

Redding Elementary School Case Study

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Redding Elementary School

School Context:	(All statistics from 1998-1999 school year)
Enrollment:	686
Grades:	K-5
Student Ethnicity:	Predominately African American (98%) (Jamaican, Haitian, Liberian, Ethiopian, Asian, Hispanic)
Low Income:	84%
ESOL:	0%
Special Education:	9%
Suspension Rate:	0%

Performance Responsibility Index (PRI) Data:

Student Attendance: Percent of students attending 90% of days or more 1995-1999, and 85% of days or more in 2000.

	1995-1996	1999-2000
Redding Elementary School	93%	86%
Elementary school average	83%	85%

Staff Attendance: Percent of staff attending 95% of days or more

	1995-1996	1999-2000
Redding Elementary School	65%	62%
Elementary school average	53%	65%

Promotion Rate: Percent of students promoted to the next grade level.

	1995-1996	1999-2000
Redding Elementary School	94%	96%
Elementary school average	87%	93%

Stanford-9 Achievement Test (SAT-9) Scores: Percent of Students at or Above Basic

	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000
Math	24.79%	26.83%	40.00%	38.84%	41.8%
Reading	36.36%	43.09%	50.43%	47.93%	54.10%
Science	33.06%	29.27%	47.83%	44.63%	58.60%

Introduction

Redding Elementary School is an aging, crowded, culturally diverse K-6 school largely made up of low-income, African American students. During the years that the School District of Philadelphia implemented a sweeping, system-wide reform effort called *Children Achieving*, Redding served as a showcase for model teaching practices and was especially well known for its strong primary grades program. A three-year longitudinal study of the Redding Elementary School began in the 1996-1997 school year. This case study examines the efforts made by Redding staff to improve the instructional program, address the reform and to increase their students' performance on the District's standardized measure, the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition (SAT-9). The case draws from data collected from three years of qualitative research at Redding, responses to the 1997 and 1999 teacher surveys developed by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, responses to a survey developed and administered by the Redding School leadership team, and analysis of school achievement data.

When *Children Achieving* began, Redding's knowledgeable and dedicated principal, Ms. Tome, had already triggered new thinking about how the school might increase the academic performance of its youngsters. Teachers had begun identifying students at risk of failing and developing individualized programs to support them. Teachers had adopted Library Power, a library-based program that encouraged collaboration with the librarian in the development of standards-based thematic curricular units, independent library access for students, and parental education to support their children's literacy skills. Redding teachers embraced several components of *Children Achieving*,

including small learning communities and Early Balanced Literacy. These initiatives dovetailed nicely with Redding's existing programs and with staff's goals for school-wide improvement.

Redding teachers had also begun taking more responsibility for planning school improvement and making decisions related to budget, staffing, and curriculum. During the reform, the principal used the Local School Council to bring parents into a decision-making role at the school. To enhance their instructional capacity, staff took full advantage of resources and training opportunities offered by the school and cluster office. This professional development resulted in changes in teachers' classroom practice. Redding teachers increasingly used Philadelphia's content standards and curriculum frameworks as a basis for their lessons and curriculum units.

In the 1998-1999 school year, teachers collaborated to write a funding proposal for Redding's own homegrown whole-school reform model. The model embodied the school's vision of success by expanding and deepening Early Balanced Literacy and Library Power.

School Context

Built in 1923, Redding Elementary School is an austere, three-story, brown-brick building. The 78-year-old edifice is historically certified. It is surrounded by row homes along three sides and bordered on the fourth side by a busy thoroughfare with a variety of "mom and pop" stores (hardware, grocery, beauty salon). Fencing encloses a stark, cement schoolyard.

Although Redding underwent "major building improvements" during *Children Achieving* (new windows, new lighting, pointing of the exterior walls) the school

still showed signs of its age both inside and out. Many areas were in need of plastering and painting, but there was no money for capital budget items to make desperately needed repairs. During an interview in 1999, a first-grade teacher related how extremely uncomfortable his basement classroom became during a cold winter. The building's heating system was inadequate and the counselor described how her health suffered because of the decaying building.

