

CHALLENGING MYTHS:

THE BENWOOD INITIATIVE AND EDUCATION REFORM
IN HAMILTON COUNTY



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Acknowledgements

This analysis describes a powerful collaboration among three principal partners, all of whom greatly influenced its conception and development. Corinne Allen, executive director of the Benwood Foundation, was keenly aware of the need to disseminate the unfolding story of the Benwood Initiative beyond a small group of education reformers within and outside Hamilton County. She made available the Foundation's internal records about the Initiative, facilitated entrée to Foundation staff and Trustees, and provided ongoing encouragement to us.

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Dr. Jesse B. Register, Superintendent of Hamilton County Schools, recounted in detail the successful strategies that have led to partnership successes and the frustrations involved in comprehensive efforts to improve low-performing schools and help transform an urban school district. His insights about the educational context in the community, the evolution of the partnership and its impact on the Hamilton County schools along with the inherently political nature of reform greatly informed our analysis.

This report depended also on the honest input of those on the front lines of the Initiative. We talked at length with teachers and other educators, who spoke of their successes, described their disappointments, and told us about what is working, what might have been and what is still to come. Above all, they shared their hopes for making schools better for students, families and communities. We are grateful for their openness and patience.

A report like this explores and interprets evolving contexts and different perceptions of them. This provides room for interpretation but also sets the stage for errors. We recognize that any in this analysis are ours alone.

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Introduction

This report differs from many current reports about education - it is positive. It tells the unvarnished story of transformative change in public education in one community. Three different organizations in Chattanooga have joined together to do what seemed to many in the community to be undoable – reform nine urban elementary schools, serving predominantly low-income and minority children, that were mired in failure. These three organizations – the Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE), the Public Education Foundation (PEF) and the Benwood Foundation – are deepening and enriching teaching and learning in these schools. In this process, they are defying long-held myths about students, teachers, schools and school districts and about what communities can do to support them.

The story begins with HCDE, PEF and the Benwood Foundation and the exceptional partnership they have forged. Each of these organizations has its own history and traditions, its own culture and its own purpose, yet they came together to craft a vision of what education could be and *should* be for the students in these schools. It is a vision that has demanded that each trust the others even when they have disagreed. It has required that they suspend their disagreements to take risks individually and collectively. It has also led them to summon a committed will and fierce persistence in the face of doubt and resistance. Each has done so, and it is these traits that distinguish this partnership from others seeking similar goals.

The vision of the partners has come to life in the Benwood Initiative. The Initiative's broad goal is to transform teaching and learning in these nine schools so that they become places where all children thrive, gaining the knowledge and skills to be successful. The focus of this broader goal is ensuring that every student is reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Success in literacy – reading and writing with understanding, coherence and sophistication – undergirds success in every other subject, and it is what the partners are striving for.

The primary strategy for attaining this goal is building educators' knowledge and skills. The partners have crafted a reform framework that provides effective professional development – most critically on-site or embedded professional development – for teachers, principals and other key participants. They have also tackled district-level structures and policies that impede reform, insisting that central office staff serve as a resource to school faculties and, when needed, facilitators of change. The partners have made meaningful qualitative and quantitative data a determining factor in decision-making at every level from the classroom to the superintendent's office.

These and other changes are paying off – students in the nine schools are making significant gains in achievement. While their story is far from over, the partners' vision is being realized. In fulfilling this vision, however, the collaborators in change have run into obstacles, none of which have been stronger than the array of myths – myths about students

and teachers and their ability to learn, myths about urban schools and districts and their capacity to change, myths about the community and its role in reform, and myths about money and its value in reform. These myths have been held by people within the school district and outside of it, and at times, they have undermined reform efforts.

For the partners to succeed in fulfilling their vision, they have had to confront these myths and demonstrate that they are false. In their place, they have promised a new and vibrant reality that is driven by imagination, innovation, dedication, and persistence. Most important, in this new reality, students are succeeding regardless of the poverty in which they may live. Through the extraordinary partnership of HCDE, PEF and the Benwood Foundation, these nine “Benwood” schools are now places where students and teachers alike are deeply engaged in learning and are defying the demeaning expectations of them held by so many for so long.

This report surfaces these myths and tells the story of how these partners in transformation have forged a new powerful and productive reality for the nine Benwood schools, the students they serve and the community.





Benwood Initiative: Core Program Elements & Timeline

The Benwood Initiative is an intensive, five-year effort to improve student achievement, with a particular focus on literacy, in nine urban elementary schools in Hamilton County, Tennessee. All nine of the schools are located in Chattanooga, and all serve predominantly low-income and minority students.¹

The Initiative is the collaborative creation of the Benwood Foundation, a local philanthropy that has long supported cultural and educational institutions in the community; the Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE), the school district which encompasses Chattanooga as well as its surrounding suburban and rural communities; and the Public Education Foundation (PEF), a local non-profit organization dedicated to the academic success of all students in Hamilton County's public schools.

The Benwood Initiative is an effort to transform virtually every aspect of teaching and learning in the nine "Benwood" schools; it is not a program that has been added to the schools' long-standing practices. The district is also committed to infusing the new knowl-

¹ The nine Benwood schools are: Calvin Donaldson Elementary, Clifton Hills Elementary, East Lake Elementary, East Side Elementary, Hardy Elementary, Hillcrest Elementary, Howard Elementary, Orchard Knob Elementary and Woodmore Elementary.

edge and best practices that are emerging from the experiences of the Benwood schools throughout elementary schools across the county. While the nine Benwood schools have been the primary focus of the Initiative, all elementary schools in Hamilton County benefit from it.

The Initiative is comprised of many elements that shape the experiences of all involved, from after-school programs for students to the development of leadership skills of principals and assistant principals to the restructuring of central office roles and responsibilities. There are, however, core components that comprise the foundation of the Initiative:

- Setting clear and high expectations of all students, most notably all students reading at grade level by the end of third grade
- Improving teachers' knowledge and skills through effective and comprehensive professional development, most of which is school-based or embedded
- Building the capacity of current and future school leaders to serve as instructional leaders, adept at identifying and responding to students' and teachers' learning needs
- Using data to inform decisions at every level, from the instructional activities teachers create to developing new reporting structures and positions within central office
- Distributing leadership or decision-making authority across schools and central office
- Establishing a fair and transparent system of accountability that integrates qualitative and quantitative data

The tremendous time, energy, hard work and good will that teachers, principals and all staff members at HCDE, PEF and the Benwood Foundation have poured into the Initiative over the last four years are paying off. Students are thriving and are reaching new levels of academic achievement. This was not the case before the Initiative was launched.

Prior to the Initiative, the schools and the students in them were in dire academic circumstances. Eight of the nine schools were among the 20 lowest performing schools in Tennessee. No other district in the state had as many schools among the bottom 20. As measured by the states then-used standardized test of achievement, the overwhelming majority of students in these schools could not read at grade level in the third grade. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Percent of 3rd Graders Reading at or above Grade Level

Clifton Hills	12%	Hardy	11%
Donaldson	12%	Howard	11%
East Lake	4%	Orchard Knob	12%
East Side	12%	Woodmore	20%

Reading was not the only skill students were struggling to master. In language arts, math, social studies and science, student test scores from these eight schools were, in each subject, among the lowest 20 in the state.

Various factors contributed to these dismal scores; prominent among them was teacher quality. Teachers in the Benwood schools had less experience than teachers in suburban schools. Before the Initiative was developed and implemented, each Benwood school had at least 10 teachers who had less than three years experience. Howard Elementary had 20 teachers who had three or fewer years of experience. The students with the greatest needs had the least experienced teachers. At the same time, the Benwood schools had the highest rates of teacher turnover. This meant that there was little continuity from year to year and that principals were constantly scrambling to monitor and guide large numbers of new teachers.

There were other issues that influenced student achievement and which the Initiative sought to address, including effective school leadership, family involvement, facilities and community engagement.

Four years later, significant gains have been made. Across the nine schools, at least 60 percent of third graders have attained the proficient or advanced level on the state's new assessment.² In three schools, 80 percent or more of students reached these levels. In addition, while third graders across the district have made gains in reading, the gains by Benwood third graders surpass those of their peers. The proportion of Benwood third graders scoring at the proficient or advanced levels grew from 53.1 percent to 74.4 percent between 2003 and 2005. During the same period, the proportion of all third graders reaching the proficient or advanced level increased from 76.8 percent to 89.1 percent.

These improvements are the result of the considerable time and effort teachers, principals, district administrators, PEF staff and all others connected to the Benwood Initiative have invested. Individually and collectively, they have identified, developed, implemented and continuously refined research-based, innovative practices to strengthen teaching and dramatically improve learning. What follows is a brief, chronological overview of the key decisions and actions that were taken in the Initiative that have brought about these results. This chronology is not designed to discuss all of the decisions that were taken in a long-term, complex and multi-partner endeavor; rather, it surfaces those that are most significant.

² In 2002, the Tennessee Department of Education instituted a new standardized assessment exam that, among other things, categorizes students as attaining one of three performance levels: advanced, proficient, below proficient. A student at the advanced level demonstrates "application of complex concepts and skills of the content area;" one at the proficient level demonstrates "general understanding of the essential concepts and skills of the content area." A student at the below proficient level demonstrates "a lack of understanding of the essential concepts and skills of the content area." (Source: *Educators' Guide to Understanding TCAP Achievement Test Results*. Tennessee Department of Education)



Planning Period

Spring 2000

In early 2000, the Benwood Foundation established a community-wide panel to explore critical issues confronting the Chattanooga area. Panel members, who were drawn from various sectors across the community and included Dr. Jesse Register, superintendent of the Hamilton County Department of Education, and Dr. Dan Challener, the president of the Public Education Foundation, concluded that strengthening public education was the most urgent issue facing the community. They also believed that the Foundation's involvement could make a positive and significant difference in public education. After reviewing a troubling report from the Tennessee Institute for Public Policy, which identified eight of the county's elementary schools as being among the 20 lowest performing in the state, the panel determined that the Foundation could make effective use of its resources by targeting those schools. These schools, as well as one other with similarly poor academic achievement, are all located in Chattanooga, and they serve primarily low-income, minority students.

Fall 2000

The Benwood Foundation asked the Public Education Foundation (PEF) to develop a proposal for transforming these elementary schools. Staff from both PEF and the Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE), including the leaders of both organizations, collaborated to craft a plan for reforming these schools. The planning process included a close examination of the specific challenges of the schools using qualitative and quantitative data and meetings with principals and teachers as well as students, parents and other community members. Drawing upon their experiences in the district as well as current research, staff from both PEF and HCDE identified demonstrated best practices and policies to transform low-performing schools and pulled them together in a comprehensive and coherent reform plan. A central feature of the plan is that each school develops annually and submits to an advisory/oversight committee its own improvement plan, which identifies and responds to its specific needs. Each school receives a grant to implement its plan. Additional funds from the Benwood Foundation are used to support Initiative-wide elements and promote changes in the district's infrastructure.

Winter 2001

PEF submitted a proposal to transform the schools to the Benwood Foundation. The Foundation approved the proposal and made the largest grant – \$5 million – in its history. PEF committed \$2.5 million of its own funds, the largest commitment of funds in its history, and promised to raise an additional \$1.5 million.

Spring 2001

PEF issued requests for proposal (RFPs) to the schools to create reform plans and, in so doing, launched a multi-month planning process for leadership teams from each school. The leadership teams are comprised of principals, assistant principals, teachers and, in some instances, parents and community members; schools were given freedom in determining the composition of their leadership teams. PEF and HCDE staff provided extensive assistance to the teams during the planning process. Among other things, they held learning forums on various topics (family involvement, accountability, federal funds, literacy and change) and coordinated site visits to high-poverty successful schools in other urban districts.

While school leadership teams were not required to include any specific strategies in their plans, they were encouraged to incorporate some innovations. A prominent example was the use of Consulting Teachers (CTs), expert teachers who would provide on-site, daily assistance to school faculties.

Program Implementation

Year One, 2001 – 02

Activities

- **Hired Initiative Director.** PEF hired Stephanie Spencer, a former Baltimore principal who had turned around two urban elementary schools, to serve as the Initiative's Director. As Director, Spencer was responsible for managing the Initiative. Among other things, Spencer provided assistance and guidance to school leaders and faculty in planning, assessing progress and identifying/recommending strategies. She developed and led various professional development sessions for teachers, principals and consulting teachers.
- **Appointed assistant principals to schools lacking them.** Prior to the Initiative, allocation of assistant principals was determined by school size; several of the Benwood schools did not have assistant principals, leaving all administrative and instructional oversight responsibilities to the principal. HCDE ensured that every school had at least one assistant principal to share both instructional leadership and administrative responsibilities.
- **Established the position of Director of Urban Education.** Initially, HCDE's day-to-day management and oversight of the Benwood schools was split between the district's two Directors of Elementary Education. To ensure that the Benwood schools got focused attention and support, the position of Director of Urban Education was established and filled by Ray Swoffard; all of the Benwood schools began reporting directly to Swoffard.
- **Implemented research-based professional development opportunities.** School-based and initiative-wide professional development was implemented. Among other things, all of the schools hired Consulting Teachers (CTs) to provide ongoing, on-site support and guidance in improving teaching and learning; CTs do not share time with other schools. Schools were also free to retain experts in critical areas to serve as consultants.
- **Fostered the use of data.** Assisted by HCDE and PEF staff, school faculties began testing various assessment tools. HCDE also began sharing data with PEF, which conducted analyses of them to identify strengths and challenges.
- **Created a pool of qualified substitute teachers.** The schools had a high rate of teacher absenteeism and struggled to find substitutes. Superintendent Register established a stable group of substitute teachers whose priority was filling teacher absences in the Benwood schools.
- **Launched reconstitution of schools.** HCDE required all Benwood teachers to re-apply for their jobs in anticipation of the 2002 – 03 school year. This enabled principals to build faculties comprised of teachers fully committed to the students and to improving their knowledge and skill.

- Built principal capacity in schools. HCDE replaced six of the nine Benwood principals. PEF provided professional development through the Leadership Initiative, a program established prior to the Benwood Initiative at the request of HCDE.

