needs. It is the part of the ten steps most easily glossed over in school planning, partly because of time, but mostly because of lack of a scientific or data-based perspective on school and classroom issues. School teams learn to use the qualitative data to probe for potential explanations of student achievement in the quantitative measures. They also learn to use group

analysis methodologies selected from corporate and public sector management and other data analysis techniques designed for decision-making and action. As an example, the application of total quality's Five Why's, as shown in the text box on page 43 is a vehicle for probing for the causes of prevailing conditions at a school.

Using Multiple Sources and Perspectives to Probe for Causation

The use of multiple measures is an educational catchphrase of recent years. Often districts, and certainly schools, are unclear

about the purposes for which they are collecting additional data. Failing to put data to good use contributes to the feeling in schools that excessive amounts of time are going for assessments, surveys, and the like. One of the cornerstones of New Directions in Christina has been the effort to increase the types of measures available to the district and schools and to learn how these additional data sources can lead to more thoughtful analyses, clearer understanding of root causes, and better decisions. The following analysis of one issue—student behavior and discipline—that emerged in district-wide data collected in the fall and winter of the 2004–05 school year provides a case study in how multiple sources of data and multiple perspectives of stakeholders can illuminate an issue for the district.

Student behavior was the most commonly volunteered challenge of all interviewees in the open-ended question that began all interviews in the fall and winter of 2004–05. There existed

Ten Steps to a Data-Based School Plan

Steps and Descriptors	Implementation Notes
Step One: Set and assess standards.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the subject standards for the State. • Adopt standards for subjects not included in state standards, based on a credible source. • Assess routinely the degree and quality of standards implementation at all grade levels/classes. • Revise, as needed, the alignment among standards, materials, teaching practices, and assessments. • Administer state assessments, as required, and other assessments, as needed, to measure student proficiency on standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation requires an understanding of each standard, its purpose, its essential elements, and how it is best taught and assessed. • Low achievement results may be related to unimplemented elements of the standards. • Low achievement results may be related to lack of alignment among standards, materials, practices, and assessments. • Teachers may have had inadequate professional development on standards-based instruction.
Step Two: Examine and analyze data.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaggregate data by income, ethnicity, program, gender, grade level, language, teacher, and other demographic or program categories that may help explain achievement outcomes. • Look for patterns in data at the school, grade, and student level. • Identify trends in multiple years of data. • Compare with state and district averages and demographically similar schools. • Look at other assessments of the same students for parallel findings. • Look at other data, including but not limited to perceptual data, behavioral data, school program and process data. • Use tests of statistical significance, if necessary, to determine if differences matter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to see patterns if assessment data are not displayed in an accessible way. It is the role of the district to provide schools with user-friendly versions. • Schools should have the software to review and test their data. • Be alert to numbers that do not make sense (i.e., more students were tested than the data reports would indicate) so that errors in data can be corrected. • Schools should be cautious in drawing conclusions where the numbers assessed are small. • A trend is a three-year pattern. • Assessment reliability increases with multiple measures. • The Organizational Assessment Survey is perceptual data.
Step Three: Identify critical issues.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine from data analysis and select those areas where significant groups of students are achieving below standard and/or that show student achievement is flat or declined over time. • Identify areas of growth and/or strength in student achievement patterns. • Develop questions to ask about observable patterns in the data. • Look for relationships among or between critical issues (i.e., math scores are down/a new textbook was implemented during the previous year). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district staff can help by identifying issues or questions that they have about each school's data. • Remember two common phenomena found in new program implementation that may explain sudden gains or losses in achievement: (1) the Hawthorne effect and (2) the implementation dip (things may get worse before they get better).

Ten Steps to a Data-Based School Plan (continued)

Steps and Descriptors	Implementation Notes
Step Four: Probe for causation.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop hypotheses about the possible reasons for the observed patterns and trends. • Use perceptual, program, and teacher data to test hypotheses and to probe for possible causes. • Collect additional data and input if needed (i.e., conducting interviews or focus groups with students, parents, and/or teachers on a topic). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This step is the most critical to drawing sound conclusions upon which to base improvement decisions; yet, it is often the one that gets the most cursory treatment. • Selecting the best strategies for improvement depends on getting to root causes over symptoms. • When root causes appear to lie outside the school control (poverty, language, parenting), probe around what the school can do given student circumstances.
Step Five: Determine priorities for improvement.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what the school can change (programs, processes, professional knowledge and skills); what it may influence (behavior, parent involvement, communication); and where it may need to intervene (pre-school, tutorials, parent visits, etc.). • Select a manageable number of priorities as the focus of school improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ascertain that the budget will support the improvement priorities. • If a school sees an area where a quick fix will address a cause, there is little reason to wait through the full planning cycle.
Step Six: Develop strategies.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for potential strategies to address the priority improvement areas. • Use educational research findings or best practices as a decision-making tool when selecting and developing strategies. • Plan strategies to address the priority improvement areas. • Determine when professional development is the strategy itself and when it is a support for the implementation of another strategy. • Consider conducting small action research projects to test out strategies before deciding on full implementation. • Consider how you will know that a strategy is producing the desired result. • There are research summaries in books and online which identify high leverage strategies. These make good starting points for researching strategies that will best address the priority areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-scale reform models that are in use elsewhere rarely transplant as a whole. Analyze carefully the elements of a reform that may be applicable to the school's priorities and conditions. • As a rule, strategies that impact the classroom are more powerful than those that address broader school structures (schedules, etc.). • Teacher professional development may be either a strategy (how to plan standards-based units and lessons) or a support for another strategy (adopting a standards-aligned textbook may require teacher orientation to the use of the text). • The more specific the strategy is to the subject matter, the greater the likelihood of an impact on learning.

Ten Steps to a Data-Based School Plan (continued)

Steps and Descriptors	Implementation Notes
Step Seven: Review current school plan.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve all stakeholders. • Communicate with stakeholders about the planning process and opportunities for input. • Evaluate the progress on previous improvement plan activities. • Consider how the new priorities fit into the current plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement planning is a recursive process, and plans for the new term are being made while elements in the current plan are still in play. • Moving from initiative to initiative without reintegrating may lead to distrust of the process of improvement planning, but always consider dropping strategies that have not produced results.
Step Eight: Revise the school plan.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft a proposal for the revision of the school plan that includes the rationale for any change and the impact on resources (staff and funds). • Include a description of the rationale for implementing a new strategy, the expected results, and the planned evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans that provide an adequate amount of narrative will assist users to understand the rationales, the research base, the cause to be addressed, etc. A narrative will also provide a group memory of the improvement agenda that will withstand staff turnover.
Step Nine: Share decisions and revise as needed.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the key elements and actions of the draft plan and solicit input from the stakeholders. • Ascertain from the process any implementation needs of staff members. • Agree on implementation activities, dates, and timelines for completions. • If stakeholders have been involved throughout the process, this step may be pro forma, but it is a good opportunity to get everyone's final say. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If stakeholders have been less involved, particularly parents, the school might want to schedule some more formal or structured sessions for input. • Where activities involve the purchase of materials or the delivery of professional development, purchases and contracts should be initiated and followed throughout the summer to avoid delays in the implementation schedule.
Step Ten: Implement the new school plan.	
<p>The school will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin the new school term with a review of the plan priorities and strategies. • Designate plan monitors to help the school stay on task, provide updates, and celebrate milestones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the new achievement data from the spring assessment and begin the process again.
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widespread perceptions that students in the district were not well behaved in school, that there was a lack of respect for teachers, and that the use of inappropriate language was common-

place. One central administrator noted, "The schools present an undisciplined environment for students to learn." Some principals felt pushed to be "sheriffs" for teachers with weak classroom

Using the Five Why's for Root Cause Analysis

ISSUE: Perceptual data indicate that 71 percent of teachers and 64 percent of students disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that “students understand and support rules and the code of conduct.” Parent opinion is more mixed overall, and 75 percent of administrators are of mixed opinion. Use the Five Why's strategy to uncover potential cause of this perception.

Why do teachers and students disagree with the statement?

Students are not following the school rules, according to teachers; the rules are not the same for all students, according to students.

Why do students not follow the rules?

There is inconsistency in the way the rules are administered by adults in the school. The inconsistency makes students believe that the rules are just for some teachers' classes. When corrected, they complain that other teachers do not care. Some students think that teachers have favorites because of the inconsistent manner in which the rules are enforced.

Why do adults administer the code of conduct inconsistently or unfairly?

Teachers say that they do not see every infraction and that there are too many rules. Some rules are less important and teachers want to focus on the important ones. Punishing every infraction takes too much class time and follow-up time (paperwork, parent call, etc.).

Why are the rules time-consuming to administer?

There is a referral slip to complete that requires a description of the infraction and it can take five or more minutes to complete and some misbehavior is not worth the effort or lost class time so teachers give verbal warnings.

Why is such a complex referral slip in use for all infractions?

It is a district form required so that the principal can address the infraction, if needed, and maintain a record. Principals report that some teachers turn in more referrals than others.

