Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement

Penny Billman, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate
NIU Outreach

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

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Acknowledgements

The greatest acknowledgement goes to the schools, the staffs, teachers, students, families, and communities who worked together to achieve and maintain the exceptional academic improvement that earned them the award status. Their dedication, persistence, and hard work is apparent as they significantly improved academic achievement while meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, proving that the mission of all children learning is possible, no matter if the school was large or small; elementary, middle, or high school; regular or charter school; wealthy or poor; urban, suburban, or rural; or low-performing or high-performing.

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In 2003-2004, the Illinois State Board of Education recognized 27 Illinois high-poverty public schools for high academic performance and 100 public schools for significant achievement gains over time. Based primarily on interviews of the principals of these very diverse schools, investigators identified six actions critical to improving academic performance: create a climate focused on the student; build leadership within the school to support ongoing improvement; establish a quality teaching team; deliver instruction based on individual student's needs; involve parents and the community; and provide resources to support improvement. The study describes the various strategies and resources used by the schools to accomplish these six actions.

Executive Summary

The enactment of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB)* established a rigorous mission: ***All students will meet high achievement standards by 2014.*** Each state was to identify learning standards, implement specific measures to track their success, and hold every school accountable for making "adequate yearly progress." Implementation of *NCLB* has generated controversy in all 50 states. A common thread of objections argues that (1) not all students can achieve high standards and (2) demographics are more important than school practices in determining academic achievement.

In 2003-2004, the Illinois State Board of Education and Northern Illinois University piloted two awards for schools that contradicted both points. Winners of the Spotlight Schools (for high poverty, high performing schools) and the Academic Improvement Awards (for schools that made significant gains in performance) beat the odds, reduced the achievement gap, turned around failing schools, and sustained success in unexpected ways and places. For these 121 schools, the mission of achieving and maintaining academic improvement is possible. This study describes what worked for the award-winning schools and provides recommendations for action.

In Illinois a decade of reform efforts accelerated in 1997, when the Illinois State Board of Education established the *Illinois Learning Standards* for early elementary grades through high school. Those Standards represent what students need to know to obtain well-paid jobs or pursue post-secondary education. Students' progress on achieving the standards is measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in grades 3,4,5,7, and 8 and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) in grade 11. Illinois has also launched a number of programs designed to improve achievement in relation to the standards; however, the process of significantly changing the educational system in our state, as well as throughout the nation, is slow and incomplete.

Are Illinois students learning the critical skills needed to succeed? The percentages of students meeting learning standards, especially students of color and/or poverty, indicate that faster progress is needed. In 2003, in third grade, only 41.3 percent of children of poverty at least met the achievement standards compared to 74.7 percent of their peers. Similar achievement gaps are evident for mathematics (57.6% versus 86.9%) and writing (43.5% versus 70.2%). At the eleventh grade, only 31.7 percent of students of poverty meet standards in reading, compared to 62.7 percent of their peers; in mathematics, 24.9 percent compared to 60.4 percent; and in writing, 30.3 percent compared to 66.1 percent (ISBE, 2003).

Despite these statewide concerns and the fact that educational reform is often slow and difficult, the Spotlight Schools and the Academic Improvement Award schools demonstrated the ability to increase student achievement, even where there are high poverty levels, and to maintain and build on those improvements over time. These schools and districts have shown that the mission of achieving and maintaining academic success is possible.

The 121 award-winning schools are located throughout Illinois and represent every kind of school: large and small; regular and charter; all funding levels; urban, suburban, and rural; low-performing and high-performing; elementary, middle, and high schools. They ranged from schools moved off the Watch List to high-performance schools with almost 90 percent of the students meeting standards.

This study focused on those strategies deemed by the principals as most critical to the success of their schools, the implementation of the strategies, and the critical elements needed for the strategies to work. Four data-collection methods were used: interviews with principals of the award-winning schools (69 principals, 57% response rate); dialogues with a subset of *Spotlight* principals; review of materials submitted by the principals; and informal follow-up discussions with selected principals and teachers. Overall, interviews and/or materials from 79 schools (65%) provided data for this study. Data analysis included identifying trends and patterns and differences in approaches used by schools due to size, poverty, location, or level of instruction.
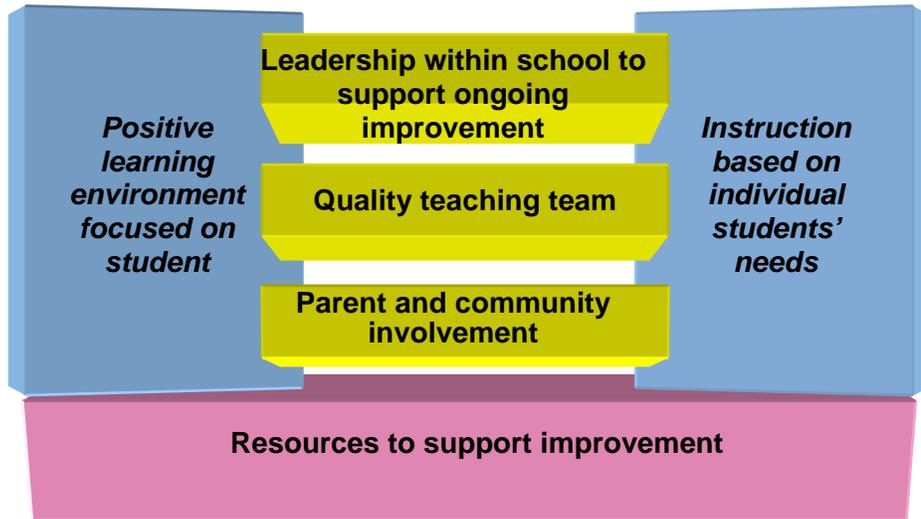
What Worked?

Previous studies identified the characteristics of high-poverty high-performing schools, high-performing schools, and schools with exemplary academic improvement (e.g., National Center for Educational Accountability, 2004; McGee, 2003; NASBE, 2002; NIREL, 2000; Stoll & Myers, 1998). This research affirmed the shared characteristics of exemplary schools identified in those studies and examined the specific actions necessary to achieve those broad goals. When asked which factors are most important in improving academic performance, the principals described six critical actions common to most of the award-winning schools.

Schools differed on the emphasis placed on each of the critical actions and on strategies to implement change; however, they all had a shared vision: to create a climate based on the student and on continuous improvement of teaching and learning. This foundation was critical to the success of academic improvement and was the first step in the change process. As one principal stated, "Without a common vision that focuses on the student, none of the other actions are even possible or meaningful."

The six critical actions interact to achieve academic improvement, as depicted below:

Model for Sustained Academic Improvement

Positive learning environment focused on student	**Leadership within school to support ongoing improvement**
	Quality teaching team
	Parent and community involvement
	Instruction based on individual students' needs

Resources to support improvement

A school focused on students strives to deliver instruction based on individual students' needs and finds ways to continuously improve learning and teaching. The success of this endeavor is based on the availability of human, fiscal, and facility resources; professional development opportunities for the school community; and assessment data. With these supports in place, the school is positioned to (1) build leadership capacity within the school to support ongoing improvement; (2) create a teaching team capable of delivering quality instruction; and (3) maximize parent and community involvement.

These six actions, working together, provide the necessary framework for sustained academic improvement. The principals offered advice on how to implement each of the individual critical actions, as summarized in the chart.

Six Critical Actions for Academic Improvement

Create a positive learning environment focused on the student.
- Create a shared vision of where the school is headed.
- Assess the climate and culture of the school, the families, and the community.
- Establish strong relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and the community.
- Decide how you can get from where you are to where you need to be.
- Prepare for the long-haul; meaningful change will take time and be ongoing.

Build leadership within the school to support ongoing improvement.
- Establish the role of the principal.
- Build teams for shared responsibility.
- Make data-driven decisions.
- Concentrate on a few initiatives with high probability of making large differences.
- Hold everyone accountable for improvement.
- Celebrate successes as the school continues to improve.

Establish a quality teaching team.
- Build and maintain a quality teaching team. Hire wisely.
- Align the curriculum to state standards, set grade-levels goals and benchmarks.
- Provide time for teachers to plan at grade-level, school-level, and district-level.
- Value and reward hardworking, dedicated teachers willing to take controlled risks.

Deliver instruction based on individual students' needs.
- Use data to set high expectations for each student and monitor progress.
- Use best practices, research-based methods, and technology to maximize learning time, especially in early childhood, reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Keep class sizes and instructional groups small.
- Implement supplemental before school, after school, and tutoring programs, especially to help those falling behind.

Involve parents and the community.
- Maximize parent and community involvement. Include them in improvement planning.
- If some parents are not participating, determine why and what you can do to involve them.

Provide resources to support improvement.
- Use state, regional, educational, and professional resources.
- Provide professional growth activities for administrators, teachers, and staff.
- Provide reliable, valid data for improvement plans for the school and for individual students.

What Can Be Done?

The following recommendations emerged from the study of key factors in the success of Illinois' award-winning schools in improving academic achievement:

Recommendation 1   Designate the improvement of student learning and the elimination of the achievement gap as fundamental priorities for education in Illinois and consistently use them as the touchstone for policy decisions and legislation proposals: "What impact will the proposed policy or legislation have on student learning? Will this action help eliminate the achievement gap?"

Recommendation 2   Recognize the importance of school-level actions in improving student learning and eliminating the achievement gap. Focus policy and financial decisions on ways to provide schools with the flexibility needed to successfully implement individual school improvement plans.

Recommendation 3   Recognize the critical role of principals in school improvement initiatives. Ensure that the preparation and ongoing professional development of principals provide them with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to implement the critical actions identified in this study.

Recommendation 4   Examine and revise funding policies that adversely impact student achievement.
- Recognize that meaningful, lasting change takes time and allow time in grant-funded projects for real change to occur.
- Revise policies that eliminate financial support for change initiatives once performance goals are met and without assessing if the improvement is sustainable without the funding.

Recommendation 5   Increase funding for schools with at-risk students who could benefit from strategies that maximize instruction time and minimize class size.

Recommendation 6   Expand early childhood education and literacy programs to serve all at-risk students.

Recommendation 7   Provide technical assistance and training to schools in the use of multiple types of data needed to drive systems of continuous improvement.

Recommendation 8   Provide professional development for administrators, teachers, and staff to enable them to continually improve instruction and find ways to increase student achievement.

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Background

Introduction

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* called for educational reform; nearly twenty years later, the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (*NCLB*) re-iterated the need for reform. During the intervening years, numerous standards-based and accountability reform efforts built the framework and the tools needed to define what all students need to know, generated ways of determining how well they are learning it, and began addressing the achievement gaps of students in public schools. *NCLB* raised the bar higher and established a rigorous mission: ***All students are to meet high achievement standards by 2014.*** According to *NCLB,* each state must identify learning standards and implement specific measures to track students' success in meeting these standards. Furthermore, every school is to be held accountable for making "adequate yearly progress" towards reaching the ultimate goal of all students meeting the state's achievement standards by 2014.

Implementation of *NCLB* has generated controversy in all 50 states. A common thread of objections argues that (1) not all students can achieve high standards and (2) demographics are more important than school practices in determining academic achievement.

In 2003-2004, the Illinois State Board of Education and Northern Illinois University piloted two awards for schools that contradicted both points. Winners of the Spotlight Schools (for high poverty, high performing schools) and the Academic Improvement Awards (for schools that made significant gains in performance) beat the odds, reduced the achievement gap, turned around failing schools, and sustained success in unexpected ways and places. For these 121 schools, the mission of achieving and maintaining academic improvement is possible. This study describes what worked for the award-winning schools and provides recommendations for action.

The success of the reform agenda outlined in *NCLB* is critical. At no time in the history of the United States have the well being of the individual and the economic development of the country been more dependent upon our educational system. "For most Americans, education and training through and beyond high school is now a necessary condition (not just the most advantageous or desirable route) for developing skills required by most well-paying jobs" (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003, p. v), and by 2005, 85 percent of all new jobs in America will require some level of post-secondary education. In addition, by 2030, nearly 30 percent of the workforce will be at or over retirement age, leaving an impending shortage of college-trained workers (Sampson, 2003; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003).

The fundamental premise for NCLB was that all students must and can learn the skills and knowledge that will enable them to succeed and obtain gainful employment. In order to accomplish this mission, educators face the daunting task of re-focusing the education system. The underlying assumption of the past, i.e. "some students will fail," is no longer acceptable. Teachers, students, parents, administrators, school boards, and the community need a new model, one in which all students, with appropriate instruction and support, can achieve high learning standards.

In Illinois, the reform effort that began in the 1980s accelerated in 1997, when the Illinois State Board of Education established the *Illinois Learning Standards* for early elementary grades through high school. Those Standards represent what students need to know to obtain well-paid jobs or pursue post-secondary education. Students' progress on achieving the standards is

measured by the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in grades 3,4,5,7, and 8 and the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) in grade 11. Illinois has also launched a number of programs designed to improve achievement in relation to the standards; however, the process of significantly changing the educational system in our state, as well as throughout the nation, is slow and incomplete.

Are Illinois students learning the critical skills needed to succeed? The percentages of students meeting learning standards, especially students of color and/or poverty, indicate a need for faster improvement. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, in 2003, children from low-income families scored significantly lower than their peers. In third grade, only 41.3 percent of children of poverty at least met the reading achievement standards compared to 74.7 percent of their peers. Similar achievement gaps are evident for mathematics (57.6% versus 86.9%) and writing (43.5% versus 70.2%). At the eleventh grade, only 31.7 percent of students of poverty meet standards in reading, compared to 62.7 percent of their peers; in mathematics, 24.9 percent compared to 60.4 percent; and in writing, 30.3 percent compared to 66.1 percent.

Figure 1. Percent of Illinois Students of Poverty Meeting or Exceeding Learning Standards
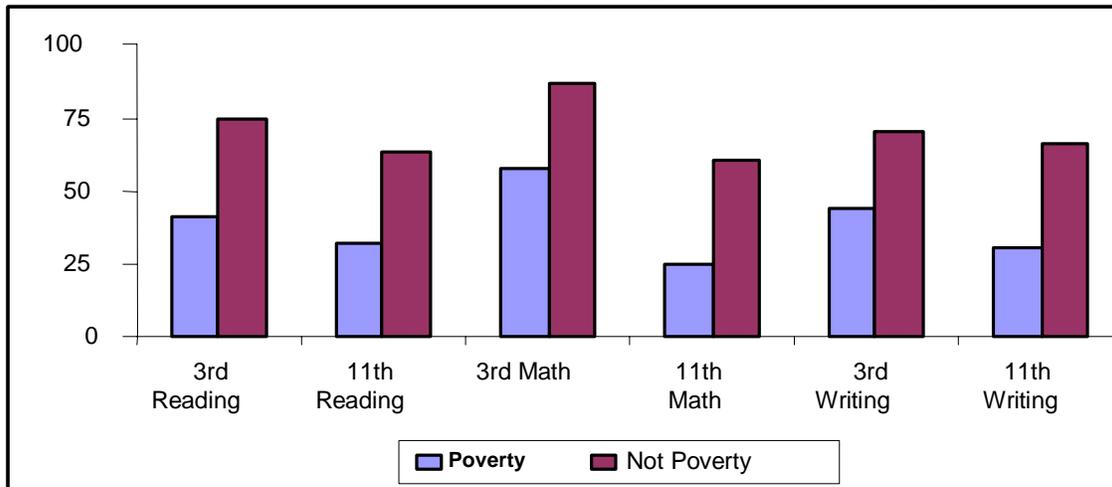
Source: ISBE, 2003 Illinois Report Card.

Children of poverty are disproportionately represented by children of color. As noted in Figure 2, children of color score significantly lower than their peers in reading, mathematics, and writing in third grade, and this trend continues through eleventh grade.

