

# WHOLE SCHOOLING RESEARCH PROJECT

## IV. MICHIGAN TEAM SCHOOL STORIES

In this section, we provide a school-by-school description, organized around the Five Principles of Whole Schooling, of each school’s implementation of inclusive education. In the next section, we conduct a cross-schools analysis synthesizing our findings. The intensive study schools were those in which we spent intensive time for at least two years of the project period in Michigan. The data from these schools is the basis for most of our findings. Short-term schools were schools in which we spent some time for one year of the project. The comparison schools were those associated with related research and development projects. We spent a range of one to three years working as participant observers in a change process in these schools.

Tables on the following three pages provide additional summary information about these schools. Table 2 illustrates demographic information for both intensive study and short-term schools while Table 3 provides a side-by-side summary comparison of practices of inclusive education, instruction, support, leadership, and other practices for the five intensive study schools and one short-term study school. We will first provide a brief summary of each school followed by a detailed description of each of the intensive study schools moving from proximity to the city of Detroit to rural areas. This is followed by brief descriptors of short-term and comparison schools.

### Short-term schools.

We spent less than a year observing in three schools in our study: Avery in Detroit (elementary), Westover Elementary in the northern part of Michigan’s lower peninsula, and Drummond High School, a school in a suburb in Macomb County north of Detroit. In the case of Westover, the observer assigned to that school moved to another state; at Drummond High School, a new principal was hired and he was not interested in pursuing participation in the project. We replaced these two schools with the Detroit elementary school. These schools are briefly described below.

**Table IV-1  
INTENSIVE STUDY SCHOOLS**

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Elementary	1	1	2
Middle School			
High School		1	

### SHORT-TERM SCHOOLS

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Elementary	1		1
Middle School			
High School		1	

### COMPARISON SCHOOLS

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Elementary	4		
Middle School			

## **Comparison schools.**

During the project period, researchers were also involved in related school reform and professional development projects in three elementary schools in Detroit. These schools had committed to becoming inclusive schools and moving towards Whole Schooling practices. However, it was clear early on that these schools were far from utilization of most of the practices associated with the Whole Schooling principles. Along with observations conducted by students in schools throughout the metropolitan area, these schools provided important contrasts to the intensive study schools that were very helpful.

## **Intensive study schools.**

We spent the most intensive time in four elementary schools and one high school in this study. Below, we describe these schools and their practices in some detail. We begin with a brief summary below.

**Meadowview Elementary** is near the border of Detroit in a multi-racial school with a free and reduced lunch rate in 1999-2000 school year of 53%. The school has 472 students where students with mild through moderate disabilities are fully included. The two special education teachers, speech therapist, and Title I personnel provide most support in the general education classes. The school has emphasized multi-age classes, looping, student-led conferences, building community among children, and holistic and project-based learning.

**Hamilton Elementary** is a K-5 school located in a wealthy near suburb of Detroit. With a high degree of language diversity, the school nevertheless served only a small number of low income children and children of color. The school has worked towards inclusion for some 10 years. A range of support services for students with special needs in the school include two special education teachers, a speech therapist, a gifted education teacher, bilingual education teachers, an early intervention literacy team of teachers and paraprofessionals, and several paraprofessionals assigned to classes with students having more significant disabilities.

**Evergreen Elementary** is a school in a rural area an hour from Detroit. Housing 800 students, it is the only elementary school in this small district. The school has committed to including all students with disabilities, serves mostly White children, and has a small, but rising, free and reduced lunch rate of 19%. Two special education teachers provide support in clustered 'inclusion' classes in upper elementary, providing 1/2-day support in each class, with a paraprofessional providing support the other 1/2 day. In lower elementary, multi-age classes and paraprofessionals provide a supportive environment.

**Armstrong Primary** is a K-3 school in a very rural area serving mostly White children but in an area of high poverty, having a free and reduced lunch rate of 56%. The school has committed to including all children with disabilities. A team of Specialists – special education teacher, speech therapist, occupational therapist, Title I teacher, counselor – provide in-class supports along with paraprofessionals assigned to most classrooms.

**Rogers High School.** Located in a near suburb of Detroit, this school includes students with mild disabilities in clustered, co-taught classes between general and special education. Staff have developed over the last ten years a cohesive positive working relationship between general and special education teachers. A class of students with severe and multiple impairments is also located in the building. While these students spend most of their time in a special education classroom, they go into general education classes throughout the day.

## SHORT-TERM SCHOOLS

### Avery

#### *Urban Elementary magnet school.*

Avery was initially established as a Waldorf school, under a previous superintendent. Teachers participated in Waldorf training, but because the curriculum, in particular the reading curriculum, differed so much from that of Detroit Public Schools, the school never fully implemented the Waldorf philosophy and methods, but described itself as being "Waldorf inspired." At the time that the school joined the study, all connections to the Waldorf approach had been formally abandoned and most materials had been removed. Only one staff member remained "from the Waldorf days." The school continues to implement some practices from the



Waldorf era, however, using brain-based and multiple intelligence theories in their curriculum and philosophy of teaching. Unique about this school is the fact that the art teacher serves as the lead teacher, and art is used to teach all academic subjects.

A primary component of the curriculum is a partnership formed with Wayne State University called "Art Centered Education" (ACE). The school partners with the university and an arts group.

Representatives from dance and theater come into the classes and teach aspects of the curriculum through their art. The principal at Avery is inclined toward inclusion of students with special needs; however, she is functioning in within a school district that has traditionally segregated the vast majority of students with significant special needs.

The most outstanding quality of this school is the leadership role of the art teacher and the central focus on art. Certainly, there is evidence of attempts to teach and adapt for diversity using art. There is also a strong focus on the use of arts to help connect family through ritual and traditional craft. For example, the students did not celebrate Halloween, but instead celebrated Ancestors Day, in which students dressed as one of their ancestors and completed programming on this theme. There are approximately five large programs per year including Black History Month, Christmas, and an annual "extravaganza." The school uses thematic instruction linking arts and academics around a particular theme. Students write stories for a newspaper. A recent unit was "cooperative economics" in which students made things to sell. After school, there is also a program for artistically gifted and talented students, as well as extensive programming for all interested students. Another recent unit involved reading Harry Potter. Mandy, the art teacher, coordinated this. Students kept their copy of the book as



well as a black gel pen and notebook for fun notes. Students had to write down and look up vocabulary words and also design their own bookmark.

The principal expressed concern that the students with special needs were bused to this magnet school, whereas other students lived in the neighborhood or had parents who were committed to the school's approach and therefore provided their own transportation. The special education students, on the other hand, were merely assigned to the school by the central office and did not necessarily have parents with any interest in the special nature of this school. As a result, the students with special education labels left on their buses immediately after school and did not participate in the after school programs that were a vital part of this school's community-building effort. As a group, their parents were far less involved with the school than were the general education parents. Since after school activities were frequently integrated with activities taking place during the school day, this situation created an additional challenge to genuine inclusion of students with disabilities.

### **Drummond High School** *Semi-rural metropolitan suburb.*

Drummond High School rises out of a rural landscape like a postmodern fortress. The imposing stone and glass structure stands stark in a field that only a short time ago must have been someone's farm. Most students and faculty are proud of their contemporary structure. On our first visit, we were only certain this was a school because the flashing sign outside the building proclaimed its name. The front door, not easily noticeable, opened to a large commons area in the center of the building. Here students eat lunch and participate in school wide functions. Banners and art projects hang from a third floor above the commons area. Inside, the corridors are carpeted; the walls seem to have fresh paint, looking barren, yet clean and new.

Drummond is a suburb approximately 45 minutes northwest of the metropolitan Detroit area. It is a predominately white area, with a population of mixed ethnic descent, comprised of people from working class backgrounds. At the time of our study, there was a surge in population in the county. A large number of upper middle-income homes were under construction, looking almost as out of place as the school building itself. According to the principal, many of these homes require the income of two parents.

### **The Road Toward An Inclusive School**

In response to the increase in the population, Drummond High School was built in 1995. It was conceived with a focus on engaging students in learning through interdisciplinary programming with teams of teachers working together. The original staff was drawn from neighboring schools and had the luxury of meeting to plan and discuss their vision prior to coming to the new school. The teachers seem proud of the simplicity and power of their mission statement, "Drummond is a place for all to learn." Teachers we interviewed report feeling proud of their school and believe many of the components of a democratic school are in place, despite the fact that not all teachers embrace team teaching and the inclusive teaching philosophy.

Before coming to Drummond, two very strong teachers had been talking about their experiences with students in special education. They had found that students in special education typically had low expectations for themselves. Once at Drummond, these teachers advocated team teaching classes comprised of a mix of special education and general education students,

but unfortunately, not enough teachers were willing to try this. As a compromise, the school adopted a model under which two general education teachers and one special education teacher worked together as a team, with the two groups of students assigned to their team. The special education teacher is not known by the students to be a special education teacher, and in fact, this teacher works with all the students in the team. The school itself was designed so that four classroom groups could be clustered together as an integrated team, with movable walls between them.

At the time of our study, the situation had evolved so that the ninth grade had two four-teacher teams of English, Social Studies, Science, and Math teachers. The special education teacher worked with both teams. In the tenth grade, English and History classes were team-taught. The twelfth grades also have some teams of teachers working together. The eleventh grades do not use interdisciplinary teaming due to problems in scheduling. (While teachers favoring the team approach had hoped to move towards block scheduling, political battles have prevented this from happening to date.)

Integrated classes at Drummond were comprised of honors, general education, and special education students. Starting in the tenth grade, students could sign a contract to carry an enriched academic load in History, English, Chemistry, and Government. Students pursue studies independently with support of faculty, engaging in reading articles on a topic, and then writing about it. Students must maintain an A average to be in the program; however, this is usually easy to do since they get extra points for their extra work as part of the honors program. If they do not do the work, they are simply not in the honors program. This way of conceiving the honors program results in raising the standards in all classes. It also gets beyond the potential for a small group of teachers to head up an elite group of students. The honors students also seem to benefit from having less academically inclined students in their classes. One example of this a situation in which an honors student and another student considered “at-risk” became friends and worked together on a project. The at-risk student did not write well but had a passion and a voice in her writing. The honors student wrote well technically but lacked a passionate voice. Both of these students worked well together and complemented one another.

One challenge to this model is the desire on the part of some parents to retain the traditional system of honors classes. One parent explicitly stated he did not want his child in class sitting next to a special education student. Another challenge comes from the teachers themselves. During the 2000-2001 school year, the science teachers (with the exception of the two science teachers who team in the ninth grade) initiated a major debate over the current system of honors election. They wanted to have traditional, separate honors classes. This was rejected by a vote of the staff and the new principal, Mary, upheld the vote.

In the same way the honors students are integrated within the general education classes, so too are students in special education integrated within general education classes. Initially, the main concern was that the students in special education would disrupt learning for the others; however, this has not been the case. The first principal believed students are disruptive when they are bored, so that high quality instruction would decrease disruptive behavior among all students.

During our first visit to Drummond, we met with the first principal, Abe, a soft-spoken man who is seen by staff as facilitative and supportive. At the end of our first year, Abe resigned and was replaced by a principal who was less vocal about inclusion. Initially some of the staff thought Mary may not have shared the vision of inclusion and integrated teaching teams; however, the outcome of the honors debate indicated otherwise. The staff now believes he may

be motivated by political concerns within the school board and administration, rather than opposition to the original mission of the school. They notice that “when push comes to shove, he has supported the progressive-minded teachers” (a teacher, personal communication, May 13, 2002). Because, at the beginning of his tenure at Drummond, Mary did not meet with us despite several attempts on our part to do so, this report will describe Drummond under the tenure of Abe.

### **Include All**

Drummond, as has been described, is a school in which students with diverse abilities (honors through special education) enroll in classes together, and where teachers teach in interdisciplinary teams. For students who had been labeled as special education students in previous schools, their first year at Drummond is spent learning new responsibilities and how to advocate for themselves. For example, in previous schools students understood that because they were in special education they did not have to do homework. Thus, they were trained to have low expectations for themselves. At Drummond, students are nurtured to understand their abilities and to be responsible for their work.

In addition to this model of teaching, a building-wide awards program is open to all students. The purpose is “to promote, recognize and reward excellence in performance in all areas of the school curriculum” (Drummond Award System). A points system allows students to accumulate points awarded grades in academic subjects, participation in clubs, service groups, and athletics. In other words, the 75 points necessary to be awarded a Drummond letter can be earned through participation in athletics, in clubs or service groups, or through grade point.

Many different programs comprise this school, so that students have the opportunity to contribute to the school culture in many ways. A very nice restaurant at the school is run by students in the Career and Technical Studies programs. Another building was being built on the school campus by the construction majors. Once completed the building was sold and moved to land the purchaser had bought. There is a preschool program for students’ and teachers’ children that has its own wing. In other words, one need not be an athlete to be popular or to have a special role at Drummond--there are many special programs that are highlighted and valued and in which students may derive a sense of identity and in which they can feel proud to participate.