COMMENT: The set of questions and answers outlined above suggests that some teachers are routinely disciplining and/or reporting all infractions while others are not—because of the referral form. If the referral form is the basic cause of inconsistent discipline and student perceptions of unfairness, then the cumbersome reporting system needs to be addressed and teachers need assistance in developing strategies that are not interruptive of class time. Notice that the questioning could have taken another path—that students do not understand the rules—which may have led to another cause and solution.

management and engagement strategies. In addition, favorable reviews of principals seemed to hinge on the school community's perception of how tough the principal was on student discipline. Interestingly, principals sometimes thought discipline was worse in schools other than their own.

Student behavior is an area where a few stories spread quickly and influence district and community perceptions. Parent focus groups provided anecdotes about fights, bullies, and poorly handled discipline issues that they had not personally witnessed. Both parents and students recount

issues of safety on buses or in walking to and from school. There is a racial component to the discipline issues in the form of thinly veiled remarks about who is creating problems and in the fact that most behavior suspensions in Christina are of African American males. The learning gap that results in African American under-representation in the high proficiency levels is exacerbated by their over-representation in disciplinary actions. There was not recognition that African American students are as likely to be the victims of misconduct, or more so, as they are to be the perpetrators and need ways to feel safe and supported in schools.

Students perceived a lack of fairness in the application of discipline policies, that the school is a “police state,” and that “favoritism” governs teachers and principal enforcement of rules. Students said that they have little voice in shaping the school environment, including rules and discipline policies, but would like to have more say and believe that if they did, there would be more compliance with rules. Traditional student government in the schools does not seem to be satisfying their need for democracy. Also, students notice that some teachers do not have discipline problems while others do. They believe “boring classrooms” to be at the root of much acting out behavior. One student notes: “Teach better and the discipline problems will go away.”

What is apparent from these findings is the variety of perspectives on student behavior among administrators, teachers, students, and parents. What is less apparent is what is at the root of the perceptions. And even less evident is what is causing misconduct. Many schools have a behavior-related program in progress that teachers have been trained to use, but the program does not appear to lead to completely acceptable behaviors. It is likely that more fundamental issues such as teacher expectations of students, classroom engagement skills, and student skills will need to be explored in order to get to root causes. Finally, it will need to be explored at the school and classroom level where some of the variables can be isolated. In short, a problem that was initially defined as one of student behavior is in fact a problem whose causes have dimensions related to expectations, instructional skills, the learning environment and classroom support.

Is getting to the causes of student misconduct in school important? There are several ways in which the student conduct issues are related to academic rigor issues: (1) learning thrives in a safe and orderly environment; (2) demanding, interesting, and rigorous class work engages students in positive behaviors; (3) lowering expectations in response to poor student participation only increases the disengagement and acting out behavior; (4) students with weak reading and

study skills may not fully engage in classroom activities unless the teacher is able and willing to accommodate a range of learners in the lesson; (5) the lowest performing group of students are over-represented in disciplinary actions; and (6) community perceptions of the academic quality of the schools may be based on perceptions of student behavior.

Seeing the Impact of the Standard Bearer Schools Process in Christina

Christina schools were divided into three phases or groups of schools to engage in intensive work on their planning process over a three-year period. At the time of this report, two phases (16 schools) had been involved in the new process and the third phase of schools has been slated for 2006–07, with the administration of the OAS and a principal training session both having occurred in the spring of 2006.

Becoming involved in a more data-driven and professional planning process empowers school staffs and communities to confront issues of student underachievement in a more open and thorough manner. Problems do not have to be swept under the rug, but can be openly discussed and even studied. Using more objective processes, focusing on a variety of data rather than only anecdotes, and applying the standards of educational practice leads not only to a better plan but to an improved professional culture and greater accountability in the school.

Starting from the pre-reform point of having minimal participation in school improvement planning, the district has made significant strides in involving school communities in the work of analyzing organizational conditions that affect student learning.

Observations of schools in the process show that those principals and faculties who have been open to using the data and willing to give adequate time to process data and work on causation have seen successful outcomes, including stronger faculty “buy in” and accountability as well as improved student achievement. However, all schools in the process gained in their willingness

Table 8 Respondents to *Organizational Assessment Surveys*

Assessing Conditions at the Sites: Organizational Assessment	
Standard Bearer Schools	Participants
Phase I	2,621
Phase II	4,732
Phase III	6,389
Total	13,742

to collect and use perceptual data and to appreciate the benefits of using multiple measures in improving student learning. Secondly, all schools have had to confront the effect of systemic denial about the importance of parent involvement, finding that years of neglect have created a chasm between many of the schools and their parent and community constituents.

In addition to participation of teachers, school administrators and students, this process enhanced the district participation of parents. The levels of parent participation are detailed later in this chapter.

Connecting School and District Planning

A new unit of organizational development was formed in the district to provide the necessary linkage—school and district practices, assessment and research, and outside technical assistance—to carry out integrated school and district planning.

Through this new level of coordination, the school planning policy, the timelines (See Figure 21)¹⁰, and the school plan template were changed to reflect the new school improvement planning process and an earlier completion date of the school plans. The earlier date allows the school priorities to impact district planning and budget allocation priorities. With school priorities coming to the attention of the district sooner, there is opportunity for the district to (1) uncover common causes and potential solutions for underachievement among schools and, where necessary, make corrections or seek technical assistance as a district; (2) change district practices

or activities that may be impacting schools negatively and reconfigure them to more effectively support the schools, (3) use the school plans in the development of the consolidated grant that goes to the state for the expenditure of categorical funds such as Title I; and (4) prepare communications for students, parents, and community in a timely manner.

Building on this approach of reconfiguring and coordinating services to better support the schools, the curriculum and instruction division has developed a service delivery team model that (1) designates liaisons from the division to every school in the district; and (2) allocates a day in the week for liaisons to conduct school visits and engage in conversations with principals and faculty. Information gleaned from liaisons and visits is used to help principals clear up organizational disconnects and to provide targeted professional development as needed. During the 2005–06 school year, principal meetings have been the forum to address topics such as analyzing data, planning and differentiating instruction. Early in the year, principals noticed the new presence of district staff in the schools:

“I am very impressed with the district support. Every Tuesday a district person comes by to ask about our concerns. I believe that the district is listening. Their presence is good. I have seen things beginning to happen.” Principal

“The support is light years better than it was before this superintendent. Now the district office works together with us. The Service Delivery model is commendable.” Principal

“I know that I have an ear [that] listens and brings issues back to the district.” Principal

The Service Delivery model and other systemic tools to improve district practice in ways that benefit students are discussed in Section E.

B. Voices in the Schools

A comparison of responses from the Christina schools on the demonstration study survey

Fig. 21 Linking School Profiles, District Priorities and Budget Preparation
April 2005–June 2006

2005									2006						
April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	
Phase II OAS Survey	OAS Results	DSTP Dibels MAP Results	Data Analysis and School Profile Production—CSD Phase I CTAC Phase II			Profile Review and Analysis Plan Development			PEP Complete	Site Budget Preparation and Review					
					District Profile Production		District Profile Review and Strategic Planning Process		PEP Roll-up and District Review of Support Needed		District Budget Preparation and Review		2006 Budget Approved		
												Phase I, II, III OAS Survey	OAS Results	DSTP Dibels MAP Results	
Findings/ Learnings					Research Surveys (100%) Research Interviews (Sample)		Data Compilation	Data Analysis		Findings/ Learnings					

showed that the educators from Standard Bearer schools (Phases I and II), including administrators and teachers, were more positive about conditions related to teaching and learning, organizational support and alignment, school planning, and human resource practices than their peers at the schools who had not yet begun the process (Phase III).

As a result of the reform in Christina, multiple constituencies have had a greater voice on significant issues in the district and in their schools. Site level practitioners, students and parents have had the opportunity to respond to surveys about the quality of the reform effort, a random sample of the same constituencies were interviewed for two successive years, and participants in the Standard Bearer schools have had more extensive involvement through the organizational assessments and the planning process. The data show that the perceptions of teachers and school administrators about the reform were impacted by their involvement in the Standard Bearer process. The longer teachers have participated in a thoughtful planning process, the stronger their feelings on important issues and the more sophisticated they become about what they need from the district.

