

George Leland Elementary School

City of Chicago District 299

School Context

The City of Chicago District 299 is the largest district in Illinois, serving more than one-fifth of the state's public school children. The district serves almost 439,000 students in 602 schools and faces challenges with overcrowding and growth in certain parts of the city. The achievement gap between its White and African American students is another district concern. This is particularly significant given that more than half the students in District 299 are African American, while fewer than 9% are White. At Leland Elementary, almost all students in the K-3 school are low-income and African American. Perhaps in response to its student population, the school promotes an African-centered learning environment.

CAS to fully align with the Illinois Learning Standards. Teachers at Leland Elementary state the state and district standards document help them understand what should be taught and learned by grade level. Although they may teach at different paces, they make sure to cover all standards. To facilitate this, district curriculum guides suggest time allotments for coverage of the content to be taught within the standards, and grade-level checklists to help teachers track their implementation of the CAS. Teachers receive copies of the *Expecting More* documents that define the district standards by grade level for the four core-content areas.

Curriculum and Academic Goals

The Illinois Learning Standards, Chicago Academic Standards, and the Curriculum Framework Statements form the curriculum used in Chicago Public Schools and Leland Elementary. Committees within Chicago Public Schools, with direction from the Chicago Teacher's Union and standards-based curriculum experts, developed the Chicago Academic Standards (CAS) several years ago. Teams of teachers then developed the Curriculum Framework Statements define the CAS, which were reviewed and revised by numerous stakeholder groups. While the CAS correlate with the state standards, some state standard elements are not addressed; because of new requirements in No Child Left Behind, which holds districts and schools accountable for *state* standards, the district currently faces the challenge of revising the

Chicago Public Schools struggles to ensure all students have equal access to the knowledge and skills they need. While the district's essential standards documents explicitly define these knowledge and skills, the size of the district poses challenges in ensuring the standards are equally implemented across schools. In an attempt to create curricular coherence across schools, the district implemented accountability measures, including the development of mandated exams. Nevertheless, the district has abandoned the high school exam because it did not align closely with instruction and was not well received. According to the Leland Elementary principal, however, students at different schools have equal access to the knowledge and skills that they need because the district has a system-wide curriculum and uses the standard grade expectations from the board. Grade level meetings at the elementary school ensure that teachers across grade levels are aware of the curriculum being taught.

Student Demographics*:

	<i>George Leland EI</i>	<i>Chicago District 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	98.1	84.9	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.0	14.5	6.3
% Mobility	26.1	24.5	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	1.5	9.3	58.6
% African-American	98.5	50.4	20.7
% Hispanic	0.0	36.8	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0	3.3	3.6
% Native American	0.0	0.2	0.2

Chicago Public Schools is currently moving forward with a comprehensive standards-based reform initiative. Chicago Public Schools is piloting its Standards-Based Curriculum Initiative in 44 schools, with an additional 100 schools targeted for participation next year. The goal of the initiative is to help schools develop school-based assessment standards through a four-step curriculum alignment process that targets curriculum, assessment, instruction, and analysis. As part of this initiative, the district is building assessments aligned to the standards.

Staff Selection and Capacity Building

Student Achievement*: Percentage of students scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for the grades and subjects tested on the ISAT.

G. Leland El Grade 3	2001-02	2002-03
Reading	53.5	85.4
Mathematics	90.7	90.9
Writing	72.1	60.5

The site-based management structure places the responsibility of principal selection in the hands of local school councils. While the district, with approval from the school board, defines requirements for principals, school councils are charged with selecting principals. School councils advertise open administrator positions in the district's human resources bulletins, and principals apply directly to the councils. The principal selection process varies by council, although councils are required to submit their principal selection to the school board for final approval.

Chicago Public Schools projects a severe principal shortage in the next five years. One district official estimates that 80% of principals in Chicago Public Schools will retire in the next five years, creating a serious challenge for recruitment and retention efforts. In the past, the district has relied on teachers to self-identify as aspiring administrators and independently pursue the necessary administrator requirements. However, the district is currently developing new recruitment strategies to identify talented administrator candidates both internally and externally.

