

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turning the Tide:

The Achievements of the First Things First
Education Reform in the Kansas City, Kansas
Public School District

Michelle Alberti Gambone, Ph.D.

Adena M. Klem, Ph.D.

Jean Ann Summers, Ph.D.

Theresa M. Akey, Ph.D.

Cynthia L. Sipe, Ph.D.



Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

This executive summary was prepared by Michelle Alberti Gambone, Ph.D., Adena M. Klem, Ph.D., Jean Ann Summers, Ph.D., Theresa M. Akey, Ph.D., and Cynthia L. Sipe, Ph.D. for Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

The report was completed in November 2004 and is available through Youth Development Strategies, Inc. online at:

www.ydsi.org

Lesley Dahlkemper of Schoolhouse Communications provided editorial assistance in the preparation of this executive summary.

© 2004

Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

429 Fulton Street

Philadelphia, PA 19147

Suggested Citation: Gambone, M.A., Klem, A.M., Summers, J.A., Akey, T.A., & Sipe, C.L. (2004). *Turning the Tide: The Achievements of the First Things First Education Reform in the Kansas City, Kansas Public School District (Executive Summary)*. Philadelphia: Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

About the Funders

This report is based on a project funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in conjunction with the Kansas City, Kansas School District and the Institute for Research and Reform in Education. The contents and views expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

This project has also been funded in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0159. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

INTRODUCTION

The story of Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools could be that of almost any urban district across the country. The students in this medium-sized district are 79 percent minority, and 74 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. For years, the district has struggled with low test scores, poor attendance and high dropout rates – just like other urban school systems.

In 1996, district leaders took decisive action to help their students by adopting a comprehensive school reform model called First Things First. The model, designed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), focused on improved instructional practice, targeted professional development, structural changes in schools to support improvements, and increased support for staff (see *Components of First Things First*). While the district required all schools to adopt the model, principals and teachers played an important role in deciding how to put First Things First into place.

Was First Things First successful in helping the district meet its goals of improved student performance? An examination of trends in attendance, test scores, and graduation and dropout rates shows improvement between 1998 and 2003. The evaluation examines and describes the extent to which these trends in student outcomes and conditions in schools were related to the implementation of First Things First across the district.

Among the major findings:

- ◆ Better relationships between students and teachers and among staff
- ◆ More students feeling engaged in school
- ◆ Higher attendance among middle and high school students

If you are in an urban area where kids are failing, you can't tweak the system. It is going to require dramatic changes, and the nerve and courage to stick with it.

First Things First gave us focus.

— Ray Daniels, Superintendent

District Phase-In of First Things First

- Fall 1998: Wyandotte High School, its two feeder middle schools and seven feeder elementary schools begin the first year of implementation.
- Fall 1999: Washington High School and its two feeder middle schools and seven feeder elementary schools begin implementing First Things First.
- Fall 2000: First Things First is now in place district-wide, with the adoption of the model by 12 schools in the Harmon cluster and 8 schools in the Schlagle cluster.

To view the full evaluation or read more about research methods, go to: Youth Development Strategies, Inc. www.ydsi.org

- ◆ Improved test scores on state reading assessment at all levels
- ◆ Improved scores on state math assessments for elementary and middle school students; and
- ◆ More students graduating from high school on time

This executive summary highlights major findings from an evaluation completed by Youth Development Strategies, Inc. in November 2004. The evaluation, which was uncommon in its scope and longevity, tracked student achievement, instructional strategies, staff and student relationships, and aspects of system-wide change over six years. The study used a range of data collection strategies, including surveys, interviews, classroom observations, student records data and a review of documents.

This report is written for policymakers, educators, foundation leaders, researchers and those who are interested in how one urban district successfully put in place a district-wide reform model, and why the outcomes of this massive effort are significant for those committed to providing high-quality education in today's most challenging school settings.

Components of First Things First¹

- Reduce student-teacher ratios in math and reading classes at each grade level for more one-on-one attention.
- Keep the same teachers with the same students for three years in elementary and middle school, and for two or more years in high school to provide better continuity in learning and build stronger relationships.
- Set high academic and conduct standards that spell out what students should know and be able to do, and how adults and students should behave.
- Provide activities that make learning more authentic and engaging for students, and ensure instruction and assessments are linked to standards.
- Assure that teachers and administrators take joint responsibility for student performance by building in incentives and consequences.
- Give teachers support to develop instructional strategies and more decision-making power over how to use those methods in the classroom.
- Grant teachers and principals more authority over resources, such as people, time, facilities and funds.



