

# Washington Elementary School

## Quincy Public School District

### School Context

The town of Quincy is located about 115 miles west of Springfield close to the state line of Illinois and Missouri. Quincy Public School District consists of eight elementary schools (grades K-3), one middle school (grades 4-6), one junior high school (grades 7-9) and one senior high school (grades 10-12) with a total enrollment of 6,573 students. Washington Elementary School serves 218 students. The majority of the students are low-income students (84.9%). The student population consists almost entirely of white (65.1%) and African-American students (33.9%). There are almost no Hispanic students (0.9%); this explains the low percentage (0.5%) of English Language Learners. Compared to the state, both the district and school have a high mobility rate. The principal and teachers interviewed all cited the mobility rate as complicating their work. In spite of the large low-income population and high mobility rate, Washington Elementary has been very successful. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards as tested on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in school year 2002-03 was 78.3 percent in reading, 89.1 percent in mathematics and 87.0 percent in writing. Three elementary schools in Quincy Public School District 172, including Washington Elementary School, received Illinois Spotlight School Awards for Academic Achievement.

### Curriculum and Academic Goals

**All schools in the district use the same curriculum, but they are not required to use the same materials. The district offers schools flexibility as long as results are good.** The state standards are the starting point for development and revision of the district curriculum. The district curriculum specifies common goals, but the assistant-superintendent for curriculum emphasizes that those are more common expectations. "We do align our standards with the state standards, but we offer schools tremendous flexibility as long as they produce results. Not everybody uses the same material; we do not require schools to use the same textbooks. However, it's not a laissez-faire approach as we closely monitor outcomes. As long as they produce the results, there is some ownership. We want the schools to develop ownership." The district defines curriculum as the information, skills and knowledge that need to be taught; the "what" of teaching. District wide curriculum documents provide guidance for teachers. For example, the PreK-6 Literacy Direction is a document clearly listing the knowledge and skills teachers should teach and students should learn in reading, writing, speaking and listening. The guidelines present each specific skill, behavior or accomplishment in the form of a one sentence performance indicator. Each indicator is followed by a rationale statement and several specific examples. A teacher says: "We have district curriculum guides that we need to follow. They tell us the skills that we need to follow and focus on. But as long as I teach the specified skills, I can pursue what I like. We have some flexibility."

### Student Demographics\*:

	<i>Washington EI</i>	<i>Quincy PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
% Low Income	84.9	39.0	37.9
% Limited English-Proficient	0.5	0.2	6.3
% Mobility	35.7	30.5	16.4
Student Ethnic/Racial Distribution			
% White	65.1	88.5	58.6
% African-American	33.9	9.7	20.7
% Hispanic	0.9	1.0	17.0
% Asian/Pacific Islander	0.0	0.6	3.6
% Native American	0.0	0.0	0.2

**Most of the district curriculum is developed in-house. The district is committed to solely adopting programs/approaches that have a solid research base.** The district invites outside researchers to come in and help develop the district curriculum. The district always establishes a long-term relationship with these consultants. The assistant-superintendent: "We do not rely upon canned programs and adopted programs; we really get to the depth by conducting the curriculum development work in our own district. That is why we get the good results. Too many people rely on the next reading program, the newest computer program, the next quick fix. That is not how you get the job done. Canned programs are not going to serve you. To achieve large gains you have to think about what you are doing every minute, you have to be extremely focused. Rather than shaping general improvement recommendations, you need to focus your improvement efforts with pinpoint, laser-like accuracy."

**Schools in the district establish a limited number of goals based on review of data.** District-wide improvement plans and school improvement plans are updated every year. According to the assistant-superintendent of curriculum these are not shelf documents. "We really use them. They are in the people's minds - have become internalized by our principals and teachers." The Washington School Improvement Plan has only one goal for the 2003-04 school year: the number of students "meeting" or "exceeding" the ISAT reading standards will increase by three percent. Activities are identified to increase student performance in reading and have a clear timeline and accountability attached to them. A second grade teacher explains that the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade team established a goal of having the children read more at home in second grade. The team wrote a grant to purchase more books.

