

School Turnaround in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

OVERVIEW

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) launched its primary turnaround initiative, called the Strategic Staffing Initiative (SSI), in 2008. The SSI program started with seven schools in “Cohort 1” (see chart below for schools and demographics), and has added five to seven schools each year. There are currently 24 schools in the program,¹ which compose roughly 15 of the district’s 170 schools. District leadership believes that there are

around ten additional schools that will need to be added to the initiative over the next couple years. SSI schools receive a new principal, who selects a team of approximately seven staff (typically a combination of an assistant principal, one or two instructional coaches, and up to five teachers) to bring to the school. The SSI principals have the freedom to design their own turnaround approach within certain district guidelines, and are given three years to improve student outcomes before being held accountable for results on their year-end evaluations. Other than an incentive compensation package for the SSI team, the schools do not receive extra turnaround resources.

DISTRICT BACKGROUND 2010-11:

Enrollment	136,000 students
\$/Pupil	\$8,500
% Free & Reduced Lunch	53%
% Special Education (self-contained)	2%
% English Language Learners	10%
Year Turnaround Program Initiated	2008
# of Schools / # of Turnaround Schools	
• Elementary	100/18
• Middle	36/4
• High	33/2

TURNAROUND PROGRAM RESULTS TO DATE

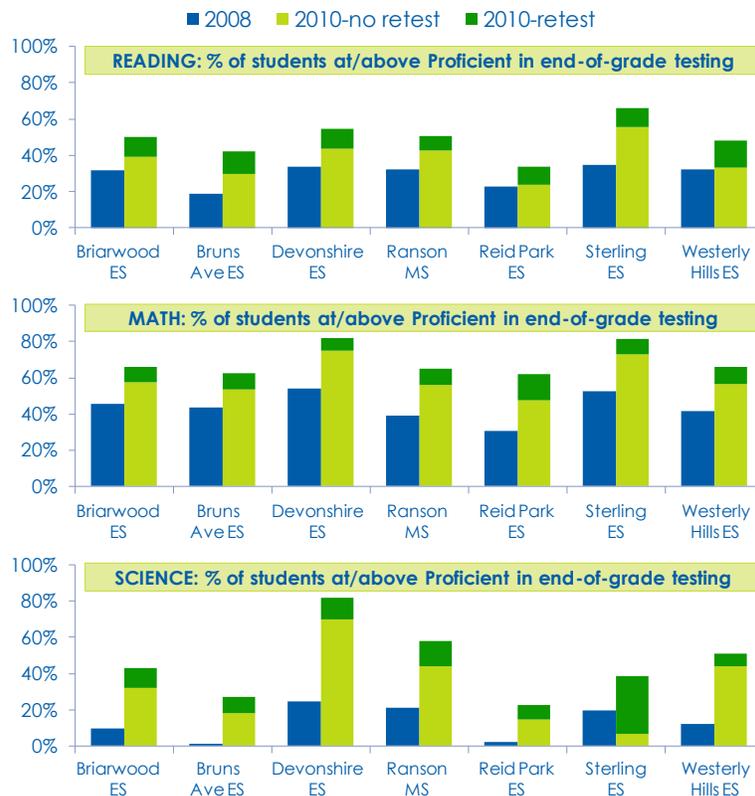
Although SSI principals are not held accountable for results until the end of the three-year period, there is evidence of success. The most recent interim report assessed the progress of the SSI schools in Cohorts 1 and 2 using quantitative and qualitative analyses; it “sought to examine changes in student achievement and culture and to determine whether school outcomes in the first and second years were the result of differences in focus and initiatives put into place by the principal.”² A few of the quantitative conclusions were:

- With respect to state test results across reading, math, and science, SSI schools tended to show an increase in the percentage of students attaining proficiency. Principals with the most directive leadership styles in their first year appeared to have larger gains in the percentage of students who were proficient on their end-of-grade tests.
- Schools that had a smaller number of faculty (where replacing five teachers represented a large percentage of staff) or high teacher-turnover rates prior to a new principal’s arrival tended to have greater increases in proficiency and growth than schools where the five teachers represented a smaller percentage of the total staff.
- Across time, SSI students were able to close the mathematics gap on a synthetic comparison group in two out of three analyses. SSI students were unable to close the reading gap.

¹ These 24 schools do not include two schools (Bishop Spough Middle and Lincoln Heights Elementary) that were SSI but closed as of Fall 2011.

² Jason Schoeneberger and Cheryl Pulliam, *Evaluation of the Strategic Staffing Initiative*, <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/accountability/cfre/Documents/Stategic%20Staffing%20Evaluation%20Report%20January%202011.pdf> (January 2011)

The charts below show gains for Cohort 1 schools after two years of SSI.³ These schools completed their three-year period as of June 2011, and final results should be available in coming months. Of those seven schools in Cohort 1, five of the principals have elected to stay on⁴—even though their three-year commitment is complete—to continue the work they’ve started.



DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY ON SCHOOL TURNAROUND

The leadership of CMS believes that high-performing school leaders, assisted by a supportive team of teachers and other staff members, are critical to turnaround, and the district designed the Strategic Staffing Initiative accordingly. This strategy evolved under the leadership of Superintendent Peter Gorman, who joined the district in summer 2006 and quickly created a team⁵ to develop a turnaround strategy for addressing those schools in which performance was slowing or even reversing, estimated to be about one-third of the district’s schools. The team concluded that in order to break the cycle of failure in which many of the schools were trapped, an approach with several components was required:

- Strong leaders who build high expectations and ownership
- Effective teachers with a proven track record
- Collaborative teacher teams
- Removal of teachers who would hinder reform
- Expertise and resources to serve students who have fallen far behind their peers

³ See Appendix A for numerical results data.

⁴ Of the two departing principals, one retired and another transitioned to a high school principal role.

⁵ Team included Superintendent Gorman, the chief operating officer, the chief of staff, the chief academic officer, and the associate superintendent for K-12 curriculum.

Therefore, Gorman and his staff decided to develop a turnaround intervention focused on strong leadership and teacher teams that worked well together. The theory is that great principals (defined as those who are proven in terms of student achievement gains and staff development) attract great teachers, and having both in place meant that they could support each other in reform. CMS also believes that these school leaders should be given the flexibility to implement a school design that will address specific challenges at their particular schools.

CMS determined that schools eligible for SSI were those where students demonstrated low academic achievement, and where student achievement data were declining or flat. This could include schools that the state had designated as low-performing, schools that qualified for restructuring, schools that were moving through the levels of NCLB sanctions, or schools where CMS executive staff had lost confidence in the leadership. Part of the selection process was also a look at the leadership: turnover rates, principal evaluations, and so forth. The team determined that in the beginning years of SSI, the district would primarily focus on elementary schools, and to a lesser extent, middle schools. The rationale for this decision was that, at the time, another strategy called the Achievement Zone was already targeting several of the low-performing high schools. However, since termination of the Achievement Zone, two high schools have been added to initiative.

DISTRICT TURNAROUND APPROACH

After many conversations with principals, teachers, and experts, Gorman developed five tenets for the CMS Strategic Staffing model (see inset at right). These general tenets are implemented across all SSI schools, although there are some variations in the specifics of implementation.

Tenet #1: A great leader. To be eligible for an SSI appointment, a principal's school must have shown gains in student achievement that surpass a year's worth of growth in a year's time; the bar was set at an average growth score of at least .04 over two years (average growth is set at 0.0).⁶ After SSI schools are selected, the superintendent and his team identify principal candidates and ask them to take on the leadership of an SSI school, which is considered an elite status. Selected principals must commit to staying at SSI schools for at least three years. There are three instances where existing principals at a school have received SSI status. In all other cases, the principals were replaced at SSI schools.

Tenet #2: A team. SSI principals choose their own teams of seven staff to accompany them to their new schools, and these teams often include an assistant principal, a literacy or math facilitator, and five teachers with proven track records of success (to be eligible, teachers must have demonstrated growth in student achievement of at least .04 average growth score in reading and math).⁷ Like principals, teachers are expected

Tenets of the Strategic Staffing Initiative

1. A great leader is needed, a principal with a proven track record of success in increasing student achievement. Also, great teachers will not go to a troubled school without a great leader as principal.
2. A team needs to go to the school so a person is not alone in taking on this challenging assignment; there is strength and support in numbers.
3. Staff members who are disruptive and not supportive of reform need to be removed from the school.
4. Principals must be given the time and authority to reform the school.
5. Not all job assignments are equal in difficulty, and compensation should be varied to match.

⁶ Based on the academic change formula in the State of North Carolina's ABCs Accountability Model. A score greater than zero roughly means the student has gained more than a year's worth of knowledge and skill for a year's worth of instruction.

⁷ Ibid.

to make a three-year commitment to the Strategic Staffing school. The rationale behind including an assistant principal and a literacy facilitator in the team was that these roles would be key contributors to a powerful collaboration to improve instruction; these roles needed to be filled by people who shared the principal's philosophy and could immediately begin implementing his or her approach. The exact composition of the SSI team varies across SSI schools (i.e., not all schools choose to add full teams), primarily due to principal preference as opposed to limited supply of suitable team members.

Tenet #3: Removal of disruptive staff. In addition to choosing a team to enter the Strategic Staffing school, the principals may choose up to five teachers to displace (these teachers are replaced by the incoming team, and are assigned elsewhere in the district). Starting with Cohort 2, it became a requirement that teachers had to be put on improvement plans before they were displaced, so that the receiving school was aware of their status and development needs. Nearly all SSI principals thus far have elected to remove the five teachers allowed; there have only been a couple of exceptions.

