

WORKING P A P E R

Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement Under Title I

Recent Evidence from the National
Longitudinal Survey of Schools

SHEILA NATARAJ KIRBY, SCOTT NAFTEL,
MARK BERENDS, JENNIFER SLOAN MCCOMBS

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**SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED AS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT UNDER TITLE I: RECENT
EVIDENCE FROM THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF SCHOOLS**

Sheila Nataraj Kirby*, Scott Naftel*, Mark Berends**, Jennifer Sloan McCombs*

*RAND

**Vanderbilt University

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I. INTRODUCTION

Accountability has become the buzzword in education. Ever since the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), there has been a great deal of emphasis on identifying “failing” schools, providing them with assistance, and sanctioning them if they do not improve. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), much like the 1994 reauthorization, requires states to establish a single statewide accountability system based on rigorous content and performance standards. This system would define explicit criteria for measuring school progress. Based on these criteria, each Title I school is required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward attaining the state’s performance standards.

Schools (and districts) that fail to make adequate progress for two consecutive years are to be identified for improvement. These schools will be required to develop or revise their plans to address identified needs, and are to be provided technical assistance by the states and districts through school support teams and other support mechanisms. Specifically, such technical assistance should include assistance in analyzing data from the assessments as well as other examples of student work, to identify problems in instruction; assistance in implementing professional development, instructional strategies, and effective, research-based methods of instruction; and assistance in analyzing and reallocating the school's resources to promote activities most likely to increase student academic achievement. The law also requires that these schools spend an amount equal to 10 percent of their annual Title I funding on high-quality professional development for each fiscal year that the school is in school improvement status. Following the first year of identification, the local educational agency (LEA) must provide all students enrolled in the school the option to transfer to another public school served by the LEA.

If schools identified for improvement fail to show progress for two full years, states and districts can take further corrective actions. These corrective actions can include, among others, providing supplemental instruction to students; decreasing decisionmaking authority at the school level; reconstituting the school staff; instituting a new curriculum based on scientifically based research; extending the school year or school day; and appointing an outside expert to advise the school. Many of these provisions were included in the 1994 amendments to the ESEA.

A key assumption underlying NCLB is that districts (and states, to a more limited extent) have the capacity and the knowledge to help schools improve. However, there is a general lack of detailed information, at the national level, on how good this assumption is or indeed how the school improvement process put into place by the 1994 reauthorization has worked over the

past several years – whether principals fully comprehend what it means for their school to be identified, what these schools look like in terms of various demographic characteristics, how long they have been identified as in need of improvement, what kinds of technical assistance they have received (or failed to receive), and whether some schools have made progress enough to be removed from this status.¹

This paper aims to fill some of this information gap, using data from a national longitudinal survey of Title I schools, fielded in school years (SY) 1998-1999, 1999-2000, and 2000-2001. Schools identified as in need of improvement in 1998-1999 were oversampled and followed for the next two years. Where appropriate, we also use some limited data from the principal and teacher surveys of the SY 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS) to validate our findings. The paper is largely descriptive because the data do not support more sophisticated analytic methods. Nonetheless, the analyses presented here offer a first-hand look at the level of confusion, uncertainty, and lack of support that characterized the implementation of the 1994 accountability provisions. The findings have some important implications for states and districts as they attempt to implement the provisions of the NCLB.

Section II provides an overview of the data and methods used in this paper. Section III describes the level of confusion that appeared to exist among school principals in 1999-2000 regarding the identification of their school as in need of improvement under Title I and what constituted adequate yearly progress. This section also provides a definition and rationale of the sample that is used as the analysis sample in later sections. Section IV presents a profile of schools needing improvement and the challenges they faced. Section V examines whether these schools had been provided technical assistance as required by the law, who provided such assistance, the types of additional strategies implemented by the school in response to their in need of improvement status; and the frequency and type of corrective action taken by districts against schools that had failed to make progress for two years. Section VI looks at schools who were successful in getting of in-need status and the factors that appeared to be related to such success. The last section provides some conclusions and policy implications.

II. DATA

The data used in this paper come from a nationwide survey of principals and teachers in Title I schools, the National Longitudinal Survey of Schools (NLSS). The NLSS was a three-year study designed and fielded by Westat for the U. S. Department of Education to collect data on the extent to which schools implemented the 1994 Title I provisions to improve student learning. In

¹An earlier report by the U.S. Department of Education (2001a) provided a more limited look at these schools, based on analyses of the same data.