Figure 2. Percent of Illinois Students of Color Meeting or Exceeding Learning Standards
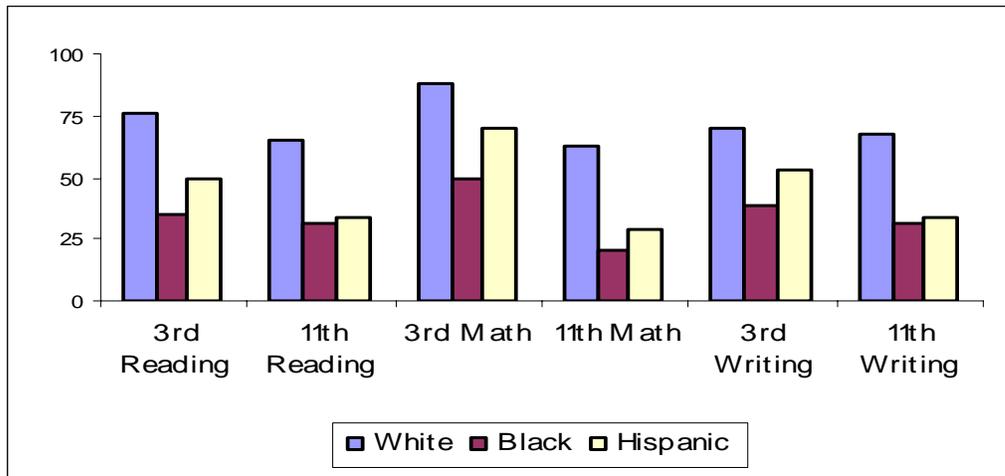
Source: ISBE, 2003 Illinois Report Card

Despite these statewide concerns and the fact that educational reform is often slow and difficult, the Spotlight Schools and the Academic Improvement Award schools are located throughout Illinois and have demonstrated the ability to increase student achievement, even where there are high poverty levels, and to maintain and build on those improvements over time. These schools and districts have shown that the mission of achieving and maintaining academic success is possible.

How have they done it? What actions were critical to these successes? Can they be replicated or adapted in other schools and districts?

This study sought answers to those questions by focusing on the school:
> Among all levels of education practice and policy, schools are the single most important factor in improving student achievement. It is at the school level that elements of effective instruction, high-quality curriculum, effective leadership, student motivation, and high-quality instruction come together to build an environment that is directly and consistently engaged in the practice of teaching and learning. It is also at the building level that state and local policies and program merge to impact a school's effectiveness in helping students achieve (NASBE, 2002, p.13).

Previous Research
The first step of the project was a review of previous research on how schools have shown that high-poverty schools can be high-performing schools, that low-performing schools can become high-performing schools, and that high-performing schools can get even better. The data collection instruments and data analysis strategies for this study built on this research.

Two types of previous research provided direction for this study: studies of the shared characteristics of exemplary schools and in-depth analyses of how schools build the capacity needed to enhance and maintain student academic achievement. Brief descriptions of the research used most heavily in this study are summarized below.

Shared Characteristics of Exemplary Schools

A comprehensive study completed by the National Association of State Boards of Educations (2002) presented characteristics common to high-performing schools around five themes:

- leadership quality
- teacher quality
- quality and distribution of professional development
- curricular quality
- use of data

For each theme, descriptive indicators for schools, districts, and states were listed. Of course, not all successful schools exhibit all of the indicators, nor are all of the characteristics of successful schools listed. This study confirmed that the themes and indicators were appropriate and tried to identify those that were most important.

Previous research on Illinois high-performing, high-poverty schools (McGee, 2003) provided the following common characteristics:

- exemplary principals who are leaders of learning, who are resourceful, who craft a culture of high standards and high expectations, and who model leadership daily
- hard-working, devoted staff with the highest expectations and who demand excellence
- policies, programs, and services that include parents in the school and educate parents in both parenting and in academic skills
- access to good nutrition and health care and ensuring schools are safe and secure
- funding of school-wide professional development on a single topic related to school improvement planning
- local and state assessment data were used to improve teaching and learning
- frequent celebrations and ceremonies
- strong early childhood programs
- early literacy practices, early intervention programs, access to books in the classroom, and formal recognition of reading progress a top priority
- ready access to a host of after school, before school, and Saturday programs
- summer school for most students
- technology to enhance learning and as a tool for analyzing and charting data
- school improvement plans focused on a small number of improvement initiatives that are embraced, supported, and sustained by the entire school community.

Another study, the Illinois Best Practice Study (National Center for Educational Accountability, 2004) identified practices associated with student achievement by comparing high-performing and average-performing schools in Illinois. District, school, and classroom practices were described for five themes:

- Curriculum and academic goals
- Staff selection, leadership, and capacity building
- Instructional programs, practices, and arrangements
- Monitoring, compilation, analysis, and use of data
- Recognition, intervention, and adjustments

The current study found similar characteristics in the 2003 award-winning Illinois schools as noted in these studies. Through the interviews with the principals, this study aimed to help identify which of the characteristics were most critical in improving academic performance.

Building Capacity for Change

In addition to identifying the strategies used by the award-winning schools, this study investigated the strategies used to build capacity for change within the schools and the capacity to sustain improved academic achievement. Schools vary in the degree of change needed and in their propensity for change. Some schools have strong leadership in place, but need to update their curriculum and instructional methods. Other schools may need to address problems in leadership and professional development. Change does not happen by itself, and whether or not the necessary changes will occur successfully is often based on the school's capacity for transformation. One topology for change described five types of schools (Fink & Balow, 2001, p. 2):

- *The Moving School* is effective and has the capacity to change. The challenge for the staff of a moving school is to maintain momentum.
- *The Cruising School* appears effective because the students do well on external tests but the school lacks the capacity to change and is, therefore, not adding value. Such schools usually are in more affluent areas. The quality of student achievement masks significant problems in the teaching and learning process of the school. The challenge of leadership is to get such schools first to recognize there is a problem.
- *The Struggling School* has the will and the capacity to change but at the moment is not considered effective. It is often confused with a sinking school and prematurely challenged by external agencies. Struggling schools need considerable outside support to build on a genuine desire to improve.
- *A Sinking School* is neither effective nor capable of change. It requires radical surgery.
- *A Strolling School* is internally quite uneven because aspects of the school are effective but in total the school is underperforming. Many secondary schools fit this description. Some departments may be excellent, some mediocre, and others quite poor. Change is occurring, but very slowly.

In this study, this topology was used to examine individual schools to identify which types of schools received the academic achievement and improvement recognitions. The high performing, high-poverty schools are often *struggling schools*, which, through time and resources, were successful in implementing complex, interwoven strategies that involved widespread, deep-structure change.

Through comprehensive, deep-structure changes, the school builds inherent capacity to support and continuously improve student learning. All schools may not need comprehensive change, but most do need to build capacity in specific areas. *What it Takes: 10 Capacities for Initiating and Sustaining School Improvement* (NIREL, 2000) describes three thematic areas, subdivided into specific capacities:

- *Foundational Capacities*
  Enhancing energy flow among staff
  Creating collective purpose
  Strengthening and evolving culture

- *Organizational Capacities*
  Teaming
  Creating structures for decentralized decision making
  Making structural changes
  Piloting

- *Learning and Resource Management Capacities*
  Creating and maintaining a learning ethic
  Bringing in information and skills
  Orchestrating resources and managing distractions

As in the other studies, the Illinois schools in this research varied in which capacities they developed and how they developed them. Given the variety of characteristics of exemplary schools and the different paths schools take in building capacity, there is not one step-by-step guide on how to improve student academic achievement. We can learn, however, from the stories of schools that did make progress and showed the mission was possible.

Study Methodology

In 2003-2004, the Illinois State Board of Education and Northern Illinois University piloted two new awards recognizing Illinois schools for exceptional academic progress. Schools winning these awards constituted the pool for the study. See Appendix B: Lists of Schools.

> The 27 *Spotlight Schools* are high-poverty, high-performing schools in which at least 50 percent of the students were low income in 2002 and 2003; at least 50 percent of the students met or exceeded standards in reading and in math in 2002; at least 60 percent of the students met or exceeded standards in reading and math in 2003; and made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2003.

> The 100 *Academic Improvement Award* schools also made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2003 and showed at least a 7.5 percent improvement in scores between 2002-2003 or at least a 15 percent improvement between 2001 and 2003 or earned removal from the state Academic Warning List or School Improvement Status.

The 121 award-winning schools (some schools received both awards) are located throughout Illinois (See Appendix C: Location of Schools) and represent every kind of school: large and small; regular and charter; all funding levels; urban, suburban, and rural; low- performing and high-performing; elementary, middle, and high schools (See Appendix D: Demographic Characteristics of Schools). The majority of the schools were elementary schools.
They ranged from schools moved off the Watch List to high-performance schools with almost 90 percent of the students meeting standards.

This study focused on those strategies deemed by the principals as most critical to the success of their schools, the implementation of the strategies, and the critical elements needed for the strategies to work. Four data-collection methods were used: interviews with principals of the award-winning schools (69 principals, 57% response rate; See Appendix E: Principal Interview Questions); dialogues with a subset of *Spotlight* principals; review of materials submitted by the principals; and informal follow-up discussions with selected principals and teachers. Overall, interviews and/or materials from 79 schools (65%) provided data for this study. The responding schools had similar characteristics to the pool of 121 schools (See Appendix D). Data analysis included identifying trends and patterns and differences in approaches used by schools due to size, poverty, location, or level of instruction.

Because interview and discussion data were collected using open-ended questions, percentages do not reflect the number of schools with a specific characteristic; rather, they indicate the percentage of schools at which that characteristic was identified as a critical component of academic improvement. For example, four principals, representing 6 percent of the respondents, could cite a specific curriculum as being critical to their schools' academic improvement. This should not be interpreted as 6 percent of the schools using the specific curriculum.

What Worked?

This study affirmed the shared characteristics of exemplary schools identified in previous studies (e.g., Corallo & McDonald, 2001; National Center for Educational Accountability, 2004; McGee, 2003; NASBE, 2002; NIREL, 2000; and Stoll & Myers, 1998) and summarized six actions deemed as most critical for improving academic performance by at least 50 percent of the responding principals of the award-winning schools:

- *Create a positive learning environment focused on the student*
- *Build leadership within the school to support ongoing improvement*
- *Establish a quality teaching team*
- *Deliver instruction based on individual students' needs*
- *Involve parents and the community*
- *Provide resources to support improvement*

Identifying the characteristics of exemplary schools is a vital first step; however, as several principals noted that what they did sounded so simple, almost common sense. But it was not simple and took years to accomplish. What they did is important, but how they did it is the real story.

The "real story" is how the six actions interact to provide sustaining change and increased academic performance. Many of the low-performing, high-poverty schools implemented massive, comprehensive changes over time. The structural change needed in these schools went beyond a checklist of characteristics and involved much more than increasing parent involvement or changing a reading series.

These six actions, working together, provide the necessary framework for sustained academic improvement. See Figure 3: Model for Sustained Academic Improvement.

Figure 3. Model for Sustained Academic Improvement

A school focused on students strives to deliver instruction based on individual students' needs and finds ways to continuously improve learning and teaching. The success of this endeavor is based on the availability of human, fiscal, and facility resources; professional development opportunities for the school community; and assessment data. With these supports in place, the school is positioned to (1) build leadership capacity within the school to support ongoing improvement; (2) create a teaching team capable of delivering quality instruction; and (3) maximize parent and community involvement. These six actions, working together, provide the necessary framework for sustained academic improvement. The principals offered advice on how to implement each of the individual critical actions, as summarized in the Figure 4.

Figure 4:   Six Critical Actions for Academic Improvement

Create a positive learning environment focused on the student.
- Create a shared vision of where the school is headed.
- Assess the climate and culture of the school, the families, and the community.
- Establish strong relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and the community.
- Decide how you can get from where you are to where you need to be.
- Prepare for the long-haul; meaningful change will take time and be ongoing.

Build leadership within the school to support ongoing improvement.
- Establish the role of the principal.
- Build teams for shared responsibility.
- Make data-driven decisions.
- Concentrate on a few initiatives with high probability of making large differences.
- Hold everyone accountable for improvement.
- Celebrate successes as the school continues to improve.

Establish a quality teaching team.
- Build and maintain a quality teaching team. Hire wisely.
- Align the curriculum to state standards, set grade-levels goals and benchmarks.
- Provide time for teachers to plan at grade-level, school-level, and district-level.
- Value and reward hardworking, dedicated teachers willing to take controlled risks.

Deliver instruction based on individual students' needs.
- Use data to set high expectations for each student and monitor progress.
- Use best practices, research-based methods, and technology to maximize learning time, especially in early childhood, reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Keep class sizes and instructional groups small.
- Implement supplemental before school, after school, and tutoring programs, especially to help those falling behind.

Involve parents and the community.
- Maximize parent and community involvement. Include them in improvement planning.
- If some parents are not participating, determine why and what you can do to involve them.

Provide resources to support improvement.
- Use state, regional, educational, and professional resources.
- Provide professional growth activities for administrators, teachers, and staff.
- Provide reliable, valid data for improvement plans for the school and for individual students.

The Six Critical Actions

Each of the six actions is described in more detail based on the data collected in this study. The critical actions and strategies were aggregated from the surveys and discussions with principals. Because the principals identified the actions which they deemed most critical to their schools' success, the percentages reported do not indicate the percent of all of the schools with the described characteristics; rather, the percentages indicate schools in which the principal considered the action critical to academic improvement.

Create a positive learning environment focused on the student

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Of the six actions, the most critical and necessary condition is that the school has a positive learning environment focused on the student. As one principal stated, "Without a common vision that focuses on the student, none of the other actions are even possible or meaningful."[1]

In the award-winning schools, teaching is not an activity that occurs behind closed doors; the entire school focuses on helping students learn. "Our school works as a team –the custodians, the lunchroom, the resource staff, career service, parents, and teachers – because if the school fails, we all fail, and we need each others' support to succeed." [2]

Some of the schools historically had such a climate; other principals, however, had to move their schools from teacher-focused to student-focused schools. In doing so, the teachers redefined their role: "The staff put on new glasses and started looking at student learning as their responsibility. They changed their way of teaching so more students would learn." [3]

In order to create the necessary learning environment, principals served as managers of change, often comprehensive change. As with other organizations, schools have deep-seated traditions that can be difficult to change. A common pattern was found in the steps noted most often as the ones taken by the principals in moving their schools toward a positive learning environment:
- Create a shared vision of where the school is headed.
- Assess the climate and culture of the school, the families, and the community.
- Establish strong relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and the community.
- Decide how you can get from where you are to where you need to be.
- Prepare for the long-haul; meaningful change will take time and be ongoing.

Create a shared vision of where the school is headed.
Nearly all of the principals of the award-winning schools work with staff, students, parents, and the community to create schools with the following traits:
- Everything at the school is driven by a passion for students and doing what is best for them.
- There is a true belief that all students can learn and meet high expectations.
- There is a climate of open communication, mutual respect, trust, congeniality, caring, and helping each other.
- Everyone is held responsible for academic improvement.

- Appreciation and recognition are given to staff and students.
- There is a positive, can-do spirit that embraces change and trying new approaches.

Principals summarized the culture using phrases such as "a school that you would want to attend," "students know that everyone cares about them," "teachers purposely build rapport with students," and "teachers feel it is a privilege to teach the at-risk students." [4,5,6,7]

These characteristics are the driving force in determining what schools need to do. A culture cannot be imposed by the principal; it needs to be owned by the administration, staff, students, parents, and community. Principals found various ways to involve the entire school community in changing culture. "The staff and I have been together for over 10 years, and we have complained and mumbled about why our students were on the bottom. Then, we started working together to make change, always looking for what works better – best! Over the last few years, we have not changed as much, but made a commitment to do what we feel is the best for our students. We have developed our own Mission Statement and Motto where RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY leads to RESULTS." [8]

Assess the climate and culture of the school, the families, and the community.
Each of the award-winning schools is a unique combination of demographic, geographic, academic, social, and political characteristics. Over one-half of the principals advised that administrators fully understand the school and community culture before initiating change. Principals from large metropolitan areas were more likely to mention the need to understand the politics of the region as well.