Tenet #4: Time and authority to reform. SSI was designed with the understanding that the new principal has three years to operate in an environment conducive to meaningful change. In other words, principals would be held harmless for academic results during their annual summative evaluation for their first three years as an SSI principal. This clause was designed around the recognition that it takes time to get traction and create real turnaround. One SSI principal commented: "It's beneficial to have breathing space with respect to trying new strategies to improve student performance. This allowed us to work for long-term transformation as well as short-term gains." In terms of having the authority to reform, SSI principals are given greater flexibility in designing their schools in the way that they deem most appropriate, though they still operate within the district's set of "non-negotiable" design features. Principals can make decisions regarding the master schedule, common planning time, student groupings and so forth. They can take innovative approaches that may be considered unconventional but are suited to that particular school. The Zone Superintendents work with SSI principals to help overcome hurdles to making school-design changes that principals deem necessary.

Tenet #5: Compensation. From the beginning, the planning group knew that one potential challenge would be attracting proven principals and staff to participate. These teams take on tremendous reform challenges in schools that had experienced consistently low performance, and the results of Strategic Staffing are closely scrutinized. Therefore, the group tasked with developing the initiative knew that the right combination of incentives would be important in building the best teams. They concluded that principals and assistant principals would receive a ten percent pay supplement to their base salaries, which would also be factored into retirement. Teachers and facilitators would receive an initial recruitment bonus of \$10,000 plus retention bonuses of \$5,000 in the second and third years, for a total of \$20,000 in bonuses. This extra compensation structure is consistent across all SSI schools.

Support and monitoring. For administrative purposes, the district is divided into five zones, each led by a zone superintendent.⁸ The majority of the SSI schools (17 of the 24, as of fall 2011) are in the Central-Elementary zone, whose Zone Superintendent is Tyler Ream. Although these SSI schools generally require more time from the zone office, the Central-Elementary zone has no additional staffing related specifically to the Strategic Staffing initiative; current budget constraints prevent extra SSI support positions at the district level. In the first years of the SSI program when there was only a handful of schools, it was easier for the

⁸ This zone structure has been in place since March 2010 and replaced the seven learning communities previously in place.

central office to provide one-on-one support to the SSI schools. As the program has expanded, it has become harder to sustain this attention. The Central-Elementary Zone Superintendent has a total portfolio of almost 50 schools, including the 17 SSI schools in the zone, and all of these schools are high-needs and high-poverty.⁹

The Strategic Staffing Initiative is complemented by CMS's overall accountability framework, including School Progress Reports and School Improvement Plans. These mechanisms that account for school performance—and identify successes and challenges particular to each school—support the Strategic Staffing Initiative. SSI schools do not have specifically mandated SSI targets, but all zone schools have mandated zone targets. In addition to the overall accountability framework, the district compiles comprehensive interim reports that analyze the improvements in student achievement for schools in the midst of the initiative.

Systems and policies. In order to support the Strategic Staffing Initiative, CMS needed to both create new systems and policies and leverage those that already existed. In particular, CMS has in place a practice called Freedom and Flexibility with Accountability (FF&A), in which principals with a strong record of results receive the freedom and flexibility to try instruction-related practices that may not work at all schools, but might work in their particular school. All of the principals at Strategic Staffing schools operate under the FF&A initiative.

CMS also leveraged its existing communications approach to introduce SSI to district employees and the public in 2008. The executive staff knew that this would be a sensitive issue, because seven schools would be losing excellent principals to struggling schools. However, the initiative was a matter of equity, and it was important to convey that reasoning. Internal communication was the first important step; the initiative was communicated to principals, and CMS leadership met with teachers who were eligible for selection by a Strategic Staffing principal. Next, Gorman communicated the initiative to external stakeholders via his weekly media briefing. He explained: “This plan may make life tougher for some principals, who may lose a good teacher or gain a struggling one, but it’s important to remember that our struggling schools belong to all of us. We are one district and we share our successes and our failures.” In following weeks, the principals and area superintendents had many other conversations in various forums to explain the initiative and the reasons for its importance. Additionally, the communications department prepared a toolkit that included letters to parents and the community.

Portfolio approach. A recent component of the district’s approach to turnaround is to merge schools: The district switched eight K-5 elementary schools to K-8 schools. As a result, the district was able to build on strong elementary schools and close 11 struggling schools. This is largely driven by budget cuts, but has also been a way for the district to ensure that more schools have strong principals. The challenges of having those principals oversee much larger schools have yet to be seen.

Evolution of SSI—a focus on leadership development. The initiative has evolved across the four cohorts now in place, as CMS has worked to improve the strategy. After launching Cohort 1 in Fall 2008, CMS sought input from those principals regarding what could be improved. One major piece of feedback was that they would have liked more time to become knowledgeable about their new schools and to determine which teachers to displace and hire. Principals in Cohort 1 started at their new schools in June 2008, just as the school year was ending, and thus had little time with school in session to develop an understanding of the

⁹ The Central-Elementary zone is a non-geographic zone based on need.

school's particular challenges and strengths or to observe classrooms as a basis for choosing which teachers to displace. As a result of this feedback, CMS adjusted the timeline so that principals in Cohort 2 started at their new schools on March 1, 2009. The former principals left the school on the same day, either demoted or dismissed. This adjustment to the timing gave the new principal about six months before the start of school to adapt to the school and formulate a reform strategy. The other members of the principals' teams joined their new schools in Fall 2009, when schools opened for the new academic year. This timeline has become the general standard for subsequent cohorts as well. While the new timing helps SSI principals staff their new schools more effectively, the trade-off is that it disrupts the school mid-year. However, the district decided it was worth the trade-off, and they have been working on better succession planning to limit the disruption that accompanies mid-year leadership changes.