1998-1999, a nationally-representative sample of 1,507 Title I schools was drawn. These schools were followed for two years, through SY2000-2001. The total number of responding schools was 1,081 in 1998-1999, 987 in 1999-2000, and 967 in SY2000-2001. Principals were interviewed in the fall/winter of each year using computer-assisted telephone interviews regarding implementation of the 1994 Title I provisions. In schools identified as in need of improvement under Title I, the principal survey included questions regarding the principal's understanding of the school improvement process, and actions taken by the state, district, and school as a result of being identified as in need of improvement. Because the SY2000-2001 findings are still under review and have not been publicly released, we present data from the first two years of the NLSS.

Schools that had been identified by the district as in need of improvement under Title I were treated as a separate stratum in the sample design and oversampled (n=282) when the sample was drawn. However, because some schools in other strata had also been identified as in need of improvement, the survey contained a total of 351 Title I schools identified as in need of improvement by the district by the summer of 1997-1998. Of these, a total of 255 schools responded in 1998-1999. By the summer of 1999, the district identified a total of 380 schools as in need of improvement under Title I. Of these, 242 schools responded in 1999-2000. Weights were calculated by Westat to adjust both for oversampling and nonresponse. The paper reports only weighted estimates. Standard errors were calculated using the jackknife method.

SASS is the nation's largest survey of elementary and secondary public and private schools. The 1999-2000 survey used a stratified probability sample design, surveying 9,893 (9404 in-scope) public schools and 56,354 (51,811 in-scope) public school teachers in SY 1999-2000. The weighted response rate was 90 percent for principals and 83 percent for teachers. The principal survey asked a limited number of questions about whether the school had met the minimum state or district performance goals, and if not, the actions the school was required to take to improve. The teacher survey includes questions about teachers' perceptions about problems they faced in their schools. Only responses from principals and teacher in Title I public schools are reported.

III. LEVEL OF PRINCIPAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

Knowledge About Whether School had been Identified for Improvement Under Title I

In 1998-1999, about 13 percent of Title I schools were identified as in need of improvement, according to information from the district. Principals in these schools were told that the district had identified their schools as in need of improvement and then asked if this was correct.

About a quarter of the principals were uncertain about their status or disagreed with the district that their school had been identified for improvement. Overall, in 1998-1999, 10 percent of Title I schools were reported as in need of improvement under Title I by both the district and the principal.

In 1999-2000, about 20 percent of Title I schools were identified by the district as in need of improvement. This increase in the percentage of schools identified for improvement was partly due to greater implementation of 1994 Title I accountability provisions and partly due to changes in the way adequate yearly progress was defined.² In an effort to examine the extent of the inconsistency between principal and district reports, *all* school principals in the NLSS sample were asked about being identified, regardless of whether they had been identified by the district or not. Principals were not informed about whether their school had been identified by the district or not. Among those schools identified by the district, 37 percent of principals disagreed with the district that their school had been identified as in need of improvement, and another 4 percent reported that they did not know whether they had been identified. Thus, among schools identified by the district, *less than 60 percent of principals agreed with the district that they had been so identified*. This level of confusion suggests the need for clearer communication between the district and schools regarding identification under Title I.

We compared the two groups of schools—schools where the principal agreed with the district that the school had been identified for improvement under Title I and schools where the principal disagreed or did not know that the school had been identified for improvement—to see whether there were any differences between them. Schools where the principal disagreed with the district identification were more likely to be urban, high-poverty elementary schools operating schoolwide programs compared with schools where the principal agreed with the district. The level of disagreement was highest among principals who had been at the school for a short period of time and, surprisingly, among those who had been at the school for four or more years. However, there was no difference in the average number of years that the principal had been in his/her current position: 5.1 years.

Some of the confusion may arise from the dual accountability systems in place in many districts and states. While the intent of the 1994 legislation was to put in place a single accountability system for all schools, in 1999-2000, 28 states had dual accountability systems in place, often with different sets of indicators and/or performance standards for Title I and non-Title I schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2001a). Overall, about 17 percent of principals of Title I schools

²States and districts were expected to implement fully the Title I accountability provisions by the 2000-01 school year (SY) and to have final assessments in place by then. Transitional measures of progress could be used until then.

reported that their school had been identified by the district as in need of improvement under some other state or district system of accountability. About 26 percent of schools identified by the district as in need of improvement under Title I and 15 percent of schools *not* identified under Title I had been targeted for improvement under another system.