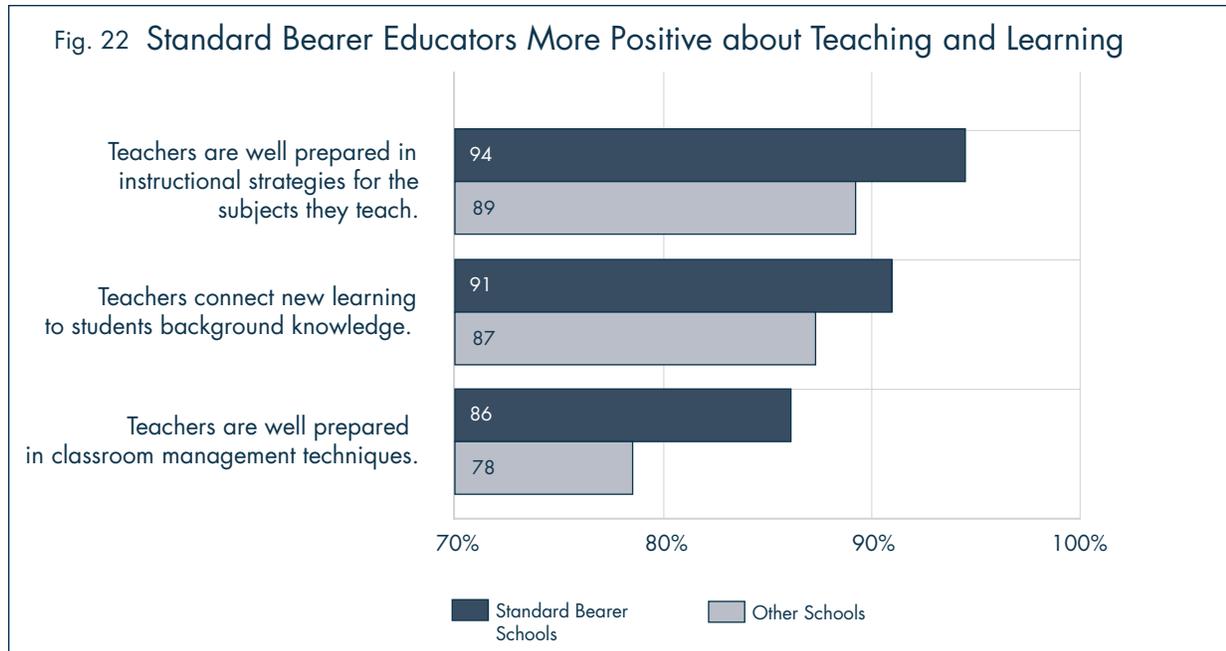
While the practitioners at the sixteen Standard Bearer schools are still in the early stages of implementing a new school improvement planning model, the process has had a positive impact on the perceptions of teachers and administrators (referred to below by the term, “educators”). The findings reported below, comparing educators in the Standard Bearer schools with their counterparts in other schools, are all statistically significant.

Teaching and Learning

There is evidence that the educators at the Standard Bearer schools are more positive about issues related to teaching and learning (See Figure 22). They are more likely to agree that teachers are well prepared in instructional strategies, connect new learning to a student’s background knowledge and are well prepared in classroom management techniques.

Organizational Support and Alignment

Educators in the Standard Bearer schools are more likely than educators in the other schools to agree that the evaluation of teachers contribute to their professional growth and improved performance,



that central administration staff are well prepared to analyze and use student achievement data, and that school staff are well prepared to analyze and use student achievement data (See Figure 23).

Human Resources Support

Educators in the Standard Bearer schools are more likely than educators in the other schools to agree that supplemental services are aligned with classroom curriculum and objectives, and that the district provides student achievement data to principals and teachers in a useful format (See Figure 24).

C. Parent Involvement

The focus on involving parents in school reform has been one of the cornerstones of the reform in Christina. This is an area where significant progress has been made and much work still lies ahead.

The Context

Among the more disturbing findings from the initial assessment of readiness and capacity as well as subsequent stakeholder interviews and surveys in 2004 and 2005 concern the state of parent involvement in many of the schools in the Christina

district. Parent involvement is not a catchphrase, nor can it be an afterthought either in school planning or day-to-day classroom planning. It must be an integral component of the school program. The best predictor of student achievement is not ethnicity or income but rather the degree to which a child's family can (1) communicate high expectations for school and life after graduation; (2) create a home environment that supports learning; and (3) engage in a child's education and school. Schools that are effective with parent involvement outperform similar schools without effective involvement, have higher teacher morale and parent approval of teachers, and garner more support and reputation in the community.¹¹

No Child Left Behind has helped refocus the nation's schools on their duty to demonstrate parent involvement with a written policy, parent-school compacts, and communications about the annual measurable progress of the school and each youngster. It also provides parents with additional rights and options when schools are underachieving or persistently unsafe. However, schools that are successful with students seem always to have known that parent involvement is

Fig. 23 Standard Bearer Educators More Positive about Organizational Support and Alignment

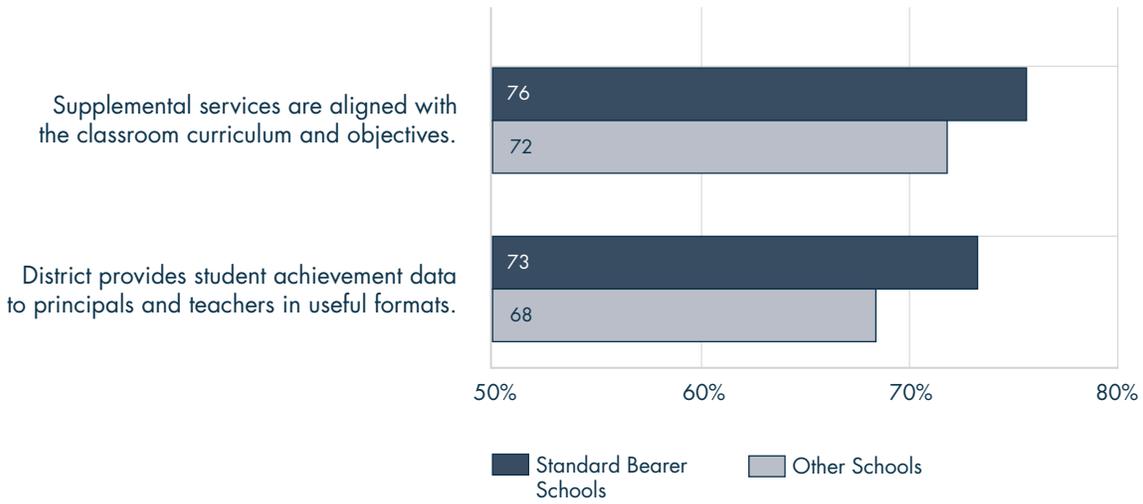
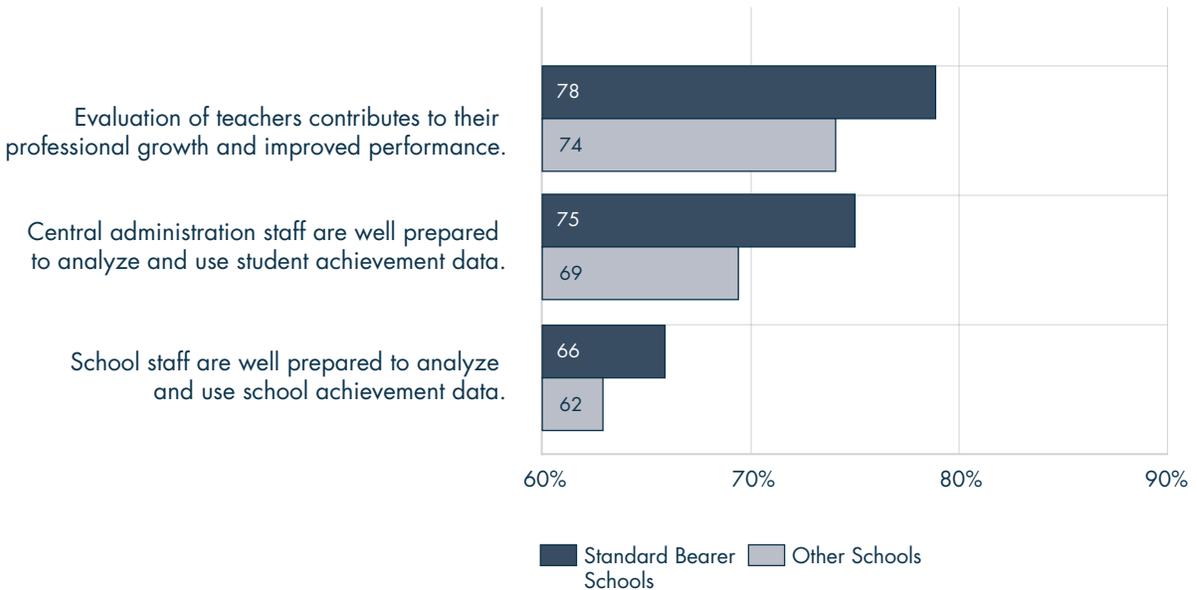


Fig. 24 Standard Bearer Educators More Positive about Human Resource Support



a critical component to student achievement and consider involving parents to be part of their job.

In the Christina School District, there are schools that are successful in communicating with, bringing out, and involving parents while there are those that struggle; there are teachers

who take on the challenge of involving parents and there are those who have given up.

Progress Through The Reform

The district has undertaken a range of efforts to involve parents in school reform. The effects of

these efforts is apparent. Through New Directions, the levels of participation in school improvement planning and in the demonstration study have been marked:

- The Standard Bearer Schools model is predicated on involving 30 percent or more of the parents at each school in analyzing organizational conditions that affect student achievement. In the 2004–05 school year, 1,485 parents participated in school improvement planning. This breadth of participation increased to 2,445 parents in the 2005–06 school year.
- Through the demonstration study component of New Directions in Christina, every household with children in the public schools was annually surveyed as part of the effort to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of the reform. During the two years of the initiative, there were 2,750 parental survey respondents and 179 related parent interviews.
- Survey and interview respondents indicate that there is greater awareness by school staff of the importance of involving parents in student learning.

