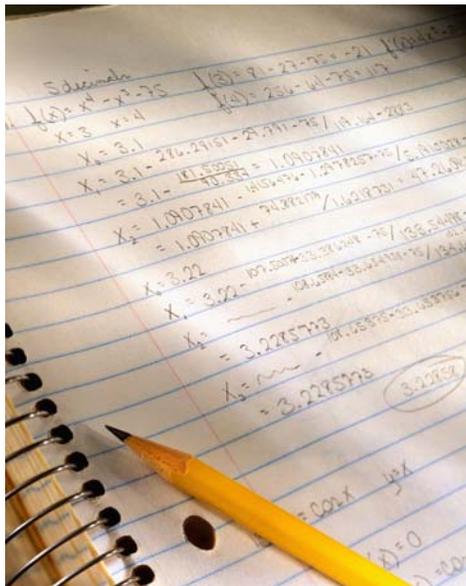


District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools

Memphis City Schools



December 2006



STATE OF TENNESSEE

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

John G. Morgan

Comptroller

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December 20, 2006

The Honorable John S. Wilder
Speaker of the Senate
The Honorable Jimmy Naifeh
Speaker of the House of Representatives
and
Members of the House and Senate Education Committees

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-602 requires the Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Department of Education to study schools and districts that have failed to meet state standards of adequate progress. Every year, the state Department of Education releases a list of high priority schools and districts that are at varying stages of meeting these standards. For the purposes of this report, OEA reviewed schools in the School Improvement 2 category of the state's high priority schools list during the 2004-05 school year, which included 24 schools in five districts. This system report for Memphis City Schools is one of five addressing the affected school systems. OEA also produced a statewide report summarizing trends noted throughout the five districts.

The scope for this study was limited to four education policy areas that impact the quality of instruction and student achievement: goals and governance; teaching quality; student discipline, attendance, and dropout; and instructional support. This report identifies areas for improvement and highlights exceptional and noteworthy practices in Memphis City Schools, and suggests recommendations for improvement.

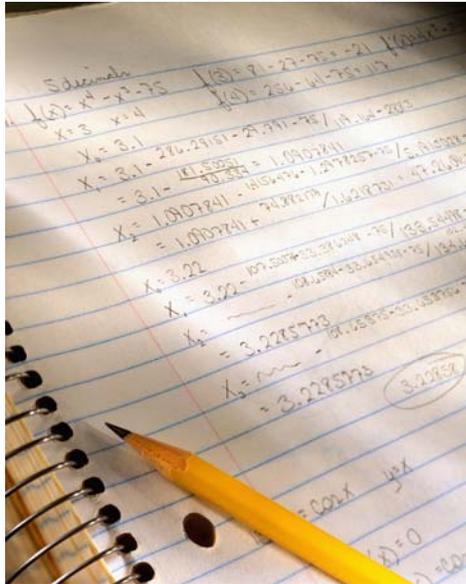
Sincerely,

John G. Morgan
Comptroller of the Treasury

cc: Commissioner Lana Seivers
Department of Education

District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools

Memphis City Schools



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December 2006

The Office of Education Accountability was created in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury by *Tennessee Code Annotated* 4-3-308 to monitor the performance of school boards, superintendents, school districts, schools, and school personnel in accordance with the performance standards set out in the Education Improvement Act or by regulations of the State Board of Education. The office is to conduct such studies, analyses, or audits as it may determine necessary to evaluate education performance and progress, or as may be assigned to it by the Governor or General Assembly.

Comptroller of the Treasury, Office of Education Accountability.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Memphis City Schools (MCS) had six schools in the 2005-06 school year that had failed to make adequate yearly progress for three years in a row. As required by *Tennessee Code Annotated §49-1-602*, the Office of Education Accountability must study schools and districts placed on notice. This report is the MCS portion of that study.

Since the Office of Education Accountability first studied Memphis City Schools' high priority schools in 2001, the district has placed a large emphasis on district-wide reform, principal leadership, budgetary efficiencies, alternative sources of financial support, teacher recruitment and induction, truancy prevention, and technology use. In fact, while MCS was a High Priority System in 2005-06, the district is no longer identified as such.¹

However, in spite of its gains, MCS faces a multitude of challenging educational circumstances, such as:

- Concentrated poverty: 95 percent of the schools qualify for Title I, a federal program that targets assistance to high poverty schools.
- High rates of student mobility:² The district's mobility rate has slowly increased from 25 percent in 2001-02 to 30 percent in 2005-06.³
- Budgetary constraints: For the past three school years, MCS has operated with a significant budget shortfall and without any increase in its operating budget.

Specifically, the report concludes:

The district works with schools to establish support for district-wide reform. MCS has restructured its district leadership teams to better guide schools toward a set of common goals. Among the newly created teams are the Academic Leadership Team and the Cross-Functional Teams. The district has replaced its monthly paper newsletter with the *Memphis City Schools Insider*, a weekly online newsletter designed to keep school staff and the greater community up-to-date on information central to district reform. (See pages 6-7.)

Despite establishing policy and support structures, MCS faces challenges in transferring district goals to school practice. MCS has over 190 schools, 117,000 students, and 7,315 teachers.⁴ As stated in the district's 2006 Comprehensive Systemwide Plan, the ratio of district support staff to the number of schools limits the district's ability to effectively support all schools. Other challenges include limited participation in professional development activities, as evidenced by professional development attendance records. (See pages 7-8.)

MCS has made significant curriculum and governance changes to cope with student mobility. MCS created a unified district focus that provides greater stability for students as they move from school to school. MCS also uses an individual student tracking system that enables the district to follow students as they move throughout the system and provide schools with student records in a more timely fashion. (See page 8.)

¹ The Tennessee Department of Education annually reviews all Local Education Agencies (LEA) in the state in order to determine if each is making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Any LEA that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years is considered a high priority system.

² Student mobility rate refers to the percentage of students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level.

³ Memphis City Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, "Percent of Stable Students for 1999-00 through 2005-06," accessed July 10, 2006, http://memphisdemo2.extranet.urbanplanet.com/sites/974cdc6f-b867-4129-8e23-506faae79343/uploads/Stability_Index_05-06.pdf.

⁴ MCS, Comprehensive Systemwide Plan, 2006.

MCS has a strong system of accountability to both monitor progress toward goals and make necessary revisions to policy and practice. During the 2005-06 school year, MCS implemented a new district-wide formative assessment system, Renaissance Learning, to monitor student performance throughout the school year and match learning needs with targeted instruction. Before launching the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan, MCS gathered baseline data – including rates of discipline referrals, suspension and expulsion, and school climate survey responses from students, parents, and teachers – and established a data analysis system to gauge the effectiveness of behavior management at schools and across the district. MCS is continuing development of a district-wide tracking system to monitor participation in and effectiveness of professional development offerings. (See pages 8-10.)

The district is committed to enhancing and sustaining principal leadership. Nearly 20 percent of MCS principals are new to the position or the school each year. Two specific initiatives provide evidence of the district's commitment to enhancing principal leadership capacity: New Leaders for New Schools and a revised principal evaluation process. (See pages 10-11.)

Facing budget shortfalls, the district focuses on efficiency and expanding sources of financial support. The district brought out-sourced operations back in-house, reengineered information technology operations, re-bid insurance and equipment contracts, merged schools to improve utilization rates, cut teachers in excess of the state staffing formula, and secured alternative funding sources by capitalizing on competitive grants, partnerships with the University of Memphis, and other community resources. (See pages 11-13.)

MCS is committed to a researched-based approach to professional development that seeks to incorporate ongoing learning in every aspect of a teacher's job. MCS focuses on several sessions of professional development with follow-up, as opposed to a one-day conference. In addition, MCS began participation in the national Teacher Leader Academy in the summer of 2006 to increase the leadership capacity of select MCS teachers. (See page 13.)

The district has a strategic plan for recruitment and induction of new educators. First Steps to Excellence, the district-provided induction program for new teachers, encourages professional growth to improve the education of students throughout MCS. In addition, the New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis, a nationally-recognized mentoring model, works to decrease teacher attrition by supporting new teachers. (See pages 14-16.)

NCLB's Highly Qualified Teacher provision has created a need for more middle school teachers in MCS. In response, MCS partnered with various agencies to recruit and train more middle school teachers. The Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) Program, a joint effort between the University of Memphis and MCS initiated in the summer of 2006, will prepare mathematics and science teachers for success in urban middle schools. The Middle School Highly Qualified Initiative is a collaborative program between Memphis area colleges and universities and the district's core middle school teachers. (See page 17.)

MCS provides incentives for teachers who improve academic performance in high need schools. MCS schools that are on the state's High Priority list and in jeopardy of falling into alternative governance enter a process called "Fresh Start." To encourage teachers and administrators to take on the challenge of re-engineering a school to improve academic achievement, Fresh Start offers monetary incentives to schools, teachers, staff, and principals for achieving the academic and non-academic results necessary for improved overall performance. (See pages 17-18.)

MCS revamped its approach to student behavior management, now using the system-wide Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan (BRBP). The plan represents a district-wide and community effort to shift from a fragmented, reactive disciplinary approach to a comprehensive, proactive approach focused on encouraging positive behavior. Despite broad community support for the plan, some

teachers have been resistant to the changes. Behavior data from 2004-05, the year prior to Blue Ribbon, and 2005-06, the first year of Blue Ribbon implementation, reveals growing numbers of violence-related incidents, such as a 35 percent increase in middle-school gang-related incidents. (See pages 19-22).

MCS implemented a comprehensive truancy prevention system that allows for earlier intervention and increased parental notification. In January 2001, MCS opened the Truancy Assessment Center (TAC). Under the TAC approach, MCS supplied the Memphis Police Department a list of students absent five days or more, and police brought students who were picked up and whose names were on the list to the TAC. MCS closed the TAC during the 2002-03 school year and replaced it with school-level Student Attendance Review Teams (SART) and a district-wide Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) in 2003. This created a comprehensive, tiered approach that involves more notification and involvement of parents and allows schools to intervene earlier with students who have patterns of truancy. MCS has a one percent recidivism rate for students referred to the SARB. (See page 22.)

MCS uses technology to reduce barriers to professional development and to increase available teaching resources. The Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) and the Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) help teachers see technology as a tool to galvanize their teaching practice, rather than an add-on to other teaching obligations. They do this by making professional development and technology more accessible and classroom oriented. (See pages 22-23.)