Knowledge About Length of Time School has been Identified for Improvement Under Title I

There was also considerable disagreement between principals and districts about how long a school had been identified for improvement. For example, in 1999-2000, among schools that the district reported as having been identified for two years:

- Only 29 percent of the principals agreed that the school had been identified for two years;
- About nine percent reported that their school had been identified for one year;
- About 17 percent reported that their school had been in this status for three years;
- About 37 percent reported that their school had been identified for four or more years; and
- About 8 percent reported that they did not know how long their school had been in this status.

Part of the discrepancy may be explained by the difference in timing between when districts were contacted for the survey (summer) and when the principals were actually interviewed (winter). However, the large percentage of principals reporting that their school had been identified for four years or more clearly shows further problems in communication between the district and schools. Nor was the level of knowledge higher among principals in schools that had been identified for longer periods of time. For example, even among schools that had been identified for four years (as reported by the district), 20 percent of the principals reported that their school had been identified for only one year, while almost a quarter reported that they did not know how long their school had been identified.

Knowledge About AYP Measures

Principals displayed a surprising lack of familiarity with district AYP measures. Overall, even among schools where the principal agreed with the district identification, a little less than half (48 percent) were unfamiliar with these measures. Not surprisingly, this knowledge or lack thereof differed by the length of time the school had been identified, with about three-quarters of principals in newly identified schools admitting that they did not know what the district considered adequate yearly progress. What was surprising was that, among schools that had

been identified for a longer period of time (four or more years), *over half* were unfamiliar with measures of progress.

The extent of the lack of knowledge on the part of principals about whether the school had been identified, for how long, and district metrics of progress strongly suggests that these criteria need to be clearly identified, clearly communicated, and publicized.

IV. PROFILE OF SCHOOLS IDENTIFIED AS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT BY THE DISTRICT, 1999-2000

Approximately 34 percent of Title I schools identified as in need of improvement by the district were in the highest-poverty category (defined as schools with 75 percent or more of their students eligible for free/reduced price lunch), compared with 19 percent of schools not in need of improvement. (See Table 1). About 47 percent of schools identified as in need of improvement were low-poverty schools, defined as those with less than 50 percent of their students eligible for free/reduced price lunch.³ Most of these low-poverty schools in need of improvement were located in rural areas and in lower-poverty districts.

A third of schools identified for improvement served predominantly minority students (75 percent or more minority students), compared with 17 percent of Title I schools not in need. Almost a quarter of the schools in need of improvement were in the highest quartile of both poverty and minority representation, compared with 10 percent of schools not in need. In the SASS data, we find that failure to meet performance goals was highly correlated with minority representation in the school. For example, about half of the highest-minority schools failed to meet goals, compared with 30 percent of those with less than 35 percent minority students.

Schools in need of improvement were much less likely to be located in suburban areas (23 percent) versus schools not in need (32 percent). About 48 percent of schools in need were located in rural areas.⁴ A slightly higher percentage of schools identified as in need of improvement operated schoolwide programs, compared with schools not in need. A higher

³The SASS data reinforce these findings. Overall about 37 percent of the public schools had not met the minimum state or district performance goals. Of these schools, about 38 percent were low-poverty schools, 26 percent had poverty rates of between 50 percent and 75 percent, and 36 percent were in the highest-poverty category. The percentage of highest-poverty schools failing to meet minimum criteria was considerably higher (50 percent) than the percentage of lowest-poverty schools (26 percent) or schools with poverty rates of between 35 percent and 75 percent (37 percent).

⁴This estimate is considerably higher than what we found in the 1998-1999 NLSS data (28 percent) and in the SASS data (32 percent).

Table 1. A Profile of Title I Schools Identified by the District as in Need of Improvement Under Title I and Title I Schools Not in Need of Improvement, 1999-2000

Selected Characteristics	Title I Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement	Title I Schools Not Identified as in Need of Improvement
	Percentage	
Percent of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch		
0-49.9% ^a	47.5	49.9
50-74.9%	18.1	31.1
75-100%	34.4	19.0
Percent of minority students		
0-49.9% ^a	57.0	68.7
50-74.9%	11.0	14.6
75-100%	32.0	16.7
Schools with 75-100% of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch <i>and</i> 75-100% minority students	23.5	10.3
Urbanicity		
Urban	28.6	21.5
Rural/small town	48.2	45.7
Suburban/large town/rural fringe of urban area	23.2	32.2
Title I type		
Schoolwide	61.1	52.3
Targeted Assistance	38.9	47.7
School Level		
Elementary school	83.6	78.5
Secondary school	16.4	21.5
Percent of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students		
0%	63.0	54.4
1-24.9%	24.2	34.2
25-100%	12.8	11.4
Schools that adopted a comprehensive school reform model	58.6	43.1
	Number of Schools	
Unweighted	242	715

Source: NLSS Principal Survey, 1999-2000, Section Principal Screener and Common Core of Data, 1999-2000.