¹ These components reflect the original version used in Kansas City, Kansas; they have since been revised to reflect lessons learned in Kansas City, Kansas.

FINDINGS

1 STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IMPROVED

Before First Things First was launched, student performance on standardized achievement tests was well below state norms. Curriculum-based assessment scores in math, reading, social studies and science were even worse (Gambone, Klem, Moore & Summers, 2002). First Things First helped turn these numbers in the right direction.

READING TEST SCORES IMPROVE

After three years of implementation of First Things First, students at all levels were significantly more likely to score proficient or above on the state reading assessment.² Elementary and middle school students were 1.6 times as likely, and high school students 1.4 times as likely to read at or above proficient levels after First Things First implementation.

Students were also less likely to perform at the lowest level – or score unsatisfactory – on the state reading test over time. Elementary and middle school students were half as likely after three years of First Things First implementation, and high school students were 4 percent less likely to score unsatisfactory.

To further investigate First Things First's link to student achievement, trends in the district were compared with those in the rest of the state. In the 2000-2001 school year, the percentage of students in the rest of the state that scored proficient or above on the state reading test was considerably higher than students in public schools in Kansas City, Kansas.

Over the next three years, that gap narrowed significantly.

Middle school students in Kansas City were 62 percent more likely to attain a proficient score on the state reading test in the 2002-2003 school year as they were two years earlier. In contrast, middle school

Evaluating the Influence of First Things First

The purpose of the evaluation was to isolate, to the extent possible, the reform's contribution to improvements in Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools. Multiple methods were used to statistically control for alternative explanations of change – for example, changes in student demographics or contextual changes in state-wide education policy (detailed in the full report).

The pattern of findings closely follows the First Things First theory. That is, virtually every process and improvement predicted by the theory occurred at both the elementary and secondary levels. This pattern, in conjunction with the statistical controls used in the analyses, shows it is likely that First Things First was an important vehicle for these improvements.

It is possible that other factors, such as new state testing mandates and the No Child Left Behind Act, may have increased the degree of urgency to engage in the reform. But the means and methods for the changes were clearly furnished by a strong reform model, and the collaboration of the school district, technical assistance partner and funding partner that formed the initiative's leadership.

students in the rest of the state were only about 7 percent more likely to score proficient by the 2002-2003 school year.

Elementary and high school students showed similar changes. Elementary students in Kansas City were 61 percent more likely to be proficient in 2002-2003, while elementary students in the rest of the state were only 8 percent more likely to be proficient. High school students in Kansas City were 38 percent more likely to be proficient, while high school students in the rest of the state were only 11 percent more likely to be proficient or above.

² The state of Kansas changed its math and reading tests in the 2000-2001 school year. Comparable data are available only from that year on. Implementation was already underway in the Washington and Wyandotte clusters, with the Harmon and Schlagle clusters following close behind.

Kansas City was also closing the achievement gap among minority students faster than the rest of the state. For example, African-American elementary students in Kansas City were nearly 70 percent more likely to score proficient in reading compared with only 6 percent of their peers across the state. And at the middle school level, Kansas City's Hispanic students were over 100 percent more likely to attain a proficient score in 2002-2003 – unlike their peers state-wide, who were only 40 percent more likely to score at this level.