In order to assess the culture, over three-fourths of the principals consider it critical to be visible within the school and community. They know what was going on in and out of the classroom, the academic performance data for the school, and the strengths of the school on which to build. They walk the halls often, visit classrooms, talk with students, meet parents as they drop off and pick up the students, and meet regularly with staff. They are well-known in the community, especially in rural areas, and build support among community leaders. As one administrator noted, "You need to know the values of the families and you need to know your data. It is only then that you know what you can change easily and what will not change so easily."[9]

Establish strong relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and the community.
Before implementing changes, approximately 85 percent of the principals were careful to build strong working relationships. This was accomplished by establishing open, honest lines of communication and always looking for ways to build trust and confidence. It was important that the staff view the principal as competent, consistent, and focused on what was best for the students. Principals identified several actions they consider critical in creating and maintaining a positive, supportive approach:
- Patiently lead and mentor
- Obtain materials needed by the teaching staff
- Hire teachers who support your vision
- Listen and take supportive actions
- Identify teachers who exemplify the vision and enlist their help
- Model desired relationship behaviors

- Have teachers visit each others' rooms to better understand what each other does and to build relationships among teachers
- Serve as a servant leader
- Implement the FISH! approach (Lundin et al, 2000)

In addition to building relationships with staff and community, 40 percent of the principals noted that it was important for school staff to build rapport with the students and address student discipline issues. The school and student relationship needed to become one of self-responsibility and respect. Most importantly, it was important for schools to handle behavioral issues consistently and with a common vocabulary across all of the grade levels. Not all schools reported the discipline approach used; however, the following methods were noted as being critical to the school's improvement: Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (4 schools), Character Counts! (2 schools), Love and Logic (1 school), or discipline program unique to the school (6 schools).

Decide how you can get from where you are to where you need to be.

In general, principals knew where the school needed to be and worked backwards to identify how best to get there. Nearly all of the principals used an inclusive process and worked to build leadership capacity. Over half of the principals indicated that it was critical to have teams analyze data, identify strengths and areas of concern, and plot multi-year, step-by-step journeys for implementing changes. Many of the schools underwent a process similar to that described by Kotter (2000, p. 2): "push urgency up, put together a guiding team, create the vision and strategies, effectively communicate the vision and strategies, remove barriers to action, accomplish short-term wins, keep pushing for wave after wave of change until the work is done, and finally, create a new culture to make new behavior stick."

For most of the principals, the "how do you get there" could only be accomplished through *building leadership capacity* within the school and *establishing quality teaching teams*, both described below as separate action items. Over half of the principals made comments such as: "You need teamwork"; "You cannot do it from above"; "You don't have the time or energy to do it alone"; "The staff has to own it and to own it they have to be participants in deciding what to do."

Prepare for the long haul; meaningful change will take time and be ongoing.

There was consensus among the principals that each school needs to begin where it is and understand that improving instruction and student learning is an ongoing, never-ending process. The process takes time to fully implement, with principals indicating a minimum of three years, and often five years or more. Considering schools enter at all different stages from *moving schools* to *sinking schools,* lasting, systemic change will not happen immediately.

Approximately 10 percent of the principals mentioned the need to let the staff go through stages of grieving. Teachers, especially long-term veterans, often went through a grieving process—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and hope. Principals noted that it was important to let the staff work through a period of mourning but not wallow in a pity-party.

For some schools, the amount of change needed was great. By taking carefully planned steps, the change did not become overwhelming. One principal offered this advice: "Don't try to change too many things at once. Figure out what the data tells you is the most significant area of

improvement. This is where you should begin. Once you have developed a plan, stay the course. Do not give up if you do not see immediate results."[10]

Build leadership within the school to support ongoing improvement.

Creating a positive learning environment is a first step; it is also important to create an organizational structure with the leadership capacity to identify problems proactively, solve problems, and initiative workable solutions to sustain ongoing improvement.

Leadership capacity is important because stakeholders who feel part of the decision-making structure are more apt to buy into the changes needed. In addition, a school with strong leadership capacity will continuously improve even during changes in academic leadership.

As noted in the NIREL study (2000), teaming and distributed decision-making are fundamental to creating organizational capacity. The principals of the award-winning schools worked diligently to build leadership capacity within their schools and offered the following strategies:

- Establish the role of the principal
- Build teams for shared responsibility
- Make data-driven decisions
- Concentrate on a few initiatives with high probability of making large differences
- Hold everyone accountable for improvement
- Celebrate successes as the school continues to improve

Establish the role of the principal.

Because exceptional leadership is the most pervasive element in determining academic improvement, the role of the principal is critical (NASBE, 2002). Some principals reported their role changed over the years. At first, they spent hours solving problems for teachers, now they provide teachers the tools needed for them to solve the problems. Other principals noted that they changed their leadership style to be more collaborative and inclusive. For others, the principal's role expanded to be academic leader, building manager, and lead change agent, often causing them to seek assistance from their colleagues to learn how to deal with new responsibilities.

Each principal has his or her own style and management techniques; however, they share some common characteristics: they value learning; set high expectations for themselves, staff, and students; and model leadership. Each shoulders broad responsibilities and delegates based on the quality of the staff and the school's culture. They assess situations and adjust leadership to best fit the situation, admitting that there is a fine line between micromanagement and stepping in when there is a need to re-adjust the course.

The principals often were consumed with day-to-day activities with limited extra time, but they maintained an energetic, enthusiastic, and risk-taking attitude.

According to the principals participating in this study, the following characteristics are the most important leadership skills needed by a principal:

Principal Needs To:	% of Respondents
Establish student-centered, caring, congenial climate	60%
Build teams to share responsibility	57%
Establish open, two-way communication with all stakeholders- really listen	55%
Demonstrate support for teachers	28%
Encourage new ways of teaching	25%
Be involved, visible, know what is going on in each class	18%
Build trust and support from teachers	17%
Communicate vision for school	15%
Know when to intervene and make hard decisions	14%
Know the culture and community	11%
Hold everyone to high standards	11%
Celebrate success and give recognition	9%
Have positive, can-do attitude	9%
Have thick skin	6%
Motivate staff and students	6%
Help teachers grow	6%
Know research and best practices	6%
Know how to get help from district office	6%
Be flexible	5%
Be a diplomat	5%

The role of the principal is critical to school improvement; however, several of the award-winning schools had principals with less than three years at the school. Some of the previous principals had retired or moved on to other positions; however, other schools had new principals replacing one who had been let go within the past five years. As one principal stated, "You need staff and community buy-in. Without it, you can be history rather quickly."[11] Change agents are not always well received and can often have short tenures.

Build teams for shared responsibility.
Nearly all of the principals of the award-winning schools actively worked at building teams and involving staff in making decisions so the staff would "own" the actions that were needed to improve teaching and learning. "No one does anything because you tell him or her to. They need to own the need to have it done."[12] Virtually every school had dedicated, hard-working staff, eager to try new approaches because they were actively involved in the planning and decision making.

Principals mentioned several approaches to developing their teams. Several mentioned that building a team was the hardest thing they had to do. At first teachers taught with doors closed and often did not know what other teachers were doing. It took hard work and diligence to form teams.

Veteran principals described the process as beginning with a vision--sometimes from the principal, sometimes from the teachers, and sometimes by both—but a vision of wanting to do

what is best for the students. They advise other principals to talk about the vision openly at staff meetings. Talk about what it looks like at your school.

No matter which scenario begins the process, principals often spoke of the need to really listen to the staff and openly communicate with them. Principals mentioned that listening was the easiest part. The hardest part was being quiet and not pushing their ideas on the teachers. They needed to build support and trust before they could share their ideas about the school and what needed to change. They wanted the idea of change to come from the teachers. Each principal handled this "pressure versus support" paradox in the way that best suited his or her management style, the staff, and the school's culture.

According to the majority of principals, a key to success was to assess the staff members' commitment to the vision, especially to continuously improving instruction, before taking any action. For some principals, the teachers were immediately on board and ready to roll up their sleeves and look at change as a continual process. About one-third of the principals carefully surveyed the staff to find "kindred spirits" who could serve as a liaison between the principal and the teaching staff. These "kindred spirits" were used to better understand the school's culture, feelings of the staff, what could be changed, and what would be best to leave alone. The "kindred spirit" usually was a veteran teacher who had some rapport with the other teachers and excellent persuasive skills.

Nearly 20 percent of the responding principals would have "informal chats" with key teachers who had influence at the school. They would share their ideas first in these "chats" to see the reaction and to gauge whether or not the idea would be acceptable to the teachers. By listening to the teachers' reactions and getting their perspectives, the principals could better decide on how to proceed with the entire staff. Sometimes, the goal of the "chat" was to only plant an idea and watch if it would grow on its own.

About 40 percent of the responding principals used federal and state improvement mandates to stress the urgency for change. One administrator began by sharing the achievement data with the staff and asking, "Are you satisfied with this?"[13] Another principal challenges schools to "not just get off the list, but be an exceeds school".[14] Another principal of a school with declining test scores helped the staff realize that if they continued to do the same things, in the same way, they would continue to get the same results. She helped them see that they had to change the way they did business.

Approximately one-fourth of the principals began the process by sharing excerpts from research and professional books at staff meetings or special brown bag sessions. Many of the teachers had not read a professional book in years. The concepts were met with interest by some and with skepticism by others. Often principals would make the books available for checkout, and the teachers who followed up with the reading and were interested often became the "kindred spirits."

The books covered many topics, such as discipline, understanding poverty, and specific pedagogical methods. (See Appendix F: List of Professional Development Topics and Resources.) Some principals used the reading approach to educate everyone, even non-teaching staff.

No matter which approach was taken, the ultimate goal was to identify a team of staff who could be integrally involved with making decisions on what needed to be changed and how. Most of

the principals tied this improvement process to the school improvement plan; the school improvement plan became a map for the school, and no longer, something put in a drawer.

__Make data-driven decisions.__

Once the leadership team was created, principals needed a way to focus their teams on what were the most important things the school needed to do. Teams needed direction in narrowing their scope of work: "Closely examine all student achievement data and data trends and select one or two instructional targets. These targets need to be taken care of first. We are too often trapped into doing everything for everybody. Our energy and resources become overtaxed and depleted before we can affect any substantive change."[15] Another principal described the process as "controlled risk-taking--trying only those things we think will really help and work and test to see if they worked or not."[16]

Schools used three types of data to focus on the most important elements to improve and how to improve them: student achievement test scores, surveys, and research-based or best practices methods. "The principal can set and direct the process in such a way that the teachers look at the data and make the 'a-ha's' themselves.   They need to look and see that there is a need to change."[17] Student achievement test data was reviewed by each of the award-winning schools, and 69 percent of the principals noted that it was critical in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Approximately 10 percent of the principals mentioned the importance of using parent, staff, community, and/or student surveys in this process.

Once the need for change is accepted, schools look at ways to make meaningful change. Often, thinking beyond the status quo was not possible until the leadership team actually saw methods in action. Best practices and research-based methods, presented through shared reading of books, attendance at conferences or workshops, visiting other locations to observe the methods, and other professional development activities, helped activate this thinking process. It was important for teachers to see so they could believe that changes, whether small or large, could make appreciable differences. Once primed with examples from other schools and research, leadership teams brainstormed what would work in their school.

As principals described how data were used to create the school improvement plans, it became evident that schools progressed in the use of data, especially in who reviewed student achievement data and how it was used. At first, the principal and/or members of a leadership team reviewed the data and identified areas that were not performing up to standard, often as part of the school improvement planning process. Generalizations were based on aggregated data.

In the next stage, the data were used to help all teachers, and in some schools all of the staff, to assess the school. Professional development activities helped orient staff to a data-driven model and how to use data.

As more members of the school community viewed data, the depth of analysis changed as well. More in-depth analyses could pinpoint which specific cohorts needed to improve. At the same time, annual data did not provide the level of assessment needed. Multiple measures of student achievement were used, such as Iowa Basic Skills, SIT, STAR, PLAN, and QAR.

Data were needed to assess whether or not interventions worked. In some schools, the principals identified weekly, monthly, and/or quarterly goals. Assessments were implemented to track the progress of individual students. These imbedded, regular measures allow teachers to intervene with students at the first signs of distress and to monitor the effectiveness of new strategies they

implemented to help students learn. "Each quarter we test each student to see if that student has reached the benchmark. Teachers work with students and parents on immediate interventions for those students who did not reach the goal."[18]

Concentrate on a few initiatives with high probability of making large differences.

Most of the schools had multiple areas to improve; however, to address everything at once with quick fixes would not work. Successful schools plotted multi-year, step-by-step journeys for implementing necessary long-term changes and allocated the human, physical, and fiscal resources to achieve their goals. Data were used to evaluate progress; plans were adjusted as needed.

For the majority of schools, the primary emphasis was to improve reading and/or writing, with mathematics the second priority. Reading task forces, literacy teams, and curriculum teams were most often used to identify the specific annual initiatives. In some schools, these team members would take the recommended actions to the entire faculty for review and comment. In other schools, the entire teaching staff was directly involved in deciding the specific initiatives for the year.

Hold everyone accountable for improvement.

At first, some schools focused improvement only on the grade levels tested as part of the state program; however, that quickly changed. "It's not just a third grade thing. Everyone needs to commit to improvement and be held accountable for doing their part. We are in this together to help all students learn."[19]

Nearly half of the schools set classroom goals based on school goals and implemented ways to track the progress of students. Principals reported walking around, going into classrooms, knowing what is to be taught in each class, offering constructive comments on how to improve instruction, providing support, and helping teachers grow. They monitored classrooms to make sure the correct curriculum was taught.

Along with accountability, nearly all of the principals considered it critical to provide appropriate professional development opportunities for the teachers: you cannot hold staff accountable for something they have not had a chance to learn how to do.

Celebrate successes as the school continues to improve.

Improvement is on ongoing process, and several principals knew that they had so much that needed to be changed and that if small victories were not celebrated along the way, the students and staff would throw up their arms in despair and give up. One-fourth of the principals considered celebrations as critical to school improvement. Morale could not be ignored, and celebrations were used as morale boosters which kept the continuous improvement process moving.

Schools varied in how they celebrated successes. For students, various awards were given for attendance, grades, reading books, and test scores. Special news broadcasts, continuous running PowerPoints, pictures, theme days, and trophies were some of the other ways to celebrate.

Establish a quality teaching team.

There was a consensus that the action is in the classroom, and what goes on there is what counts. The vast majority of principals attributed the school's academic improvement to the staff members whom they described as dedicated, hard-working people who really cared about the students. In other words, these staff members embodied the characteristics of the positive learning environment described in the first critical action. Once these values are embodied, teachers are more inclined to make decisions in the classroom based on what is best for students and to continually look at ways to improve instruction. This orientation to teaching transcends implementing a specific textbook or approach; it is the cornerstone of what it takes for the school to be flexible, continually trying new approaches, looking at results, and planning accordingly for future improvement.

Build and maintain a quality teaching team. Hire wisely.

When building a quality teaching team, principals looked for individuals who valued all students, understood the school's culture, were hard-working, knowledgeable of content and pedagogy, and set high goals for all students and themselves. They also worked to place the right teacher into the best grade/student level.

Nearly 30 percent of the principals mentioned that it was critical for teachers to work together to form a coordinated teaching team. Good team members are aggressive learners who apply what they learn in the classroom and share what they learn with colleagues.

Some principals had a strong teaching team, others provided training and built a team. No matter what stage the school was in, principals used two strategies most often to build and maintain the quality team. First, when vacancies occurred whether by attrition or dismissals, the principals hired wisely. The new teacher had to share the vision, be an excellent teacher, put learning first, be motivated and motivating, communicate effectively, and fit into the school culture. Tenure was given to only those of the highest quality. Second, principals assessed the situation and provided professional development activities that would purposely build and strengthen the team.

Some principals extended the teaching team to include all employees. Examples included bus drivers tutoring students during down-time, and lunchroom workers helping students to read signs.

As facilitators, mentors, and guides, the majority of principals mentioned spending significant amounts of time in supporting and encouraging the teaching staff. Some principals had to be more prescriptive than others. Several principals mentioned that they had to grow a thicker skin and deal with some teachers who did not like the extra work and commitment. The award-winning principals kept asking the teaching team, "If it helps student achievement then shouldn't we at least try it?"

