

LEADING *for* LEARNING

States are taking on new roles as they provide support for low-performing schools and districts.

With state funding, teams of educators are assisting struggling districts. **S14**

The state requires “priority schools” to use a continuous-improvement program. **S16**

Distinguished educators are assigned by the state to help low-scoring districts. **S18**

States face new challenges as they try to help schools and districts improve learning.

Building Capacity

By **Jeff Archer**

What’s gone around has come around.

After a decade or so spent largely on setting academic standards against which to hold schools accountable, states are themselves being held accountable for helping schools figure out how to meet them.

The result is a huge leadership challenge. With few or no added resources, state education agencies are retooling to provide more technical support just as new federal rules are dramatically driving up the number of underperforming schools and districts demanding their assistance.

Echoing the sentiments of many of her counterparts across the country, Yvonne Caamal Canul, who directs the office of school improvement at the Michigan Department of Education, says there’s ample cause for both hope and concern in the situation.

“The good news is that we’re being asked to step up to the plate and take on more authority,” she says. “The bad news is we didn’t hire people over the past 20 years or 15 years to think that way about their work.”

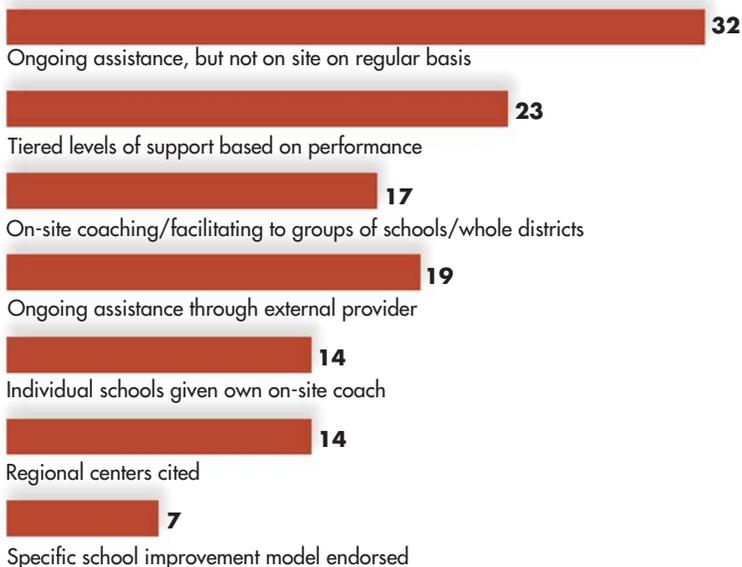
For those reasons, *Education Week* is focusing on states’ relatively new, but increasingly critical, role in building local capacity to improve instruction for its third

State Assistance to Low-Performing Schools and Districts

The charts reflect the number of states that cited each type of assistance in their 2004-05 consolidated performance reports to the U.S. Department of Education, including the District of Columbia. In some cases, state education departments were called or their Web sites reviewed to clarify the reports or fill in missing information.

SOURCE: *Education Week*

Ongoing Support



annual “Leading for Learning” special report.

To gauge the demand for that support, the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center analyzed data on schools and districts identified for improvement in 2005 under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, based on 2004-05 data.

The findings suggest a tall order. Nationwide, 8,446 schools and 1,624 districts that receive federal aid were listed as “in need of improvement” for failing to meet improvement targets at least two years in a row. In addition, 2,399 districts have at least one school in that status. The law says all schools and districts so labeled are entitled to technical support from their states.

But the challenge is anything but uniform. A handful of states account for the bulk of the nation’s schools cited for underperformance. Even within states, those schools are clustered in certain regions and districts.

In addition, *Education Week* reviewed federal documents in which each state describes its efforts to turn schools and districts around. While those reports may not tell all that states actually are doing in that regard, taken together they do reveal clear trends. States are providing heavy doses of help with improvement planning; emphasizing supporting schools in groups, or entire districts, instead of just

individually; providing training in leadership and data analysis; and establishing tiered systems based on level of need.

Profiles in this report highlight the evolving efforts under way in Kentucky, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania to help schools and districts. Other states’ approaches are highlighted in four snapshots of more specific tactics.

Many analysts say that whether these strategies are up to the task may well determine if the goals of the movement to set higher standards are fully realized. For what would it say, they posit, if states can’t help students achieve what the states themselves are asking?

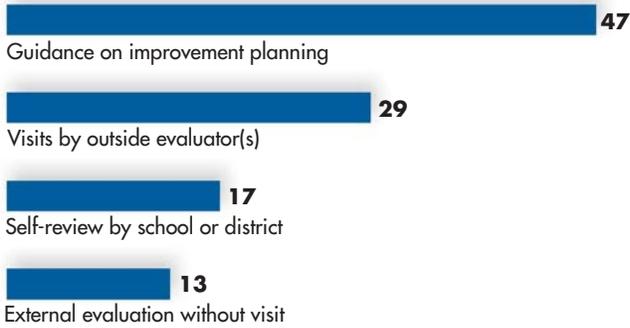
“If the interventions fail, it’s really going to cut to the core of the public’s faith in public education,” says William J. Slotnik, the executive director of the Boston-based Community Training and Assistance Center, which works with states on the issue.

And if that’s not reason enough for states to give more assistance, the No Child Left Behind Act requires it. Signed into law by President Bush in January 2002, the measure says states must have a “system of intensive and sustained support” that at least includes “support teams” to work with schools and districts getting federal Title I aid.

Highest priority for such help is reserved for schools and districts that have reached corrective action. That means that for four or more years in a row, they’ve failed to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP, toward the law’s goal of having all students from all back-

★ ★ ★ Low-performing schools and districts are entitled to technical support from their states.

Reviews and Planning



Training



grounds score at the proficient level or above on their states' reading and mathematics assessments in grades 3-8—and once during high school—by 2014.

Under the law, schools in corrective action face such consequences as having staff members replaced or new curricula imposed. Districts with the label may be put in state receivership or even abolished.