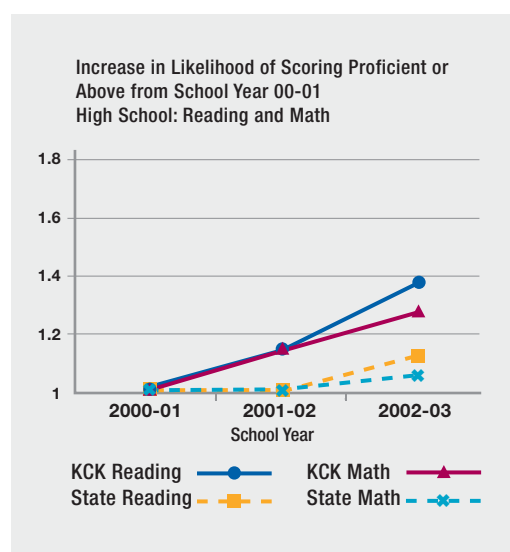
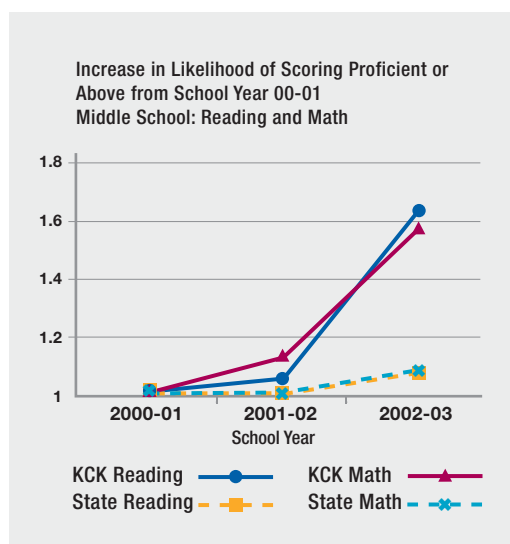
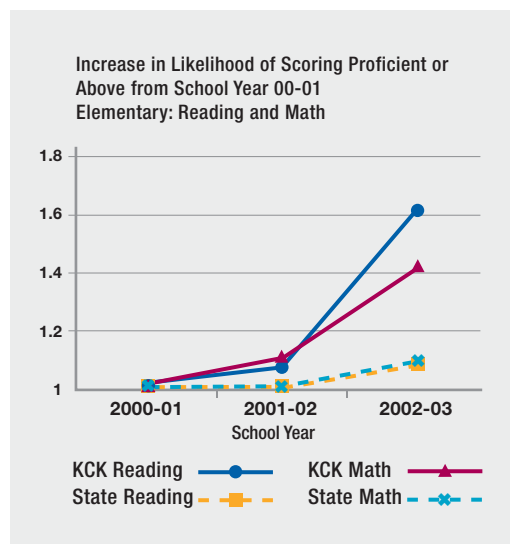
Progress was also seen at the elementary and high school levels with regard to the income gap. Low-income elementary and high school students were closing the gap with high-income students faster in Kansas City than the rest of the state.

MATH TEST SCORES IMPROVE IN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Test scores on state math tests also improved after First Things First was put into place. After three years of implementation, elementary and middle school students were about 1.5 times more likely to attain proficient scores, and high school students were nearly twice as likely to score at the proficient level.

The gap between Kansas City, Kansas, students and students state-wide also narrowed. Kansas City students were much less likely in the 2000-2001 school year to score proficient than students in the rest of the state. By the 2002-2003 school year, however, the gap between Kansas City students and their counterparts state-wide narrowed, especially at the elementary and middle school levels.

This progress was particularly evident among minority students. The district's African-American students were 60 percent more likely to attain a proficient score on the math test by 2002-2003, compared with African-American students state-wide who were only 17 percent more likely to score proficient. Hispanic students saw similar gains. Unlike the reading test scores, there were no differences in the pace of improvements between the district's low-income students and their counterparts state-wide.

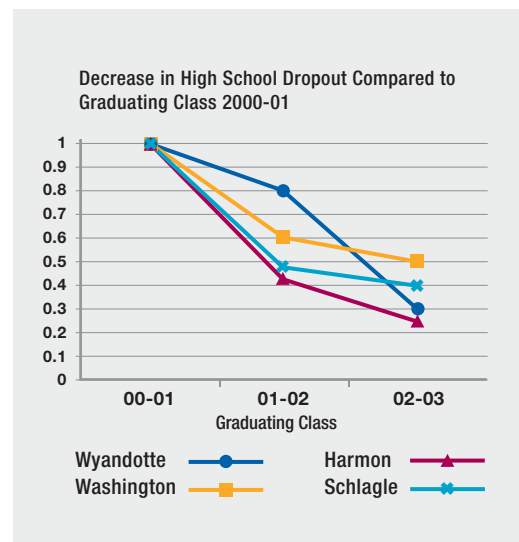
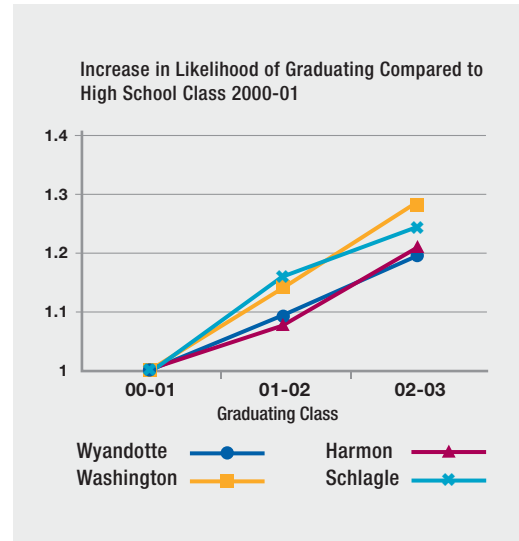