MCS struggles to find an appropriate role in providing supplemental education services (SES) for students in underperforming schools. The district has difficulty helping families make well-informed choices about available tutoring services. Low attendance in SES programs makes it difficult for MCS and the Tennessee Department of Education to evaluate provider services once in operation. (See pages 23-24.)

MCS restructured alternative schools to meet various student needs. Alternative Learning Programs in MCS offer a variety of alternative learning environments and focus on academics, behavior modification, parent involvement, and service learning. Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, alternative schools enrolled students according to the necessary level of intervention: Level A - zero tolerance schools, Level B - success schools, and Level C - choice schools. (See pages 24-25.)

The report recommends:

The district should maintain a steady focus on school-level capacity for and implementation of district-wide reform efforts. Implementing change and sustaining focus is difficult in any sizeable organization – Memphis City Schools is by far Tennessee’s largest school district and struggles with all the complexities and obstacles inherent in urban districts. Maintaining the effort will be extremely challenging, but is crucial to real improvement for Memphis City Schools.

The district should study the issue of student mobility to better target effective interventions. In Memphis, high student mobility is often the effect of poverty, city redevelopment, and family instability, and is not necessarily linked to school quality. MCS leaders may want to devote more attention to this problem and initiate discussions with other relevant public agencies, such as those concerned with housing, transportation, and city redevelopment.

The district should continue the established momentum focused on recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities for high quality teachers. MCS should evaluate its newly-developed partnerships and programs to determine their impact on teacher retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

See page 25 for the recommendations. See page 27 for Memphis City Schools’ response to the report.

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INTRODUCTION

Tennessee Code Annotated §49-1-602 charges the Office of Education Accountability (OEA) to study schools and districts that have failed to meet state standards of adequate progress.¹ Every year, the state Department of Education releases a list of high priority schools and districts that are at varying stages of meeting these standards. For the purposes of this report, OEA reviewed schools in the School Improvement 2 category of the state's high priority schools list.

This report identifies areas for improvement and highlights exceptional and noteworthy practices in Memphis City Schools. In addition, OEA developed reports for the four other districts with Improvement 2 schools and a state-wide policy report that looks at state actions affecting high priority schools.

SCOPE

The purpose of OEA's study is twofold. First, it informs the legislature of how well districts' existing policies and practices support the improvement of student achievement in Improvement 2 schools. Second, it includes recommendations that support improving student achievement. This report focuses on findings and recommendations for Memphis City Schools (MCS). The state-level report focuses on findings and recommendations at the state level.

There are 24 Improvement 2 schools in five school districts – the four large urban districts in the state and Fayette County. The study reviewed all 24 schools and the five districts.

The scope for the study was limited to four education policy areas that impact the quality of instruction and student achievement:

Goals and governance

- How clearly are districts and schools setting goals and assessing their progress?
- How well are districts and schools developing a positive and effective work environment?
- How effectively are districts and schools involving families and the community in improving achievement?
- Are resources allocated to schools in a way that allows them to be used for the most important student achievement improvement efforts?

Teaching quality

- How well are districts' professional development initiatives meeting the needs of teachers and administrators?
- How effective are teacher and administrator evaluations and how are teachers and administrators held accountable for improving student achievement?
- Are districts taking the necessary steps to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers?

Student discipline, attendance, and dropout

- What are districts and schools doing to establish safe and orderly environments in the schools?
- How effective are districts and schools at addressing drop out and attendance issues

Instructional support

- How effective have supplemental education services, namely tutoring, been at targeting students' learning needs?
- How well are districts and schools using technology to improve student achievement?

¹ *T.C.A. §49-1-602* requires the OEA to study jointly with the Department of Education schools placed "on notice." The term "on notice" is no longer used by the Department; instead, the Department calls all the schools and districts on the list "high priority," and has renamed "on notice" schools and districts as those in the third year of failing to meet adequate yearly progress (also called School Improvement 2).

- How effective is the district at ensuring that teachers have sufficient current textbooks and other instructional materials?

METHODOLOGY

The Office of Education Accountability used a variety of methods to collect information about schools' and districts' policies. Staff conducted a literature review to define the four areas of study and determine indicators of best practices. In addition, staff reviewed numerous school, district, and state documents pertaining to the four areas. OEA conducted surveys of district staff and school principals and also interviewed district superintendents, key district staff members, school principals, assistant principals, and other school staff.

SNAPSHOT OF THE DISTRICT

Since the Office of Education Accountability first studied Memphis City Schools' high priority schools in 2001, the district has focused on improving its governance. The district has placed a large emphasis on district-wide reform, principal leadership, budgetary efficiencies, alternative sources of financial support, teacher recruitment and induction, truancy prevention, and technology use. In fact, while MCS was a High Priority System in 2005-06, the district is no longer identified as such.²

When Dr. Carol Johnson assumed leadership of Memphis City Schools (MCS) in October 2003, she found "many departments working in complete isolation, causing confusion and undue stress on schools."³ She responded by creating district leadership teams to develop and monitor the district's Academic Achievement Agenda (The Academic Leadership Team) and to systematically review school improvement plans (grade-level specific Cross-Functional Teams). Dr. Johnson also secured MCS participation in *New Leaders for New Schools* (NLNS), a national initiative to recruit and develop high quality urban principals. (See pages 6-14.)

In addition to a focus on issues of governance, MCS is enhancing learning opportunities to provide teachers and staff with the necessary capacity to implement reform. Over the past two school years, MCS has implemented an array of strategic initiatives focused on professional development and mentoring support for educators, such as the *New Teacher Project*, and improved services provided by the Teaching and Learning Academy of MCS. (See pages 14-19.)

In terms of student behavior issues, MCS implemented the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan during the 2005-06 school year. Blue Ribbon is a district-wide effort to shift from corporal punishment and 127 distinct student behavior programs to a comprehensive, proactive approach focused on encouraging positive behavior. (See pages 19-23.)

Regarding instructional support, MCS has expanded the use of technology to reduce barriers to professional development and to increase available teaching resources. However, like many districts statewide, MCS faces challenges with supplemental education services (SES) implementation. (See pages 23-26.)

In spite of its gains, MCS faces a multitude of challenging educational circumstances, such as:

- Concentrated poverty: 95 percent of the schools qualify for Title I.

² The Tennessee Department of Education annually reviews all Local Education Agencies (LEA) in the state in order to determine if each is making adequate yearly progress (AYP). Any LEA that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years is considered a high priority system.

³ Brenda Cassellius, "Using Relationships, Responsibility, and Respect to Get from 'Good to Great' in Memphis Middle Schools," *Middle School Journal*, 37 (5), May 2006, pp. 4-15.

- High rates of student mobility:⁴ The district's mobility rate has slowly increased from 25 percent in 2001-02 to 30 percent in 2005-06.⁵
- Budgetary constraints: For the past three school years, MCS has operated without any increase in its operating budget.

Exhibit 1: Background facts for Memphis City Schools, 2004-05 School Year

Schools and Staff	
Number of schools	185
Number of schools on notice	6
Number of teachers	7,315
Number of teacher waivers	140
Number of teacher permits	79
Average teacher salary	\$48,740
Student Population	
Number of students	117,740
African American	106,406 (85%)
Caucasian	12,113 (10%)
Hispanic	5,073 (4%)
Other	1,708 (1%)
Limited English proficient	3,990 (4%)
Students with disabilities	15,990 (14%)
Economically disadvantaged	90,701 (64%)
Number of students in Improvement 2 schools	5,185 (4%)
Suspensions	24,991
Expulsions	490
Graduation rate	66%
Grades K-8 attendance	94%
Grades 9-12 attendance	88%
Funding	
Total expenditures	\$922,966,517
Per pupil expenditures per ADM	\$7,836
Federal revenue	16%
State revenue	39%
Local revenue	45%

SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, 2005 Report Card; MCS Office of Research, Evaluation, & Assessment

HIGH PRIORITY STATUS

As required in *TCA §49-1-601*, the Tennessee Department of Education began placing schools “on notice,” meaning that they failed to meet achievement and growth criteria established by the Department in 2001. Once placed on notice, the Tennessee Code requires the Department of Education and the Office of Education Accountability to study these schools. Schools could be on notice for up to two years before more serious sanctions – such as a state takeover of a school – could occur.

With the introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2002, Tennessee adapted its accountability system to mesh with the requirements under the federal legislation. This effort produced new terminology

⁴ Student mobility rate refers to the percentage of students moving from one school to another for reasons other than being promoted to the next school level.

⁵ Memphis City Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, “Percent of Stable Students for 1999-00 through 2005-06,” accessed July 10, 2006, http://memphisdemo2.extranet.urbanplanet.com/sites/974cdc6f-b867-4129-8e23-506faae79343/uploads/Stability_Index_05-06.pdf.

for holding schools accountable, including “School Improvement 1 and 2” and “Reconstitution.” In NCLB terms, schools on notice are now called School Improvement 2 schools.

Of the 57 schools on the high priority list in MCS, six are in the School Improvement 2 category. The district’s other high priority schools include:

- 22 in School Improvement 1, all of which are Improving;
- eight in Restructuring 1, six of which are Improving;
- 16 in Restructuring 2, ten of which are Improving;
- five under State/LEA Reconstitution.

Exhibit 2 provides an overview of the six School Improvement 2 schools, and the reasons for which they did not make adequate yearly progress during the 2004-05 school year.

Exhibit 2: Memphis City Schools in School Improvement 2, Reason for High Priority Status, 2005-06

Klondike Elementary	% proficient/advanced in math for all students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students; % proficient/advanced in reading/language arts/writing for all students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students
Northside High School	% tested and % proficient/advanced in math for students with disabilities; % tested and % proficient/advanced in reading/language arts/writing for students with disabilities
Oakhaven Middle/High School	% proficient/advanced in math for all students, African American students and economically disadvantaged students; graduation rate ⁶
Pyramid Academy	Elementary/middle: % proficient/advanced in math for all students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students; % proficient/advanced in reading/language arts/writing for African American students and economically disadvantaged students High school: % proficient/advanced in math for economically disadvantaged students
Raleigh Egypt Middle School	% proficient/advanced in math for all students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students
Trezevant Middle/High School	High school: % proficient/advanced in math for all students, African American students, and economically disadvantaged students; graduation rate

SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, State Report Card 2005

In August 2006, the Tennessee Department of Education released the 2006-07 High Priority Schools list. Four of the six High Priority Memphis City schools from 2005-06 have not improved and are now under corrective action. Klondike Elementary School and Oakhaven Middle/High School have seen improvement; the schools made AYP in the 2005-06 school year and are now listed as School Improvement 2 - Improving.