Given that the federal law is now in its fifth year, the full effect of the designation is just beginning to dawn. According to the data compiled for this report, 2,721 Title I schools in the United States had reached corrective action by the 2005-06 school year—the latest for which data were available—had 80 districts.

More schools could be in the pipeline. The analysis tallied 2,990 schools, and 469 districts, that missed AYP three years in a row. Then there's the 2,735 schools and 1,075 districts "in need of improvement" for not making AYP two years running.

"The numbers are becoming staggering," says Paul Koehler, the director of the Phoenix-based Southwest Comprehensive Center, which gets federal money to assist state education agencies. "States are building their school improvement systems while each year more schools are being identified."

While states on average were found to have

Michigan

- ★ Number of Title I schools: **1,111**
- ★ Percent of Title I schools in need of improvement: **21.4**
- ★ Number of districts with Title I schools: **329**
- ★ Percent of Title I districts with schools in need of improvement: **17.9**

Five years ago, the Michigan Department of Education dispatched a small group of highly skilled educators to work full time with low-performing schools around the state. Later, the agency told them to write down what they'd learned.

The result is "MI-MAP," a how-to book for turning schools around. In detailed steps, it spells out the process for putting in place such elements of effective schools as systems for student behavior management and collaborative professional learning.

Teams of educators from schools in the state listed as needing improvement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act now get two days of training on MI-MAP. Education departments in other states also have bought the guide to incorporate its lessons into their own work. (Information can be found at www.michigan.gov/mde.)

The Michigan department has further distilled the ingredients of school success into a shorter "framework" to help schools organize their efforts. The agency sees the framework as a curriculum for school improvement, and MI-MAP as the lesson plans. —J.A.

Connecticut

- ★ Number of Title I schools: **492**
- ★ Percent of Title I schools in need of improvement: **19.9**
- ★ Number of districts with Title I schools: **148**
- ★ Percent of Title I districts with schools in need of improvement: **12.2**

In Connecticut, state leaders are helping school districts learn from one another. The education department there has formed two cohorts of leadership teams out of 10 districts that have low-performing schools.

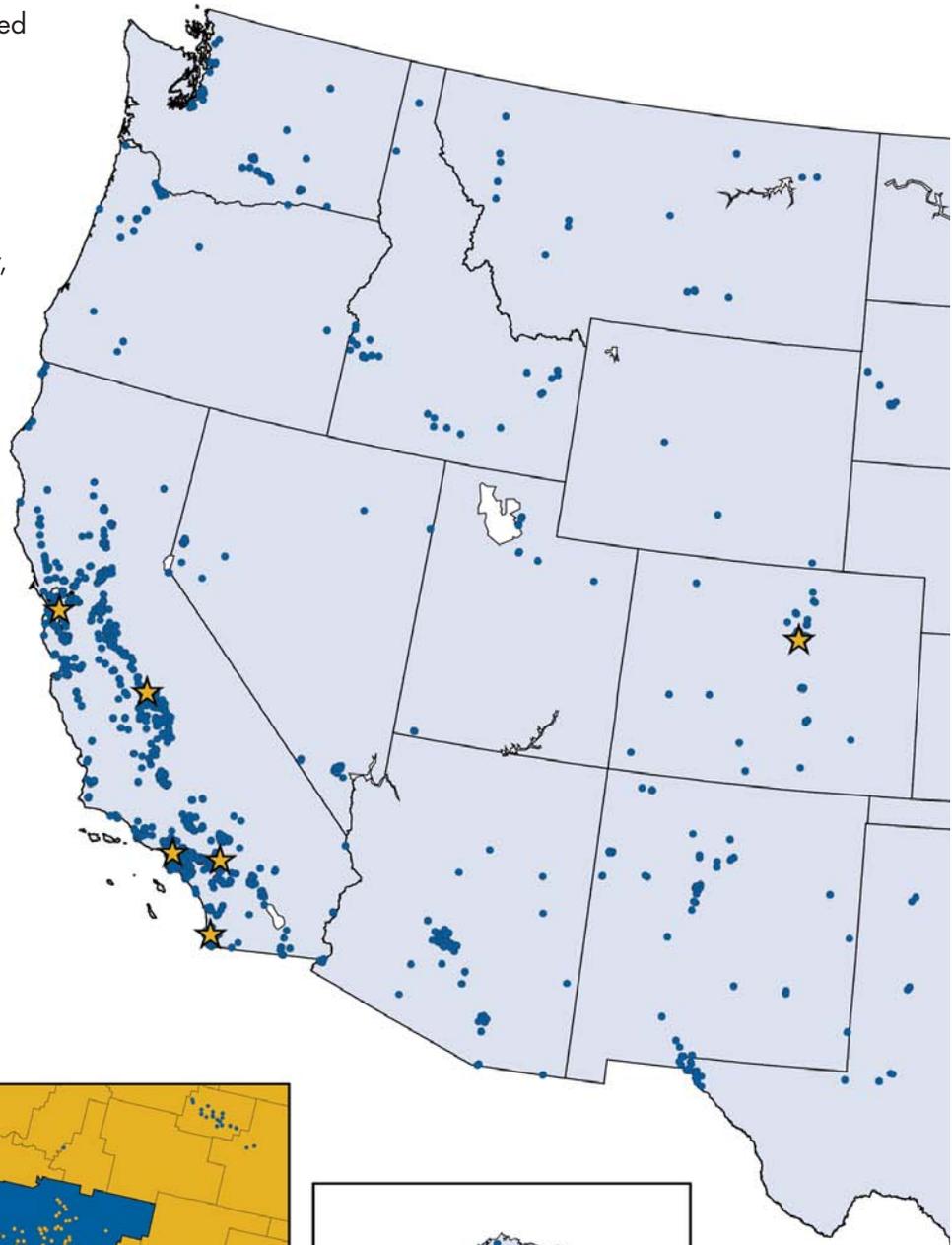
In regular meetings organized by the state, members of each cohort have shared ideas on how to put into place data-driven strategies for improvement planning. They've all received training on such strategies through the agency.