2 ATTENDANCE, GRADUATION AND DROPOUT RATES IMPROVED

With each additional year of First Things First, students at all grade levels were likely to meet the district's attendance standards of one or no absences a month per student. Improvements in attendance were greatest at the secondary level. For example, the likelihood of middle school students meeting or exceeding the district's attendance standards increased nearly twofold after three years of implementation compared with before First Things First began. That is, for every 100 middle school students who were meeting attendance standards before First Things First, an additional 87 were attending school at this level after three years of implementation. Improvements in attendance were even greater among high school students with 2.5 times as many students demonstrating high levels of attendance. At this level, for every 100 students who were meeting district attendance standards before First Things First, an additional 153 were meeting this standard after three years.

The likelihood of students graduating on time also improved. Students in the class of 2002-2003 were between 20 percent (in Wyandotte) and 27 percent (in Washington) more likely to graduate compared with graduation rates for the class of 2000-2001. This means that graduation rates increased to about 80 to 85 percent, holding other factors, such as socioeconomic status and ethnicity, constant.

At the same time graduation rates increased, dropout rates decreased. The probability of dropping out of high school declined significantly in each of the four high schools over the course of First Things First implementation. In Wyandotte High School, for example, baseline numbers show that about 18 percent of students dropped out before graduating. After four years of First Things First implementation, students were about 70 percent less likely to drop out of school. That means that for every 100 students who dropped out in the baseline year, only 30 would have dropped out after four years of implementation.



3 STUDENTS HAD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEACHERS AND WERE MORE ENGAGED IN LEARNING

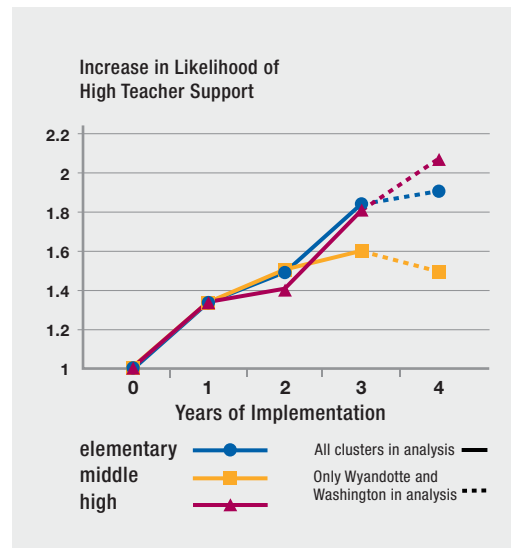
Stronger student-teacher relationships and student engagement in the classroom are cornerstones of First Things First. A student's relationship with his or her teacher has an impact on learning, and students who pay attention in class, ask questions and focus on classroom assignments also are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores.

To track changes in student-teacher relationships and classroom engagement, students in third through twelfth grades were surveyed each year. Surveys included questions on how much students felt teachers cared about them, and if teachers explained why students were learning certain subjects and concepts. Students were also asked how hard they worked in school, how important school was and if they came to class prepared.

After three years of First Things First, elementary students were 85 percent more likely, middle school students 60 percent more likely and high school students 82 percent more likely to report better relationships with their teachers than before the reform effort began. These improvements started after only one year of First Things First.

Students also showed significant gains in academic engagement. After three years of implementation, secondary students were much more likely to have high levels of engagement. The changes were less dramatic for elementary students, because more of them were engaged at the start.

However, consistent and steady improvement was seen moving students at all levels out of the lowest category of engagement. After three years of implementation, elementary students were 15 percent less likely to be highly disengaged from school, middle school students were 45 percent less likely, and high school students were 66 percent less likely.



I feel safe because the teachers care about you so much.

— Student

4 BETTER INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND IMPROVED STANDARDS WERE FOUND IN THE CLASSROOM

First Things First promotes “enriched and diverse learning opportunities” for students. Initially, some school staff interpreted this to mean field trips and project-based learning. But over time, it evolved into a more structured and strategic approach called a Teaching and Learning Framework. More emphasis was placed on higher-order thinking skills, hands-on learning and student interaction.