Note: ^aUnweighted sample size is too small to allow further disaggregation.

percentage of schools in need of improvement had adopted comprehensive school reform models (59 percent) compared with 43 percent of schools not in need.⁵

We do not have survey data on schools where principals disagreed with the district identification; thus, for the remainder of the analyses, we are limited to those schools that were identified as needing improvement by *both* the district and principal. Schools that had not been identified by the district were categorized as not in need. Other schools were omitted from the analysis.

Challenges Facing Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement

The NLSS data suggested that schools identified as in need of improvement faced significant challenges in terms of teacher mobility and lack of student preparedness. For example, compared with principals and teachers in Title I schools not identified as in need of improvement, principals and teachers in Title I schools in need of improvement were significantly more likely to report that:

- Lower percentages of their students were prepared to work at the next grade level (74 percent compared with 85 percent);
- Their school had significantly higher turnover rates among teachers (37 percent compared with 8 percent);
- That content standards in reading and mathematics were too hard for most of their students “to a great extent” (15 percent compared with 10 percent);
- Barriers to using content standards with all students “to a great extent” included lack of parent support (25 percent compared with 14 percent), and difficulty aligning practices with content standards (13 percent compared with 3 percent).

Hamman and Schenck (2002) conducted an analysis of 25 districts in New York City where the New York City State Education Department proposed to take corrective actions against 122 schools that had failed to make adequate yearly progress toward student performance goals. In reporting on the specific needs of these schools, districts most commonly identified teacher mobility, lack of qualified teachers, predominance of special needs populations (English language learners, special learning needs), student mobility, and teachers’ use of ineffective instructional strategies as important factors impeding progress in improving student performance.

⁵We present evidence later to show that many of these schools were encouraged to adopt models as part of the improvement process.

The SASS data also reinforce these findings. For example, compared with teachers in other schools, teachers in schools that had not met minimum state or district performance goals were more likely to report the following as a “serious problem”: student apathy (25 percent compared with 18 percent); lack of parent involvement (37 percent compared with 25 percent), students coming to school unprepared to learn (44 percent compared with 31 percent), student absenteeism (21 percent compared with 12 percent), and student disrespect for teachers (25 percent compared with 16 percent).

V. STRATEGIES TO HELP SCHOOLS IMPROVE: ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FROM STATES/DISTRICTS, ADOPTION OF ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES, AND CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

Provision of Additional Technical Assistance

Although the Title I legislation required states and districts to provide technical assistance to schools identified for improvement, *only about 34 percent* of these schools reported receiving additional technical assistance or professional development from outside agencies.⁶

Districts appeared to be focusing their support efforts on schools that had been in this status for longer periods of time, as Figure 1 shows. Only 25 percent of schools that had been identified for one year reported receiving additional assistance. However, this percentage was not much higher among schools that had been identified for two years. Even among schools in their third year, less than 40 percent reported receiving additional technical assistance. About 63 percent of schools that had been in need of improvement for four or more years reported receiving additional assistance.

These statistics paint a disturbing picture of the capacity of districts and states to provide needed help to schools that would allow them to meet goals for adequate yearly progress – help, moreover that the legislation requires them to provide.

Districts, state departments of education, and school support teams⁷ were the primary providers of additional technical assistance. Overall, we find that:

