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School Turnaround

principles for success

With more than a decade of experience in school reform, WestEd's Fred Tempes knows how challenging it is for chronically low-performing schools to improve, but he also knows that almost any can accomplish dramatic turnaround. What it takes is "hard work around a core set of principles over an extended period of time," says Tempes.

Sounds simple, but a basic challenge is that no one can make the improvement happen for a school. Rather, the entire school community must pull together collectively and do the work for themselves.

"People look for a magic solution — the one textbook, program, or external provider who'll come in and help them get it right," says Tempes, Director of WestEd's Comprehensive School Assistance Program. "But it's really a matter of doing what needs to be done, and doing it collaboratively and with a shared sense of responsibility."

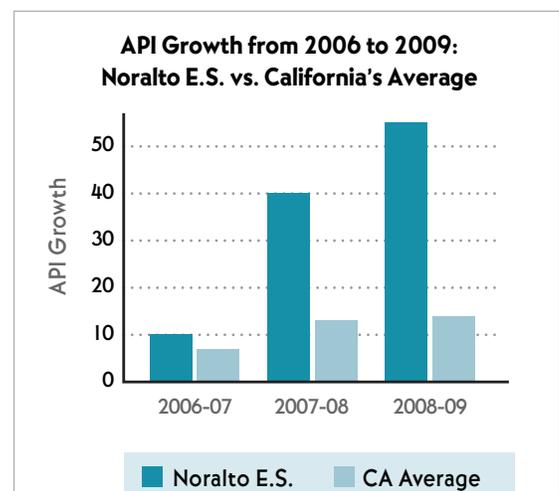
To assemble WestEd's deep knowledge and expertise on "what needs to be done," CSAP created a School Turnaround Center last year in response to President Obama's call to turn around the nation's 5,000 lowest-performing public schools.

The center's approach to school reform is based on research indicating that successful schools share characteristics that include effective school leadership, highly qualified teachers, a rigorous standards-based curriculum, and ongoing staff development. The real challenge is how to instill these characteristics in schools that have been chronically low-performing. To do that, says Tempes, schools must establish "a culture of improvement that is sustainable."

WestEd's School Turnaround Center supports schools in creating and maintaining such a culture by focusing on three closely linked and complementary operating principles: developing *local support and collaboration*, ensuring *effective implementation*, and building *mutual accountability*.

LOCAL SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

A collaborative approach to school reform has been critical to the turnaround of Noralto Elementary School in Sacramento, California. Serving a diverse, mostly low-income population in grades K–6, Noralto repeatedly had





Thirty years ago, teachers were very isolated, but we now realize how important their collective knowledge is when it comes to moving learning forward.

not met achievement targets and had been designated by the state of California as a school in need of program improvement for several consecutive years prior to working with WestEd.

Joseph Sassone, Project Director with WestEd's Local Accountability Professional Development Series (LAPDS), credits the teachers with coming together to find ways to raise achievement. "Thirty years ago, teachers were very isolated, but we now realize how important their collective knowledge is when it comes to moving learning forward," he says. "And the Noralto teachers really ran with that concept."

In 2006, working with Sassone and LAPDS, the teachers met over several days to examine the state standards and establish an English/Language Arts curriculum that spelled out exactly which skills students would need to master in each grade. "The key was that they *decided collectively* to guarantee that students would reach proficiency in a set of specific skills each year," says Sassone.

The next steps in the process — designing weekly assessments and analyzing the resulting data — involved ongoing, consistent collaboration. At grade-level data meetings, for example, teachers worked together to check student progress and to plan and revise lessons on those skills students were finding hardest to master. "I'd hear teachers say, 'It looks like your students did well here. What exactly did you do in that lesson?'" says Sassone. Even Noralto's daily, 30-minute "What I Need" intervention sessions for struggling students were handled collaboratively, with teachers working with each other's students in order to increase efficiency.