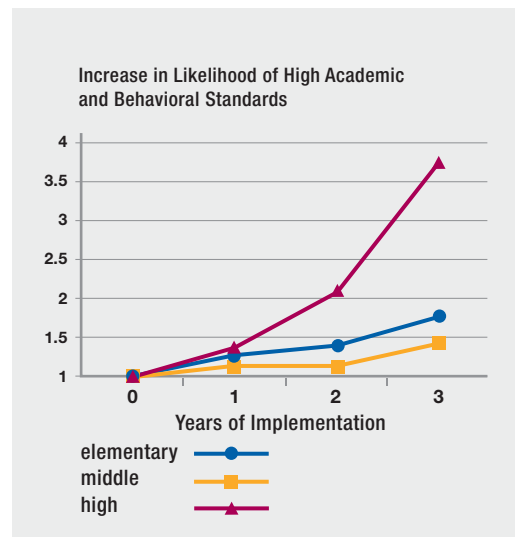
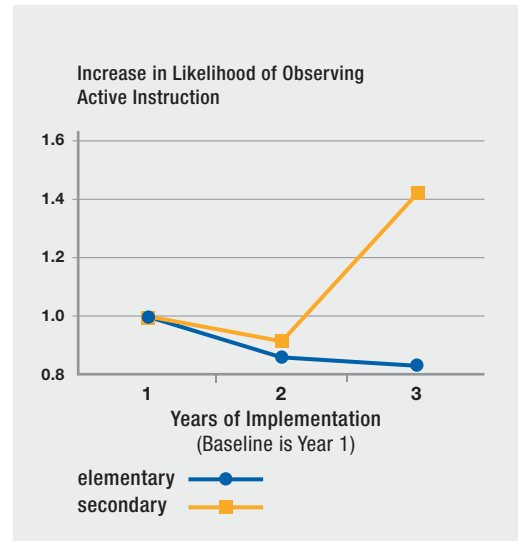
In elementary schools, the use of small grouping strategies was twice as likely to be observed by researchers after three years of reform in the Wyandotte and Washington clusters. There were also increases in using small grouping strategies in middle and high schools.

Survey data also showed high school students were one-third more likely to report working in teams on projects that connected subjects to life outside of school. Elementary students, however, did not report that they were significantly more likely to experience this type of active learning strategy. Still, classroom observation data showed improvements overall at the secondary level from passive to active instructional strategies.

Academic and behavioral standards also improved. The data show students were significantly more likely to experience high academic and behavioral standards after First Things First was put in place (see *Promoting Standards*). The greatest gains were seen for high school students after only one year of implementation, when these students were 38 percent more likely to experience high standards

I love history class because we don't do the same thing all the time, like writing essays and boring things. We are always doing something new and different. We talk in groups and look up information in the library. We work in teams. It's a fun class.

— Student



than they were prior to First Things First implementation. After three years of implementation, nearly four times the number of high school students (375 for every 100) in the first two implementing clusters were experiencing high academic and behavioral standards.

Improved student perceptions of instructional and behavioral standards coincided with improved clarity in communicating these standards. The district published widely its revised standards and benchmarks, provided data to each school about student performance based on the standards, and integrated the standards in the Teaching and Learning Framework.

5 REDUCING CLASS SIZES PROVED CHALLENGING

Decreasing student-to-teacher ratios and increasing the continuity of student care are also critical aspects of First Things First. Accomplishing these goals meant making significant structural changes in schools. Elementary schools, for example, marshaled all staff, including physical education teachers, support staff and paraprofessionals, to achieve the low ratios during reading and math instruction.

School staff also created “small learning communities.” This allowed the same group of teachers to stay with the same group of students for most of the school day and the years the students were in the school. The adults of a small learning community assumed collective responsibility for helping every student achieve high academic standards. The data show that the likelihood of students being in a small learning community for two or more years doubled for elementary students and increased fourfold for secondary students.

The evaluation limited analyses of structural reforms in the Washington and Wyandotte clusters where First Things First had been in place the longest. The data show at the secondary level significant improvement was made in reducing the likelihood of students being taught in classrooms with high ratios. For elementary schools, the data show a significant result in the wrong direction.

Reasons behind the struggle to meet lower classroom ratios may include an acute teacher shortage, which peaked in the model’s early years of implementation. Also, the district’s 10-year decline in student enrollment came to a halt in Fall 2000. For the first time, enrollment stabilized due to an influx of Latino families. The district also faced drastic cuts in state funding from 2001-2003 due to declining state revenues.

Promoting Standards

In one elementary school, bulletin boards showed an academic standard and student work that met the standard. At weekly meetings, teachers analyzed student data by grade, compared them to the standards, and prepared instructional plans for the coming week based on their findings.