⁶ In 2005-06, Tennessee used the event dropout rate – a measure of the proportion of students who dropped out of school in a single year – for its graduation rate. The state now uses the graduation rate definition – the percentage of students graduating on time.

CHANGES SINCE THE 2001 STUDY

The Office of Education Accountability (OEA) first reviewed schools on notice in 2001, per *Tennessee Code Annotated* §49-1-602. Both the 2001 study and this report look at goals and governance and instructional support issues. However, the 2001 study also looked at facilities and climate and class size. OEA broadened the study this year to include teaching quality and student discipline, attendance and dropout issues. In the 2001 study, OEA made several recommendations for MCS, including:

1. Memphis City Schools should continue efforts to expand pre-kindergarten opportunities to at-risk children.

MCS will have 160 Pre-K classrooms for the 2006-07 school year, up from 88 classrooms in 2001-02.⁷ Fifty-one of these classrooms are “Voluntary Pre-K,” and these programs give first priority to at-risk four-year-olds.

Exhibit 3: Pre-K Classrooms, MCS, 2006-07

Funding Source	# of Classrooms
No Child Left Behind Pre-K	33
District Funded Pre-K	20
Voluntary Pre-K	51
State Pilot	12
Careers and Technology	8
Special Education Pre-K	25
Head Start	8
Adolescent Parenting	3
Total 2006-07 Classrooms	160

SOURCE: Email to author from Brenda Taylor, Early Learning Coordinator, MCS, July 14, 2006

2. Memphis City Schools should continue to develop and implement strategies to attract and retain quality teachers.

MCS has launched several recruitment and retention initiatives - *New Teacher Project*, *New Teacher Center*, *New Leaders for New Schools*, *Teacher Quality Enhancement Program*, *Middle School Highly Qualified Initiative*, and *Teacher Leader Academy*. Many challenges remain, including the need to recruit teachers with experience working with at-risk children, especially in the district’s most impoverished, low-performing schools.

3. Memphis City Schools should evaluate the effectiveness of the Truancy Assessment Center in lowering the dropout rate.

The Truancy Assessment Center closed during the 2002-03 school year. The Center’s mission was incorporated into MCS operations by developing Student Attendance Review Teams (SART) and a district-wide Student Attendance Review Board (SARB). (See page 22.)

4. Memphis City Schools may wish to study further the effects of student mobility and explore possible solutions by collaborating with other community agencies.

The student mobility rate in Memphis City Schools has slowly increased from 25 percent in 2001-02 to 30 percent in 2005-06.

5. Memphis City Schools should continue its focus on school-level improvements.

Much of the district-level restructuring has established momentum and support for school-level improvements. The Academic Leadership Team and Cross-Functional Teams can better target

⁷ The 2001-02 data is from an interview with Bob Archer, MCS Associate Superintendent for Administration and School Supervision, and Dr. Marieta Harris, MCS Associate Superintendent for Curriculum and School Reform, April 25, 2002.

school needs. MCS-developed Fresh Start Schools program has maintained the district's responsibility for improving schools in the alternative governance category. MCS also provides PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System) coaches to help schools implement the new Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan.

6. Memphis City Schools should continue to concentrate on increasing parental involvement, using strategies at both the central office level and the school level.

MCS is concentrating on increasing family involvement through Community Report Cards for Parents (PIPE) and other tactics. However, despite the district's focus on this issue, family involvement is still a concern for many schools. Challenges include communicating with parents about student performance and getting parents more actively involved as volunteers and decision-makers.

In 2001, MCS had 64 schools in School Improvement 2 status. As of 2005-06, 29 of these schools have failed to improve and moved further along in the accountability system, 12 have improved their status, four remain on notice (Northside High, Oakhaven High, Raleigh Egypt Middle, and Trezevant High), and 19 have made it off the target and high priority list.

CONCLUSIONS: GOALS AND GOVERNANCE

The district works with schools to establish support for district-wide reform.

Over the past three school years, Dr. Carol Johnson and her staff have endeavored to create the policy and support structures necessary for district-wide improvement.

In light of systemic challenges, such as poverty and student mobility, Dr. Johnson and her staff recognized the need for district-wide reform rather than disjointed improvement efforts. As most interviewees confirmed, the district is more centralized and more collaborative in its decision-making processes. For example, during the 2005-06 school year MCS transformed its approach to student behavior management from 127 unmonitored behavioral programs to the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan,⁸ a unified district-wide approach.

This kind of systemic change in a large urban district is a complex process. Success is highly dependent upon the district's and schools' capacity for change. Setting clear and high expectations with individualized support; providing transparent and accessible information; encouraging team work; and monitoring progress toward established goals are critical for transformation.

The district is laying the groundwork to implement a complex process by confronting what Dr. Johnson refers to as the "brutal facts" about the district's need for improvement. MCS is systematically developing district and school capacity necessary to deal with its educational challenges.

Memphis City Schools has worked to build a guiding coalition that focuses on team work.

MCS has restructured its district leadership teams to better guide schools toward a set of common goals. Two such newly created teams are the Academic Leadership Team and the Cross-Functional Teams.

The Academic Leadership Team (ALT) is comprised of central office staff⁹ focused on curriculum and instructional practices. Their work includes development of MCS "Academic Achievement Agenda," which is a strategic plan focused on academic goals such as accelerating learning for all students and creating safe and welcoming school environments. The ALT has also identified and

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Blue Ribbon Plan, refer to pages 19-22.

⁹ ALT is comprised of the following team members: Dr. Johnson (superintendent), B. Johnson (deputy superintendent), A. Hall (associate superintendent of curriculum & instruction), Academic Superintendents (three elementary, one middle school, one high school), Optional School staff, Alternative School staff, Exceptional Children staff, and Career and Technology staff.

implemented the district's new formative assessment system (*Renaissance*), taken responsibility for the review of School Improvement Plans, and become involved in data analysis of school performance.

Cross-Functional Teams (CFTs)¹⁰ meet once per month to address teaching, learning, and other performance needs specific to either elementary, middle, or high school. For example, the high school CFT systematically reviews school improvement plans, with particular focus on high priority high schools.

MCS is using information sharing strategies to encourage schools to implement district-wide goals; the district uses similar strategies to garner community support for these goals.

The district has replaced its monthly paper newsletter with the "Memphis City Schools Insider," a weekly online newsletter designed to keep school staff and the greater community up-to-date on information central to district reform. This electronic communication highlights school success with reform efforts, provides opportunities to offer feedback, and notifies staff of training opportunities.

With the help of Partners in Public Education (PIPE), a local nonprofit dedicated to school improvement in Memphis, the district now disseminates Community Report Cards to parents.¹¹ These report cards, initiated in February 2006, provide a transparent look at each school's profile, safety measures, academic and extracurricular programs, academic performance, and environmental survey results from students, parents, and teachers. Most of the data in the Community Report Cards has been available on the MCS website and in the schools, but PIPE pulls the data together and presents it in a format that helps parents better understand the data. The Report Cards include "traffic signals" designed to illustrate areas of strength (green light), areas to watch (yellow light), as well as areas that need more attention and focus (red light).

Over the past two school years, MCS has created several systems to monitor school performance and establish internal accountability.

As most interviewees confirmed, MCS is data-driven, frequently collecting and analyzing performance data to guide policy decisions. One such effort is the district's new formative assessment system, *Renaissance*, which assesses students' academic performance every six weeks and provides feedback to schools in order to tailor instruction to the learning needs of students. MCS takes a similar approach to monitoring student behavior management, collecting behavior data and providing feedback to schools frequently throughout the year.¹²

Despite establishing policy and support structures, MCS faces challenges in transferring district goals to school practice.

Some schools have integrated district reform efforts more effectively than others. A review of interview and survey responses from MCS district and school staff reveals several reasons for school-to-school variability. In addition to issues of teacher expertise, student ability, school resources, and parent support varying among schools – all of which can impact performance – MCS faces several

distinct implementation challenges.

MCS has 185 schools, over 117,000 students, and 7,315 teachers. As stated in the district's 2006 Comprehensive Systemwide Plan, the ratio of district support staff to the number of schools limits the district's ability to effectively support all schools.

¹⁰Each CFT (elementary, middle, high school) is comprised of members with expertise in either elementary, middle, or high school; each team includes ALT members, as well as staff from various departments, including reading and math coaches, instructional technology, and counselors.

¹¹ For more information, visit the PIPE website at <http://www.yourschoolreportcard.com/>.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of the Blue Ribbon Plan, refer to pages 19-22.

The variable effectiveness of reform within schools is evident in several examples related to curriculum, professional development, and the district's Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan. The district's Comprehensive Systemwide Plan explains the major challenges to curricular improvements:

- The challenge of “district-wide, effective implementation of curriculum guides”¹³ within schools.
- The limited participation in professional development opportunities, as indicated by professional development attendance records.
- An imbalance of satisfaction with the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan, with high schools tending to express the most resistance or having a more difficult time implementing the shift in culture and policy from corporal punishment to positive behavior management.¹⁴

MCS has made significant curriculum and governance changes to cope with student mobility.

Memphis' high priority schools have higher mobility rates than the district average. (See Exhibit 4.) Research indicates that frequent student moves may lessen the likelihood of graduation and that “meaningful school reforms can dramatically reduce a school’s student mobility rate.”¹⁵

Exhibit 4: Student Mobility Rates, 2001-02 through 2005-06 School Years

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Memphis City Schools	25	26	27	28	30
Klondike Elementary	33	36	33	38	38
Northside High	28	30	33	31	31
Oakhaven Middle/High	31	29	32	38	36
Pyramid Academy ¹⁶	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Raleigh-Egypt Middle	25	26	26	29	32
Trezevant Middle/High	28	30	31	36	34

SOURCE: Memphis City Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, “Percent of Stable Students for 1999-00 through 2005-06” data file.