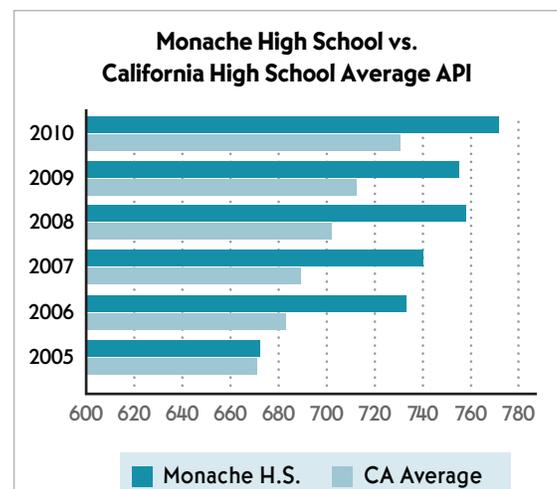
Says Sassone, "Bouncing ideas off of each other, working with each other's students — it's a matter of *sharing collective knowledge*. It has a lot of power."

Noralto's collaborative approach to turnaround has helped take the school's Academic Performance Index from 672 in 2006 to 797 today.

EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Generating a plan for improvement is important to school turnaround, but that is only the beginning. A key lesson learned by WestEd researchers is that even the best of plans are only as good as their implementation. And effective implementation can be difficult to achieve.

"Implementation is easy to derail," notes Shirley Houser, a team leader with WestEd's School Turnaround Center. Critical to effective implementation of school improvement efforts is a strong focus on the long-term goals



and consistent leadership to keep that focus front and center, says Houser.

Before joining WestEd's staff in 2007, Houser was principal of Monache High School in California's Porterville Unified School District. Serving a diverse population of approximately 1,900 students, the school was identified in 2004 as underperforming and in need of state monitoring. Monache chose WestEd to provide the support of a state-approved, external School Assistance and Intervention Team.

WestEd's support team determined that boosting the school's performance enough to remove state sanctions would require major changes in its English and math programs, especially instructional materials, class schedules, intervention classes for struggling students, and teacher support. Implementing action plans in these areas, Houser says, took effective leadership, teacher commitment, and two years of hard work.

For example, a new intervention system aimed at closing the achievement gap between white and minority students relied on academic coaches. The coaches worked closely with teachers, analyzing student data, then developing lessons designed to reinforce concepts and skills that proved hardest for students to master. The coaches also took to the classrooms to model exemplary teaching practices.

Houser emphasized to her staff that she wanted improvement not just in English and math, but across the curriculum. To that end, virtually all Monache students were enrolled in college-prep classes that included extra support for students who needed it as well as additional courses in which specific learning gaps were identified and addressed.

The work paid off. Monache's API increased from 672 in 2005 to 772 in 2010. Houser is not surprised. Once "everyone knows what is being done and why," she says, implementation takes on a momentum of its own, generated by "a certain energy that actually becomes greater than the individuals involved."

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

These days, through her work with WestEd's School Turnaround Center, Houser frequently finds herself encouraging educators to build in accountability, both individual and collective, for the outcomes of their school improvement efforts. "The kind of accountability we're talking about goes from the superintendent down to the instructional aides and back up," says Houser. Once staff members realize they "all have a stake in how this is going and all are going to be held accountable," they're more likely to support each other's efforts.

In the Mt. Vernon School District in Washington state, stakeholders are building in mutual accountability for school improvement "from the boardroom to the bus," says WestEd's Jon Frank. A Senior Program Associate with WestEd's School Turnaround Center, Frank has been working with district staff for three years through the state's Summit District Improvement Initiative. Frank's primary role is to make quarterly implementation review visits to Mt. Vernon, a 5,700-student, low-income district in the Skagit agricultural valley.

Frank says his visits are designed to "identify and try to celebrate the district's accomplishments, identify further challenges as well as any related roadblocks and

multi-level support

for early educators

Maria Muñoz has been a teacher's assistant for the past three years at a preschool that provides subsidized services to low-income families. From the start, she has wanted to be the best early educator possible for the children in her classroom. She knew that doing so would require improving her teaching and her English language skills. So, when she heard about a local program that supports the professional development of early educators working with children from birth through five years old, she decided to check it out.

Through WestEd's Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES) program in California's Santa Clara County, Muñoz has received individualized academic advising and financial support that allowed her to enroll at San Jose City College and embark on a path toward a college degree in early childhood education.

"Through CARES, I've accomplished many things I didn't think were ever possible for me, especially being an immigrant and limited English speaker," says Muñoz. "The program helped me plan the courses I need to get a degree, and I've now completed several, including ESL [English as a second language] courses. I feel more comfortable speaking English in my preschool classroom, and I'm much more confident and independent."