More emphasis was also placed on behavioral standards. To raise awareness about the school’s discipline plan, posters on character-building were hung in hallways to help students understand how to treat one another.

6 STAFF ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM LEADERSHIP IMPROVED

The architects of First Things First believe that for school staff to be successful, they need support from colleagues and administrators, and they must be engaged in their work. Staff surveys were used to measure how much support they received and the degree to which they felt engaged. Survey data were compiled from the Wyandotte and Washington clusters, which offered three years of information.

While the degree of support staff felt from colleagues did not change substantially, “system support” – support from the principal and district administrators – improved significantly. More staff believed building administrators supported them in making their own decisions about students, and the central office provided the resources to get the job done. Elementary and secondary school staffs were about 40 percent more likely to feel supported by building and district leadership after three years of First Things First.

Staff engagement also increased. Secondary staff showed a 51 percent improvement in the likelihood of feeling highly engaged. Elementary staff also saw gains. The evaluation measured staff engagement by

examining how staff felt when teaching, how they handled challenges, and perceptions about whether staff did what is necessary to get the job done.

The data show that improvements in staff perceptions of support from leaders and engagement in their work was related to the leadership ability of the principal and school improvement facilitator, who worked with staff to improve instruction. Staff acceptance of the model was strengthened in schools where the principal was hands-on, instruction-oriented, and built consensus about school improvement plans and staff development. The ability of the school improvement facilitator to model collaborative behavior and facilitate professional development also contributed to staff acceptance.

The small but consistent improvements in teachers’ perceptions of system support illustrated a shift in how they viewed district administration. In the reform’s early years, mandates for change were seen as interference and control. Later, they were viewed more positively because teachers perceived the reform as having an impact. The central office reorganized itself as much as it was asking of schools, and administrators were increasingly visible in schools. And teachers who resisted the reform resigned or retired.

*Central office is much more visible.
It’s good to see them sitting in on our
in-services. Also, it’s good to know they are
willing to work as hard at
restructuring as they expect us to.*

— School Principal



7 SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS

Putting a comprehensive school reform model in place district-wide is a major undertaking. The data show that schools with the leadership and relationship characteristics described below were more likely to have success implementing First Things First:

Principal Leadership

Staff members believed the principal cared about them and knew what was going on. The principal was highly visible in the classroom and hallways, and pitched in with instruction. Communication was open and direct.

School Improvement Facilitator Leadership

The principal trusted the school improvement facilitator. The school improvement facilitator demonstrated competence in instructional leadership and staff members turned to the facilitator with instructional questions.

Small Learning Community Coordinator

The coordinator position was the responsibility of one staff member, and not rotated among the team. The coordinator was well accepted by teachers and demonstrated effective facilitation skills.

Decision-Making Process

Staff members had information to make decisions and felt their decisions were

As I have reflected over the last eight years, it's amazing to me that the staff has done this. We asked them to change so much.

We have changed the way they teach.

They are staying with kids for multiple years. I used to worry, 'How much more will these people do?' I've been amazed staff didn't say, 'That's enough!'

They just kept rising to the occasion.

— Ray Daniels, Superintendent

respected. Discussing issues openly and resolving differences was encouraged. School teams met regularly.

Professional Development

Participants perceived the topics as relevant to them, were actively engaged in training, and had concrete ways to practice and assess the impact of new practices.

Peer Relationships

A system was in place for mentoring new staff. Social groups were neither rigid nor fueled by negative feelings. Communication was open, based on mutual respect and focused on constructive conversation, rather than complaints.

Staff and Student Relationships

Students could identify at least one adult they could turn to for help. Staff members demonstrated knowledge of students' lives outside of school, did not stereotype groups of students, listened to student concerns and were more willing to handle discipline issues.

Together, these factors contributed to the higher-quality implementation of the First Things First reforms or, conversely, progress was impeded in schools where these factors were not evident.

8 THE DISTRICT PLAYED AN ACTIVE ROLE IN REFORM

Large systems and organizations are difficult to reform, and individuals tend to resist change. Still, administrators in Kansas City, Kansas, put in place several strategies that offer valuable insights for achieving “top-down” change. These strategies focused on three key areas: commitment, consistency and clarity.

COMMITMENT

District leadership, at all levels, demonstrated visible commitment to the First Things First initiative. Administrators showed that they were willing to engage in restructuring processes that were as difficult as those they were asking schools to undertake. Many of the roles of central office staff were changed – just as teachers were asked to change the way they did business. Leaders also made their involvement in the reform visible to schools by

participating in learning and development opportunities along with building staff. The central office also provided support and resources to further the goals of instruction and reform.