External Developments

Chattanooga's then Mayor Bob Corker established the Community Education Alliance (CEA), a group of business and civic leaders, to consider how other sectors of the community might support the Initiative. Working with PEF, CEA developed a plan to help recruit and retain teachers in the Benwood schools. The core of the plan was to provide financial incentives – bonuses based on student achievement gains – to teachers to come to Benwood schools and to improve their instructional effectiveness.

The Osborne Foundation, a foundation based in Chattanooga, expressed interest in supporting the Benwood Initiative. After consulting with Osborne and Benwood Foundation staff, PEF and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga developed a plan to establish a master's degree in urban education for Benwood teachers; the plan was funded by the Osborne Foundation.

Year Two, 2002 – 03

Activities

- **Maintained and deepened professional development opportunities.** In addition to the CTs, who participated in professional development designed for them, PEF provided extensive learning opportunities for teachers.
- **Maintained and refined use of data.** HCDE and PEF staff continued to assist school teams in their efforts to identify effective assessment tools and to use data to inform instruction.
- **Enhanced school leadership teams.** HCDE established the Urban Leadership Academy Program, through which an expert in urban schools works with individual school leadership teams on critical issues including vision, culture and teamwork.

External Developments

The CEA plan to recruit and retain teachers at the Benwood schools via financial incentives was announced. In the first year, 16 teachers were awarded bonuses.

The Benwood Foundation joined with the Lyndhurst Foundation, a foundation based in and serving the Chattanooga area, to fund a forgivable loan program through Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise that provides 10 percent of the purchase price of a home for Benwood teachers who move to urban neighborhoods near the Benwood schools.

The Osborne Fellows program was launched; its first cohort was made up of fourteen Benwood teachers.

The Urban League of Chattanooga was awarded a federal grant to establish 21st Century Community Learning Centers in four Benwood schools. The Centers provide tutoring, mentoring, after-school programs and other activities that supplement the reforms underway in these schools.

Year Three, 2003 – 04

Activities

- **Maintained and refined professional development opportunities.** Continuation of full-time CTs as well as additional school-based and Initiative-wide professional development. Increased emphasis on literacy development in professional development.
- **Created Leadership Coaches.** PEF created the position of Leadership Coach; like CTs, the two leadership coaches work one-on-one with principals and leadership teams in their schools. The coaches are former HCDE principals.
- **Standardized use of assessments across schools.** HCDE instituted Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), an early literacy assessment tool, as well as other measures of student learning across the Benwood schools.
- **Incorporated external evaluation.** PEF retained two experts in education reform to conduct a comprehensive evaluation using qualitative and quantitative data. Evaluation findings were subsequently used to inform schools' annual plans.
- **Developed district-wide literacy plan.** Drawing upon its successes with and lessons from the Benwood schools, HCDE constructed and launched a district-wide plan to improve literacy. Balanced literacy is the approach to literacy development taken in the Benwood schools and across the district.³

External Developments

Benwood Initiative Partners group was established so that community stakeholders have input into the Initiative and can monitor progress.

The NEA Foundation, based on the strength of the partnership between PEF and HCDE built through and demonstrated by the Benwood Initiative, awarded HCDE, HCEA , and PEF a grant of \$2.5 million to close the achievement gap; Superintendent Register directed the grant to reforming urban middle schools.

³ In HCDE, the major components of balanced literacy are: Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Independent Reading, Write Aloud, Shared Writing, Guided Writing, and Independent Writing. The essential components of reading instruction are phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, phonics and comprehension. All of these components of balanced literacy should be present in the classroom everyday. (Communication from Faye Pharr, Co-Director of Benwood Initiative.)

Year Four, 2004 – 05

Activities

- **Maintained effective professional development strategies.** Continuation of CTs, use of consultants and other school-based and initiative-wide professional development; narrowed focus of most professional development to literacy.
- **Continued reliance on data.** Facilitated by HCDE and PEF staff, school faculties continued their use of various assessment tools and reliance on data to inform decisions.
- **Ensured greater consistency in curriculum and instruction within grade levels.** Schools instituted common planning time for grade level teams; teams were provided with assistance in using common planning time effectively (e.g., how to analyze and discuss data, how to offer critiques of colleagues' lesson plans, etc.)
- **Instituted use of the DIBELS assessment throughout district.** Based on the valuable information about Benwood students' literacy development generated by the use of DIBELS, HCDE implemented it in elementary schools across the district.
- **Cultivated greater family engagement.** The position of Family Partnership Specialist (FPS) was created. The FPSs are school-based individuals, trained by PEF, who facilitate greater family awareness of and participation in students' academic lives. There are FPSs in six Benwood schools.
- **Continuation of external evaluation.** External evaluations captured critical information that shed light on process and progress. Findings informed not only schools' individual annual plans but also that of the whole Initiative.

External Developments

The first cohort of the Osborne Fellows program earned their master's degrees in urban education.

Based on the significant progress that PEF and HCDE have made in reforming the county's elementary and high schools through the Benwood and Carnegie Initiatives, respectively, the Lyndhurst Foundation provided funding for all of the district's middle schools to develop individual reform plans. The planning process is the first phase in a multi-year, multi-million dollar investment by the Lyndhurst Foundation in reforming middle schools.

Throughout the years of its operation, the Benwood Initiative has confronted significant myths about public education, the capacity of teachers and the abilities of low-income, minority students.



Myths about Students and Teachers

1. Myth: Low-income minority students cannot achieve at the levels of their economically better-off peers.

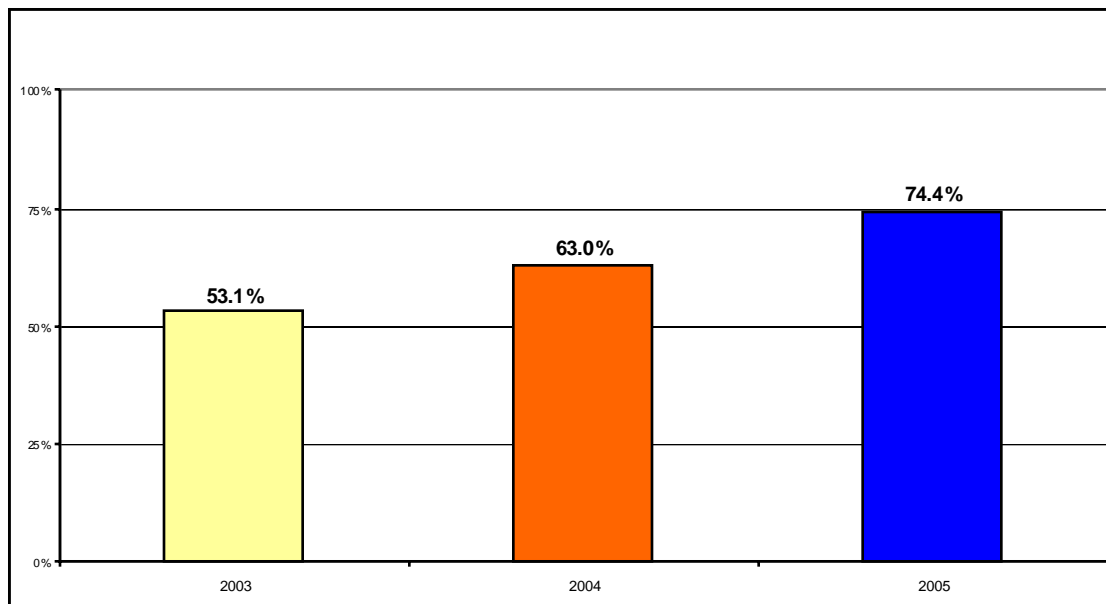
Reality: Given effective instruction, support and guidance, low-income minority students can master rigorous curricula and attain high levels of academic achievement.

One of the most persistent beliefs about low-income minority children, held by educators and non-educators alike, is that they cannot attain high levels of achievement. This belief may reflect the perception that these children are not capable of learning, or it may be connected to a sympathetic but misguided understanding of the challenges that these students often confront. Children living in poverty face hurdles to learning and academic success. Among other things, their basic physical needs may not be adequately met, their parents may not be able to provide ongoing support and supervision, and their home environments may be lacking the books, crafts, games and other enriching resources more commonly found in the homes of middle- and upper-income children.

While these hurdles are real, the students in the Benwood schools demonstrate that they are surmountable, that low-income minority students can and do excel academically with effective and appropriate instruction, support and guidance. Their poverty sentences them to academic failure only if teachers, principals, district leaders and the community believe that it does so. The Benwood Foundation firmly and unequivocally embraces the belief that poverty does not mandate failure in school.

According to multiple assessments, Benwood students have made significant strides in achievement. Figure 2 shows the progress third graders at Benwood schools made in reading between 2003 and 2005 as measured by Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program exam (TCAP).⁴

Figure 2: Percentage of 3rd Graders Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading-Language Arts

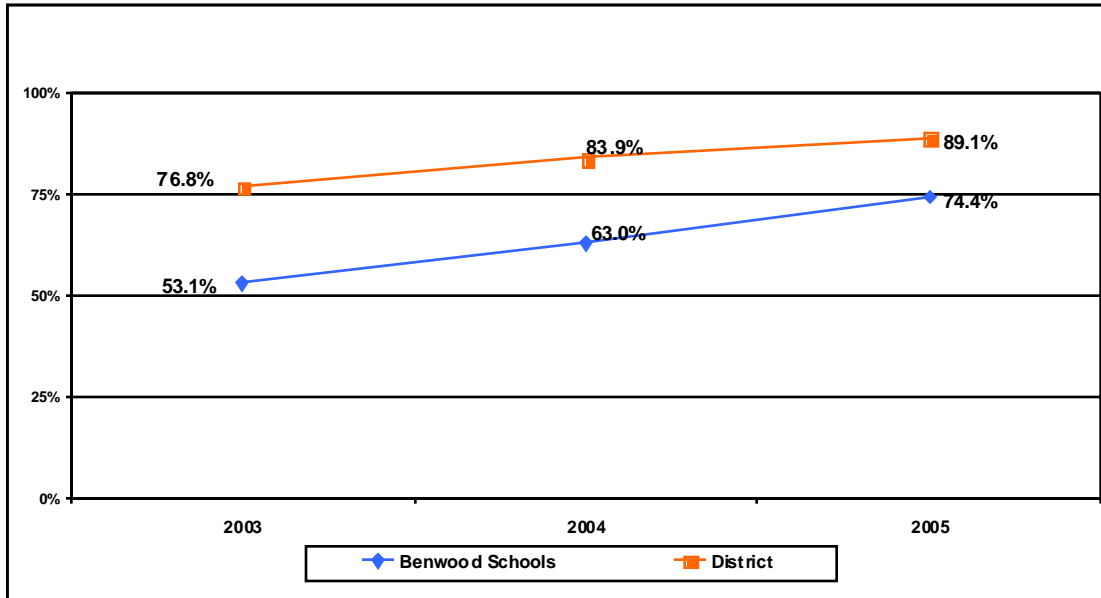


Every school made progress, some showing particularly large gains. In 2003, only 41 percent of third graders at East Side Elementary attained the level of proficient or advanced in reading; just two years later, 84 percent of them reached that level, a gain of 43 percentage points.

In addition, while most schools in Hamilton County made strides forward in student achievement, the gains made by Benwood schools, as measured by third graders' reading results, surpassed the district's average gain in improvement. This has served to narrow the achievement gap, as shown in Figure 3.

⁴ Comparisons between current student achievement data and data from the Initiative's earliest years are not possible. In response to NCLB, the Tennessee Department of Education instituted a new, criterion-referenced assessment program, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), which replaced an earlier, norm-referenced assessment program.

Figure 3: Percentage of 3rd Graders Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Reading.



While literacy has been the focus of the Benwood Initiative, the changes that school faculties and district administrators have made have reverberated throughout the schools, influencing teaching and learning across all subject areas as Figure 4 reveals.

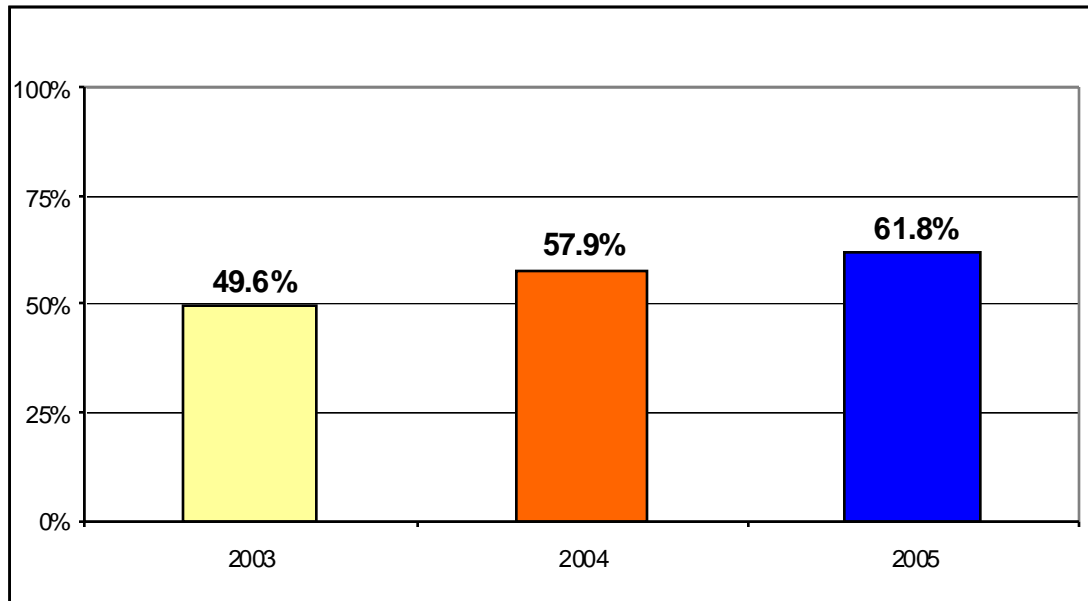
Figure 4: Value Added Scores for Benwood Grades 4 & 5

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>
Reading-Language Arts	A	B	A
Math	A	A	A
Science	A	B	A
Social Studies	A	A	A

The above represents the Annual Value Added (TVAAS) scores for Benwood schools. TVAAS measures the achievement gains of students in a given year. An 'A' indicates that students have made "exceptional" gains in student achievement; a 'B' indicates that student achievement gains "exceed the state growth standard" and a 'C' indicates that student achievement gains "maintain the state growth standard."