In anticipation of launching Cohort 3 for the 2010-11 school year, CMS leadership turned its attention to expanding the training and preparation process for principals. Some elements of the preparation process evolved organically. For example, on their own initiative, principals in Cohort 1 offered to act informally as mentors to principals in Cohort 2. However, CMS leadership also wanted to create a more structured process for principals to prepare to enter the Strategic Staffing schools, with the idea that such training would increase their ability to turn around low-performing schools. CMS decided to partner with Education Resource Strategies (ERS) to design this process, and through this partnership various training approaches for SSI principals in Cohorts 3 and 4 have been piloted. This training has helped principals to think more innovatively about school design and provided them with a toolkit for their new roles. Thus, principals in the later cohorts have been equipped to enter their SSI schools with critical resources: the knowledge of how best to turn around a low-performing school, lessons learned from experienced Strategic Staffing Initiative principals, and designs for best utilizing the resources available to them. As Ann Clark, chief academic officer, explained, "Strategic Staffing is an evolving model that builds on learning from the previous year. No two years have looked alike, and that's by design."

SCHOOL TURNAROUND ELEMENTS

The five tenets of the Strategic Staffing Initiative are consistent across schools, although the tenets themselves allow for some flexibility, such as the fact that the SSI team is capped at specific numbers but does not have to be entirely filled out. The district has given certain parameters, but there is variation across schools in the composition of the SSI team and the number of teachers removed.

Furthermore, there is significant variation in design of SSI schools as a result of the flexibility given to principals, described earlier. SSI schools look very different in terms of master schedule, student groupings, structure of teacher planning time, and so forth. For example, some principals shifted schedules, divided classrooms by gender, or combined classrooms for parts of the day.

FUNDING

SSI schools receive the same level of funding as other district schools (\$8,500 per pupil on average). The only additional resources that SSI schools receive are compensation incentives for the SSI team. As described above, SSI principals, assistant principals and literacy facilitators receive a 10 percent pay supplement to their base salaries, which is also factored into retirement. Teachers receive an initial recruitment bonus of \$10,000 plus retention bonuses of \$5,000 in the second and third years, for a total of \$20,000 in bonuses. When a school has completed the three-year SSI period, the SSI teachers no longer receive any bonuses. However,

the salary increase for principals and other positions is permanent during their employment in the district.¹⁰ In the past, this extra SSI compensation has come from General Funds, but for the 2011-12 school year, the district is utilizing Race to the Top funds from the North Carolina initiative.

¹⁰ This is a result of the language used in original SSI contracts, which gave non-teacher positions a salary increase instead of a bonus. In order to take away that salary increase after three years, CMS would have to demote staff in those positions: According to state rule, any decrease in salary is a demotion.

SUSTAINABILITY AND IMPACT

The question has been raised as to whether SSI will be sustainable over time. Thus far, only Cohort 1 has completed the three-year period initiative, and final results have yet to be analyzed. However, five of the seven Cohort 1 principals have elected to continue in their SSI schools because they want to further strengthen the schools so that they will experience continued improvement.

Also, because SSI requires minimal resources (in the form of extra compensation for SSI team members), dollars are not diverted from other schools in any significant way. The more challenging element of SSI is the fact that excellent principals are moved from one school to another. In some cases, particularly when the Strategic Staffing Initiative was just being launched in 2008, the school communities that were losing principals expressed dissatisfaction. However, as the Strategic Staffing initiative has grown and become part of the school district's culture, greater community understanding has developed.

Another component of sustainability is creation of a method for sharing best practices that are emerging from the district's implementation of its turnaround strategy. Thus far, the district has not created a definitive internal feedback loop to disseminate the learnings from SSI schools to other schools. However, the changes being made at SSI schools are certainly a topic of conversation within the district—via the CMS Accountability Department's interim reports on results at SSI schools, multiple news articles and press releases, and increasing understanding within the district about how SSI works. It has become an honor to be selected as an SSI principal or to be part of an SSI team. The district is thinking about how they want to use the learnings from the SSI schools more widely and plans to do so in the near future.

Profile: Paw Creek Elementary

OVERVIEW

In spring 2009, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Elementary would be part of the second Strategic and that veteran principal Mary Jo Koenig would be turnaround process. Koenig started at the school in opportunity to set the school staffing and schedule for population at the time exceeded 1,200 students, many mobile units. (The opening of a new school that to about 550 for Fall 2009.) The number of office Koenig describes her first impressions of the school: mismanaged and discipline was out of control. There hallways than in the classrooms. The culture was really were so many inexperienced teachers on staff that know any better.”