Each meeting brings together about 40 to 50 people, including superintendents, principals, and district curriculum specialists. A third cohort is in the works, as is a similar series of gatherings specifically for school board members from districts with low-performing schools.

This past April, the state also hosted its first statewide "data fair," where districts could show off how they track student progress and measure the success of their improvement strategies. Some 400 people attended. A second fair is planned for next spring. —J.A.

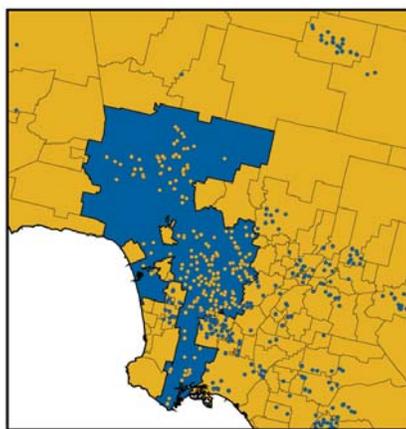
Schools in Need of Improvement for the 2005-06 School Year

During the 2005-06 school year, a total of 8,446 Title I schools nationwide were identified as "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act. The identified schools tend to be extremely clustered geographically. In fact, one-quarter of all identified schools in the nation are concentrated within just 25 districts. The number of identified schools meets or exceeds 100 in six districts: Chicago; Detroit; Los Angeles; Miami-Dade County, Fla.; New York City; and Philadelphia.

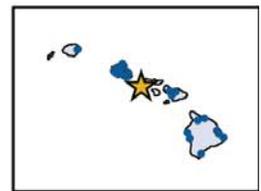
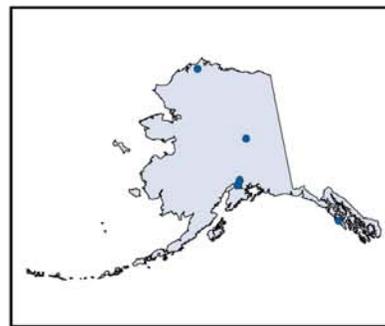


These districts, with the number of schools in need of improvement, account for one-fourth of all schools in such status nationwide.

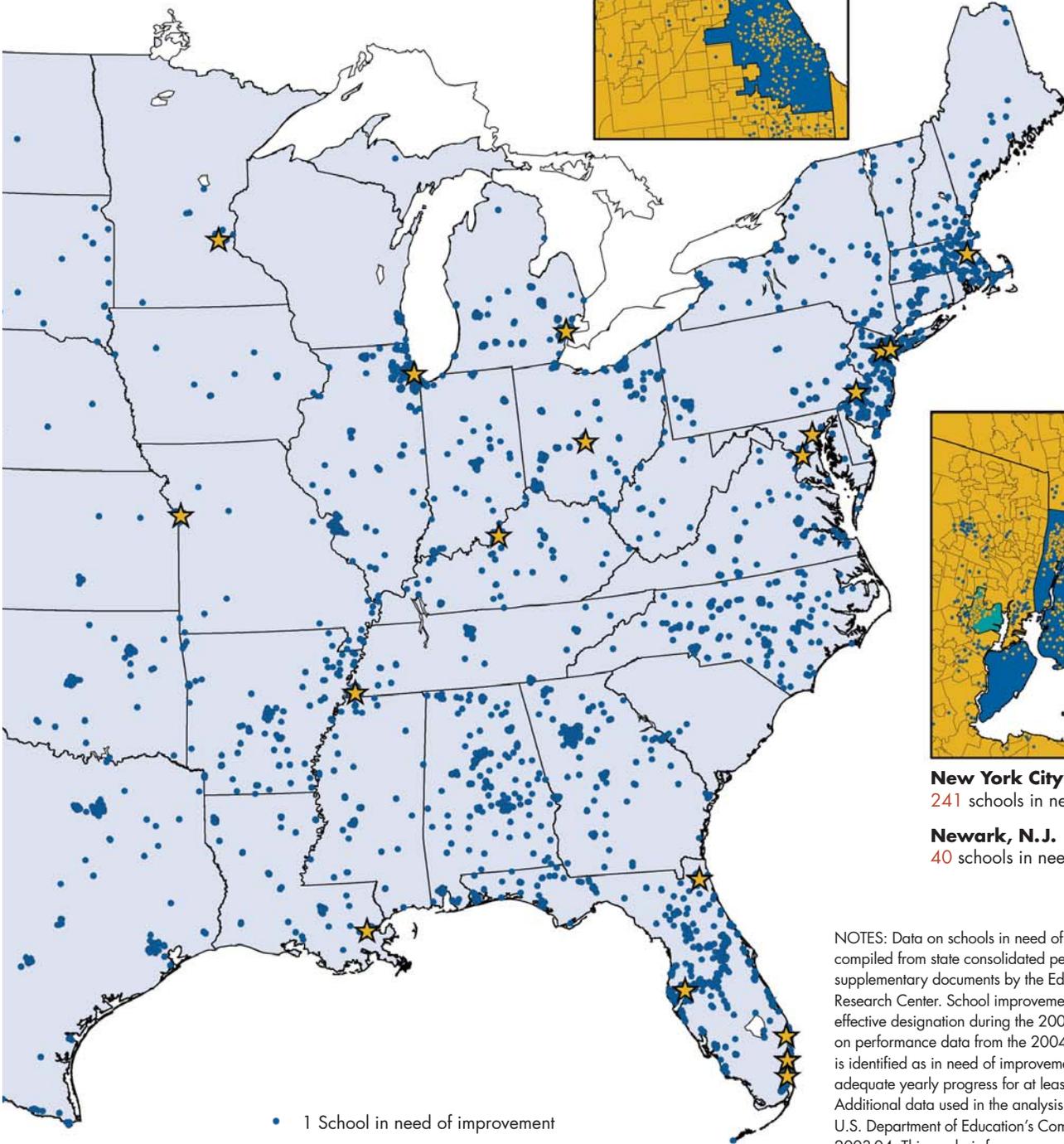
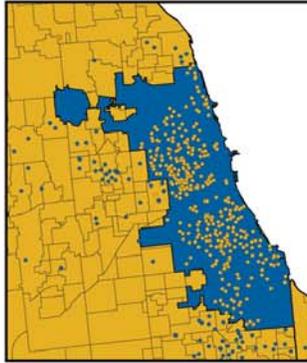
Chicago	341
New York City	241
Los Angeles	205
Philadelphia	109
Detroit	105
Miami-Dade County, Fla.	100
District of Columbia	82
Hillsborough County, Fla.	71
Boston	67
Orleans Parish, La.	65
Palm Beach County, Fla.	62
Fresno, Calif.	60
Baltimore, Md.	57
Memphis, Tenn.	57
Denver	54
Oakland, Calif.	51
Broward County, Fla.	46
Columbus, Ohio	45
San Bernardino City, Calif.	44
Minneapolis	43
Duval County, Fla.	41
Hawaii	41
San Diego	40
Newark, N.J.	40
Jefferson County, Ky.	39
Kansas City, Mo.	39