In addition, according to district calculations total parent participation in attending meetings at schools and other district-wide functions increased significantly during the 2004–05 and 2005–06 school years.

Continuing Concerns

Consider the following sample of teacher and principal observations about parent communication and involvement from interviews conducted in the fall of 2005:

“The limitations are hard for working effectively with parents. We are a divided community. One-third of students come from Wilmington, bused in from 30 to 45 minutes away. Many parents don’t have transportation. Parent involvement poses major problems. There is little connection between the city of Wilmington and Newark. There are little

opportunities to talk with students one on one. We can leave a message if we call on the phone but that’s not always effective.” High school teacher

“It is very difficult to reach parents: lines are disconnected, they don’t accept messages, no one is at home, they moved. When you do reach them, most are very responsive. I think [when] the school was down, parents put their hope in what it is going to become. It could be really good if we all stick together.” High school teacher

“I don’t think [parent communication is] too effective. It varies teacher to teacher, administrator to administrator. [Parents] call the school and the voice mail is full, or they don’t get through, or the school doesn’t call back.” Elementary school teacher

“I have the best communication with parents face to face after school and with the homework agenda daily. On Friday’s all the week’s homework goes home for parent’s signature. I note the good things that happened during the week.” Elementary school teacher

“We have great parent involvement. The way we teach now, parents need to be aware of different ways we teach. Math and reading is taught so differently since they were students. We try to let the parents know what’s going on.” Elementary school teacher

“We take a Parent Volunteer Form to each home visit and we brainstorm with the parent all the ways they can volunteer from home if they can’t get to the school. This makes parents feel you are really serious about [their] being an important part of the team.” Elementary school teacher

“We do portfolio conferences and traditional conferences. The traditional conference is where the teacher talks to the parent. In a portfolio conference, students take responsibility for showing the strength of their work and seek feedback for improvement from their teacher and parents... For portfolio conferences, there is 70-75 percent attendance and traditional conferences are much below that.” Middle school teacher

“We hold Parent Hour every six weeks. Anyone can attend, but the same people come. CTAC surveys are being used. We’re working on this area.” Elementary school principal

“We survey three times a year. PTA meetings have a time of open discussion. We stay outside every morning and afternoon to encourage conversations. Parents are not very involved in school planning.... This year we have more involvement than last year. We expect involvement to increase.” Elementary school principal

“This is a weak area in all schools in Christina, I would guess.... At the high school three or four parents are involved and attend meetings.” High school principal

With this sample of teacher and administrator responses in the fall of 2005, one can see the diverse character of parent involvement in the district, the challenges, and the perceptions surrounding it that guide practice.

- There is a large medley of informal strategies in play—some of which may be effective, though unevaluated. More formal strategies, such as the portfolio conferences, other student performances, and teacher visits to the home early in the year do seem to be particularly effective in achieving parent turnout and commitment.
- Teachers are the primary communicators with parents and engage in a huge range—in quantity and quality—of communications to the home; less in evidence are formalized opportunities and vehicles for parent communications with teachers and administrators, except as implied, when there is a concern.
- Elementary and middle school teachers and principals are more positive about the effectiveness of their parent involvement strategies than are high school teachers and administrators; parent involvement at the secondary schools is lower than at elementary schools and seems to be powered by a few committed parents.

- A student and his or her parents, because of the teacher assignment, in any one year may be the recipient of less effective communication than students and parents in the class next door.
- Though a few teachers expressed rationales for why they work on parent communication and involvement, such as “math and reading is taught so differently since [parents] were in school,” there is not a well-thought out definition or rationale for parent involvement developed for the district, school, or classroom.
- The principals are characteristically the key to the level of parent involvement in the schools.

The following text from a parent focus group asked about communications from the school on student progress and illuminates school communications from the parent perspective.

“Too late. You wait until a certain point, but they really needed help before. Even the interim reports are too late.”

“There are no agenda books in middle and high school that get sent home like elementary schools.”

“With the middle school, we don’t know what’s going on. You have to go through their book bags. They don’t do enough [checking for understanding] to make sure kids know what they have to be doing.”

“It is too free in middle school. They need more hand-holding, more help.”

“Kids lose study habits [learned in elementary school] in middle school and that follows to high school, then affects college.”

“If we don’t stay on them ourselves as parents, they would be floating through.”

“At Shue, I’ve been pleased. Every single teacher encourages e-mails and responds immediately. The science teacher has a distribution list, such as assignment, outlines for studying.”

“We got e-mails from teachers...But first, I went there to see a face. If not for that, they wouldn't have taken as much of an interest.”

“I get phone calls from teachers, but if I didn't make an effort to meet them there wouldn't be that relationship.”

This sample of parent opinion shows that parents get different communications about student progress; that some communications come too late to turn around a grade report; that students have homework for which they do not have adequate directions; and that there is an expectation in many cases that the school should be the taskmaster. Other parents in this group have examples of positive experiences and clearly some parents have developed some survival skills for teacher communication, while at least one was willing to say that parents have some obligations. Other interview and focus group responses indicate that some parents are not getting the state testing information, though survey data indicate that most (94.9 percent) are.

The following sample of survey information indicates, parents give themselves high marks for supporting the learning of students while principals and teachers are less sure. Secondary parents and students (mostly secondary) are less satisfied with achievement at their schools than elementary parents and a little less certain that their schools demonstrate a commitment to parent involvement.

From 2004 to 2005, there is evidence of a greater awareness of the importance of involving parents in student learning, as well as recognition that three significant actions have to take place at the district level: (1) a continuing commitment in practice to the vehicles that have proven most effective in involving parents in the work of school reform; (2) a rubric of the levels of parent involvement that identifies first the most significant parent involvement, which is in the home, and successively other kinds of involvement in support of the student and school that will be valued; and (3) a planned two-way, multi-media parent communication system, some elements of

Table 9 Stakeholder Satisfaction

Do you agree that . . .	Principals (n=45)	Teachers (n=1,106)	Parents Elementary/ Intermediate (n=707)	Parents Middle/ High (n=658)	Students (n=652)
Parents provide support for the academic learning of students.	63.6%	56.2%	96.2%	92.6%	79.8%
Parents are satisfied with the school's achievement results.	80.6%	75.2%	85.9%	53.1%	55.7%
Parents receive results of their child's progress in meeting state standards.	95.2%	92.2%	96.9%	93.0%	85.1%
Parents understand their rights under No Child Left Behind.	53.1%	37.6%	75.1%	63.2%	67.2%
The schools demonstrate a commitment to parent involvement in student learning.	90.9%	88.0%	93.3%	74.6%	63.6%

which are standardized across the district, so that there is fair and consistent access to the most critical information for all parents. Communicating with parents is not a one-time event that can be checked off, but rather an ongoing duty of the district and its schools.

D. Academic Focus

The district accomplished essential steps to implement fully the state standards, increase the rigor of the academic program and respond to issues emerging from the data on student achievement and organizational assessment.

Achieving Academic Rigor for All Students: A Change in Expectations

Even though Delaware state standards and assessments have been in place since 1997, student performance outcomes and interview data indicated a lack of clear direction prior to the reform effort about standards-based teaching and standards-aligned supports, including professional development, in Christina schools. Thus, school programs suffered from an uneven implementation of the standards and a common misconception that teaching a standards-based curriculum is the same as “teaching to the test.” There are still perceptions on the part of many teachers, students, and parents that the assessment mandate will one day go away because it is somehow flawed or not politically supported. Thus, many veteran and new teachers have planned instruction, for the most part, with reference to the state standards rather than with well-developed curricula and practices that support all students in meeting the standards. Survey data in 2004 showed that 92.7 percent of teachers and 93.3 percent of school administrators believed that “state standards guide district curriculum and instruction,” while student outcome data suggested otherwise.

A common reason that students do not perform well on assessments is that they have not been taught the content and skills being assessed. This explanation may account for achievement in Christina, particularly after grade four. The fact

that several schools did not have significant numbers of students performing in the top two performance levels of the *DSTP* seems to indicate that standards may not have been taught in a focused way to higher performing students either. Commonly held beliefs that students cannot learn due to factors beyond the control of the school coupled with unequal opportunities to learn based on these low expectations are the bricks and mortar that build walls between students and learning standards. Interview data indicated that teachers and administrators, when asked about the achievement gap, frequently posited a web of sociological reasons that distance them from the need to seek real causes and solutions or become accountable for student performance.

Weak implementation of a curriculum can be the outcome of several systemic failures: lack of a consistently stated expectation from district leadership; lack of aligned texts, teaching materials, and pacing guides; and/or lack of professional development for teachers so that they have the requisite knowledge and skills. There may also be inadequate interim or formative assessments to provide teachers with information about student progress throughout the year. Poorly implemented curriculum impacts struggling students disproportionately and is the first obstacle to overcome before implementing more complex intervention strategies.