In terms of the school community, the building uses the concept of an "idea generator." This provides an opportunity for all stakeholders (parents, students, staff) to identify problems and provide solutions. People in all groups have taken advantage of this opportunity. In addition, parents and students serve on the School Improvement Team alongside school staff.

## **Instruction**

At Drummond, heavy emphasis is placed on faculty collegiality. By participating in teaching teams, teachers have given up their comfortable solitude. They plan together and teach together. As at Rogers, it is up to the team to decide how they will carry out the actual mode of instruction. In some teams, we observed two teachers teaching together. In other teams, we observed one teacher taking the lead for certain subject areas, while the other teacher stayed in the background, often reading or grading papers, yet available if needed. Negotiating co-teaching arrangements requires a lot of discussion and compromise between the teaming teachers.

In addition to the integrated teams, adaptations are made for students when necessary. Adaptations can include tests being read orally, and word banks being given for multiple-choice questions. Correct notes are distributed before tests, so that if a student having difficulty with taking notes would still have a full set of notes prior to an exam. Tutoring is also available at the school on Saturdays.

## **Parent And Community Partnerships**

A Booster Club is not affiliated with any particular student group and is committed to the success of every student, not just those involved in extracurricular activities. The intent with all programs has been to support the needs of every student.

A social studies teacher was particularly proud of a new independent study class that she felt exemplified the concepts of democracy she tried to model and teach. In this class, students select their own project. They sign a contract about what they will study and the outcomes they will achieve to demonstrate what they have learned. Students may elect to take this class twice.

## **Leadership, Democracy, Professional Development**

During our visits to Drummond, we were struck by the degree to which staff seemed to own the culture of the school, policies, etc. There was no sense of administration versus faculty, but rather of a complex democratic process among the staff themselves. The sense of collegiality began with the new teachers. There were teacher-mentors for new staff members, and "cracker barrel" discussion groups for teachers new to the profession. The staff took it upon themselves to meet at homes to talk about issues. Relationships had been established between Drummond staff and faculty at Wayne State, so that there was an also opportunity to participate in professional development outside of Drummond.

## **Lessons Learned, Questions To Ask**

It was very evident that several strong teachers and a principal committed to an inclusive vision did much to realize that vision. Yet, as with any changes in tradition, there were challenges to address and resolve. For example, attaining the benefits of working in inclusive teams required teachers to redefine their roles. Not all teachers have wanted to participate in integrated teams. Even among those who did choose to become involved, challenges still existed. One special education teacher, for example, needed to adjust to the idea that her partner teacher called a parent. Although this was helpful to her, it was also hard to give up being the only teacher who had contact with parents.

The non-academic subject teachers could also have been included more in the integrated teams. Both art teachers felt they were “being dumped on” with what they perceived to be more than the average number of students with behavior problems. Had they been included more in the planning, they might have bought into the inclusive philosophy. Instead, their exclusion may have contributed to their lack of motivation to embrace a team model of teaching. A social studies teacher agrees “the art teachers are dumped on when math failures are prevented from continuing on in a math class at the end of first semester.” This teacher feels “the math department is the biggest source of unofficial tracking at Drummond” (teacher, personal communication, May 13, 2002).

In other ways, the arts are being included in the teaching teams. For instance in 2001-02, one of the ninth grade teams includes all of the band and choir students. In addition, the idea to have a Spanish and a French team has been raised. What has held this back is the perception that scheduling would be impossible.

Questions about how and to what extent the inclusive efforts can be continued when not all teachers share this vision remain to be answered. Hopefully, the logistics for implementing this complex system of inclusion of honors, general education and special education students in teaching teams will be worked out. Drummond High School is engaged in some important and interesting experiments in the midst of a conservative county. The pressure to conform to the traditions of other high schools in the county may have contributed to Al’s decision to leave. Mary seems to be attempting to support traditions at Drummond that have proven successful, while balancing negotiations and communications with the school board and community who may be less familiar with the philosophy of inclusion.

## **COMPARISON SCHOOLS**

### **Urban Cluster**

#### *Urban elementary schools*

An allied project of the Whole Schooling Research Project, a project that provided interactive understandings, was a three-year intense involvement with three schools in one area of Detroit: Bonaventure, Hoover, and Hastings Elementary Schools. These schools came together as a cluster to participate in the school reform initiative of the Detroit Public Schools called the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Initiative, a major effort funded through the Annenberg Foundation. The group was organized by the principal of Bonaventure Elementary School and Michael Peterson.



From the beginning, the schools agreed to use the Whole Schooling framework as the centerpiece of their school reform efforts. Ultimately, however, the schools were required to choose a school reform model that was identified in a catalogue compiled by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. They intentionally worked to select a model consistent with Whole Schooling and initial work was designed to be a collaborative effort of faculty associated with the Whole Schooling Consortium and staff of Accelerated Schools,



the model selected.

In the fall of 1999, the cluster was one of 10 in Detroit to receive four year funding for a comprehensive school renewal effort to transform teaching and learning in their schools. For one year, Wayne State faculty members Michael Peterson and Kathi Tarant-Parks worked collaboratively as members of the Whole Schooling Consortium. Michael provided support to all three schools related to movement towards inclusive education. Kathi did this in Hoover Elementary School as part of her primary role as an external coach for the Accelerated Schools Project. She spent much time helping teachers to develop innovative approaches to literacy based on her work combining inclusive education with the Early Literacy Project approaches. They collaborated with Susan Florio-Ruane of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) who had been working with teachers at Bonaventure Elementary to develop a Literacy Circle, a study and support group of teachers to help improve literacy instruction.

Unfortunately, the great promise eventually disintegrated because administrative leadership in several schools did not support substantive change with respect to either literacy instruction or inclusive education. However, much was learned in this effort that has helped to inform an understanding of how to create quality schools, as well as the barriers presented by attitudes, use of power, and purely administrative decision-making. Below, we would like to describe how this work played out and describe lessons learned along the way.

### **Bonaventure Elementary**

Bonaventure Elementary School has a population of approximately 660 students with classes from Head Start through grade five. It also houses three special needs classrooms. It is a school-wide Title I building offering technological training and skills development, Project Share, after school programs, OmniArts, and history study at the Detroit Historical Museum. Institutional community partnerships include Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity (Iota Boule Adopt-A-School Program), Michigan State University, Detroit Institute of Arts; National Bank of Detroit In School Program, and Kappa Delta Pi Eastern Michigan University tutoring program. Parental and local community involvement includes the Site-Based Decision - Making Council, the Local School Community Organization, chaperones, and classroom tutors.

### **Hoover Elementary**

Hoover Elementary School has a population of 626 students. This includes five classrooms for students receiving specialized services. Special features and programs at Hoover include After School Tutorial Program, Family Math and Science, Kwanzaa Garden, Starbase, technology projects, and WyTriad. Each classroom is equipped with computers and telephones. Hoover School houses a community health center in conjunction with Mercy Hospital. The Southeast Optimist Club has been a long time partner. The Hoover School family works collaboratively to create a caring, nurturing, and challenging environment for all students. It is also a place where teachers, students, parents, and the community form learning partnerships to help ensure that students flourish in the information age.

## Hastings Elementary

Hastings Elementary School has an enrollment of 750 students. The population includes students from the Preschool level through grade five. Hastings also has two classrooms for students receiving specialized services. It incorporates a strong and diverse General Education Program that engages parents and students in homework initiatives. There is a full time MEAP Instructional Specialist; a counselor and social worker together form a Resource Recovery Team. Hastings also has instituted a School-to-Work Program to inform students about the employment process, and an After-School tutorial Program in which high school students assist instructional staff and students.

The schools came together as a cluster in 1998 to work together to improve our schools as part of the 21st Century Initiative of the Detroit Public Schools. Bonaventure Elementary School and faculty of the Whole Schooling Consortium agreed to work together to use the Five Principles of Whole Schooling to improve learning. The schools formed a Cluster Coordinating Team composed of administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and faculty. Per the requirements of the



21st Century Schools initiative, they formed a collaborative working group to begin to plan for school renewal. With support by the faculty of the Whole Schooling Consortium and the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, the cluster developed a 3 1/2 year plan. Some successful efforts occurred in the schools to move towards inclusive education and improved teaching.

- In Bonaventure Elementary School, a special education teacher began in the fall of 1999 to include all her special education students in general education classes. She followed them into these four classes to provide support, consultation, and assistance to the general education teacher. This was one of the first such efforts in the city of Detroit.
- Working with faculty of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA), teachers in Bonaventure Elementary School tried new strategies in literacy learning to engage students in authentic reading and writing. They formed a Literacy Circle in which teachers meet after school to read and discuss methods of improving instruction. In one class, students using these strategies had the highest test scores on a recent standardized test.
- In Hoover Elementary School, teachers began to try new engaging literacy strategies associated with the Early Literacy Project -- morning message, journals, author-sharing, and so forth. According to their teacher, many students were engaging in reading and writing in ways they had not done before.
- In Hoover, cadres were formed for teachers to engage in study and planning related to curriculum, assessment, and discipline. In March of 2000, faculty of the Whole Schooling Consortium met with a small group of teachers who decided to form an ongoing study cadre related to Inclusive Education. They are meeting at periodic 'chat 'n chew' sessions at lunchtime.

- Numerous after school program activities are being initiated by the Coordinators of Communities in Schools program at all three schools to involve parents and community members.

## **INTENSIVE STUDY SCHOOLS**

In this section, we describe in detail the school in which we spent the most time in this study.

### **Meadowview Elementary School**

*Close-in metropolitan suburb*

The road that divides the city proper from its more affluent suburbs is not just a thoroughfare but also a demographic boundary: It often describes differences in income levels, race, lifestyle, city services, government, and most importantly, public school systems. Meadowview Elementary School is located just north of the city limits. Situated in a surprisingly rural stretch of land, the road leading to Meadowview is dotted with fruit and vegetable stands, and tiny brick and wood frame single-family homes. The school itself sits in a cul-de-sac, surrounded by trees and the "Meadowview Nature Path." To the west, the neighborhood boasts an eclectic mix of homes, and by 2001, a dozen new luxury homes began construction nearby.

### **School and Community**

Meadowview was built in the 1960s as an "open school." Built in the shape of a circle, open classrooms line its circumference, with the gym, library, kitchen, and art room situated in its center. Each classroom has a door leading to the outside; however, the rooms and offices in the interior of the school are windowless. Of the 480 Meadowview students, 55% are African American; 40% are white, and 3% Chaldean (Iraqi Christians). In 1999, six Vietnamese students enrolled. Within its district, the school has the highest level of single parent families, primarily with female heads of households. While 52% of the students qualify for Title I, the district encompasses both the lowest and highest income levels of the district. Some students attending Meadowview live near a wealthy neighboring suburb, and others live in an area of the district that has a large, a low-income, trailer court community. The principal, Tom, believed many students from the latter community resent the closure of a school in their own neighborhood and still resist sending their children to Meadowview.



Nineteen classroom teachers comprise the faculty, both new and experienced teachers. In addition, there are an art teacher, a music teacher, a physical education teacher, and a librarian. There are two multi/categorical support teachers, one Title I teacher, one reading clinician, one special needs support teacher, an ESL teacher, a psychologist, a social worker, and a speech

pathologist, in addition to three para-professionals. At the beginning of this study, there were two kindergarten classes, three first grade classes, three second grade classes, one third grade class, one fourth grade class, one fifth grade class, one grades 1-2 multi-age class, one 2-3 multi-age, one grades 3-4 multi-age, one grades 3-4-5 multi-age and one grades 4-5 multi-age classrooms. The new principal, Nancy, has gradually eliminated all multiage classrooms, except for one (grade 1-2), and departmentalized the upper elementary grades.

### **Becoming An Inclusive School**

With a background in counseling and administration, Tom, the school principal at the beginning of this study, was a strong advocate for students and worked diligently to meet the needs of the whole child, emotional and physical as well as academic. Upon beginning his tenure as principal in 1992, Tom found students with special needs were segregated from their non-disabled peers, despite written policies that indicated otherwise. Many of the teachers believed that "differently labeled" children would not be able to work well in general education classrooms. Under Tom's leadership, Meadowview moved from a system of total "pull-out" to one of inclusion. During Tom's tenure, multi-age classes and two-year looped classes provided much of the structure for the inclusion model. "Occasionally students are pulled out of classes to be given additional support, but to do this there must be a very specific objective. When at all possible, students receive support in class" (Tom, interview, March 1999). In 1999-2000, twelve students had labels as special education certified students: four EMI (educably mentally impaired), four LD (learning disabled), one HI (hearing impaired), and four 'labeled at another school'). Children who would elsewhere have been identified as "emotionally impaired" were not given formal labels at Meadowview.