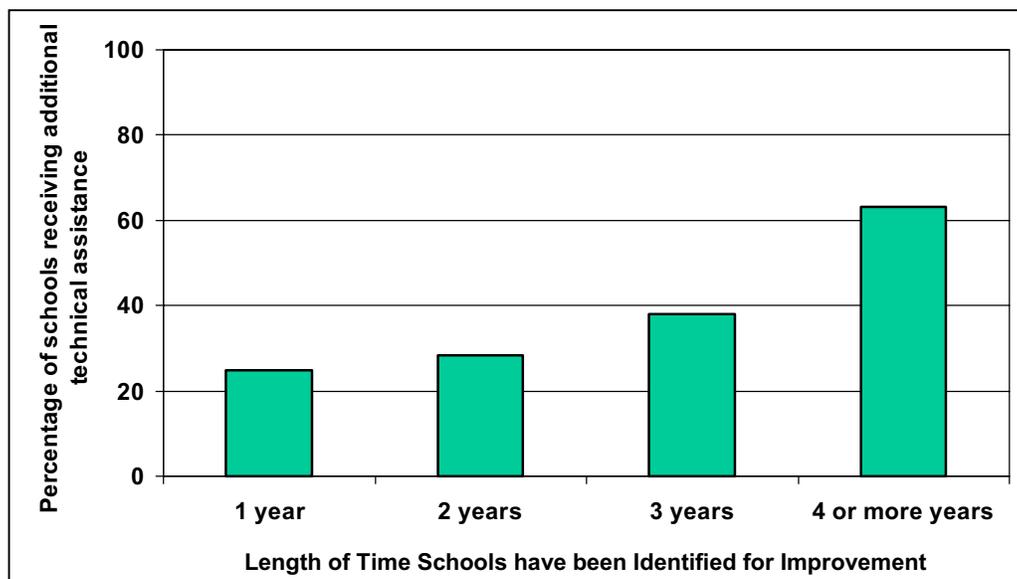
- 25 percent of all schools identified as in need of improvement had received assistance from the state;
- 22 percent had received assistance from the district;

⁶The SASS data show that only 40 percent of schools that had failed to meet performance goals had been provided technical assistance and about 51 percent had been provided with additional resources, although it is not clear what these resources included.

⁷These may not be entirely mutually exclusive.

- 22 percent had received assistance specifically from school support teams (these may come from the state or the district);
- 19 percent had received assistance from an intermediate or regional education agency; and,
- 14-15 percent had received assistance from university or independent consultants.

Figure 1. Percentage of Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement that Received Additional Technical Assistance by Length of Time Schools have been Identified, 1999-2000



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Schools, Spring 2000, Principal Survey, Section E, Q. PE2 and PE8

The percentages of schools that had received assistance from these sources were substantially higher among schools that had been identified for four or more years compared with schools that had been identified for one to three years. For example, among schools that had been identified for four or more years, 55 percent had received assistance from the district compared with less than 20 percent of schools that had been identified for one to three years. Similarly, 48 percent of schools that had been identified for four or more years had received assistance from the state compared with less than a quarter of schools that had been identified for one to three years.

About 6 percent of all schools in need of improvement had received assistance from one to two sources; 18 percent had received assistance from three to four sources; and 10 percent had received assistance from five or more sources.

ADOPTION OF ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Among schools that had been identified for two or more years, 87 percent of schools had implemented additional strategies in response to being identified. Not surprisingly, among schools that had been identified for one year, only 37 percent had implemented additional strategies. These strategies ranged from revising or developing a school plan, as required by Title I legislation, to more professional development than in years prior to being identified.

Figure 2 shows the different types of strategies adopted by schools that had been identified for two or more years to address school improvement needs. Over 80 percent had revised or developed a school plan.⁸ Between 70-75 percent adopted strategies that included greater emphasis on test-taking skills; increased family and community involvement;⁹ increased professional development for teachers; and changes to the curriculum. About 54 percent had sought assistance from outside the district and a little more than one-fifth had adopted a new, comprehensive school reform model.

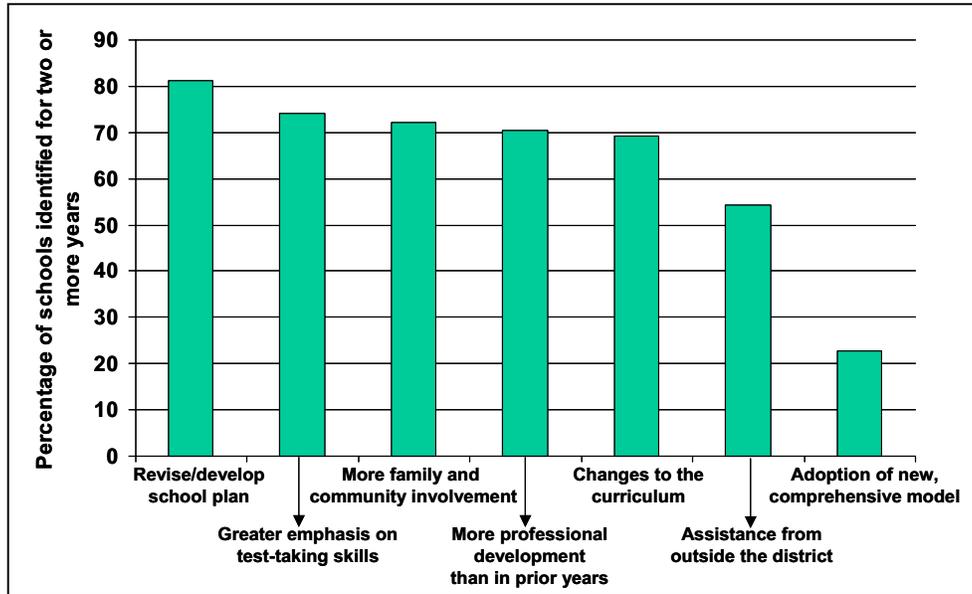
Among schools with limited English proficient students, about 45 percent adopted teaching or learning strategies focused on these students; among schools with migrant students, about 40 percent adopted teaching or learning strategies focused on migrant students.