Several messages, formalized initially in the superintendent’s performance targets and later in the Board’s Theory of Action (adopted October 11, 2005), did clarify the district’s intent to provide standards-based curriculum for all students and to increase the rigor for high school students through greater access to college preparatory and advanced placement curriculum and assessments. Using 2002-03 as the baseline year, the superintendent established growth targets for student performance by 2006-07 on the *DSTP* that measures student achievement on the state standards. These performance targets also addressed the need to close the achievement gap that exists between African American and

Hispanic students and White and Asian students in the district and engage students in an enrichment curriculum as measured by participation in advanced placement courses. Performance targets also addressed special education, the learning environment, and community engagement.

Interviewee responses over two years indicate that staff members at all levels of the system are aware of the need to improve student achievement and close the learning gap between groups of students. Of greater significance, the superintendent and district staff began the arduous journey of re-focusing a large system on student achievement and making the entire system accountable for quality learning experiences for all students. Significant areas were identified for focus: aligning instruction and assessment with standards, institutionalizing the availability and the regular use of student performance data in instructional improvement, and, as discussed earlier, developing a school and district planning process that seeks and addresses the root causes of underachievement.

Aligning Instruction with Standards

Interview and survey data collected by CTAC in 2004 as the baseline for the demonstration study showed central and site administration to be in agreement that “alignment is not even in the vocabulary” of many classroom teachers. Since then, issues of the alignment and full implementation of standards in the classroom are being addressed by (1) the adoption of common standards-based reading and mathematics texts and instructional materials for use in the K-8 program; (2) the introduction of pacing guides for reading and mathematics K-8 with training for teachers; (3) the implementation of three annual Northwest Evaluation Association *Measures of Academic Progress* administrations that give teachers interim information on the progress of students towards meeting the standards; (4) the training of teachers in strategies for differentiating instruction, which was a response to the *MAP* data showing the range of achievement within

classrooms; and (5) the re-vitalized preK-12 framework for all curricular areas that describes the manner in which all students in the Christina School District can best meet the standards. Schools in the district have improved classroom teaching practices for special education students with inclusion coaches, allowing for more instruction in the mainstream for greater numbers of students and increasing opportunities and access to standards-based instruction. Finally, several formal intervention and support programs for English language arts were introduced.

Teachers and principals interviewed in the fall of 2005, particularly elementary school teachers, did have “alignment” in their vocabularies and were able to speak confidently about standards:

“We follow the [standards] using pacing guides and that helps us. Having some new materials now that work well helps us in this area.”

Elementary school teacher

“Our instruction is content-oriented and standards-based. We have much more leeway to address the standards. I feel more professional.”

Elementary school teacher

“The new textbooks are excellent and aligned with national standards.” Elementary school teacher

“Clearly, teachers are addressing the standards effectively. There is a close working relationship between standards, materials, lessons, and assessments.” Elementary school principal

“I see unbelievable growth among teachers. Teachers include standards in their planning with more detail and accountability—they go beyond lip-service. They now know they are responsible.” Elementary school principal

In high schools, alignment work is more complex, but several initiatives have led to an opening up of the more rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum to more students, including a change from a traditional mathematics sequence to integrated mathematics in the middle and high schools, with

both approaches being supported during the transition. These actions provide students with access to better aligned coursework. The course catalog for the three high schools has been integrated and revised with common course descriptions for the core curriculum, thereby improving information consistency and access across schools. The three high schools in the district have initiated an aggressive approach to ensure that capable students have access to an advanced placement curriculum and are encouraged and supported in this rigorous learning environment. The approach includes an administration of a district-funded *Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)* to identify students for enrollment in advanced placement courses. From 2003 to 2006, the participation in advanced placement coursework and assessment increased steadily. Other high school improvement strategies are provided in more detail in Section G.

E. Management and Service Delivery

Overview

As indicated earlier in this report, a critical element of the reform in Christina has been that of improving district systems in order to focus more effectively on teaching and learning in the schools. While such a goal can be cogently expressed, the reality of changing school systems for better outcomes for clients is a thorny one. While schools as organizations are staffed predominantly with educational professionals focused on students and educational programs, other systems in the district are staffed with different types of professional expertise—human resource management, data management, facilities management, and research services, among others. Personnel who work in all of these systems intend for their work to support students and schools and can be surprised to find that teachers and other school staff give them varying marks for school support and quality outcomes.

Though there was an implementation dip effect at first (things get worse before they get

better), the district grappled with how difficult systemic changes are to implement and maintain. Subsequent progress was evidenced in the interview data, where principals and teachers could point to specific central divisions or people who were supportive or “understood schools,” and there are a growing number of more positive reports. Particularly principals, who have more communication with central administrators than most other site level practitioners, are able to articulate changes and improvements in district support, as in these comments from interviews in Fall 2005:

“If we have lost a teacher, HR has been quick to find and replace that teacher. Facilities have been great, cooperative. They have kept communications open. The financial officer gave a card that helped streamline ordering and it is faster now. Someone is in charge of each curriculum area. All these people support. It is much different than it was three years ago.”

“There are formal processes—how to write a school improvement plan, individual conferences with the superintendent, and performance dialogues. We analyze data and align resources with needs. The superintendent has changed the landscape.”

“The Service Delivery Model is commendable.... The contact person visits every week, which is good in theory, but if he/she doesn’t have the right background, it isn’t helpful.”

“The central office offers structure—at least now they do. The superintendent’s target goals are shared, identified, and public. There are money resources, too.”

“Central office sends us a resource person every Tuesday. If I call for data I get it. Additionally, I would like more conversation with decision makers. I’d like to be involved in decision making, not told about it.”

“Two senior staff helped with lesson analysis and with the opening days and registration. If I need help, I can call on several people.”

“MAP data, which allows us to align curriculum and instruction. Also the AP testing is helpful. Research-based instruction and materials are good support.”

“Support in academics, grant writer, and security. I would like the Service Delivery to provide curricula and college prep seminar models for the teachers.”

“District is supportive. We’re learning together. Summer retreats are helpful for effective teaching. There is a clear district focus on achievement.”

“The Service Delivery Model is improving.”

Many principals and teachers identify several district-supported structures and initiatives that have been especially helpful, such as the Service Delivery Model, the data-based school improvement planning model, and the *MAP* assessments. One point that was demonstrated in the interviews is how much trust is built upon interpersonal connections between people in the schools and central office. Additionally, principals like it when their own meetings are used for professional development or for interactive dialogue and problem-solving with central staff, but not for disseminating “information that could be e-mailed.”

Managing Data Capacity, Integration and Use to Support Students

High on the reform agenda of refocusing the system on students has been increasing data capacity so that principals, teachers, and district administrators can have access to student and teacher data that are timely, integrated, and purposeful. Schools are busy places and time to review and reflect on the meaning of current data, let alone last year’s assessment results, is limited. When individuals and whole school faculties gloss over assessment information quickly, or do not have the data available in accessible formats, the potential for effective program evaluation and improvements as well as improved differentiation and intervention methods evaporates. The hallmark of insanity is doing the same thing over again and expecting a different result, but teachers and

schools are often placed in such a position when current student data and time to explore its meaning are not readily available.

With direction and technical assistance, the data management area of the district has been transformed into a professional division by implementing critical changes, including hiring qualified research staff, adding new processes, and providing data in formats more usable for data-driven decision making. As a result, several improvements in the district’s capacity to manage, integrate, and use data occurred, enabling the district to provide schools with the supports described in this report. These include: (1) qualitative measures of school and community perceptions in the form of the CTAC organizational assessment administered annually to teachers, school administrators, students, and parents; (2) formative measurements of student progress with three regular administrations of the NWEA *MAP*; (3) annual school profiles as part of the Standard Bearer Schools model that bring together and analyze multiple measures and suggest potential areas for further analysis in the school planning process; and (4) principal training on the assessments and their use by NWEA and CTAC. Providing the schools with assessment data that are displayed in readable formats with preliminary analyses was a significant milestone in the development of a professional research department.

Committing district resources to the NWEA *Measures of Academic Progress* in Reading, Language Usage, and Mathematics was an important signal that students are expected to make regular progress toward mastering standards and that the system supports teachers and students in this effort. The *MAP* is designed to provide accurate measurement of student achievement and student growth at three points throughout the school year in order to provide principals and teachers with continuous information about individual student and group progress toward meeting standards. Regular assessment makes it possible to intervene and/or differentiate learning opportunities earlier than before. Research shows frequent monitoring of student

progress to be correlated with gains in student achievement.¹² Interviews conducted in Fall 2005 reveal the MAP has strong support among teachers in the district who like the immediacy of the information about students currently in their classes.

“MAP is a great opportunity to assess students’ knowledge and it helps us motivate students and teachers. Teachers adjust lessons based on test results.” High school principal

“MAP testing is very good for our students. It is administered three times during the year. We can monitor our progress. It has been terrific.” High school teacher

“The MAP report divides the class into groups for differentiated learning and notes which skills should be focused upon for each group.” High school teacher

“We are using MAP assessments and we are anticipating that this will give us the data analysis we need to improve instruction.” Elementary school teacher

The responses to the findings from assessments are significant. With additional and more immediate data from which to work, student performance can be monitored and instruction adjusted so that learning improves. It is clear that, particularly in the elementary schools, regular data analyses together with pacing guides and differentiation of instruction are having a positive effect.