Koenig has used SSI’s mandate—to turn around the school—along with the freedom and flexibility given her by the district to make dramatic changes. Two years in, the school is a different place, as evidenced by the mere 34 office referrals in the 2010-11 school year. Koenig has one year remaining in her three-year commitment to the Strategic Staffing Initiative; in summer of 2012 she will be held accountable for student progress over the prior three years. Although the school has changed dramatically, the high turnover in student population means that the new culture of achievement must be constantly emphasized.

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

The opportunity to have a hand-picked team of seven staff join her at Paw Creek was a novelty for Koenig, who had led two other struggling schools prior to Paw Creek without any sort of supporting team. Given personal preference and the particular dynamics at play, Koenig did not use all seven SSI team slots. Instead, she opted to bring a few key people from her previous school: an academic facilitator, a media/technology expert, and a special education teacher. Several Paw Creek teachers had electively transferred to the new district school, leaving two teacher openings at Paw Creek; Koenig hired teachers with proven success to fill those positions. Koenig opted not to displace five teachers, as is permissible under SSI, because she didn’t need to do so in order to bring in her team (given the elective transfers).

In terms of Koenig’s interaction with the district on a day-to-day basis, she describes it as fairly limited but entirely sufficient. As a former curriculum coordinator at the CMS central office, Koenig understands the resources that the district can offer. She states, “If we need something, we call, but we

PAW CREEK: QUICK FACTS

- **SCHOOL TYPE:** Public elementary school
- **GRADES:** K-5
- **LOCATION:** Charlotte, NC
- **SIZE:** 575 students
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** 89% low-income, 55% African-American, 34% English Language Learners, 15% special education
- **SCHOOL DAY:** 7 hours/day (7:45a.m. – 2:45p.m.)
- **AVERAGE CORE CLASS SIZE:** Homeroom classes range from 15-18

announced that Paw Creek Staffing Initiative (SSI) cohort, leading the school through the March, which gave her the the following year. The student of whom were taught in one of 24 summer reduced the population referrals that year surpassed 3,700. “Transitions between classes were seemed to be more students in the one of having given up, and there many of them probably didn’t

haven't been micromanaged. I'm pretty independent. I know what's expected and I don't need someone to check in." On occasion, Koenig has asked the zone superintendent to help move along the HR process in order to get the people she wants in certain positions.

SCHOOL DESIGN ELEMENTS

School culture. Koenig saw immediately that the school culture needed to change significantly if the school was going to become a place of student growth and achievement. In order to give students responsibility for their behaviors, Koenig decided to involve them in the process of defining the culture. At the start of each year, Koenig and her staff work together to create a set of "essential agreements" about what they want for the school. For example, "We agree to do whatever it takes to make student achievement our number one focus for all student learning at this school site." Then teachers work with their individual classes to create essential agreements for each class. An example of such an agreement at the classroom level is, "We agree to be peaceful in the classroom and respect one another." The students sign on to these agreements and revisit them every few weeks. As a result, students encourage each other to behave according to the essential agreements; a sort of positive peer pressure works to create an environment that is conducive to learning.

Investments in teaching quality. Koenig emphasizes professional development for her teaching staff, with two specific foci: (1) implementation of the inquiry model for teaching and learning, and (2) connecting the inquiry model to technology. Professional development is mostly accomplished in the school via focused PD sessions and common planning time, although Koenig also sends teachers to off-site conferences and trainings.

Teachers meet by grade level for common planning time for 50 minutes every day, with a 90- to 100-minute session once per week. This takes place while students are in specials. One or both of the facilitators on staff attend each planning session. When Koenig started at the school, the facilitators led the sessions, but now they are generally teacher-led. The goal is to plan about two weeks out. Teams utilize the SmartBoard to outline the plans, and then email them to members of the team after the session. Koenig comments, "It's amazing to see the change in the teachers. We just had a planning session for [2011-12] and everyone came with a flash drive with their folders organized for the year, along with video clips and websites and other resources."

Use of time. At the same time that Koenig started at Paw Creek, the district mandated a 90-minute-per-day literacy block for K-3 and 60 minutes per day for math. Therefore, Paw Creek's master schedule is built around these large blocks of time, and all science and social studies content is integrated with the literacy blocks (see Appendix B). Koenig has provided professional development to teachers on how to do integrated instruction with the inquiry model.

Individual attention. The Paw Creek staff use data to determine which students need additional instruction and on what skills. Once per week, common planning time is focused solely on student data (last year it was "Data Monday"), and teachers are expected to bring their assessment data from the previous two weeks. The team reviews the data, identifies which students need re-teaching, and creates a plan for making that happen during the literacy block (which has time built in for re-teaching).

For students' social and emotional needs, the school has a full-time counselor on staff. (There was also an in-house mental health worker until the position was cut across the district.)