### **Staff Selection and Capacity Building**

**Recruiting quality personnel for administrative and teaching positions is a challenge for the district. District administrators actively encourage talented teachers to apply for leadership positions.** To recruit teachers, the district sends people out to college job fairs and they advertise on the school website. The assistant-superintendent states that it is a challenge for the district to recruit quality personnel for both administrative and teaching positions. "The talent pool looks so different today. There are more opportunities

for women to do other things. We no longer capture first generation males as well into teaching like we once did. People are more and more materialistic. And there is this constant barrage in the media about what is wrong with schools. That draws people away from education. It's not an unsolvable problem, but we need to be more aggressive in our approach." The last two principals at Washington Elementary were both recruited and hired from within the district. The assistant-superintendent: "The first principal turned the school around from the bottom of everything to above average. When he retired, we were obviously concerned, because you really need a leader. So I went and looked across the state to try to recruit the right person. The candidate we eventually selected from within district was not even interested in serving as a principal. But she had the right qualities: she was a great teacher and had the ability to lead. We looked for specific leadership qualities and were not interested in hiring the next person that was available."

**Candidate teachers in Quincy Public School District 172 go through a rigorous screening and selection process.** The assistant-superintendent explains that the district is reaping the benefits of a long-term commitment of training their administrators to hire teachers a specific way. Hiring instruments are research-based, including the Gallop Teacher Perceiver Instrument developed by Don Clifton. This instrument generates information regarding teacher strengths in basic classroom skills such as empathy, individualized perception, listening, innovation, focus, etc. The district also administers a basic skills exam in writing and mathematics and requires a live teaching demonstration observed by several principals. This lesson is also videotaped. "We look at subject area competence, classroom climate and management, planning and preparation, and instructional practices. It is so good to have that opportunity, because people can say all the right things, but when you see them with students, you can really see if they have that spark that it takes to be successful, and you can also tell if they are well prepared" (principal Washington Elementary). Multiple administrators interview the candidate. The final decision for hiring teachers rests with the principal, because the district wants principals to feel a sense of ownership and holds them accountable. The principal of Washington Elementary says: "We look at and discuss all the different scores. There is no perfect person, so you look at what their weaknesses and strengths are and how that would fit into your team."

**The teacher selection process is uniform across the district, but principals make their own decisions about granting tenure to teachers based on student achievement data.** The assistant-superintendent explains: "Before a teacher is granted tenure, we ask the principal to be sure that the teacher is able/ has demonstrated the ability to improve student achievement, using student assessment data as the basis for the decision. You need to look at data. The former and current principal at Washington both had a real talent for hiring good teachers and they also possessed the courage to only keep the very best. They were very deliberate in their tenure decisions and did not worry about political pressure or popularity. A culture of high expectations has been established at Washington Elementary and only the best teachers are granted tenure. You have to be able to make those hard decisions. If teachers cannot improve student learning, don't keep them". The superintendent adds: "You really plant a big oak tree when you put someone on tenure - an oak tree that will stay planted for 30 years."

**The district uses several tools to select principals and establishes a culture of high expectations.** The district administers the Gallop Principal Perceiver to candidate principals. Candidates also respond to a writing prompt and interview with several central office administrators. In addition, candidates meet with groups of teachers and parents, but the decision is made at the central office level, because that is where the accountability resides. District administrators clearly communicate high expectations to the new principals. The principal of Washington Elementary says: "The key expectation for me from central office consisted of two things: build a relationship with your staff and community and accelerate student achievement. Achievement is strong, but it can always be stronger."

**Quincy Public School District 172 expects and supports collaboration between all schools; Washington Elementary teachers collaborate focusing on curricular and instructional issues to improve their teaching.** The principals of the eight elementary schools in the district meet every week. All the elementary schools feed into one middle school and the collaboration between principals helps keep all the schools aligned with the district expectations. Teachers collaborate across the district in the district curricular committees. At Washington Elementary there are mandatory faculty meetings every other week followed by grade level meetings. The focus in the grade level meetings is on reading and writing. The principal says: "I try to sit in on the grade level team meetings. Sometimes I leave these meetings open-ended, sometimes I give them a topic or assignment, for example talk about your top three and bottom three students in reading and what your next goals are for those students."

**The district does not put much stock in professional development designed at the district level, but makes every effort to work at to the school level and focuses support on the schools' specific needs.** The district does not believe in one day workshops, but hires outside consultants and researchers and insists upon developing a long-term relationship with them throughout the school year. Teachers analyze their test results to see if scores are low for two consecutive years and complete forms to indicate which in-service activities would best serve their needs. A teacher says: "Even if scores are not low for my students, I still might need some professional development in that area." In addition to working at the school level, the district also recognizes the importance of impacting the classroom level. Professional development activities are often planned at the school site, using consultants to work directly in the classroom where they can have a direct impact upon student learning.