Launched by WestEd in 2002, Santa Clara CARES is an early education workforce development program that supports local educators like Muñoz by providing education stipends and individualized education planning services to help them work toward obtaining college degrees. The program is predicated on a growing body of research that confirms what Muñoz already knows — children benefit tremendously, many going on to be more successful in school and life, when their early educators are well-trained and well-educated.

Santa Clara CARES helps fill a significant gap. While extensive systems of preparation and in-service professional development are provided for K–12 teachers, the same depth of support is not typically available to early educators. This deficit of opportunity often results in an early educator workforce characterized by low educational attainment, high turnover, and poor compensation.

"The challenge of working toward a degree in early childhood education is that it's not like other streams where you would complete your coursework and get your degree before entering the field," says George C. Philipp, Senior Program Associate at WestEd. "Many early educators are older or are English language learners who go back for coursework while working full time. Many feel lost and jump from course to course without receiving systematic support to ensure academic progress."

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

WestEd established the program in 2002 with funding from First 5 Santa Clara County, First 5 California, and the California Department of Education. The agency developed a collaborative local infrastructure in partnership with four local early education agencies that specialize





Because we knew higher education levels had higher impact on child outcomes, we made a concerted effort to focus participants toward a degree path.

in offering community-based support to early educators, every community college in the county, and two local four-year universities. The collaborative established clear, consistent guidelines for the transferability of courses — an essential step toward systematizing professional development for early educators.

Santa Clara CARES has an ongoing enrollment system — any educator who works with children up to five years old at a licensed early education program in Santa Clara County can apply to join at any time. To ensure local educators are aware of the program, Santa Clara CARES and its partners conduct extensive outreach that has been quite successful — an analysis of Santa Clara CARES conducted in 2010 by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) found the program had reached 85 percent (close to 5,400 individuals) of the county's early educators since its inception.

Word of mouth among participants has also helped the program grow. Muñoz says that because CARES motivated her to continue her own education, she was inspired to spread the word — she now finds herself regularly encouraging colleagues to tap into the program's extensive resources.

To participate in the program, early educators must complete an enrollment application and meet with a CARES-affiliated advisor from one of the partner colleges to create a Professional Development and Education Plan, an online record that outlines the coursework necessary for the participant to achieve a college degree. Each time participants work with advisors to complete or update their plan, they receive an electronic Participant Summary outlining their degree progress.

Without the direct advising support that comes through developing a personalized education plan, early educators often find it challenging to pursue a degree. California, like many states, lacks clear guidelines for what it means to be a "qualified" early educator, and systems for professional development and education are fragmented and confusing.

"Before CARES, I had a few college credits. I wasn't sure which courses to take, and I wasn't continuing my education," remembers CARES participant Tanya M. Wieber. "After creating a Professional Development and Education Plan, I've completed my core courses and administration courses, and I have a certificate from De Anza College for Home-Based Child Care. I've just started taking GE [general education] courses — achieving a degree is my next goal."

In addition to specifying necessary coursework, the Professional Development and Education Plan is used to allocate stipends based on the number of college units participants earn from approved courses.

"I used the stipends to pay for courses and books," says Muñoz. "Without them, I'm not sure I could afford to go to school." Muñoz says the financial assistance from Santa Clara CARES enabled her to take classes continuously during spring, summer, and fall semesters this past year, which has been crucial to keeping her on a degree trajectory.

While similar programs offer financial stipends for one-off workshops and trainings that don't necessarily lead toward a degree, Santa Clara CARES awards stipends only for unit-bearing credits that help participants progress toward a

college degree. “Because we knew higher education levels had higher impact on child outcomes,” says Santa Clara CARES Director Yolanda Garcia, “we made a concerted effort to focus participants toward a degree path.”

This emphasis has led to a more educated workforce in Santa Clara County. According to the 2010 REL West analysis, “all returning participants, independent of their number of years in the program, increased their total accrual of semester units,” and 66 percent of the participants advanced to a higher California Child Development Permit level.

USING DATA TO INFORM PROGRAMMATIC EFFORTS

The Professional Development and Education Plans serve another crucial function by providing ongoing guidance that shapes what the program offers. Aggregated into an online database, the plans offer a rich portrait of early educators in the county, including detailed demographic, professional, and educational information. Early on, Santa Clara CARES staff realized the importance of leveraging this database to inform systematic change in early educator support.

“Before Santa Clara CARES began collecting and analyzing early educator data, we couldn’t really define who was working with the children,” Garcia says. “Once we developed a system for capturing this data, we could really understand their needs and plan our support accordingly.”