As in reading, every Benwood school has seen increases in the percentage of third graders reaching the proficient or advanced level in math, as shown in Figure 5. Hillcrest Elementary made the greatest progress. In 2003, 56 percent of its third graders demonstrated proficient or advanced math skills; by 2005, that number had climbed to 79 percent, a gain of 23 percentage points. In total, seven of the schools saw double-digit increases in the percentage of students reaching the proficient or advanced level in math from 2003 to 2005.

Figure 5: Percentage of 3rd Graders Scoring Proficient/Advanced in Math



These results powerfully show that low-income minority students can learn, that they can attain the same high levels of academic achievement as their middle- and upper-income white peers. The perception that they cannot is wrong and harmful not only to these students but also to their communities.

While test scores may be the most commonly cited measure of student performance, they are not the sole indicator of how the Benwood Initiative is shaping, for the better, the academic experiences of students too often dismissed. Students' own words also capture the results of the reforms underway in Benwood schools. Students speak with affection for their teachers, of having pride in their school work, and, perhaps most importantly, with enthusiasm for their futures. They talk of becoming writers, scientists, detectives, lawyers, veterinarians. One student has even decided to become a meteorologist; he loves his science class and is deeply intrigued by cycles of weather and the often rapid, somewhat mysterious changes in it. No adult in his school has discouraged him or his peers or has questioned their ability to reach their goals. Instead, students recount the encouragement their teachers have given them both to excel in school and to pursue their dreams.

Undoubtedly, their career aspirations will change and the would-be writer might become a radiologist while the would-be meteorologist might become a computer engineer. Because of the Initiative, however, beginning with teachers who believe in them and now know how to be the most effective educators that they can be, the dreams of these students are not hollow. To the surprise of some and the delight of many more, it is clear that Benwood students – low-income minority children – can thrive in the classroom.

2. Myth: The best way to foster student learning is to mandate teacher activities that are prescribed by one-size-fits-all programs.

Reality: Ongoing and meaningful teacher learning is the key to fostering significant improvements in student learning.

Under burgeoning pressure to meet student achievement goals required by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), many schools and districts have turned to discrete programs that typically prescribe a progression of specific activities that teachers are to undertake with their students. These will presumably lead to increased student test scores. Teachers, who typically have little or no input into the selection of the program, may participate in a few days of training in the program and then are sent off with step-by-step manuals to implement it.

HCDE, PEF leaders and staff view such programs skeptically. As they constructed the Initiative's framework, they recognized that they could get such a program into the schools quickly and that it might lead to short-term gains in student achievement. They believed, though, that any such gains would be limited. Such programs tend to focus on rote aspects of literacy rather than the more complex elements of learning to read. In these programs, students might reach certain levels or gain certain skills but will be unable to advance beyond them. Because mechanical programs do little to expand their knowledge about how children learn to read, teachers would be poorly equipped to guide students beyond the specified points in the program. Both teachers and students would be stuck.

Initiative leaders believed that these programs would not be sufficient to attain their goal of every student reading on grade level by third grade. This requires nurturing academic excellence among students whose needs have been overlooked and abilities discounted for too long. This is a far cry from seeking bumps in test scores that would be limited and short-lived. HCDE and PEF made a different choice. They assumed that the depth and breadth of student learning depend on the depth and breadth of teacher knowledge and skill. HCDE and PEF determined to build teacher knowledge and skill. Teachers were to be learners too. While this approach takes more time and greater resources, ongoing and meaningful *teacher* learning is the key to fostering significant improvements in *student* learning and to sustaining them over time.

The Initiative eschews typical professional development – half-day or one-day seminars on topics selected by administrators and therefore often disconnected from the issues teachers confront daily. HCDE and PEF looked to research as well as PEF's own experiences working with teachers and determined that the most effective way of deepening teachers' knowledge and improving their practice would be to help the faculty at each Benwood school to identify, annually, the instructional areas they needed to focus on and to craft a plan to address those areas in large part through "embedded" professional development.



Embedded professional development occurs in schools during the school day and entails a “master” teacher – a teacher with demonstrated expertise, experience and effectiveness with students – who works one-on-one or with small groups of teachers. Research and the district’s own experience with such “master” teachers, a position the district was already exploring, revealed their potential to significantly deepen and enhance teachers’ knowledge and skills.

These master teachers – known in HCDE as Consulting Teachers (CTs) – have assumed a pivotal role in each Benwood school. They are resources for teachers, providing them with information about an array of issues such as best practices, current research, and district, state and federal policies that affect them. They provide concentrated support to new teachers, frequently working with them individually for several weeks as they adapt to leading their own classrooms. The CTs offer similar support to more experienced teachers who may be struggling to master new instructional strategies; they provide information on the instructional strategies, model them for teachers, observe the teachers as they implement them and provide feedback on ways to strengthen them. They help principals and assistant principals, serving, where appropriate, as another set of eyes and ears that can gather feedback from teachers about what is going well and what is going less well so that principals and assistant principals can



respond promptly to emerging challenges. They also work with principals and assistant principals to provide guidance to teachers in implementing school- or Initiative-wide reform elements such as aligning curriculum horizontally across a grade and vertically from one grade to the next.

Teachers are open in their praise of the CTs and speak of their willingness to help, to encourage and to support but not to dictate. CTs have worked hard to build trusting relationships with teachers. Most voluntarily participate in lunchroom duty as well as “drop-off” and “pick-up” duties where teachers monitor students’ arrivals to and departures from school. They reach out to teachers, who may be initially skeptical of them, asking them what they need and making sure that their requests – even those as simple as supplies – are filled. In short, CTs listen to teachers and treat them as skilled colleagues, essential to establishing strong working relationships.

As important in cultivating positive relationships with teachers is the fact that CTs have no evaluative role. Responsibility for evaluating teachers remains with the principals. When a CT enters a classroom, her purpose is to help a teacher, not judge her. This encourages teachers to be open and frank in discussing their challenges so that they can be resolved instead of hiding them.

In addition to having the CTs on site, many of the school teams have brought in consultants, individuals with deep expertise in specific areas, usually literacy, for extended periods several times during the school year to work hands-on with teachers. These consultants, selected by school teams in response to issues they have identified, have proven to be critical resources as faculties grapple with some of the more challenging components of reform.

In addition to the extensive support provided to teachers on site, from the beginning, there have been regular Initiative-wide professional development opportunities. These opportunities are typically coordinated by the Initiative director and respond to requests from principals and other school staff for information about selected topics. They also respond to observations made by both PEF and HCDE staff, who are in schools every week, talking to faculty, observing classrooms, reviewing data and more. They identify issues of which school leaders and faculty, immersed in meeting day-to-day demands, may not have been aware. Some of the issues addressed through Initiative-wide professional development include understanding urban poverty, parental engagement, assessment strategies, classroom management and creating classroom environments that support achievement.

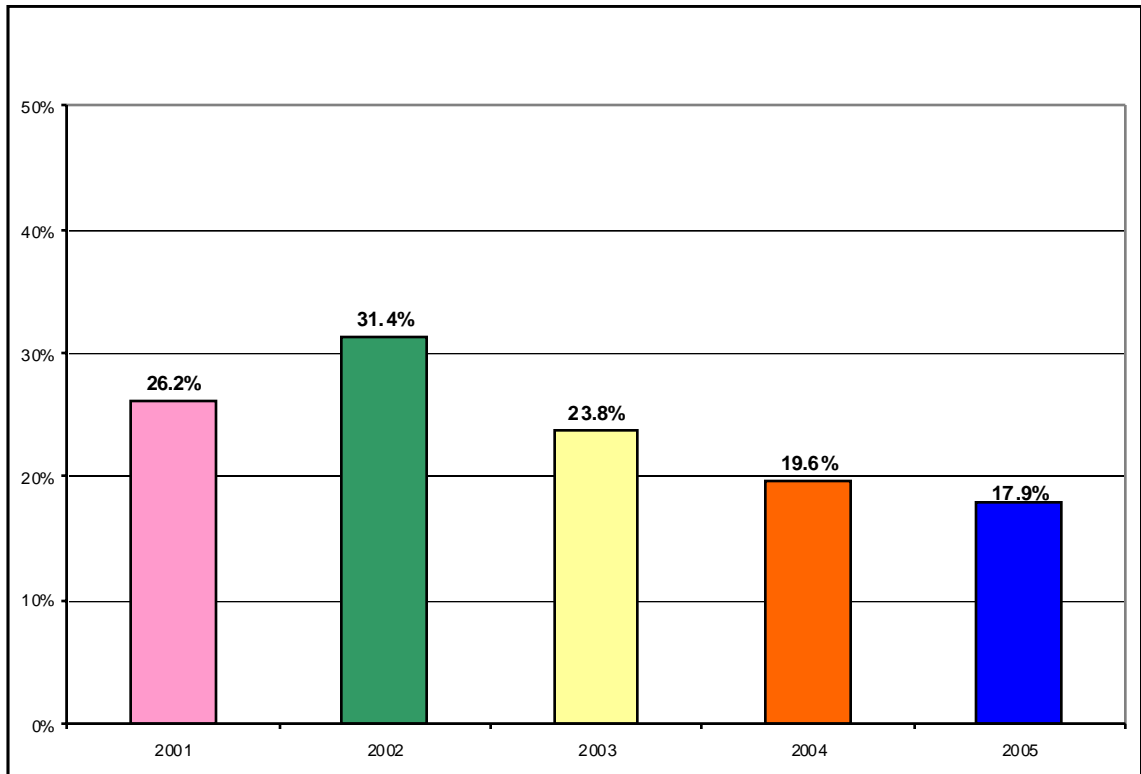
Another rich opportunity for professional growth is the Osborne Fellows program. This program, described in detail in Myth 4, is a collaborative effort between HCDE, PEF, the Osborne Foundation and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, through which teachers in Benwood schools as well as several other urban schools in the district are able to pursue a master's degree in education, with a targeted focus on urban education and literacy. The program is uniquely configured to combine more traditional classroom seminars with hands-on practice and research in schools.

Providing this kind of comprehensive professional support to teachers takes time, money, patience and energy. In the face of this, a purchased program offering set prescriptions may seem more manageable to schools and districts lacking these resources. The return on this investment of resources, however, is reflected in the considerable gains in achievement made by Benwood students on standardized exams, as described above.

While student achievement is the most important measure of the impact of the approach taken to teacher learning, it is not the only one. Another indicator of the value of investing in teachers' professional learning and development is the falling turnover rate at Benwood schools. Before the Initiative, the doors at these schools seemed to be continuously revolving. Most young teachers sought transfers to suburban schools as soon as they could while other teachers, overwhelmed and unprepared, often simply quit. Since the Initiative was launched, however, the number of new teachers hired at the schools has dropped; teachers are increasingly reluctant to leave these schools.



Figure 6: Percentage of Benwood Teachers who are New to Their Schools



Beyond numbers, teachers themselves also testify to the effect of the professional development they participate in through the Benwood Initiative. One teacher, speaking about the intensive training and guidance she has received in literacy, commented, "I've always worked hard and I thought I was a good teacher before. Now I know what I didn't know. Now I know what I wasn't doing, and I want to apologize to all the students I had before."

3. Myth: Schools embrace the latest fads without realizing that students would be more successful if they were educated the way previous generations were.

Reality: Schools must combine the best of traditional educational approaches with new, proven strategies and must equip students with skills to adapt to a more demanding job market.

A few observers of the efforts of educators in the Benwood schools and HCDE to transform teaching and learning see them as misguided. To them, educators should simply rely on the policies and practices of decades past. Those policies and programs worked well once and, these observers believe, would do so again if educators simply utilized them.

For many students – though never all – these policies and programs did function well enough. They did so, however, at a time when the economy was local, regional or national and all students needed for low- or semi-skilled jobs that paid a living wage was a high school diploma. This economy, however, no longer exists.

The past several decades have brought tremendous changes to Chattanooga, to Tennessee and to the nation. The economy is now global. Boundaries between nations have fallen away as people of different countries, languages, religions, ethnicities and cultures interact with each other in this evolving context. Information technology has exploded, changing how people communicate with one another and about what. Technological advancements in general have altered and become embedded in almost every aspect of commerce from finance to production to distribution and much more. Society now most values educated and skilled workers. Most students of years past did not get these skills and this knowledge in school, but they did not need them to find a job. If schools today rely on past policies and practices, current students will lack these skills as well, but unlike their predecessors, they will be consigned to a future of few opportunities and low incomes.

Leaders of the Benwood Foundation, HCDE and PEF understood the implications of these dramatic shifts in the economy for students. They knew, when designing the Benwood Initiative, that they could not rely on old policies and programs. They needed to change what was taught and how it was taught, and they knew that this would require everyone – from teachers to the superintendent – to embrace new roles, new responsibilities and new practices.





One role undergoing dramatic change is that of principals. To be effective today, principals cannot be the building managers they once were, focused on maintaining processes and enforcing procedures while rarely entering a classroom. Instead, they must be instructional leaders, able to provide sound guidance and advice on content and pedagogy to teachers, able to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and able to foster teachers' professional growth. In this new role, principals are in classrooms everyday, observing, teaching, questioning and suggesting, in an effort to help teachers reflect on and improve their practice.

This new role is not one that principals were initially trained to fill, and they need support and guidance to do so. They have received this through the Initiative by, among other things, the hands-on assistance of its director from PEF, the Director of Urban Education and the Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education from HCDE, on-site leadership coaches and through participation in the Leadership Institute. (See Myth 6 for a more complete discussion of these elements.)

As roles are being re-created, so too are long-standing practices, one of which is teaching in isolation. By tradition or habit, teachers rarely collaborate or even communicate with one another about instructional challenges. They work alone in their classrooms, too often struggling to accurately identify and effectively respond to the myriad of instructional needs of their students. This kind of isolation is ending in the Benwood schools.

Commitment to collaboration has infused the Benwood Initiative since its formation and extends to expectations of how teachers, principals and other faculty members work together. For example, every grade in every Benwood school now has a captain who facilitates regular grade-level planning meetings. By teachers' own descriptions, these are not cursory meetings but rather opportunities to engage in rich discussions about many things including best practices, emerging research, questions about different topics such as evaluating student work, and new ideas.