My overall, overarching concern is the physical plant. It is archaic and defective. In my own office every morning I get a sand pile of plaster on the floor. I have had no heat all winter until I threatened the union and school administration that I would go outside to get help. In the whole school there is no proper heat. Some rooms are like a sauna.

Space was at a premium in the school. Both the lunchroom and gym were needed during the lunch periods to provide adequate seating for students. There were no empty classrooms and the school used every available space for supplemental programs (library, music, art, science and computer laboratory).

In 1998-1999, the K-5 school had a population of approximately 686 students. Ninety-eight percent of students were African American (but also included Jamaican, Haitian, Liberian, Ethiopian, Asian immigrants and a small number of Hispanic students); 84 percent were from low-income families. The steady influx of culturally diverse students, transfer students from surrounding elementary schools, and students from non-traditional household settings created challenges for Redding. A small learning community coordinator described the changes she observed in the community and school during her thirty-year tenure:

A school is not a building. It's the people inside of it. It has been in the same location, but it is not the same school. We've had principal changes. There has been turnover in staff and changes with the turnover of kids. The neighborhood is not bad, but there are a lot of hidden problems that our children face. Many live with grandparents after coming from worse neighborhoods; many are foster kids and that brings different problems to the school and those things are hard to deal with. The things children have to deal with impact the classroom, but we have managed to keep a positive climate.

During the 1997-1998 school year 82 percent of students enrolled at Redding came from low-income families. By the 1998-1999 school year, that number had grown slightly to 84 percent. Redding students made marked academic progress in all subject areas in the first two years of the reform as determined by citywide SAT-9 scores, but their scores dropped slightly in the third year.

School Organization

In total, Redding housed three Head Start classes, four kindergarten classes, and 20 elementary classes in grades one through five. There were also two Learning Support classes that assisted students who required additional academic supports. During *Children Achieving*, Redding staff divided the school into four small learning communities (SLCs), schools within schools that consisted of classrooms grouped together in pairs by grade level (K-1; 2-3; 4-5).

Over the course of *Children Achieving*, Redding's principal and staff created a system of support for teachers. One point of support was the SLC coordinator who had released time from teaching duties in order to coordinate the work of the SLC and assist teachers. A second point of support was an assigned specialist teacher to each floor of the building. Ms. Tome, Redding's principal, explained the purpose of the specialist teachers:

The purpose of having specialist teachers on every floor is that they can assist teachers. They don't have a class to supervise. If there is a teacher on that floor that needs assistance, they can help that teacher.

She believed this configuration helped to improve the overall climate of the school by promoting collaboration among the teachers on curriculum and instruction and increasing student achievement by making specialist teachers more accessible to students.

Until 1998-1999 there had been little teacher turnover at Redding, but that year there were five teachers (out of a faculty of 36) new to the building and to the teaching profession. Unlike some schools, Redding was ready with support structures and personnel when the number of new teachers increased dramatically.

Analysis of Achievement

From 1996 to 1999, Redding's overall performance, as measured by the District's Performance Responsibility Index (PRI) rose along with that of other elementary schools, while outperforming the District average by a small margin. The school's PRI increased from 70 to 77 between 1996 and 1998, decreasing slightly to 76 in 1999. A net gain of six points from 1996 to 1999 was in contrast to a nine point average gain

(from 66 to 75) for elementary schools District-wide.

In 1996, the number of students who attended Redding school 90 percent days or more was 93 percent, about 10 percent greater than the average for elementary schools. By 1999, this figure had declined to 87 percent, yet remained slightly higher than the District's elementary average of 86 percent in 1999. Staff attendance dropped, going from 75 percent in 1996, a figure that exceeded the District average for elementary schools at the time to 69 percent, a figure that was eight percent lower than the elementary average in 1999. Student promotion rates at Redding increased from 94 to 97 percent from 1996 to 1999, while the District's elementary school average rose from 86 to 89 percent in the same period.