In 1998, the teaching staff began training in the Glasser choice theory model, which emphasizes awareness that all behavior is motivated by wants and that choices are available to students. In classroom situations, for example, if a student acts out, the instructor tries to determine what that child wanted to accomplish by exhibiting that particular behavior.



### **Support For Learning**

Those students identified as having particular needs are supported by the "STAR Team" (support team for students at-risk), which provides supports and collaborates with general education teachers. The team includes two special education teachers, two Title I funded teachers, one teacher funded through a grant for class size reduction, a reading clinician, and a speech therapist. A social worker and school psychologist also work

part-time. Finally, a full-time coordinator works provides training and support to children in conflict resolution through a grant with a local hospital. These individuals work as a team to develop collaborative schedules for in-class support. Students are heterogeneously placed in rooms across the school with much collaborative conversation among teachers across grade levels. No special education or other pull-out classes exist. Staff work together to help meet

individualized student needs. One student, for example, has an ear that did not develop on the outside, and consequently, a hearing impairment. Originally, the girl was enrolled in a school for the deaf, but the parents were dissatisfied with this school. Now she is at Meadowview with accommodations including headphones and sound amplification.

Student-directed parent-teacher-student conferences are another important way in which students are empowered. These are not the parent-teacher conferences common at other schools. Student-directed conferences are conferences involving and directed by the object of the conference: the student. Prior to the conference, the teacher reviews the student's progress with the student. Together, the two select the students' best work, and also examples of work that show where the student may need extra direction or support. The work is arranged in a portfolio. At the conference, the student presents his work to his parents, shows his progress, and articulates his goals with his teacher. Any problems or issues are also discussed, so that all three constituents are clear about the plan.

When visiting the school, one will see many smaller examples of the student empowerment that gives Meadowview its unique character.

In some classes, children select their classroom seating arrangements. In other classes, teachers select the more unpopular students who in turn select a partner for themselves for collaborative learning activities. Students are paired with one another to check each other's work. Students taking turns leading activities like Calendar Math. There are classroom community meetings are used to discuss issues and solve problems. Extracurricular programs focus on responsibility for others, such as Coats for Kids, and collecting money for medical expenses for children in other countries.



### **Authentic, Multi-Level Teaching**

The teaching approaches of staff are highly conducive to inclusive teaching. A culture of open and active learning has gradually developed over the years. Few teachers have desks arranged in rows. Most use tables where children often work in groups. Reading and writing workshop approaches are used in which children work at their own levels, sometimes alone and sometimes in pairs or small groups, as teachers conference with individual students. Until the 2001-2002 school year, every teacher in the school was involved in either a multi-age classroom or looping, practices that provide a continuity and sense of community among children and a context in which multi-level teaching becomes a natural part of the total curriculum. Many teachers use individualized spelling lists drawn from words misspelled in the students' own writing. Project-based learning is a centerpiece of curriculum. Residents from a local hospital weekly engage children in authentic, hands-on learning regarding health. The school is involved in the Jason Project, a science curriculum that is linked to satellite conferences involving children in data collection and connection with actual scientists conducting investigations. Students select their best work and show parents what they have learned in student-led conferences are used

where students, planned and conducted under the guidance of the teacher. Combined with in-class support, these strategies provide many options for students with differing abilities, needs, and challenges.

One of the most talented teachers in the school, Sandra, consistently demonstrated how she taught for diverse learners. The first time we visited her room, we thought it must be “center



time.” All the children were doing something different. Looking around the room, two children were playing the game, Maisy. Three were playing cards. Where was the teacher, we wondered. Finally, we found her sitting at a table with a small group of children, giving a spelling test. Some children were sitting at other tables copying spelling words. Sandra explained once spelling words are assigned, the students practice writing the words five times. Eventually, they take turns being individually tested by the teacher. All students have different spelling words, based on their "itty bitty" books-- 3 by 5

inch notebooks in which a dialog takes place between Sandra and the student. The student writes to the teacher, the teacher writes back, taking note of which words are misspelled, but close to being spelled correctly. Those words then become that child’s spelling words.

A second teacher, Rhoda, who helps with math, is seated on the floor with some of the students. They are using colored plastic disks, a manila folder divided in thirds of different colors, and are rolling a die. "They don't know it but they are learning to carry." Once they get five disks in one column, they take them away and add one in the middle column.

Just beyond the die rolling, it is calendar time, today directed by Shafik. I knew that because there was a note up on the board that said “Shafik is the special helper today.” First, the children sang days of the week to the tune of Adams' Family. Then, there were some questions printed on a piece of green paper from which Shafik could select to ask his “class.” In addition, a large chart board hung with some blanks to be filled in. “\_\_ease \_\_ind some time \_\_oday to read Andy’s Halloween story.” Calendar math resumed: How many days do we have until Keith’s birthday? How many days do we have until Halloween?

Calendar math continued: Since today the date was 21 October, the children had to make a square or rectangle with little magnet squares. This was followed by writing in their journals as many ways they could think to make “21”. A large shape was drawn on graph paper in the chart board. Children made estimations of how many squares were in the area. Next came perimeter estimations. Finally, all the squares were counted. Children were all to write the area in their math calendar books. Next came the date translated into money. Then they did the date in money. Two sticky dimes and one penny were placed up on the blackboard.

## Building Community

A variety of extra curricular programs provide opportunities for students to be involved in projects that best support their skills and interests. Meadowview's strong emphasis on building community to support learning can be seen in a number of its programs. There is an annual overnight parenting retreat each spring. Here, a bus takes 15 sets of parents to Frankenmuth for workshops, conversation, dinner, and camaraderie. This is provided for only \$15.00 per person.



The "Watch Me Grow" program meets on Wednesdays after school to talk about loss, feelings, home issues, and similar issues. There are PTA meetings with community dinners. A newsletter is published monthly. There are numerous assemblies for the whole school covering a variety of issues. In a recent assembly, just after the shooting of a six-year-old girl in Flint, students discussed school violence. Campfire girls and Voyager are summer programs, and the community service project, Make a Difference Day, takes place in the spring.

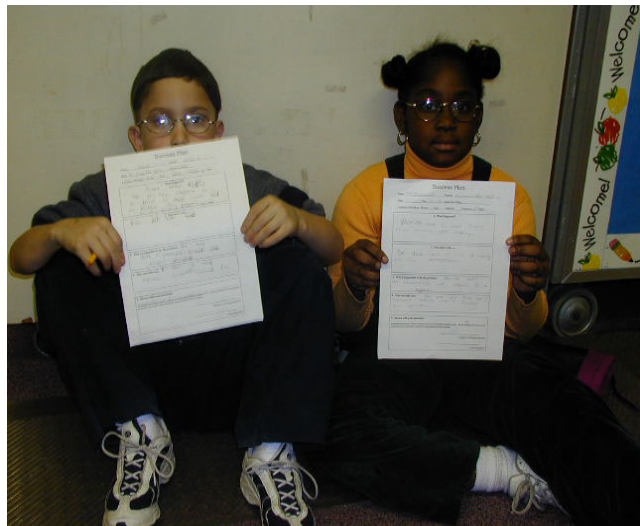
Another special project was the Wayne State service-learning project that was initiated as the result of the Whole Schooling project. For the service-learning project, students were selected by teachers based in part on who did not have a special extracurricular group with which they were connected. The students then worked with Wayne State students in addressing one of the problems of the school: a few students destroying the bathrooms. During a university semester, eleven Meadowview students and eleven Wayne State students worked together to try to solve the problem and sought to beautify the bathrooms through painting murals.

In the course of this project, an incident occurred with one of the Meadowview students that serves to illustrate how the entire school rallied around a single student in need: after school, Janine, the janitor stormed into the classroom. She had just passed Natasha's mother in the hall, and had been asked to hold her baby, Natasha's sister. Janine then was horrified to see Natasha's mother proceeded to "beat the crap out of Natasha with a belt." Janine was in shock, and she had the baby in her arms. Natasha was screaming and being hit hard and repeatedly. In trying to reconstruct what must have provoked this incident, we learned that Natasha's mother had a note in her hand that presumably said something about Natasha's negative behavior that day. We informed the principal of this incident, as well as the classroom teacher.

The entire Meadowview community rallied around Natasha and her family. A parent-teacher-principal meeting revealed that Natasha's family was going through a divorce. The mother would have new insurance in a month with a new job she had to assume, and promised to take Natasha in for counseling. Tom promised to arrange some appointments ahead of time for Natasha, so that when the insurance became activated, they would be ready to go. The mother was also considering going on the annual Meadowview overnight parenting retreat. Natasha's teacher began a "circle of friends" for her. This meant that in a class meeting, the teacher discussed the fact that Natasha was having some serious problems, and that the teacher alone could not help

her. She asked for volunteers to help Natasha when anyone noticed she was having a hard time. Eleven students raised their hands to be in Natasha's circle.

Natasha was not the only student who expressed problems in the course of the service project. Several others exhibited behavior unlike their school behavior. To Tom, this was evidence that inclusion works. "I saw some behaviors of kids that I would not expect to behave that way...Part of the inclusion model says that these kids will perform better when they have positive peer pressure, and in some regard we had children, who because of the small group and because of the attention and because the peer pressure was *not* to perform, who just fell apart. And they were kids who in another building could be resource kids, yet here when included in classrooms, are holding themselves together."



### **Behavioral Challenges.**

Generally, teachers are able to find ways to help children with diverse learning styles, who seem to want to learn, more so than they are able to find ways to help children whose behavior gets in the way of learning. Indeed, one of the biggest challenges for teachers is a child with behavior problems. Often, excluding children with behavior problems seems to be the best way to insure learning for the majority. When Tom was principal, he believed very strongly in keeping all the

students at Meadowview. He thought referring a child to an emotionally impaired program would not necessarily help the child, and in fact would sentence the child to being considered "emotionally impaired" for the rest of his or her life. Further, since all teachers had students who posed behavioral challenges, it would be too easy to continue to send problem students elsewhere.

Based on the Glasser philosophy, students with behavioral problems would not be punished. Instead, it is believed that determining the motivation of the child -- determining what that child wanted -- will lead to an awareness of alternative, more appropriate ways to accomplish the desired ends. Then the student completes a one-page "success plan" that asks the student to write out what happened, the motivation for the behavior and the goals, or what will be done differently in the future. At times, the success plans are sent home for signatures to keep parents informed. This way of dealing with behavioral issues actually empowers the students by helping them determine the more appropriate way to act in the future.

The second principal, Nancy, believed a little differently. Like Tom, she was very interested in the thought of keeping all children at Meadowview. In the beginning, it seemed she believed her will to make a good school would equip her with the ability to solve behavioral problems as well. But this did not always happen. A case in point was Jacob, a first grader with a ring around his mouth from licking chapped lips, who knew all the expletives. Nancy seemed to want to balance the desire to keep him in the school with responding to her teachers' frustration levels. She decided to refer him to a program for emotionally impaired children. The teachers had not been used to this happening. For some, it was a positive signal that Nancy would listen to their



concerns. Others felt less comfortable with bringing problem behavior to Nancy for fear that a child would be sent away.

## **Community Partnerships**

Meadowview has a number of partnerships in place with community groups. First, they have a partnership with a major local hospital, Growing Healthy, in which 30 physicians work personally with 55 third through fifth graders. Consistent with "including all," all interested students may participate. The doctors come to the school twice monthly and work with the same one or two students in order to build a personal relationship with a physician.

Another partnership is with Common Ground, in which emotionally steadiest students are trained as peer mediators. Meadowview also partners with Arcadia Presbyterian Church, who provides tutoring. In addition, there is a Seniors Tutoring program in which seniors come to the school to assist with homework. In the Senior Center partnership, seniors with Alzheimer's visit the students. In this way, in keeping with the values of inclusion and diversity, students continue to meet people with a variety of needs and strengths.

## **Changing Leadership And Community Dynamics**

During the time we studied Meadowview, the dynamic principal of eight years, Tom, retired. Tom, who believed that the "five principles of whole schooling reflected the philosophy and many of the initiatives currently in place at the school" (interview, March, 1999), was replaced by Nancy, previously principal of a K-2 school. Nancy's own children had attended Meadowview; hence she was extremely motivated to assume responsibilities for a school that had such personal meaning to her. Although Nancy verbally embraced the ideals of Whole Schooling, she also wanted to bring her own vision to the school. Nancy clearly struggled with managing the multitude of challenges she faced in a school with students enrolled through fifth grade, although unlike Tom, Nancy did not always view the inclusive philosophy as a structure to solving the challenges she faced. Nancy was a more quiet person than Tom, and she was put in the difficult position of following in the footsteps of a much-loved principal.