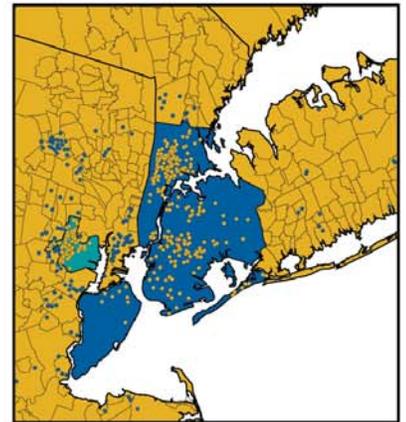
Los Angeles Unified School District
205 schools in need of improvement



Chicago
 341 schools in need
 of improvement



- 1 School in need of improvement
- ★ Districts with at least 39 schools in need of improvement, accounting for 25 percent of identified schools nationally.



New York City
 241 schools in need of improvement

Newark, N.J.
 40 schools in need of improvement

NOTES: Data on schools in need of improvement were compiled from state consolidated performance reports and supplementary documents by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. School improvement status refers to a school's effective designation during the 2005-06 school year, based on performance data from the 2004-05 school year. A school is identified as in need of improvement if it has failed to make adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years. Additional data used in the analysis were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data, 2003-04. This analysis focuses specifically on schools receiving Title I funding.

SOURCE: EPE Research Center

16 percent of their Title I schools cited as needing improvement, in Alabama, Alaska, California, the District of Columbia, and Florida it was more than 30 percent. Meanwhile, in Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming, fewer than 2 percent of all Title I schools were so listed.

That's due in part to differences in state standards, tests, and accountability systems. Some states also had certain accountability rules in place before NCLB, and so are further along. But most states were found to have more schools potentially one year away from corrective action than they already had in that status.

To put the looming demand on state education departments in terms of student needs, the EPE Research Center combined the federal data on schools' performance status with data on schools' student populations and other characteristics.

The bottom line: Together, all the Title I schools in the country listed as needing improvement under the law in 2005 served a total of some

5.8 million students, of whom 66 percent lived in poverty, and 75 percent were members of ethnic and racial minorities.

Further analysis of the combined databases showed the schools those students attended were disproportionately located in certain areas within their states. While 2,399 U.S. districts had at least one Title I school identified for improvement, 25 individual districts accounted for a quarter of all such schools nationwide.

Given the numbers, state education agencies can ill afford to do business as usual, says G. Thomas Houlihan, who stepped down last month as the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, a Washington group representing commissioners and superintendents of education. Merely monitoring for compliance, he says, won't turn schools around.

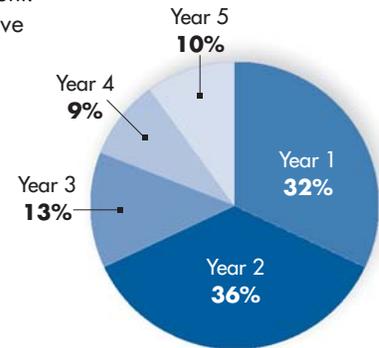
"NCLB has highlighted the fact that the system of education must change in this country, and that states are going to be the primary and immediate focus point for leading that," Houlihan says. "I don't think anyone in this country understands the enormous sea change we're talking about."

Clues about how states are trying to reach so many schools were found in *Education Week's* review of the consolidated performance reports that they submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, indicating measures they're taking to address the needs of schools and districts identified as needing

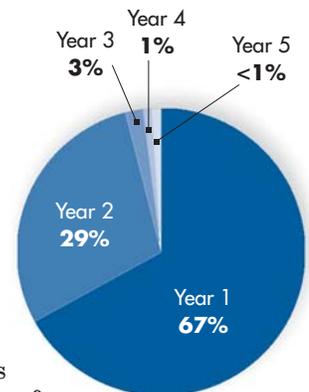
Schools and Districts in Early Stages Of NCLB Improvement

A total of 8,446 (or 16 percent) of Title I schools nationwide have been identified as "in need of improvement" under the No Child Left Behind law. More than two-thirds of those schools are within their first two years of school improvement.

Fewer than one in five identified schools have reached the "restructuring" phase (year four of improvement and beyond).



About 12 percent of districts with Title I schools nationwide have been identified as "in need of improvement" under NCLB. The vast majority (95 percent) of these districts are within their first two years of school improvement.



SOURCE: EPE Research Center

help under NCLB.

The most common assistance is with planning. Forty-seven states cited providing some form of guidance on drafting improvement plans. In 29 states, the process involved visits by outside evaluators, while 13 described outside reviews based on documentation, and 17 mentioned self-reviews.

Many states described improvement planning as a way to organize the work of local leaders. Massachusetts, for example, has a highly detailed process, called "performance-improvement mapping," aimed at prodding schools to better use data to zero in on problems and evaluate their strategies.

"In many of our schools, our observation is not that they need a different program, it's that they need to stop doing some of the multiple, sometimes

★ ★ ★ Almost 5.8 million students, 66 percent of whom are poor, attend schools in need of improvement.