Align the curriculum to state standards; set grade-level goals and benchmarks.

Over 85 percent of the principals attributed improved performance to the alignment of the curriculum to state standards and teachers adhering to the curriculum. Several principals described their staff as excellent teachers but they had not always been teaching the appropriate content. In aligning the curriculum to the state standards, these schools found that some topics

were duplicated in several grades and some topics were never covered. Once the teachers focused on the curriculum aligned to the state standards, these schools saw their test scores increase.

Teachers received information and/or training on the Illinois State Standards and many posted the standards in their classrooms. Most importantly they examined their curriculum. "We looked at what everyone was teaching, why they were teaching it, and if we should be teaching it in that grade."[20] It is important for teachers to know within the grade level that they have coordinated instruction and that across grade levels topics are covered in an appropriate manner—each teacher needed to understand the horizontal and vertical integration of the curriculum.

Principals from larger schools were more apt to mention the role of the curriculum coordinator in this process. In smaller schools and districts, the principal was more apt to provide direct leadership for the alignment of the curriculum.

Middle schools needed to adjust the curriculum to match the ISAT test. Historically, American History was taught in 8th grade, and 7th grade concentrated on geography. To cover the appropriate content before the ISAT, students in 7th grade receive half a year instruction in geography and half in American History.

Some schools took further action in establishing grade-level expectations and systematically used formative and summative evaluation to assess whether the expectations were met. Teachers work with students and parents on immediate interventions for those students who did not reach the goals.

Provide time for teachers to plan at grade-level, school-level, and district-level.

When the teachers taught more autonomously, there was little need to meet to coordinate instruction; however, to maintain the integration and alignment of the curriculum and delivery of instruction required significantly more time for teachers to plan and discuss instructional strategies. Over three-fourths of the principals identified the critical need to provide time for teachers to work together regularly. Many principals changed the format of staff meetings to allow more time for team planning. The amount of planning time varied depending on the level of instruction and the format of professional development activities at the school. Furthermore, budgetary and collective bargaining issues complicated the issue.

Even though the increased interaction among teachers began as part of the alignment of the curriculum, principals reported that it grew to include peer coaching, sharing of best practices, and increased morale. Many of the award-winning schools routinely have teachers observe each other or at other schools in the district. One school created their own "best practices" manual based on each others strategies. Principals reported that teachers became more open with each other. As the teachers shared with each other and observed each other, there was almost a sigh of relief that they didn't have to do this alone—they could do it together.

Value and reward hardworking, dedicated teachers willing to take controlled risks.

The principals encouraged and supported teachers who modeled the student-focused approach and epitomized continuous improvement. Verbal recognition was the most often form of acknowledgement. Some principals maintained funds to help exemplary teachers with additional materials and professional development opportunities.

Deliver instruction based on individual students' needs.

The award-winning schools constantly look at ways to improve instruction. When asked which changes were most critical, the principals reported deep-seated philosophical changes as well as pedagogical changes. "What we did in the past was not working. We needed to change how we taught."[21] Another principal described the critical action as: "We realized that if we wanted to improve academic achievement, we needed to start looking at how to improve each students' individual achievement. In the past, we identified 'at-risk' as those students who were way below the average. We began to look at those students who were just below average and average."[22] Interventions with those students would help keep them from slipping lower, which usually happens when it was too late to make a difference.

The role of the teacher changed as well. A majority of principals related that it was the school's responsibility to teach in ways that students learn. This often meant changing instructional delivery from whole classroom approaches to more small group and individualized instruction. It changed the role of the teacher from imparter of knowledge to a learning facilitator who is responsible, along with the learner, to ensure learning occurs.

"Changing the way we teach" and refocusing instruction from whole group to individual students had ramifications on many aspects of the delivery of instruction. Four strategies emerged from the interviews and surveys:
- Use data to set high expectations for each student and monitor progress
- Use best practices, research-based methods, and technology to maximize learning time, especially in early childhood, reading, writing, and mathematics
- Keep class sizes and instructional groups small
- Implement supplemental before school, after school, and tutoring programs, especially to help those falling behind

Use data to set high expectations for each student and monitor progress.
In order to reach the NCLB and state mandates, teachers in the award-winning schools established high expectations for each student. Teachers became more attuned to the exact achievement level of each student, especially in reading, writing, and mathematics. Additional assessments tracked the progress of individual students, especially for those not meeting expectations.

In retrospect, 12 percent of the principals mentioned they should have used the student achievement data sooner, especially analyses to identify areas needing additional instruction for individual students.

Use best practices, research-based methods, and technology to maximize learning time, especially in early childhood, reading, writing, and mathematics.
When award-winning schools decided to make a curricular or instructional change, they looked to best practices and researched-based methods for guidance. Decisions concerning practices and methods to implement were made at the local and district levels.

Nearly 60 percent of the elementary school principals emphasized two strategies: increase instruction time and focus on literacy skills. This was accomplished by many of the elementary schools by creating a literacy block of time in the morning, which very rarely, if ever, was interrupted. During this time, all students were engaged in literacy activities. A few principals also noted the following actions to minimize interruptions:

- Eliminated or minimize morning announcements
- Eliminated or minimized the number of field trips during the block
- Eliminated or minimized the number of assemblies during the block
- Attendance taken electronically or office staff collected from doors
- Teachers immediately started instruction with daily reading activity

When asked which practices were most important to improve academic performance, principals offered several generic actions their schools had taken, including the following:

- Increased use of technology in instruction
- Students practice taking tests similar to ISAT/ACT
- Use of enrichment and supplemental materials
- Emphasis on critical thinking
- Emphasis on hands-on and manipulatives
- Emphasis on cooperative learning
- Fine Arts, PE, and library necessary to academic improvement
- Emphasized engaged learning
- Thematic units important
- Teach to learning styles
- Staff given instructional materials for multiple grade levels
- Elimination of coloring papers
- More work for students to take home to do
- Cross-grade activities
- Use of spiral curricula
- Books for all students on the first day

Principals offered specific recommendations by content area, especially for reading, writing, science, mathematics, and for subgroups. See Appendix G: List of Curricular and Instructional Changes.

Reading and Writing

Over two-thirds of the principals mentioned changes to reading and/or writing instruction during the past three years. Reading was viewed as the core subject, and 14 percent of the principals described ways in which reading and/or writing was taught across all subjects, especially science and social studies, and, at a few schools, in physical education as well.

Literacy instruction with a phonetic approach to reading (47%) and a balanced literacy approach (32%) were cited most often as the critical instructional practices which improved academic performance. Twelve percent of the principals noted the importance of having literacy coaches and specialists to help improve teaching and student learning. The following literacy practices were mentioned by the principals as being critical to school improvement:

- Emphasis on phonetic approach to reading
- Four-Blocks or Balanced Literacy program
- More books in classroom

- Reading incentive programs
- Changing the reading series/program
- Accelerated Reader
- Reading First
- Guided reading at centers
- Readers' Workshop
- Sustained silent reading in upper grades
- Open Court
- Lunch used for reading
- Book-it program
- Mandatory book reports
- Use Gates Reading test to monitor progress
- On Solid Ground
- Reading skill drills daily
- Reading improvement team
- Reading Counts
- Readers Theatre and Poetry
- Questions-Answer Relationship Strategies (QAR)
- NIU Pride program
- Individual reading/writing everyday
- Houghton Mifflin reading series
- Harcourt reading series
- Fountas and Pinnell approach
- DAR pre and post tests
- Departmentalized reading
- Break Through to Literacy
- Book Busters
- Chicago's Reading Initiative

Over one-third of the principals reported an increased emphasis placed on writing, mostly in response to low performance of students on the state test. Specific strategies used to improve the writing scores included

- Increased amount of writing required of students
- Higher expectations for students' writing achievement
- Use of Four-Square to specifically improve writing
- Teachers learning and applying the state rubric and indicators
- New writing curriculum based on state's expectations
- Use of extended response
- Use of journals
- Use of portfolios
- Weekly, or more often, required writing samples
- Use of graphic organizers
- Use of Traits of Writing
- Use of Power Writing
- Use of AlphaSmarts

Early Literacy

Overall, one-third of the elementary school principals emphasized the importance of early literacy programs. Nearly all elementary school principals with lower-level grades found these programs critical to academic improvement.

Individual principals noted the following critical characteristics of their programs:
- All day kindergarten
- Phonetic awareness approach
- Daily oral language
- Waterford program
- Early Start classroom housed in the elementary school
- Pre-kindergarten special education students instructed with regular class with team teaching
- Extended day kindergarten
- Reading aid works with kindergarten students
- Students exit kindergarten as readers
- Encourage parents to bring pre-kindergarten students to school
- Parent Center where families can check out books

The Parent Liaison was mentioned by two principals as a critical component of their early childhood program. The liaison visits families with young children and provides them with information and training materials on how to help their children learn and become integrated into the school.

Mathematics

Approximately 32 percent of the principals mentioned a focus on mathematics. Various principals attributed academic improvement to the adoption of the Every Day mathematics series, Accelerated Mathematics, and Sexton mathematics. Principals also mentioned the increased use of hands-on strategies in mathematics instruction, implementation of a more problem-solving approach, and exploration of the use of team teaching for mathematics for the first time. Other strategies mentioned by individual principals are in Appendix G.

High school principals noted the need for calculus students to brush up on algebra before taking the state tests.

Science

Fifteen percent of the principals offered comments concerning science instruction, including more hands-on and/or lab instruction and changes made in the curriculum. One principal described the following approach: "Sciences processes and vocabulary are introduced in grades kindergarten through fourth. Teachers are asked to include hands-on experiments and use the science vocabulary that goes with those experiments. The goal is to have students familiar with concepts of science processes and the vocabulary that explains it."[23]

Strategies for Subgroups

One-fourth of the principals commented on strategies for improving the academic performance of subgroup populations. Half of these principals noted that it was critical to use of data to identify students needing interventions and to monitor the progress of these students.

Strong bilingual education was noted by 30 percent of principals. One principal mentioned that English and Spanish versions of the same basal reader are used for instruction.

Both push-in and pull-out programs were described, with most of the comments describing a combination of both approaches but a propensity towards including students whenever possible in the regular classroom. Smaller class sizes, differentiated instruction, early childhood programs, and supplemental programs were noted as approaches to help not only the subgroups but the entire student body.

Keep classes' sizes and instructional groups small.
Over one-third of the elementary school principals attributed their schools' academic improvement to deliberate efforts to minimize the number of students in a class. Different strategies were used to accomplish this including
- Innovative uses of grants
- Elimination of administrative positions to afford teaching positions

Over half of the elementary principals described the use of small instructional groupings, whether through differentiated instruction, flexible groupings, or the use of additional adults in the classroom, including additional teaching aids.

Implement supplemental before school, after school, and tutoring programs, especially helping those falling behind.
Over half of the responding principals mentioned the importance of supplemental programs, especially for those students who need extra help.

Tutoring programs, often staffed with volunteers, were noted by 42 percent of the principals as a necessary approach to providing additional one-on-one assistance to student at-risk of falling behind. Volunteers included parents, retirees, community members, and students from local colleges. After school programs were identified as critical by 36 percent of the principals. Grants were most often used to fund these programs, and many were staffed by volunteers.

Eight principals specifically noted how critical summer programs are, especially Summer Bridges. Concern was expressed over the loss of funding for Summer Bridges because of rising test scores, where improvements were limited and fragile.

Involve parents and the community.

Of all of the six critical actions, this one, the involvement of parents and the community, provided the most challenges to the award-winning schools. Over half of the principals mentioned each of the following two strategies, described below:

- Maximize parent and community involvement. Include them in improvement planning.
- If some parents are not participating, determine why and what you can do to involve them.

Maximize parent and community involvement. Include them in improvement planning.

Over three-fourths of the principals indicated that they pursue parent and community involvement "any way they can." There was a consensus that it was critical to keep parents and the community informed and to make them feel part of the school.

Most of the schools had some form of a newsletter or other regular communication to the parents. Several principals mentioned using the school's website as a major means of communication with parents.

Principals of one-third of the schools praised the work of the parent-teacher organization in getting parents involved, providing volunteers for activities such as tutoring and trips, and funding special projects at the school.

Principals often described the importance of having parents on committees and/or involved in the school improvement planning. A few principals mentioned that parent volunteers were used to help with student clubs.

Other strategies deemed critical to the school's success are listed below:
- Evening programs, such as Reading Night, Family Nights
- Provide information to parents on how to help their children learn
- Grant funds critical to keeping parents involved
- Use of Parent Coordinator, Family Resources Coordinator, Nurse, or Outreach Person
- Information provided to parents on state testing
- Hosted open house
- Regular news releases to newspaper
- Use of school facility for community functions

Community organizations played another vital role for 87 percent of the award-winning schools. These schools, especially those with students in poverty, worked with the community to help provide food, clothing, health services, and other services for students in need. Faculty and staff team to do whatever is necessary to help meet the non-educational needs of students, e.g., get glasses, purchase clothes, supply personal products, etc. Schools with Title IV grants mentioned the importance of drug and safe school programs coordinated with the law enforcement agencies. For more detailed information, See Appendix H: List of Parent and Community Involvement Activities.

If some parents are not participating, determine why and what you can do to involve them.

The vast majority of principals are looking for ways to better involve parents with the school. One school increased participation through a formal method to collect and maintain accurate parent contact information and by starting the scheduling of parent conferences early in the year. Nearly one-third of the principals mentioned the busy lifestyles of the parents as a barrier to their participation in the school.

Approximately, 15 percent of the schools, especially those with parents with limited educational backgrounds, noted the difficulty of getting parents to school because the parents are not

comfortable in a school setting. A few of these schools are discussing ways to go to the parents: If they won't come to us, how can we go to them?

> ## *Provide resources to support improvement.*

A variety of resources were used to attain the levels of academic improvement achieved by the award-winning schools, and resources will be needed to sustain the growth. Unfortunately, over 20 percent of the responding principals mentioned that they are losing funding for programs instrumental in achieving the academic improvement. Most of these schools are facing decreased funding because they no longer qualify for grants and special funding due to the improvement in the test scores or changing school demographics.

The levels of academic improvement realized by the award-winning schools required funding for new materials and supplies; professional development of administrators, faculty, and staff; and, where possible, the addition of personnel, most often literacy coaches and specialists or family liaisons. Nearly half of the responding principals identified grants as the source of funding used most often to fund these supports, especially the Title grants, Reading Improvement, Summer Bridges, Classroom Reduction Grant, REA Grant, Comprehensive School Reform, technology grants, Learn and Serve, and Small Rural Schools.

Three actions, each identified by over half of the principals, emerged as critical in attaining and sustaining academic improvement:
- Use state, regional, educational, and professional resources
- Provide professional growth activities for administrators, teachers, and staff
- Provide reliable, valid data for improvement plans for the school and for individual students

Use state, regional, educational, and professional resources.
Principals were asked how important the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), their Regional Office of Education (ROE), colleges and universities, and professional groups were in academic improvement of their schools. Of those reporting the use of these resources (n=45), the ROE (49%), colleges and universities (44%), ISBE (18%), and professional groups (13%) were found to be important.

The ROEs were mentioned most often as being the most useful resource. Nearly half of the principals used the ROEs for professional development for themselves and their faculty, and nine percent looked to the ROEs for assistance with grants. Several principals mentioned the willingness of the ROEs to do on-site development activities, which was cost-effective, and should be considered more in the future.

Colleges and universities provided student teachers/interns (44%), graduate courses, shared grants, and other professional development workshops and training.

ISBE was most important for grants, professional development, and the website.

Professional groups mentioned as helpful included the Illinois Principal Association, International Reading Association, Illinois Reading Council, Association of Illinois Middle Schools, principal groups within the district, teacher bargaining associations, ASCD, the Higher Learning Commission-NCA, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Candidates (NBPTC).

Approximately 10 percent of the principals noted the importance of the district office in providing fiscal support and professional development activities: we have a "dedicated, knowledgeable team of district administrators who keep abreast of current practices for student improvement of achievement and do all that is necessary to provide the teaching staff with what is needed."[22]

Provide professional growth activities for administrators, teachers, and staff.