Tom was affectionate and energetic. Walking with him through the school during an early orientation, he stopped to "eat" play food with the kindergarteners in their playhouse. One of the students called out, "I love you, Mr. Jones," to which he replied, "I love you, too." He spoke casually yet firmly with teachers, most of whom seemed to like him and respect his leadership. We never did see Tom alone in his office. He was always accompanied by one or more students whom she was counseling or reprimanding, in between making and receiving phone calls, working on his computer, or typing the newsletter. Tom was known for personally transporting children in his own car if they missed the bus. When he resigned, his superintendent remarked he knew of no one else would could go into the trailer park, pick up the



children, have words with the parents who neglected to get their children to school, and go back after school to have a beer with the parents. One of Tom's last projects was production of a film on Meadowview Elementary School outlining its philosophy and the five principals of Whole Schooling. Originally, Tom sought to be part of the Whole Schooling study because he believed "it is important for public education to link with outside supports to be able to do what schools should do" (interview, March, 1999).

In many ways, Meadowview Elementary is on the edge of the continuing changing demographics of many near-urban suburbs. For the last twenty years, the population has been changing from a largely white population. Many Jewish people live in the area, which boasts many synagogues and temples across all segments of Jewish religion. Increasingly, African-Americans have moved into Arcadia, many leaving the city to do so. Along with a growing Chaldean population, there are many other ethnic groups represented in smaller numbers. Arcadia has for many years utilized its increasing diversity as a way to promote the city. Indeed, Arcadia is one of the most diversity cities in Michigan in terms of racial and ethnic diversity as well as people from different socio-economic groups.

But all this has not been without conflict and concern. Particularly as the city continues to attract a larger population of low-income black and white residents, life challenges associated with poverty become more evident in the schools. Both high schools have, in recent years, strengthened security measures and employed a visible in-school security force. It is reported of a meeting of administrators that some suggested that the children of these newer residents all be put in one school for children with problems.

The number of low-income children has increased concurrently with increased pressure from the state to perform well on the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP). As scores on this test correlate highly with the wealth of students' families, test scores have been a great problem. The recently retired superintendent put enormous pressure on administrators to raise test scores, threatening at least one principal with losing her job. Recently, the district adopted a basal reading program for the entire district. Emphasis is growing to keep children 'at grade level', resulting in pressures to teach only at one level and increased intolerance of children with emotional challenges. In 2000, the city's mayor threatened to take over the operation of the public schools, ousting the elected school board as occurred recently in Detroit. When Nancy took over leadership at the school, she brought a new philosophy and leadership style at the same time that she entered a situation where new pressures from above her in the district had the potential to exert enormous influence on structures and practices within the school. It is in this context that we spent almost two years observing classroom practice in this school, talking with teachers and other staff.



### **Lessons Learned And Questions To Ask**

Meadowview represents both possibility and peril, both for inclusive schooling and for effective schooling for

all students. From one perspective, Meadowview represents the stability of important cultural components of a school. While we expected that special education pull-out classes might be re-established in the building in response to outside pressures and the change in leadership, this has not occurred. The structure of in-class support for students with special needs has remained stable. The same can be said of the growing constructivist instructional approach that has bit by bit become more established in the building. Most teachers use some variation of a workshop model of instruction, using trade books at varying levels, despite the purchase of the Houghton Mifflin basal series by the district. At both upper and lower elementary levels, some strong teachers are involving students in authentic learning activities not driven by textbooks.

On the other hand, administrative decrees in one fell swoop virtually destroyed looping and multi-age classes. Further, the commitment to keeping students with social and emotional difficulties in the building has substantially weakened with several successful systematic efforts to remove these students to special classes in another school for students with emotional impairments. Similarly, the explicit use of the Glasser principles has weakened though many teachers still use this approach to guide their own work.

In all this, the most substantive questions are: As Arcadia becomes a majority Black district, will the district and the culture of schools model that seen in the nearby urban area: highly structured, punitive, segregated approaches to schooling? The trends are in that direction.

### **Hamilton Elementary School**

*Affluent metropolitan suburb*

On our first visit, we drove to Hamilton Elementary School, winding through the roads shielded from connections to the recently constructed freeway in this high-income community. Sitting on the side of a hill was this beautiful, imposing school called Hamilton Elementary. We toured the school after a cordial meeting with the principal and a group of eight staff representing all aspects of the school. We were impressed by the gracious hospitality combined with open conversation and dialogue. The staff evinced respect for the principal and her interaction style made people feel comfortable so that conversation flowed. We observed co-teaching between general and special education teachers, visited a classroom where a student with a severe and multiple disability was included, watched students with autism in regular classes supported by para-professionals, and toured the building, peeking in the two self-contained special education classes located at the end of a wing. We were impressed by the teaching, yet were confused why these segregated special education classes existed in a building with staff so proud of their efforts towards inclusive education. “Those students will never be included,” said a staff member as we walked around that day. Two years later, this same staff person would be working with special education staff to facilitate moving the special



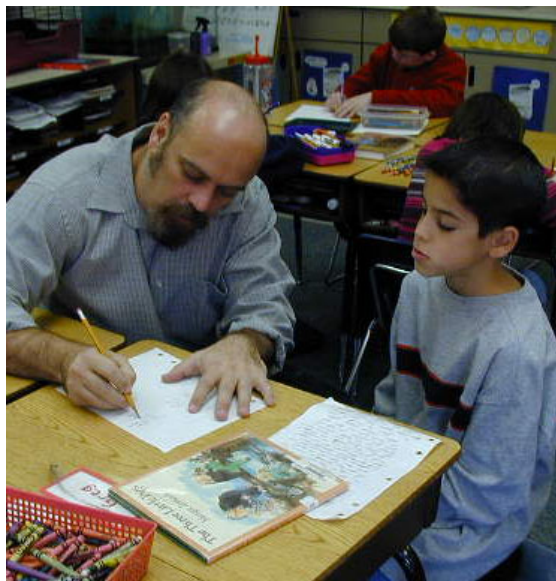
education students into general education classes and the involving special education staff in providing support.

As we debriefed with the principal and psychologist at the end of the day, we said, “The two special education classes don’t seem to fit with your philosophy of inclusion.” The principal, Jeremy, looked at us, paused a minute, and said in a thoughtful voice, “You’re right. It doesn’t.” While they discussed the district-level logistical reasons why these classes existed, pulling children with severe learning disabilities from throughout the district, we were struck by the non-defensiveness and thoughtfulness of the response. When we called Jeremy to let him know we wanted to spend time in his school, he was delighted. “We need people bringing us outside perspectives, helping us to ask new questions,” he said, a response and way of thinking we would come to know well over the next two years.

### **School and community.**

Hamilton represents a school constantly engaged in growth and change that has seen inclusive education as part of its overall mission. As a near-suburb school, they are experiencing shifts in population that will provide an ongoing experiment in developing an effective inclusive school and engaging in partnerships with other schools. In the 2000 – 2001 school year, Hamilton was named as both a state and national Blue Ribbon school in recognition of their quality work.

Hamilton Elementary School is ten years old, one of the newest schools in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, home to many professionals and individuals in higher socio-economic brackets. In the past, Hamilton served a predominantly white, Christian, relatively affluent community of students whose families resided in the United States for generations. Very recently, however, the school has seen an influx of students from the Middle East, particularly Iraq, an increase in African-American students moving from nearby Detroit or closer-in suburbs, an increase in students whose parents are recent immigrants or transferees from all parts of Asia, and a significant number of children adopted from various locations throughout the world. Thus, Hamilton staff are being challenged to teach an increasingly diverse population, thus placing the commitment to inclusion of students with disabilities in a broader context.



We came to realize over time that Hamilton is considered by many in its district to be a flagship among their elementary schools. One of the newest schools in a system where many schools were built in the 1970’s, Hamilton has a physical plant envied by many, and a reputation for attracting some of the most able teachers. The faculty elects a ‘Teacher-Leader’, who serves in a supportive role in many school projects and serves as a liaison between the principal and teaching staff.

Hamilton is part of a relatively large district that has a total K-12 enrollment of 12, 063 students. The school building is in a residential area, and it opened only nine years before this project began. There are four classes per grade level. The building is spacious and well designed. The district’s

mission statement is: “...together with our community, [we] will provide quality learning experiences empowering each student to become a thoughtful, contributing citizen in a changing world.”

The district’s 2007 Mission Beliefs are stated as: learning is a lifelong process, individual responsibility is fundamental to learning, there is strength in diversity, positive relationships enhance effectiveness, effective communication is key to growth and understanding, working cooperatively enhances individual and group performances, all individuals have unique gifts and talents, change provides opportunities for growth, a commitment to quality requires a system to continually improve, and learning empowers and all individuals can learn.

Hamilton’s mission statement is as follows: “We believe that all students can learn and that learning is enhanced by a combined effort of school, family and community. Students learn best in an environment that integrates curriculum, is developmentally appropriate, and addresses diverse intelligences, learning styles and interests. Students will develop respect for self and others and become cooperative, contributing citizens of a technological society.”

Valley View Public Schools serves students in several bedroom communities and a small downtown area. All of the communities are considered high middle to high-income areas. One, for example, in 1989 had a median household income of \$51,986. Driving through these areas, we see spacious houses in well-groomed yards. Many families have professional and managerial white-collar positions and a substantial portion of the population has graduated from an institution of higher learning. Hamilton is in the most affluent portion of the school district, but even there, there are pockets of poverty communities: 3.8% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

### **The road towards an inclusive school.**

Since its beginning, the leadership and staff of Hamilton have sought to create an inclusive school. When we began visiting the school in 1999, they were including students with autism, medically related disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional impairment, and others. With the growing number of children whose home language is not English, bilingual services were provided. Paraprofessionals had been identified to work with some challenging students, particularly students with autism, and the two special education teachers in the building were co-teaching with staff as part of their job assignments.

Jeremy, principal of the school until the 2001-2002 school year, provided substantive leadership moving towards inclusion. As part of this, he chaired the district’s *Elementary Study*, a ten year strategic improvement plan that incorporated numerous innovations: inclusion, multi-age, looping, bi-lingual services, differentiated instruction, social and emotional supports for children. All schools in the district are expected to develop a yearly



initiative based on one of these themes and move toward implementation of all aspects of the plan over a ten-year period. Growing out of this study, the district formed an “Inclusion Forum,” an across-schools discussion group that focuses on the move toward inclusive education.

In 1998, the school applied to be part of the Whole Schooling Research Project to obtain the assistance of an outside group to help clarify its vision of a genuinely inclusive school by asking “different questions” that might help the school staff see a broader range of possible strategies and solutions. Researchers were invited to be part of the school change process and have been involved in individual interactions with teachers, support staff, the principal, and various discussion groups. In many ways, we have been able to experiment with facilitating change as part of our involvement at Hamilton.

When we began observations, students with moderate to severe disabilities were largely still served in the district’s separate special education school. That remains true as of the spring of 2002. In addition, students were clustered in classroom placements based on special needs -- disability, language learning needs, gifted and talented – and even racial differences were not evenly distributed across classrooms.

During the three years we spent in the school, beginning in the spring of 1999, staff had numerous meetings to explore whether and how they might become a fully inclusive school. A school psychologist identified students with severe disabilities who were attending segregated schools whose “home school” would have been Hamilton. Meetings were held to discuss ‘multi-level teaching’ as a strategy for having students work in heterogeneous groups at their own levels of ability.



School staff particularly discussed the clustering of students by special needs. It became clear that the prime driver for such an arrangement was from support staff – special education teachers, speech therapist, and others – to facilitate their scheduling by having fewer classes with students needing their services. Placement decisions for students with special needs were largely made by the support staff team, who made an effort to gain approval from receiving teachers. The clustering issue was the focus of much discussion, and toward the end of 2000, staff voted to abandon clustering in favor of intentional and systematic heterogeneous grouping of students. The

general education teachers on a grade level team would meet, inviting support staff to participate, and recommend placements for the coming year, heterogeneously grouping children and thinking about the match of student and teacher styles and personalities. This decision embodied a major shift. During the next year, the principal constantly reiterated the commitment to heterogeneous classes as an operating principle.

In the 2000 – 2001 school year, first steps were made related to the three separate special education classes in the building. These classes had also been a subject of much discussion. Previously, all of these classrooms were adjacent to one another in one wing of the building. As a first step, the upper elementary special education class was placed in the upper elementary

section on the second floor and plans were developed to have students involved in general education classes. In some cases, students began to spend the majority of their time in general education classes. Thus, these rooms began to function more like resource rooms than fully self-contained special education classes. Some students, however, continued to spend the major portion of their time in these rooms. Sue, a psychologist who works in the building part-time, was assigned to work with teachers and paraprofessionals to facilitate this process.