In an effort to address its mobility problem, MCS created a unified district focus that provides greater stability for students as they move from school to school. MCS also uses an individual student tracking system that enables the district to follow students as they move throughout the system and provide schools with student records in a more timely fashion. Neither of these efforts removes the hardships of student mobility, but they represent an effort to minimize some of the consequences that come with high rates of mobility.

MCS has a strong system of accountability to both monitor progress toward goals and make necessary revisions to policy and practice.

With over 180 schools, MCS uses data to better understand how effectively various schools, teachers, and students are responding to district-wide reform. The district monitors outcomes such as student achievement and behavior, teacher professional development, and evidence of professional learning communities at the school level.

These accountability mechanisms rely greatly upon district-

¹³ MCS, Comprehensive Systemwide Plan, p. 43.

¹⁴ While the reason for this high school tendency is not entirely clear, it may surface from the escalating disciplinary problems that arise as students advance from elementary into secondary school, and teachers may feel more vulnerable in dealing with older students without the heavier sanction of corporal punishment.

¹⁵ Russell W. Rumberger, ‘Student Mobility and Academic Achievement,’ ERIC Digest, 2003, accessed September 21, 2006, <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-2/mobility.html>.

¹⁶ Student mobility rate is not calculated for alternative schools.

generated data to guide decision-making. This data provides MCS with a more comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning than can be provided by the state achievement tests alone. The district also uses more qualitative measures such as surveys of teacher satisfaction with professional development, school climate surveys, and school visits by the district's Academic Superintendents.¹⁷

The district's student achievement accountability system has been well-received in schools.

The district's Academic Leadership Team identified the need for a formative assessment system to monitor student performance throughout the school year in order to match learning needs with targeted instruction.¹⁸ During the 2005-06 school year, MCS implemented a new district-wide formative assessment system, *Renaissance Learning*. *Renaissance* tests are aligned with state performance standards, and students are tested every six weeks. This allows teachers, principals, and district staff to better understand how students are progressing toward state standards for academic performance.

In its first year of implementation, most district and school staff perceived *Renaissance* as a meaningful and useful tool. With scanners on-site, each school is able to capture the results and upload them into a web-based database for frequent and timely feedback. MCS provides professional development and on-site technical assistance to ease challenges with using this testing technology. Implementation has had challenges, the largest of which has been coding errors. For example, when a student is misclassified in the computer system as being in an incorrect grade, they are assigned an incorrect assessment, which results in invalid test results. The district has identified these technical errors and is taking steps to resolve them.¹⁹

Accountability is central to the district's new student behavior management initiative, the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan (BRBP).

Beginning in fall 2005, the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan replaced the district's previous use of corporal punishment by implementing a new focus on positive behavior management.²⁰ MCS gathered baseline data – including rates of discipline referrals, suspension and expulsion, and school climate survey responses from students, parents, and teachers – and established a data analysis system to gauge the effectiveness of behavior management at schools and across the district.²¹

MCS systematically tracked schools' progress toward BRBP goals through the CompStat (Computer Comparison Statistics) process, modeled after the New York Police Department's use of computerized statistics to compare maps of criminal activity with police response rates and effectiveness. In the school district setting, CompStat meetings involved school staff and trained support staff from the district office discussing student behavior data – such as the time and location of each incident – every two weeks. Last year's CompStat process helped district level support staff prioritize and reallocate resources to the schools showing up in the data as needing additional support. It allowed MCS to immediately address persistent disciplinary problems.

The original CompStat idea has been incorporated into a broader process called DATA (Directing Achievement Toward Accountability), currently a pilot program in 12 district schools. The DATA process examines the *Renaissance Learning* formative assessment data, along with end of year test data, and behavioral data, every six weeks. Principals and their leadership teams discuss the implications of the data and the strategies they use in response. This process provides a consistent forum through which each school can monitor and adjust its School Improvement Plan and implementation activities as informed by the data.²²

¹⁷ MCS is organized into academic areas – three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school – for the purpose of better serving schools' unique teaching and learning needs. An Academic Superintendent oversees each of these five academic areas.

¹⁸ Interview with Bernadeia Johnson, Former Deputy Superintendent, MCS, January 12, 2006.

¹⁹ Email to author from Alfred Hall, Chief Academic Officer, MCS, May 15, 2006.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the Blue Ribbon Plan, refer to pages 19-22.

²¹ Interview with Brenda Casseilius, Middle Schools Superintendent, MCS, January 9, 2006.

²² Email to author from Brenda Cassellius, Middle Schools Superintendent, MCS, August 22, 2006.

MCS is continuing development of a district-wide tracking system to monitor participation in and effectiveness of professional development offerings.

The Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) – the district’s hub of professional development – has been piloting a tracking system in the areas of math and science with plans to expand it to all subjects in the coming school year. Upon completion of a professional development session, participating teachers fill out a scan sheet that collects information related to teacher background, school characteristics, and evaluation of training quality. The feedback allows TLA to monitor and notify principals of participation rates at various schools, with particular attention to High Priority school involvement. In addition to participation data, the tracking system provides information related to training sessions’ usefulness and ideas for improvement.

For example, TLA provided training for principals on using the *Renaissance* student assessment system. The initial training delivery involved two large group settings – one group for elementary principals, the other for secondary principals. Feedback from the first group of principal trainees revealed that the training sessions involved too many people and were not conducive to interactive question and answer sessions. Within a week, TLA revamped the training delivery into small group sessions in computer labs, allowing principal trainees to work one-on-one with computers using *Renaissance* simulations.²³

The district is committed to enhancing and sustaining principal leadership.

No Child Left Behind introduced tougher accountability measures and consequently increased the responsibility placed on school leaders for bringing about change and improvement. Today’s principals and superintendents are responsible for more than budgets and logistics. In fact, as the instructional leaders of their schools and districts, they are expected “to understand effective instructional strategies, regularly observe and coach classroom teachers, and be able to analyze student achievement data to make more effective instructional decisions.”²⁴

MCS recognizes that high quality principal leaders are critical for high quality schools. Therefore, the district is committed to developing principals to be academic leaders with knowledge and skills to guide academic agendas and a disciplined focus on student achievement outcomes. Two specific initiatives provide evidence of the district’s commitment to enhancing principal leadership capacity – *New Leaders for New Schools* and a revised principal evaluation process.²⁵

MCS uses a national program to improve principal leadership skills.

In 2004, MCS kicked off *New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS)*, a national principal recruitment and training initiative committed to developing high quality urban principals, working with other cities such as Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C. At a time when approximately 45 percent of MCS principals would be eligible for retirement within the following three years and 56 percent in five years, *NLNS* offered an opportunity to recruit high caliber leaders into the district. The program seeks high potential principal leaders, trains them through a six-week summer institute, and provides them with a resident principalship for an entire school year under the guidance of a high-performing MCS principal.²⁶

From Memphis’ first cohort of nine *NLNS* participants, seven were placed as Principals and two as Assistant Principals in Memphis City Schools for the 2005-06 School Year. The two Assistants were promoted to Principals for the 2006-07 School Year. From the second cohort of nine, five were placed as Principals and four as Assistant Principals for the 2006-07 School Year.²⁷

²³ Interview with Alfred Hall, Chief Academic Officer, MCS, January 12, 2006.

²⁴ Katy Anthes, “No Child Left Behind Policy Brief: School and District Leadership,” Education Commission of the States, not dated. Accessed 10/4/06 at <http://ecs.org/clearinghouse/34/62/3462.pdf>.

²⁵ Interview with Suzanne Kelly, Chief of Staff, MCS, January 10, 2006.

²⁶ MCS, *New Leaders for New Schools*, accessed March 24, 2006, http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/NLNS_info.html.

²⁷ Email to author from Brenda Cassellius, Middle Schools Superintendent, MCS, August 22, 2006.

MCS revised the process for evaluating principal performance and implemented the new process in fall 2005.

The new evaluation process emphasizes both leadership and achievement accountability measures. The Academic Superintendents²⁸ evaluate their principals on a three-year rotation, which involves three conferences a year, a school walkthrough, and evidence-collecting. Principals are required to write personal goals and professional development plans for the year, and the district monitors evidence of meeting those goals. The district's Deputy Superintendent perceived this change as a critical need, as the old model for principal evaluations was an invalid measure of principal quality. Principals were required to set goals and submit documents as evidence. However, document collection was time-consuming and could easily be fulfilled with counterfeit documents; some principals reportedly altered dates of previously submitted documents. Now, MCS can track principals' completion of personal professional development plans through the TLA tracking system (described above) and the ongoing development of electronic portfolios.²⁹

Nearly 20 percent of MCS principals are new to the position or the school each year.

MCS reassigned 35 principal from the 2005-06 school year to the 2006-07 school year:

- 21 in Elementary Schools (18.75 percent of 112 elementary schools)
- six in Middle Schools (18.75 percent of 32 middle/junior high schools)
- eight in High Schools (22.2 percent of 36 high schools)³⁰

At first glance, this data is troubling. Principal instability can have negative impact on school improvement efforts as change can divert attention from progress. In fact, leadership is "second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school."³¹ And "the impact of leadership tends to be greatest in schools where the learning needs of students are most acute."³²

However, the district recognizes that having the right leader at each school makes a critical difference in both student and teacher success. When reassigning principals, MCS considers the particular characteristics of the staff, community, and students, school climate survey data, achievement data, and school size. Therefore, while the number of recent leadership changes seems high, MCS is actually taking important steps to insure that school leaders serve in the "best fit" school and to decrease the number of future principal reassignments.

Facing budget shortfalls, the district focuses on efficiency and expanding sources of financial support.

Over the past three fiscal years, MCS has operated without increased funding for the operating budget, contributing to a \$29.1 million budget deficit during the 2005-06 school year. Without increased funding, MCS cut approximately \$55 million out of its operating budget over two school years: \$30 million in 2003-04 and \$25 million in 2004-05. The total operating budget for the 2005-06 school year was \$797,170,852.

Facing these compounding budget shortfalls, MCS has focused on building greater efficiencies for resource use while also expanding sources of financial support. District officials indicate that MCS brought out-sourced operations back in-house, reengineered information technology operations, re-bid insurance and equipment contracts, merged schools to improve utilization rates, cut teachers in excess of state staffing formula, and secured alternative funding sources.³³ While not resolving all

²⁸ The district replaced geographical "zone directors" with five "academic superintendents" – one elementary, one middle school, and three high school – responsible for developing principal leadership and grading school reform initiatives, thus allowing for more direct support to principals.