These new practices are changing the culture in the Benwood schools. Arriving without notice at a Benwood school one day, a senior HCDE administrator walked into the schools conference room to find the principal, assistant principals, full grade-level team and special education teacher all immersed in a planning session centered on student achievement. Prior to the Initiative, he had never seen such a gathering.

This collaboration has, in turn, led to other new practices that are essential in schools responsive to the economic and civic challenges of the 21st Century. With regular grade-level meetings in place, school leaders have taken planning to the next level; they instituted horizontal planning. While rigorous curriculum standards had been instituted across the district before the Initiative was launched, teachers, as they do in schools across the country, created lesson plans for these common standards on their own. This meant, for example, that while every fourth grader might have to know and complete long division, the strategies individual fourth grade teachers in the same school used to teach long division might vary considerably in substance and in effectiveness. Through horizontal planning, teachers, among other things, develop common learning activities and share feedback on what worked well and what worked less well with these activities so that they may be refined.

The Benwood faculties are now moving to institute vertical planning. Teachers are now meeting to plan not only within grade levels but up and down in grade levels as well. This will help ensure that the learning activities students participate in and the knowledge and skills they are required to master during one year are aligned with those of subsequent years.

The Benwood Initiative has given educators within HCDE and the experts from PEF who are working with and supporting them an opportunity too rarely granted to educators to merge the best of traditional educational approaches with new ideas and strategies. These have been tested and refined in Hamilton County classrooms, so that students as well as the community will not be left behind in a rapidly changing world.

4. Myth: The best way to recruit and retain promising teachers is to provide financial incentives.

Reality: Above all, teachers are motivated by their commitment to excellence for their students and for their teaching. Providing opportunities to attain this level of excellence is the best way to improve teacher quality.

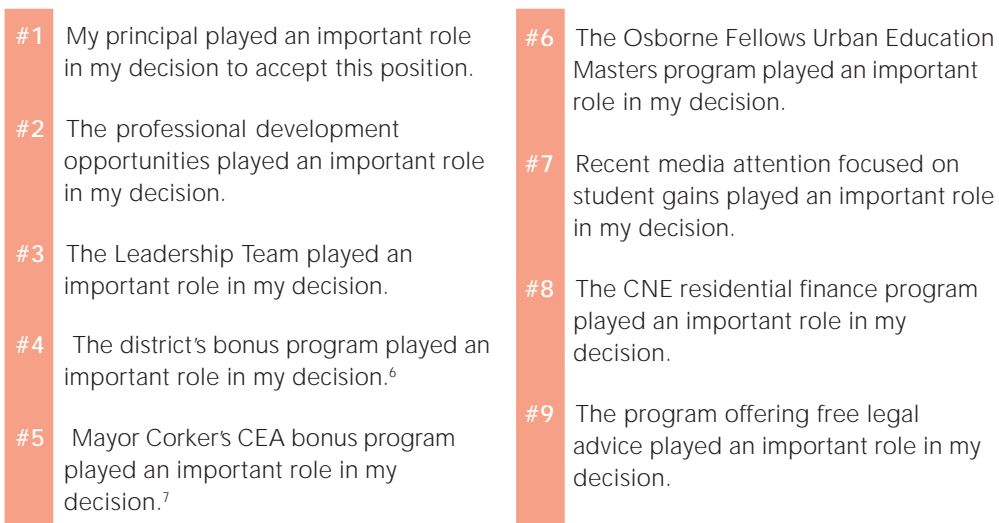
Money matters and it matters to teachers. Like everyone else, teachers seek financial security and want to provide for their families' needs. Is money – the promise of bonuses in response to attaining certain student achievement goals – sufficient in and of itself, however, to lure good teachers to struggling schools like those in the Benwood Initiative and keep them there? According to Benwood teachers, the answer is “no.” They appreciate the opportunity to earn additional income, but that alone is not why they teach in Benwood schools.

In conversations with teachers about what drew them to the Benwood schools and what keeps them there, they consistently rejected the notion that the promise of bonuses was a factor. At the forefront of their reasons was a commitment to the students in the Benwood schools. One teacher, when asked why she reapplied for her job at a Benwood school that was undergoing reconstitution, said, "These are my kids. I knew I could be better and I knew I could make a difference. This [the Benwood Initiative] gave me the chance to do so." When asked directly if the possibility of a bonus was a consideration in her decision to stay in a Benwood school, another teacher laughed and commented, "You don't do this for the money; you do this because you believe in these students. I could be in a suburban school but those kids don't need me; these kids do."

Other teachers spoke of wanting to work with the principals and administrative teams of the Benwood schools who had dynamic visions for the schools that centered around academic excellence. Several noted their desire to work with colleagues who were energetic and supportive and who shared their own vision of what public education can be. One commented, "People here [at her school] are willing to help you; we support each other."

These comments echo the results of an annual survey of new teachers at Benwood schools. According to the survey, there are multiple reasons teachers seek positions at these schools; leading the list are their principals and the professional development opportunities available to teachers in Benwood schools.⁵

Figure 7: New Benwood Teachers: Ranking Their Reasons for Coming to Benwood Schools, 2005



⁵ It should be noted that the list of possible reasons teachers chose a Benwood school did not include a desire to work with traditionally disadvantaged students; survey respondents could not, therefore, cite it as a reason.

⁶ HCDE has an incentive plan that provides bonuses ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for certified professionals in schools that meet specified annual student achievement goals.

⁷ Funded by the Community Education Alliance, an effort created by former Chattanooga Mayor Bob Corker, teachers in Benwood schools that reach specified student achievement goals over a three year period receive an annual salary bonus of \$5,000 for three years; principals receive an annual salary bonus of \$10,000.



The survey results indicate that the possibility of earning a bonus is a factor for teachers when they are considering where they would like to teach. What matters most, however, is the opportunity to work in a school led by a visionary principal and in which there is a collegial professional community that fosters learning.

A comparison of 2004 and 2005 results from the new Benwood teacher survey demonstrates further the attraction to teachers of working in a professionally supportive environment. About 25 percent and 19 percent of new 2005 teachers said, respectively, that the professional development opportunities available at Benwood schools and the opportunity to participate in the Osborne Fellows Urban Masters program were important factors in their decision to come to the schools; a year earlier, in 2004, only 13 percent of new Benwood teachers indicated that either of these were important factors in their decision to teach at a Benwood school. The word is spreading in Hamilton County that Benwood schools are places where both students and teachers can flourish.

As the survey results reveal, money is a factor in teachers' decisions about where they will teach in Hamilton County. It is, however, only one of many factors that inform teachers' decision-making process, and it is not the driving consideration for them.

The Osborne Fellows Program

The Osborne Fellows Program is a unique program through which Benwood teachers can earn a master's degree in urban education from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC). It was inspired by the Benwood Initiative and launched to complement it.

The Osborne Fellows Program is funded by the Weldon F. Osborne Foundation, a local foundation that gives primarily in the Chattanooga area. Observing the efforts of the Benwood Foundation, PEF and HCDE in developing the Benwood Initiative and seeing its potential to transform the nine elementary schools involved, the board of the Osborne Foundation wanted to contribute to it. Believing that teacher quality is the factor that has the greatest impact on student learning, board members sought to develop an initiative through which the knowledge and skills of Benwood teachers would be enhanced significantly. They turned to PEF, which constructed the Osborne Fellows Program in partnership with the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and HCDE.

The Osborne Fellows Program is distinguished by its uncommon structure, which includes:

- A curriculum that emphasizes the unique needs of students in urban schools, literacy and action research
- Study groups led by Osborne Fellow coaches in which Fellows explore how the content of their seminars are applicable to their work in Benwood schools
- Teaching Partners, HCDE teachers who have been identified as highly effective and who serve as personal mentors to Fellows, visiting them in their classrooms and inviting the Fellows into their own so that they can observe and practice effective instructional strategies
- Learning Trips, visits by Fellows to schools in other urban communities where they can observe, meet with and learn from highly skilled teachers

It is too soon to calculate the effect of the Osborne Fellows on student achievement. Despite this, there are indicators that the Fellows program is leading to more effective professional practice both within and outside of the classroom. Principals and consulting teachers report that members of their faculties who are Osborne Fellows are assuming formal and informal leadership roles in their schools; of their own initiative, several Fellows, for example, have developed and conducted professional development sessions drawn from their experiences in the Osborne program. One principal described her Fellow as another pillar (in addition to the assistant principal and consulting teacher) in the school that she can rely on to be a critical resource for information on and a model of best instructional practice.



Myths about Schools and Districts

5. Myth: It is the responsibility of the central office to determine effective reform strategies.

Reality: Sustainable reform requires elements of bottom-up ideas and innovations along with top-down direction and insight.

It may seem instinctive for district leadership, when it is seeking to change what happens in classrooms and improve student achievement, to be the decision-makers of reform – to determine its goals, the strategies to be used to achieve them, the processes and timeline for implementing them and virtually all other critical components of it. District leaders – the superintendent and key members of his or her administrative team – are people with considerable experience and expertise and with ready access to information and external expertise. They have a broader perspective than do those at the school level and at times can identify problems missed by school faculty who are immersed in the day-to-day demands of teaching and meeting students' needs.

When it is developed by district leadership, reform can be initiated fairly quickly; reform efforts do not get bogged down in seemingly endless meetings disconnected from action. Moreover, it is the district leadership, specifically the superintendent, who is the public face of reform and accountable for its success. If he or she is accountable for it, then he or she should determine its form and content. The pressure of meeting annual yearly progress goals under NCLB and its attendant accountability mechanisms may heighten the urgency district leaders feel to move quickly and to control all or most aspects of it.

While central office control of reform, its construction and implementation, may seem to be the quickest route to change, it too often is a pathway that crumbles as people seek to progress along it. Changing what people do – what many have done every day for years – is difficult. For many people, educators and non-educators alike, change is threatening, and they will resist attempts to impose it on them. Many more will not resist it; they will instead acquiesce to it. They will implement the district's decisions regarding reform because they are required to, but they will not take full responsibility for it. Reform in this instance is something being done to them and to their students. Some teachers and principals with a more expanded vision of what education can be may be willing, even eager, to pursue reform, but uncertainty that the district's specific approach and strategies will be effective in meeting the needs of their students may temper their enthusiasm.

Recognizing these pitfalls, PEF and HCDE staff avoided a top-down approach to reform. They also spurned a bottom-up approach, one in which school faculties drive reform. Teachers and principals may know their school communities and students better than central office administrators, but they rarely have the time, resources or capacity to surface different strategies to meet student needs most effectively and to identify which among these strategies is most suitable. As individual schools, they have little opportunity or energy to develop relationships with external organizations that may be able to contribute to reform in meaningful ways. Without the district or another partner acting as a bridge between them, the development of a learning community of principals and assistant principals would be haphazard at best, dependent on personal goodwill. For school leaders, maintaining focus on long-term reform goals can be a challenge in the midst of meeting the day-to-day demands of students. If schools are pursuing different reform strategies with few common elements, central office staff may struggle to respond effectively with their varying and possibly competing demands. In short, pursuing a bottom-up type of reform seemed as unwise to Initiative planners as did a top-down reform. They set out to craft an approach to reform that would bypass the drawbacks of both and build on the strengths of each.

The approach HCDE and PEF developed relies on *distributed* leadership – placing decision-making authority at multiple levels – which has been critical in ensuring the Initiative's success. Sharing decision-making authority throughout the Initiative has fostered a sense of ownership across it as well as cultivated enthusiasm for it. Teachers, principals, assistant principals and other school site faculty are not only implementing others' ideas, they are generating their own. Their work reflects their own innovations, creativity and energy.

At the outset of the Initiative, PEF and HCDE staff set their long-term goals, broadly outlined the issues that needed to be addressed to reach those goals and suggested possible strategies for doing so. The issues identified by the planners were:

- Academic achievement
- Quality and stability of teachers
- Effective leadership teams
- Family involvement
- Facilities and supplies
- Community engagement

While HCDE and PEF drew on research and experience to identify effective strategies for addressing these issues, they did not require that schools implement them. Teams of school administrators, teachers and others, including parents, used this research to determine the specific strategies that would be most effective in their particular environments. HCDE and PEF would act as their advisors and information resource in this process.

This process has been repeated each year as the school leadership teams create annual plans detailing how their individual schools will make progress in meeting the Initiative's goals. The plans are presented to the Benwood Steering Committee, which is comprised of leaders and senior staff members of PEF, HCDE and the Benwood Foundation, for review. From the outset, the review process has been rigorous; principals present their plans to the committee and must be able to explain how plan components will effectively address the particular challenges of their schools and lead to gains in achievement, particularly literacy.

School teams are not alone in this work, however. The steering committee understood early on that if it asked for comprehensive plans comprised of coordinated reform strategies of demonstrated effectiveness from the leadership teams, it needed to ensure that the teams had the information and skills necessary to craft such plans. During the first planning phase, it brought in various experts to lead intensive sessions on issues critical to reforming urban schools. It arranged for leadership teams to visit other schools where low-income and minority students were thriving. Members of the steering committee also offered considerable hands-on assistance – they provided information, reviewed data, asked critical questions and encouraged teams to explore different ideas. Steering committee members have continued to provide this kind of hands-on assistance throughout the school year.

While it has offered encouragement and at times incentives for school leadership teams to pursue certain strategies, only rarely has the steering committee or HCDE leadership mandated specific activities in the Benwood schools. When this has occurred, it has been in response to persistent problems or to spread a specific strategy that resulted in real gains in one school across the others.

As beneficial as the support from members of the steering committee is, school administrators and team members need more to be effective leaders – they need leadership skills. The Benwood Initiative asks principals, assistant principals and other members of the Leadership Teams to assume roles and tasks they have not been prepared to do. To meet the Initiative's goals, these school leaders need far more than a deep understanding of how children become literate and successful readers and writers. Among other things, they need to know how to help other adults gain this understanding. They need to understand the change process – what makes it succeed and why it fails. They need to know how to foster a cooperative school culture and facilitate teamwork. In short, principals, assistant principals, CTs and others in leadership roles in schools need the same type of high-quality professional learning experiences that are available to teachers.