Over the project period, we observed numerous strategies to engage teachers and other staff in dialogue, inquiry, and thinking about becoming a fully inclusive school. In the 1998 – 1999 school year, an ‘Inclusion Committee’ had explored many issues and developed recommendations, which included considerations of student-led conferences, looping, and multi-age classes. During the years in which we observed in the school, the principal facilitated discussions and forums and provided resources to explore options. Some of the change support strategies included:

- Inclusion Committee study group.
- Applying to and becoming part of the Whole Schooling Research Project to “bring new questions and ideas” to the school.
- Holding of forums on the interactive issues of multi-level teaching, a vision for a fully inclusive school, barriers and needs to become a more fully inclusive school.
- Participation of the principal and a small number of staff in both conferences held by the Whole Schooling Consortium in the summer of 1999 and 2000.
- Forums to discuss successes, needs, and next steps related to mainstreaming of students from the self-contained special education rooms.
- Visitations to other schools moving towards inclusion, several of whom were part of the Whole Schooling Research Project.
- Initiating the formation of the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling, inviting initially some 12 schools to a meeting at Hamilton Elementary.
- Involvement of teachers in a Multi-level Teaching Work Group to explore and work on multi-level, heterogeneously grouped teaching strategies.



Throughout this process, the role of the principal, Jeremy, was critical. He constantly asked probing questions and facilitated scheduling time for discussion, both during and after school. While he indicated his hope to move towards inclusion by constantly bringing questions to the group, reflecting what he was hearing, he did not mandate movement, instead working to facilitate group input and decision-making. This balance of leadership, facilitation, and listening is difficult. However, it was clear that the approach empowered teachers to express their opinion and explore options.

In this school, the researchers assigned to the building observed classes and adult discussions, but were also active participants, working to listen, ask questions, and challenge existing assumptions and practices. In many cases, we led discussions or made presentations to

staff. The principal constantly queried us regarding perspectives that we shared. Frequently, we saw our language directly used in staff conversations and discussions. Jeremy constantly emphasized that “we value people from the outside bringing us new questions. If we keep asking the same questions, we will constantly get the same answers.”

In April of 2001, the full staff voted to adopt the principles of Whole Schooling as one guide for their school improvement process. We further agreed to both pilot and collaboratively develop this process with Hamilton Elementary School staff in interaction with other schools involved in the Michigan Network for Inclusive Schooling.

In the fall of 2001, Jeremy became the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for the district and Karen, previously principal at an early childhood center in the district, became principal. She brought a continued commitment to inclusive education and a collaborative leadership style. As of April 2002, Hamilton remains one of the most inclusive schools in its district, continuing patterns established over the years. Other schools in the district, however, have joined together in the inclusive effort and Jeremy’s promotion to district-level leadership has meant that change in this direction is taking place at an accelerated pace. The separate special education classrooms that pull students from across the district still are in place. However, students associated with those classrooms are involved in general education classes more. The teachers from the self-contained classrooms are spending increasing time in the classrooms of their general education partners. As of this writing, a significant shift has been to make each student’s “home base” a general education classroom rather than the special education classroom. A small number of students with more severe disabilities are beginning to come to the school; however, no systematic attempt has yet been made to invite Hamilton catchment area students attending separate schools to return to their home school.

### **Including all.**

All students with disabilities who are identified as special education students at Hamilton are included in general education classes for at least a significant portion of the school day with support from special education staff, related services personnel, and/or paraprofessionals. The



labeling rate for children is much lower in this school than in many other schools in the district: approximately 5%. Students included in general education have learning disabilities, autism, emotional impairment, and one student with severe and multiple disabilities. Presently, the district sends students with moderate to severe disabilities to special education classes that serve as centers for the district. Thus, some Hamilton catchment area students attend other schools and Hamilton itself draws students with moderate disabilities from throughout the district into its formerly separate special education classes. With an

increasing number of exceptions, however, students with moderate to severe disabilities continue to be served at separate schools and in classes in other buildings throughout the district.



There is relatively little racial diversity in this largely white building, although there is a wide diversity of ethnic groups and native languages. Students in many classrooms receive bilingual services. There are a small number of children of color in the school. However, this demographic profile is rapidly changing. Students who are considered gifted and talented are served in regular classrooms with some pull-out services by a full-time “gifted specialist.” Multiple intelligences are used as a framework for student assessment for all students to identify particular areas of strength. The two separate special education classrooms are referred to as “Learning Disabilities” classrooms and they serve students with severe learning disabilities and students with milder cognitive impairments (EMI). As we discussed above, during the time we observed in the school, major efforts were made to begin mainstreaming these students in general education along with some involvement of the special education teacher. This shift is still in progress as of this writing.

Teachers ability group students in several ways for instruction. In the early grades, an early intervention literacy team comes into K-3 classes two or three times per week. Four to five adults split the class into small groups of students who are engaged in a prescriptive program of literacy instruction involving phonics, common readings in simple books, and other related strategies. During this time, the special education co-teacher works with the identified special education students. Except for this literacy program, students with different categories of special needs – gifted, special education, bilingual – who were initially clustered in classes to facilitate support services by specialists are now heterogeneously grouped.

### **Authentic, Multi-level Teaching**

The staff has received training in multiple intelligences, instructional differentiation, bilingual education, cooperative learning, co-teaching, and alternative assessment strategies. Observing in classes, we see many teachers who are using multiple approaches to designing and implementing engaging lessons. As you walk down the hall, you see writing and drawings of students’ personal lives and research they have conducted. Students are often working in small groups or pairs in the hall. Teachers use cooperative learning, inquiry-based projects, activity-based learning, and authentic reading and writing strategies. Many teachers employ alternative assessment tools such as portfolios, and some teachers have begun to implement student-led parent conferences. The school offers a unique program of optional special interest classes at the end of the school day that helps provide a range of opportunities for students. In addition, the school has a full program of art and music.



In many classes throughout the building, students participate in the development of classroom rules and learn to be part of a team through the use of cooperative groupings. Many teachers use multiple strategies to involve students in decision-making and in having an active role in the conduct of the class. The student council gives students an opportunity to practice

leadership skills. Several monthly community service projects also provide the chance to develop citizenship skills.

In recent years, some teachers have begun to loop with their students. In the 2001-2002 school year, a grade 1-2 multi-age class was established for the first time. In general, teachers at Hamilton are moving steadily toward adopting many of the strategies and approaches described later in this report.

### **Support for learning.**

The school has a wealth of resources to provide support for student learning. Support staff includes the following:

- Two special education teachers who co-teach with several teachers to whom they are assigned.
- Bilingual education specialist and several paraprofessionals
- Gifted education specialist who provides consultation with teachers and conducts some pull-out learning activities with students
- A school psychologist who also serves as a parent/community facilitator and liaison, helping to develop programs to promote drug and violence prevention that include support groups, drug and violence prevention information programs, and other activities.
- An Early Intervention Team, funded through Reading Recovery, that works in the lower elementary grades to provide intensive services to support literacy skill development of students
- Paraprofessionals assigned to individual students with challenging needs, such as a student with severe multiple disabilities or autism.

Hamilton particularly relies on a formalized process of collaborative consultation in which students are identified as having challenges. A teacher and member of the support staff meet and develop a written, targeted intervention plan for the student.

Special education support staff meet weekly as a Building Team, as they call it. During this time they may have formal collaborative consultations regarding students with teachers, plan and coordinate work, engage in dialogue regarding key issues. A major emphasis is on having the special education teachers and the speech therapist engage in collaborative co-teaching. Depending upon the classes and staff involved, this plays out in different ways. Increasingly, a primary approach has involved using support staff to collaboratively plan and teach lessons that would help students with special needs, but that involve the total class. In some cases, co-teachers may lead the lesson or the general and special education teachers may switch roles between leading and helping individual students. In some cases, the special education teacher has viewed the role as working with specific students on a caseload.

An ongoing topic of discussion at Hamilton has been how best to structure the use of the support staff. Discussions have been focused on moving beyond having staff deliver targeted direct services only to students on their caseload to a model of both direct and indirect services in the context of collaborative teaching with the general education teachers. Members of the support staff have felt double messages regarding their legal obligations under the state's rules and regulations for special education. While the various members of the total support staff engage in group discussions, each of their programs has tended to operate in independently, with

limited co-planning. For example, it is rare to find collaborative planning between the special education and gifted specialists, or planning among the whole team “attached” to all students within a particular classroom.

One of the topics of discussion in some forums involved the interaction between multi-level teaching and support. In numerous discussions, general educators expressed the need for more support. Given the relatively high levels of support in this school in comparison with most other schools, the meaning behind these statements has not been entirely clear. We suspect that there continues to be a belief among some general education teachers that the specialists have a “bag of tricks” that they need access to but cannot recreate or discover themselves. At the same time, belief that support staff are always required in order to bring about change can provide a rationale for not making changes that would bring the teachers’ practices better into line with the philosophy those teachers have ostensibly adopted.

### **Building community and dealing with behavioral challenges.**

Hamilton has sought in many ways to emphasize community in its school. Its Peace PAWS program emphasizes key points for students in building respect and positive relationships. The principal, Jeremy, has engaged staff in ongoing discussions regarding common issues for the school. Many of the teachers we observed emphasize the building of community in their classrooms. Shelley, a first grade teacher, engages children daily in making choices regarding their daily activities, considering their own behavior, and explicitly discussing their



classroom community. Dennis, an upper elementary grade teacher, very intentionally engaged children in discussions that focus on building an inclusive classroom community when a student with a severe multiple disabilities spent two years in his class. Jennifer has students involved in developing rules for the class, organizing service projects, and using committees to accomplish important work of the class.

Ruby, a school psychologist functioning as a support person for dealing with social-emotional issues and needs, often works in collaboration with classroom teachers to implement learning units related to building community and enhancing social-emotional learning. For example, Ruby and Shelley worked together to help Ned, a first grader with autism, understand social interactions through the use of social stories. Similarly, Ruby and Julie, then a second grade teacher, taught some lessons related to dealing with feelings of anger and hurt in response to needs within Julie’s class. Ruby and other support staff tend to work hard to use a variation on positive behavioral support when children are having emotional and behavioral problems, looking at the needs expressed by problematic behaviors and identifying more positive ways by which those needs might be expressed and then met.

### **Parent and Community Partnerships.**

Parents are involved in Hamilton in many ways. On any given day, many parents and family members can be seen in classes throughout the building helping in ways that range from making

copies for the teacher to operating learning centers in collaboration with the teachers. At other times, parents come for formal programs, either school-wide assemblies or classroom-based presentations. For example, one day we visited Jennifer's fifth grade class when students put on a musical related to a topic they had been studying. Bella, now a grade 1-2 multi-age teacher, had special event she called the Peppermint Patty Café. Students set up tables with bright tablecloths and had developed menus that were literacy activities that each student presented to the 'customers', largely parents and other family members, at their table.

Parents are also involved in school improvement decisions through the district-wide School Improvement Steering Committee as well as each school's School Improvement Goal Committee. The school has a very active PTA and the building houses a Parent Volunteer Lounge. The PTA supports and encourages extra field trips, enrichment assemblies, family fun nights, and the Science Fair. Parents volunteer in classrooms, the media center and on district curriculum committees.

### **Democracy, leadership, and professional development.**

As we described above, the school administration attempts to support teachers in engaging in change and improvement by involving them in team decision-making. This style seems to be a characteristic of the new principal, Karen, as well. Teachers may take initiatives and obtain support and input of the principal. We were particularly impressed with the way researchers on this project were invited to be active participants in a change process. In our experience, principals are often wary of outsiders in schools. As a result of this invitation and the many concrete ways in which this was made real, we spent much more time in this school than some others in the study.

We were particularly intrigued with the process of reflection and innovation supported in this school. In many ways, this seemed to spawn deeper thinking and commitment. On the other hand, the process was so slow we sometimes were concerned that dialogue was a form of resistance and an impediment to positive change.

### **Lessons learned and questions to ask.**

Involvement at Hamilton Elementary has been a source of substantial insight and has raised substantial questions. We watched thoughtful leadership, discussion among staff, and interactions of general and special education teachers, all of which demonstrate the interest and support for inclusion of many of Hamilton's general education teachers, as well as their desire to master ever more engaging approaches to instruction and effective community building.



The commitment and leadership of the principal in the movement towards inclusion was critical. Where does such commitment originate? Although Jeremy was open enough with his thinking that we could record the commitment as it grew, we do not have a clear understanding of its roots and the reasons that it took hold so strongly.