²⁹ Interview with Bernadeia Johnson, Former Deputy Superintendent, MCS, January 12, 2006.

³⁰ MCS, *New Principal Assignments for 2006-07, Revised May 1, 2006*, accessed May 30, 2006, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/special.announcements/NewPrinAssignments.htm>.

³¹ Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson and Kyla Wahlstrom, *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*, Learning From Leadership Project, 2004, p. 5.

³² Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom, p. 3.

³³ Email to author from Nancy Richie, Director of Fiscal Services, MCS, October 2, 2006.

budget necessities, these efforts have enhanced the district’s stability and its ability to continue improvement efforts.

In February 2005, MCS surveyed Memphis residents to gather the community’s recommendations for budget cuts.³⁴ The 13,500 respondents prioritized budget cuts as follows, from most to least supported:

1. merge/close underutilized schools;
2. adjust school start times;
3. eliminate transportation, except for special needs students; and
4. continue restructuring central administration.

The survey revealed least preferred cuts to be:

1. reducing early childhood education programs;
2. reducing/eliminating safety and security programs and school resource officers;
3. eliminating the purchase of new classroom computers; and
4. reducing extracurricular activities.

In light of these survey results and other district priorities, Dr. Johnson recommended \$16 million in savings for 2005-06. The following chart highlights Dr. Johnson’s recommendations and actions taken by MCS because of budget shortfalls in 2005-06.³⁵

Exhibit 5: Recommendations and Actions Taken for Budget Cuts, 2005-06

Recommendations	Actions Taken
Change school start times	MCS changed the start time at six schools from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. District officials reported associated savings of \$1.3 million.
Freeze district administrator salaries	MCS froze salaries for administrative coordinators and higher positions for two years.
Eliminate 157 staff positions	MCS eliminated seven positions in central administration and 50 positions in plant operations and maintenance. The district reviewed all non-mandated, non-classroom positions for value added to outcomes. Proposals made from the bottom up and top down were presented to the School Board for final approval.
Merge ten elementary schools	MCS merged eight schools into four.

MCS saves money by linking organizational changes and information technology.

MCS focuses on enhancing organization and improving information sharing with technology, both of which have implications for more efficient resource use. The Technology Project Office (TPO) is an Information Technology (IT) unit designed to provide end-to-end technology project management and contract management to non-IT areas. Because school district personnel do not buy technology every day, they have little leverage or knowledge of the process when negotiating with technology vendors. Therefore, MCS created the TPO to ask the right questions, get the right deliverables in contracts, seek competitive prices, and get the right annual maintenance agreement. Additionally, the TPO helps the district offices put together a comprehensive project implementation, maintenance, and evaluation plan relative to the technology in question, making the district less dependent upon the professional services of vendors and contractors. According to

³⁴ MCS publicized the survey in the local newspaper and on the district’s web site and distributed it to parents and staff.

³⁵ MCS, “Facts about the Budget.”

the TPO, MCS saved \$1 million in the renegotiation of pending instructional software contracts during its first six months in operation.³⁶

MCS is proactive in seeking financial resources outside of traditional school funding sources.

School districts rely on non-competitive federal grants and state and local allocations to fund schools. Notably, MCS goes beyond these traditional sources by capitalizing on competitive grants, partnerships with the University of Memphis, and other community resources. While not exhaustive, Exhibit 6 provides an overview of such notable grants, partnerships, and community resources:

Exhibit 6: Additional MCS Financial Resources

Research Grants
<p><i>New Teacher Project (2004)</i>³⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education and \$600,000 from the school district, the Hyde Foundation and Partners in Public Education. ▪ Urban teacher recruitment initiative.
<p><i>Striving Readers Program (2006)</i>³⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$16 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. ▪ Improve middle school literacy.
Partnerships with University of Memphis
<p><i>The New Teacher Center (2003)</i>³⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides induction and mentoring support for new teachers by full-time released mentor specialists. ▪ Evaluations reveal positive impact on teacher retention, teacher quality, and student achievement.
<p><i>Teacher Quality Enhancement Program (2006)</i>⁴⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepares high quality urban middle school teachers. ▪ The U.S. Department of Education offers forgivable loans to teacher candidates, as they progress through a 15-month teacher licensure program.
Community Resources
<p><i>Connect (2005)</i>⁴¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office Safe & Drug Free Schools. ▪ School-based mentoring program for approximately 225 students in grades 4 through 8, with particular attention to those students in “Fresh Start” schools (i.e., alternative governance).
<p><i>Adopt-a-School Program (1979)</i>⁴²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More than 650 business and community partners donate time and money to MCS schools. ▪ Partners provide tutors, mentors, and financial incentives to help schools meet school improvement goals.

³⁶ Email to author from James Smith, Chief Technology Officer, MCS, July 13, 2006.

³⁷ Ruma Banerji Kumar, “Memphis City Schools working on the kinks in hiring: New Teacher Project, announced today, to reshape HR protocol,” *The Commercial Appeal*, September 29, 2004.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Striving Readers FY 2005/2006 Grants, accessed February 10, 2006, <http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/awards.html>.

³⁹ See pages 16-17 for discussion.

⁴⁰ MCS, accessed December 29, 2005, <http://www.teachmemphis.org/about/press.htm>.

⁴¹ MCS, accessed December 29, 2005, <http://www.mcsc12.net/connect/mission.html>

⁴² MCS, accessed December 29, 2005, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/tlpages/mpas/adopt-a-school.asp>

CONCLUSIONS: TEACHING QUALITY

MCS is committed to a researched-based approach to professional development that seeks to incorporate on-going learning in every aspect of a teacher's job.

culture by offering on-going evaluation of teachers regarding their practice and inviting teachers to act in leadership roles at school.

This professional culture does not exist in all MCS schools, but the district is committed to developing such practices and capacity at the school-level. MCS is leading by example, modeling this type of learning community among district staff. The district hopes to help educators realize that they do not need an expert to come into their schools; they can learn from each other's expertise.

MCS focuses on several sessions of professional development with follow-up, as opposed to a one-day conference.

District visits to schools verified that it is difficult for teachers to transfer training into practice when they attend one-day professional development sessions. Therefore, the Teaching and Learning Academy is moving the district toward multi-session training with follow-up, thus allowing for more ongoing contact hours.

For example, the Teaching and Learning Academy – the district's professional development system - offers a multi-session math course, Algebraic Thinking. The training is divided into 12 meetings, allowing teachers to begin implementation of lessons into classroom practice over the course of training. The extra contact hours allow teachers to focus on deep understanding of content and how to apply the training in the classroom.⁴³

MCS fosters the development of teacher leaders.

MCS began participation in the national Teacher Leader Academy in the summer of 2006 to increase the leadership capacity of select MCS teachers. The Academy equipped 17 MCS teachers, referred to as Teacher Leaders, to serve as instructional models in their schools. To gauge the program's effectiveness, the teachers will use reflective journaling to document the Teacher Leader experience throughout the 2006-07 school year. The Teacher Leaders will contribute to the professional development program in their schools by designing and delivering data-driven professional development courses, including a course to present at the 2nd Annual MCS Professional Development Institute during the summer of 2007.⁴⁴

The district has a strategic plan for recruitment and induction of new educators.

MCS developed recruitment and mentoring programs based on national models, best practices, scientific research, and feedback from school and district personnel. Because of early successes with retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement, one program, the New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis, is the recipient of the 2006 Tennessee Board of Regents' Academic Excellence Award.

⁴³ Interview with Alfred Hall, Chief Academic Officer, MCS, January 12, 2006.

⁴⁴ Email to author from Janet Denton, Academic Affairs, MCS, September 13, 2006.

The New Teacher Project works to improve the district's hiring process.⁴⁵

The teacher shortages in large districts can have more to do with hiring inefficiencies than with candidates' reluctance to teach in troubled schools. Therefore, MCS joined other large urban districts, such as Washington, D.C., New York, and Cleveland, in the New Teacher Project (NTP) in 2004. NTP is a reform initiative to "revamp hiring practices and reshape the human resources department to keep highly qualified candidates from falling through the cracks."⁴⁶ MCS is using the grant to improve technology for recruiting, hiring and application processing. Such improvements include offering online applications and making "the hiring process more transparent so principals can see who's in the candidate pool for openings they have at schools."⁴⁷

First Steps to Excellence encourages professional growth to improve the education of students throughout MCS.

MCS piloted First Steps to Excellence, the district-provided induction program for new teachers, in 2004-05 and launched the program district-wide in 2005-06. The district developed this program based on the mentoring model of the New Teacher Center, the mentor training of Tennessee's "Raising the Bar" program, and Harry Wong's New Teacher Induction programs. At the end of 2004-05 and 2005-06, the district administered a comprehensive survey to new teachers and their mentors. Much of the program planning has been done in response to survey results and feedback from school principals and instructional facilitators and district content coordinators.⁴⁸

First Steps to Excellence has three components:⁴⁹

- *Orientation*: key topics include planning for the first days of school, literacy, and teaching in the urban context.
- *Mentoring*: Each MCS school has a mentor coordinator and the district facilitates a partnership between each new teacher and an effective, experienced teacher. MCS offers mentor-specific training and academies developed by the New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis.
- *Professional Development and Networking Opportunities*: New MCS educators attend New Teacher Network meetings five times a year. These meetings provide professional development and resources tailored to the specific needs of new teachers. New educators also complete a course, "Preparing for the Second Year," during the summer after the first year.

The New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis, a nationally-recognized mentoring model, works to decrease teacher attrition by supporting new teachers.

The New Teacher Center (NTC) at the University of Memphis is designed to effectively transition new teachers from the university to the classroom setting. Research shows that teacher mentoring programs have a positive impact on teacher retention rates. When novice teachers are allowed to develop their teaching skills under the guidance of more experienced and skilled colleagues, they may develop more confidence in their abilities and may be less likely to leave the teaching profession.⁵⁰

The Memphis NTC is designed to improve retention of new teachers and positively impact student achievement. Their secondary goals are to identify changes and revisions needed in the University's academic teacher preparation program and to quantify the impact of teacher mentoring on student achievement in high poverty urban schools.⁵¹

⁴⁵ The New Teacher Project in Memphis is funded by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education and another \$600,000 from the school district, the Hyde Foundation and Partners in Public Education.

