

Sample Workgroup Report



School Improvement Audit 6

Target Low-Performing Students and Schools, Starting With Reading

Effectiveness Findings and Evidence

Effectiveness Finding 1

The school district established board policy regarding *all* students' learning in 1989, long before most communities were concerned about the achievement of low-income and minority students.

The goal of the Middletown School District is to provide every student, regardless of race or income, an opportunity to master basic skills, achieve high academic proficiency, and graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to a successful post-secondary experience. (Policy #45/1989)

The policy of the Middletown School District is to ensure that every K–12 student is taught by an experienced, well-trained, and qualified teacher. (Policy #63/2001)

The Middletown School District is committed to the goal of ensuring that all students are reading at grade level by the end of the third grade. (Policy #16/2002)

Supporting Evidence

The goal of the Middletown School District is to provide every student, regardless of race or income, an opportunity to master basic skills, achieve high academic proficiency, and graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to a successful post-secondary experience. (Policy #45/1989)

Effectiveness Finding 2

The school district has been able to attract and keep teachers with strong preparation with the exception of areas where there are national teacher shortages (special ed); the school district has no teachers misassigned or uncertified. Even in the shortage areas, there are only five teachers working under emergency certification.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Emergency Certification	3	2	0	1

Effectiveness Finding 3

The school district is well on the way to ensuring that all students are reading at grade level by the end of the third grade. With the exception of one school, more than 70 percent of all elementary school students at the other three elementary schools have achieved that goal districtwide of reading at or above grade level.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Grade Level	73%	34%	73%	78%
Near Grade Level	20%	39%	21%	19%

Effectiveness Finding 4

Fifth-grade basic skills instruction is overall impressive, although the scores at the elementary school serving the largest number of low-income students are distinctively lower than the three other elementary schools; math needs attention districtwide.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Reading	72%	26%	75%	80%
Writing	68%	21%	72%	74%
Math	56%	19%	62%	76%

Effectiveness Finding 5

North Elementary School is doing a superb job in effectively teaching large numbers of poor and minority students reading and writing. Their scores in fifth-grade reading and writing rival our district's two middle-class schools. The same is true of third-grade reading.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Fifth-Grade Reading	72%	26%	75%	80%
Fifth-Grade Writing	68%	21%	72%	74%
Third-Grade Reading	73%	34%	73%	78%

Improvement Findings and Evidence

Improvement Finding 1

The school board policies regarding student achievement do not include specific measurable goals to ensure high performance from poor and minority students. One policy established in 1989 uses the outdated concept of providing all students the “opportunity” to learn.

Supporting Evidence

The goal of the Middletown School District is to provide every student, regardless of race or income, an opportunity to master basic skills, achieve high academic proficiency, and graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to a successful post-secondary experience (Policy #45/1989).

Improvement Finding 2

School district policies lack clearly established, measurable goals, including a process to sufficiently monitor progress and maintain accountability.

Supporting Evidence

The Middletown School District is committed to the goal of ensuring that all students are reading at grade level by the end of the third grade (Policy #16/2002).

Improvement Finding 3

There is a significant disparity between the two high-poverty, high-minority schools and the two more affluent, low-minority schools in terms of “experienced teachers” and “teachers with master’s degrees.” This does *not* reflect existing School Board Policy #63/2001 that ensures that every K–12 student is taught by an “experienced, well-trained, and qualified teacher.”

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Years of Experience	9	8	18	16
Master’s Degrees	8%	7%	35%	29%

Improvement Finding 4

There is a disparity regarding per-pupil cost in the four elementary schools. High-poverty, high-minority schools have a lower per-pupil cost than the more middle-class schools. Since personnel costs account for approximately 90 percent of the per-pupil cost, the disparity between schools may reflect primarily on teacher training and experience. It may also reflect specific programs that are offered only at certain schools.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Per-Pupil Cost	\$5,000	\$5,500	\$8,500	\$6,800

Improvement Finding 5

Not all students in the school district are achieving proficiency in basic skills. One school in particular, South Elementary, has student achievement that is far below the other three elementary schools. This school lacks several programs that have proven effective with poor and minority students at the districts' other high-poverty, high-minority elementary school (North Elementary). Given School Board Policy #16/2002 ("All students are reading at grade level by the end of the third grade"), the school district is not achieving its stated, measurable goal in third-grade reading.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Reading at grade level	75%	34%	73%	78%
Reading Programs: Accelerated Reader	X	X	X	X
All Day Kindergarten	X	X	X	X
ESL	X			
Reading Recovery	X	0	0	0
Success for All	X	0	0	0
NovaNET/Internet	0	0	X	X

Improvement Finding 6

There is an unfortunate disparity in class size in the four elementary schools, with schools serving primarily middle-class students having the smallest class sizes; the largest class sizes are found in low-income schools.

Supporting Evidence

	North Elementary	South Elementary	Riverview Elementary	Prairieview Elementary
Class Size	32	29	23	18

Conclusions

1. The school district has both policies and performance that reflect an unusually effective school district, and ensure that all students have excellent opportunities to learn.
2. Overall, the school district is doing superb work with all student groups, with the exception of one elementary school serving the largest percentage of low-income students. In spite of great efforts, this school has been unable to overcome the debilitating effects of the “culture of poverty” in this diverse student body.
3. Special commendation should be made to the faculty and staff of North Elementary for their great success in working with poor and minority students.
4. The school board should review existing policies to ensure that the school district has clearly defined, measurable goals designed to ensure all students achieve high levels of proficiency, especially in the basic skills area.
5. The school board and school district administrators should review school-level funding, enrichment/remediation programs, and teacher quality at the four elementary schools and make needed adjustments to ensure equity between high-poverty, high-minority schools, and the schools serving more middle-class families.*
6. The school district should mobilize a program of targeted professional development; provide additional funding for highly effective basic skills programs (Reading Recovery/Success for All); and set specific measurable accountability goals for the district’s lowest-performing elementary school.*
7. Policies and practices that permit such a wide difference in class sizes must be reviewed, and every effort possible should be made to provide balanced class size throughout the school district.*

*These conclusions have significant funding implications for the school district. Cost analyses have not been developed for any of these conclusions.