In any case, by the end of the project there was both a commitment to be an inclusive school and many reservations about taking the next step. Some teachers thought that students served elsewhere should be invited back. One special education teacher thought that full inclusion was actually illegal because it did not conform to his understanding of the continuum of services mandate of IDEA. Some support staff were clearly uncomfortable with the idea of full inclusion, in part because they did not have a vision of their own roles in an inclusive school. This discomfort shifted and lessened as individual teachers began to experiment with new alternatives.

On one day after the close of the formal project, we talked with the staff and the new administration, expressing our sense that the school is at the edge. The question of whether or not it will go the next step is becoming pressing. For example, the separate special education rooms remain problematic. Has part-time mainstreaming in grade level teams become a new structure or is it a transitional phase on the way to fully inclusive teaching? Will school staff take the affirmative steps to invite students with moderate to severe disabilities back to the school? What does the new position of the previous principal, Jeremy, mean for movement towards inclusive education and addressing issues that are district-wide? Will the district continue to support disability-specific self-contained programs at various schools in the district, and how will that decision shape what happens at Hamilton?

In addition, Hamilton is directly in the path of major racial and socio-economic demographic changes occurring throughout the metropolitan area. Bordering Meadowview's district, whose population has just tipped to be slightly more than majority African-American, Hamilton's district demographics are rapidly changing. If experiences in other cities undergoing this change are indicative, the district will have even more challenges to a commitment to inclusion as the demographic and socioeconomic changes intensify. What will be the response? On the one hand, one feels teachers and staff are committed to inclusive teaching. On the other hand, it is not clear how directly staff are thinking about the impact and significance of these changes. We complete this project intrigued by the commitment and leadership towards inclusive education, yet wondering whether the school continue on the road to inclusion and how it will deal with demographic changes in already in progress.

**Evergreen Elementary School**  
*Rural south-central Michigan*

**The Community.**

This school is located in a small, rural community on the outskirts of a mid-sized city. At the community's center is a stop sign for a crossroads around which are clustered the major businesses and community institutions: churches, city hall, and so forth. The community is growing rapidly, however, as part of the overall growth of the metropolitan area of its nearby urban center.

The metropolitan area is undergoing a period of economic renewal and expansion after difficult times in the 1980's. As a result, the demographics of Evergreen's school district are



changing and the community is less homogeneous than in the past. Formerly, the district's families relied primarily on small industrial shops, service trades, and agriculture for their livings. These sources of income continue to be important, but the area is also attracting higher income families who work in the newer technical industries located at the edges of the city and who have higher education levels and possibly higher expectations for their children. At the same time, the district is also absorbing children who live with

foster families but whose own families live in Detroit or elsewhere. The district remains predominantly white, and these foster children represent a significant portion of the minority population of the school. At present, the school has a mix of socioeconomic groups with largely working class parents. There are only a small handful of children of color in the building.

## **The School**

Evergreen Elementary School has 800 students and is part of a small district that also includes one middle school, one high school, and an adult education center. The K-12 schools are located on a single campus 1/4 of a mile from the town's central crossroads. The administration of the school district has had a change in leadership over the last few years. They have been seeking to establish a new sense of accountability in the school system and greater responsiveness to the community. At the end of the 2000-2001 school year, the current superintendent announced plans to leave and the future leadership of the district is again in question.

*In partnership with our community, the mission of Nantucket Community School, as a leader in education, is to strive for excellence by providing students with quality, equitable and diverse learning experiences, preparing them to become responsible and productive members of a competitive society.*

(The district's mission statement)

*We, the Elementary Staff of Evergreen School, believe that all students can learn. We are committed to providing our students with a positive learning environment designed to foster academic and social growth, individual achievement will be measured through formal and informal assessment. We accept the responsibility to educate our students to become productive learners and contributing members of our school community.*

(The school's mission statement)

## School Change and Improvement

Many efforts are underway to improve the district's schools through innovation. These efforts are included in the school's NCA<sup>1</sup> accreditation process. The school has not adopted a formal school reform model; however, they are actively trying to use data to align their curriculum and ongoing assessments with the MEAP, the state's standardized testing program. At the same time, the school team at Evergreen has committed itself to developing an inclusive educational program and in recent years has made significant changes in that direction, particularly in the upper elementary grades.

Administrative leadership at Evergreen Elementary is provided by a team of two co-principals. Alice is also the district's special education director and Penny has a special interest in multiyear and multiage teaching models. The team has a strong and coherent vision for the school, both with respect to building inclusive community and with respect to achieving high academic standards. Teachers in the school have a significant sense of empowerment and see themselves as working with the principals as part of a team. There is considerably diversity in teaching styles and classroom cultures from one classroom to another. The central components of building an inclusive community are multiage classrooms, multiyear classrooms, co-teaching, paraprofessional support staff, and strong community involvement.

According to one of the teachers, the staff was given a choice whether they wanted to invest funds in technology for the classrooms or in paraprofessional support. The staff opted for paraprofessional support, resulting in having a general education paraprofessional aide available to every classroom in the school. There is still considerable access to technology, with some computers in most classrooms, access to televisions and VCRs, and a computer lab in the school's media center. However, there is less of a presence of technology in the classrooms than in some other schools in the study. (It is not clear, however, that there is less use of technology by students and teachers, merely that there is less hardware distributed throughout the building.)

In the 2000-2001 school year, the teachers agreed to use the methods and philosophy in The First Days of School<sup>2</sup> to try to establish a quiet and purposeful school climate from the beginning of the year. Teachers who mentioned this were very satisfied with the results. The teachers' focus seemed to be on behavior of students in hallways and when making transitions from one activity or location to another. The somewhat anti-inclusive assumptions that permeate the book and the method were not mentioned and may not have been noticed or deemed relevant by the Evergreen staff.

### Early elementary: K-2

The school building itself is shaped like a large "h." The early elementary grades (K-2) are located on one side of the building represented by the short vertical side of the "h." Most classes in this wing are multiage classes across two or three grades (K-2 or 1-2). The option of a single-grade kindergarten is maintained to meet the needs of students deemed not ready for an academic environment. Following school-wide policy, a paraprofessional is assigned to each class. Most classes adjoin one another in a continuous teaching space where staff and children mix. The

---

<sup>1</sup> North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the primary accreditation group used by public schools in Michigan as well as other educational institutions in 19 states

<sup>2</sup> Wong, Harry K. and Wong, Rosemary T. (1998). The First Days of School. Mountain View, CA: Harry K. Wong Publications.

classroom areas are delineated by half-walls. In each classroom, there is a large classroom space, a partitioned area that can be used as a teacher work area and for one-on-one or small group work with children. There are also tables placed in the main hallway just outside the classrooms that can be used by individual students or pairs of students.

Within the classroom areas, the layouts vary but all avoid the traditional rows of desks set-ups. At least one classroom has a small loft space reached by a ladder, and all have seating arrangements that allow for large and small group activities, both at tables or desks and on the floor.

Teachers have rocking chairs as well as more traditional desks and desk chairs. Classrooms are bright and decorated with both student work and commercially produced materials. There are cabinets brimming with supplies along the wall that forms a corridor between all the classrooms.



### **Upper elementary: 3-5**

In the upper elementary grades, classes are organized by traditional grades (3, 4, and 5). At each grade level, one or two classrooms are designated as co-taught rooms where a special education teacher works with the general education teacher. Co-teachers are normally involved with each general education room for a half day, so that some classrooms are co-taught in the mornings and others in the afternoon.

Co-teachers sometimes collaborate in teaching the lesson and sometimes the special educators work more with students having special needs as the general education teacher does the main lesson. In addition, some of the grade 4 and 5 classrooms are looping classrooms, where the group stays intact with the same teacher for both years. This is labeled “multiyear” classrooms by the school.

### **Empowering Citizens in a Democracy**

The school’s two co-principals work together to share decision-making. Teachers have weekly common planning times that allow grade level teams and co-teachers to plan together. Students are dismissed one hour early every Wednesday to provide this planning time school-wide and insure that teachers can meet in whatever groupings are necessary for the tasks at hand. There is also use of substitute teachers to free classroom teachers to meet for longer work sessions during the school day when necessary.

There is a supportive atmosphere in the building. Many teachers are engaged in teaching practices that appear to seek to empower children to take active roles in their own learning. Teachers have latitude in selecting teaching philosophies to some degree though some initiatives are clearly encouraged and pushed by the co-principals. Children are taught the rules of the school, most recently via the Harry Wong approach. These are presented and discussed by the two co-principals together at the first of the school year in grade level meetings with children and staff in the gym.





## Include All

This school has a range of students with mild to severe disabilities that include autism (AI), severe multiple impairments (SXI), and students with moderate to severe cognitive impairments. About eight students in the district attend a “center program” run by the county, but this is a situation the school seeks to avoid. The disability label considered least stigmatizing is used when possible. For example, several students are officially categorized as speech and language impaired but would also qualify for special education

services under the labels of autistically or educably mentally impaired. Approximately 5% of the student body, compared with national average of 10% or more, is classified as eligible for special education services.

In K-2, students with disabilities are included in the general education classrooms with support from paraprofessionals and a special education co-teacher. Some one-on-one or small group work for specific targeted skills is done in tables in a workroom or in the hall. This program has been in place for about 8 years. For classrooms with students with more significant disabilities, schedules are arranged so that the students are supported by either a paraprofessional or a co-teacher throughout the classroom day.

In grades 3-5, students with disabilities are again included in general education with special education teachers assigned to co-teach in one to two classrooms per grade level. To maximize the ability of co-teachers to work with all students with disabilities, there appears to be some clustering of students with disabilities in the co-taught classrooms. However, the number of students with disabilities is not allowed to exceed five in a class of 24 students, and the range of disabilities among those five is quite large. This approach was begun because the school was concerned about performance of students with more significant disabilities. It is important to note that students with the most severe disabilities, who are supported by dedicated paraprofessional aides, are not necessarily placed in the co-taught classrooms if it is believed that the general education teacher and the special education paraprofessional together can support the student. These children often have a parallel curriculum to the rest of the class.



Continuing concern regarding the large number of high needs students in grade 3-5 has led to consideration of using pull-out special education room like a traditional resource room. At present, the students are sometimes clustered within their general education classrooms to receive literacy instruction using a model of direct instruction that is a successor of the DISTAR program but sometimes do leave the classroom in pairs or small groups to use materials and technology located in the special education teachers’ room. All of the special education teachers have desks and storage space in this room to facilitate communication among them. One side of the room is set up to accommodate small groups of students.

During the last two years of the study, at least three students with moderate/severe disabilities who had been supported by dedicated paraprofessionals have been withdrawn from the school at the request of their parents. In at least two of the cases, the reasons given by the parents for their dissatisfaction was the lack of genuine social inclusion for their children. According to the principal, the parents felt that their children had no true friends and were not part of the social fabric of their classrooms. These three students were the three with the most challenging needs in the upper elementary grades, so their absence has changed the degree to which inclusion spans the entire range of disability at Evergreen, at least in the upper grades.

### **Authentic Teaching for Diverse Learners.**

Instructional techniques and strategies seem to run a gamut of constructivist, child-centered approaches to more traditional approaches using whole-class instruction, worksheets, and round robin reading. Some classes have individual desks arranged in rows. Most, however, have students seated in groups of five or so. K-2 teachers are clearly involved in authentic, active learning strategies. They offer special interest classes for students in the evening as part of a recent new program. Games and projects are used to reinforce academic skills as well as to promote social skills and group processes. Although the teaching styles are more uniform in the lower grades, some of the strongest instances of authentic teaching were observed in the upper grades. These were observed in classrooms both with and without co-teachers; however, there was more conscious attention paid to meeting the needs of diverse learners in classrooms with strong co-teaching teams.

The co-principals are pushing teachers to align their curricula with the MEAP and to develop ongoing assessments that allow teachers to gauge progress towards objectives of the curriculum that the MEAP purports to measure. They believe that this process is serving to increase accountability of teachers for learning of all students. In addition, they strive to focus on aligning curriculum and using good teaching strategies as a strategy for heightening test scores rather than focusing on the taking of the test itself. The school has shown significant increases in test scores in recent years. Teachers work in teams and utilize a variety of ongoing assessments and running records to track progress of students. The teacher who labels herself as



“constructivist” and who has the most obviously nontraditional classroom says that her classroom also has the highest MEAP scores at that grade level in the school. Whether or not this is due to self-selection of students into her classroom, it is used by both teacher and administration as evidence that high quality authentic teaching is the best route to high test scores, rather than teaching methods that most closely replicate a testing situation.

Special education co-teachers and general education teachers work together to facilitate student supports and curriculum adaptations as needed. Sound amplification devices are used throughout the building to enhance the voice of the teacher over classroom noise. There has been some difficulty in adapting this technology for use in the open space of the K-2 wing of the

school, but the administration believes that the problems are minor and can easily be overcome. The school has collected data that is believed to show that these devices have raised achievement and test scores. The school makes a distinction between 'adaptations' and 'modifications' for special education students. 'Adaptations' allow students to pursue the general curriculum with supports and relatively minor curriculum adaptations. 'Modifications' involve more significant changes often resulting in parallel curricula for students with disabilities.