A comparison of Winter 2004 to Fall 2005 results of demonstration study surveys shows that while in 2004 only 57.5 percent of administrators agreed or strongly agreed that teachers use student achievement data to plan the delivery of instruction, in 2005, 88.4 percent of administrators agreed. Moreover, in 2005 as many as 94.7 percent (up from 82.5 percent) of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teachers assess student progress and use data to adjust instruction.

Developing Organizational Supports

While increasing the amount of interactions between district and school staffs is inarguably

important, it may not fundamentally change the way the system works. In order for the whole system to work toward long-term improvement based on data and rational analyses rather than quick fixes, hodge-podge programs, and troubleshooting, the organizational development unit was established as a means to help spearhead the systemic improvement effort in collaboration with the curriculum and instruction effort, and keep it on track and integrated with the vision of the district and the board’s Theory of Action. Besides an effort from each of the central office divisions to make their services more transparent and user-friendly and to engage in timely communication and troubleshooting, several meta-concepts or models have been developed in order to engage the system in “organizational learning.”¹³

One such model that was particularly mentioned in the comments from principals is the Service Delivery Model and another one is the Standard Bearer Schools process, discussed earlier in the report. Two other models of organizational learning include the Christina Partners for Excellence (CPE), a corporate and community advisory group supportive of district and school improvement, and the Mid-Course Correction Concept, which is an on-going data-based evaluation on the state of the reform with the purpose of correcting the course of the reform, as needed.

- The Service Delivery Model is used to describe a change in operational philosophy and approach for what is traditionally known as the Curriculum and Instruction Division. Like similar divisions, curriculum and instruction staff have roles commensurate with specific expertise and functions, such as student service, categorical programs, etc. However, in addition to traditional roles, they act as a service delivery team with members assigned to each school for weekly communication, dialogue, and if needed, troubleshooting. Team members discuss their observations and problem solve while monitoring program implementation. Their findings contribute to

decisions about leadership needs, professional development, program implementation, and long-term solutions to common problems or issues that arise in the implementation of the educational program.

- The Standard Bearer Schools model, as discussed earlier, is a three-phase implementation of a data-based and cause-seeking school planning process. The Ten Step process promotes the use of multiple measures, including qualitative ones, and defensible and valid analytical processes in decision making. A key premise of this process is that stakeholder opinions are important and ought to be systematically collected and considered in the planning process. In this model, the school process is completed prior to the time that district planning is conducted and impacts and complements strategic decisions made by the district.
- The Christina Partners for Excellence is an alliance of business partners that meets regularly. This group functions as a peer executive resource to the superintendent on systemic issues and includes individuals who have institutional memory and a breadth of experience with the area's history, culture and politics. Leaders from the corporate and philanthropic community have had a significant impact on educational policy and direction in the state. Their expertise on operational issues is similarly valuable within the district. The superintendent, executive director for organizational development and CTAC staff have assisted the start-up and functioning of this alliance.
- The Mid-Course Correction concept is formulated on a recognition that reforms, even ones based on meaningful data and educational research, are rarely perfectly conceived nor are conditions static. It is an ongoing check-up, based on an analysis of data collected for the purpose of taking the temperature and making essential corrections, undertaken to maintain health of the reform.

In other words, things change, either with new information or new conditions, and the path of the reform will need correction. To go forward without adjusting is to ask for failure.

It has been noted that the arena of public education is characteristically not a safe and supportive environment for making mid-course corrections. In being fully transparent, leaders invite public scrutiny, which can be helpful in making improvements or can create a backlash against the entire effort. The well known analogy of pendulum swings in education programs comes from the practice of giving up on initiatives rather than correcting or emending them.

By contrast, through vehicles that were part of New Directions in Christina, the district has assumed a leadership role by placing an organizational emphasis on being transparent and making mid-course corrections. As an example, more than 140 district, school and community leaders were active in reviewing and responding to the findings from the student achievement data, the Standard Bearer Schools data, and the demonstration study's interview and survey data.

F. Professional Support and Rewards

The district pursued two strategies for improving compensation and linking it to the core mission of the district.

Teacher Compensation

The leaders of the Christina educational community sought to explore ways to improve teacher compensation, focusing on the core mission of the district to improve student learning and the importance of supporting and recognizing teachers' contributions to student learning. A ten-member Teacher Compensation Task Force of five members appointed by the Christina Education Association (CEA) and five members appointed by the superintendent was convened to collaboratively

examine varying approaches to compensation. District and association appointees served as co-chairs and CTAC served as technical assistance provider. The Task Force, which placed its work on hold pending the appointment of a new superintendent, contributed to the learning of the organization by:

- *Evaluating national compensation practices from educational and corporate sectors.* The Task Force critically examined a range of compensation systems. In the educational arena, this included examining state level plans (i.e., Iowa), district level plans (i.e., Denver, Cincinnati et al.) and school level plans (i.e., a Los Angeles charter school). In the corporate arena, this included examining varying approaches to awarding compensation. Based on these evaluations, the Task Force identified promising elements from the various examples and fields.
- *Defining screens through which potential new compensation elements must pass.* The screens include (a) student learning; (b) appeal to the broader public; (c) fundability; (d) fairness; (e) professionalism; (f) stability; (g) quality teaching; (h) support; (i) learning communities; (j) appeal to teachers; and, (k) applicability.
- *Examining the elements of a pilot.* Should a pilot occur, the construct would require the approval of the union and the district prior to implementation, and offer the following considerations and elements: (a) trend analysis; (b) learning; (c) study of impact; (d) pilot and control schools; (e) phases; (f) selection criteria; and, (g) feedback.
- *Providing effective communications.* Any effort to develop an innovative compensation system takes place in a highly charged environment. Moreover, with new efforts, the forces of inaccurate information are often more powerful than the forces of accurate information. Accordingly, from the outset, the Task Force stressed the importance of an effective communications strategy and took steps (including the development of an Intranet site) to ensure that

teachers and parents would have regular, updated information on the work of the Task Force.

- *Integrating the positions of parents and teachers into the development of a new compensation system.* CTAC undertook to survey and interview teachers and parents in the district and community. Doing so made it possible for the voices of teachers and parents to be heard and become part of the Task Force's deliberations. Interviews with questions paralleling the surveys were conducted with a variety of constituent groups within the district and community.

The initial findings in the area of compensation are significant. For example, a majority of teachers (50.7 percent) agree that teachers should be rewarded with extra compensation for improving student learning in their individual classrooms; 43.1 percent disagree. Further, 83.8 percent of the parents agree that teachers should be rewarded for performance in their individual classrooms. These perspectives expand when the topic is rewarding teachers for increased student learning at their schools: 57.7 percent of the teachers agree that they should be rewarded with extra compensation for improving overall student learning in their schools; 34.5 percent disagree. Most parents, 81.0 percent, were also in agreement.

Administrator Compensation

In an effort to reward performance and build accountability, the district initiated, set in policy approved by the Board of Education, and began implementing a new administrator compensation program. This initiative focuses on providing additional compensation to approximately 150 site and central administrators based on the ability of the administrator to meet or exceed a set of goals agreed upon by the administrator and his or her supervisor. Progress towards the goals is to be tracked through an electronic tracking system.

In the Fiscal Year 2007 budget, \$600,000 was to be set aside for this initiative. The dollar award for each administrator is as follows: no additional

compensation if the goals are not met; \$3,000 if the goals are met; and \$5,000 if the goals are exceeded. As part of this plan, cost of living increases have been eliminated.

When asked about the potential of a link between school and district performance and administrator compensation and what might be needed to make it fair and successful, principals said:

“It would keep us on our toes. It is important to see how students and teachers are progressing. It’s competition. Seeing how students are faring and how teachers are making adjustments is going to be a plus. Looking at writing samples was an eye opener for me. A good lesson in observation.”

“It is happening this year. Evaluation is against one’s self and what one has accomplished. The principal, staff, parents accomplish this performance. Again, it should not be a comparison of schools.”

“There are many factors to consider. The principal has been in both urban and suburban schools. The dynamics are totally different in an urban school with 66 percent SES and 61 percent minority than a suburban school with 49 percent SES and 41 percent minority. Clearly there are different dynamics in these schools.”

“Oh yes! You need to look at the student population, the experience of the staff, parental involvement, resources. Principals are committed educational leaders. The link should be based on what can be observed, not educational fluff.”

“If the components for instructional support are in place, then it is reasonable to hold administrators in terms of financial compensation. We need to examine district-wide indicators to identify areas of concern with program versus personnel.”

G. Broadening the Reach of the Reform

Overview

As key initiatives got underway—implementing a planning process oriented toward causes of

underachievement, involving the community, aligning curriculum and instruction with state standards, increasing academic rigor and achievement, introducing multiple measures, improving data availability for decision making—district leadership sought to extend the reach of the reform to address additional areas of need.