Additionally, the district has developed the Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago (LAUNCH) principal preparation program that integrates cohort training and internship activities to prepare aspiring educators for administrator positions. The principal of Leland Elementary participated in this program.

Although Chicago Public Schools recruits teachers for schools, teacher selection occurs through a decentralized process. Chicago Public Schools targets recruitment in a 500-mile radius, placing particular efforts in Big Ten universities and neighboring states. Moreover, the district recruits at universities recognized as leaders in teacher preparation, including Harvard University and Columbia Teachers College. Staff from one of the district departments give presentations and attend job fairs. Additionally, the district recruits teachers through direct email, direct mail, and its website. The district develops the prospective teacher candidate pool, and principals are then responsible for interviewing and selecting teachers from this candidate group. At Leland Elementary, the principal conducts all interviews, and Leland teachers are not involved in the teacher selection process.

New principals and teachers in Chicago Public Schools are required to participate in induction programs. All first-year principals must participate in the Leadership Initiative for Transformation (LIFT) program, which includes a four-day orientation, five multiple-day retreats, and three one-day instructional sessions. Moreover, each new principal is paired with a coach who collaborates with novice administrators at all required retreats and sessions and interacts with their mentees on a weekly basis. For new teachers, the district mandates participation in the Guidance, Orientation, and Leadership Development Empowering New Teachers (GOLDEN) program for their first two years. First-year teachers participate in an orientation, at least one observation of a colleague, professional development opportunities, and networking activities. Additionally, first-year teachers are paired with a mentor who interact with new teachers at least six hours each instructional quarter and conduct at least three observations of the new teacher. Second-year teachers receive support in completing their Individual Growth Plans, which define goals and provide teachers with opportunities for self-reflection on their instructional practices and student learning.

Each second-year teacher is paired with a coach who meets with novices twice each instructional quarter and participates in two observations. Both mentors and coaches participate in training prior to taking on support roles, and these educators receive financial compensation for supporting new teachers.

Teachers at Leland Elementary value their opportunities for collaboration, although they admit their collaborative efforts are more horizontal than vertical. Before and after school, teachers meet to discuss what is happening with their groups of students. Teachers also benefit from shared planning time, where they can do long-range planning and plan units and projects. As one teacher notes, success takes team work, and that is what happens in Leland Elementary classrooms. Another teacher acknowledges, however, that teachers collaborate more at the beginning of the year, with collaboration activities tapering off as the school year progresses. At the school level, teachers also meet periodically in instructional units (lower primary and upper primary grade levels). While the principal reports that teachers agreed to use half-days for collaboration, she asserts that teachers are not using their time for collaborative activities.

Chicago Public Schools provides intensive support for its two major curricular initiatives—the Reading Initiative and the Chicago Math and Science Initiative (CMSI). Currently, all district schools receive support through the Reading Initiative, and 200 schools will receive extensive support through CMSI. Each initiative relies on district coaches (assigned to geographic areas of the district) and content specialists (assigned to particular schools). Coaches and content specialists receive training in content and process, and they provide full-time instructional and content-related assistance to schools.

Currently the district has increased support associated with math and science by 400% since the initiative began, and Chicago Public Schools is trying to double the number of content specialists in the elementary schools. As one administrator explains, one content specialist is not enough to assist with 850 students, the average size of a district elementary school. This district administrator describes the current level of support from coaches and content specialists as “meager” given the size of the district. In addition to support staff, Chicago Public Schools offers professional development opportunities that reflect the districts focus on reading and math/science.

The Chicago Public Schools’ nine principles of professional development drive training efforts in the district. According to these principles, professional development is effective when it is curriculum focused, student centered, data driven, coherent, continuous, and results oriented and occurs in the context of learning communities, shared leadership, and adequate resources. A district-provided rubric allows schools to evaluate their professional development. Chicago Public Schools requires seven professional development days for teachers. The new teacher contract also imposes a system-wide restructured day twice monthly; during these days, students are released at noon, and teachers remain at school to participate in professional development activities. Schools are responsible for creating professional development plans that align with their improvement plans. The district reviews professional development plans on an annual basis. In addition to direction provided within these plans, teachers can individually select training opportunities; the district website provides planning tools to assist teachers in selecting appropriate professional development opportunities.