Most schools adopted a variety of strategies. A little less than half of the schools that had been identified for improvement for two years had adopted five or more of the strategies discussed above. This was true of well over 70 percent of schools that had been identified for three or more years.

⁸This compares to 73 percent of schools that reported developing or revising a school plan in the SASS.

⁹Schools in need of improvement were significantly more likely than schools not in need to offer training for parents (84 percent compared with 65 percent). They were also more likely to have extended-year programs (29 percent compared with 19 percent), although the difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 3. Additional Strategies Implemented to Address Need for Improvement by Schools Identified as in Need of Improvement for Two or More Years, 1999-2000



Source: NLSS Principal Survey, Spring 2000, Section E, Q. PE9A

CORRECTIVE ACTION BY DISTRICTS

Under the 1994 legislation, districts could take additional steps with schools that failed to improve for two or more years. As mentioned earlier, these corrective actions ranged from making alternative governance arrangements (such as creation of a charter school) to developing agreements with other public agencies to provide health, counseling, and other social services needed to remove barriers to learning (many of these are also included in NCLB). Providing parents the choice of moving to other schools was another corrective action authorized by the 1994 legislation; this has been given particular prominence in NCLB.

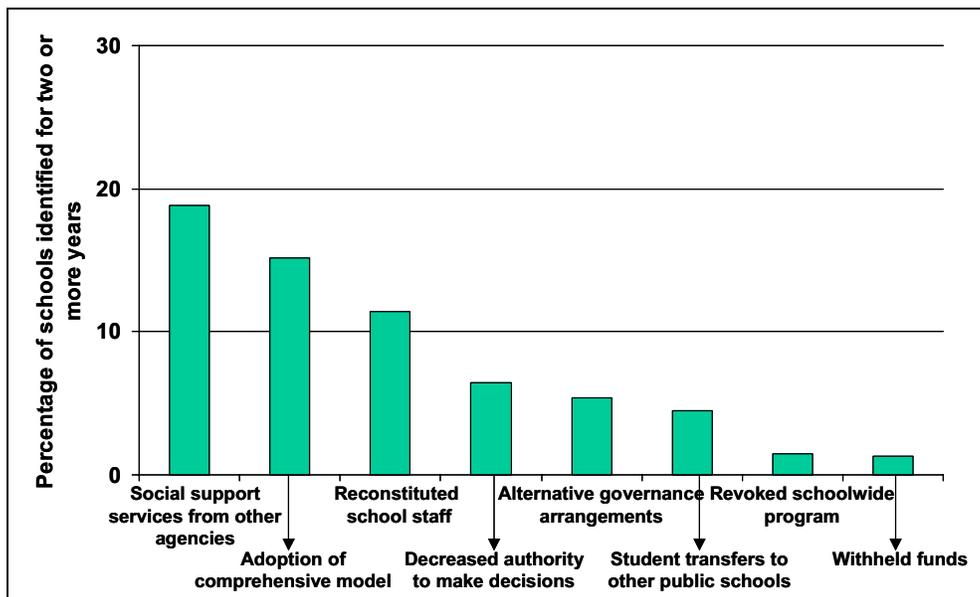
Between 42-46 percent of principals in schools that had been identified for between two to three years reported that they had been subjected to corrective action by the district. This was true of 69 percent of principals in schools that had been identified for four or more years.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of Title I schools identified for two or more years that had been subjected to particular corrective actions. The most frequently-adopted strategies were arranging to provide social support services from other public agencies, requiring schools to adopt comprehensive school reform models, and reconstituting school staff. However, even these were reported only by between 10-20 percent of principals. In New York City, almost all

of the districts proposed decreasing the decisionmaking authority of the school (Hamman and Schenck, 2002).