### Teacher Demographics\*:

	<i>Washington EI</i>	<i>Quincy PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Average Teaching Experience	--	15.5	13.9
% of Teachers with Bachelors Degrees	--	49.4	53.9
% of Teachers with Master's Degrees	--	50.6	46.0
% of Teachers with Emergency or Provisional Credentials	0.0	0.7	2.5
% of Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified Teachers	0.0	0.3	2.1

The assistant-superintendent for curriculum emphasizes that you need to have strong principals to guide this work: "We need to hire people that have the intellectual capacity to make a sound judgment about the quality of new programs, projects and activities and know whether a program has caliber." The principal says: "The district really does not engage in or believe in 'one workshop quick fix' approaches. Washington Elementary received money for staff development through the Reading Excellence Act grant. We looked for consultants and indicated that we wanted an ongoing relationship and that we needed them to be flexible enough to design their staff development around our needs rather than coming in with a canned program."

**Schools do not have to provide the same professional development activities; the district offers flexibility as long as schools show results in student performance.** The assistant-superintendent: "I don't care where ideas come from. Good ideas can come from anywhere as long as they have a solid research base. We evaluate on the basis of the quality. I don't like to think of it as site-based management. It is flexibility. We want to provide flexibility as long as there is a solid research base that leads to sound practice and produces good results. We also are not interested in structural and process change, but want to focus on classroom level instructional changes." Principals can request certain professional development activities for their schools. The principal: "If I want to do something on my own, I can. I have been very supported in those endeavors. If it would reach the point where there would be a shift in emphasis in my school, then I would sit down with the assistant-superintendent and we would go over the nuts and bolts, but she would probably give me the O.K."

**Professional development for principals takes place at the district and school level.** The assistant-superintendent works with each principal individually to strengthen their leadership skills. The principals were involved in working with researchers from New Zealand to improve the district's reading program. The weekly principal meetings have a professional growth component as well; the principals mutually decide to do a book study or research. Recently the principals were involved in professional development on the new Gallop teacher selection instrument. Part of the professional development of principals is tied to the professional development of teachers. The principal at Washington Elementary participated in all the teacher in-service activities that were provided through the REA (Reading Excellence Act) grant and also participated in the ISAT writing training.

### **Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements**

**Program selection is handled at the district level. District administrators thoroughly examine the research behind programs.** The assistant-superintendent always involves a team of principals and teachers in the selection process, but plays a leadership role herself. She says: "I do not delegate this task, it is too important. This work takes a lot of time and teachers and principals sometimes do not have the resources to be thorough in their examination of the theory base behind programs. Also, somebody needs to ask the tough questions and often, it is best if that person comes from central office. We always look for a strong research-base when we examine new programs. This can be difficult because there's a lot of poor quality research out there. I put more weight

#### **Instructional Information\*:**

	<i>Washington EI</i>	<i>Quincy PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	—	16.6	18.4
Average class size			
- Grade K	14.0	14.5	20.6
- Grade 1	12.3	17.5	21.3
- Grade 3	12.8	17.8	22.5
<b>Time devoted to teaching core subjects (minutes/day in grade 3):</b>			
- Mathematics	62	72	56
- Science	46	25	30
- English/ Language Arts	180	171	146
- Social Science	46	25	31

behind research-based models than reform based models that just focus on change.” The district usually pilots new programs or interventions on a small scale to make sure they yield results. Two programs guide much of the instruction in the district: Guided Reading developed by Fountas and Pinell and the Chicago Math Program, developed by the University of Chicago. Staff at the district, school and classroom level has made a long-term commitment to implementing and supporting these programs. Before adopting the Guided Reading program, the district sent a team to New Zealand to study with well-known reading specialists, resulting in an in-depth understanding of the underlying philosophy and teaching strategies of this program.

**State standards form the foundation of the instructional program at Washington Elementary.**

**The instructional focus is on reading and mathematics.** The state standards are the starting point for the analysis and revision of the curriculum and staff also uses them to establish scope and sequence. The English language arts program is completely child-centered. Balanced Literacy is used at the primary level. Washington Elementary does not have set reading, writing, or phonics textbooks or even detailed guidelines, but district and school staff is very trained and familiar with Balanced Literacy approaches. The morning block of instruction is dedicated to language arts (approximately 180 minutes) and the afternoon block is primarily reserved for mathematics (60 minutes). Most teachers start the day with an hour and a half block of guided reading, followed by a writing block. The children rotate through different centers. Social science and science are completely integrated in the language arts curriculum. The afternoon is spent on mathematics, where teachers also use a center approach. The focus is on independent work.