Teacher Demographics*:

	<i>G. Leland El</i>	<i>Chicago District 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	13.6	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	58.2	53.9
% of Teachers with Master’s Degrees	--	41.7	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	0.0	7.6	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	7.6	2.1

Leland Elementary is 1 of 135 elementary schools participating in the district's School Teams Achieving Results for Students (STARS) professional development program. The STARS program seeks to help schools develop a cohesive professional development framework that supports their efforts to ensure academic achievement for all students. Leland Elementary School designated a leadership team, composed of the principal and five teachers. At each school, the leadership team is responsible for building capacity within the school based on the district's nine professional development principles. During the first year of STARS participation, leadership teams attend a week-long STARS Summer Teacher Leadership Academy that offers training on capacity building, managing change, designing effective instructional strategies, building a learning community, developing the leadership team, and planning. During the school year, leadership teams participate in six follow-up training sessions focused on research-based instructional strategies, including cooperative learning, multiple intelligences, brain-compatible classrooms, and graphic organizers. A second-year summer training institute covers the following topics: differentiated instruction, assessment, using student work for decision making, and promoting higher order thinking. The district's Office of Professional Development employs eight coordinators responsible for helping STARS schools implement instructional strategies and facilitate professional development opportunities.

Principals in Chicago Public Schools participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. The district collaborates with the principal's union to provide school administrator training through the Chicago Leadership Academies for Support Success (CLASS) program. The CLASS program is comprised of five separate training strands:

- LAUNCH—leadership development for aspiring administrators,
- LIFT—new principal induction program,
- Illinois Administrators' Academy—mandated professional development activities,
- Chicago Academy for School Leadership—portfolio program targeting enhanced leadership skills and promotion of academic achievement, and
- CLASS Academy—comprised of new initiatives, action learning labs, and mini-conferences on emerging educational issues and instructional strategies.

At Leland Elementary, educators' professional development centers on topics related to the district's two primary educational initiatives—the Reading Initiative and the CMSI. The principal reports attending state reading and math conferences, the Elementary Principals' Literacy Institute, and the Chicago principals' reading conference. In addition to these professional development opportunities, the principal also participated in sessions on technology and presentation and facilitation skills, as well as monthly principal meetings conducted by the district's area instructional officer. Teachers also attended the state reading and math conferences as well as numerous individual training sessions focused on literacy and reading. Fewer indicate participating in math and science professional development offerings.

Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements

The site-based management structure in Chicago Public Schools creates challenges in program consistency and curricular support across schools. According to one district administrator, the site-based management structure in the district gives local school councils the authority to select their school's instructional materials and programs, although schools on the academic watch list have less autonomy in selecting their materials. Site-based management limits the amount of content- and program-related support that the district can provide because of the diversity of materials and programs being used in Chicago schools. Moreover, it contributes to a lack of curricular direction in the core-content areas. In order to try to move schools in a common direction and create more programmatic coherence, the district has identified particular sets of instructional materials in math and science that align closely with the standards. Approximately 230 schools have adopted these materials, and in return, they receive high quality support and other incentives from the district.

Leland Elementary uses school-wide textbook committees to select educational programs and materials at the school. The principal describes the selection process as a team effort, and she indicates that while she could choose the materials, she allows the committee (composed of teachers) to make selection decisions because the principal believes this encourages buy-in among the staff. The committee bases its selection decisions on program alignment to state goals, curricular framework components, and alignment with the state test. They particularly look for materials that align with and facilitate the implementation of the district curriculum. The committee offers program and materials recommendations and then requests feedback from everyone at the school. The textbooks currently used at the elementary school appear in Table 5.