In 1998, at the request of Superintendent Register, PEF partnered with the Annenberg Foundation to establish the Leadership Initiative to help prepare future HCDE principals and to strengthen the skills of current ones. Programs tailored to their needs have been created for Benwood principals, assistant principals, CTs and others at the Leadership Initiative. They are also encouraged to participate in non-Benwood programs that are offered at the Leadership Initiative. In addition, a new position – leadership coach – has been established. Much as the CTs do, the leadership coaches provide on-site support to principals and assistant principals. They serve less as mentors and more as critical friends, asking essential questions and pushing school leaders to think through their approaches to reform. There are two leadership coaches, Lonita Davidson and Faye Pharr, both of whom have extensive experience as teachers and principals, working in the Benwood schools.

Through the Leadership Initiative, the leadership coaches and the ongoing guidance offered by the steering committee, there is now a cadre of current and future school leaders who have a common vision of academic excellence and the skills to realize that vision and who can serve not only Benwood schools but schools across the district.

While distributed leadership may require more time and resources than other approaches to reform, its benefits are significant. The powerful and positive changes already seen in Benwood schools in many areas including teacher and administrator quality, student learning and school climate, and which continue to emerge, likely would not have oc-

curred had decision-making authority not been shared. Principals own the Benwood Initiative. Teachers own the Benwood Initiative. HCDE owns the Benwood Initiative. And PEF owns the Benwood Initiative. The Initiative is not happening around them or to them. It is their work and they are wholly committed to it and to its success.

6. Myth: Teachers' unions are more concerned about raising teachers' salaries and protecting teacher tenure than in improving student achievement.

Reality: When district leaders build collegial relationships with them, teachers' unions can be strong collaborators in reform.

Teachers' unions exist to ensure that teachers are paid fairly and adequately, that they cannot be terminated without just cause, and that their seniority in the district is respected so that they determine in which school they will teach. District leaders, operating under virtually constant fiscal constraints, seek to limit their personnel costs, the largest item in their budgets; at the same time, they want the flexibility to place teachers where they are most needed and to remove those teachers who have demonstrated that they are not effective in the classroom. Given their respective and sometimes conflicting aims, it is not surprising that in most places, including, until recently, Hamilton County, teachers' unions and district administrations have at best uneasy and skeptical relationships or at worst consider each other adversaries. At their best, however, what they have in common is an unwavering commitment to students. In Hamilton County, through the efforts of Superintendent Register and encouraged by PEF, this shared commitment has been surfaced and is especially valued. It now guides the relationship between the district and the union. With this shift, the union has become a critical ally in reform.

This change did not occur by happenstance nor did it occur quickly. It is the result of deliberate decisions, risky but wise, made by both Register and Gerry Dowler, the coordinator of the Hamilton County Education Association (HCEA), the local National Education Association affiliate, which were supported by Challenger at PEF.

When Register was hired to serve as superintendent of HCDE in 1996, the district and the union had a contentious relationship. That did not change in the earliest years of his tenure. Not long after his arrival, he began to negotiate a new contract for teachers with HCEA; for over a year, there was little progress. One of the biggest obstacles to reaching a new agreement was the teacher transfer policy, which often resulted in the least effective teachers being placed into the schools where the students had the greatest needs. For a time, this hurdle seemed insurmountable.

Frustrated but determined to find a resolution, Register went to union leaders in early 1999 and explained that he wanted to work with them to find a way through their differences and begin focusing on making schools better. They began meeting more informally, gathering for dinner and talking about their concerns and emerging issues. With Register's



encouragement, union leaders sought training in and then joined the district in a process of collective bargaining through which they pursued mutually acceptable solutions to significant issues.

During this period, PEF and the district began collecting and analyzing extensive data on teacher placement and student achievement. They learned that the lowest performing schools had the least experienced teachers (43 percent of teachers had less than three years experience), the highest teacher turnover rates, and the most difficulty finding substitute teachers.

These findings made clear that Register's concerns about teacher placement and turnover and the effect that they had on student learning were not conjecture; where teachers were placed and how they were supported made a difference to students. Sharing the data with Dowler and other HCEA leaders fostered a common understanding of the challenges low-performing schools faced, which helped them to push through the impasse on contract negotiations as well as go far beyond that. Dowler, Register and Challenger began developing a "Strategic Plan for Success," a plan to help move the district forward in its quest to improve student learning and achievement significantly. The plan included strategies to bolster teacher recruitment and retention and to provide better professional support to teachers so that they could meet higher goals for student learning.

HCEA was not a passive recipient of this plan – it was actively involved in creating it. It surveyed its members to understand what they believed were the greatest challenges to improving student achievement and how those challenges should be addressed. The union also undertook various outreach and engagement efforts, which continue, with its members so that they would be aware of and understand the changes being contemplated

and implemented. Perhaps most notably, the union, after a process of frank and sometimes difficult negotiation, agreed to reconstitute the Benwood schools as well as a handful of other schools in similar straits and to a bonus pay plan for teachers in Benwood schools.⁸ In most other districts, unions have fiercely resisted such changes. The commitment to students and to finding shared solutions that is held by the leadership of HCDE, PEF and HCEA made this possible. It also opened up new opportunities.

In 2004, HCDE and HCEA received a five-year, \$2.5 million grant from the NEA Foundation; it was the first grant awarded by the foundation under a new program to close the achievement gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers. HCDE and HCEA were awarded this grant because of the strength of their partnership and the accomplishments they have made together. With the Benwood Initiative focusing on elementary students and the Carnegie Corporation funding a far-reaching high school reform effort, Register has chosen to use the NEA Foundation funds to reform five urban middle schools.

As HCEA demonstrates, teachers' unions can be powerful allies in reform. Their collaboration can lead to increased recognition, support and success.

7. Myth: School districts are rigid, bureaucratic structures that stifle the development of creative and effective schools.

Reality: School districts can display sustained creativity and flexibility and can cultivate dynamic schools.

Many people are deeply skeptical of school districts' ability to transform themselves into high-functioning organizations that provide academically rigorous opportunities to all students, particularly those who are low-income and minority. They point to the difficulty of changing inflexible bureaucracies and note that, while there are many examples of individual schools in urban areas where students of all backgrounds attain high levels of academic achievement, there is not yet a district that can make this claim fully. The Hamilton County Department of Education, however, is making rapid progress toward doing so.

The central administration of HCDE is remarkably different today than it was four years ago when the Benwood Initiative was launched. Its structure is being realigned and its culture is changing. Today, by their own account, HCDE staff see reform – constantly seeking ways to foster excellence in classrooms and in schools – as their work, a dramatic shift from the long-held perception that their role is to monitor schools' compliance with regulations.

⁸The bonus pay plan is funded with dollars raised by the Community Education Alliance, a group of local business leaders that was created and led by then Mayor Bob Corker. Funding for the bonus plan does not come from local, state or federal taxes.

One pivotal change in the district's structure was the creation of a new position to oversee urban schools. Prior to the Initiative, there were two Directors of Elementary Education, each of whom oversaw a group of elementary schools. Responsibility for the Benwood schools was divided between these three directors. Concerned that the particular needs of the Benwood schools, mixed in among the other schools, would be overlooked or not clearly understood, Superintendent Register established a new position – Director of Urban Education – which would oversee the Benwood schools as well as three additional urban schools and would, as an expert in urban education, provide critical guidance to the Benwood principals.

Register asked Ray Swoffard, then one of the directors of elementary schools who had served for many years as a well-respected principal of an urban school in the district, to fill the new position. Swoffard, aware of the low priority that urban schools had had in the district and the community for years, was initially hesitant but accepted the position. With Register's support, he has helped forge a new model of an administrator. Instead of being desk-bound, Swoffard went into schools, observing and meeting with principals and teachers alike. If something was going poorly, he wanted to know so that it could be fixed, and if something was going well, he wanted to know that too so that he could spread the word.

Swoffard has since been promoted and is now the Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education. He remains intimately involved in the Benwood schools, however. Like his





successor as Director of Urban Education, Susan Swanson, he continues to visit schools to ask the difficult but essential questions of how to make schools effective for all students – what do schools need to do better and what does HCDE need to do better?

As HCDE's structure is changing, so too is its culture. District staff report a greater openness along with a greater willingness to acknowledge challenges and to craft solutions collaboratively. In the first year of the Initiative, a group of HCDE staff came together spontaneously to identify and address district policies and practices that were impeding reform. The group was not official, and its members were not asked to gather by the superintendent. Instead, they realized, as they talked among themselves, that some district policies and practices curtailed reform and needed to be changed or removed. As the

Initiative progressed, fewer internal barriers to reform remained in place and the group has ceased to meet. Their voluntary assumption of responsibility for change, however, was a harbinger of a growing spirit of collaboration and commitment to change within HCDE.

Fostering innovation and excellence requires risk taking; at times these are very public risks with very public consequences. When needed, HCDE leaders, in particular Register, have taken such risks. The most notable example of this willingness to take risks is Register's decision to reconstitute the Benwood schools during the Initiative's second year.

Swoffard had become frustrated by the slow pace of change and the unresponsiveness of some teachers. To succeed in meeting the Initiative's goals, the schools needed teachers committed to reform and committed to becoming the most effective teachers they could be. While many were so committed, there were some who were not, and their resistance to change was a significant obstacle to progress. In response, he proposed reconstituting the schools.

Reconstitution – requiring teachers to re-apply for their jobs and moving those who were not re-hired to other schools in the district – would enable principals to pull together faculty committed to effective instruction for at-risk students. It would also establish unequivocally that poor performance would not be accepted within Hamilton County's schools. Register concurred with Swoffard's assessment and decided to proceed with reconstitution even though he knew it was risky for him to do so. Reconstitution likely would not be well-received; principals at non-Benwood schools would not cheer the

placement of struggling teachers in their schools. Knowing that the academic success of Benwood students depended primarily on the quality of teaching provided to them and that they were more vulnerable to the consequences of poor teaching than many of their more economically secure peers, he chose to forge ahead.

At a district-wide retreat for principals, Register announced the reconstitution and explained what it could mean for other principals – possibly taking a struggling teacher onto the faculty and working to build his or her knowledge and skills so that students' academic success would not be compromised. As anticipated, the principals were not enthusiastic; one meeting participant described their response as “complete silence, not a sound in the room.” Suddenly and unexpectedly, principals who rarely had to deal with less effective teachers faced the prospect of having one in their schools. Understanding their lack of enthusiasm, Register asked them to consider the challenge that lay before the Benwood principals – nurturing academic excellence among students struggling with the profound challenges that accompany poverty. To have a chance at academic success, these students needed outstanding teachers committed to excellence. For non-Benwood principals, reconstitution might mean that they would have to contend with one struggling teacher, but it would also mean that Benwood principals, who at times had had entire faculties that were comprised of teachers who were overwhelmed and ineffective, would have a chance to build faculties committed to their students' success, to their own learning and to reform.

When reconstitution was implemented, there were about 300 teachers across the Benwood schools and a few other schools that were included in the reconstitution. Of these, approximately 200 re-applied for jobs in the reconstituted schools. Of the remaining 100 who wanted to leave, 72 were selected by principals in other schools. This left 28 teachers who were not well-suited to the Benwood schools and who were not hired by other schools in the county. These 28 were moved involuntarily to other schools. While their transfer to other schools may have been inauspicious, anecdotal feedback indicates that some of these 28 teachers have thrived in their new schools. They have found school environments in which they are more comfortable and have gotten the support that they needed to be better teachers. Others, who could not or would not improve, left the district either of their own accord or with the strenuous encouragement of their new principals. As one principal who received a reconstituted teacher described, “I sat him (the reconstituted teacher) down and told him what the expectations were... what the parents expected of teachers, what teachers expected of each other, and he chose to leave.”⁹

While they did not cheer it, no principal complained directly to Register about reconstitution. It may have generated some additional work for non-Benwood principals, but they understood what was at stake for the students in the Benwood schools and that the district is only as strong as its weakest school. Others in the community, though, raised very vocal objections. They saw reconstitution as foisting ineffective teachers on success-

⁹ Carroll, Beverly A. “Suburban Schools Continue Academic Progress, Data Show,” *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. July 16, 2005.

ful schools and diminishing the quality of education provided at those schools. Some of the stronger objections came from members of the Hamilton County Commission, which provides funding for the district. Reconstitution remains, for several commission members, a criticism of Register, and several commissioners formally called for his resignation.

Reform is not for the faint of heart and, as much as it requires creativity, innovation and flexibility, it requires a willingness to take real risks and the fortitude to withstand intense criticism.





Myths about Reform

8. Myth: School districts can reform themselves by themselves.

Reality: School reform requires active partnerships with diverse elements of the community.

At every level within a school district, educators are accustomed to working alone. Their isolation has been a defining characteristic of public education. Superintendents, no less than teachers, look for resources within the boundaries of their schools or the district itself; they rarely look outside. Parents, civic officials, business leaders and other community members are accustomed to this. Districts often appear to them to be black boxes of indecipherable inputs and uncertain outcomes. Until recently, districts rarely offered in-depth information about what they are doing and community members seldom asked for it. As long as districts' outputs – some students failing, most students doing well enough to get by and a handful reaching high levels of achievement – were acceptable, few questioned their goals, policies and practices or suggested that they needed to be altered.

As described above, significant economic and social shifts have made clear, however, that these outputs are no longer acceptable. (See Myth 3) Every student, regardless of



income, ethnicity, native language or other characteristic, must master a rigorous curriculum so that he or she is able to thrive in a world that prizes and pays for knowledge and skill.

This new requirement sets a new standard for school districts, one for which they were not designed to meet. Regardless of their dedication, energy, knowledge and experience, they do not have the capacity to reach it on their own. They must have support and assistance at a level that surpasses any offered previously – they require partners in reform.

PEF serves as HCDE's primary partner in pursuing academic excellence for all students. Since PEF's founding in 1988, the partnership between it and HCDE has evolved, gradually becoming more robust as the organizations and their leaders have learned from and gained increasing trust in each other.

Prior to the development of the Benwood Initiative, while PEF had worked closely with HCDE on critical issues including programs to enhance teacher quality and a community-wide effort to develop rigorous curriculum standards for the merged district, the two organizations had not collaborated on an undertaking of the Initiative's scope. The Benwood Initiative is not limited to particular aspects of how districts and schools deliver instruction to students – it touches upon all pieces of how they do so and was intended to transform nine high-poverty, high-minority schools that were failing their students.