Students' scores on the SAT-9 improved between 1996 and 1998, but dropped slightly in 1998-1999. This dip signified how difficult it was for a school to show test score gains each and every year, even when it had a blueprint for improvement and its staff was working consistently to upgrade the educational program. We hypothesize that the turnover of staff and mobility of students at Redding were factors in its test score fluctuations. Between 1996 and 1999, reading scores increased from 36 percent of students scoring at basic or above to 48 percent; math scores increased from 25 percent of students scoring at basic or above to 39 percent; and, science scores increased from 33 percent of students scoring at basic or above to 45 percent. Despite these significant gains, the school remained below the average for all elementary schools during that period.

Leadership

In 1999-2000, Redding's principal was in her sixth year as administrator at the school. A selection committee of Redding parents and teachers had chosen her to be the school's principal and its decision proved to be a good one for the school and its community. Prior to becoming principal at Redding, Ms. Tome had had an extensive career in the District as an Early Childhood Supervisor and a Curriculum Supervisor. She believed she was "relatively familiar with the expectations of what was called the 'new principal'" when she accepted the position. She described herself as a lifelong learner and a model for her staff, saying, "I have to do the same things I'm expecting them to do." Ms. Tome served on a number of committees within the District and was well regarded by colleagues and cluster staff.

Ms. Tome had high expectations for herself and her staff:

I am a very demanding administrator. I have high expectations for people. When I say that everyone has to have more than one job, well guess what, I'm willing to sweep the floor, pick up trash, teach, and cover classes—anything that needs to be done, I'm willing to do it. Therefore, I don't have any qualms, because I don't expect you to do as much as I do but I expect you to drop those protection barriers and get your hands dirty also.

Ms. Tome said that she preferred to adopt the role of a "facilitator" inspiring, rather than commanding staff. Her leadership style empowered teachers to take on greater leadership roles.

My role, my mission was to come to this school and establish small learning communities, to be more of a facilitator, an educational leader, and collaborate with staff to do things that are site-based managed so that we all feel ownership about what we do. That was my goal and mission when I came here. My role is evolving to be more collaborative with the teachers. When we make decisions we sit down and make them as a school (1999). Cluster staff spoke admiringly about the many strengths of the principal. They described her as the "backbone of change," and as having "endless energy." They considered her a "very strong leader with a good understanding of the elementary level" and believed that her effectiveness was reflected in students' academic progress. Cluster staff noted that Ms. Tome did not hide out in her office but made it a priority to visit several classrooms daily. "Her watchful eye makes for a more conscientious and better instructional program all around." They found her adept at motivating staff to participate in professional development activities, take on leadership positions, and "do things above and beyond the contract."

However, the principal's "enthusiasm and energy" was not always matched by the capacity of staff to engage in so many initiatives in a meaningful way. Cluster staff said that the principal "can have a lot of things going on at the same time," to the extent that some staff members felt overwhelmed. While they credited the principal's enthusiasm in bringing new program ideas to staff, some teachers complained of feeling "scattered" and were frustrated that the principal was not more of a "buffer" who protected them from the seemingly endless mandates of *Children Achieving*. One teacher remarked:

We are so overwhelmed. Every time we turn around, downtown [the central administration] wants this, the cluster office wants that, this test has to be administered, report cards are due. There is never a chance for us to sit and reflect on what we are doing and fine-tune it.

Cluster staff also praised Ms. Tome's outreach to parents and community members. As will be discussed later, she made the school a welcoming place for parents who felt comfortable bringing their questions and concerns to the principal and their children's teachers. In addition, Ms. Tome was skillful in recruiting community members to volunteer at the school. Redding benefited greatly from the involvement of parents and community. Their presence was apparent in hallways, classrooms, the lunchroom, and playground.

Instructional Priorities

When *Children Achieving* began, Ms. Tome had been at Redding for two years and, as a result of her leadership, several improvement efforts were well underway. For example, staff routinely developed individualized instructional programs for all students at risk of failing, not just students identified as needing special education. In 1994, Redding had become part of Library Power, a program funded by the Philadelphia Education Fund that put the library at the center of curriculum renewal. Below is an account of how, during *Children Achieving*, Redding staff built upon these foundational efforts and added District initiatives such as small learning communities and Early Balanced Literacy to its reform plan.