The state accountability system has affected instructional practices at Leland Elementary.

Although the principal at the elementary school asserts that the standards drive the educational system at the school, teachers acknowledge that the state accountability system has changed instructional practices at the school. Teachers now align their instructional strategies more with standardized tests, requiring more extended responses and explanations for answers. Moreover, support from content specialists has evolved due to accountability requirements—the writing specialist now focuses on the writing process, and the school's math specialist monitors teachers to ensure all content is covered for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The district's accountability department has developed a network that encourages schools to use data analysis to drive instructional goals.

In describing instructional practices at Leland Elementary, educators focus on the variety of practices used for reading instruction. As teachers explain, reading is a priority at the elementary school, and teachers try to pull reading into everything they do. All educators at the school devote the first 40 minutes of each school day to reading groups in which teachers or students read in small group settings. Teachers assert that these reading groups allow for individualization, ensuring that students are able to receive reading instruction on their level. Teachers also use whole group strategies to deliver reading instruction, and they rely on a variety of reading materials, including poetry, novels, biographies, and entertainment reading. The principal has also developed a book club that assigns a particular novel for all classes to read; she visits with classrooms and leads discussions around the assigned novel. Additionally, the third-grade teachers host a poetry café where all students choose a poem to perform, and once each year students and their parents can read together at the school's Early Bird Breakfast.

Instructional Information*:

	<i>G. Leland EI</i>	<i>Chicago Dist. 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	19.3	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	29.5	22.6	20.6
- Grade 1	27.7	24.0	21.3
- Grade 3	20.5	24.7	22.5
Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):			
- Mathematics	48	50	56
- Science	24	25	30
- English/ Language Arts	144	144	146
- Social Science	28	28	31

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data

Chicago Public Schools and Leland Elementary use a variety of measures to assess and monitor student progress. In addition to the state-required ISAT, Chicago Public Schools requires additional testing for elementary students, including the ITBS reading and math subtests (grade 3), the Miscue Analysis Assessment for reading (grades 1 and 2), Criterion Referenced Tests for the Comprehensive Reading Program for reading and math (kindergarten), and Logramos Spanish language achievement test (grade 3). Additionally, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading and Mathematics tests, although optional, are suggested for testing students who will be served in remedial programs. The district is also currently developing benchmark assessments in math and reading that will be administered once each academic quarter. These assessments will give schools and teachers information on how well students are performing in relation to the standards. At the school level, Leland Elementary developed mathematics and reading rubrics and five-week assessments as part of the school's ongoing improvement efforts. The school also requires book reports, word list tests, and a kindergarten readiness progress checklist. In discussing student assessment, teachers at the third-grade level, whose students must take the high stakes ISAT, emphasize the stress that these tests cause their students. District policy mandates retention for students who do not perform adequately on the ISAT in third grade. This cause stress for all students, although one teacher notes that students who have already repeated the grade have a horrible time and sometimes breakdown. Another teacher indicates that teachers would know who needs to repeat the grade without even having the test.

Chicago educators and stakeholders have extensive access to a wealth of student data. The district employs both internal and external research evaluation teams to help analyze the extensive student data collected by Chicago Public Schools. The district website offers a number of data reports, including school profiles, school and citywide ITBS and state achievement test results over time, and citywide elementary promotion rates. Query tools allow individuals to select specific statistics for individual schools, such as demographic information, general information, or specific test results. Educators can make specific data download requests.

The district also creates Running Records reports that indicates how many students citywide are reading at proficiency level by grade level. The principal of the elementary school indicates that she can access data on longitudinal ITBS and other test results, attendance, medical records, and behavior. She stresses that educators must know how to use it. A district administrator, however, acknowledges challenges in ensuring all school data are accurate, a problem exacerbated by the district's size.