This was not a small undertaking, and neither organization pursued it casually. Each, however, perceived it as a risk worth taking not only because of the Initiative's goals but also because their previous work strongly suggested that PEF could add considerable value to the district's effort to improve schools.

PEF, more than anything, is a critical friend to HCDE. No organization is an objective observer of its own actions. No organization can see with complete clarity what its strengths and its weaknesses are. PEF fills that role – it helps the district to see issues of which it may be unaware or to see them from a different perspective. It asks difficult questions and pushes the district for answers.

PEF also acts as an information resource. It has developed a staff with deep expertise in a variety of areas including standards, family engagement, leadership and teacher quality. It conducted an extensive national search to find the right person, Stephanie Spencer, to serve as the Director of the Benwood Initiative.¹⁰ Spencer had extensive experience in urban education; as a principal, she had turned around two failing elementary schools in Baltimore. She knew what it would take to transform the Benwood schools. While it has built its own staff, PEF does not presume to have all the answers and frequently turns to outside experts for input on critical issues. It also conducts its own research and gathers and analyzes data on its own, which it shares readily with HCDE.¹¹

Beyond all this, PEF brings a steadfast commitment to the students of Hamilton County, especially those who are low-income and minority, and respect for their teachers. Several teachers commented that Dan Challener, PEF's president, as well as other staff members "believe in us." For teachers often overlooked or even derided, having the respect of and support from PEF is a powerful affirmation.

While PEF may be its primary partner, HCDE has connected to other organizations in the Chattanooga area that have also made important contributions to its work. First among them is the Benwood Foundation, which moved well beyond its traditional mode of operation as a grantmaking funder to initiate the process that led to the formation of the Benwood Initiative and which plays a critical role in sustaining it now. In many ways, the Benwood Foundation acts as a critical friend to PEF, encouraging it to examine its work and explore different strategies. Without the Benwood Foundation, the Benwood Initiative and all that has flowed from it would not exist.¹²

As discussed above, the Benwood Initiative led to a new partnership between PEF and HCDE with the Osborne Foundation and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) to develop, support and implement the Osborne Fellows Program. (See Myth 4) This program is the first significant investment of resources that the Osborne Foundation has made in HCDE. UTC has also devoted considerable resources to the program and together, the Osborne Foundation and UTC helped foster the creation of a cadre of highly skilled teachers, deeply knowledgeable about urban education and literacy development and prepared to function as school leaders.

Another partnership that has grown out of the Initiative is the Community Education Alliance (CEA), which was formed by former Chattanooga Mayor Bob Corker. While the Mayor had no formal role in the school district, he understood the need to have a school

¹⁰ After serving as the Initiative's Director for four years, Spencer resigned in June 2005 to serve once again as a principal in the Baltimore area. She has been replaced by Faye Pharr and Lonita Davidson, who, as leadership coaches, are deeply knowledgeable about the Initiative.

¹¹ Kirk Kelly and Phil Ashworth of HCDE work in close partnership with Debra Vaughan of PEF to gather and analyze data.

¹² The Benwood Initiative was the first of several comprehensive reform initiatives that HCDE and PEF are currently pursuing, one to transform the district's high schools, which is funded by the Carnegie Corporation, and one to transform the district's middle schools, which is funded by the Lyndhurst Foundation and the National Education Association Foundation. Stakeholders within and outside of HCDE and PEF believe that the progress made in the Benwood Initiative was pivotal in the decisions by the three other funders to fund the other reform initiatives

district that prepares all students fully for the 21st Century's global, knowledge-based economy; the community's economic future and well-being rest squarely on it. Mayor Corker brought together a group of business leaders to explore ways to contribute to the Initiative; after considering various options, the group chose to provide financial incentives – bonuses – to Benwood teachers and principals whose students meet specific achievement goals.

Another organization that has made important contributions to the Initiative is the Urban League of Chattanooga. The Urban League won a federal grant to create a 21st Century Community Learning Center program. The program is designed to serve low-income students and, through it, students from four Benwood schools are able to participate in an array of academic and cultural activities in non-school hours. In addition, the Urban League has provided some support for family partnership specialists. Thus far, while there have been some efforts to engage families, the primary focus of the Initiative has been on helping teachers and administrators make positive changes that will enhance student learning. In the coming year, that focus is expanding to help parents make similar changes. The family partnership specialists will reach out to parents and help them learn how they can best support their children's academic success.

As much as expertise, energy and goodwill, these organizations have brought financial resources to the district. These dollars have been essential. The changes underway would not have been possible without these funds. The salaries of CTs and leadership coaches, for example, whose daily presence in schools has been critical to implementing and sustaining change, have come from foundation funds. Experts in literacy, urban education, leadership and other areas that PEF has brought in to assist school leadership teams are not free. The literacy consultants who have provided extensive, hands-on assistance to school faculties do not work pro bono. The various assessment tools that have provided such critical information in understanding what students are learning and not learning well are not donated. HCDE has sought to use its various funding sources as strategically as possible. Swoffard was able to ensure that every Benwood school had two assistant principals through a shrewd mixing of federal Title 1 funds. Register converted a number of central office positions in curriculum and instruction into CT positions. Such innovative uses of resources, however, do not free up the amount of funds needed to support the Benwood Initiative or the other crucial high school and middle school reforms the district is pursuing. The financial support that HCDE has received from the Benwood Foundation with other contributions from PEF, the Osborne Foundation, CEA, the Urban League and others has been critical to the progress it has made in improving achievement for all students.

While the generous contributions of these organizations cannot be calculated simply by tallying the dollars they have invested, they have received benefits in return. These organizations have grown and changed as a result of their work with the district. The Benwood Foundation has learned much about pursuing pro-active approaches to complex community issues including how to set expectations of grantees, assessing progress, and



outlining its own role in nurturing grantees' work. The Osborne Fellows Program has immersed members of the School of Education at UTC in public schools, connecting their work with the realities of schools' daily lives. UTC faculty are exploring ways to incorporate what they are doing with the Osborne Fellows and what they are learning from them and in the Benwood schools into the curriculum at the School of Education.

The Benwood Initiative has also seeded new ones. As a result of the partnership forged between PEF and HCDE through the Initiative, PEF has been awarded grants from the Carnegie Corporation to support high school reform and from the Lyndhurst Foundation and the National Education Association to support middle school reform. What each organization is learning about change and about teaching and learning from the Benwood Initiative is informing their collaborative work to reform high schools and middle schools as this is, in turn, enhancing the Initiative.

9. Myth: School reform is a finite process and can be accomplished in a few short years.

Reality: There are no quick fixes; real reform is an on-going process that occurs incrementally and unevenly.

Reform initiatives are not typically undertaken because things are going well. When the Benwood Foundation began exploring opportunities to improve public education, the circumstances of the Benwood schools bordered on disastrous. Together the schools had the highest staff turnover rates in the district, the most inexperienced teachers, insufficient leadership both in number and quality, and facilities in physical disrepair and disarray.¹³ Most troubling of all, students were failing, or more accurately, the schools

¹³ Almost half of the teachers in Benwood schools, prior to the start of the Initiative, had been teaching for less than three years.

were failing their students. In seven of the nine Benwood schools, fewer than 13 percent of third grade students were reading at grade level as measured by the state's standardized assessment. In the highest performing school, only 20 percent of third graders were at grade level in reading. Eight of the schools had the dubious distinction of landing on the Tennessee Institute for Public Policy's list of lowest 20 schools in the state, far surpassing the number of schools any other district had on the list.

The board and staff of the Benwood Foundation, as well as the community group it had assembled to assist it in considering grantmaking options, felt a great sense of urgency as they came to understand the circumstances and needs of these schools. To them, reforming these schools was not optional, it was vital.

This sense of urgency not only compels reform, it understandably demands that reform happen quickly. Reform – meaningful reform that transforms the beliefs about and practices and structures of schools and school districts – does not happen quickly, though. It cannot be completed within a year or two or even five years. Much progress can and should be made in transforming schools and districts in that length of time. In the Benwood schools, significant progress has been made, but deep and sustainable reform takes time.

There are numerous reasons reform is so arduous and so time-consuming. Primary among them is that there is no an agreed-upon recipe for successful reform. There are no "right" strategies or "right" ways to implement those strategies. There may, in fact, never be an absolute list of specific ingredients for successful reform, for reform is a process of cultivating and testing ideas and refining them, of educators becoming students of the learning process and the change process, and of ongoing reflection and continuous improvement. Reform is not easy, and it is not linear. What may seem, for example, like a promising idea initially, because it has been effective in one district, may prove to be ineffective in another district because the districts and their contexts differ, not because the idea is unsound.

Those involved in the Benwood Initiative, even experienced and exceptionally skilled teachers, principals and administrators, have learned much as they have worked to transform the schools, and as reform proceeds, they are using this emerging knowledge to refine and strengthen existing strategies and to develop new ones that may be applied not only within the Initiative but across the district. Some of these lessons are about the "nuts and bolts" of specific strategies while others are broader and speak to the process of change.

One "nuts and bolts" lesson learned concerned the skills most needed by the Consulting Teachers. HCDE and PEF staff knew that the teachers selected to serve as CTs had to be teachers with demonstrated expertise who were respected by their colleagues, believed that all children could learn, and held the dynamic vision of effective teaching and learning that undergirded the entire Initiative.

The CTs were carefully chosen, and they have had considerable impact. The support, guidance and information that they provide every day to teachers, as described above,

have been essential. This is why Register sought to place them in every school throughout the district. (See Myth 3) In hindsight, however, HCDE and PEF staff have realized that the individual areas of expertise of some CTs were not aligned with the specific goals of the Initiative, in particular its literacy goals.

Coming into their positions, several of the CTs were deeply knowledgeable about literacy; one, in fact, had served as the district's literacy expert before becoming a CT. These CTs were able, from the Initiative's earliest days, to provide comprehensive information about literacy and guidance on effective strategies to teach reading and language skills. Other CTs, however, did not have this in-depth knowledge about literacy. Like the teachers in their schools, they needed intensive professional development in literacy, which took time. While many factors contributed to the amount and speed of the progress schools have made, the schools served by CTs with backgrounds in literacy have made greater progress than those served by CTs without this expertise.

Another important lesson emerged from the reconstitution process. As described above, Register reconstituted the Benwood schools in the Initiative's first year. This was critical, for reconstitution forced teachers to commit to the students, to developing their knowledge and skills and to reform or to move to schools that had students whose needs were far less and where they would be effective. In reflecting on it, though, members of the steering committee have suggested that reconstitution should have been postponed until after HCDE had identified and placed the right principal in each Benwood school. Some of the principals in place when reconstitution occurred had the knowledge and





skills to capitalize on having a newly committed and determined faculty; other principals, however, were less-suited for the challenges of guiding schools serving disadvantaged students and were uncertain on how best to move forward.

Lessons about the CTs and about reconstitution speak to the structure and implementation of specific reform strategies. Other emerging lessons speak to the broader scope of reform; in one instance, for example, PEF and HCDE have learned of the importance of prioritizing goals and areas of need, even when each goal and each area is valuable and should be addressed.

The Initiative has five goals:

1. 100 percent of all students who began the program in preschool or kindergarten will read at grade level by the end of third grade.
2. The Tennessee Value Added Assessments (TVAAS) will measure more than 100 percent gain in all five subject areas of reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.
3. Survey data will show that more than 90 percent of all parents and all teachers are satisfied with their school and believe it supports their students and their teachers.
4. The profile of the teaching staff will mirror the district average in the number of new teachers, range of teaching experience and credentials of the teachers.
5. Attendance for both teachers and students will average at or above 95 percent.

The Initiative seeks to reach these goals by addressing five issues: academic achievement; the quality and stability of teachers; effective leadership teams; family involvement; and, facilities and supplies.

Reaching all of these goals is essential and addressing each of these issues is vital. As the Initiative progressed, however, it became apparent that educators cannot effectively address all critical issues simultaneously. Attempting to sustain a focus and maintain momentum on all six goals and address all five issues curtailed progress on each, including the most critical goal of all – every student reading at grade level by the end of third grade. Literacy is the foundation of success in every subject and at every level of a student's development. Meeting this goal is mandatory, not optional.

Each year, the Initiative has gathered extensive qualitative and quantitative data from internal and external assessments. It has analyzed these data and used findings from

them to refine reform strategies – professional development, instruction, leadership development and more. With each successive year, these strategies have been increasingly honed to an almost exclusive focus on literacy.

While the priority has been literacy, none of the goals has been abandoned nor have any issues fallen by the wayside. Having focused first on and made significant gains in improving teacher quality and stability and fostering effective leaders and leadership teams – factors that have the greatest effect on student achievement – HCDE and PEF are now turning their attention to family engagement and deepening their efforts to involve parents in more meaningful ways in their children's academic lives.

The experience of the Benwood Initiative has demonstrated to its participants that comprehensive reform, which has multiple goals and engages multiple categories and levels of people around multiple issues, is possible. Effectively addressing all of the goals, however, requires that they be prioritized and that the implementation of reform strategies be staggered.

Beyond encompassing an iterative process of testing and learning about overall approaches to reform and about specific reform elements, HCDE and PEF staff have also found that reform takes time because change is difficult. The Initiative is not a new phonics or creative writing program educators simply add to their curriculum. The goals of the Initiative and the strategies used to meet them shape everything that educators do, from how they read stories to and with students to how they create and subsequently evaluate homework assignments. These goals compel teachers to examine their beliefs about students and their families and about their roles and responsibilities as educators. They set far higher expectations for teachers, principals and other educators than they have faced before and for which they were not trained to fulfill; they are now striving to gain the knowledge and skills essential to meeting those expectations. No matter how frustrating, time is required for effective and sustained reform.





10. Myth: Effective teaching is an art, not a science.

Reality: Effective teaching draws on data, which enable teachers to make clear decisions about effective instructional practices.

Despite the proliferation of standardized tests, data about student learning are rarely used to inform teaching. For the most part, standardized tests are state-mandated and are given once a year, usually in the spring. Results are typically released as the school year is ending or during the summer and provide parents and other members of the community with a snapshot of their schools. Are schools generally doing well or less well? How is the school attended by one's children or in one's neighborhood doing? Can the business community and civic leaders tout the school system as a community asset when they are encouraging business development?