To sustain academic improvement, administrators, teachers, and staff need on-going professional development which support the vision of the school and its school improvement plan. Providing these opportunities in times of budget and grant reductions is challenging. In the future, more innovative, cost-effective professional development opportunities will be needed.

Many principals indicated that it was critical to maximize professional development by requiring teachers to report back to their colleagues what they learn at workshops and conferences, often modeling techniques and approaches.

Approximately 15 percent of the responding principals advised that professional development activities must be practical and involve modeling or hands-on implementation of strategies for in-class use.

Establishing learning communities within the school was the approach mentioned as most critical by 5 percent of the principals.

Some principals specifically mentioned the lack of training for principals to help them monitor, support and sustain the changes in teaching in learning. Implementing grants took additional time, resources, creative thinking, and trouble shooting, and some principals felt they had not been prepared for this nor had a good source to provide them direction and assistance.

Provide reliable, valid data for improvement plans for the school and for individual students.

The use of student achievement data to monitor academic success forced schools to begin really analyzing and using data. The award-winning schools used data on a continuum from looking at school data at a global level to using multiple sources of data to identify instructional strategies for individual students.

Fifteen percent of the principals made recommendations on ways to change the current state testing system to be more useful to them. Recommendations included the following:
- Provide results before the end of the school year in which they are given.
- In computing school performance, use the median score and not the mean.
- Test students at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year to measure annual academic improvement.
- Base improvement on multiple types of data and not only one test score.

What Can Be Done?

The central goal of all education policies and programs needs to be school improvement for greater student achievement and not the distribution of rewards and sanctions (NASBE, 2002). School improvement, not accountability, is the primary purpose of the standards and assessments. Based on this premise, the following recommendations emerged from the study of key factors in the success of Illinois' award-winning schools:

Recommendation 1 *Designate the improvement of student learning and the elimination of the achievement gap as fundamental priorities for education in Illinois and consistently use them as the touchstone for policy decisions and legislation proposals: "What impact will the proposed policy or legislation have on student learning? Will this action help eliminate the achievement gap?"*

Academic improvement and the elimination of the achievement gap is critical to the well being of the individual students and to the economic viability of Illinois and the United States. In allocating resources and creating mandates, the vast majority of resources need to be allocated to those strategies that will directly impact student learning.

Recommendation 2 *Recognize the importance of school-level actions in improving student learning and eliminating the achievement gap. Focus policy and financial decisions on ways to provide schools with the flexibility needed to successfully implement individual school improvement plans.*

The award-winning schools are successfully using the school improvement process to focus instruction, professional development, and resources on strategies that will result in academic improvement. Because each school has unique social, demographic, academic, and geographical needs, flexibility in the allocation of resources is needed to implement the best practices, research-based strategies identified in their school improvement plans.

Recommendation 3 *Recognize the critical role of principals in school improvement initiatives. Ensure that the preparation and ongoing professional development of principals provide them with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to implement the critical actions identified in this study.*

As is true of any profession, leaders need ongoing professional development to enable them to proactively lead their institutions in new and innovative ways. This is especially true for academia which is built on the crumbling traditions of the past.

Recommendation 4   *Examine and revise funding policies that adversely impact student achievement.*
- *Recognize that meaningful, lasting change takes time and allow time in grant-funded projects for real change to occur.*
- *Revise policies that eliminate financial support for change initiatives once performance goals are met and without assessing if the improvement is sustainable without the funding.*

Grant funding for comprehensive changes need to be lengthened to ensure the school has developed sufficient leadership capacity to sustain the changes. This is especially true if the funding is used for personnel or ongoing material costs. Incentive and support grants used to bolster academic achievement need to be reviewed carefully, especially if schools are using the funding for personnel or materials critical to student achievement.

Recommendation 5   *Increase funding for schools with at-risk students who could benefit from strategies that maximize instruction time and minimize class size.*

Strategies that maximize instruction time and provide more direct instruction to individual students have been successful in the award-winning schools. These strategies, however, often involve additional or re-allocation of personnel and other ongoing costs.

Recommendation 6   *Expand early childhood education and literacy programs to serve all at-risk students.*

The award-winning schools serving the early elementary child have strong early childhood programs, especially in areas of poverty. Unfortunately, funding for these programs is often grant-funded and tenuous.

Recommendation 7   *Provide technical assistance and training to schools in the use of multiple types of data needed to drive systems of continuous improvement.*

As schools progress from using aggregated school data to the use of data for regular monitoring of student achievement, technical assistance will be needed for in-depth analysis of data and in ways to implement reliable, valid measures appropriate for prescribing instructional interventions needed by individual students.

Recommendation 8   *Provide professional development for administrators, teachers, and staff to enable them to continually improve instruction and find ways to increase student achievement.*

As the allocation of resources becomes more competitive, professional development activities are often the first item cut from the budget. It is important to find more creative, innovative ways to deliver cost-effective professional development activities that are directly tied to improved instruction and student achievement.

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Appendix A: References for Quotations from Principals

1   John Tignor, Principal, Berrian School, Qunicy, Illinois

2   Mary Lou Gutierrez, Principal, Everett Elementary School, Chicago, Illinois

3   Violet Tantillo, Principal, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Berwyn, Illinois

4   Sharon Kherat, Principal, Whittier Primary School, Peoria, Illinois

5   John Tignor, Principal, Berrian School, Qunicy, Illinois

6   John Tignor, Principal, Berrian School, Qunicy, Illinois

7   John Tignor, Principal, Berrian School, Qunicy, Illinois

8   Timothy Sexton, Principal, Atlanta Elementary School, Atlanta, Illinois

9   Alene Reuschel, Superintendent, Avon District 176

10   Jay A. Streicher, Principal, James R. Wood Elementary School, Somonauk, Illinois

11   Anonymous

12   Merri Lynne Seaburg, Principal, Jefferson Elementary School, DeKalb, Illinois

13   Alene Reuschel, Superintendent, Avon District 176

14   Tim Ryon, Principal, Tyng Primary School, Peoria School District 150

15   Craig Sundstedt, Principal, Golfview Elementary School, Carpentersville, Illinois

16   Merri Lynne Seaburg, Principal, Jefferson Elementary School, DeKalb, Illinois

17   Elaine Day, Principal, Bement Middle School, Bement, Illinois

18   Carol Crum, Principal, Calhoun High School, Hardin, Illinois

19 Violet Tantillo, Principal, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Berwyn

20 Timothy Sexton, Principal, Atlanta Elementary School, Atlanta, Illinois

21   Violet Tantillo, Principal, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Berwyn, Illinois

22   Terri Katsulis, Principal, Holden Elementary School, Chicago, Illinois

23   Anonymous

24   Connie L. Sutton, Superintendent, Paris Union School District No. 95, Wenz Elementary School

Appendix B: List of Schools

Illinois Spotlight School Awards
For Academic Achievement
2003 Award Winners

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	CITY	ZIP	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
A R GRAIFF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PO BOX 400	LIVINGSTON	62058	DOUGLAS ZEHR	618/637-2130 dzehr@livingstonschools.org	LIVINGSTON DISTRICT 4
BERRIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1327 SOUTH 8TH ST	QUINCY	62301	JOHN TIGNOR	217/228-7691 tignorjo@qps.org	QUINCY DISTRICT 172
BLACKHAWK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1401 SOUTH BLACKHAWK AVE	FREEPORT	61032	DONNA BENTON	815/232-0490 dbenton@freeport.k12.il.us	FREEPORT DISTRICT 145
CARRUTHERS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	80 CANDY LANE	MURPHYSBORO	62966	FRANK PUTTMAN	618-687-3231 fputtman@mboro.jacksn.k12.il.us	MURPHYSBORO DIST. 186
DAVIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	301 GREEN ST	ANNA	62906	RONALD CROSS	618/833-8022 rcross@anna37.union.k12.il.us	ANNA DISTRICT 37
DEWEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	2040 CHERRY	QUINCY	62301	PATRICIA ROKUSEK	217/228-7117 prokusek@hotmail.com	QUINCY DISTRICT 172
EARL H HANSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	4000 9TH ST	ROCK ISLAND	61201	DEBRA DESSER	309/793-5930 debra.desser@risd41.org	ROCK ISLAND DISTRICT 41
EAST RICHLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1001 NORTH HOLLY RD	OLNEY	62450	SUZANNE HAHN	618/395-8540 shahn@east.rchlnd.k12.il.us	EAST RICHLAND DIST. 1
FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	301 NORTH 2ND ST	BELLEVILLE	62220	JEFF DOSIER	618/233-2413 jdosier@stclair.k12.il.us	BELLEVILLE DISTRICT 118
GORDON SCHOOL	14100 HARRISON AVE	POSEN	60469	JOHN CARACCI	708/388-7202 jcaracci@sd1435.org	POSEN-ROBBINS DIST. 1
HARDIN COUNTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	RR #2	ELIZABETHTOWN	62931	CHARLES LITTLE	618/287-7601 Fax 618-287-8381	HARDIN DISTRICT 1
HARDING PRIMARY SCHOOL	415 EAST 9TH AVE	MONMOUTH	61462	SUE WILSON	309/734-4915 swilson@zippers.warren.k12.il.us	MONMOUTH DISTRICT 38
JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	7035 16TH ST	BERWYN	60402	VIOLET TANTILLO	708/795-2454 vtantillo@d98.cook.k12.il.us	BERWYN NORTH DIST. 98

SCHOOL	ADDRESS	CITY	ZIP	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	211 MC CORMICK DR	DE KALB	60115	MERRI LYNNE SEABURG	815/754-2263 mseaburg@dist428.org	DEKALB DISTRICT 428
JONES COLLEGE PREP HIGH SCHOOL	606 SOUTH STATE STREET	CHICAGO	60605	DON FRAYND	773-534-8600 principal@jonescollegeprep.org	CHICAGO DISTRICT 299
LELAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	5221 WEST CONGRESS PRKY	CHICAGO	60644	LORETTA LAWRENCE	773/534-6340 Fax 773-534-6040	CHICAGO DISTRICT 299
MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY	240 WARREN AVE	KANKAKEE	60901	VICKIE ROMEIN	815/933-0709 vickie-romein@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DISTRICT 111
MAPLE GROVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1698 GRAND CHAIN RD	METROPOLIS	62960	BARRY ANCELL	618/543-7434 bancell@hotmail.com	JOPPA-MAPLE GROVE 38
MICHAEL E BAUM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	801 SOUTH LAKE RIDGE AVE	DECATUR	62521	CARL WILKEY	217/424-3259 cwilkey@dps61.org	DECATUR DISTRICT 61
PETTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	RR #2, BOX 227	SUMNER	62466	GARY HUBER	618/947-2204 ghuber@red.lawrnc.k12.il.us	RED HILL DISTRICT 10
SAINTE MARIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PO BOX 157	SAINTE MARIE	62459	DAVID PARKER	618/455-3219 or 3231 dparker@roe12.net	JASPER DISTRICT 1
VERGENNES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PO BOX 35	VERGENNES	62994	NATE GEIGER	618/684-3527 Fax 618-687-3363	ELVERADO DISTRICT 196
WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1400 NORTH 8TH	QUINCY	62301	PATRICIA VINIARD	217/222-4059 viniard@adams.net	QUINCY DISTRICT 172
WESTHAVEN ELEMENTARY	118 WESTHAVEN SCHOOL RD	BELLEVILLE	62220	JAMES SLATER	618/257-9201 jslater@stclair.k12.il.us	BELLEVILLE DISTRICT 118
WHITTIER PRIMARY SCHOOL	1619 WEST FREDONIA AVE	PEORIA	61606	SHARON KHERAT	309/672-6569 sharon.kherat@psd150.org	PEORIA DISTRICT 150
WILLOW HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	PO BOX 39	WILLOW HILL	62480	DAVID PARKER	618-455-3231 dparker@cusd1.jasper.k12.il.us	JASPER COUNTY DIST. 1
ZIEBELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	149TH & ROCKWELL	POSEN	60469	DELOIS BARNES	708/388-7206 Fax 708-331-7830	POSEN-ROBBINS 143.5

ILLINOIS
Academic Improvement Awards
June 2004

SCHOOL	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
ALLEN JUNIOR HIGH	CYNTHIA SHEVOKAS	(815)638-2233 cshevkas@bhsroe.k12.il.us	LA MOILLE DIST 303
ANDALUSIA ELEMENTARY	JULIA EVANS	(309)798-2424 jievans@riroe.k12.il.us	ROCKRIDGE DIST 300
AROMA PARK PRIMARY	MICHAEL ROLINITIS	(815)937-1162 michael-rolinitis@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DIST 111
ATLANTA ELEMENTARY	TIMOTHY SEXTON	(217)648-2302	OLYMPIA DIST 16
AVON GRADE SCHOOL	ALICE KING	(309)465-3851	AVON DIST 176
BARKSTALL ELEMENTARY	CHRISTINE BRINKLEY	(217)373-5580 brinklch@cmi.k12.il.us	CHAMPAIGN DIST 4
BARNARD MATH & SCIENCE CENTER	ALAN MOLESKY	(773)535-2625 alanrmolesky@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
BEMENT MIDDLE SCHOOL	ELAINE DAY	(217)678-4200 eaday@bement.k12.il.us	BEMENT DIST 5
BERRIAN ELEMENTARY	JOHN TIGNOR	(217)228-7691 tignorjo@qps.org	QUINCY DIST 172
BROOKPORT ELEMENTARY	DEBBIE CHRISTENSEN	(618)564-2482 christiansen@brookport.massac.k12.il.us	MASSAC DIST 1
BUDLONG ELEMENTARY	ALVIN SOLOMON	(773)534-2591 ansolomon@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
BUNCOMBE ELEMENTARY	KATHY ANDERSON	(618)658-8830 kanderson@bgs.johnsn.k12.il.us	BUNCOMBE DIST 43
BURR ELEMENTARY	VINITA ROMAN SCOTT	(773)534-4090	CHICAGO DIST 299
CALHOUN HIGH SCHOOL	CAROLE CRUM	(618)576-2229 ccrum@calhoun.ezl.com	CALHOUN DIST 40
CARMI-WHITE HIGH SCHOOL	BRADLEY LEE	(618)382-4661	CARMI-WHITE DIST 5
CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN	GABRIELLE HERNDON	(708)868-9470	DOLTON DIST 149
CAROL WENZ ELEMENTARY	BRENDA	(217)466-3140 brothen@paris95.k12.il.us	PARIS-UNION DIST 95
CARRUTHERS ELEMENTARY	FRANK PUTTMAN	(618)687-3231	MURPHYSBORO DIST 186
CARTERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL	DONALD SMITH	(618)985-2940 dsmith@cartervillelions.com	CARTERVILLE DIST 5
CATLIN ELEMENTARY	CRYSTAL VOWELS	(217)427-5421 vowelsc@catlin.k12.il.us	CATLIN DIST 5
CENTENNIAL ELEMENTARY	SANDRA WILKENS	(815)946-3811 swilkens@leeogle.org	POLO DIST 222
CERRO GORDO HIGH SCHOOL	BRETT ROBINSON	(217)763-2711	CERRO GORDO DIST 100
CERRO GORDO MIDDLE SCHOOL	LINDA MCCABE	(217)763-6411	CERRO GORDO DIST 100
COFFEEN ELEMENTARY	PAMELA DELONG	(217)534-2314 pdelong@hillsboros.net	HILLSBORO DIST 3