⁴⁶ Kumar, Memphis City Schools working on the kinks in hiring.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Email to author from Greg Keith, Teacher Induction Staff Development Coordinator, MCS, September 6, 2006.

⁴⁹ MCS, accessed August 2, 2006, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/admin/tlapages/induction/index.asp>

⁵⁰ American Federation of Teachers, "Beginning Teacher Induction: The Essential Bridge," AFT Educational Issues Policy Brief, No. 13, September 2001, accessed July 12, 2006, <http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/policy13.pdf>.

⁵¹ Lyle Hull Davis, Ying Huang, Deborah Slawson, and Cathy Wood, *The University of Memphis New Teacher Center: Research Report*, Center for Research in Educational Policy, University of Memphis, April 2006.

Memphis' New Teacher Center is modeled after an induction and mentoring program at the University of California at Santa Cruz. The Memphis NTC partnered with the Santa Cruz NTC, Memphis City Schools, and the Memphis Education Association in 2003 to provide induction and mentoring support for new teachers by full-time released mentors in Memphis City Schools; one mentor provides support for 12-15 first-time teachers for a period of two years. For the first two years, the NTC served first-year elementary teachers. All new teachers at the selected elementary schools were supported.⁵²

Because most new teacher hires are in the middle and high schools, in year three the school district selected middle and high schools identified as in need of mentoring support.⁵³ New teachers in these schools were supported by the mentors while the support of second-year elementary teachers continued. The Memphis NTC is presently supporting more than 300 first and second year teachers employed in 20 school districts across Tennessee. Sixty-five percent of NTC-sponsored teachers are in MCS.⁵⁴

Representatives from Memphis City Schools, Memphis Education Association, and the New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis selected five Mentor Specialists from 126 applications from veteran teachers.⁵⁵ These advisors work full-time at schools, in addition to the four Induction Specialists that the district already employs. They assist new teachers with teaching strategies, lesson planning, identification of curriculum resources, communication with principals, and establishing professional learning goals.

New teachers have monthly seminars which provide networking opportunities and discussion of educational strategies or issues. Advisors meet as a team once per week to discuss common problems their beginning teachers are facing and to design appropriate intervention strategies.

Evaluation findings reveal that program participation is increasing teacher retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. In comparison to MCS teachers receiving district provided mentoring, NTC beginning teachers report receiving more help managing their classrooms, handling job-related stress, developing a repertoire of teaching strategies, and developing curriculum and standard-based lesson plans. NTC participants also felt more strongly that their work with their mentors was guided by professional teaching standards.⁵⁶ Because of these accomplishments, the Tennessee Board of Regents named the New Teacher Center at the University of Memphis the recipient of the 2006 Academic Excellence Award.⁵⁷

(See the Office of Education Accountability's state report, State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools, for a related finding.)

⁵² According to Dr. Vivian Morris, Director of the New Teacher Center, elementary schools were randomly assigned to groups receiving mentoring or to a control group to facilitate the evaluation of the mentoring model.

⁵³ According to Dr. Vivian Morris, Director of the New Teacher Center, middle or high schools' need for mentoring support is based on student achievement scores.

⁵⁴ Email to author from Heather Murley, Administrative Secretary, New Teacher Center, University of Memphis, September 25, 2006.

⁵⁵ Email to author from Heather Murley, Administrative Secretary, New Teacher Center, University of Memphis, September 29, 2006.

⁵⁶ Davis, Huang, Slawson, and Wood, April 2006.

⁵⁷ Vivian G. Morris, "Investment in New Teacher Center mentoring program pays huge dividends, study shows," *Memphis Business Journal*, March 10, 2006. Accessed at <http://memphis.bizjournals.com/memphis/stories/2006/03/13/editorial4.html?surround=etf>.

NCLB's Highly Qualified Teacher provision has created a need for more middle school teachers in MCS. In response, MCS partnered with various agencies to recruit and train more middle school teachers.

Under No Child Left Behind, all teachers in core courses must be "highly qualified" by 2005-06. The U.S. Department of Education states that a "highly qualified teacher is one with full certification, a bachelor's degree and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching."⁵⁸

According to the State Report Card, 65 percent of MCS' core courses were taught by highly qualified teachers during the 2004-05 school year. This improved to 75 percent by February 2006.⁵⁹

A joint effort between the University of Memphis and MCS will prepare mathematics and science teachers for success in urban middle schools.

The 15-month Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) Program, a joint effort between the University of Memphis and MCS leads to a Master of Arts in teaching (MAT) degree and initial teacher licensure in Tennessee. The program began in summer 2006 with 18 students expected to enroll. TQE Fellows take a clinical approach to teaching preparation. They will be placed in a shared middle school teaching position in Memphis City Schools at half salary while completing the program. Students' tuition will be covered by a grant from the Department of Education in the form of a forgivable loan. In return, participants will be required to teach at least two years in a high need school and district upon completion of the program.

MCS works with area universities and colleges to build middle school teachers' skills and achieve NCLB's Highly Qualified status.

The Middle School Highly Qualified Initiative is a collaborative program between Memphis area colleges and universities and Memphis City Schools (MCS) core middle school teachers. The goal is to positively impact student achievement by increasing middle school teachers' knowledge base and helping middle school teachers achieve Highly Qualified status.

The Highly Qualified Initiative is for licensed middle school teachers who are Highly Qualified in one content area but teaching in another or for middle school teachers who hold grades 1-8 or K-8 licenses. The coursework is used to become Highly Qualified by obtaining 15 semester hours toward coursework in the subject taught.

Local colleges agree to develop courses designed to enhance the core content knowledge of middle school teachers.⁶⁰ MCS agrees to cover costs of coursework and textbooks for 15 semester hours. Participating teachers receive an honorarium of \$1,000 after completing the program.

MCS provides incentives for teachers who improve academic performance in high need schools.

Some states have developed teacher incentive programs for teachers in high priority districts or schools. A National Governors Association issue brief explains: "Evaluations that determine teacher salary or influence a teacher's professional designation are more likely to affect instructional practices and teaching outcomes than ones that do not."⁶¹

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Education, "Teacher Quality: Frequently Asked Questions," accessed July 13, 2006, <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/methods/teachers/teachers-faq.html>.

⁵⁹ MCS, Comprehensive Systemwide Plan, 2006, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Participating colleges and universities: Rhodes College (science), Christian Brothers University (geography), LeMoyné-Owen College (history and English/language arts), University of Memphis (mathematics and reading), and Crichton College (English/language arts). Fine arts, ESL, and foreign language teachers receive 15 semester hours through Professional Development HQ Tuition Grants.

⁶¹ National Governors Association, *Improving Teacher Evaluation to Improve Teaching Quality*, December 9, 2002, p. 5, accessed July 12, 2006, <http://www.nga.org/cda/files/1202IMPROVINGTEACHEVAL.pdf>.

Fresh Start Schools Incentives Program

After six consecutive years of not making adequate yearly progress on student assessments and other areas of improvement, the Tennessee Department of Education, under NCLB requirements, places these schools under Alternative Governance and must replace all or most school staff. MCS schools that are on the state's High Priority list and in jeopardy of falling into alternative governance enter a process called Fresh Start. As of the 2005-06 school year, there are eight Fresh Start Schools in MCS.⁶²

The program requires teachers to re-apply for their own jobs and allows principals to staff schools according to their expectations and the educational delivery methodology they established as the instructional leaders. To encourage teachers and administrators to take on the challenge of re-engineering a school to improve academic achievement, Fresh Start offers monetary incentives to schools, teachers, staff, and principals for achieving the academic and non-academic results necessary for improved overall performance. Performance measures include comprehensive assessments of academic achievement, discipline, student and teacher attendance, professional development, and parental involvement.

MCS rewards each school based on the percentage of goals achieved. The school decides how to distribute the funds.

Exhibit 7: Monetary Awards for Fresh Start Schools

Award Level	% of MCS Fresh Start Goals Achieved	Award Per Teacher
Tier 1	90-100%	\$3,000
Tier 2	80-89.9%	\$2,500
Tier 3	70-79.9%	\$2,000
Tier 4	60-69.9%	\$1,000
Tier 5	50-59.9%	\$500

SOURCE: Memphis City Schools, "Fresh Start Schools Incentives Program."

The Fresh Start Incentives are available to each school for one academic year, but an additional incentive of 10 additional professional development days per school year is offered for an additional two years in the Fresh Start Program.

(See the Office of Education Accountability's state report, State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools, for a related finding.)

CONCLUSIONS: STUDENT DISCIPLINE AND ATTENDANCE

According to University of Memphis' Department of Criminal Justice, there are at least 3,757 known gang members in Memphis. Although the zero tolerance rate has declined since 2003-04, MCS data indicates a 41 percent increase in gang-related incidents occurring at schools from 2003-04 (598 incidents) to the 2004-05 school year (1,022).

An analysis of student-level school office referral data reveals that MCS has numerous repeat offenders. According to the MCS Student Management System, 52,294 students received the 234,922 discipline referrals during 2004-05.⁶³

⁶² MCS "Fresh Started" Fairview Junior High, Georgian Hills Junior High, Longview Middle, Vance Middle, and Winchester Elementary in 2004-05 and Airways Middle, Geeter Middle, and Sherwood Middle in 2005-06.

⁶³ MCS, "Tennessee Department of Education School Safety & Learning Support Programs FY 2005-2006 Safe Schools Act Application," October 2005.

MCS revamped its approach to student behavior management, now using the system-wide Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan.

MCS launched the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan (BRBP) at the start of the 2005-06 school year.⁶⁴ The Plan represents a district-wide and community effort to shift from a fragmented, reactive disciplinary approach to a comprehensive, proactive approach focused on encouraging positive behavior. Prior to BRBP, MCS had district-wide corporal punishment and 127 distinct programs to address student behavior. During the 2003-04 school year, 29,829 incidences of corporal punishment were recorded in MCS.⁶⁵

Recognizing the need for greater efficiency, MCS researched many discipline programs and initiatives nationwide. The district found a national trend moving toward elements of the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). Originally funded through an Office of Special Education Programs grant from the US Department of Education to reduce referral to special education, PBIS is a national model of promoting positive behavior and discipline plans focused on data, early intervention, and monitoring. Currently, 5,050 schools in 38 states are implementing PBIS.