### **Building Community and Supporting Learning**

The school has a welcoming atmosphere. There is a community bulletin board just inside the front doors and a few comfortable chairs for people who are waiting or early for an appointment or pick-up. Parents come and go with comfort and are welcomed in the office, which is adjacent to the entryway. The teachers and co-principals appear to interact in genuine, caring ways with children and parents.

The support structures put in place include multiage teaching, looping, paraprofessionals, and special education co-teachers. These staff members assist in developing the sense of care and support that pervades the school. Wednesdays are set aside for intensive planning among staff. Common Planning Time is created by early student dismissal on Wednesdays. In the morning, substitutes are provided so that special education co-teachers can meet. One time per month, co-teachers from all three buildings meet together.

In lower elementary, paraprofessionals and parent volunteers provide multiple supports for individualized assistance to students. There are often three or more adults in a classroom. In upper elementary, two special education teachers work with selected 'inclusion' classrooms, co-teaching a half day in each of their assigned classrooms. There are also additional programs to provide support for students: a service learning program in which high school students do work in the classrooms with teachers and students; and HOST, a mentoring program in which community volunteers read one-on-one with students.



Efforts at community building take many forms. In one example, there is a fairly traditional program to encourage independent reading in which students receive rewards when they have accumulated enough reading points. The rewards are somewhat unusual however, and are focused on community membership. Students reported on the system with pride and enjoyment: rewards include coming back to school in the evening to watch movies (with popcorn provided), having a chance to roller blade through the hallways, and so forth. The reward activities all assumed that school was a good place to be and involved students having social relationships with each other and with staff and community members. In one of the fifth grades, the teacher and students decided to participate in the high school's homecoming parade by making a float and joining the parade. The entire class, less two students who had a scout meeting, met after school at one of the student's homes to build the float, along with the teacher and the co-teacher.

## Parent Partnerships.

The school is very family friendly and conducts traditional family outreach efforts such as parent teacher meetings. However, the co-principals and other staff have consistently indicated a desire to improve the degree and type of parent connection and involvement in the school. One recent innovation has been the introduction of “family Friday.” Originating in a single classroom, this activity is slowly spreading throughout the school. Every Friday, parents are invited to join their children for lunch in the classroom. In some cases, students prepare food to serve; in others, it is a brown bag (or cafeteria food) affair. According to the community bulletin board, there is also a prayer group that meets weekly (off campus) to pray for the school.

A strategic planning committee meets monthly to address parent involvement and other issues, and faculty involvement in the community is mandated. The school district as a whole has developed written communications for parents and a recent study found high degrees of parent satisfaction in interactions with staff of the school and its programs. The building is used frequently by community groups.



### **Armstrong Primary School** *Rural northern Michigan*

Driving up to this new, brightly colored school somehow makes you feel good. Parents of all sorts, high and low income, are coming and going. The principal, Bobbie, stands in the broad common area with a smile on her face, greeting families and parents as they come in, listening, comfortable, full of warmth. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff walk back and forth preparing for the day. Allen, a student with severe autism, meets the paraprofessional assigned to him and Rodney, an academically able student who has cerebral palsy, shows Bobbie his new lightweight wheelchair.

What is unique about Armstrong is the degree to which all staff genuinely have adopted inclusion as a value. They may struggle with individual students, but the commitment they share is clear. One day we sat in the small conference room of the school talking with Bobbie about Wesley, a kindergartner with an unstable home life whose behaviors were sometimes frightening. I had been surprised talking with teachers and other staff throughout the school in the consensus among all that this child needed to be included in their school. All were deeply concerned for the child, talking sensitively, wanting to reach out to him to bring the little boy out of what seemed a scared and angry animal. Bobbie talked about the possibility that social services might take the child away from the family. If this happened, he would go to another county since they could not find foster parents in this community. As we talked she began to cry, “I know what will happen to Wesley then,” she said. “He will be put in a segregated program for EI kids that the ISD runs. We will lose him. This is my biggest fear.” We were struck by the contrast between this and the scenario we have seen at many other schools where the entire staff seemed united in anger toward such a child. How had this come to be?

## School and community.

Located in northern half of Michigan's lower peninsula, the district that covers 525 square miles and has 2,100 students K-12, 65% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. Some 14% of all students are labeled as special education students. Bobbie describes her school district as "land rich but resource poor."

Armstrong is located in a small community that is very rural, with much poverty and the highest infant mortality rate in the state, possibly due to many very young mothers and chemical pollutants in the area. Many parents have disabilities themselves. The district

contains large parcels of state and federal land. The racial make-up of the community is fairly homogeneous with a vast majority of whites, and less than 10 representatives each of other groups: 4 blacks, 7 Native Americans, and 10 Asian-Americans. The population includes approximately 600 households with a median household income in 1989 of \$22, 054. The economy relies heavily on tourist pursuits of hunting, fishing, and canoeing.

Armstrong Primary was built in 1997 after seven attempts to pass the school bond issue that allowed its construction. This new school, however, was the expression of a dream of the staff: a school that would welcome all children to learn together, a school that would be designed inside and out to meet the developmental needs of young children, K – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. As one walks in the front door one enters an open space where the four hallways of the school converge. Ahead is a beautiful media center with glass doors and walls with books, a computer lab, a reading area where teachers bring their classes for read-alouds and other activities with the Media Specialist. Each hallway is color coded with floors of bright red, blue, and yellow. Yellow hall is for kindergarten, preschool, and a library with sets of leveled books; blue and red halls have mixes of first and second graders. The two grade 2-3 multi-age classes are at the end of the blue hall. These two rooms adjoin one another and the two teachers team-teach the classes together.

The office is directly on to the right of the entrance, with glass windows into the hallway. Directly ahead down the red corridor on the right is the entrance to the specialists' office. In this large room are housed the all of the members of the building support staff: special education teacher, speech therapist, itinerant occupational therapist, math support teacher, Title I funded literacy specialist, and the counselor. All work together, daily eating lunch together in the small adjoining conference room. This arrangement, resisted at first by the staff, has made daily interactions, relationship building, discussions of children a natural, integral part of the school life and has contributed to the sense of community in the building.

Each classroom is large, with either tables or desks, depending on the teacher's choice. Each room also has, in the corner, a loft arrangement where children can climb a short ladder or go up stairs to a second level. With netting and other interesting materials, it provides a place children



can go for greater privacy. Additionally, the school has obtained funding to develop an extensive library of leveled books to be used in guided reading. This library is located in a large classroom. Teachers can check out well-organized groups of books such as Wright books for use in small groups in their classrooms.

### **The road towards an inclusive school.**

Armstrong Primary made a commitment to be an inclusive school for all children from its beginning of the construction of the new building. However, this commitment and plan entailed a huge shift from the way the previous school had operated. Bobbie and members of the staff have reflected on how they became the school they are today. Bobbie had never considered being a principal but was called one day by the local superintendent after the existing principal resigned. She found many serious problems in the school:

It truly was a dark time for my building. We were terribly overcrowded, with 650 students jammed into a building built for probably 500 . . . Because I came to this principal thing in such a roundabout way, I had no clue about the “right” way to do things. I didn’t know much but I DID know that things didn’t feel right. For example, there was total pull-out for special education students, resulting in a lot of isolation. The most severely impaired students attended center programs at the ISD [Intermediate School District] 18 miles away or in other districts. The regular classroom teachers didn’t seem responsible for the special needs kids – in fact, no one *owned* any of the *challenges* our building presented. It seemed like all I was doing was dealing with *discipline*. Every infraction, big or small, got sent to me to ‘FIX’. Like a fireman, I felt all I did was put out fires! I very quickly got the idea that the total climate of our building was *sick*. This really hit home when a group of teachers filed a grievance to exclude the paraprofessionals from the staff lounge. Technically the contract did say the teachers were entitled to a *teachers’ lounge* but come on! Wow! How could the staff even begin to think about including kids when they felt isolated and divided themselves? There just had to be a solution! I just wanted to wave my magic wand and make change happen. . . but change is a slow process.

From the beginning, Bobbie had a vision of an inclusive school. Over the two years we spent in her school, numerous times we asked her the source of the vision. She did not know, but a vision of a school that accepted and welcomed all children was a deep part of her being. Entering a school in which segregation was the norm, where staff were at odds, was difficult.

Bobbie decided to begin, feeling her way toward the vision she could only vaguely see. She looked for staff who might be interested and found a few who wanted to get to work and take responsibility to solve problems. They formed a small study group and together read William Glasser’s The Quality School<sup>3</sup>. They used this as a basis to probe deeply into issues in the school. For Bobbie it was “shocking to reveal what people really believed about kids” and they began to understand that “we needed to get to the root of our beliefs, and what we saw there was simply fear.” Bobbie explains,

We began experimenting with different kinds of support. People in our small circle of Quality Schools backed each other up and planned together. We wanted to

---

<sup>3</sup> Glasser, William (1992) The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion. New York: Harper Collins.

do more inclusion but just really didn't know where to begin. So we just started to do it! After all, the journey begins with the first step! We started phasing out the categorical room and started convincing parents to keep their children in our building... We did this by starting with the parents whom we had formed relationships with since their children were preschoolers. They *trusted* us so we started there.



Bobbie formed a particular bond with two specialists who began to share her vision – Betty the special education teacher and Tracey the speech therapist. “Together,” she says, “we forged a bond of commitment to our beliefs.” As they began working to include all children, they had their first major test when a family with a child with autism and very challenging behaviors moved into the community. As they struggled with this child, and as another child one day came into her office and ripped it apart in rage, she contacted specialists outside the school who could help: a consultant on inclusion from a university and a psychologist friend known for his expertise in dealing with behavioral challenges. “I just kept thinking,” she said, “that I hadn’t asked the right person...surely someone should be able to help us with all of our concerns. If only FIA<sup>4</sup>, CMH<sup>5</sup>, the courts, the ISD<sup>6</sup>...”

She brought in her psychologist friend to talk with staff and he told them words that “rocked our world . . . He said to his friend, ‘Bobbie, you have to understand that *nobody is coming*’ ”. These words sunk home and forced a shift in direction. They began to accept as a staff that they had to figure the situation out themselves.

The real start of the problem-solving process was a retreat held in a nice, relaxing atmosphere for several days for the entire staff before they moved into the new school. Creating a professional community among the staff itself provided both challenges and opportunities. Bobbie had the opportunity to select people she thought would support the philosophy of the direction she wanted to follow. She describes the retreat:

Our retreat truly was the birth of our new staff. First, we spent time grieving the fact that no one was coming. Then we pulled ourselves together and began to plan for what came next. We accomplished seven things.

1. We revisited our beliefs (lots of deep, probing dialogue);
2. We abandoned our boundaries and limits;
3. We listed the support we did have;

---

<sup>4</sup> Family Independence Agency, the state agency that replaced the former Department of Social Services

<sup>5</sup> Community Mental Health, the state agency that administers county-level programs for people with developmental disabilities, “severe emotional disturbance” or mental illness, and severe substance abuse

<sup>6</sup> Intermediate School District, and administrative entity roughly corresponding to a county and responsible for many supports to local school districts and major responsibilities in the area of special education

4. We listed our needs;
5. We developed a school improvement plan, a Title I plan, and a North Central Accreditation plan that was all *one* plan;
6. We created the crisis intervention team (to remove the confrontational and emotional aspects of behavior disruptions; we understood that behavior was communication);
7. We divided the specialists up and assigned one per teacher.

But mostly we came away from the weekend with the firm belief that *all our kids belong to all of us*.

The school staff have continued to build on these events – retreats each year, building-wide celebrations with children and parents – to continue their commitment to inclusion with no pull-out special education or Title I rooms and to work on literacy strategies. Within a fairly short time, the school made major changes that took hold in the belief systems of all staff in the building. They became part of the Whole Schooling Research Project in 1999, in part as a way to



reach out and make connections with others sharing the same vision. In the initial site visits, we heard that they were not having opportunities to be challenged and learn. They have had no local colleagues similarly seeking to be an inclusive school.

### **Including all students.**

Armstrong is committed to welcoming all students to its school. Some 14% have been identified as special education students with labels that include autism, learning disabilities, educable mental impairment,

emotional impairment, physical or other health impairment, and speech and language impairment. In this rural community, students come from a wide range of incomes. However, 65% qualify for free and reduced lunch. Virtually all students in the school are white as virtually no people of color live in their community. The commitment of staff as a whole to be an inclusive school appears to be quite well established. We found no indication of underlying dissatisfaction with the goal of the school to include all children, even those with substantial challenges. The comments and working relationships among staff all appeared to reinforce this commitment.