| SCHOOL	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
COLUMBIA EXPL. ACADEMY	JOSE BARRERA	(773)535-4050 jbarrera@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
DAHLGREN ELEMENTARY	WILMA CROSS	(618)736-2316	HAMILTON DIST 10
DELAVAN JUNIOR HIGH	ANDREW BROOKS	(309)244-8285	DELAVAN DIST 703
DEWEY ELEMENTARY	PATRICIA ROKUSEK	(217)228-7117	QUINCY DIST 172
DIVERNON HIGH SCHOOL	RON ERVIN	(217)628-3414 ervinr@divy.net	DIVERNON DIST 13
EDINBURG JUNIOR HIGH	DAVID JONES	(217)623-5733	EDINBURG DIST 4
EDISON JUNIOR HIGH	KEN JAEKE	(309)793-5920 ken.jaeke@risd41.org	ROCK ISLAND DIST 41
EDISON PRIMARY	RICHARD HARRIS	(815)9320621 richard-harris@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DIST 111
EVERETT ELEMENTARY	MARY LOU GUTIERREZ	(773)535-4550	CHICAGO DIST 299
FEARN ELEMENTARY	DAN BRIDGES	(630)907-2470 dbridges@sd12p.org	AURORA WEST DIST 129
FIELDCREST - WEST	JAMES DEMAY	(815)452-2613	FIELDCREST DIST 6
FORT BOWMAN ACADEMY	ELISABETH PEEPLES	(618)332-7404	CAHOKIA DIST 187
GALATIA JUNIOR HIGH	AMY RICHEY	(618)268-4194 ajrichey@galatia.saline.k12.il.us	GALATIA DIST 1
GARFIELD ELEMENTARY	SHELLY LEONARD	(847)888-5192	DIST 46
GEORGE ROGERS CLARK ELEMENTARY	SANDY ANAST	(773)534-6225 smanast@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
GLEN OAK PRIMARY	CHERYL ELLIS	(309)672-6518	PEORIA DIST 150
GOLFVIEW ELEMENTARY	CRAIG SUNDSTEDT	(847)426-1250 csun@d300.kane.k12.il.us	DIST 300
GRAYMONT ELEMENTARY	JULIE FRITCHTNITCH	(815)743-5346 jfritch@rookscreek.k12.il.us	ROOKS CREEK DIST 425
GRIGGSVILLE-PERRY PRIMARY	ANDREA ALLEN	(217)833-2352	GRIGGSVILLE-PERRY DIST 4
H. R. MCCALL ELEMENTARY	PATRICIA ROSS	(847)360-5480	WAUKEGAN DIST 60
HAMPTON ELEMENTARY	TOM BERG	(309)755-0693 tberg@riroe.k12.il.us	HAMPTON DIST 29
HARDING PRIMARY	SUE WILSON	(309)734-4915 swilson@zippers.warren.k12.il.us	MONMOUTH DIST 38
HAROLD WASHINGTON	SANDRA LEWIS	(773)535-6225	CHICAGO DIST 299
HOLDEN ELEMENTARY	TERRI KATSULIS	(773)535-7200	CHICAGO DIST 299
HOOPESTON MIDDLE SCHOOL	HANK HORNBECK	(217)283-6664 hahfour@hoopeston.k12.il.us	HOOPESTON DIST 11
HOOVER WOOD ELEMENTARY	SAM PALAMARA	(630)879-1636 sam.palamara@bps101.net	BATAVIA UNIT DIST 101
ILLIOPOLIS ELEMENTARY	MARK CAMFIELD	(217)486-7521	ILLIOPOLIS DIST 12
JAMES R. WOOD ELEMENTARY	JAY STREICHER	(815)498-2338 streicher@somonauk.net	SOMONAUK DIST 432
JOHN NELSON ELEMENTARY	STEPHEN FRANCISCO	(815)229-2190 francis@rps205.com	ROCKFORD DIST 205
KENNEDY ELEMENTARY	DAWN HILDEMAN	(708)756-4830 dhildeman@d170.s-cook.k12.il.us	CHICAGO HEIGHTS DIST 170

SCHOOL	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
KING MIDDLE GRADE	JOSEPH ROCKETT	(815)933-0750 joe-rockett@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DIST 111
LACON ELEMENTARY	SARA MCDONALD	(309)246-7215 smcdonald@midland-7.org	MIDLAND DIST 7
LAKE CREST ELEMENTARY	MIKE SMITH	(217)346-2166 micsmith@oak.k12.il.us	OAKLAND DIST 5
LEEPERTOWN ELEMENTARY	AMBER HARPER	(815)659-3191	LEEPERTOWN DIST 175
LELAND ELEMENTARY	LORETTA LAWRENCE	(773)534-6340	CHICAGO DIST 299
LINCOLN ELEMENTARY	BOB MASON	(309)343-0317	GALESBURG DIST 205
LOGAN ELEMENTARY	MARABETH ROBERTSON	(309)743-1613 mroberts@molines.org	MOLINE DIST 40
MABEL ODONNELL ELEMENTARY	EDWARD BROUCH	(630)299-8300 ebrouch.odonnell@d131.org	AURORA EAST DIST 131
MADISON ELEMENTARY	LINDA ECHOLS	(773)535-0551	CHICAGO DIST 299
MAYO ELEMENTARY	FREDRICK MCNEAL JR	(773)535-1260 fredrickdmcneal@cps.k12.IL.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
MERIDIAN ELEMENTARY	ED BRITTON	(618)342-6773 bpalmisano@mhs101.pulski.k12.il.us	MERIDIAN DIST 101
METCALFE ACADEMY	MICHELE BARTON	(773)535-5590 michele.l.barton@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
MORRIS ELEMENTARY	DEBRA TIPPETT	(618)332-3718 tippetdj@stclair.k12.il.us	CAHOKIA DIST 187
MT. OLIVE HIGH	RONALD RYAN	(217)999-4231 rryan@macoupin.k12.il.us	MOUNT OLIVE DIST 5
MT. ZION ELEMENTARY	BARBARA JANES	(217)864-3631 janesb@mtzion.k12.il.us	MT ZION DIST 3
MURPHY ELEMENTARY	DONNA NELSON	(773)534-5223	CHICAGO DIST 299
MURRAYVILLE-WOODSON ELEMENTARY	GARY BARLOW	(217)882-3121 morgan@k12.il.us/jvds117gbarlow	JACKSONVILLE DIST 117
NORTH ELEMENTARY	JAMES RUPERT	(217)563-8521	NOKOMIS DIST 22
ONEIDA ELEMENTARY	JOAN HOSCHEK	(309)483-6376 jhoschek@rowva.k12.il.us	R O W V A DIST 208
PETTY ELEMENTARY	GARY HUBER	(618)947-2204 ghuber@roe12.net	RED HILL DIST 10
PLANO MIDDLE SCHOOL	WAYNE CZYZ	(630)552-3608	PLANO DIST 88
PRAIRIE VIEW ELEMENTARY	RAYMOND EPPERSON	(815)786-8811 rayrayepperson@netscape.net	SANDWICH DIST 430
REDDICK ELEMENTARY	DENNIS PANKEY	(815)365-2375 pankeyd@hsd2.k12.il.us	HERSCHER DIST 2
RIDGELY ELEMENTARY	KEN GILMORE	(217)525-3259 kennyg@springfield.k12.il.us.rigley	SPRINGFIELD DIST 186
RIVERVIEW ELEMENTARY	SCOTT FISHER	(815)389-1231 sfisher@sbsobs.org	SOUTH BELOIT DIST 320
SALAZAR ELEMENTARY BILINGUAL CENTER	MARTHA MIRANDA	(773)534-8310	CHICAGO DIST 299
SCHNEIDER ELEMENTARY	SUSAN WILSON	(309)928-2611 swilson@br18.k12.il.us	BLUE RIDGE DIST 18
SERENA ELEMENTARY	JULIE PRENDERGAST	(815)496-9250	DIST 2
SHABAZZ CHARTER	ELAINE MOSLEY	(773)651-1221	CHICAGO DIST 299
SHERMAN ELEMENTARY	BEVERLY LAFRANCE	(217)496-2021 blafrance@wcusd15.org	WILLIAMSVILLE DIST 15

SCHOOL	PRINCIPAL	CONTACT INFORMATION	DISTRICT
SHOESMITH ELEMENTARY	LENORE BEDAR	(773)535-1764 lyb0314@aol.com	CHICAGO DIST 299
SOUTH CENTRAL -KINMUNDY	RICK SMITH	(618)547-7696 rrsmithk_el@yahoo.com	SOUTH CENTRAL DIST 401
SOUTHERN ELEMENTARY	DALE BUSS	(309)924-1531	SOUTHERN DIST 120
STEUBEN ELEMENTARY	DANIEL HOLLOWELL	(815)933-7813 daniel-hollowell@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DIST 111
STRATTON ELEMENTARY	SANDRA DUCKWORTH	(217)373-7330 duckwosa@cmi.k12.il.us	CHAMPAIGN DIST 4
TAFT PRIMARY	ARLENE BARTOLINI	(815)932-0811 arlene-bartolini@k111.k12.il.us	KANKAKEE DIST 111
THOMSON ELEMENTARY	TED BRADSHAW	(815)259-2735 tbradshaw@thomson301.org	THOMSON DIST 301
TYNG PRIMARY	TIMOTHY RYON	(309)672-6559 tim.ryon@psd150.org	PEORIA DIST 150
UNITY MIDDLE	RON DEMPSAY	(217)936-2727 msprinu4@cusd4.com	DIST 4
VENICE ELEMENTARY	JAMES EDMOND	(618)451-7953 jedmond3@hotmail.com	VENICE DIST 3
WACKER ELEMENTARY	VALERIE BRATTON	(773)535-2821 vjbratton@cps.k12.il.us	CHICAGO DIST 299
WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY	PATRICIA VINIARD	(217)222-4059	QUINCY DIST 172
WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY	MARY CAMERER	(217)243-6711 viniard@adams.net	JACKSONVILLE DIST 117
WESTVIEW ELEMENTARY	RHONDA KRUSE	(309)647-2111 rkruse@cantonusd.org	CANTON UNION DIST 66
WILLIAMSFIELD ELEMENTARY	RICH PUTNAM	(309)639-2199	WILLIAMSFIELD DIST 210
ZAPATA ELEMENTARY	CHRISTINA GONZALEZ	(773)534-1390	CHICAGO DIST 299

Appendix C: Location of Schools

Spotlight Schools 2003
Map prepared by The Center For Governmental Studies
NIU Outreach 10/03
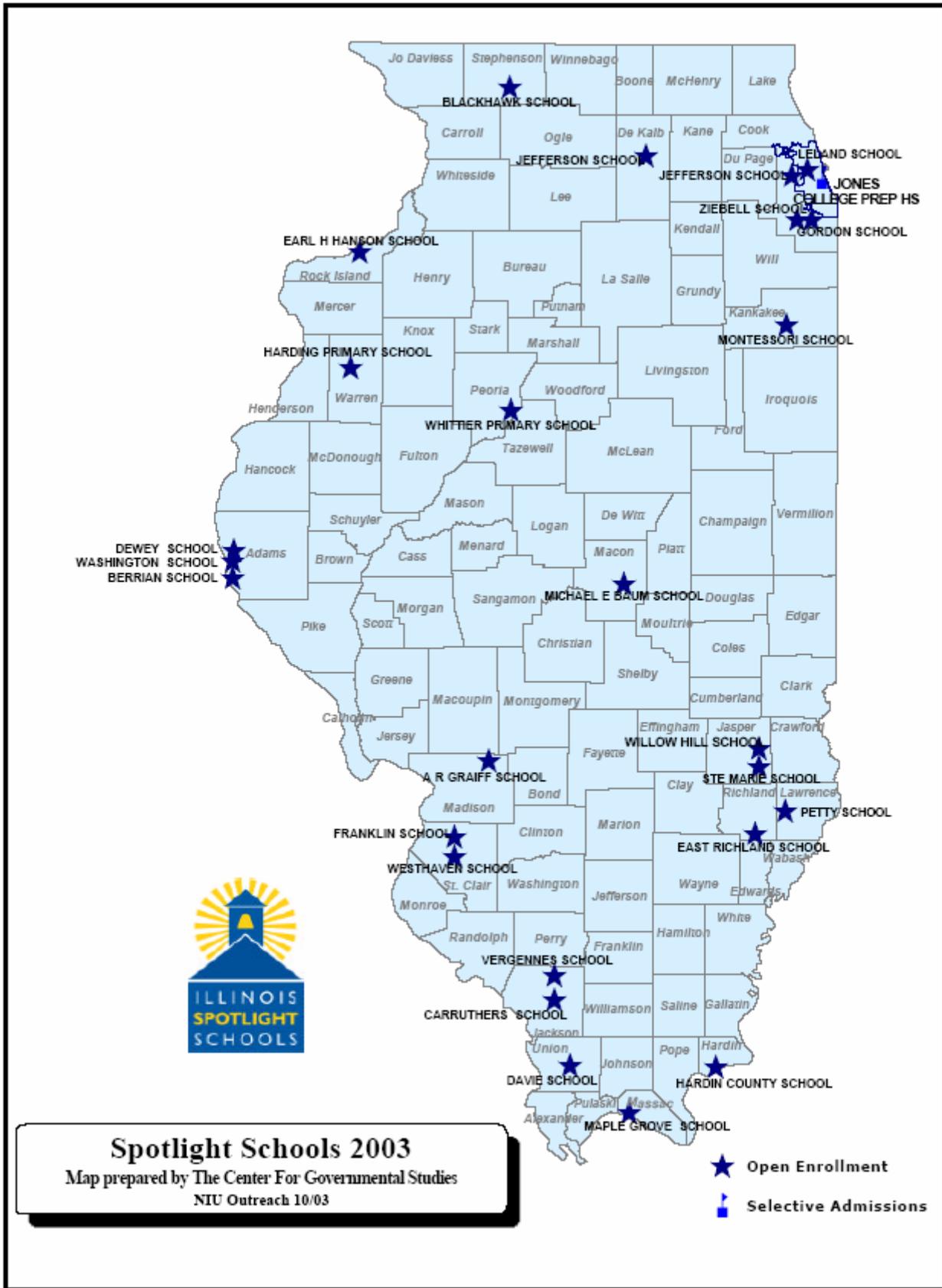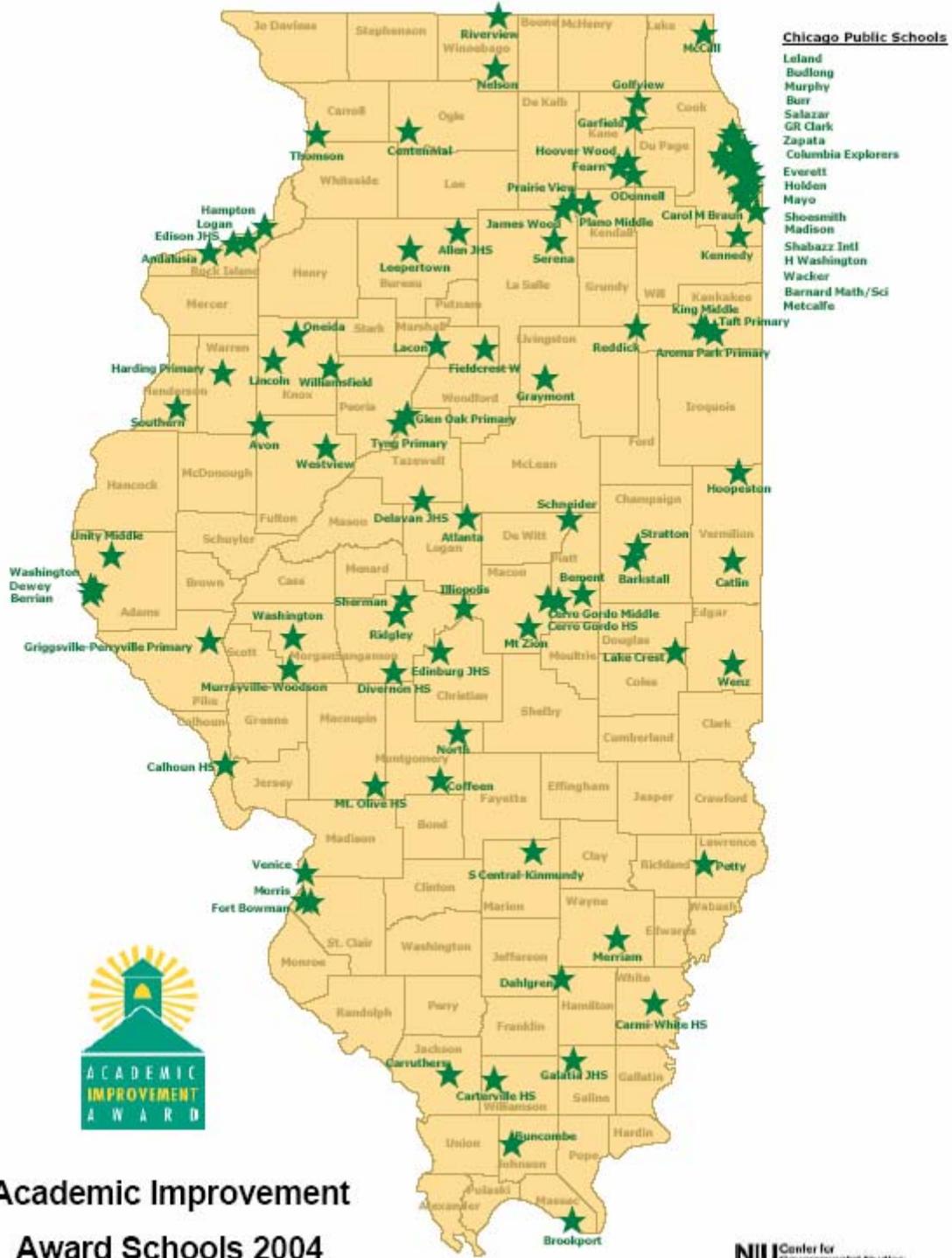
Academic Improvement
Award Schools 2004

Appendix D: Demographic Characteristics of Schools

2003 Spotlight School Award for Academic Achievement
Each of the 27 schools was a high-poverty school, with at least 50 percent of the students categorized as low-income.