Significant resources were also dedicated to developing principals' capacity to lead the reform in their buildings, which increased their engagement in First Things First. The unions were involved early on and backed the changes required by the model. And, the school board demonstrated commitment to the reform in key decisions. Board members selected a new superintendent based on his dedication to First Things First and by approving an early release policy one day a week for professional development. This signaled to all staff that all levels of the district's leadership were committed to seeing the reform happen.

CONSISTENCY

All administrators were "on message" (not an easy process to achieve) with the goals of First Things First. Every change made in the district was addressed within the context of First Things First until the reform was seen as the fundamental work of the district rather than a short-term effort. This consistency in message chipped away at the "this too shall pass" mentality of those administrators and teachers whose usual response to change was to hunker down and wait for the initiative to go away.

Further, at both the district and the building level, First Things First provided a mechanism for organizing school improvement efforts and protected staff from external pressures that could have taken them off course. For example, First Things First served as the district's court ordered desegregation plan; the

Through all the cuts and budget crises, the district office has done everything it could to keep teacher positions and instructional coaches. This really sends a message about what our priorities need to be: kids and instruction.

— Instructional Coach

building reform plans served as the state mandated school improvement plans; and when No Child Left Behind was enacted, the district was already in the process of making the improvements needed to meet "adequate yearly progress" mandates.

CLARITY

Clarity was perhaps the most difficult to achieve, since some elements of the initiative were sharpened as it moved forward. There were problems with clarity early on. For example, school improvement facilitators (central office staff assigned to support buildings in the change process) and several administrators who were assigned similar responsibilities crossed lines in reporting.

Recent studies examine factors that help create the clarity needed for meaningful change at the building level. Several lessons emerged in Kansas City, Kansas, that reinforce these studies (e.g., Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001):

- Staff need to establish high, clear and fair academic and behavioral standards. Understanding what is expected in terms of the work and the way in which staff relate to other adults and students in the school is clearly linked to good relationships among staff and students. In turn, strong relationships are linked to positive long-term outcomes.
- Systemic instructional approach is another critical component. Initially, the district allowed schools to identify their own instructional strategies for improving student performance. Over time, there was a realization that a more coherent, systemic curriculum and instructional approach was needed to improve student outcomes. Leaders increased the use of small group formats and placed instructional coaches in every building.
- Professional development is key to improving instruction. The initiative's partners supported system-wide professional development and involved all building staff in roundtables to learn about First Things First. This was followed by the ongoing allocation of resources to professional development – most notably in the weekly early release time. This allowed school staff to work together on self-assessment, data analysis and strategizing. Teachers were also trained in instructional strategies like cooperative learning.

WHAT WE LEARNED

At the center of First Things First's successful implementation in Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools is the importance of positive, supportive relationships. For example, when students viewed their relationships with teachers as positive, they were more likely to succeed academically. When teachers perceived support from district leadership, their views of First Things First were more positive. Schools with positive, working relationships among staff saw more staff embracing the model and higher degrees of colleague support.

The data also show that when students experienced more of First Things First's critical features, they experienced better outcomes. As the model took hold over the years, students were more likely to receive the support from teachers that is critical to achievement, especially in urban districts. And, teachers with high academic and behavioral standards were viewed by students as the most supportive. Learning in small group formats and lower student-to-adult ratios also made a difference and helped students feel more engaged in learning.

Finally, as these outcomes for students improved, student achievement increased. With each additional year of First Things First, students were more likely to come to school, they performed better on state achievement tests, and they were more likely to graduate. The achievement gap between minority and white students also closed faster in Kansas City than it did in the rest of the state.

Turning the tide in an urban district that serves economically disadvantaged youth from one with disaffected students who do not come to school

and who perform poorly to one with students who attend school regularly, are engaged in their work and develop the necessary skills for a successful transition to adulthood requires:

- Committed, clear and consistent leadership
- Several years to accomplish reforms
- Teachers working with the same students for longer periods of time
- High, clear and fair academic and behavioral standards
- Teachers who have good relationships with students
- Effective instructional strategies, such as active instruction techniques
- Teachers who are supported by district leaders
- Data to show staff how students are fairing and when improvements are achieved

None of these findings is surprising or new. But the experience of Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools and its partners in implementing the First Things First reform has demonstrated that this can, in fact, be accomplished and offers an effective blueprint for doing so.