Educators delve more deeply into test results. They look for signs of success and for red flags signaling issues needing attention, such as a persistent decline in reading scores from fifth grade to eighth grade. Such a decline may indicate that the approach to literacy instruction in middle schools is flawed. Too often, however, data from the state exams are of limited utility in identifying specific problems. Are students struggling because they have limited vocabulary, because they are not exposed to a wide array of new words used in various ways? Are they struggling because they are not fluent, because they cannot quickly and easily identify words? Are they struggling because they do not understand their meaning or are unable to comprehend the meaning of these words when they are put together in sentences and paragraphs?

Even where state standardized exams offer insight into such questions, they are of limited practical use. Test results come to teachers after students have moved on to the next grade; they are not in teachers' hands when they are in the classroom, facing seven year-olds who are stumbling through the day's reading assignment. Teachers know their students are struggling, but for the most part, they have to rely on intuition, experience

and luck to identify the particular elements of reading that elude their students. Lacking the information needed to identify the specific problem means that most teachers in most districts are gambling with their students' academic progress. They do so because few schools and few districts are organized to provide teachers with the information that they need to make the best instructional decisions possible.

If luck – good or bad – once characterized instruction in the Benwood schools, it no longer does so. As described above, the Initiative is greatly expanding teachers' knowledge and skills so that they have deep understanding of literacy development and effective literacy instruction. (See Myth 3.) Closely aligned with this is another core component – data that are accessible, accurate, current and relevant so that teachers can correctly and quickly identify students' learning needs and make the best instructional decisions for them.

Drawing on information provided by HCDE and PEF staff, school leadership teams, from the Initiative's early days onward, embraced data as a powerful way to inform teaching. They quickly began exploring and instituting different types of assessments and churning out data. As one HCDE senior administrator described it, the Benwood schools went from a data "famine to a feast."

A feast, however, is at times too much. As the Initiative progressed, teachers and administrators began to question what they were assessing, why they were assessing it and how they were assessing it. They concluded that, in some instances, they were testing too much and the information they were generating offered little insight into students' learning needs. Assessments needed to have a clear purpose, one aligned with the Initiative's goals, and had to be tied to the work students were doing in the classroom. Most critically, assessments had to provide information that would be valuable to teachers in meeting those goals, that would enable them to quickly identify problems and respond with best instructional practices for individual students.

HCDE and PEF determined which assessments were aligned with student learning goals and provided accurate, accessible and current data to teachers, and which did not. They kept the former, instituting them across the Benwood schools, and jettisoned the latter. Multiple assessments are still used in the Benwood schools, but each is now aligned with student achievement goals and have demonstrated value in improving instructional practice and ultimately student learning. They include DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills); Running Records, and ThinkLink.¹⁴ DIBELS has proven to be so useful to Benwood teachers in quickly detecting problems among early readers that Register has implemented it across the district; all elementary schools now use DIBELS, and given the

¹⁴ DIBELS is a "set of standardized, individually administered measures of early literacy development" developed at the University of Oregon; it is administered at regular intervals throughout the school year and measures phonological awareness, alphabetic principle and fluency with connected text. Running Record is a structured way for teachers to track and record students' reading behaviors; among other things, it helps teachers monitor students' progress, identify the specific needs of individual children, and understand the reading skills and strategies that students have mastered. ThinkLink, created at Vanderbilt University, is a formative assessment that measures students' progress toward meeting state student achievement goals.



climb in reading scores at most schools, it has become an essential and powerful tool across the district.

Faculty have become adept at using assessment results to recognize teachers' specific instructional strengths as well as students' learning needs. Prompted by a new sense of collegiality and facilitated by such innovations as horizontal planning and other best practices that foster collaboration, teachers are more aware of what skills and knowledge they and their colleagues are particularly successful in teaching. They can now move children who are struggling to master certain skills or knowledge to the teacher who is most effective in providing instruction in them.

Although using data to inform best instructional practices is now embedded in Benwood schools, introducing and implementing assessments did not always proceed smoothly. These assessments are useful because they are comprehensive – they are given at regular intervals throughout the year and must be administered to each student separately. This format gives teachers the individualized data they need, but it requires time, something teachers are perpetually lacking. Many teachers readily admit that, even while understanding how data produced by assessments could strengthen their practice, they expected the assessments to be quite cumbersome. Already devoting considerable time and energy to deepening their pedagogical knowledge, they were somewhat less than enthusiastic at times about implementing them and may not have done so had Register not required it of them. Speaking in hindsight, however, many also readily admit that the data generated through these assessments have become essential to their teaching and – time-consuming or not – they would not wish to forgo them.

11. Myth: The way to improve education is simply to hold teachers accountable for outcomes on standardized exams.

Reality: The way to improve outcomes is to improve teaching through a combination of internal and external evaluations and feedback for each teacher continuously.

With its testing requirements and the high-stakes penalties that can be imposed as a result, NCLB has made standardized exams the core, if not the entirety, of most states and many districts' accountability systems. As described above, there is value in these exams; among other things, they enable goals to be set across schools and districts and offer a snapshot of progress toward those goals. (See Myth 10.) They do not, however, constitute a complete and effective system of accountability if the purpose of the system is two-fold – holding people responsible for meeting expectations and improving teaching and learning. Many state and district accountability systems focus on the former and pay scant attention to the latter.

For those involved in the Benwood Initiative, an accountability system must accomplish both. There are clear and high expectations of all involved, and there are consequences when those expectations are not fulfilled. At the same time, accountability is about information – gathering, analyzing and using data to improve teaching and learning.

Multiple methods are used across the Benwood schools to gather information and establish accountability. Data from assessments are a primary means of doing so. Data from quantitative assessments of student learning are, in many ways, the final calculation of achievement and, hence, the final measurement of accountability. Assessment data showing consistent gains in student achievement indicate that teachers and administrators are on the right track; a lack of gains or, worse, a decline in test scores reveals problems. The array and quality of the assessments used in the Benwood schools help to ensure that problems are flagged and resolved quickly. (See Myth 10)

Assessment data are not the only means for detecting emerging problems and establishing accountability. To understand clearly and accurately what underlies rising or stagnating test scores – the specific practices and policies that are resulting in the scores and who is responsible for them both in design and implementation – principals, assistant principals, CTs, HCDE and PEF staff are in schools and in classrooms every day.

In many districts, principals and other school leaders venture into classrooms once or twice a year, usually for administrative purposes. This is not the case in Hamilton County. Benwood principals, assistant principals and CTs are in classrooms continuously. It is their responsibility to know what's going on, to quickly identify and help correct ineffective teacher practices and to surface structural or policy issues that may impede teachers' effectiveness. It is, in turn, the responsibility of HCDE and PEF staff to know what is going on in schools, and they do because they are in them.

Ray Swoffard, the Associate Superintendent for Elementary Education, and Susan Swanson, the Director of Urban Education, are in schools regularly and frequently; each often visits multiple schools throughout the week. PEF staff are also in schools on an almost daily basis. All talk to principals, assistant principals, CTs and teachers in both formal and informal settings. They observe how teachers, principals and others work in the classroom and outside of it and offer ideas for improving practice. They review assessment data – from the various “interim” assessments such as DIBELS, Running Records and ThinkLink as well as from state assessments – with teachers and principals. They ask questions about issues school staff have noted are troubling and also surface new issues that might be impeding reform. While HCDE and PEF staff are in schools so frequently to assist school staff in finding answers to the challenges they face, they are also there to ensure that expectations are being met. School staff know that when HCDE and PEF staff start asking questions, they need to start finding answers.

Overseeing all of this is the Initiative’s steering committee, which includes not only senior staff of both HCDE and PEF but also Superintendent Register, Challenger, and Corinne Allen, the executive director of the Benwood Foundation. Their involvement is hands-on and active, not cursory, and it sends a strong signal to staff throughout the schools that this Initiative and their work in it matters and will be observed. The steering committee meets regularly to review progress, identify and help resolve challenges and plan for next steps.

One of the committee’s primary responsibilities is appraising schools’ annual plans. Every year, school leadership teams prepare a plan of work that will move each school forward in meeting the Initiatives goals. The plans must include not only what they will do but why they will do it; teams must be clear in explaining why they have selected the particular strategies that they have and what challenges they address. Principals present their teams’ plans to the steering committee, who, in turn, carefully scrutinize every aspect of them. The committee’s approval is not pro-forma. It has sent plans back to leadership teams for revision on multiple occasions. The committee encourages school teams to be innovative and thoughtful risk-takers, but it expects teams to rely on research and demonstrated best practices in doing so.

The school plans are informed by another type of assessment – an external assessment, which is conducted by a team of evaluators with deep expertise in school reform. The evaluators spend considerable time in schools and classrooms and review extensive data, both quantitative and qualitative. Coming from outside the district and the community, they are, at times, better positioned to be objective about particular strategies or practices and to maintain a focus on the long-term goals of the Initiative than even HCDE and PEF staff are. Their more distant perspective on the Initiative has also helped the external researchers surface issues common across the nine Benwood schools. This has assisted the steering committee in focusing its work with the school leadership teams as it sets and refines its expectations of them.

In Hamilton County, data – both quantitative and qualitative – are collected, analyzed and shared to improve teaching and learning. The decisions teachers, principals, and

administrators make are better for students when they are informed decisions, when they respond to correctly identified student needs instead of guessed or assumed needs. Assessment data are not gathered to be punitive. Yet, teachers and principals are responsible for student learning, and if there is persistent evidence that learning is not improving, they will be removed. Reconstitution is the most prominent example of Register's willingness to remove staff who have demonstrated over time that they cannot or will not meet expectations. Determined to find the right principal for each school, he has also replaced most of the original Benwood principals; at several schools, he has done so more than once. Removing ineffective faculty members does more than take a non-productive educator out of the classroom or school – it demonstrates to remaining faculty that there are real consequences for not meeting expectations.

12. Myth: The appropriate venue for education reform is in schools and classrooms; efforts to communicate about education reform are a waste of time and money.

Reality: Communicating about reform – both inside and outside the school system – is a critical element of implementing and sustaining reform.

Effective communication between a school district and its community is essential for reform. It is, however, the one element of reform that districts and their partners frequently overlook or delay at considerable cost. Developing and implementing a communications strategy seems less important than other core components of reform such as identifying and instituting meaningful assessments or instituting effective professional development strategies. Too often, however, comprehensive reform efforts, such as the Benwood Initiative, become mired in misperceptions that can undermine their long-term success and sustainability. These misperceptions generally arise from a lack of information in the community about reform – the reason it is needed, the outcomes it seeks to attain, its strategies, its funding, how it will affect students across the system on a day-to-day basis and progress in it. Lack of information combined with the strong feelings and opinions that people hold about schools is frequently a recipe for trouble.

Unlike most other public institutions or systems, people feel closely connected to and are often passionate about their schools. Schools are where their children spend the bulk of their waking hours Monday through Friday, and teachers can seem as influential as parents. Schools are where community members gather to watch football games or basketball games and, in the process, connect to one another and build shared allegiances. Schools are where their tax dollars flow; in most places, more public funds go to schools than any other public institution or sector, and people often feel fierce ownership of these dollars. They do not see how their dollars are spent on prisons or on hospitals and clinics; they do, however, see the school in their neighborhood and want to know that school funds – their taxes – are used effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, everyone, whether or not they have children, has been to school. Consequently, almost everyone feels some level of expertise in schools and schooling. Many people believe that they know what works and what does not work in the classroom based on their memories of their own days in classrooms.

Through the combination of all of these factors, people often have very strong opinions about schools, teachers and, at times, even students. Reform – poorly communicated and misunderstood – frequently runs directly into these opinions, and in the case of the Benwood Initiative, on many occasions it has.

One of the most misunderstood and consequently most criticized elements of the Initiative was Register's decision to reconstitute the Benwood schools. (See Myth 7.) Many in the community believe that the reconstitution of the Benwood schools led to the transfer of large numbers of poor teachers from Benwood schools to suburban schools and of similarly large numbers of good teachers from suburban schools to the Benwood schools. This did not happen. Of the 200 teachers who re-applied for their jobs at Benwood schools, only 28 were involuntarily moved from Benwood schools to suburban schools. Anecdotal evidence indicates that some of these teachers have thrived in their new schools and that many of those who did not, chose to leave the district altogether.

Led by Register, and supported by Challenger, the district's leadership was careful in presenting this to school leaders; they communicated the need for reconstitution, their expectations of its results and the process by which it would occur. Less energy was devoted to communicating the same information to the broader community and to civic leaders, which has contributed to continued misunderstandings about and criticism of reconstitution.

Several years after it occurred, reconstitution remains a current source of criticism, usually of the superintendent. Several county commissioners, including the commission chair, continue to believe and publicly promote the perception that the district has moved low-performing teachers out of urban schools, such as the Benwood schools, and sent them to suburban schools.¹⁵

Compounding this inaccurate belief about reconstitution, there is also the perception held by some in the community and similarly promoted by civic leaders, including county commissioners, that Benwood schools are receiving, unfairly, far more funding than suburban elementary schools.

Benwood schools receive the same amount of state and local funds that other elementary schools in Hamilton County receive. Like all schools in the district and across the nation that serve low-income students, Benwood schools receive federal Title 1 funds. The Title 1 program, established in 1965, is designed specifically to help close the achievement gap between low-income students and their middle- and upper-income peers by providing

¹⁵ Carroll, Beverly A. "Suburban Schools Continue Academic Progress, Data Show," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. July 16, 2005.



additional financial resources to the schools they attend; Title 1 is an important funding source for the Benwood schools, as it is for many schools in Hamilton County. The Benwood schools also receive private grants of up to \$100,000 annually from the Benwood Foundation for the duration of the Initiative; when the Initiative ends, so do the grants.

The combination of Title 1 funds and Benwood grants seem to be a generous addition to the per pupil funds allocated to Benwood schools, funds that other schools, particularly those in suburban areas and serving more economically stable children and families, do not have access to. Instinctively this may seem unfair – all students in Hamilton County could benefit by having additional funds, particularly in a state that ranks 46th in the nation in per pupil funding.¹⁶ If more funding was available, the district would, for example, have been able to keep Consulting Teachers – likely the single most effective way to improve teachers’ knowledge and skills and hence student learning – in all of the elementary schools in the county as system leaders wished to do. Funds for these positions at every school, however, are not available through local and state monies; Benwood schools have been able to keep their CTs through the innovative and strategic use of Title 1 funds and Benwood Initiative grants.