Location of School

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners
Rural	7	25.9%
Suburban	5	18.5%
Urban	15	55.5%

2003 Academic Improvement Award Schools
The 100 Academic Improvement Award schools were characterized by type of school, location, size, and level of poverty.

Type of School – All Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Elementary	83	83.0%	81.8%
Middle/Junior High	11	11.0%	6.0%
High School	6	6.0%	12.3%

Location of School – All Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Rural	39	39.0%	40.0%
Suburban	14	14.0%	15.4%
Urban	47	47.0%	44.6%

Poverty Levels – All Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
0 - 14.9% low income	12	12.0%	15.4%
15 - 49.9% low income	38	38.0%	40.0%
50 – 100% low income	50	50.0%	44.6%

Size of School – All Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Less than 120 students	11	11.0%	10.8%
121 to 300	43	43.0%	41.5%
301 – 500	32	32.0%	32.3%
More than 500	14	14.0%	15.4%

2003 Academic Improvement Award Schools – Elementary Schools
Of the 100 award-winning schools, 83 were elementary schools. The majority of elementary schools were in urban locations and schools with over 50 percent of the students were low-income.

Location of School – Elementary Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Rural	27	32.5%	32.1%
Suburban	13	15.7%	17.0%
Urban	43	51.8%	50.9%

Poverty Levels – Elementary Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
0 – 14.9% low income	7	8.4%	11.3%
15 - 49.9% low income	28	33.7%	37.7%
50 – 100% low income	48	57.8%	50.9%

Size of School – Elementary Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Less than 120 students	5	6.0%	5.7%
121 to 300	37	44.6%	43.4%
301 – 500	28	33.7%	34.0%
More than 500	13	15.7%	17.0%

2003 Academic Improvement Award Schools – Middle/Junior High Schools
Of the 100 award-winning schools, 11 were middle or junior high schools.

Location of School – Middle/Junior High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Rural	7	63.6%	62.5%
Suburban	1	9.1%	12.5%
Urban	3	27.3%	25.0%

Poverty Levels – Middle/Junior High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
0 – 14.9% low income	2	18.2%	25.0%
15 - 49.9% low income	7	63.6%	50.0%
50 – 100% low income	2	18.2%	25.0%

Size of School – Middle/Junior High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Less than 120 students	5	45.5%	37.5%
121 to 300	3	27.3%	25.0%
301 – 500	2	18.2%	25.0%
More than 500	1	9.1%	12.5%

2003 Academic Improvement Award Schools – High Schools

Of the 100 award-winning schools, six were high schools.

Location of School – High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Rural	5	83.3%	100%
Suburban	0	0.0%	
Urban	1	16.7%	

Poverty Levels – High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
0 - 14.9% low income	3	50.0%	50%
15 - 49.9% low income	3	50.0%	50%
50 – 100% low income	0	0.0%	

Size of School – High Schools

	Number of Schools	Percent of Award-winners	Percent of Respondents
Less than 120 students	1	16.7%	25%
121 to 300	3	50.0%	75%
301 – 500	2	33.3%	25%
More than 500	0	0.0%	

Appendix E: Principal Interview Questions

1. What changes in curricula did you make, if any, to improve learning?

2. What changes in instructional methods did you make, if any?

3. How have you supported teachers; i.e. helped them learn what they needed to know in order to improve achievement?

4. What strategies did you use to improve achievement by student subgroups?

5. What specific steps did you take to involve parents and the community in improving your school?

6. Did you partner with agencies or groups outside of the school to take care of non-educational needs (clothing, glasses, dental care, health care, etc.)?

7. How did you prioritize the steps to take? How did you make those decisions?

8. If you were giving advice to another principal trying to significantly improve student performance, what is the one thing you would recommend most highly?

9. If you were starting over in trying to raise student achievement, what would you do differently?

10. What leadership skills have been needed to bring success at your school?

11. Which of these potential resources for assistance were important to you: State Board of Education, Regional Office of Education, colleges or universities, professional groups?

12. Did any specific programs or funds provide flexibility to help support change?

13. Did an increase in student achievement cause your school to lose special funds for low-performing schools?

Appendix F: List of Professional Development Topics and Resources

List of selected topics and resources reported by principals as being helpful.

Topic for Professional Development	Resource
Balanced Learning	http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/timely/briiss.htm Review of literature on Balanced Learning by Learning Points
Comprehensive Reform Models	http://www.isbe.net/CSR/html/csrmodel.htm This site provides links to Modern Red Schoolhouse, America's Choice, and other comprehensive reform models. http://www.csrclearinghouse.org/ National clearinghouse for CSR
Data and Assessment	http://www.makingstandardswork.com/ Center for Performance Assessment 90/90/90 schools
Differentiated Instruction	*The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners-* Carol Ann Tomlinson
Flexible Grouping	*http://www.eduplace.com/science/profdev/articles/valentino.html*
High Schools	*High Schools That Work* <www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/background/backgroundindex.asp> Research by Southern Regional Education Board initiated in 1987 and involving 1,100 sites in 31 states on practices to improve academic and career technical instruction in high schools.
Illinois State Standards School Improvement Planning	www.isbe.net or Regional Education Offices
K-12 Resource	http://www.aboutlearning.com/ "To promote the dissemination, evaluation, and development of effective school reform, leadership development, professional development, and organizational design strategies used in K-12 education, higher education, and public/private organizations, especially in organizations serving communities with limited access to exemplary school reform, leadership development, professional development, and organizational design strategies. The 4MAT Foundation continues the work of Dr. Bernice McCarthy and the development of the 4MAT System begun in 1979, which values diversity and promotes quality learning for all learners."
Leadership	Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools *AIMS* <http://www.cprd.uiuc.edu/aims.html>
Leadership	Books by Jon Saphier
Leadership	*Building Leadership Capacity for School Improvement* by Alma Harris, Linda Lambert
Leadership	*E-lead: Leadership for Student Learning* <www.e-lead.org.> Standards-based leadership development strategies by topic with research, best practices, and case studies. On-line leadership library.
Leadership	Founded in 1943, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents 160,000 educators <www.ascd.org>
Leadership	*Illinois Principals Association*

Topic for Professional Development	Resource
	\<http://www.ilprincipals.org\>
Leadership	Mulhall, P., Hartter, S., Camp, D. *Illinois Principals: Instructional Leaders or Endangered Species?* Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois, Institute of Governmental and Public Affairs, 2003. Research study on the supply, quality, recruitment, and retention of principals in Illinois.
Leadership	*Reframing the Path to School Leadership* by Lee G. Bolman, Terrence E. Deal (Four Frames of Leadership)
Leadership	*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* by Patrick M. Lencioni "Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare…"
Learning Communities	*Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* by Richard Dufour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, Gayle Karhanek, Gayle Karhanek "As the latest wave of educational reform washes upon the public schools of the United States in the form of the No Child Left Behind…" *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* by Richard Dufour, Robert E. Eaker
No Child Left Behind	http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml Government site on NCLB
North Central Association	http://www.ncacihe.org/ Home page of The Higher Learning Commission – NCA
Other topics without references:	Content areas: Reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies; learning styles; one-on-one instruction; how to work with parents; project-based learning; setting high expectations for students; student shadowing; train the trainer; curriculum mapper; peer observations
Pedagogy	*Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration* by Carol Rolheiser
Pedagogy	*Engaging Minds: Learning and Teaching in a Complex World* by Brent Davis, Dennis J. Sumara, Rebecca Luce-Kapler
Poverty	Payne, R. K. (1996). *Framework for Understanding Poverty.* (Third Revised Edition) Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc. www.ahaprocess.com
Problem Solving	*Math Stories for Problem Solving Success : Ready-to-Use Activities for Grades 7-12* by James L. Overholt, Nancy Aaberg, James Lindsey
Professional Groups – Reading	http://www.illinoisreadingcouncil.org/ Illinois Reading Council
Writing	*Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K-8* by Ralph Fletcher, Joann Portalupi

Appendix G: List of Curricular and Instructional Changes

Selected topics mentioned by principals.

Topic	Resource or Change
Behavior Program	Love and Logic Fay, J. and Funk, D. (1995). *Teaching with Love and Logic: Taking Control of the Classroom*. Golden, CO: The Love and Logic Press, Inc.
Behavior Program	Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS)
Bilingual	Bilingual goals and standards from prekindergarten through 8th grade
Character Program	Character Counts!
Class Size	Lower classroom size
Cognitive Guided Instruction	Use of cognitive-guided instruction
Curriculum	Aligned curriculum horizontally and vertically
Curriculum	Unified lesson plans and quarterly planning maps
Differentiated Instruction	*The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners-* Carol Ann Tomlinson
Four-Blocks	The Four-Blocks® framework was developed in 1989-90 in one first grade classroom (Cunningham, P. M., Hall, D. P. & Defee, M, 1991. Nonability grouped, multilevel instruction: A year in a first grade classroom. Reading Teacher, 44, 566-571.). Since 1991, the framework has been used in numerous first and second grade classrooms and in third grade classrooms where many children still struggle with reading and writing (Cunningham, P. M., Hall, D. P. & Defee, M., Nonability grouped, multilevel instruction: Eight Years Later. Reading Teacher, 51,May, 1998).
Grouping	Balance whole group with small group instruction
High School Enrichment	Students in academic enrichment classes do all assignments in class
High School Literacy	Language arts skills class for entering freshmen
Learning Styles	Provided instruction for varying learning styles
Literacy	*6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The Complete Guide (Grades 3 and Up)* by Ruth Culham "The weave of assessment and instruction is the focus of this book-what it is and how to manage it…"
Literacy	*A Fresh Look at Writing* by Donald H. Graves
Literacy	Accelerated Reader <http://www.rosenpublishing.com/acreader.cfm>
Literacy	Book Busters
Literacy	Book-it program
Literacy	Break Through to Literacy < http://www.btl-inc.com/>
Literacy	Chicago's Reading Initiative < http://www.btl-inc.com/>
Literacy	DAR pre-post testing http://www.riverpub.com/nclb/readingfirst_dar.html
Literacy	Departmentalized reading
Literacy	Emphasis on phonetic approach to reading
Literacy	Guided reading at centers
Literacy	*Guiding Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy*

Topic	Resource or Change
	by Irene C. Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell
Literacy	Harcourt reading series
Literacy	Higher expectations for students' writing achievement
Literacy	Houghton Mifflin reading series
Literacy	Individual reading/writing everyday
Literacy	Literacy Framework – Tim Shanahan
Literacy	Lunch time used for reading
Literacy	Mandatory book reports
Literacy	More books in classroom
Literacy	NIU Pride program
Literacy	Open Court
Literacy	Pair third graders with kindergarteners to read together
Literacy	Questions-Answer Relationship Strategies (QAR)
Literacy	Readers Theatre and Poetry
Literacy	Readers' Workshop
Literacy	Reading Counts
Literacy	Reading First
Literacy	Reading incentive programs
Literacy	Reading series/program new
Literacy	Reading skill drills daily
Literacy	Solid Ground
Literacy	Strategies that Work
Literacy	Sustained silent reading in upper grades
Literacy	Taberski, S. (2000). *On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3.* New York: Heinemann.
Literacy	Use Gates Reading test
Literacy Block	Uninterrupted literacy blocks
Mathematics	Adopted Growing with Mathematics
Mathematics	CMSI Program
Mathematics	Everyday Math
Mathematics	Extended math in kindergarten to 60 minutes
Mathematics	Four-Square Mathematics
Mathematics	Increase use of timed math tests
Mathematics	More problem solving,
Mathematics	Pre- and post-testing in reading and math to measure growth and identify student abilities
Mathematics	Use of Calendar Math
Mathematics	Use of Computer Curriculum Corporation for K-8 mathematics
Mathematics	*Windows of Opportunity: Mathematics for Students With Special Needs* by Carol A. Thornton, Nancy S. Bley
Pedagogy	Teachers trade classes for a day to see and appreciate what goes on at other levels
Personnel	Added Curriculum Director, literacy coaches, parent liaisons, mentors
Report Cards	Detailed report cards with specific benchmarks for each grade
Science	Changed or increased hands on
Special Education	Inclusion of special education students with least restrictive environment
State Standards	Aligned curriculum to state standards; Put copies in classrooms
Supplemental	After School Counts

Topic	Resource or Change
Supplemental	Mandatory after school tutoring if student under-performing
Supplemental	Sylvan Learning; Kummon Centers; Saturday Academy; Homework Help Hotline
Time on Task	Increase time on task
Writing	Higher expectations for students' writing achievement
Writing	Increased amount of writing required of students
Writing	Journal writing, students write weekly with one 4-square sample each week, monthly review of writing samples by committee, extended responses, research reports,
Writing	New writing curriculum based on state's expectations
Writing	Teachers learning and applying the state rubric and indicators
Writing	Use of AlphaSmarts
Writing	Use of extended response
Writing	Use of graphic organizers
Writing	Use of journals
Writing	Use of portfolios
Writing	Use of Power Writing
Writing	Use of Traits of Writing
Writing	Weekly, or more often, required writing samples

Appendix H: List of Parent and Community Involvement Activities

Selected topics mentioned by principals.