For the most part, [First Things First] is ingrained enough in the district that it's part of what we do. We conducted a survey of our community and parents, and they asked us to stick with it.

— Ray Daniels, Superintendent

Acknowledgements

In an effort of this magnitude – seven years of planning, data collection and developing new strategies for sharing data with stakeholders in formats that are more consumable than the traditional evaluation report – there are many, many people to thank.

First and foremost we are grateful to all the staff and students in the Kansas City, Kansas school district who for five years took time out of their days to share their thoughts and opinions while enduring classroom observations, staff and student interviews, and annual survey administrations. We appreciate your honesty and hard work and admire all you have accomplished.

The Executive Committee was the initiative's leadership team and included representation from each partner organization. It was their commitment to tracking the progress of their work and their absolute commitment to accountability that made this evaluation not only feasible, but worth doing. Thank you for serving as our learning lab for understanding that more decimal places are not always better and the medium really does affect the message. Your insistence on clarity helped us develop creative forms of making complicated and important information tell a meaningful story. We (at least) will miss our two day marathon meetings.

Dr. William Moore played an integral role regardless of the hat he wore over the six years of the evaluation. His thoughtful perspective about the field of education, commitment to the project, high quality work and team building skills were critical to both getting the work done year after year and remaining more sane than not while doing so.

Special thanks to Dr. Sue C. Thompson and Dr. Loyce Caruthers, who worked with dedication to interview the faculty and students of the schools, and to help analyze factors contributing to – or impeding – reform efforts. They brought their many years of experience as educators and administrators to the analysis and were assisted by Corrin Danner Dunn and Jessica Dumas.

The quality of the data in this evaluation was dependent on the strong working partnership between the FTF research team and the KCKPS Department of Evaluation, Research, and Assessment (DERA). Dr. Dan Wright, Director of DERA, and Ms. Jill Cobb, Institutional Research Analyst, spent countless hours collecting data, preparing data sets, and cleaning data files over the last seven years. Both Dan and Jill made this research a regular part of their daily work, responding to our calls despite the fact that they knew it meant adding work to their already full plates and striving to improve the quality of data collected throughout the district.

Several other members of the research team made irreplaceable contributions to this work.

- ◆ Donna Sulak has earned a thousand thanks for her work with the KCKPS datasets over the course of the evaluation. After six years of carefully cleaning, documenting, and analyzing KCK data, she has officially earned the title of “the most careful data analyst ever.”
- ◆ Drs. Nona Tollefson and Steve Lee at the University of Kansas were instrumental in developing the classroom observation strategy.
- ◆ Dr. Phyllis Clay trained and oversaw the classroom observers and managed the FTF survey administration. Our response rates would have been much lower without her!

We'd like to express our gratitude to colleagues who wrangled their schedules and commitments in order to provide guidance and advice on the analytic design of this complex evaluation. Dr. Mark Berends (Vanderbilt University), Dr. Ann Blanc (Blancroft Research International), Dr. David Francis (University of Houston), and Dr. Richard Serpe (California State University, San Marcos) reviewed our analytic methods and provided invaluable recommendations for how to maintain the highest levels of scientific rigor while maximizing the utility of the results to the field.

Dr. Berends, Dr. Blanc, Stacey Daraio (Community Network for Youth Development), and Dr. Adam Gamoran (University of Wisconsin, Madison) dedicated hours to reviewing drafts of the report and provided essential feedback on key issues in the fields of education, youth development and methodological rigor.

Special thanks to Dr. Blanc who not only provided expertise in log-odds models and survival analysis, but who also persevered with us in our continuing pains to present results in a format meaningful to diverse audiences.

Drs. Howard Bloom, Fred Doolittle and Janet Quint from MDRC also provided invaluable insight as we identified the best strategies for analyzing, presenting, and discussing the results of this evaluation.

We are indebted to the editorial team - Natalie Jaffe, Maxine Sherman and Lesley Dahlkemper for their outstanding skills in pushing us to do the best we could to boil seven years of intensive implementation and masses of data into an intelligible story. Our thanks also to Janice McLemore Graphic Design.

Finally, a very special thanks to Jan Nevin who invested hours of effort and creative energy into helping us develop strategies for presenting results to stakeholders in the district while the reform was underway. Jan excels at finding new ways to present information to people in meaningful ways – allowing school and central office staff, researchers and funders to see a clear picture of what the data were showing as the initiative unfolded.



Youth Development Strategies, Inc.

429 Fulton Street

Philadelphia, PA 19147

267-975-0723

www.ydsi.org