Local colleges began to use information gathered in the education plans to learn what courses students were requesting most often and what specific supports the colleges needed to offer to ensure students’ academic success. And Santa Clara CARES uses the information about

participants to target the outreach and support that the program provides. For example, early data indicated that many Santa Clara CARES participants had received college education outside the United States, but their transcripts had never been translated or reviewed. This knowledge led CARES to develop a system for transcripts to be evaluated, providing a big jump in the degree progress of many participants – some even found that their original degrees were fully equivalent in the United States.

Another key piece of data indicated that a large number of Santa Clara County’s early educators were English language learners, with particularly high numbers who spoke Spanish. In response, Santa Clara CARES engaged the National Hispanic University to help more fully support its Spanish-speaking participants. CARES also collaborated with local Spanish-speaking family-based educator networks to provide strategic counseling and advice for participants.

Now in its tenth year, Santa Clara CARES has become a robust model of collaborative, data-driven support, constantly reevaluating needs, and evolving to better serve local early educators. The benefits are both systemic and personal. “Completing these college courses has not been easy, especially because I work full time and have a young daughter,” reflects Muñoz. “But CARES has connected me to wonderful support at the college and in my community, so I’m no longer alone with my goal of earning a degree.”



For further information on Santa Clara CARES, contact Yolanda Garcia at 408.299.1701 or ygarcia@WestEd.org.

LEARNING FROM experience

The Indiana Institute for **School Leadership Teams**

In almost any recipe for school improvement, leadership is a key ingredient. And yet districts across the country continue to struggle with chronically low-performing schools in need of more effective leadership. How can dynamic leaders be developed and their skills harnessed to make a difference for the schools most in need?

For answers, a new institute in Indiana has taken a direct approach: Ask the principals who've already succeeded.

Since 2008, WestEd has worked with the Indiana Department of Education to create and implement an initiative in which the state's lowest-performing schools learn from those who've overcome similar obstacles. Matching school leadership teams with Distinguished Principals who coach them for two years while continuing to run their own buildings, Indiana has shown that its worst schools can indeed meet high standards of learning.

"I think the story is that it *can* be done," says Distinguished Principal Stephen L. Foster, who has turned around one failing elementary school and guided two other transformations through the Indiana Institute for School Leadership Teams. "Those schools that have the resources and the desire to get better can get better."

In addition to raising test scores and dramatically changing school cultures, the initiative has repositioned failing schools as models of successful practices for others to adopt. According to Laura Cope, Title I Specialist with the Indiana Department of Education, the entire faculty in one school voluntarily signed a contract agreeing to stay at the school for three years so that teacher turnover would not disrupt improvements. In another school,

teachers use Skype to confer with colleagues in the school run by the Distinguished Principal assigned to help both faculties.

"That frequent communication is key," Cope says. Through the institute, each Distinguished Principal is paid to visit the low-performing school four times per year. "But they really do daily emails and make connections and ask their staff to be mentors," Cope says. "They have instant credibility. They can say, 'I've been in your shoes and I know how you feel.'"

A TEAM-BASED APPROACH

Indiana's leadership initiative started in 2008 after state officials asked WestEd for help designing a research-based model of school change based on teamwork and accountability. Cheryl Williams, Director of Outreach for Learning Innovations at WestEd, encouraged some key components:

- » **Team leadership.** While harnessing the power of dynamic school principals, the Indiana initiative also emphasizes that successful school leadership does not rely on a single person. Rather, it builds the capacity of many people to collaboratively steer school change.





- » **Focus on data.** The process begins with a summer institute in which leadership teams from participating schools learn how to analyze school performance data, design interventions that are narrowly focused and consistent across the building, and build camaraderie. Teams continue to focus on data and make adjustments through the year.
- » **District-level engagement.** Each school's leadership team includes at least one high-level district leader who can provide inside knowledge of the school system's policies and expectations as well as hear firsthand what barriers are preventing low-performing schools from achieving desired results.
- » **Distinguished Principals.** Each leadership team receives coaching from a Distinguished Principal who works closely with the team during the summer academy and throughout the school year to help the group shape and implement its own improvement plans.

Building commitment has been integral to Indiana's success, Williams says. "If you think you can get commitment without people feeling they're part of the process, forget it. You'll get compliance but not commitment. You need to have a process in place to get you to success, and that process needs to address relationships across the leadership team and school."