Teachers identified at-risk students and developed individualized programs to support them. Redding staff adopted several instructional practices aimed at

getting **all** students to meet District standards. Ms. Tome encouraged her teachers to develop a "Specially Designed Instruction Program" for every student. She believed that Specially Designed Instruction should be an "anchor for every child in the building," and should address each individual child's unique academic, emotional, and social needs.

In addition, special education students were part of regular education classrooms. The principal explained:

Special needs children feel they are part of the school because they are not isolated. Their own expectations for what they can achieve are enhanced because they are included in regular classrooms.

The Specially Designed Instruction Program teacher collaborated with regular education teachers and "shared expertise" about effective instructional strategies for students who had learning difficulties. Although teachers reported that the school made progress on the goal of customized instruction, in its school-developed survey, 52 percent of teachers also said that they still needed additional training to work with special students who were mainstreamed in regular education classes, according to the school's survey.

Students who scored Below Basic on the SAT-9 received extra assistance in math and reading. The TLN coordinator pointed out that Ms. Tome mobilized her staff around providing extra assistance to at-risk students long before it was a District mandate. She said:

I believe it (Redding) is a school where all students have all their needs met. [The principal] was very insightful in her identification of students who were Below Basic on the SAT-9 and her ability to mobilize staff around the possibilities of identifying one or two students that each

teacher would take responsibility for and move those children up one level. They were successful doing that.

Another strategy implemented to strengthen instruction adopted by Redding staff prior to the *Children Achieving* initiative was the Library Power Program. The program, judged a resounding success by all who participated, was launched in 1994 as part of a three-year grant from the Philadelphia Education Fund. Teacher collaboration with the school librarian was the central premise of the model. Teachers and the librarian received ongoing professional development to learn how to collaboratively create and implement standards-based thematic units.

Teachers who participated in the Library Power Program valued the opportunity to develop thematic units jointly with the librarian. One teacher said, “[We] put together a scope and sequence for each grade, so that the librarian can pull together materials for upcoming units of study. Teachers tend to see things in a fragmented way. Library Power has helped in getting teachers to see how things overlap and come together.” According to findings from the survey results for 1998-1999 the majority of teachers reported collaborating with the librarian five or more times during the year and 52 percent said they used resources from the library at least once per week. Fully, 68 percent of teachers felt that the library’s collection supported their curriculum.

Teachers used the library’s resources to enhance students’ research. They spoke with pride as they described their students’ ease at locating and checking out material for projects or for their own enjoyment:

I like Library Power because it makes the library more usable for research and students can go into it without the teacher. It’s open all day for independent check-out. It’s great to see the children being responsible on their own. Parents come to the school for workshops and leave with books for their children.

The Library Power Program allowed students liberal use of the library’s resources. Students were trained to use the library’s catalog system to locate and retrieve books for projects or to pursue their personal interests, as well as how to check out, return and renew books without assistance. The TLN coordinator expressed admiration for the independence this fostered in children, saying:

For me to see first and second graders unaccompanied by teachers, pulling out books, marking what they need to mark is incredible. The type of environment and flow is just exciting for me.

The principal spoke about the program in terms of its capacity to build students’ research and reasoning skills:

I think Library Power is very helpful, because the children do a lot of research. That means they do a lot of writing and interpretation of what they read and they do projects and activities. It affords an opportunity to do a lot of internalizing, thought processes, answering questions [and the process] dovetails with the expectations of the SAT-9 in that you must write what your reasons are, your logic for coming up with that reasoning for answering questions.

Library Power also afforded the librarian the opportunity to work with parents. MotherRead/FatherRead was a program that educated parents about their role in building their children’s literacy skills. Participating parents received materials to use at home with their child. The school

community coordinator stated, *"The library is open for anyone and parents have their own parent corner to come in, read, and do research. The librarian holds meetings with parents for MotherRead/FatherRead before school and gives them information on how to help their child at home."*

According to the survey results 1998-1999, of the parents surveyed, 56 percent said that their child brought home a book from the school's library once a week, and 61 percent said that their child worked with the librarian two or more times during the year, as part of a class project or research assignment. One parent with two daughters at Redding talked about their experiences at the school and change, in particular, with her fourth grader. She said she "saw a difference" in her daughter's education, because she seemed to be doing more "independent work," including more research and writing. During an interview, she reported:

The librarian works with kids in their classroom and in the library to help them research subjects their teachers are working on. My daughter's class was working on a project about Africa and she did research on different things concerning Africa.