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

<i>Washington EI</i>	2001-02	2002-03
<b>Grade 3</b>		
Reading	64.0	78.2
Mathematics	84.0	89.1
Writing	68.0	87.0

Teachers have tremendous flexibility as long as they cover the core objectives. A teacher says: “I could never address the needs of my students if I was required to follow a set, prescriptive program.” Teachers interviewed at Washington feel that the accountability system has changed their instructional practices in a positive way. “It has increased our expectations for students. Before, I never thought about what I needed to teach, I just thought about developing projects. Now, I can still do the fun stuff, but it has to have an academic purpose. For me, it has had a really positive effect on my instructional practice.”

**Students are heterogeneously grouped within the district, with the exception of accelerated students.**

The assistant-superintendent of curriculum is a strong supporter of mainstreaming special education students in the regular classroom. There are no self-contained classrooms for learning disabilities in the district; schools are provided with resource help. The only self-contained classrooms in the district are for Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH) students, Behaviorally Disordered (BD) students and accelerated students. The assistant-superintendent: “I am an advocate for heterogeneous grouping, but I believe in self-contained classrooms for accelerated students. The range of students is so great that you simply cannot challenge all of them. Washington Elementary now has a combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade accelerated classroom. Since we started this grouping arrangement, the accelerated students at Washington are competing with students from high socio-economic schools for the gifted and talented program in the 4th grade of the middle school.” Staff at Washington elementary tries to build classrooms with children from different backgrounds and ability levels. Teachers group students by ability level during guided reading; when students work in centers they are in heterogeneously grouped.

**The accountability system makes teachers focus instruction more on skills required to pass the test.**

The assistant-superintendent of curriculum feels that the district has always been focused on results; school improvement plans were in place before they were mandated through the 1985 school reform legislation. The state accountability system has influenced the instructional practices in the area of writing. The assistant-superintendent: “Once teachers knew that writing would be assessed in a particular way, they started to focus on it more and teach students to write rather than focusing on teaching isolated skills.”

The principal of Washington Elementary explains that because the stakes for the ISAT test are so high, it gets your attention in a hurry. When students are not performing well in a certain area, teachers make sure they practice those skills for next year.

### **Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data**

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#### **District administrators gather and summarize all student achievement data to help schools monitor students and identify achievement gaps.**

The district gathers and summarizes all the initial data 'because it is too time consuming for people in the schools'. District administrators want school staff to focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data so they can design the right interventions. The assistant-superintendent of curriculum: "We use our own data management system. It is all in-house and we prepare it all. By spending a lot of time on this at the district level, we also send a message to the schools that their data is important to us. We want the principals and teachers to know that we care what their reading scores are. Reporting is very important. We disaggregate by all subgroups; we did that even before it was required by NCLB. The principal: "Subgroups at Washington Elementary are achieving similarly. We have a 35 percent minority population, but there is no discrepancy between our African-American students and our white students. All groups made AYP. Mathematics was an area of strength for all our subgroups."

#### **District benchmark assessments form a strong supplement to the state assessments. District and school staff closely monitor student progress.**

The district administers the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test to provide educators with detailed information on student progress, students who are in need of additional reading support, and the effectiveness of support and intervention programs. The district purchased the Stanford scoring charts, so they can score the tests in-house and get the results back quickly. Developmental Reading Assessments are administered at the beginning and end of the school year. Teachers also submit reading charts outlining the monthly growth/progress to the principal monthly; these reading charts are compared across the district. All elementary schools conduct yearly assessments in writing, using the same prompts across the district.

The writing assessments are scored by multiple raters at the district level. Schools also conduct local mathematics and speaking assessments that are compared district wide. Retelling assessments are administered quarterly to students who are reading above grade level. Washington teachers analyze the Stanford and ISAT data in grade level teams in the summer and use that information to establish the focus for the rest of the year.