Resources. The only additional resources that Paw Creek received for turnaround were the compensation incentives for the Strategic Staffing Initiative: a 10 percent salary increase for the principal and facilitators and \$20,000 in bonuses (across three years) for the SSI teachers. Koenig has used most of the school's Title I funding for teacher PD, to send them to national conferences so that they have exposure to ideas beyond the district. Also, Koenig has chosen to invest in technology such as Flip video cameras and wireless cards for laptops. A partnership with IBM will soon provide six new computer stations in classrooms. Koenig explains, "I have made it a point to have technology as a focus, because it enables kids to be responsible for their own learning."

Profile: Devonshire Elementary

OVERVIEW

In 2008, Devonshire Elementary school was floundering. Carolina’s low-performing list, meaning that less than 50 scoring at or above grade level on end-of-grade testing. As Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) launched its Strategic Staffing 2008, Devonshire was included in the first cohort of implement SSI, the district asked a proven principal, over leadership of the school, and she selected a team to excellent teachers (who were assigned to grades 3-5), a math facilitator. Gimenez was given freedom to design the determined would be best to turn around the low. The resulting design of Devonshire includes many will be highlighted here. As Gimenez states, “I like to describe my model as an eclectic style. I look for the things that I know will work. I take any program, any model, and tweak it to make it fit the needs of the school, because I don’t think there’s one size that fits all.”

DEVONSHIRE: QUICK FACTS

- **SCHOOL TYPE:** Public elementary school
- **GRADES:** K-5
- **LOCATION:** Charlotte, NC
- **SIZE ('10-'11):** 520 students
- **DEMOGRAPHICS:** 98% low income, 60% African-American, 40% Hispanic English Language Learners, 15% special education
- **SCHOOL DAY:** 6.25 hours/day (8:30 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.)
- **AVERAGE CORE CLASS SIZE:** Homeroom classes range from 16-21

It was on the state of North percent of students were a result, when Charlotte-Initiative (SSI) in fall of schools to participate. To Suzanne Gimenez, to take accompany her: five literacy facilitator, and a school in the way that she performance of its students. components, a few of which

Gimenez’s three-year term as an SSI principal officially ended in June 2011, and she was asked to move to another SSI school. She instead opted to stay at Devonshire because she wants to continue to improve the school, build capacity of the teaching staff, and ensure that the turnaround is sustainable. Gimenez’s goal is to turn Devonshire into a lab school, in which teachers could be trained to move into other SSI schools.

IMPLEMENTATION OF DISTRICT STRATEGY

The district did not mandate any specific turnaround elements for Devonshire (beyond the tenets of Strategic Staffing) given its particular needs, but instead entrusted Gimenez to make judgments about how to structure the school. As Gimenez prepared to lead Devonshire, she determined that a centralized approach—one that clearly defined expectations and trusted staff to meet them—would work best. To this end, she outlined the way that the school would run and the structures that would be put in place to create student and staff accountability. Given the population of the school, Gimenez knew that she needed to create a consistent environment, so she paid attention to the details that impact culture, such as procedures for entering the building in the morning and a school-wide discipline plan. As she explains, “The students might not know where they’re going to sleep tonight or if they’re going to have supper, but they know when they come in this building every day, we look the same, we act the same, and the day is the same. I want them to have that foundation and that security.” Gimenez states that being a principal at an SSI school “has been the most rewarding experience of my professional career,” because it has allowed her to be creative in using different strategies for improving student performance. She explains that the district has provided her the necessary support—both resources and flexibility—to turn the school around.

SCHOOL DESIGN ELEMENTS

With flexibility to make changes and a mandate to turn Devonshire around, Gimenez made specific decisions about how to use time, invest in teacher quality, and provide individual attention to students.

Use of time. Devonshire has constructed a schedule that creates long, uninterrupted blocks of instructional time in literacy and math. The typical student day includes 90 minutes of reading, 30 minutes of writing, and 90 to 105 minutes on math, depending on grade level. (Also, Math Club—45 minutes per day—builds in time for re-teaching.) In order to make this approach possible, science and social studies are integrated with literacy (and fifth graders have an additional science block once per week). “Specials” (e.g., physical education, music) occur daily for 45 to 90 minutes.

Investments in teaching quality. Gimenez considers the provision of collaborative planning time for teachers to be one of the most important changes at Devonshire. Teachers meet daily for 45 minutes with their facilitator (the school has facilitators for math and literacy, plus an instructional coach for K-2) to discuss upcoming content in the Standard Course of Study for North Carolina. This planning time occurs while students are in “specials.” The sessions are highly structured, with set agendas and processes. Teachers exchange ideas about how to teach the content, and one teacher, Suzy Turner, states, “We get better ideas from listening to other people and reflecting on what works for them.” The school also uses the Instructional Rounds method to develop “problems of practice,” observe each others’ classrooms, and share feedback. The teachers submit their lesson plans to Gimenez each week and she reviews them for thoroughness. As Margaret Twitty, the math facilitator explains, “Teachers can still put their own individual spin on it [the content], but we’re all teaching the same thing at the same time.”

One major component of this collaborative planning time is the examination of student data. The teams rely on common assessments given weekly, as well as the formative assessments given out by the county to figure out which content needs to be revisited or which students are particularly struggling with certain material. As teacher Suzy Turner explains, “We look at the students and figure out where we might need to go back and re-teach or where we need to re-group students.”