Teachers implemented key features of the District's Early Balanced Literacy initiative to increase student achievement. In January 1999, the District mandated that elementary schools adopt Early Balanced Literacy (EBL), an instructional approach that drew on both whole language and phonics. Redding teachers embraced EBL because many of its components were congruent with their preexisting literacy program and their vision for school improvement. EBL involved children in authentic, meaningful reading and writing situations to help them develop the necessary literacy skills. EBL required "literacy blocks" of 90 minutes so that students could engage in instructional tasks

meaningfully. Redding blocked out this time each morning to implement EBL in grades K-2. The school was awarded "literacy interns" in 1999 to reduce classroom teacher/student ratios.

The District supported EBL at Redding by providing teachers and the interns in those grades professional development sessions during the summer and school year as well as suggestions for curriculum and assessment tools. Teachers praised this professional development. One teacher recalled:

A lot of the professional development that I've been to concerning balanced literacy has been very helpful. I received information from summer content institutes. They helped me understand how all the different components work. I knew I had to do something different but I needed guidance to that direction and the Balance Literacy content institutes helped with that. It was a fountain of information and ideas.

When asked what changes in teaching practice she had made in the last four years, another teacher described her experience with Early Balanced Literacy:

With Balanced Literacy, kids read on level and I'm sure that everyone can read. The students are more confident readers. With a program like this I'm better able to assess students' skills and I know what their needs are. I know they can read. I like this concept.

Early Balanced Literacy made sense to Redding teachers. Their earlier work on strengthening literacy in the primary grades made teachers receptive to the approach and grateful for the support provided by the District. There were numerous other initiatives at Redding that augmented the school's focus on literacy. In most cases, staff wrote grant proposals to obtain

funding for these efforts. In 1999-2000 literacy-related initiatives included:

- **The 100 Book Challenge**, an initiative the District encouraged schools to adopt, “challenged” students to read 100 books in the lower grades and 300 in the upper grades.
- **Read to Succeed** provided reading materials and professional development for K-3 teachers.
- **Reading Excellence** provided additional funding for reading materials.

In 1999, Redding staff successfully applied for a grant to implement their own home-grown whole-school reform model under the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act. The school’s proposal, “Children Learning Today to Lead Tomorrow,” wove together elements of Early Balanced Literacy and Library Power. Major features of the model included:

- Constructivist, standards-based pedagogy that will prepare students to demonstrate proficiency in the fundamental processes of reading, writing, and math, and the more sophisticated skills needed to solve real world problems and learn independently;
- Collaborative planning between the school librarian and teachers to develop thematic units and performance-based assessments of student learning;
- Intensive professional development for staff so that teachers would be able to implement this challenging approach to teaching and learning;

- Technology to enhance instruction; and
- Purchase of appropriate materials and equipment to make these changes possible.

In summary, Redding staff wove together improvements well underway at the school with the new *Children Achieving* initiatives. During the last year of research at Redding, the principal and teachers began implementation of their own home-grown, whole-school reform model—a model that combined and took to a deeper level the strongest elements of Library Power, Early Balanced Literacy and individualized supports for students at risk of failing. Redding’s successful whole-school reform proposal was a major coup for staff. As will be discussed below, it emerged from ongoing school-wide discussions about how improvement efforts were progressing. These discussions helped staff, in the words of one teacher, “to get on the same page about where we’re headed.”

Professional Community

Strong professional relationships characterized the climate for teaching at Redding. The staff was small and relatively stable which contributed to better communication. The principal described her staff as “good, dedicated, and hardworking.” Cluster staff said the school had a “very empowered staff,” capable of making decisions, following through, and taking on leadership responsibilities. Because Redding did not have an administrative assistant or a reading specialist, two leadership positions that existed in many elementary schools, it was especially important for teachers to pitch in and assume responsibilities beyond their classroom walls. The “mantra” of Redding’s administration and staff was, “Everyone has

more than one job." A number of other factors contributed to the good professional relationships that existed among Redding teachers.