Recognition, Intervention and Adjustments

Leland Elementary uses a variety of activities to recognize students for both academic and behavioral performance. The school has instituted the Gold Star Program that has ten areas addressing behavior modification, such as wearing their uniforms every day, doing homework, and obeying class rules. Students receive gold stars for positive behaviors, and parents receive updates on student progress through a weekly Gold Star sheet. Classes get rewards, such as field trips, for accumulated gold stars. The school also implements recognition activities for its third grade students (the highest grade served by the elementary school). Third grade students participate in an end-of-year luncheon and recognition ceremony. At the ceremony, a valedictorian and salutatorian are recognized, and all graduating students do singing and dancing performances and receive trophies in reading and math. The school also has essay contests and the Hundred-Day Celebration.

Chicago Public Schools and Leland Elementary use a variety of intervention strategies for students needing additional assistance. Educators at the elementary school use benchmark and ITBS test results to identify students in need of additional assistance. The district provides extensive after-school services for students who are behind as well as summer programs for students in the early grades who need additional instructional support. Chicago Public Schools has also implemented the step up grade for third grade students who are behind in reading. At the school level, teachers cite cooperative learning groups, tutoring, one-on-one assistance, and individualized instruction. When educators identified vocabulary development as a particular area of need, the school began a Word of the Day program, geared primarily toward third grade students, that involves displaying words throughout the school's hallways.

Students can also participate in after-school reading and math programs. The principal does not retain students in kindergarten, but she does retain first and second grade students. Students in third grade are retained on the basis of their ITBS scores.

Other Factors Influencing Practices

Core Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

The belief that all children can learn pervades education at the district and campus level. District administrators indicate the mission of Chicago Public Schools is “every child every school,” and they believe that if you give children the appropriate level of support from highly qualified teachers, then there is nothing students cannot do. Administrators attribute the achievement gap in the district to the experiential base that students bring with them to school. According to the principal of Leland Elementary, all children can learn, though not at the same pace. She emphasizes that the proper environment and appropriate instruction are key in fostering student learning, and she further she notes that teachers at the school are experts in the field and use a variety of instructional strategies to support student learning. Teachers at the school strongly believe that all children can learn, and they recognize the important role they play in ensuring that learning occurs. Two teachers add that while all students can learn, they do so at different paces, in different ways, and at different levels. Teachers at the school have high expectations for students and define success in terms of student learning, appreciating the moments when they see student success. They indicate that learning takes a village, and their school climate further strengthens their belief in student learning, as all teachers support each other and remind each other that all students can learn.

Local Influences, Relationships and Communication

Teachers at Leland Elementary describe a positive school climate that contributes to the school’s success. Teachers at the school appreciate the close knit, nurturing family environment at the school. They indicate working well together, embracing new educators, and collaborating to solve any problems in the classroom. Educators recognize that everyone at the school, from the lunch ladies and janitor to the teachers and principal, have a role in and a responsibility for supporting student success.

Resource Allocation*:

	<i>Chicago Dist. 299</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$5,286	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$8,482	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	50.7	45.5
General Administration	1.6	2.5
Supporting Services	38.5	31.0
Other Expenditures	9.2	21.0

*Financial Indicators 2001-02

As one teacher states, everyone at the school is all about the business of learning. Another teacher muses that the positive school climate is partially attributable to the low turnover rate in the staff, resulting in teachers who know the many generations of neighborhood families who come to the school.

Like many other schools, Leland Elementary continually strives for stronger parent involvement.

Educators at Leland Elementary view parents as partners and are working to improve their parent involvement program in different ways, including parent surveys and recognizing parents through a Parent of the Year program. To foster communication, the school hosts an open house at the beginning of the school year, although one teacher acknowledges that parent turn out was not very good. The principal contacts parents with academic and behavioral concerns. Teachers send home Gold Star sheets (weekly progress reports on students’ behavior) and student planners. One teacher explains that she used to send newsletters to the parents, but she stopped because parents were not reading them. Teachers also try to involve parents through participation in homework monitoring, student performances, playground monitoring, and chaperoning for field trips. Teachers attribute some of the challenges with parent involvement to the fact that many parents work. Teachers also note that parental support and involvement is often most lacking for students with the greatest needs (i.e., those with academic and behavioral problems).