The PBIS framework encourages establishing rules and procedures for all school settings – classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, restrooms, and buses – and three levels of school-based efforts to create positive school environments:

- *Primary Prevention:* According to the PBIS framework, 80 percent of students will respond to schoolwide efforts such as creating a routine in which staff station themselves in the hallways during transition times to supervise the movement of students.
- *Secondary Prevention:* An additional 15 percent of students will respond to targeted group plans such as a check-in process through which a student checks in with a designated teacher in the morning, checks out with the same teacher in the afternoon, and receives daily teacher evaluations to take home and return signed at the following morning's check-in.
- *Tertiary Prevention:* The remaining five percent of students will require individualized, functional behavioral assessments and intervention strategies such as preventing problems and encouraging positive behaviors by rearranging the student's school environment or routine or teaching the student to use new skills as a replacement for problem behaviors.⁶⁶

PBIS is the framework of the Blue Ribbon Plan. The goals of the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan are to:

- Improve academic achievement;
- Promote positive student behavior;
- Improve student attendance, engagement, and leadership;
- Provide early intervention; and
- Create alternative settings for children with chronic misbehavior.⁶⁷

The district developed this new student behavior plan with input from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members. The school board approved the Blue Ribbon Behavior Plan in May 2005 and set the implementation date for August 2005. Each MCS school was required to develop a discipline plan, unique to the needs of their students, based on the district's discipline plan template.

Because Blue Ribbon introduces a major shift in behavior management, each school sent a team of five teachers and one administrator (1,600 participants) to a Blue Ribbon Summit in the summer of 2005 to learn general BRBP information and best practices for creating positive student

⁶⁴ Refer to finding in Goals & Governance section on "Strong systems of internal accountability" for ways in which BRBP involves data-based decision making.

⁶⁵ MCS, Division of Research and Evaluation, "A Summary of the Corporal Punishment Parent Telephone Survey," October 2004. Data requested by the Memphis City Schools Board of Education, Policy Committee.

⁶⁶ U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, accessed August 28, 2006, <http://www.pbis.org/main.htm>.

⁶⁷ MCS, accessed December 29, 2005, http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/BlueRibbonPlan/BRP_Exec-Summary.html.

behaviors and safe school environments. Team members trained at the Summit were responsible for disseminating information at the school level – a “train the trainer” approach that put teachers in leadership positions. Some schools indicated not all “trainers” adequately disseminated information and training to other school staff.

Additionally, MCS held a Blue Ribbon Parent Summit at a local middle school and a Town Hall meeting at a local community center in an effort to inform parents about the details of the Blue Ribbon Plan. Dr. Johnson took part in a radio tour to allow the public to ask questions concerning the Blue Ribbon Plan, and she writes a weekly address in the MCS newsletter highlighting ongoing district-wide incentive campaigns.

To implement the Blue Ribbon Plan during 2005-06 school year and to meet the goals of the new student behavior initiative, MCS realigned staff and created new professional development offerings.

School-level implementation of BRBP included Student Support Teams, referred to as S-teams, and new professional development course offerings at the TLA. Consisting of psychologists, social workers, representatives of the Division of Exceptional Children, administrators, teachers, and parents, S-teams⁶⁸ monitor and deal proactively with student behavior issues. New behavior management courses at TLA include the following topics:

- Behavior Intervention;
- “Win-Win” Discipline;
- Positive classroom relationships and organization; and
- Peaceful, productive classroom environments.

MCS provided five Prevention Specialists and one Behavior Specialist for each High Priority school. The specialists serve as coaches for school behavior plan implementation and conduct formalized assessments of school climate. The assessments include surveying parents and staff, examining the facility for evidence of implementation, and reviewing the conduct data with the school-wide discipline team. The prevention and behavior specialists also help schools disaggregate their behavioral data and monitor the S-team process.⁶⁹ Additionally, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) coaches are available to all schools to aid in implementation and monitoring of BRBP.⁷⁰

Because the BRBP is time consuming for teachers who are not yet familiar with the positive, proactive behavior management techniques, MCS is facing resistance.

In the years leading up to BRBP, many MCS schools started transitioning out of corporal punishment. When MCS launched BRBP, about 40 schools had either eliminated or minimized the use of corporal punishment.

However, based on feedback from MCS school staff, schools need more understanding of positive behavior management policy and process. Some schools are having difficulty ending corporal punishment and adjusting their strategies for effective positive discipline, but it appears to be an issue of reluctance rather than complexity. Principals and teachers who embrace positive behavior management had no problems developing strategies and building cohesiveness in their buildings around a positive discipline agenda; those who feel that the School Board should not have ended corporal punishment are more reluctant to take on these tasks.⁷¹

MCS recognizes that it will take time for all teachers, students, and parents to believe that there are other ways to discipline children. Dr. Johnson established avenues for parents and faculty to communicate concerns and questions about Blue Ribbon directly to district staff by email, phone, or comment card. Dr. Johnson also held a series of meetings at several school sites in May 2006 in

⁶⁸ S-teams are similar to Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams but are focused on student behavior issues rather than on special education students.

⁶⁹ MCS, accessed December 29, 2005, http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/BlueRibbonPlan/BRP_Exec-Summary.html.

⁷⁰ MCS, Academic Achievement Agenda 2005-2010.

⁷¹ Email to author from Brenda Cassellius, Middle Schools Superintendent, MCS, August 22, 2006.

an effort to listen to teachers' ideas, concerns, and feedback regarding the Blue Ribbon Plan. The informal meetings were open to every teacher in the district.

Behavior data from 2004-05, the year prior to Blue Ribbon, and 2005-06, the first year of Blue Ribbon implementation, reveals growing numbers of violence-related incidents.

For example, assaults to students increased 38 percent in elementary schools, gang-related incidents increased 35 percent in middle schools, and threats to staff increased 40 percent in high schools. (See Exhibit 8.) Consequently, school safety remains an area of concern for MCS.

Exhibit 8: Percent Change between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 School Years

Discipline Indicators	Percent Change			
	District	High School	Middle School	Elementary School
Violence				
Fighting	-2%	+25%	-13%	-7%
Weapons Possession/Use	+17%	+30%	+10%	+12%
Gang-Related	+18%	+14%	+35%	-13%
Bullying	+13%	+16%	+16%	+7%
Assaults to Students	+26%	+21%	+14%	+38%
Firearms	-19%	-9%	-65%	+33%
Battery Against Staff	+30%	+85%	+29%	+4%
Threats to Staff	+30%	+40%	+30%	+10%
Behavior				
Class Cutting	+18%	+20%	+12%	-9%
Insubordination	+8%	+33%	0%	-22%
Alcohol/Drug	+6%	+6%	+12%	-20%
Misconduct	-31%	-17%	-28%	-51%
Office Referrals	-17%	-10%	-17%	-33%
Dress Code Violations	-18%	-29%	+16%	-22%
Administrative				
Suspensions	-5%	-7%	-2%	-7%
Expulsions	+27%	+30%	+16%	+129%

SOURCE: Memphis City Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, "Blue Ribbon Data Comparison, 180 days of school 2004-05 and 2005-06."

The school violence trend parallels the increase in violent acts within the city of Memphis. Memphis and its surrounding counties ranked second in the nation for violent crimes committed last year, according to the FBI's annual report on crime released in September 2006. The 2005 data shows the Memphis metro area had 1,197 violent crimes per 100,000 residents last year, up slightly from 1,132 in 2004.⁷² Memphis recorded 118 homicides in 2004, 153 in 2005, and 132 as of October 2006.^{73, 74}

However, reductions in office referrals and misconduct among students suggest that the strategies being implemented under the umbrella of Blue Ribbon and PBIS, Positive Behavior Interventions

⁷² Yolanda Jones, "City's 2nd in violent crime: D.A. cites gang 'war' in grim national stats," *The Commercial Appeal*, September 22, 2006.

⁷³ Memphis Police Department, accessed October 19, 2006, <http://www.memphispolice.org/investigations.htm>.

⁷⁴ Pamela Perkins, "Beaten man dies; new charges set: Death is Memphis' 132nd homicide in '06," *The Commercial Appeal*, October 19, 2006.

and Supports, are beginning to show positive results in the classroom learning environment. For example, misconduct decreased 51 percent in elementary schools and 28 percent in middle schools. This is promising for changing disruptive classroom behavior early in the education process.

MCS implemented a comprehensive truancy prevention system that allows for earlier intervention and increased parental notification.

In January 2001, MCS opened the Truancy Assessment Center (TAC). Under the TAC approach, MCS supplied the Memphis Police Department a list of students absent five days or more, and police brought students who were picked up and whose names were on the list to the TAC. The number of cases referred to Juvenile Court increased with the creation of the TAC.⁷⁵

However, MCS closed the TAC during the 2002-03 school year and replaced it with school-level Student Attendance Review Teams (SART) and a district-wide Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) in 2004. This created a comprehensive, tiered approach that involves more notification and involvement of parents and allows schools to intervene earlier with students who have patterns of truancy.

Each school has a committee – a Student Attendance Review Team – to identify and address the needs of truant students at risk of violating the compulsory school attendance law. Schools refer students who continue to violate the attendance law to the SARB, which is held at Juvenile Court. SARB works with parents and guardians to restore a student’s regular attendance at school. MCS has a one percent recidivism rate for students referred to the SARB.⁷⁶

CONCLUSIONS: INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

MCS uses technology to reduce barriers to professional development and to increase available teaching resources.

The Office of Instructional Technology (OIT) and the Teaching and Learning Academy (TLA) help teachers see technology as a tool to galvanize their teaching practice, rather than an add-on to other teaching obligations. They do this by making professional development and technology more accessible and classroom oriented.

MCS offers on-site training and assistance.

The district often provides on-site training on how to successfully integrate hardware and software into classroom instruction. Six Instructional Technology Coaches, whose salaries are paid by Title IID funds, provide customized professional development at the school site during planning times and team meetings. The training is determined by the expressed needs of the teachers with a focus on the hardware and software available at that school. If teachers want to see examples of technology integration in action, the trainers often do classroom demonstrations with the teacher’s class.

Principals like the customized, job embedded professional development because it reduces the need for teachers to be away from the classroom and, consequently, the need for substitute teachers. Teachers like the approach because they can learn on the actual equipment that they use every day.

⁷⁵ Offices of Research and Education Accountability, *Tennessee Schools on Notice 2001-02, System Report: Memphis City*, September 2002.