Teachers worked collaboratively to solve problems and share concerns in their small learning communities. The small learning community structure at Redding was formed in the 1997-1998 school year. The rationale behind SLCs was to foster collegiality among staff members and improve curriculum instruction. Teachers had time allotted in their schedules to meet with their SLC colleagues on a weekly basis. Teachers found those meetings useful. As one teacher explained the meetings kept everyone updated about what was going on. She commented, "[We are] very much in tune and they keep everyone aware of what's going on. We are working together. "

A survey created by and administered to Redding teachers revealed that 58 percent felt supported "a great deal" by colleagues within their SLC. Teachers had the opportunity to discuss students' needs. One teacher remarked, "The SLC is a place to vent and share strategies." In the 1999 survey of Philadelphia teachers, conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 56 percent of teachers from Redding noted that SLCs had a positive effect on their school, a figure slightly higher than the average for elementary schools.

They developed curriculum in grade group meetings. But SLCs were not necessarily a place where teachers planned and coordinated curriculum. Only 18 percent of Redding's teachers reported that they planned collaborative instructional units for children in their SLCs two or more times during the year, as reported on the school developed survey.

Teachers requested a time to meet with other teachers in their grade group to talk about curriculum and the schedule was rearranged to accommodate these meetings. Teachers viewed grade group meetings as an invaluable forum to discuss grade-specific strategies customized for their particular students' needs. One teacher explained that her grade group reviewed the District's "Curriculum Frameworks" (a document that addressed each academic content standard at each grade level, articulated grade specific content and skills, recommended best practices and resources, and defined classroom assessment¹). On other occasions, presenters from the cluster came to speak with the grade group and teachers shared how reading or science strategies they had piloted in their classrooms had gone. One teacher summed up the value of grade group meetings: "They allow us to get on the same page regarding what students need to know before moving to the next grade."

Teachers invested in a series of professional development activities designed to facilitate better communication and foster team building. Teachers took the "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator,"[®] a test that categorized people according to 16 distinct personality types, to help them better understand their individual learning styles and preferences for interacting with others. That information enabled them to identify what qualities/skills they needed in order to interact with others whose "profiles" were different from their own.

Teachers shared their expertise with each other, with parents, with teachers in training, and with others interested in public education. There was a general consensus among teachers at Redding to

¹ School District of Philadelphia, Office of Curriculum Support (1998). Curriculum Frameworks Grades 5-8. Philadelphia, PA p2

share their knowledge with their constituents, from parents of the children they served, to college students interested in becoming teachers. Principals and staff from other clusters visited Redding to observe its primary program and its Library Power program. The principal had a strong commitment to “giving back to the profession” by training aspiring teachers, and providing opportunities for them to learn and grow. The principal spoke passionately about creating an “each one teach one” model in the school and mentioned several local colleges that wanted to send their student teachers to her school for their teaching practica because of the support previous students sent to the school reported they had received. She said:

I feel that we owe something back to our profession. If we don't train teachers that are coming into our profession, we are neglecting our own. We complain that teachers are coming to us and they are not "quality instructors." We have a moral obligation to be the best teachers we can be. The philosophy I hope we all have adopted is that Redding school is a learning community. We have a responsibility. We try to teach parents and our community, anyone coming into the building (2000).

In addition, mentors were assigned for new teachers at the school. One new teacher to the profession remarked, “We have support for each other. Mentors are assigned for teachers who are new and who need help. I was assigned when I first came here. I needed help. I was new and struggling.”

At Redding teachers participated on a rotating basis on a leadership team that made decisions on school wide issues from allocation of funds to curriculum design. Because of the small number of staff, teachers took increasing responsibility for

whole school improvement. “Leadership” was shared and every teacher served on the school’s leadership cabinet. While only 15 percent of Redding teachers indicated that they played an active role in decision-making in 1996, by 1999 that number had grown to 40 percent—a figure on par with responses at other city elementary schools. The principal explained:

Everybody serves on the leadership team. Everybody takes responsibility once a month. Some do it twice a month. You help make decisions for this school and this is real important—that everyone knows they are valued and recognized for their skills and abilities.