MAINTAINING FOCUS

Like many states, Indiana has had to transform schools with similar academic challenges but different cultural traditions. In rural schools, teachers typically have strong roots in the community but may have outdated methods of instruction and no urgency to change. In contrast, urban schools often struggle with poverty, violence,

and shifting priorities, so staff are distracted with more immediate concerns.

"One of the things clearly shown by research about the difference between low-performing and high-performing schools is that the latter are doing *fewer* things," notes Williams. "For some people, that's counterintuitive. But trying to do too many things creates a lack of focus and coherence. There are some very well-meaning people who don't give their interventions the time to take hold or provide the right level of support before they're off to the next thing."

Stephen Foster experienced the challenges of shifting priorities in his work at Lakeside Elementary School outside Indianapolis a decade ago. As the area's changing demographics resulted in the admission of more students from low-income and minority families, Lakeside's faculty didn't know how to adjust. Foster helped the school focus by using data to determine the most urgent needs. He showed faculty how to analyze data sources to determine which students were struggling and develop interventions addressing each child's needs.

A daily tutorial period enabled teachers to provide remediation for some students and enrichment for others. Foster also set up demonstration classrooms where colleagues could observe teachers skilled at designing small group lessons, conferring with students, or analyzing formative assessment results.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS, LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

"We realized that it was very important for us as a staff, myself included, to accept being vulnerable and be able to say, 'I'm not getting it. Who can I go see to get help?'" Foster says. "It

I think the story is that it can be done.... Those schools that have the resources and the desire to get better can get better.

was not judging who was good or bad but who needed professional development and what kind." And instead of adopting a multitude of competing strategies, "when we found something that was working, we stuck with it."

By the time Foster was tapped to lead another struggling school, Lakeside had doubled its pass rate on the state's achievement tests and earned distinction as a national Blue Ribbon school. Since 2008, Foster has also guided two elementary schools participating in the Indiana Institute for School Leadership Teams. WestEd has provided critical support, he says, such as helping him sharpen his group facilitation skills and providing professional development unique to each school.

Foster says he always goes into a school wanting to learn about them and from them. Even failing schools have good practices to share, he says. He recalls one school that had posted learning standards in clear, kid-friendly language, which he immediately recognized as something his own school needed to do. The staff was pleased when he snapped photos of the graphics. Such reciprocal sharing and celebrating small victories can help colleagues build trust and develop stamina for the hard work of school transformation, Foster says.

"I think where things can fall down is if someone goes in and says, 'I have all the answers,'" he notes. "I don't tell people what to do. My job is to help staff look at the data so they can figure out what to do." At the same time, "I've got to walk the talk. I can't go to someone else's building and say, 'Have you thought about this and that?' if I'm not doing that in my own home."

Indiana's leadership initiative has had some growing pains. For example, based on the success demonstrated by the first group of schools, the state tripled the number of participants in the second year and found that it was too difficult to provide sufficient support to all. State leaders decided to narrow their efforts in the third year.

Likewise, Indiana is confronting two interrelated problems that continue to stymie other states: how to find enough principals experienced with school makeovers to coach others, and how to help the growing number of failing high schools. School improvement practices at the elementary level don't easily translate to the upper grades. And without new recruits for the Distinguished Principal ranks, states risk burnout with the ones they've come to rely on.

Sarah Pies, Title I Specialist with the Indiana Department of Education, says the state is already asking superintendents to nominate their "all-stars," and has been tapping assistant principals who've been involved with the Indiana Institute for School Leadership Teams and who may be ready for an expanded role.

Pies is optimistic about building on the successes of the leadership team initiative. "It creates hope in the schools that we didn't see when they first got involved in the initiative," she says. "They started out as the most struggling schools in Indiana, and they became the most hopeful."



For more information about the Indiana Institute for School Leadership Teams, contact Amy Bush at 317.232.0540 or abush@in.gov; or Cheryl Williams at 781.481.1113 or cwillia@WestEd.org.

Putting the needs of children in foster care on the education research agenda

Children in foster care move like shadows through the school system, but they leave indelible marks. Largely ignored by the education community, as a group they've had consistently dismal educational outcomes. Research shows that by the time many of their peers are graduating from college, half the young adults who have been in the foster care system are unemployed, a fourth are homeless, and a fifth are in prison.