⁷⁶ Emails to author from Ronald Pope, Director of Student Engagement, MCS, August 3, August 22, and August 30, 2006.

MCS offers multiple web-based programs for communication and professional learning.

In addition to the traditional format of classes offered at the TLA and on-site training offerings, MCS delivers interactive professional development classes on the TLA website through a product called Teacher Workplace. These sessions cover topics such as basic integration of technology into classroom instruction, specific training on standard software packages, and ideas for effectively using technology in the classrooms to support specific Student Performance Indicators. These classes combine information posted on the web, with on-line chats and submitted assignments. In fall 2006, MCS is offering online classes on MS Publisher, Classroom Management, Learning Foreign Languages, and Book Studies online.

A blog, which is short for “weblog,” is a form of journaling. Blogs consist of articles posted on a regular basis and a means for the reader to respond to the article, thus creating a dialogue between the author and the readers. OIT began blogging at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year for communication and professional development purposes, with articles pertaining to curriculum and instruction, technology integration, district/school news and special awards/achievements. As interest in the activity grew, OIT created an infrastructure to allow other departments to blog as well. Currently, Secondary Literacy and Library/Media Services have blogs, and the district expects other departments to follow.

A podcast is an audio file recorded on a computer and then uploaded to a website that users may subscribe to at no cost. Once subscribed, new episodes of the podcast are automatically downloaded to the user’s computer. OIT began podcasting during the 2005-06 school year, and Instructional Technology Coaches now use podcast episodes consisting of informational presentations, interviews with district personnel, as well as episodes pertaining to curriculum and instruction. OIT created an infrastructure to allow other departments to podcast as well, and several schools have either begun to create podcasts or are preparing to do so.

MCS subscribes to unitedstreaming (US), an online video streaming service. Teachers can search the U.S. database for video resources that support the objective or topic they are teaching, select a video segment to download, and incorporate the video into instruction at the most appropriate time to enhance student understanding.

MCS also uses video streaming to offer professional development via the internet. OIT has purchased equipment to allow them to easily create short video segments and post them on the web so that teachers can review specific elements of professional development courses. The video stream shows the presenter in one frame and the computer output (i.e., Power Point) in another frame. The district is awaiting hard drives to allow the web access to begin.⁷⁷

MCS struggles to find an appropriate role in providing supplemental education services for students in underperforming schools.

Federal law requires districts with schools that have failed to meet AYP goals for three consecutive years to oversee the provision of additional tutoring services, called supplemental educational services (SES), for low-income students – at the same time, the law prohibits the districts themselves from providing such services. While the Tennessee Department of Education is responsible for approving provider applications and maintaining a list of providers, MCS is responsible for

notifying and informing parents of eligible students about available tutoring services at least annually and helping parents choose a provider, if requested.⁷⁸ MCS, like many districts statewide and nationally, faces many challenges fulfilling these responsibilities.

⁷⁷ Email to author from Diane Raley, Instructional Technology Coordinator, MCS, September 21, 2006.

⁷⁸ U.S. Department of Education, No Child Left Behind, *Supplemental Educational Services: Non-Regulatory Guidance*, June 13, 2005.

The district has difficulty helping families make well-informed choices about available tutoring services.

According to district officials, it is difficult to balance the complexity necessary to describe each tutoring service with the simplicity necessary to make the information accessible regardless of the parent’s education level. Additionally, MCS, like all districts, has limited control over tutoring services. The Tennessee Department of Education and not the district approves providers; therefore, MCS officials feel that they have little control over the quality of the services and over the appropriateness for their students’ needs.

Low attendance in SES programs makes it difficult for MCS and the Tennessee Department of Education to evaluate provider services once in operation.

On average, less than 10 percent of eligible MCS students participate in supplemental educational services. The combination of this low attendance and the district’s high mobility rate makes it difficult to measure the impact of any tutoring service.

Exhibit 9: Number of Eligible and Participating Memphis City Schools’ Students for School Years 2003-04, 2004-05, and 2005-06

2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
Eligible	Participating	Eligible	Participating	Eligible	Participating
30,113	2,800 (9%)	27,378	2,331 (8.5%)	20,886	2,178 (10%)

SOURCE: Tennessee Department of Education, Email to author from Carol Groppe, April 21, 2006.

(See the Office of Education Accountability’s state report, State Approaches to Improving Tennessee’s High Priority Schools, for a related finding.)

MCS restructured alternative schools to meet various student needs.

Over half of schools in this study mentioned inadequate alternative school placements as a barrier to student behavior management. However, it appears that MCS has an extensive structure of alternative learning programs to meet an array of student needs.

Alternative schools provide a learning environment for students suspended or expelled from a regular school program. The Education Improvement Act (EIA) of 1992 mandates that each LEA offer at least one alternative school for 7th-12th graders and authorizes the creation of alternative schools for grades 1-6. MCS has alternative school options at each grade level.

Alternative Learning Programs in MCS offer a variety of alternative learning environments and focus on academics, behavior modification, parent involvement, and service learning. Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, alternative schools enrolled students according to the necessary level of intervention: Level A - zero tolerance schools, Level B - success schools, and Level C - choice schools.

MCS has eight Zero Tolerance Schools (Level A) that provide academic and behavioral remediation for middle and high school students who have committed zero tolerance offenses.⁷⁹

MCS has five Success Schools (Level B) for elementary, middle, and high school students referred by the building principals. Success Schools, which are “schools within schools,” focus on academic and behavioral remediation for students in need of a smaller and more therapeutic learning environment.⁸⁰ Students must meet the improvement expectations specified in their personal

⁷⁹ MCS, accessed July 31, 2006, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/schools/Alternative/alternativeschools.html>.
⁸⁰ Pupil/Teacher ratio is 15:1.

Success Plan before they can transition back into the traditional program. Students at these schools have chronic behavior problems but have not had a zero tolerance violation.⁸¹

MCS has three Choice Schools (Level C) for grade 7-12 students who are referred by a traditional school, choose to attend, or are recruited. Choice Schools offer programs for students with unique learning needs to stay on track for graduation. Students in grades 9 through 12 can earn both a high school diploma and two years of college credit toward a bachelor's degree.⁸²

(See the Office of Education Accountability's state report, State Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools, for a related finding.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

The district should maintain a steady focus on school-level capacity for and implementation of district-wide reform efforts.

Implementing change and sustaining focus is difficult in any sizeable organization – Memphis City Schools is by far Tennessee's largest school district and struggles with all the complexities and obstacles inherent in urban districts. However, it is important to note that the district has made a substantial commitment under its current administration both to establishing school support for district reform efforts and helping schools implement reforms. Maintaining the effort will be extremely challenging, but is crucial to real improvement for Memphis City Schools.

The district should study the issue of student mobility to better target effective interventions.

Memphis has made some rather significant curriculum and governance changes in recent years to address its mobility problem, a difficult issue that frequently plagues urban systems. However, mobility is not always linked to school quality. In Memphis, high student mobility is often the effect of poverty, city redevelopment, and family instability. MCS leaders may want to devote more attention to this problem and initiate discussions with other relevant public agencies, such as those concerned with housing, transportation, and city redevelopment.

The district should continue the established momentum focused on recruitment, retention, and leadership opportunities for high quality teachers.

MCS has increased its focus on attracting and preparing teachers for high need and hard-to-staff schools, subjects, and grade levels through programs such as Fresh Start Schools, the Teacher Quality Enhancement Program, the Middle School Highly Qualified Initiative, and the New Teacher Center. The district has also expanded its mentoring services through programs such as First Steps to Excellence and the New Teacher Center. MCS should evaluate these partnerships and programs to determine their impact on teacher retention, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

⁸¹ MCS, accessed July 31, 2006, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/schools/Alternative/success.html>.

⁸² MCS, accessed July 31, 2006, <http://www.memphis-schools.k12.tn.us/schools/Alternative/alternativeschools.html>.

APPENDIX A – PERSONS CONTACTED

Joyce Anderson
Principal, Klondike Elementary School

Tequilla Banks
Research Evaluator, MCS

Charlotte Baucom
Prevention/Intervention Supervisor, MCS

Aubrey Bond
Director of NCLB, MCS

Wayne Booker
Coordinator, Strategic Planning and Quality
Improvement, MCS

Marion Brewer
Principal, Oakhaven Middle/High School

Brenda Cassellius
Middle Schools Superintendent, MCS

Linda Delaney
Prevention/Intervention Supervisor, MCS

Janet Denton
Academic Affairs, MCS

Ashley Faulk
Prevention/Intervention Specialist, MCS

Benjamin Greene
Former Principal, Trezevant High School

Alfred Hall
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Nita Hartley
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Prevention/Intervention Specialist, MCS

Bernadeia Johnson
Former Deputy Superintendent, MCS

Carol Johnson
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Denise Keys Johnson
Coordinator, Blue Ribbon Plan, MCS

Greg Keith
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Instructional Facilitator, Northside High School

Freda Williams
Professional Development Director, MCS

Bill White
Executive Director of Research, Evaluation, and
Assessment, MCS

John White
Principal, Pyramid Academy

Appendix B – RESPONSE LETTER FROM MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS



Superintendent

Every Child. Every Day. College Bound.

Reply to the office of:
Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent
Memphis City Schools

FAX (901) 416-5578
superintendentmcs@mcsk12.net

November 30, 2006

Phillip Doss, Assistant Director
State of Tennessee Comptroller of The Treasury
Office of Education Accountability
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Mr. Doss,

We appreciate the opportunity to review the special report draft on *District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools: Memphis City Schools*. Our review found the report to be extremely thorough and an accurate portrayal of the interviews and focus group sessions that were conducted, as well as the district documents that were submitted.

The Conclusions and Recommendations will prove to be a helpful resource for our system as we attempt to build upon our strengths and maintain the efforts that are producing positive results. In addition, the findings from this report will also serve to guide our planning and focused efforts toward key areas in which improvements are still needed.

We look forward to the opportunity we have to enhance our efforts to create substantial improvements in our high priority schools. We truly believe that as we continue to provide sustained and focused support that produce positive results, our schools will be able to achieve the goals we have set as a system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol R. Johnson".

Dr. Carol R. Johnson
Superintendent

2597 Avery Avenue • Room 214 • Memphis, TN 38112 • (901) 416-5300 • www.mcsk12.net

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