Teachers engaged in ongoing and systematic discussions about “what makes a good school.” Teachers reported collaborating together on an ongoing basis with the primary focus of addressing and improving students’ instructional needs. In 1996, staff began a three-year dialogue about what a good classroom, teacher, parent, etc looks like. In these discussions, staff developed a “shared language” around those themes and revisited them time and again. In 1998, the leadership team created a survey and administered it to parents, teachers’ and students. The survey focused on the school’s three most important improvement initiatives (Small Learning Communities, Specially Designed Instruction and the Library Power Program). It asked respondents about their general awareness of the initiatives and the extent to which they believed the programs were making a difference at the school. The data were compiled into a report that served as a basis for staff discussions about the school’s progress and future direction. Several staff members, including the principal, related the same story to illustrate how Redding teachers “pulled together” for the good of all of its students. During the 1999-2000 all of the third grade teachers were new to the

profession; in addition one third grade classroom had a teacher vacancy during most of the year. This staffing crisis precipitated a school-wide response. The principal described what happened:

I'm delighted and proud to say that we came together as a staff and decided what would be the best thing for us to do at Redding School, because the children aren't just one teacher's children, they are everybody's children. We had to come up with a program for all the children in that particular classroom. The team had a vision. They knew the importance of those children being instructed in a meaningful way and on an ongoing basis. They wanted them to be able to achieve on the SAT-9.

A small learning community coordinator spoke about how disruptive teacher turnover was to the school, "Every year there is a turnover in staff, not anything drastic, but in the grade 2-3 community, every third grade teacher is new. One thing that is needed in the small learning communities to make them work is good relationships between teachers. You can't do collaborative things unless there is trust, and you can't build that if you have to work constantly with new people.

Professional Development

During *Children Achieving*, the District stepped up professional development efforts in order to prepare teachers for the challenge of getting students to high academic standards. Redding staff took full advantage of these training opportunities. The principal cajoled her staff to attend the many offerings, using the Performance Responsibility Index as leverage. The cluster leader praised the school's participation and noted the principal's important role:

The Redding staff comes to everything. She [the principal] drums up business, puts flyers in mailboxes, posts [advertisements] on the wall. [She] goes to individual teachers and asks if they will attend. She attends many professional development [programs], and sends a message that it's important.

Not only were teachers encouraged to attend professional development sessions, they were expected to return and share what they learned with others in the school community.

A first grade teacher's experience offers an example of how professional development rippled through her small learning community and the entire school. Ms. L participated in professional development offered by the School District throughout the year. When asked to describe what she had gained from these sessions, she stated:

It's important that my lessons are aligned with the standards so that students have a knowledge base. I use hands-on activities. We have to stay positive, all students can learn even if they learn differently.

During the summer, she attended a series of math workshops sponsored by the Philadelphia Urban Systemic Initiative (a District initiative aimed at raising achievement levels in science, mathematics, and technology for all students). She returned to Redding in the fall to do turn-around training for her colleagues. She described how she had worked with teachers in her SLC and across the school:

I get pulled out of my class from time to time to teach a math class of another teacher. I turn-around train with materials and [model] practice lessons. I've done turn-around training for my small learning community and during staff meetings.

This sharing spirit permeated the faculty and created a professional environment

that encouraged continuous learning. Another teacher said:

I like to come back and show someone else what I've learned through 'turn-around training,' [and I like it when] others come back and share, because you get more knowledgeable about what is going on. At this school, we know that you don't expect to go someplace and not [come back and] teach someone else.

One teacher spoke with pride and enthusiasm as she described attending professional development with her colleagues and returning to the school to share with others:

Our Grades 4-5 small learning community presented. There were different people on the leadership team. We had fun. We did a scavenger hunt in the book. It made us open the book and familiarize ourselves with it. The frameworks were designed by teachers.

It is significant that this teacher noted that teachers had developed the curriculum frameworks for the District. Clearly, she felt that there were important roles for teachers to play in the development and implementation of *Children Achieving*.