"They are one of the most academically vulnerable student groups," says BethAnn Berliner, Senior Research Associate at WestEd. "Improving their academic outcomes means we must do right by them when they are young and still in school, so they can turn around their life trajectories."

One of the main challenges is a lack of coordination among the many entities and services that play a role in the foster care system. As wards of the state, children in foster care come in contact with a wide range of adults from judicial, social service, and education sectors. Usually there is no one who advocates specifically for their academic needs. With limited coordination of services and little or no sharing of data, agencies lack any reliable way to determine what the children need to succeed in school.

A promising initiative is poised to change those circumstances. Ready to Succeed, a project born of the former California Collaborative for Children in Foster Care, aims to spotlight the educational needs of children in foster care to find ways to support their success. The initiative unites philanthropists, researchers, educators, and state and county social service providers who have often

worked at cross-purposes, despite good intentions and shared interests in helping children in foster care excel.

"This is such vital work. The education of these kids has too often been overlooked, trumped by caring for other crises in their lives," says WestEd's Chief Executive Officer, Glen Harvey, who was a member of the Collaborative. "But given their outcomes, improving education for these children has become an emergency as well."

The initiative could have a profound impact on foster care services throughout the United States. California is home to one-fifth of the country's more than half-million children in foster care. Like other states, California has a hodgepodge of policies designed to serve children in foster care, and many have been implemented without sufficient evidence that they improve academic achievement or reduce the scars of family trauma.

Studies show that children in foster care perform significantly worse in school than the general population: Three-quarters perform below grade level, over half are held back in school, and they are twice as likely as their classmates to be suspended and to drop out. By age 18, California's foster children have attended an average of





nine different schools. Uprooted from their biological families because of abuse and neglect, they often have behavioral problems so severe that some schools have expelled children from kindergarten.

In 2010, Ready to Succeed published a report that points to new research priorities that could determine a better approach to educating children in foster care. *Grappling with the Gaps: Toward a Research Agenda to Meet the Educational Needs of Children and Youth in Foster Care* examined three main focus areas: school readiness, school success, and data sharing.

School readiness. Many young children in foster care experience conditions that undermine school readiness and place them at risk for school failure. Ready to Succeed has identified early intervention services and preschools as essential developmental supports to young children. The initiative recommends expanded eligibility and access to early intervention services for all children ages 0–2 in foster care and better access to high-quality preschool for all children ages 3–5 in foster care. But there is limited research about how many of these children are currently receiving these supports, which of the supports are most beneficial, or what other problems could also affect their early learning.

For example, when researchers tried to determine baseline information about the percentage of young children in foster care who were receiving preschool and other early intervention services, only one of the 58 counties in California had collected data that could be reviewed. That review found that there is a long way to

go before achieving the initiative’s recommendations for universal access to early intervention services and licensed preschools.

School success. Most educators don’t even know where to begin to turn around the poor educational outcomes of children in foster care. For example, experts consulted for the *Grappling with the Gaps* report said, “We know virtually nothing about what happens in classrooms” for these children. There is almost no research about effective instructional practices for this student population. And because children’s school record transfers are often delayed or incomplete, and professional development focused on trauma and learning is practically nonexistent, teachers don’t know how to help. “How can we expect teachers to adjust their instruction if they aren’t even clued in that their students are foster kids?” the report asks. “Schools are starved for this information and want classroom solutions, but it isn’t there.”

Additionally, policymakers and social service providers often urge school districts to keep foster children in the same schools as a way to ease the disruptions caused by frequent changes in their home placements. But because the children are often concentrated in low-performing schools, it remains an open and controversial question whether they may be better off in the long run moving to higher-achieving schools.

Another common practice that may not be effective is to place children in special education services because of behavior problems likely associated with the foster care experience. As one expert explained, “It’s the only

This is such vital work. The education of these kids has too often been overlooked, trumped by caring for other crises in their lives.... But given their outcomes, improving education for these children has become an emergency as well.

game in town” because mental health services are virtually nonexistent at schools and there are few other ways to fill the gaps in their learning. “We don’t even know why their performance is so low,” said one expert cited in the report. “Is it (poor) attendance, instability in their home placement, school changes, or cognitive impairments and developmental delays?” Another expert remarked, “We haven’t separated out what part of what we’re seeing in student performance is student effect, teacher effect, school effect, or system effect.”