Individual attention. The reliance on data also contributes to another strategy for meeting the individual needs of students: flexible groupings. “You’re in a group based on what you need to learn,” explains Gimenez. Devonshire staff members continually adjust student groupings based on the data, with major re-groupings done two to three times per year (after every DIBELS and benchmark assessment). This approach means that students are learning in groups of all different sizes. Homeroom class sizes range from about 16 to 21, but literacy and math groupings range from 8 to 10 for the neediest students and 20 to 25 for on-target students. Students are re-grouped for math club (where re-teaching happens) and reading workshop, and the school also uses a modified parallel block schedule (careful grouping of students into homeroom classes initially so that they can be grouped effectively).

Also critical to providing individual attention is the school’s inclusion approach to ESL and Special Ed. The ESL teachers “push in” to classrooms during reading workshop to work with students in small groups. Special Ed teachers do inclusion for reading workshop, math, and writing (they co-teach or work with students in small groups). They also sometimes do pull-out for those with very low skills according to their IEPs, but mostly the

model is inclusion. Devonshire has found that this is an advantage because it allows Special Ed teachers to work with students who are low-skill but don't necessarily have IEPs. SPED and ESL resource teachers meet regularly with the facilitators (once per week) and homeroom teachers (15 minutes before or after school on a set schedule) in order to stay aligned. In addition to the inclusion model, there are two self-contained classrooms serving 16 multi-grade children.

Upcoming changes for 2011-12 year. Starting this fall, the district is increasing the school day to eight hours, which gives Gimenez more time for implementing her strategies. She will increase common planning time to one hour per day (up from 45 minutes) and add 30 minutes per day of intervention/enrichment ("I/E") for math and literacy. During the latter, students will be regrouped weekly, based on the teachers' assessments of their skill mastery, and will be either re-taught or will receive additional enrichment. Furthermore, a new literacy model designed by the Devonshire staff will increase daily time spent on literacy and writing: 180 minutes, with social studies and science content integrated during approximately 90 minutes of that time (and fifth graders have a separate science/social studies block for 60 minutes daily). In addition to these changes to use the extra time in the school day, Gimenez has hired two first-year teachers who will not be assigned to classrooms but will move between classrooms to allow for smaller groupings.

Resources. The only incremental resources that Devonshire received for turnaround were the compensation incentives for the Strategic Staffing Initiative: a 10 percent salary increase for the principal and facilitators and \$20,000 in bonuses (across three years) for the five teachers.

Appendix A

Percent of Cohort 1 Students at/above Proficient in EOG testing: 2008 vs. 2010¹¹

Cohort 1 SSI schools	Reading 2008 (no retest)	Reading 2010 (no retest / retest)	Math 2008 (no retest)	Math 2010 (no retest / retest)	Science 2008 no retest)	Science 2010 (no retest / retest)
Briarwood ES	31.8	39.3 / 50.0	45.7	57.3 / 66.0	9.8	31.9 / 42.9
Bruns Avenue ES	18.8	29.5 / 42.3	43.8	53.4 / 62.4	1.1	18.2 / 27.3
Devonshire ES	33.9	43.7 / 54.7	54.2	75.1 / 81.8	24.6	70.0 / 81.7
Ranson MS	32.0	42.4 / 50.7	39.0	55.9 / 64.9	21.1	44.0 / 58.1
Reid Park ES	22.8	23.5 / 33.9	30.8	47.8 / 61.8	2.2	14.6 / 22.5
Sterling ES	34.6	55.4 / 65.8	52.4	73.1 / 81.6	19.6	6.5 / 38.7
Westerly Hills ES	32.4	33.1 / 48.3	41.7	56.6 / 66.2	12.1	43.9 / 51.2

¹¹ Reading and math data are a composite of grades 3-5, while science data shown are for grade 5 only (there is no science assessment for grades 3-4).

Appendix B

Schedule of subject area by grade level at Paw Creek Elementary:

SUBJECT/ GRADE	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Literacy*	90 min/day					
Math	90 min/day	90 min/day	90 min/day	60 min/day	60 min/day	60 min/day
Science lab	60 min/wk	60 min/wk	60 min/wk	90 min/wk	90 min/wk	90 min/wk
Media	45 min/wk	45 min/wk	45 min/wk	~45 min/wk	~45 min/wk	~45 min/wk
Art	45 min/wk					
PE	45 min/wk					
Music	45 min/wk					
Computer	45 min/wk					

*Science and social studies content integrated with literacy.