Redding teachers' high degree of participation in professional development resulted in greater commitment to the main elements of the *Children Achieving* reform than their elementary colleagues across the city, particularly to the implementation of standards and curriculum frameworks. The results from the 1999 Teacher's Survey developed by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education indicated that Redding teachers' support of standards (80 percent) was markedly higher than elementary teachers overall across the District (56 percent). Their support of the curriculum frameworks (80 percent) was higher than elementary

teachers overall (58 percent). Sixty-eight percent of Redding teachers reported that their professional development experiences resulted in changes to their practice while only 56 percent of elementary teachers across the District reported this positive impact.

Parent/Community Involvement

Redding staff wanted to welcome and include parents and community members into the school. To that end, they diligently worked to involve and engage them in meaningful ways. The TLN coordinator spoke about the number of outsiders mobilized in the school and mentioned "a stream of alumni that come in and support the school." During its 75th anniversary, there was an initiative to "welcome back" alumni and have a program in place for them to mentor students after school. One alumnus and his wife supported the school offering grants to teachers who wanted to explore different educational programs. They also ran a computer club and tutored students. Volunteers from the nearby high school, colleges, and community groups came into the school to tutor students

Parents were encouraged to join the "Home and School Association" and serve as "Community Assistants" (volunteers who received a small stipend through Title I funds) or volunteers. Redding formed a Local School Council, composed of parent representatives from each small learning community, the president of the Home and School Association, the principal, the teacher's union building representative, seven teachers and one representative from the non-teaching staff. The council met monthly and oversaw the implementation and evaluation of the school's improvement efforts.

During 1998-1999, a school community coordinator joined the Redding staff and

organized a committee of teachers who developed workshops for a “Saturday school” for parents. These workshops focused on technology, literacy, math, reading, and parenting skills. One parent said that she had more access to information about what was going on in the school and the District because, according to the TLN coordinator, the principal encouraged ongoing efforts to “*get everybody in the community involved in the school.*”

In their proposal for their home-grown whole-school reform model, Redding staff articulated their commitment to community participation in the planning and implementation of the model. They would encourage partnership by:

- Strengthening relationships with parents and other caregivers through better communication (using existing weekly communication folders, monthly calendars, and surveys);
- Recruiting parents to serve on planning teams;
- Offering workshops to familiarize parents with school reform strategies; and
- Creating monthly Saturday morning activities for parents (they already have programs in place such as MotherRead/FatherRead where parents are invited to workshops that offer them strategies and books for reading to their children).

Creating a comprehensive family literacy program focused on both reading and writing (supplemented by family math, family science, family geography, and technology workshops in which parents can use a variety of materials to enhance their children’s skills).

Parent and community involvement at Redding was more intense than in almost all other elementary schools our research team visited. Parents were comfortable approaching the principal and teachers with questions about their children or about the school’s programs. Children were accustomed to parents working inside the classroom. Parents felt valued by Redding’s teachers and principal. Parents and community members volunteered their time to support the school’s instructional program. They tutored students. Parents learned strategies to support their children’s literacy development. Parents were also active in school decision-making. They evaluated the school’s improvement efforts through their involvement on the Local School Council.

Summary

Redding Elementary shared many of the same struggles that confront urban schools. The building was aging and in desperate need of repair and the student population was in flux. Reductions in funding forced the school to closely scrutinize each expense and, at times, cut back programs and personnel (for example, its teacher specialists). While everything was not “perfect” at Redding, the school made steady progress in strengthening its instructional program and raising student performance on SAT-9 test scores. Contributing factors included: the principal’s dedication, knowledge, and leadership; a history of improvement efforts that served as a foundation for incorporating the new reform, *Children Achieving*; a faculty who accepted the hard work of reform by attending professional development offered by the District, and sharing what they learned with one another; and teachers’ investment in the main elements of the reform, namely the

adoption of standards and the curriculum frameworks.

In the words of the principal, “the staff’s work on the proposal for a home-grown whole-school reform model was “one of the school’s proudest moments.” She praised the collegiality and “quality” of her staff. She credited the staff’s three-year dialogue, about what constituted a good school, for its progress and was optimistic about the future.