Data sharing. Data are rarely shared across education, child welfare, mental health, and judicial systems. Confidentiality is the primary reason cited for the closed silos of information erected by agencies with overlapping responsibilities for children in foster care. But protecting children in the state’s care might require new kinds of data sharing agreements.

The Ready to Succeed initiative aims to create the collaborative spirit and innovative thinking needed to break down the barriers that interfere with the school success of children in foster care. And there is much work ahead.

WestEd is currently in the early stages of launching an ambitious data-sharing effort with the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, the Stuart Foundation, the California Department of Education, the California Department of Social Services, and other initiative partners. The goal is to create the first-ever statewide report on the educational outcomes of children in foster care drawing from multiple data sources. The conclusions from such a report could provide the information needed

to answer key questions raised by the *Grappling with the Gaps* study, including:

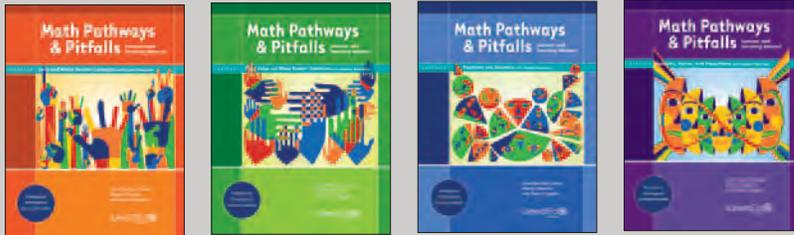
- » What improves the educational outcomes of children in foster care, and in which circumstances?
- » How can duplicated services be eliminated and more effective ones be coordinated, funded, and monitored?
- » Who should be responsible for planning and providing counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and other targeted interventions? And what kinds of training and supports are needed for those who provide advocacy and instruction?

“We need to share data across the education and child welfare fields to better serve those children,” says Vanessa Ximenes Barrat, Senior Research Associate at WestEd. “The goal is to have programs, evaluations, and solutions that can be generalized and useful to other communities and states.”



For more information about the education of children in foster care, contact BethAnn Berliner at bberlin@WestEd.org or 510.302.4209, or Vanessa Barrat at vbarrat@WestEd.org or 415.615.3315.

Featured Resources



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ISBN: 978-0-914409-60-1

Grades 6–8: Percents, Ratios, and Proportions with Algebra Readiness

Publisher: WestEd, 2010

Pages: 368 / Price: \$165

Format: Trade paper with DVD, CD-ROM, and Poster

Product #: MPP-09-04RD

ISBN: 978-0-914409-61-8

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By Kirsten R. Daehler, Jennifer Folsom, and Mayumi Shinohara
Illustrated by Jennifer Mendenhall

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obstacles, and then determine the next best steps” in the school turnaround process. During a recent visit, Frank was heartened when Mt. Vernon staff members, and in particular members of its leadership team, assumed most of the responsibility for the review. “In the past, they were in the fishbowl and I was looking in and facilitating from outside,” says Frank. “This time, 85 percent of the facilitation was handled by Mt. Vernon staff engaged in thoughtful conversation about how to bring about reform. Yes, they held me accountable for putting the improvement process in place, but now the accountability is on their shoulders. They’ve come to like the process, and that, in itself, is a huge success.”

As a result, Frank says staff members plan to continue monitoring student progress and adjusting instruction, as needed, on their own.

The district’s school improvement plan calls on staff to set achievement growth targets for every student in literacy, mathematics, and English language acquisition, then differentiate their instruction to meet individual student needs. The plan also focuses on quality instruction, with principal walk-throughs viewed as non-evaluative, non-punitive opportunities for teachers to learn about research-based best practices.

Frank says teachers across the district “absolutely feel responsible to each other,” which he sees as key to significant, lasting school improvement. Although standardized math and literacy test data show some gains, district staff members say too many students are still performing below expectations. Still, Frank says middle school teachers report that incoming students are demonstrating stronger academic skills and abilities than in the past.

The district has developed a “data dashboard” or report card that is shared with the board quarterly. The board is very adept at focusing on student growth, says Frank. “If a report is not as positive as expected, the board asks questions such as ‘What needs to be changed?’ or ‘Where do we have to do more?’ and ‘How can we help?’ That’s really healthy, and holds incredible promise for the district’s future.”



For more information about WestEd’s Comprehensive School Assistance Program and its School Turnaround Center, contact Fred Tempes at 916.492.4039 or ftempes@WestEd.org.