Appendix C

Devonshire Elementary - School staffing and budget summary

PERSONNEL 2009-10 Staffing Allocation (with trades)				
Position	Compensation (w/Benefits)	FTEs	Avg Position Costs (incl. benefits)	Notes
Principal/Headmaster	\$100,000	1.0	\$100,000	
Assistant Principal	\$85,900	1.0	\$85,900	
Dean of Students	\$0		\$66,000	
ADM Teacher	\$1,710,800	28.0	\$61,100	Allocated 27; swapped 2 K-3 teacher assistants to get another ADM teacher position
Facilitator	\$61,100	1.0	\$61,100	
Computer Tchr (elem.)/ Technology Tchr (MS/HS)	\$0		\$61,100	
Language Arts Teacher (elementary literacy)	\$183,300	3.0	\$61,100	Via Title I allocation
Math Teacher (elementary)	\$0		\$61,100	
Arts Education Teacher	\$183,300	3.0	\$61,100	
TD Teacher **	\$24,440	0.4	\$61,100	
EC (Special Ed) Teacher *	\$91,650	1.5	\$61,100	
SBS Teacher	\$0		\$61,100	
SBS Assistant	\$0		\$30,550	
SAC Teacher		2.0	\$61,100	
SAC Assistant		3.0	\$30,550	
ESL Teacher **	\$183,300	3.0	\$61,100	
CTE Teacher **	\$0		\$61,100	
Media Specialist	\$69,900	1.0	\$69,900	
Counselor **	\$69,900	1.0	\$69,900	
K-3 Teacher Assistant	\$183,300	6.0	\$30,550	Originally allocated 8, but swapped two for an additional ADM teacher position

Media Assistant	\$0		\$30,550	
ISS Assistant	\$0		\$30,550	
General Assistant	\$0		\$30,550	
EC (Special Ed) Assistant *	\$30,550	1.0	\$30,550	
Hourly Tutors	\$40,000	2.0	\$20,000	5 hours per day, 5 days per week
Admin. Student Intervention Assistant	\$0		\$30,550	
Interpreter/Translator/ Family School Advocate	\$0		\$37,700	
Technology Associate	\$0		\$38,000	
Curriculum Associate	\$0		\$38,000	
Campus Security Associate	\$0		\$33,000	
BMT	\$0		\$39,000	
Custodian **	\$97,200	3.0	\$32,400	
10 Month Secretary	\$69,400	2	\$34,700	
TOTAL	\$3,144,040	60.9		

* Exchanges "out" of this category are allowed for other positions within the same program category only.

** Exchanges "into" this category are allowed, but allotted positions may not be reduced.

Devonshire Elementary - Use of Title I dollars (2010-11)

Description	Amount
1.5 Teachers (used as 1.0 instructional coach and 0.5 EC (Special Ed) teacher)	\$91,650
1.0 Social worker	\$60,000
2.0 Tutors	\$40,000
PD allocation (Instructional Rounds training, conferences, stipends for additional teacher PD day before school starts)	\$22,700
Parental involvement allocation, uses it to buy books to send home with kids	\$4,622
Extended employment (pays facilitators to work over the summer; supports the Miracle School tutorial program)	\$4,200
Fees for Rocket Ryan science enrichment program	\$1,800
Instructional materials	\$1,300
Field trips	\$500
Preliminary Total (may increase 20%)	\$227,010K

Devonshire Elementary Master schedule (2010-11)

	8:30 9:00	9:00 9:30	9:30 10:00	10:00 10:30	10:30 11:00	11:00 11:30	11:30 12:00	12:00 12:30	12:30 1:00	1:00 1:30	1:30 2:00	2:00 2:30	2:30 2:45
K	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Workshop Seeing Stars SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop Seeing Stars	Specials	Physical Activity	Lunch	Math Investiga- tions	Math	Math Lab	Literacy Writing	Literacy Seeing Stars	Literacy Seeing Stars
1	Literacy Workshop Seeing Stars SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop	Specials	Specials 10:15 Math Investiga- tions	Math	Math 11:15 Math Lab	Math Lab 11:45 Physical Education	 12:15 Lunch	Lunch 12:45 Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine It	Literacy Imagine It 1:45 Writing	Writing 2:15 Seeing Stars Reading Club	Reading Club
2	Specials	Specials 9:15 Math Investiga- tions	Math	Math 10:15 Math Lab	Math Lab 10:45 Physical Activity	Physical Activity 11:15 Lunch	Lunch 11:45 Literacy Workshop V/V	Literacy Workshop V/V SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop V/V SS/Sc	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Writing V/V Reading Club	Literacy
3	Math Investiga- tions	Math	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Writing V/V	Lunch	Physical Activity	Literacy Workshop V/V SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop V/V SS/Sc	Math Club	Math Club 1:45 Specials	Specials	Specials Reflect
4	Math Investiga- tions	Math	Literacy Workshop SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop SS/Sc	Literacy Writing	Literacy Writing 11:15 Specials	Specials	Physical Activity	Lunch	Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine IT	Math Club	Math Club
5	Literacy Workshop SS/Sc	Literacy Workshop SS/Sc	Math Investiga- tions	Math	Math Club	Math Club 11:15 Physical Activity	Physical Activity 11:45 Lunch	Lunch 12:15 Specials	Specials	Science/ Writing	Science 1:45 Literacy Imagine IT	Literacy Imagine IT/ Writing	Literacy Imagine IT/ Writing