#### **The district has a rigorous evaluation process in place for new teachers. Administrators from different schools conduct multiple classroom observations per year.**

Non-tenured teachers receive ten evaluations in their first year, four evaluations in their second year and three evaluations in their third and fourth year. Tenured teachers have a formal evaluation every other year. A primary evaluator (usually the principal) is assigned to each teacher and two other administrators from the district are assigned as secondary evaluators. Teachers receive feedback from all of these observations through their primary evaluator. The principal: "It takes a lot of time, but I think it is good to have a different set of eyes to look at someone, especially if you have a person that is not of caliber or is questionable. You can detect problems earlier and it is good to not be the bad guy by yourself." Any teacher beyond the first year is also required to establish personal performance goals. Teachers determine these goals in the fall and articulate how they are going to be measured and evaluated. At least one performance goal must be set in the area of Instructional Interaction (Teaching). District staff also assembles the trend patterns of every student achievement test by school and by teacher. This information is shared with everyone but teacher anonymity is preserved. The district standards for evaluating teacher performance are adapted from "Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching" by Charlotte Danielson. The standards are captured in six domains: Instructional Planning, Diagnosis and Placement of Students, Classroom Climate for Learning, Classroom Management, Instructional Interaction (Teaching) and Professionalism.

## Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment

**Washington Elementary has processes in place to ensure that students who experience difficulty mastering any of the standards during the course of the school year are identified on a timely basis. Title I and district resource staff provide support for teachers.** Staff at Washington Elementary meets monthly to analyze and monitor student progress in the areas of reading and writing. Staff annually evaluates a variety of information and test data (ISAT, Stanford, district writing assessment and Reading Recovery year-end results). Title I support is the biggest source of support at Washington Elementary. Teachers interviewed indicate that the Title I support is of great value to them; it helps them to focus on other students. A teacher says: "We are so successful in general because we have a tremendously dedicated staff and wonderful support in the classroom. I have a Title I teacher in my classroom who really services students who need extra help." Washington Elementary also has a HELPS team in place to identify and support students who are experiencing significant academic, social, emotional and/or behavioral issues. The HELPS team consists of the principal, social worker, psychologist and counselor, sometimes the classroom teacher sits in on the meetings as well. After the teacher submits a HELP request form to the principal, a plethora of things can happen: intervention by the behavioral specialist, identify support for the family, occupational therapy or a full case evaluation. The HELP team meets each week to review old cases and look at the new ones. A behavior intervention specialist from the district is available to come in and observe in the classroom.

**Washington Elementary has a self-contained combined 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom for accelerated students.** Students are identified by test scores and input from teachers. The gifted teacher: "In the accelerated class we move quicker through the material and we look at things a little deeper. But I think all classrooms do a great job of looking at the top students to see how we can bump them up even more to advance their learning. Everyone has high expectations for all their students. I have always emphasized higher order thinking, but I think all the teachers do that now."

**Interventions for struggling teachers are driven by the needs of children, i.e. actual performance results.** District administrators look at student assessment results and rely on the principal's observations of classrooms to determine where they need to give extra support. Mentors are assigned to struggling teachers and more intense professional development is available. The principal always encourages the teachers to give the district information and to keep the central office informed about what they need. Teachers indicate that the principal is the first person they go to when they experience difficulties in a certain area and then they go to the assistant-superintendent. The principal: "Sometimes teachers come to me and say they don't feel comfortable teaching something. If I feel that I can offer something, I will come in and teach a lesson and help them. Or sometimes, I can provide them with specific resources."

## Factors Influencing Practices

### Resource Allocation

**The assistant-superintendent of curriculum states that high-performing schools would not be able to perform at high levels if you would take federal funds out of the high-performing schools.** "The resource piece is critical. We could not do it without the federal money we receive, which mostly consists of Title I dollars. These funds support smaller classes, extra reading teachers, summer programs, and professional development. In fact, almost all of our professional development is supported with federal money - Title I, II, III and IV. The superintendent is concerned that the district will not be able to maintain quality when they keep deteriorating financially.

### **Resource Allocation\*:**

	<i>Quincy PSD</i>	<i>Illinois</i>
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$4,027	\$4,842
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$6,842	\$8,181
% Expenditure per Function		
Instruction	46.4	45.5
General Administration	1.1	2.5
Supporting Services	39.4	31.0
Other Expenditures	13.0	21.0