Authorizing transfers of students to other public schools occurred very infrequently, in less than 5 percent of the schools. Although this is a cornerstone of the NCLB, the extent to which districts can actually implement choice plans is unclear. For example, out of the 22 districts analyzed by Hamman and Schenck (2002), five districts reported that they had no plan for school choice or that conditions existed that made it impossible to implement a choice plan (overcrowding in the potential receiving schools; lack of schools within the district that were not in improvement status). Among the districts that could implement a choice plan, there was an average of five corresponding elementary or middle schools to which students could transfer. However, nine districts reported that they could not transfer any students and five districts identified only one potential receiver schools.

Exhibit 4. Corrective Actions Taken by the District with Schools that had been Identified for Improvement for Two or More Years



Source: NLSS Principal Survey, Spring 2000, Section E, Q. PE10 and PE10A

VI. SCHOOLS THAT SUCCEEDED IN MOVING OUT OF IN -NEED STATUS

Because the NLSS data allow us to track schools for two years, we can identify schools that were successful in getting out of in-need status by looking at whether schools were identified by the district as needing improvement in 1998-1999 but not identified as needing improvement in

1999-2000. A total of 206 schools had been identified by the district in the first year, of which 68 were not in-need status the following year. Forty-four percent (weighted) of schools identified in the first year were not identified in the second year. Unfortunately, we only have data for a subset of these schools (n=166, of which 52 got out of in-need) because some of the principals identified in 1998-1999 disagreed with the district identification. Principals who disagreed with the district identification did not answer this section of the survey. The (weighted) success rate for the subset of schools in our analysis sample was lower – 33 percent – than the 44 percent reported above, suggesting that the principals may indeed have been correct about their not being in-need of improvement.

We estimated a simple logistic model relating success in getting out of in-need status to several variables such as support from various sources, length of time the school had been in in-need status, school characteristics, and strategies adopted by the school. Although none of the coefficients in the multivariate model was statistically significant, the simple bivariate analyses highlighted some factors that appeared to affect the ability of schools to get out of in-need status.¹⁰

As Table 2 shows, four factors appeared to be significantly related to the likelihood of success:

- Length of time the school had been identified for improvement;
- Whether the school received outside support;
- Whether the school received support from the district; and
- Whether the school received support from school support teams.

Not surprisingly, the length of time that a school had been identified was significantly related to the ability of a school to meet Title I criteria and be removed from in-need status. Seventy-three percent of schools identified for four or more years were no longer in need of improvement compared with 38 percent of those identified for two years. (It is puzzling that schools identified for three years were much less successful – only 5 percent of them were no longer considered in need of improvement). Forty-one percent of schools that received additional support were no longer identified for improvement in 1999-2000 compared with 27 percent of schools that did not receive such support. District support and support from school support teams appeared to be particularly important in helping schools get out of in-need status. For example, 46-47 percent of schools that received district support or support from school support

¹⁰While we do comment on the statistical significance of relationships below, we did not make adjustments for multiple comparisons. This is an exploratory analysis and the results should be seen as suggestive.

teams were successful in getting out of in-need status, compared with 25-26 percent of schools that did not receive such support.

Table 2. Percentage of Schools in Improvement Status in 1998-1999 that Succeeded in Moving out of in-Need Status in 1999-2000, by Selected Characteristics of Schools

Selected Characteristics	Percentage of Schools that Succeeded in Moving out of in-Need Status
Overall	
Length of time school had been identified for improvement	
1 year	24.6
2 years	37.5
3 years	4.6
4 or more years	72.9
Additional assistance provided by outside entities	
Yes	40.6
No	27.3
District provided additional assistance	
Yes	45.9
No	25.7
School support teams provided additional assistance	
Yes	46.8
No	25.1
Number of schools in improvement status in 1998-1999 that succeeded in moving out of in-need status in 1999-2000	52
Total number of schools in improvement status in 1998-1999	166

Source: NLSS Principal Survey, 1998-1999 and 1999-2000, Sections Principal Screener and E, Q. PE2, PE8, PE8A

While we found some differences by school characteristics, these differences were not statistically significant. Lower-poverty schools, those with lower percentages of minority students and elementary schools were somewhat more successful than their counterparts. Principal familiarity with district measures of progress also contributed to success, although one could argue that is circular reasoning (principals who got out of in need presumably know

more about AYP measures precisely because they met these goals). Among schools that had a model, schools that received assistance from the model developer also showed higher rates of success than schools that failed to receive such assistance (46 percent compared with 24 percent).