Topic	Activity/Involvement
Activities	Family Science Night
Activities	Family Math Night
Activities	Family Reading Night
Business Partners	Mentor, job shadowing, vendors supply extras materials/training, Rotary, department stores such as Sears,
Communication	Open door policy
Communication	Weekly newsletter
Community	Building used for community activities, such as elderly walking in morning, youth football,
Community	Character Counts! For school and community
Community	May Day Baskets, open houses, parades,
Community	School holds Community Career Fair
Glasses	Lion's; WalMart, Pearle Vision, Lens Crafter,
Government	Health department, city and state officials and offices, public safety, courts, post office, park district, public library
Instruction	Family resource library
Instruction	Information in newsletter on how to help your student
Instruction	Materials for families to use at home
Instruction	Parent-Teacher Conferences
Instruction	Reading packets for parent and students to do together
Instruction	Workshops for parents on how to teach their children
Leadership	Parents on School Improvement Plan team
Literacy	Bookbusters
Literacy	St. Jude Marathon
Medical	Social agencies provide doctors, counselors,
Medical	Volunteer dental service (around Valentine's Day), hospitals, doctors, medical aid society,
Organizations	Banks, grocery stores, churches, Miles of Smiles,
Organizations	Businesses help around holidays
Organizations	Children societies; Children's' Aid,
Organizations	College and universities, YMCA,
Organizations	Food pantry, clothes closets, neighborhood organizations,
Organizations	Local education foundations
Organizations	Local radio station
Organizations	Ministers
Organizations	Music instruction, choirs, etc. provided by external groups, Junior Achievement,
Organizations	Teachers' union, service clubs, private donors,

Topic	Activity/Involvement
Organizations	VFW, American Legion, Red Cross,
Organizations	Wal-Mart
Organizations	Women's clubs, Jaycees, civic development groups,
Parent Liaison	Visits kindergarten students, gave family library card
Parent Teacher Organization	Provide materials, supplies, playground equipment, landscaping, Teacher Appreciation Week, Sponsor Read a thon after Book It ends
Personnel	Family liaison, outreach, nurse, counselors,
Planning	Input from parents after every field trip
Planning	On school committees, Bilingual Committee, Leadership Committee, School Improvement,
Planning	Parent survey, Community Survey
Volunteers	Parent who is certified teacher to work with students; retirees; grandparents; tutoring; lunchroom;
Volunteers	University/college students, sororities, fraternities,

Appendix I: Case Studies

Case Study 1

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, Berwyn, Illinois
Violet Tantillo, Principal
http://www.d98.cook.k12.il.us/

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School is an example of a high-poverty school which is also a high-performing school. By emphasizing reading, this school saw remarkable increases in the percentages of students meeting or exceeding the state standards. On the 2003 ISAT exam, 70 percent of the third-grade students met or exceeded the Illinois state standards in reading and 79 percent in mathematics. Fifth graders were high performers as well with 64 percent meeting or exceeding state standards in reading and 76 percent in mathematics (Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu).

Located one mile west of Chicago, Berwyn is an urban school on the fringe of a large city. The demographics of this kindergarten to 5th grade school have changed rapidly in the past few years. Enrollments increased 31 percent from 1999 to 2003 (436 to 573), with an additional 6 percent increase predicted for 2004. The percentage of low-income students increased from 50.2 percent in 1999 to 78.9 percent in 2003. With a mobility rate hovering between 20 to 25 percent, Jefferson rapidly changed from a school with a predominately white population to one with three-fourths of the students of Hispanic descent, most of whom are second-language learners.

In 2001, this school directly addressed its declining test scores and changing demographics by focusing on reading, and the improvement of reading instruction became the priority of the entire school. The principal, a certified reading specialist, provided leadership in establishing the school as a Best Practices school, which was a radical change from the school's prior whole group instruction. The Illinois State Board of Education's Summer Bridges grant, which was the responsibility of the principal, was instrumental in providing the foundation needed to implement this change. Title I reading teachers served as professional development providers to implement the Summer Bridges Best Practices in Reading Instruction school-wide. Subsequently, a district curriculum director was hired, and the entire district adopted the Best Practices approach with Jefferson as a model.

The current, comprehensive reading program is grounded in scientifically-based research and is carefully aligned to the Illinois learning standards. The reading program is based on Best Practices and has five components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Each day, adequate and uninterrupted time is provided for reading instruction. The reading program includes

- Harcourt Collections, adopted in 2001 by the district. The series provides intervention readers for those students who are off grade level.
- Fountas and Pinnell Phonics which is aligned to the Harcourt series
- Michael Haggerty's Phonemic Awareness
- Grade level curriculum maps
- Guided Reading Groups/Literacy Circles
- Literacy Centers

Instructional materials, geared to the specific needs of the students, include

- Scholastic Guided Reading Program
- Ready Readers (Modern Curriculum Press)
- First Chapters (Modern Curriculum Press)
- Orbit Chapter Books
- Extensive collection of books on tape

Title I intervention is provided in grades 1 through 3 when student progress is not adequate. The intervention aligns with the overall reading program and targets the identified areas where the student requires additional instruction.

ESL services help second language learners. On Our Way to English (Rigby) and an ELL technology program are part of this program.

Changing from whole group instruction to the Best Practices model required extensive, initial and ongoing professional development of the staff. Development activities focused on helping teachers apply the proven principles in effective classroom instruction and included

- ISBE, Meet the Challenge
- Fountas and Pinnell, Guided Reading
- West 40, Reading First Academies
- Debbie Diller, Literacy Work Stations

Data are used to improve reading instruction. Student progress is monitored throughout the year with valid, reliable classroom-based instructional assessments. Tests also include commercially available and state instruments such as DIBELS, ISEL, and TPRI. Teachers use these assessments to determine flexible classroom groupings and for other instructional decisions.

Mathematics instruction is aligned to the Illinois state standards and includes

- Houghton Mifflin Mathematics series
- Daily Oral Math
- Problem of the Day
- Grade level manipulatives
- Grade level curriculum maps

A technology component is directly tied to the curriculum maps to maximize student achievement, including A+ Math and Wild Wild West Math.

The school seeks active involvement of the parents. Each day, whatever the weather, the principal is outside greeting children as they come, saying good bye, and being visible and approachable for parents. In addition to an involved PTA and other activities, parents are involved in four family reading nights each year funded through Title I and Our Reading First programs.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Case Study 2

Berrian Elementary School, Quincy, Illinois
John Tignor, Principal
http://schools.qps.org/berrian/

Berrian Elementary School, recipient of the Spotlight School Awards in 2003 and 2004, and an Academic Improvement Award for 2003, is located in Quincy, a town of 40,366 in Illinois. Approximately 185 students and 12 teachers, 8 support teachers, and 14 support staff are in this kindergarten through third grade school. Over 70 percent of the students are low-income, and the racial distribution is 86 percent white students and 14 percent black students. In this high-performing school, 79 percent of the third graders met or exceeded Illinois reading standards and 85 percent met or exceeded math standards in 2003.

At Berrian, students are the number one priority, and the goal is to create a climate that helps students get ready to learn and to achieve academic excellence. Daily, the principal and teachers work to build and maintain positive relationships with the students so they feel needed, wanted, and valued. The staff purposefully builds rapport with students. It is important at Berrian that students and staff leave each day feeling that it was a good day.

The school adopted Love and Logic (Fay & Funk), a common sense approach to help students take responsibility for their actions. Character building focuses on one value: kindness. Violence, even name calling, is not tolerated, and the school has become virtually violence-free.

When openings occur, teachers are selected who not only understood academics, but also are empathetic, good listeners, build and maintain relationships naturally, support the mission of the school, and can meet the needs of individual students.

The principal and teachers at Berrian have worked for over five years to build the climate and collaboration needed to continuously improve academic achievement. A key to their success is that together they read and study books, such as

- Guiding Readers and Writers (Fountas and Pinnell)
- On Solid Ground (Taberski)
- Strategies that Work (Harvey & Goudvis)
- Fresh Look at Writing
- Understanding Poverty (Ruby Payne)

Through these book studies, they have identified strategies to implement at Berrian to improve academic achievement. One such strategy is making sure individual children are matched with the appropriate instructional level. This is particularly important in reading. Berrian uses a Readers Workshop approach, which incorporates guided reading with independent reading. Students in first, second, and third grades read independently for 30 to 60 minutes per day. In order to make sure each child has a book at the correct learning level and of interest, Berrian developed classroom libraries with hundreds of books. Writing is emphasized with a purposeful, daily writing activity. The progress of students is carefully monitored. Struggling readers are identified every two weeks, and monthly writing samples track the progress of each student.

Berrian has worked diligently to involve parents in structured activities that help them understand and assist their children. Activities such as Girls Night Out and Boys Night Out are attended by approximately one-third of the students and the Adult/Child Activity many times has more than one-half the students attending.

The school involves the community in a variety of ways. The school was built in 1904, and open houses are held so community members can come back and reminisce about their education. Students deliver May Day baskets with notes and candy, and the school staff and students march in the Dogwood Parade.

The high academic performance at Berrian is founded on solid leadership principles which include --
- Establish the purpose of the school--to educate students
- Share a vision or road map of where the school is headed
- Create a commitment and investment from everyone through shared ownership
- Develop capacity through developing abilities, knowledge, skills, tools, and resources
- Build supports needed for continued growth.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Case Study 3

Catlin Grade School, Catlin, Illinois
Crystal Vowels, Principal

Catlin Grade School, recipient of the Academic Improvement Award in 2003, is located in a rural area in east central Illinois near the Indiana border. The grade school covers kindergarten through eighth grade and also houses a pre-kindergarten program. Nearly all of the approximately 400 students are white. Approximately fifteen percent of the students are low-income.

Students at Catlin are high achievers. In 2003, 81 percent of the third grade students met or exceeded Illinois reading standards, and 97 percent met or exceeded mathematics standards. In fifth grade, nearly three-fourths of the students met or exceeded reading standards, and 77 percent met or exceeded math standards. (Interactive Illinois Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu)

The dedication of the teachers makes a big difference in this school's performance. There is a commitment to the success of all children—they do not want even one or two to fall behind. The school works to maintain a culture based on caring. Teachers dedicate time to student tutoring and keep in constant contact with parents regarding student concerns and successes. The goal is to help each individual child succeed.

Because they know how important a positive culture is to success, the principal and teachers celebrate as often as they can. Morning news broadcasts provide time to celebrate achievements and talk about positive happenings at the school. A continuous PowerPoint displays these "pats on the back" for all to see. It is not uncommon to celebrate in unique ways, such as the Kazoo Day.

The principal and teachers use staff meetings and development time to discuss ways to improve instruction and share what they are doing in their classrooms. From these discussions, the curriculum was mapped and aligned to meet Illinois state standards both within and between grade levels. Areas needing additional attention were identified by analyzing the test data. Ways to improve writing were implemented, including the Four-Square method. Reading for Kindergarten to second grade now uses Four-Blocks. The staff continually looks at ways to increase the interest of the unmotivated reader, especially in third and fourth grades. The kid-friendly learning standards are used.

The school is fortunate in the strong parent and community support. A Solid Foundations grant was useful in increasing parent involvement and sharing ways parents could help their children learn. Catlin has also secured a grant with The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning to support students as social learners as well as academic learners.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Case Study 4

Riverview Elementary School, South Beloit, Illinois
Scott Fisher, Principal
http://southbeloitschooldistrict.org/riverview/riverview.html

Riverview Elementary School, located in South Beloit, Illinois, enrolls around 250 students in grades 2 to 4. Near the Wisconsin border and in the urban fringe of a large city, River view enrolls a diverse group of students: over half of the students are low-income, over 20 percent are of Hispanic descent, and 6 percent are Black.

From 2001 to 2003, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding Illinois standards increased from 46 percent to 67 percent in reading, from 31 percent to 50 percent in writing, and from 55 percent to 88 percent in math. In 2001, 48 percent of the students met or exceeded all state standards; by 2003, this percentage increased to 64. (Interactive Illinois Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu).

Several factors led to the exemplary academic improvement at Riverview that earned it an Academic Improvement Award in 2003-04. Under the leadership of a new principal, reading was the highest priority, followed by a focus on mathematics. Each day, students spend 90 minutes on reading and on math. Riverview purchased new textbooks and computers.

Reading instruction follows the Seven Strategies of a Good Reader. Whole group instruction; Four-Blocks with small group instruction; and daily skill, phonics, and vocabulary drills are some of the characteristics of the reading program. Reading skills are reinforced through computer programs, and students read at school as much as possible. Students also use Accelerated Reader and an awards program.

For mathematics, the newly adopted Houghton Mifflin series provides a problem-solving approach and multi-step problems. Assessments determine if students are meeting achievement timelines.

The Four-Square approach is used for writing instruction, including the use of graphic organizers, a focus on thinking, and extended responses. Students complete writing samples three times a week.

Riverview focuses on the needs of individual students. When ever possible, students are kept in the classroom by using supporting teachers, adaptations, and individualized programs.

During the past three years, reading tutors and paraprofessionals were hired and class sizes kept low. Future funding cuts may make these strategies difficult to retain.

Retaining a quality teaching staff is a priority of Riverview's administration. New hires must fit into the school's environment, be highly motivated, be part of a cooperative team, and enjoy working with families of low-income.

Professional development activities focus on practical applications that have been shown to be effective. For example, on development activity concerned how to conduct parent conferences. Through a concerted effort to involve parents, conference participation increased to 100 percent.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Case Study 5

Whittier Primary School, Peoria, Illinois
Sharon Desmoulin-Kherat, Principal
http://www.psd150.org/whittier/index.html

Whittier Primary School, a pre-kindergarten to fourth grade school in Peoria, is part of a large unit district in a medium-sized city in central Illinois. With an enrollment of approximately 380, Whittier enrolls over 60 percent of its students from low-income families. The diverse school has 47 percent white students, 47 percent black students, and 4.8 percent Hispanic students. This low-income, high-performing school earned the Spotlight School Award in both 2003 and 2004. Performance continued to improve in 2004, as these test scores make clear:

	3rd Grade Reading	**3rd Grade Math**
2003	65% meeting or exceeding standards	88% meeting or exceeding standards
2004	89% meeting or exceeding standards	92% meeting or exceeding standards

(Interactive Illinois Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu)

The key to the success of this school is the positive learning environment focused on the students and the belief that all students can learn. In other words, the expectations are high for all students. The focus is placed on academics and maintaining a climate of mutual respect. Staff and students are encouraged in a positive manner on a regular basis. The teachers are learners and are always willing to share with others. The goal is to make Whittier a school anyone would want to attend--a first class school that the teachers, staff, their friends and families members would feel proud attending and/or recommending to others. Instruction is founded on best practices and scientific-based research. Examples include the Open Court Reading Program and a reading coach for the school. Strategies in reading instruction include summarizing, making connections, visualizing, predicting, asking questions, clarifying, and monitoring

Student achievement is carefully monitored. Classroom goals are based on school goals, and teachers are provided tools to assist in documenting and tracking academic progress. A routine assessment program includes unit and end-of-month assessments. The monitoring of lesson plans and constant review of achievement data are part of the school culture.

A variety of interventions are implemented (during and after school) for students who fall too far behind. The workshop program provides individualized academic support to students. Continuous encouragement and countless incentives help students to keep growing. One particularly successful intervention is the extended day reading program in which students received additional instruction, a snack, and transportation.

Volunteer tutors serve a critical role. A college close to Whittier provides tutors, and parent volunteers assist with the chess club, robotics club, enriched math for fourth graders, grants for orchestra students who are low-income and in need of a rental instruments, and in many other areas.

The school is wide open and everyone is welcomed with a smile. All community members and parents are invited to assist when their schedule permits. There is something for everyone to do. A uniform professional development program provides teachers with a common focus and consistency across the grade levels. Teachers collaborate with each other and, when possible, visit other buildings. Finally, they are always looking for ways to improve.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Case Study 6

Petty Elementary School, Sumner, Illinois
Gary Huber, Principal
http://www.red.lawrnc.k12.il.us/

Petty Elementary School earned both the Spotlight Award and the Academic Improvement Award in 2003 and 2004. This kindergarten through fourth grade school with less than 100 students is part of the Red Hill Community Unit School District along the southeastern border of Illinois. Over half of the students are low-income in this school with a nearly all white population. In 2003, over 90 percent of the third grade students met or exceeded the Illinois state standards in reading, writing, and in math. (Interactive Illinois Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu).

A focus is placed on reading and math instruction. Four-Blocks, a balanced literacy program, is used, as well as Accelerated Reading and Accelerated Math.

A myriad of special programs help students succeed. One program focuses on improving attendance. Incentive programs reward students for improved grades, completed homework, and demonstration of good character traits.

The district strongly supports professional development activities. The independent, motivated, well-educated staff completed curriculum mapping and alignment of curriculum to standards, assessments, and descriptors. Teachers are encouraged to attend and participate in instructional curriculum improvement activities and workshops, whenever possible.

Petty Elementary has the support of the parents and community. Parents are involved in the planning and implementation of many aspects of the school, including technology, the school improvement plan, and the discipline committee. An active PTO strives to support the school with any means possible.

Billman, *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement,* NIU, 2004.

Appendix J: Selected School Summaries

Individual school research reports are available by clicking on the school name at
http://www.p20.niu.edu/P20/acadimproveawards/awards.asp.