\*Financial Indicators 2001-02

### **Local influences, Relationships and Communication**

**Washington Elementary tries to increase parental involvement in student-results oriented activities to involve parents in their children's educational program.** The principal: "We try to continually push parent education and parent involvement. Sometimes this takes the form of getting them to understand how important it is for their children to get to school on time. Parents sometimes do not understand which things they need to be doing. They do not have any established routines at home. So we try to tell parents, sensitively and tactfully, what they need to do, especially around testing periods. In the beginning of the year, we give them a lot of information on how to support their child academically, how to take care of their children's basic needs and how they should read with an emergent reader. Reading has to be short, fun and the child should not be struggling." Washington Elementary organizes many activities to get parents involved in their child's education. In the fall, there is an Open House/Cookout including an informal "School Improvement" session as well as a session with each of the child's teachers. A "Back to School Fair" with clothes, school supplies, physicals etc. also takes place in the beginning of the year. The principal serves on the fair's planning committee and volunteers at the fair. The school hosts a Family Read Night with dinner provided, a book fair and book swap and holds quarterly "Parent-Child Together Times" (directed opportunities for parents to engage in fun, yet educational activities with their children). At least one "Muffins with Moms" and "Donuts with Dads" breakfast event is organized. The parent educator holds weekly Parent Volunteer Sessions and hosts quarterly "Chat-n-Craft" parent sessions including a seasonal craft and a relevant resource person to lead/inform parents in a guided discussion. Washington Elementary holds parent-teacher conferences in the spring in addition to the annually scheduled fall conferences. In the 2003-04 school year, all students who went to the conference received a book; the principal wrote a grant to obtain the books. Teachers send a summary home after each project is completed. Report cards are sent home at the end of each month. The principal also makes home visits for each Kindergarten and third grade student.

### **Staff at Washington Elementary is close and proud of their accomplishments. The school climate is open and positive.**

Teachers that were interviewed describe the climate of Washington Elementary as total cooperation. The staff is very close. A teacher says: "We work as a team; I cannot say enough about the colleagues I work with. You are not here to just do your job, people are really personable. It is like a family; we all really care about each other." The principal says: "There is very much a culture of communication in this school. Teachers feel good about what they have done. It is nice that the test scores have improved, but at a deeper level, we feel that we change a life when these kids learn how to read and write."

### **Core Beliefs About Teaching and Learning** **The district and school are characterized by high expectations for their students and staff.**

The former principal started to change Washington Elementary's performance levels by establishing a culture of high expectations in the school. A teacher describes: "Washington Elementary used to be a school where no one wanted to come to. When the former principal started to work here, he completely changed the expectations and the whole climate changed. We began to expect students to perform at high levels; we expected and trusted them to behave. In previous years, we did not even allow students to eat with forks because it was thought to be too dangerous!"

According to the assistant-superintendent of curriculum all children can learn "under the right conditions, with the right support, with high expectations and the right people". She adds: "We should not accept the assumption that high poverty children cannot learn, that minorities cannot learn, or that any group cannot learn. We have high expectations for students, for teachers, for principals, and for ourselves. But to say that a hundred percent of the students can perform at a certain same specified level is simply foolish. It ignores what we know about differences in students."



The principal: "I think the statement "all children can learn" is a worn out statement. People say it, but do not really believe it. I get so tired of hearing that statement and then going into schools where they have a basal approach. That way not all children can learn, because not all children learn the same way. At Washington Elementary I see teachers take concerted steps to get children to learn. You start by identifying the students' specific needs and you build on that. It is like building a little scaffold for each child."

**School staff is concerned about NCLB's requirement that a hundred percent of the students have to reach high performance levels in a couple of years.** The principal talks about the challenge of meeting the NCLB requirements with a high poverty population. "There are so many issues that come with poverty and low-income children. We have a lot of catching up and accelerating to do and the mobility rate complicates our work. We have a number of children that have not been in school for weeks or months until the parents settled down." A classroom teacher adds: "I am very concerned about NCLB, because of the pressure it puts on children and staff. We don't live in a perfect world where you can have a hundred percent score. We need to have standards that are attainable, that people can work towards, that students can actually achieve. Otherwise, you set them up for failure. I am concerned about the amount of stress that is put on educators. You want to motivate students to learn, but these standards are sometimes demotivating and I am afraid that that will carry over into the classroom and have an effect on the students."

**Quality across the system requires synergy across all key components.** The assistant-superintendent explains: "The key thing that I have found to be important is the inter-relationship of components. A small class size will not get you anything, will not produce any gains if you do not combine it with the best principals and teachers, high quality professional development, a solid instructional program, sound implementation, etc. etc. And it is not *whether* you have a reading coach, but *who* you choose to serve in that role. Are you willing to stand up and pick the person that can accomplish the best results?"