Among the additional strategies adopted by schools, increased professional development appeared to hold some promise, although it is not clear what the focus of this increased professional development was. Forty-four percent of schools that had implemented increased professional development were successful in getting out of in-need status compared with 31 percent of schools that did not adopt this strategy.

Adoption of a model did not by itself increase a school's chances of getting out of in-need status. This may be because schools that adopted models (often at the direction of the district) may have been worse off than schools that did not. It may also be important to control for the types of models adopted and the period and quality of implementation, neither of which we could do, given the small sample size and the lack of reliable data on implementation.

Schools that received assistance from more than one source—for example, a combination of state, district, and school support teams—were not much more likely to get out of in-need status than schools that received assistance from any one of these sources.

VII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The role of district leadership in fostering reform and school improvement is well-documented (Datnow and Stringfield, 2000; Berends, Bodilly, and Kirby, 2002). District leaders can provide *organizational leadership* to build organizational systems to support administrators and teachers to further expectations and norms for teaching and learning and to encourage a professional climate of continuous learning (Task Force on School Leadership, 2000; Cohen, McLaughlin, and Talbert, 1993). They can also provide *instructional leadership*—to establish a clear vision for teaching and learning and provide guidance for other educational leaders throughout the district. NCLB relies heavily on the ability of districts to play such a leadership role.

However, whether districts have the ability to play such a leadership role without important investments in building up the capabilities of the district staff is doubtful. As the federal report on school improvement points out, states and districts “need knowledge, human resources, and financial resources to turn around low-performing schools” (U. S. Department of Education, 2001a: 30). Schools fail for a variety of reasons, and reform strategies need to be tailored to fit the needs of individual school. School reform needs to be a four-step process: needs assessment and goal setting; carefully planning and choosing a set of coherent strategies to best fit identified needs and priorities; focused, sustained implementation; and evaluation and

feedback to facilitate continuous improvement (U. S. Department of Education, 2001a). During this process, schools need critical external support, information, guidance, and resources from districts.

However, district support by itself is not enough to change a school. Research has consistently shown that the principal strongly influences the likelihood of change (Fullan, 2001; Berends and Kirby, et al., 2001; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Newmann et al., 2000; Day et al. 2000; Bryk et al., 1998; Berman and McLaughlin, 1977). As Fullan writes, "I know of no improving school that doesn't have a principal who is good at leading improvement" (2001: 141). Newmann et al. (2000) defined school capacity in terms of five components: teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional community; program coherence; technical resources; and principal leadership. Without strong, supportive, visionary leadership, however, school capacity is seriously undermined. Elmore, for example, writes:

[T]he job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result (2000: 15).

So, hand-in-hand with building up the capacity of the district staff, it is important to focus on enhancing the ability and knowledge of the principal to act as an instructional leader and as an advocate for the school. This includes providing the principal with an in-depth understanding of the school improvement process, the criteria by which the school is being judged, an assessment of the school's needs, the resources available to the school, and how best to employ them to turn the school around.

However, as we have shown, considerable confusion existed on the part of principals regarding whether their school had been identified as in need of improvement under Title I, with only about 60 percent of principals agreeing with the district that their school had been identified for improvement. Even where there was agreement between the principals and districts that the school had been identified under Title I, there was considerable disagreement about how long a school had been identified for improvement, and a lack of familiarity with AYP measures established by the state. States and districts need to provide clearer guidance to schools identified for improvement regarding the school improvement process and the criteria on which schools are being judged. It may be helpful to have regular follow-ups, especially in the first two years, to ensure that schools understand what they need to do in order to improve. In addition, states and districts need to establish a single system of accountability with one set of clearly stated, well-publicized criteria.

The NLSS data show that only one-third of schools in need of improvement received additional technical assistance or professional development in 1999-2000.¹¹ This is particularly problematic, given that such assistance is mandated by law and seems to play a key role in the ability of schools to get out of in-need status. States and districts need to pay serious attention to capacity-building, providing professional development and resources for their staff to learn about effective ways of improving schools and how to implement such strategies. As Hamman and Schenck (2002) point out, there is little empirical evidence on the effects of some of the corrective actions in improving failing schools. Further, “if districts have not been able to assist schools in need of improvement, there is little chance they will be able to turn around low-performing schools by taking corrective action, *unless* some action is taken to boost the capacity for reform at the district level” (2002: 3). NCLB currently does not have explicit provisions to develop the capacity for reform either at the district or the principal level – an important oversight, especially in view of the fact that under NCLB, the number of schools identified as in need of improvement will likely increase.

¹¹ The estimate from the SASS sample was slightly higher, almost 40 percent had received technical assistance.

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