In addition to the accomplishments already mentioned, New Directions in Christina expanded further to include: conducting a district and national policy review; enhancing the district’s connections with Congress and other federal entities; increasing the district’s capacity to identify and engage external supporters and resources in the public and private sectors, including foundations with interests in education; improving the district’s capacity to develop and manage additional external funding sources; building management and communications infrastructure; building the capacity of the district to advance a comprehensive in-house data system and training functions to support it; and increasing the district’s visibility with the educational media. The area of high school reform also received additional attention and is discussed below.

Improving Christina’s High Schools

As indicated in the alignment section, high school standards alignment and student performance improvement is complex. To improve student achievement, high schools in the Christina district have had to address the same initiatives as elementary, intermediate and middle schools: (1) develop standards-based classroom instruction; (2) assess academic progress routinely and with a variety of measures; (3) differentiate instruction so that struggling students have the opportunity to meet the standards and stay in school; and (4) develop a data-based school planning process where root cause analysis informs decisions about programs and solutions.

Yet, high schools must do more. When students are behind in basic skills and knowledge, they often become even further behind in their readiness to succeed in high school coursework.

Thus, high schools have geared up to provide options that allow students to catch up, that provide extra support and tutoring, as they also learn how to differentiate classroom instruction. Additionally, high schools provide an array of course offerings that require a guide to navigate and which, for historical reasons, are tiered and tracked in such a way that a student who is not alert to these nuances and/or does not have a good guide, may find himself shut out of post high school opportunities.

Interviews and surveys of students in 2004 and 2005 indicate that while high school students are generally positive about their schools, they are not uncritical. They have concerns that are serious and need to be addressed in an ongoing manner. For example, in focus groups, students point out the inconsistencies in the quality and preparation of teachers to address an advanced curriculum. Still another observation from students originates from their peers who took easy credit classes and will not be able to go to college because they did not receive adequate counseling. They believe that there is a racial component to the type of placement selected for students. Whether these observations are accurate or not, their suggestion that high school counseling for course placement and college begin in the middle schools, a recommendation that is included in this report, rings true.

On the demonstration study survey, students are less impressed than principals that teachers prepare lessons that are interesting and involve everyone. Figure 25 shows students to be less sanguine about aspects of teaching and learning in their schools than adults.

Low expectations are insidious, whether at the personal, classroom, or school level. Teacher expectations are powerful charges and data from the study show that high school teachers, who see students who have fallen behind nearing the end of their public school career, find it hard to believe that they can make a difference. High school teachers also feel that they are teaching students whose parents seem to be the most detached from their offspring's education.

The issues confronting high schools in Christina are not unlike those of other school districts with similar demographics. Other high schools, by changing expectations and requiring rigorous academics for all students, are beginning to turn around performance with a slate of critical reforms not unlike the ones on the agendas of Christina's high schools.

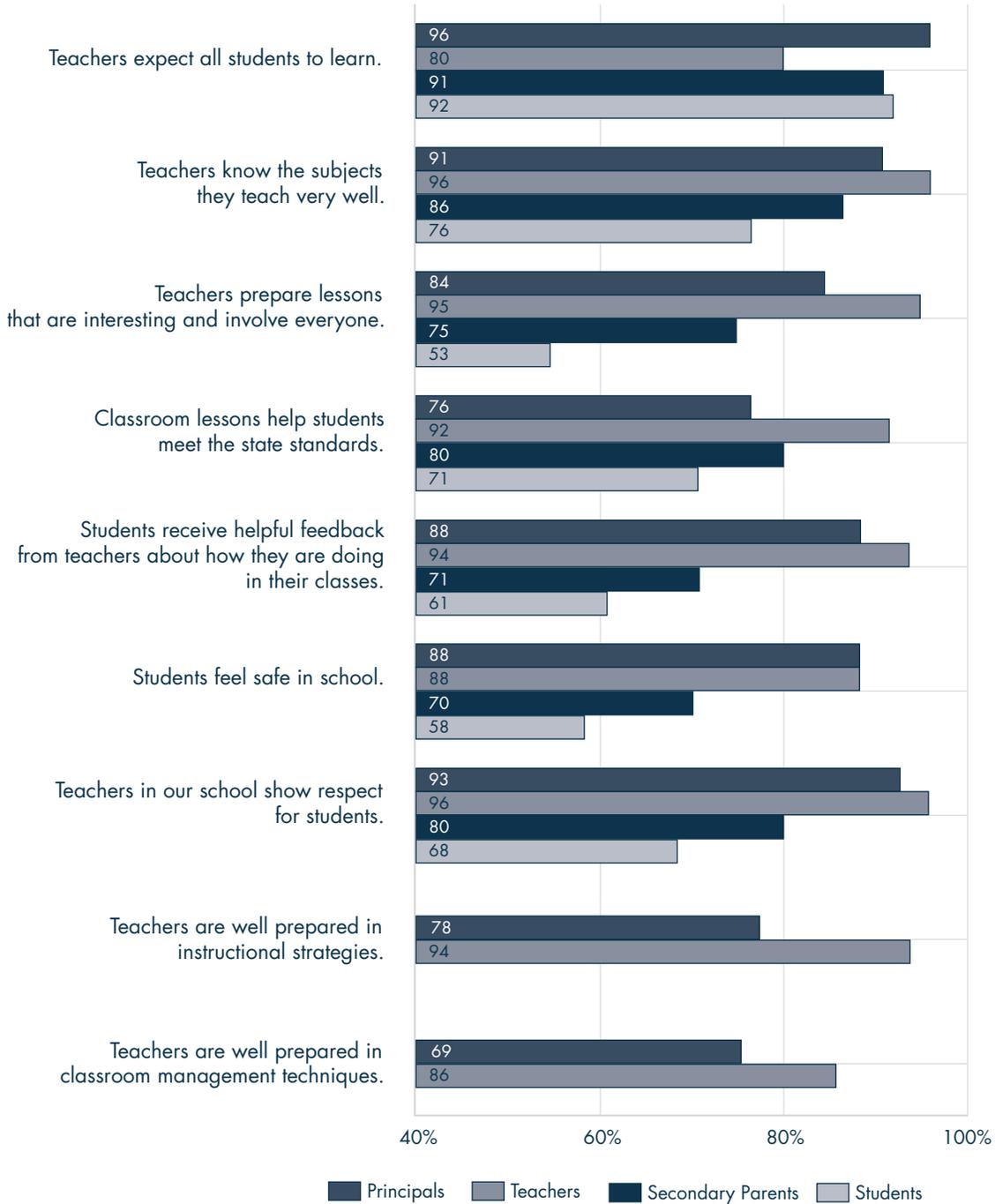
Given the achievement trend in Christina and based on the national limelight on high school reform, the superintendent and Board of Education fashioned a special reform mandate: more enrollments in advanced placement (AP) courses as a way to increase academic rigor. In support of the effort, the district sponsored a universal administration of the *Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)* as a means of identifying potential candidates.

As a result of the district's mandate, and as indicated previously, enrollments increased dramatically from 2003 to 2005. A district website report in the spring of 2005 indicated that over the two-year period, enrollments increased by 240 percent and that enrollment of African American students had increased by 614 percent. Recently, the district website featured interviews with students at Newark High School, which had succeeded in being named to *Newsweek* magazine's top 500 high schools, a list generated with advanced placement tests as the key metric. It was the first time for any high school in the district to make this list.

Based on a superintendent-commissioned review of high schools by CTAC, including an educational literature review, the Christina School District designed and began to implement *Six Essentials for High Schools* with the intent of increasing the achievement of all students in grades 9-12 by 2008. These include:

- High course-level and graduation standards for all high school students;
- Rigorous standards in differentiated instruction and cultural competence for high school educators;

Fig. 25 Issues Related to Teaching and Learning



- Full inclusion and academic support for all special education and other disadvantaged students into a college-prep curriculum;
- Small learning community cadre-assignment and block scheduling for all high school students;
- Data-driven, mid-course corrections and adjustments to guide the teaching and learning and collaboration work of all high school teachers and students; and
- Zero-tolerance articulation of school code of conduct.

By 2005–06, most of the six essentials were in evidence or in the planning stages in the three high schools: schedules had been devised to give teachers collaboration time; schools were engaged in professional development related to standards

and differentiation of instruction; greater inclusion for special education students was in evidence; *MAP* assessments were providing some of the basis of analysis and dialogue; and data-based school planning was underway in two high schools. Best of all, tenth grade *DSTP* scores had begun to turn around for African American, Hispanic, and low-income students.

A High School Task Force, comprised of school district staff and a broad base of community members, was appointed by the superintendent and the mayor and assisted through New Directions, with the charge of visualizing what a new kind of high school in the city of Wilmington should look like. A report that captures the ideas and recommendations of the group was developed for future action by the superintendent and Board of Education.



IV

CHAPTER

The Path Ahead: Recommendations

The Christina School District is at a critical juncture. In a two-year period of time, the district has made significant and positive improvements in student achievement, school and community participation, and educational conditions at the school sites. Simply put, the level and extent of educational progress have been marked. The district must now build on these accomplishments so that students continue to be the beneficiaries of the reform effort. Moreover, at a time of change in the superintendency, it is essential to confirm the district's direction and commitments, while precluding any possibilities of organizational backsliding.