California

- ★ Number of Title I schools: **5,579**
- ★ Percent of Title I schools in need of improvement: **31.3**
- ★ Number of districts with Title I schools: **962**
- ★ Percent of Title I districts with schools in need of improvement: **37.7**

centers to form 12 support teams to work with schools and districts in different parts of the state.

Finally, seven states described networks of schools and local leaders they had created to share best practices.

Richard Laine, the education director at the New York City-based Wallace Foundation, agreed states have broader influence by acting as conveners and brokers.

“We need to think of the state agency not as a physical building, but figure out how we as a state agency can help coordinate the state capacity to be more helpful for districts and schools,” says Mr. Laine, whose foundation underwrites this report and other leadership coverage in *Education Week*.

But even with such efforts, few state leaders say they have the wherewithal to meet the growing need. Many are beefing up their technical assistance without new dollars. State agencies also tend to pay less than many districts do, making it hard to recruit the new talent they require.

In addition, many experts say that there’s a dearth of research on how to turn around large numbers of schools at the same time, and that even less is known about how to improve whole districts in ways that can be sustained.

A poll released this past March by the Center on Education Policy, a Washington-based research and advocacy group, showed leaders of 26 state education agencies felt they lacked “sufficient in-house expertise” to help schools and districts identified for improvement under the No Child Left Behind law. Another 16 had concerns about meeting future demand.

“For the better part of a decade now, many state education agencies have been cutting back in personnel and funding, and the federal government hasn’t made up the difference,” says Jack Jennings, the former Democratic congressional aide who is the center’s president.

Federal guidelines set aside 4 percent of Title I money for school improvement activities. At the current \$12 billion allocation for Title I, the main federal program for disadvantaged schoolchildren, that equals about \$500 million.

But because 95 percent must go to schools and districts, just \$25 million is left for 50 state agencies to work with, at most. Other federal budget rules bar states from reserving money for school improvement efforts if doing so would mean districts get less Title I aid than in the previous year. As a result, many state departments say they’re unable to set aside the 4 percent.

States also are having a hard time allocating money for the work. In Massachusetts, the state board of edu-

With more schools under its jurisdiction than its counterpart in any other state, the California Department of Education can’t support every school that needs assistance itself. So it relies extensively on outside help.

Low-performing schools contract with one of 50-some external providers that have been approved by the state to form “school assistance improvement teams.” Many are countywide education offices. Others are private consulting groups.

State guidelines spell out the work of the teams in assessing schools’ needs and in providing ongoing support with the implementation of improvement plans. Schools receive grants from the state to help pay for the providers. Last year, 200 schools had such teams.

The state is piloting a similar program using external providers to work with entire districts. That effort includes a new statewide survey process to be used in evaluating districts in such areas as curriculum management, use of data, and parental involvement.

—J.A.

South Carolina

- ★ Number of Title I schools: **555**
- ★ Percent of Title I schools in need of improvement: **2.5**
- ★ Number of districts with Title I schools: **88**
- ★ Percent of Title I districts with schools in need of improvement: **35.2**

The South Carolina Department of Education has long relied on an army of specialists to provide on-site and intensive coaching to low-performing schools. But faced this year with its first three districts identified for corrective action under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the state took a different tack.

All three districts were required to adopt a K-8 curriculum designed by Anderson County School District Five, a 12,000-student South Carolina system that already had been selling its curricular materials to other districts.

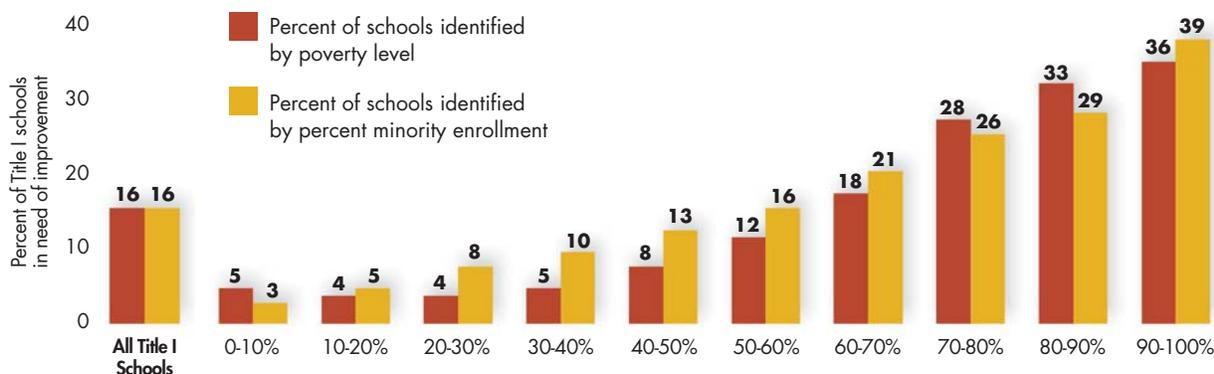
Anderson’s curriculum is aligned with the state’s academic standards, and is broken down into unit plans and pacing guides meant to help teachers make sure they cover all the skills that students are expected to learn within each grade.

State education department leaders say the Anderson model won’t automatically be mandated for all districts that wind up in corrective action. But after evaluating the first districts in the state to get that designation, they concluded that each lacked a coherent curriculum.

—J.A.

School Improvement Status Strongly Tied to Poverty

On average, 16 percent of all Title I schools nationwide are identified as “in need of improvement” under the federal NCLB law. However, the identification rate is more than twice as high for schools with the highest poverty levels and for schools where more than 90 percent of students are members of racial and ethnic minority groups.



NOTE: Poverty is measured as the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
SOURCE: EPE Research Center

cation this year called for \$25 million for new school improvement efforts led by the education department. But lawmakers approved \$5 million, essentially level-funding such activities.

“In most state legislatures, the idea of building the bureaucracy with further investment is an unpopular one,” says S. Paul Reville, the president of the Boston-based Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, which has studied the issue in the Bay State and elsewhere.