Many people in the community do not understand that the additional funds Benwood schools receive are not local or state dollars or that they do not come at the expense of suburban schools. Even some of the community’s civic leaders do not fully understand the distinction in funding sources and have, as a result, cited it as evidence that the district manages funds poorly and called for Register’s removal.

The debate about fairness of funding implies an even deeper misunderstanding about the Benwood Initiative and the schools participating in them – it suggests that many in the community do not understand, or are not concerned about, the state of these schools prior to the Initiative or the needs of the students who attend them. In many ways, these

¹⁶ Education Week. *Quality Counts 2005 No Small Change: Targeting Money Toward Student Performance*. January 2005.

schools were among the vestiges of two unequal systems of public education. The Benwood schools and the teachers and students in them were, for decades, ignored. They had the weakest faculties, the poorest leadership, woefully inadequate resources for the needs of their students and the facilities in which they were housed were in utter disrepair. Perhaps most disheartening, no one expected much of these students and few were distressed when these students, often confronting profound challenges of poverty in their homes and bereft of adequate resources and expert teachers in their schools, failed year after year. This would not have been tolerated in more economically stable, more affluent neighborhoods. It was tolerated by many in the community in these schools until the Benwood Foundation aligned its vision and resources with the fervor and expertise of PEF and the dedication and will of HCDE to put an end to these disabling disparities. The Benwood Initiative has opened up opportunities to learn for low-income students that suburban students and their families have long taken for granted.

The degree to which these misunderstandings about the Benwood Initiative have permeated the community suggests that the communication efforts of HCDE and PEF have not been as far-reaching or effective as possible. The business community in Chattanooga, which in other cities has been an active and visible advocate for reform, has been only peripherally involved in the reform effort. While there are various reasons for its limited involvement, one representative of Chattanooga's business sector noted that they did not receive regular information from PEF and HCDE about the Benwood schools or the other reform initiatives they were pursuing together. If not provided with information about and opportunities to be engaged in reform, the business sector, or others in the broader community, will likely not be advocates for it.

PEF staff readily acknowledge that, pushed by the need to put other reform elements in place, they dedicated less time and resources to communicating with and reaching out to the business community, parents and other key stakeholders and that this has contributed to some of the criticisms and roadblocks they have faced. Confident that critical elements are in place in the Initiative, they are focusing increasing attention on communication and engagement, targeting first parents and families.

Conclusion: What Lies Ahead

The quiet truth about reform is that the process of transformation is never finished. It cannot be complete if one is committed to ensuring that every student succeeds in school to the best of his or her ability and that every teacher is as knowledgeable and as effective as she can be. Benchmarks may be set and reached. Student achievement goals may be determined and attained. The quest for academic excellence, however, does not end, for neither knowledge nor the world in which we live are static. Both are continuously evolving. Declaring an end to reform would be to embrace the status quo.

To fulfill their vision for the Benwood schools and for the district itself, HCDE, PEF and the Benwood Foundation must continuously maintain and renew their dedication to reform and to the students who are its beneficiaries. The three collaborators have accomplished much in the schools and, drawing on lessons learned from the Initiative, in the district as well. Much, however, remains to be done, most particularly in four key areas: continuing collaboration, engaging families, enhancing communication and building public will.

Continuing Collaboration. The Benwood Initiative would not exist without its three partners. Each partner has brought essential and unique knowledge, skills and resources to the Initiative, and each has encouraged and enabled the others to develop new ideas and new capacities, which have, in turn, strengthened the Initiative. Their work together in the Initiative is not yet complete. Those deeply involved in the Initiative, who work in schools as members of faculties or as advisors to them, speak of the tremendous growth that has been made as well as of what remains to be done. They understand that, if the Initiative were to end now, teachers and students' potential would not be fully realized and that many of the changes put in place would erode over time.

The presence of PEF and the Benwood Foundation will be particularly important in the coming years. Superintendent Register has decided that, at the close of the 2005 – 06 school year, his tenth year leading the district, he will retire. In many communities, a change in the superintendency threatens reform for a variety of reasons. In the upcoming period of transition within HCDE, PEF and the Benwood Foundation can help teachers and administrators at all levels continue their focus on and commitment to their work. They can encourage other members of the district's leadership, including the school board and senior administrators, to maintain the course of the Benwood Initiative.

If they are able to foster a similarly trusting relationship with the new superintendent, PEF and the Benwood Foundation may be able, as well, to counter the tendency of incoming superintendents to dismantle their predecessors' initiatives. Building a relationship with a new superintendent will take time and sensitivity, but it is an investment that must be made and nurtured.

Engaging Families. The partners have taken critical first steps to engage families. Six schools, for example, have family partnership specialists; their responsibility is reaching

out to parents and other family members and providing them with the information, tools and opportunities needed to be actively involved in their children's academic lives. Low-income parents, as most in the Benwood schools are, face many hurdles to involvement in their children's schools and in nurturing academic success at home. Yet parents have a critical role in ensuring that students stay in school and succeed. The partners must continue to identify and implement effective approaches to engaging parents and cultivating their involvement.

Enhancing Communications. Several of the obstacles the Initiative and those leading it have run in to reflect a lack of information about and understanding of reform. Thus far, each partner has focused on the body of reform – the essential changes that must be made in schools and in the central office if instruction is to improve and learning to expand. Communication has been farther down the list of priorities. The lack of awareness across the community about the Initiative – its purpose, progress and implications for the rest of the district – threatens to undermine it. The partners must identify and institute effective communications strategies to reduce the misconceptions that circle it.

Building Public Will. Closely tied to increased and better communications is fostering public will. The continuation and success of reform depends in part on the public's desire and support for it. If parents, business leaders and others whose voices are listened to advocate for the reforms underway through and as a result of the Benwood Initiative, civic leaders and others who make and influence decisions will support reform as well.

Building public will, like reform itself, is neither easy nor quick. It requires more than effective communications, though that is essential. It requires ensuring people have a role in reform, that they are able to contribute in a way that is meaningful to them so that they become invested in reform's success. PEF has worked closely with parents and other community members over the years on a variety of important issues such as the formation of rigorous curriculum standards. It is well positioned to undertake this kind of effort.

The Benwood Initiative is defying the myths that often stifle reform. It is transforming teaching and learning in nine urban elementary schools, and the students in these schools now have a genuine opportunity to achieve academically and thrive in the community. Addressing the four issues described above will deepen and enhance the significant changes the Initiative has already fostered. The future is finally hopeful.

Appendix A: About Kronley & Associates

Kronley & Associates has more than twenty years' experience in providing strategic consulting services to philanthropic organizations (including family, independent, company-sponsored and community foundations), non-profits, corporations, public agencies and individuals. The firm's work includes policy and program analysis, strategic planning, evaluation and targeted advice on change issues. Substantive areas of interest include education reform, community and economic development, social services, youth development, equity, and philanthropic and corporate giving. The firm works closely with clients to chart pathways to change as well as to develop deep understanding about the impact of possible strategies on outcomes and goals. Each client is treated as a unique entity, and the firm strives to develop creative approaches to needs and issues.

Some current and recent clients include: the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Ball Foundation, the BellSouth Foundation, the Benwood Foundation, the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Community Care Foundation, the Community Memorial Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Forum for Education and Democracy, The Foundation for the Carolinas, the Joyce Foundation, the Meridian Public School District, the Panasonic Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Southeastern Council of Foundations, and the Tupelo Public School District.

The project team that developed *Challenging Myths: The Benwood Initiative and Education Reform in Hamilton County* was comprised of the following persons:

Robert A. Kronley is President of Kronley & Associates. Areas of focus include policy analysis, strategic planning, evaluation and program dissemination. Mr. Kronley has written extensively on education, philanthropy and public policy.

Claire Handley is Senior Associate at Kronley & Associates. Her focus there includes research, data collection and analysis, program evaluation, and strategic planning. She has written extensively on public policy, education and philanthropy and has provided strategic advice to numerous philanthropic and nonprofit clients.

Appendix B: Interviewees and Focus Group Participants

Name	Organization
Corinne Allen	Benwood Foundation
Terri Bailey	Hamilton County Department of Education
Kristy Bramlett	Hamilton County Department of Education
Gene Burnett	Weldon F. Osborne Foundation
Beverly Carroll	Chattanooga Times Free Press
Dan Challener	Public Education Foundation
Neena Clevenger	Hamilton County Department of Education
Janice Coffman	Hamilton County Department of Education
Dick Corbett	Independent Educational Researchers
Bob Corker	City of Chattanooga
Anita Creasman	Hamilton County Department of Education
Lonita Davidson	Public Education Foundation
Shavon Diggs	Hamilton County Department of Education
Diane Doyle	Hamilton County Department of Education
Leslie Graitcer	Public Education Foundation
Sylvia Greene	Hamilton County Department of Education
Jane Harbaugh	Public Education Foundation
Karen Hollis	Hamilton County Department of Education
Anita Horton	Hamilton County Department of Education
Courtney Johnson	Hamilton County Department of Education
Penny King	Hamilton County Department of Education
Stephanie King	Hamilton County Department of Education
Warren Logan	Urban League of Greater Chattanooga
Jack Murrah	Lyndhurst Foundation
Raquel Newton	Hamilton County Department of Education
Barbara O'Hara	Hamilton County Department of Education
Janetta Patterson	Hamilton County Department of Education
Faye Pharr	Public Education Foundation
Jesse Register	Hamilton County Department of Education
Wendy Roberts	Hamilton County Department of Education
Teresa Seymore	Hamilton County Department of Education
Susan Swanson	Hamilton County Department of Education
Stephanie Spencer	Public Education Foundation
Bo Sudderth	Benwood Foundation
Ray Swoffard	Hamilton County Department of Education

Appendix C: School Profiles

Calvin Donaldson Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	239
Economically Disadvantaged	92%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	8.1
African American	89.3
Hispanic	2.7
Asian	0.0
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	48.0	52.6	52.0	48.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	48.0	51.7	51.0	49.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	46.0	53.7	50.0	50.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	30.0	69.9	27.0	73.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	29.0	70.4	26.0	74.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	31.0	69.3	28.0	72.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Clifton Hills Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	406
Economically Disadvantaged	98.3%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	32.2
African American	65.9
Hispanic	1.7
Asian	0.2
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	50.0	50.0	43.0	57.0
White	26.0	73.4	48.0	52.0
African American	59.0	40.9	41.0	59.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	48.0	51.5	45.0	55.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	37.0	63.6	25.0	75.0
White	19.0	80.8	22.0	78.0
African American	42.0	57.6	27.0	73.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	36.0	63.8	26.0	74.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles East Lake Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	321
Economically Disadvantaged	94.5%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	30.9
African American	65.3
Hispanic	3.5
Asian	0.0
Native American	0.3
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	41.0	58.7	41.0	59.0
White	26.0	73.5	35.0	65.0
African American	48.0	52.8	42.0	58.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	42.0	58.0	40.0	60.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	26.0	74.2	35.0	65.0
White	23.0	76.5	34.0	66.0
African American	27.0	72.9	36.0	64.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	27.0	73.7	36.0	64.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles East Side Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	488
Economically Disadvantaged	96.7%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	5.9
African American	68.9
Hispanic	25.2
Asian	0.0
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	%Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	41.0	58.9	28.0	72.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	39.0	70.2	31.0	69.0
Hispanic	58.0	41.7	22.0	78.0
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	42.0	58.3	27.0	73.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	30.0	70.0

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	%Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	39.0	60.1	37.0	63.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	37.0	63.3	35.0	65.0
Hispanic	63.0	37.9	34.0	66.0
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	40.0	60.0	36.0	64.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Hardy Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	560
Economically Disadvantaged	97.3%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	2.9
African American	97.0
Hispanic	0.2
Asian	0.0
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	49.0	51.4	27.0	73.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	49.0	50.9	28.0	72.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	47.0	52.4	28.0	72.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	45.0	55.4	30.0	70.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	44.0	55.6	30.0	70.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	43.0	56.2	30.0	70.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Hillcrest Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	291
Economically Disadvantaged	93.8%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	19.1
African American	77.2
Hispanic	2.2
Asian	0.9
Native American	0.6
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	%Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	42.0	58.3	27.0	73.0
White	30.0	70.0	25.0	75.0
African American	42.0	57.5	30.0	70.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	46.0	53.9	28.0	72.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	%Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	35.0	65.0	21.0	79.0
White	39.0	60.9	8.0	92.0
African American	34.0	66.0	24.0	76.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	35.0	64.4	23.0	77.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Howard Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	252
Economically Disadvantaged	92.8%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	2.2
African American	97.4
Hispanic	0.4
Asian	0.0
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	54.0	45.4	45.0	55.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	55.0	44.5	45.0	55.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	55.0	44.6	47.0	53.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	43.0	57.3	42.0	58.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	42.0	58.2	44.0	56.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	44.0	56.7	41.0	59.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Orchard Knob Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	359
Economically Disadvantaged	96.3%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	0.9
African American	98.2
Hispanic	0.5
Asian	0.5
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	44.0	56.4	46.0	54.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	44.0	56.4	46.0	54.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	42.0	57.4	47.0	53.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	32.0	67.6	32.0	68.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	32.0	67.6	32.0	68.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	29.0	70.8	33.0	67.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Appendix C: School Profiles Woodmore Elementary School

Student Population

Number of Students	453
Economically Disadvantaged	95.3%

Ethnicity(Percent)

White	3.1
African American	96.7
Hispanic	0.0
Asian	0.2
Native American	0.0
Pacific Islander	0.0

Criterion Referenced Academic Achievement

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Math				
All Students	47.0	52.9	39.0	61.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	49.0	50.7	41.0	59.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	47.0	53.1	39.0	61.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

	2003		2004	
	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced	% Below Proficient	% Proficient & Advanced
Reading/Language Plus Writing				
All Students	27.0	73.0	34.0	66.0
White	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
African American	28.0	72.2	34.0	66.0
Hispanic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Native American	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Economically Disadvantaged	29.0	71.4	35.0	65.0
Limited English Proficient	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a



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