A summary of recommendations follow. They all meet the criteria of building on accomplishments to date, being research-based, addressing the root causes of current problems, and are achievable and manageable within existing budgetary constraints.

Issue One: Standard Bearers and Organizational Alignment

- *Fulfill the commitment to the schools to implement the Standard Bearer Schools process.* The school improvement planning process is now substantive. It has moved away from largely an exercise in compliance and has become increasingly a school-based practice of identifying and addressing the root causes of student and school performance. The schools have been included in the Standard Bearer process in three phases. Thousands of educators, parents and students have participated to date. The third phase began in Spring 2006 and now includes all of the district's schools. The district needs to demonstrate that it remains serious about its

commitment to addressing causality, making planning meaningful, and providing promised timely support to the schools by following through on the third phase of Standard Bearers.

- *Align the school plans, the district profile and the budget.* For the first time, the district has established a coherent means for linking school improvement plans, the district priorities based on those plans, and the budgetary planning process. The processes are significant and have all been put in place. It is now incumbent on district leadership to follow through to ensure that district emphases and budgetary allocations, in practice, reflect the needs and priorities of the school sites. Particularly in a period of fiscal limitations, staying focused on school priorities is a bottom line requirement of senior management.

Issue Two: Parent and Community Engagement

- *Own the responsibility to involve parents.* Starting from the point of having minimal parental involvement in the schools just two years ago, the district has taken steps to involve greater numbers of parents in school improvement as evidenced, for example, by the Standard Bearer Schools process. This progress has been primarily driven by a small number of central units and needs to be embraced more fully as an essential compact between the district and the parent community. The district needs to more clearly define the leaders and units at school and central levels that will be responsible for involving parents, delineate what specific organizational supports the schools can expect from the administration as they work to involve parents, and identify how practitioners centrally and locally will be held accountable for involving parents.

Further, the district should confirm the purposes for parent involvement and the baseline of expectations for the schools. Doing so will enable parents to know what to

expect from the schools and what the schools expect of parents. It will also provide a basis for professional development, dialogue and accountability.

- *Ensure that community and school voices will continue to be heard.* The Christina School District has made major strides in the past two years in becoming a more public institution. It has become central to district operations to annually conduct surveys of all households with children in the schools and of all administrators, teachers and other staff at the schools. The survey responses have then been analyzed and used as the basis for improving practices at the schools and central administration. Conducting this activity and taking action based on findings is now an expectation that both external and internal communities have of the district. Their voices need to be heard.
- *Build bridges with teachers and the union.* Teachers are both instructors and a core part of the educational community. As part of the reform effort, Christina teachers have developed new skills in areas ranging from using data to improve instruction to conducting school improvement planning. Many have undertaken new practices. Overall, they have been key contributors to the district's improved results in student achievement. However, the continued progress in student achievement will be dependent on both the organized capacity of the district to support the sites and the level of trust that the district can establish with teachers and their elected representatives. Within public schools, trust can be an elusive commodity. It will be important to use the initial collaborative building blocks (e.g., joint task forces, increased participation in school planning, site specific professional development) as a foundation for broadening the working relationship between the central administration and the teachers.

Issue Three: Standards and Reform

- *Stress the linkage of standards and classroom teaching.* Standards-based teaching is different from standards-referent teaching. Data indicate that steps have been taken so that alignment between standards, assessment and instruction becomes the baseline of practice for the district. Teachers now have progress assessments, new standards-based materials and pacing guides. Many teachers are learning how to differentiate instruction. While these changes have contributed to positive movement in student achievement, there continue to be differences between perceptions of teaching effectiveness and actual student achievement results. The beginning turnaround in performance of the two lowest performing ethnic groups and of low income students demonstrates that students benefit from the standards-based approach. To maintain the momentum, there needs to be a greater organizational focus on identifying where the differences between adult perceptions and student results are most prevalent, what is causing the gaps, what solutions are needed, what the school's specific plan is to address the gaps, and what the district's specific plan is to support the schools and classrooms in making necessary changes.
- *Build the reform of the secondary schools on the progress of the elementary schools.* The district's gains in student achievement have resulted from focused and coordinated efforts in leadership, community involvement, pedagogy, planning, data usage and analysis, and mid-course improvements. While the district overall has shown progress, the high schools in particular need to build on the improvements made at the feeder schools and focus the reforms on (1) providing early and frequent program and career counseling so that all students will be prepared to participate in a rigorous high school learning experience, (2) continuing to

explore new structures that personalize the relationships among teachers, students, and parents, (3) developing and implementing study and support programs that help overcome obstacles to learning and staying in school, and (4) ensuring that parents are actively engaged in the education of their children and the school's reform efforts.

Issue Four: Professional Development and Data Usage

- *Broaden the understanding and usage of multiple academic measures.* Far ahead of many districts, Christina has been a leader in providing its educators with an array of high quality assessments. It has also increased the district's overall data capacity. The next challenge is to build the capacity of the central administration and the sites to use the multiple measures in concert to better understand student, teacher and school performance, and to inform practice at site and central levels of the district.
- *Strengthen the professional development for principals.* Christina's site level administrators need more professional development that is tailored to the data on student and teacher performance at their respective schools. If the principals are to become the chief executive officers of their buildings, a frequently stated goal in the district, they will need increased levels of assistance in guiding the specific reforms underway in their schools.

Issue Five: Mid-Course Corrections

- *Ensure that mid-course corrections will continue to be driven by performance data.* One of the greatest strengths of the Christina reform has been the use of data on student and school performance, as well as on organizational conditions, to regularly drive improvements. Making such mid-course corrections has had a positive impact and has extended to numerous educational and organizational components of the district. However, due to the blend of changes

in district leadership, the demands of a referendum campaign and strains from subsequent fiscal controversies, the focus on making mid-course corrections to the benefit of students and the classrooms has slowed. The district needs to ensure that future managerial constructs include vehicles for making transparent mid-course corrections.

- *Establish operational standards for central service delivery to the schools and community.* While much has been made of the pace of reform in Christina, the real concern is the ability of the central administration to respond to the needs of the schools and community. The progress the district has made in such areas as using data in decision-making, making multiple assessments available, differentiating instruction and implementing the Standard Bearer Schools process needs to become the service delivery norm for all commitments the district makes to the sites and the community. In this regard, district leadership needs to confirm the standards that will guide central service delivery, and apply them consistently and with follow-up when addressing priority needs.
- *Change the role of Christina Partners for Excellence (CPE).* Since the inception of this corporate and community entity, there have been significant changes of leadership within both the district and Delaware's corporate community. Further, the essential building blocks for

educational reform have been put in place and the student achievement results are positive. From this point onward, the role of CPE needs to expand so that corporate and community leaders take on the mantle of becoming the conscience of the reform. In this role, CPE needs to ensure that the educational reforms, upcoming organizational changes and related management systems are accountable and show demonstrable results for children. By so doing, CPE will be able to help advance the momentum of reform and address gaps resulting from either changes in leadership or stagnancy in district performance.

Summary

Under the impetus of New Directions in Christina and the Transformation, the district has made substantive progress in improving student achievement, increasing community participation, changing school conditions to be more supportive of the classrooms and student learning, and changing district systems for greater student impact. This is significant progress by any district's standards and all the more noteworthy given the short time span of the reform initiative in the Christina School District. The challenge ahead is to ensure that the educational and organizational progress of the recent past is firmly engrained as the foundation for the future. The stakes are simply too high in Delaware's largest district for any other outcome to be acceptable.

Endnotes

Chapter I

- 1 Developed by the Organizational Development Unit, Christina School District.

Chapter II

- 2 Demographic information is compiled from the Delaware Department of Education website.
- 3 In 2005, the state moved from Version 9 of the *SAT* to Version 10.
- 4 The *DSTP* is given in science and social studies in grade 8 and 11 beginning in September 2005 and grades 4 and 6 beginning in February 2006.
- 5 “RIT” refers to the Item Response Theory and Rasch Modeling methodologies used in the development and scaling of the *MAP*.
- 6 Results are often presented in the form of “percent of students below and percent at or above standard” thereby aggregating all of the students into two categories. While meeting the requirements of NCLB, this may be misleading. For example, if the percent of students in the Meets Standards level keeps increasing but the percent of students in the upper two levels (e.g., Exceeds Standards and Distinguished Performance) decrease then performance is not improving.

- 7 American Indian students were not reported in order to prevent the individual identification of students which might result from the small number on students in this group.
- 8 While this change is notable, due to the small number of students in this group the results did not reach statistical significance.
- 9 Data from the Spring 2006 administration were not available at the time this report was written.
- 10 Developed by the Organizational Development Unit, Christina School District.
- 11 “Parent Involvement in Schools,” Michigan State University Best Practice Briefs (No. 30-R, June 2004), ed. Betty Tableman.

Chapter III

- 12 This line of research is summarized in Marzano, Robert J. (2003). *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*. (ASCD: Alexandria, VA).
- 13 Peter M. Senge, (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization*, New York: Doubleday.

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AND ASSISTANCE CENTER

30 WINTER STREET • BOSTON, MA 02108
TEL: 617.423.1444 • E-MAIL: ctac@ctacusa.com
www.ctacusa.com