There are some bright spots. New Mexico put \$8.4 million this year toward school improvement after previously relying only on federal money. Pennsylvania wrote into law a year-old state education department program that places distinguished educators in struggling districts. (See *related stories*, Pages S16 and S18.)

At the federal level, the Bush administration has proposed, for the first time, allotting \$200 million for grants to state education agencies to use in providing technical assistance to low-performing schools and districts. An agreement on federal spending for fiscal 2007 is expected to emerge from Capitol Hill after the November elections.

In such actions, state agencies see some recognition of the new responsibility they bear in ensuring high-quality schooling for all children. How far that acknowledgment grows remains to be seen. Houlihan, the former head of the state chiefs’ group, says the stakes are too high for him not to be hopeful.

“I really believe that while this is a very, very difficult and tricky time for state education agencies in our country, I also think it’s a huge opportunity,” he says. “If we can get enough of the expertise and enough of the resources, states will figure this out.” ★



About This Report

This special pullout section is the third annual *Education Week* report examining leadership in education, a topic of critical concern at a time of ever-increasing expectations for schools. It includes a mix of explanatory articles and research findings analyzed by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, under the leadership of Christopher B. Swanson, with project management by Hajime Mitani and contributions from interns Erica Brewington and Rachelle Dennis.

The project is underwritten by a grant from The Wallace Foundation, which seeks to support and share effective ideas and practices that expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people. Its three current objectives are:

- ★ Strengthen education leadership to improve student achievement;
- ★ Enhance out-of-school learning opportunities; and
- ★ Expand participation in arts and culture.

For more information and research on these and other related topics, please visit the Knowledge Center at www.wallacefoundation.org.

For copies of last year’s special report, go to www.edweek.org.

Kentucky

The state expands its 'distinguished educator' program to districts, including their school boards.

By **David J. Hoff**

Kentucky, which has a long history of sending skilled educators to the rescue of struggling schools, is expanding that approach to entire school districts.

Seven districts have been working with "voluntary-assistance teams" since early this year. Thirteen more have joined the program for the 2006-07 school year.

Kentucky officials expect that the expertise will help districts head off potential interventions under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which for districts can include state receivership or even being abolished if they fail to make achievement targets for four years in a row.

Under the initiative, four educators join the district superintendent on a team with the goal of making changes—either big or small—that will turn lackluster student achievement around.

The state department of education provides one of its staff members and a "highly skilled educator"; the Kentucky School Boards Association picks a school board member from another district in the state; and the Kentucky Association of School Administrators assigns a retired superintendent to the team. All the members are from districts that have succeeded in raising achievement. The superintendent of the struggling district is the chairman of the group.

For the 2005-06 school year, the state gave each participating district \$20,000 to pay consulting fees and the expenses of the superintendent and the school

board member on the team. (The state education department pays the salaries and expenses for its employee and the highly skilled educator.)

In the current school year, the state is paying \$10,000 and is requiring the districts to match that amount with their own money.

'Laser-Like Focus'

In Madison County, a rural but growing area in the Bluegrass region in the center of the state, five of the 10,000-student district's 15 schools failed to meet achievement targets under the NCLB law in the 2005-06 school year. The district's cumulative scores fell short of its overall goals under the law, and another year without districtwide improvement could subject it to state interventions as drastic as the replacement of the superintendent.

Superintendent B. Michael Caudill says the decision to sign up for the assistance was a good one. "It's created time for me to focus laser-like on academics," he says.

One of the team's first actions was to hire consultants to conduct a thorough academic audit of the district. The 17-member team identified specific schools where Madison County needed to improve the culture and change the curriculum.

"While I knew that, I needed that ammo to make some moves," says Caudill.

The team also recommended that the district hire a chief academic officer to take responsibility for all issues in curriculum, professional development, and everything else tied to student learning.

In addition, the assistance team has been active in

helping school board members set policy. The outside school board representative on the team attends all of the Madison County school board's meetings and advises its members. Based on the outside board member's review, the district board has realized that its meeting agendas are "too management-heavy," Caudill says, and has taken steps to ensure issues related to student achievement are the center of its discussions.

And it has started to require that staff members report back to the board about the results of certain programs the board has approved.

'Everyone Understands'

The involvement of the local school board and the leadership role of the superintendent are important ingredients in the process, according to those who helped design the districtwide assistance.

"With this model, everyone understands what the intervention is, and they support it," says Stephen M. Schenck, the state's associate commissioner of education for leadership and school improvement. "It's about everybody having the same plan and supporting that plan."

And when the voluntary-assistance team finishes its work, the hope is that the district will be able to keep up the improvements set in motion.

"If we're going to have systemic change in a school district," says David A. Baird, the associate executive director of the Kentucky School Boards Association, one of the sponsors of the project, "we need to have the intervention all the way from the top down."

Six months after the team first met in Madison County, it's too early to measure the impact of the effort on student achievement. But participants say cultural and managerial changes are under way.

Such changes will help Madison County and the other participating districts in the long run, the program's sponsors hope, because district leaders will have changed the way they approach their jobs and acquired the knowledge and skills needed to sustain any improvements.

"When there's outside interventions in school districts, the intervention is only effective as long as

you're there," Baird says. "We want to try to develop a little bit more leadership capacity of the local superintendent because this team has no intention of staying there long term."

Legislative Support Questioned

The question for the future is whether Kentucky lawmakers will continue to finance state interventions to help schools in trouble.

In this year's legislative session, the state Senate's two-year budget plan would have eliminated the highly-skilled-educators program, which the state has run since 1995 under its own accountability framework.

The program is too expensive, and the state-sponsored consultants cause internal conflict because "they have too much authority," says Sen. Dan Kelly, the Republican majority leader and a critic of the program.

Although the Kentucky House of Representatives won concessions in a conference committee to allot the program \$5.6 million for the current fiscal year and the same amount for fiscal 2008, many in the state wonder whether the legislature will continue to back the deployment of highly skilled educators and other state interventions intended to improve student performance.

"It concerns me more than a little" that the Senate voted to eliminate money for the highly skilled educators, says Schenck, the associate commissioner of education.

But as districts start entering the "corrective action" phase of the No Child Left Behind Act, Kentucky—and all other states—will need tools in place to help turn schools around, according to one organizer of Kentucky's voluntary district-assistance program.

"Whatever they call it, there's going to be a need in Kentucky, and other states, for highly skilled educators," says W. Blake Haselton, the executive director of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, referring to consultants generally, not just the Kentucky program. "It's very difficult when you have an intervention ... and don't build in general internal capacity to sustain it when you leave." ★



New Mexico

The Baldrige continuous-improvement program is prescribed by the state as a cure for troubled schools.

By **Linda Jacobson**

Catherine Thomas knows teaching grammar is not her greatest strength. But she's gifted at helping her students comprehend what they're reading.

The 4th grade teacher at Armijo Elementary School in Albuquerque, N.M., didn't reach those conclusions on her own, however. It was only after examining student-achievement trends—using a school improvement strategy mandated by the state—that her strengths and weaknesses in the classroom became clear.

"When the data is in your face, it's hard to argue with," she says of what is known as the Baldrige model of "continuous improvement," popular in the business world.

Teachers at the 450-student school, which until last school year was not able to make adequate yearly progress under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, aren't the only ones "drilling down" into the scores to see where they need to improve. Students in the high-poverty school are also setting their own goals and changing their attitudes toward learning, Thomas says.

"They are taking on responsibility, and their self-esteem is incredible," she says, adding that many of her students' parents have low educational levels. "They're like, 'We're smart after all.'"

Students are learning to follow the Baldrige model's steps of "plan, do, study, act," Thomas says. And throughout the year, they do a quick check that involves reviewing individual and classroom goals and

what needs to be done to get there.

Other schools categorized for their low achievement as "priority schools" by the New Mexico Department of Public Education are having similar success using Baldrige principles. Of the 13 schools that came off the list of priority schools in 2005, nine were Baldrige schools, says Sally Wilkinson, the director of the Priority Schools Bureau, which focuses on schools in need of improvement.

The model draws inspiration from the criteria for the prestigious Baldrige Award. Named after the late Malcolm Baldrige, a U.S. secretary of commerce during the Reagan administration, the award was originally given to companies in the 1980s to encourage excellence in an increasingly competitive world market. More recently, its criteria—in areas such as leadership; strategic planning; and measurement, analysis, and knowledge management—have been applied to schools and other nonprofit organizations as well.

"The reception from those who have tried it and stayed with it has been very positive," says Laurel Moore, the director of Strengthening Quality in Schools, an Albuquerque-based initiative launched in 1992 that provides training in the Baldrige model.

"The kids are so engaged in their learning," she says. "I've had 1st graders look at where a graph went down and say, 'This is not acceptable.'"

Wider Interest

New Mexico's interest in the Baldrige model dates back to 1991, when then-Gov. Bruce King established a business advisory group to spread the message of

“continuous improvement” to the state’s schools.

But interest in the model has increased significantly in recent years as the number of schools listed as being “in need of improvement” under state and federal rules has grown.

Now, schools on New Mexico’s priority list don’t get to choose which method they’ll use to work toward meeting goals for adequate yearly progress, or AYP.

“If we’re paying for it, and you’re on my radar, you don’t get a choice on that one,” says Wilkinson, the former principal of a school that used the model.

Schools required to participate aren’t the only ones interested in the Baldrige approach, however. There are about 100 schools on the list that will receive the training this fall and next spring.

But last school year, more than 1,500 people from across the state took advantage of regional leadership training based on the Baldrige model, Wilkinson says.

By bringing school improvement success stories to the attention of key policymakers in the state, Wilkinson was also instrumental in helping to see that \$8.4 million was included in the fiscal 2007 state budget for school improvement activities—the first time such programs have received state funding. Over the past two years, her office has evolved from a small initiative to a larger technical-assistance department that offers resources and provides “coaches” who actually become adjunct staff members at schools they are trying to help.

Rewarding Improvement

At Santo Domingo School, a combined elementary and middle school, implementing the Baldrige process kick-started additional improvements that are transforming the school community, according to Bryan Garcia and Richard Torralba, who serve as co-principals of the school.

Located on Pueblo land north of Albuquerque, the schools are leased to the 3,400-student Bernalillo school district by the tribe and serve an almost totally Native American population. The elementary school was required to begin using the Baldrige method in

the 2004-05 school year.

The two principals decided that working as a team—and drawing from each other’s strengths—could bring greater collaboration among members of the staff and continue the improvements made at the elementary level into the middle grades. Before, a kindergarten teacher would have had little knowledge of what an 8th grade teacher was doing.

“Now they know each other’s role in the school, and that’s a helpful link to student achievement,” Garcia says.

While most of the achievement gains have been in mathematics, students are hitting their reading and writing targets too, he adds.

After just two years, the elementary school has “gone from ‘in need of improvement’ to a designation of ‘none’ [for not missing AYP], which is a good thing,” says Garcia.

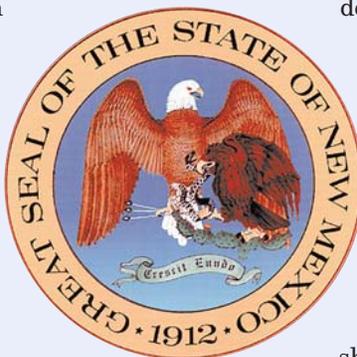
Because evaluating data is a critical focus of the Baldrige approach, the principals created what they call their “war room,” where all the school’s achievement data are displayed on the walls. Teachers meet there to discuss areas that need attention and plan intervention strategies.

Students, who make graphs showing their own scores, are also rewarded for improvement through an incentive program in which they earn “school dollars” to spend in the school store. But Garcia and Torralba agree that their students received the greatest boost from an assembly in which every student was given a gold medal because Santo Domingo was named a “school on the rise” by the state education department.

Garcia contrasts that event with a somber rally held three years ago in which the school community tried to persuade state officials not to take control of the district because of low achievement.

Bernalillo Superintendent Barbara Vigil-Lowder—who thinks what Garcia and Torralba have done serves as a model for other schools—says she also notices a difference in the students.

“Three years ago, the students would walk with their heads down. They would misbehave. They didn’t think they could do it,” she says. ★



Pennsylvania

To help struggling districts, the state provides teams of top-notch educators for two years.

By **Jeff Archer**

By any measure, Wynton Butler has a mammoth job. As the principal of Reading High School in Pennsylvania, he leads a building with 4,300 students—eight in 10 of whom live in poverty.

Among his to-do's: create smaller learning communities, put in place school-to-career programs, upgrade teacher training, implement data-driven instruction, and launch new efforts to improve the English-language skills of non-native speakers.

"I would not be honest if I didn't say it was a challenge," says Butler, who has been a principal for just a year.

Fortunately, he's able to tap the advice of a team of veteran administrators assigned to his district by the state of Pennsylvania. With their help, he's learned to delegate responsibilities, to plan more strategically, and to set priorities.

The 17,000-student Reading district—pronounced *Redding*—is one of 13 districts that in fall 2005 became the first beneficiaries of Pennsylvania's "distinguished educator" program. Each received a team of specially trained administrators to provide on-site assistance for two years.

"They've played a critical role in tying it all together, and making sense of it," Butler says. Otherwise, he adds, "you'd have 21 loose initiatives going in lots of different directions."

Working like consultants, the DEs, as they're called, analyze districts' needs and recommend action steps. They connect local educators with others elsewhere who have had success in improving achievement. And

they act as sounding boards.

Reading Superintendent Thomas Chapman, himself new to the role of district chief, says the support is invaluable as he aims to make big improvements in teaching and learning and in facilities in a school system identified as "in need of improvement" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

"It's like having four or five *consiglieres*," says Chapman, a film buff, making reference to the Italian term for a trusted adviser made famous in *The Godfather*. "We couldn't go out and buy these guys."

Expanded Role

The program marks an expanded role for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. After adopting a system of statewide standards and accountability measures for schools several years ago, the agency has more recently focused on creating tools to help local educators realign their efforts to achieve better results.

"Accountability and demands are one part of the equation, but equal to those—or at least equal—should be the support systems," says Gerald L. Zahorchak, the state's secretary of education. "When you have both those together, you get stronger results."

A critical job of the distinguished educators is to show local leaders how to use the tools available to them. For last year, the state recruited and trained 35 former principals and district administrators to serve in teams of up to six DEs, most of which split their time between two districts.

By focusing on districts rather than schools, the aim is to achieve lasting change, says Juan Baughn, who directs the program at the state department. No district was required to take part, but none that was offered a

team last year rejected it. All are among the lowest-performing school systems in the state.

“I’ve seen too many times where we had a charismatic principal, and things went well, and as soon as the principal left, everything fell apart,” Baughn says. “So we’re trying to put together systems in districts that can make things work.”

Administrators in Reading felt they had little to lose when the state gave the district the option of being included in the program’s inaugural year. Two of its 19 schools—as well as the district as a whole—had been labeled as needing improvement two years in a row under the No Child Left Behind law. A third school is in “corrective action,” triggering intervention.

An hour west of Philadelphia, the district serves a city of 81,000 struggling amid the decline of the heavy industry that long powered its economy. About 85 percent of its students live in poverty. Two-thirds are Hispanic, many the children of parents who see Reading as more affordable than a larger city.

Detailed Assessment

The district’s relationship with the distinguished-educator program began with an assessment. Six DEs—two of whom would later be on Reading’s ongoing team of six consultants—spent a week last fall observing instruction, reviewing data, and interviewing staff members, students, and parents.

The reviewers lauded the district for starting to use data to make instructional decisions, but noted a need for a new data-management system. They liked the variety of teaching methods they saw, but proposed more alignment across the district in what gets taught.

“They have a lot of work to do, but they’re moving forward,” Stanley Landis, one of the distinguished educators on the team assigned to the district after the assessment, says of Reading’s school leaders.

Reading’s six distinguished educators, each of whom has worked in education for at least 30 years, reflect a range of experience. Landis has mentored new principals; one has administered special education programs; and other members have led the restructuring of middle and high schools.

Reading has been able to exploit the variety of skills to its advantage. For example, Butler, the high school

principal, has relied heavily on Landis to help organize the work of his school’s other leaders. One result was a recent retreat for the school’s vice principals.

Meanwhile, Distinguished Educator LouAnn Miller has helped Butler implement a state high school improvement program she had put in place in her own district. That help included arranging a visit for Reading High staff members to see the program in action in a nearby school system.

The distinguished educators also arranged for all of the Reading district’s principals to undergo training by the National Institute for School Leadership, whose course of study—designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy, in Washington—teaches skills like team-building and progress-monitoring. Distinguished Educator Michael

Gibbs says much of their aim is to raise expectations for what’s possible.

“It’s getting them to that point where they truly do believe that all children can learn,” says Gibbs, who advised the adoption of new literacy programs for English-language learners at a Reading middle school. “Our task has to be to have them have experiences that allow them to come to that belief.”

At the district level, Reading administrators have sought advice from the team on how to roll out new initiatives. Last year, the district unveiled a multiyear, \$135 million building plan to accommodate new theme-based magnet schools and the breakup of Reading High into two buildings, among other goals.

Superintendent Chapman credits the distinguished-educator program with improving relations with the state. Two years ago, under a different superintendent, Reading sued the state, alleging it was not providing adequate resources to meet NCLB expectations. The suit hasn’t been dropped, but Chapman downplays it.

Providing for the distinguished educators poses challenges. Paying for the first cohort cost \$2.8 million. Baughn, the program’s director, says it was hard to find enough people who had been successful leaders in the kinds of districts where they’d be placed.

But Zahorchak, the state schools chief, says the program is worth the effort: “Too often, states have only put out the standards and then said ‘good luck’ to everyone, and then they wonder why nothing is working.” ★