### **Instruction.**

Over time, every school develops a culture of instruction that develops through an interaction between building-wide, formal initiatives and the personal instructional styles and initiatives of teachers. At Armstrong, there is a heavy reliance on work in small groups of six to eight students, grouped by ability levels, each directed in learning activities by an adult. We observed such arrangements especially in literacy-related activities in numerous classes across grade



levels. The school has been a pilot site for the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP), an intensive assessment tool for early literacy that provides a ‘balanced’ framework for literacy instruction. Much of the instruction that we observed is centered on a variation of guided reading in which students are grouped by ability and an adult leads the children through reading a common book together, using strategies and working on skills. In many of the classes, the bulk of instruction in literacy has been based on this model.

However, other approaches and strategies were also evident. In the preschool, Kristy, the teacher who began the multi-age classes in the school, provides a class in which children work in heterogeneous groups on authentic tasks for the appropriate to the developmental age of her students.

Two grade two-three multi-age classes are housed next to each other. These teachers were very new to multi-age instruction and were experimenting. They decided to team teach their classes, pulling aside the removable walls that separate them. They have divided their group into two sections. One section will work in one classroom that has enough desks to facilitate work on individual projects, or sometimes on projects done by pairs of students. In the other classroom, they establish centers with various activities: guided reading, working on writing or spelling, social studies, and so forth, in small, ability-based groups supervised by an adult, typically the classroom teacher (with the highest group), two paraprofessionals, and the special education teacher.



The school uses ‘Chicago Everyday Math’ program, a highly structured math program. The multi-age teachers have reported having difficulty teaching this curriculum while keeping their multi-age groupings intact, so they have broken students into age/ability levels in teaching math. In the second year of our observations at the school, a Math Support teacher began teaching math lessons based on this curriculum in a separate classroom for every class in the school. Several times per week, each class goes the math room for a 45-minute lesson. The classroom teacher participates as well. This is intended to both provide instruction by a teacher well trained in this curriculum but also to provide guidance and modeling for the general education teacher.

Another teacher operates a 2-3 multi-age class as well. She does not participate with the support staff in using small ability groups but does most of her instruction using centers established throughout the room where children learn how to work on their own. They keep records and periodically conference with the teacher regarding their progress. This class appears to have fewer students identified as having special needs.

In a second grade class, we discovered a very different approach to the typical ability-based, small instructional groups used in the school. This class was developed jointly by the general education teacher and the speech therapist to assist students with language development needs. In this class, instruction is organized around reading and writing workshop, in which children are engaged in authentic reading and writing activities at their own level of ability, largely in

heterogeneous groups. Here, students work collaboratively with the teacher and speech therapist, who go from group to group providing assistance and direction as needed.

Staff of the school are constantly seeking to expand resources. In the summer of 2001, the school was awarded a grant that would allow them to run a special summer program to provide additional engaging experiences and learning opportunities related to literacy learning.

While Armstrong is in many ways an outstanding example of the Whole Schooling principles in action, the reliance on ability grouping in most classrooms works against the Whole Schooling definition of inclusive education. It appears that the extraordinary commitment to creating an inclusive community and to emotional support of all children counteracts the potential negative effects of ability grouping at this school, but the true costs and benefits of this compromise remain to be investigated.

### **Supporting teachers and children in learning: *A Specialist support team.***

Armstrong has developed a particularly strong support system for inclusive education. In addition to the professionals listed earlier, special funding was approved through the district that, mixed with special education and Title I funds, has allowed the school to hire paraprofessionals for most classrooms in the school. In addition, a small number of paraprofessionals are assigned as one-on-one assistants for students who have substantial behavioral challenges. While we were in the school, such a paraprofessional worked with a student with severe autism and two children with emotional difficulties. Such paraprofessionals often helped to support a student to work in the general education classroom, often using a parallel curriculum. In cases with severe behavioral challenges, a paraprofessional might work with a student in a separate, small therapy room on various activities. This occurred primarily to provide a higher level of supervision; however, the goal was always providing the stability that would allow the student to re-enter the general education class.

All of the specialists provide support services in classroom, most often as part of ability-

based literacy and other instruction. The special education teacher, Title I teacher, and speech therapist particularly work together to provide in-class supports, jointly supervising aides to the general education teachers. Each classroom is assigned at least one specialist for support. Through co-teaching, modeling is provided on how to work with a variety of special needs students.

The support staff has worked out an efficient working process providing support to general education classroom teachers with whom their working relationships appeared extremely comfortable and positive. Support staff and general education teachers have learned to work as a family team, all taking responsibility for all



children in the school, constantly sharing information and ideas, particularly in informal discussions at lunchtime as specialists and teachers eat together in the office.

Once every month, each teacher in the school has a Wednesday afternoon planning session with the specialist team. During this time, the music and physical education teachers take the classes of two general education teachers for a special activity. Common planning periods are also built into the schedule for grade level teams, including a one-hour block of time per month, with each grade taking one week per month.

### **Community, crisis intervention, and paraprofessional support for behavioral challenges.**

The school staff also has developed an effective crisis-intervention team. This team includes representatives across the entire school staff, including the physical education teacher, secretary, speech therapist, special education teacher, two general education teachers, and one special education paraprofessional. This team has received specialized training in dealing with crisis situations. If a teacher is experiencing a situation he or she cannot control, the teacher sends a student with a note to the office. A coded announcement is made and all on the team who can do so immediately go to the classroom identified in the announcement to provide assistance and intervention.

### **Parent and community partnerships.**

Staff strive to include parents in their children's educations as early as possible, bridging the gap from the preschool years to primary with multiple transition activities. There is a monthly family night, a strong and active Parent Group, and school-to-work lesson plans which link children back to their community. Bobbie has identified a lack of trust between parents and school as a problem to be addressed. There are also scheduled monthly parent meetings where learning and fun are mixed.

We also observed several strategies by which the school staff seeks to link school learning to the community. During one year, the school adopted "community" as a year long, school-wide theme for study. This involved children in gathering information about the local community, creating drawings and art work related to differing aspects of community, developing three dimensional models of the community, and organizing a self-written play which they put on in a large assembly of parents and community members.

Finally, school staff are active in accessing community agencies to provide support to families and children. Bobbie, along with the specialists, provides leadership in this arena. She is active in a human services coordinating committee for the county. In addition, we observed her continued and direct connections and interventions, reaching out to hard-to-reach professionals such as psychiatrists in search of answers and assistance for children and their families.



## **Leadership, democracy, and professional development.**

The ongoing leadership of Armstrong and the process of change we have described above point to a school that has successfully developed a culture committed to including all children in learning together. The principal, along with key staff, has provided leadership in establishing a clear vision for the school while both encouraging and supporting staff in taking responsibility to develop solutions for themselves. Bobbie has also been particularly committed to staff development and has worked with a professional development team through the Intermediate School District. She seeks out professional development opportunities and supports attendance of staff members at conferences and other training events.

## **Lessons learned and questions to ask.**

Armstrong Primary is as inclusive a school as any we know in Michigan. They have successfully moved from a segregated school, one filled with staff conflict and hard feelings, to a culture of inclusion and community that pervades the school. In addition, we saw numbers of examples of teacher-to-teacher innovation, the freedom to try new strategies, and working relationships that allowed sharing among at least some teachers. Further, the support staff provided intentional support to teachers, seeing this as a major part of their role, particularly with teachers new to the building. They seek to support individual children, as well as the entire instructional effort. Support staff, particularly, daily helped strengthen a culture in which all adults understood that all the children in the school belonged to each one of them.

On the other hand, the school relies heavily on ability-based instruction. They appear to not have considered the potential harmful effects of such instructional arrangements on both the culture of the school and the self-concept, and even learning, of individual children. In addition, with the exception of a small number of classes where teachers appear to have established different instructional procedures and classroom culture, the use of small groups of 6-7 students per adult who emphasized very direct, directive instruction has created a situation in which adults have constant power and supervision over students. Said another way, students are rarely involved in child-to-child helping (for example, via peer mentorships or shared reading), and have minimal responsibility for the implementation of classroom procedures. It is the only school we have ever seen where it often seemed that there might be too many adults in the classroom. Finally, while the commitment to children with behavioral challenges was very clear, we were concerned with the fallback to one-to-one paraprofessionals. While this served both to control student behavior and to provide distraction from problematic activities, it is not clear what students are learning socially and emotionally in this process nor is it clear that the school community is exploring and experimenting with strategies to build community among the children and meet the emotional needs of these students without effectively segregating them.



Despite these concerns, we valued the time spent in this school, the work they has occurred in building an inclusive culture in the school, the exemplary examples and model of caring leadership we saw so clearly demonstrated.

### **Rogers High School**

A semi-urban metropolitan high school

Smokestacks begin to dominate the view along Interstate as one travels south of Detroit to the industrial suburban area where Rogers High School is located” Amidst the smoke, one begins to notice the landscaping along the road, and then there is the sign giving credit to the landscapers: the Rogers High School horticulture classes. Beside the parking lot, a large electronic sign gives the time of day while high school events run continuously across the bottom of the screen.

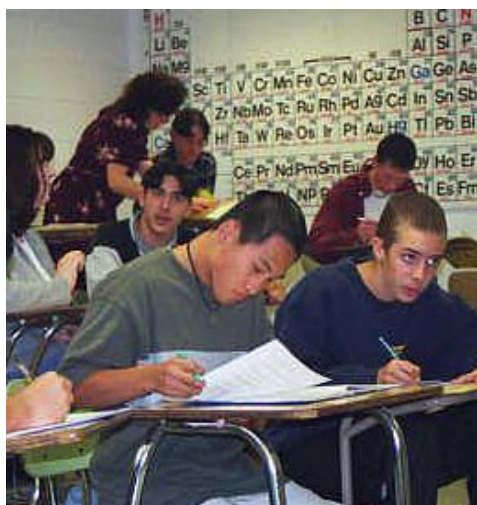
### **School And Community**

Built in 1923, at a cost of \$1,140,000, Rogers High School was described as one of the most magnificent buildings of its time. The two-story brick building was built to provide for 1400 students, but by 1928, 1800 were "crowded in." No further construction was done until 1957 when the Music and Industrial Arts Annex was opened. In 1962, the Science block was built, and in 1970, the district citizens passed a \$7,000,000 bond proposal to renovate the original building. A new gymnasium, swimming pool, locker rooms, "cafetorium," central kitchen, student commons area, administrative offices, art rooms, home economics area, stair towers, planetarium, and driver education rooms were built.

Trophy-filled showcases greet visitors in the main lobby. An assistant principal patrols the hall with his walkie-talkie. An Air Force Recruitment Officer is enlisting students. "Rogers is Drug -Free," a banner proclaims. The Trading Post is "Open."

Wearing t-shirts and blue jeans fashionably too long and too wide to stay up at the waist, the student population of Rogers High School is predominately Caucasian. Of the 1,300 students, one hundred forty qualify for free and reduced lunch. The principal, Marlene, has three assistant principals, four counselors, and 87 teachers. A wide spectrum of students coexists in Rogers, from students labeled “severely multiply impaired” to students labeled “gifted.” The staff state that all students are welcomed, regardless ability level. We are told that all students have opportunities to choose to be in any educational or extracurricular program. The staff tries to build an environment to empower students to become citizens in a democracy where all members of society are represented.

The bell sounds. Students pour out of classes, swarming around the vending machines. Some students push others in wheelchairs. Some wheelchair users travel without extra assistance. Many are in route to the Trading Post, the school store.



Special education co-teacher assists student in a biology class.

## **The Road To An Inclusive School**

Of all the high schools in the metropolitan Detroit area, Rogers has perhaps the oldest and most extensive system for inclusive education in the form of team teaching, which has been in place since 1987. At Rogers, inclusion began with teachers talking to teachers. Prior to 1987, students labeled Educably Mentally Impaired (EMI) were taught by three teachers at one end of the building. The students considered learning disabled (LD) and emotionally impaired (EI) were enrolled in many separate classes. The special education teachers were feeling isolated from the rest of the school. They started asking those teachers (beginning with the gym teacher) who often had their students in their classes to consider team teaching with them. Gradually the teaming system expanded.

Today, an elaborate scheduling system allows team teaching in a number of the classes. Generally, the team-taught classes are comprised of approximately two-thirds general education and one-third special education students. The team consists of a regular classroom teacher and a special education teacher. The relationship between the teaming teachers seems to account for much of the success of the system. The special education staff appear to be close, sharing an office that allows for constant communication of information about students and support for one another.

Each teacher-team determines the specific ways in which they will teach the class. In some teams, the classroom teacher serves as the lead teacher and the special education teacher walks around assisting all the students as needed. In other teams, it was nearly impossible to tell which teacher was which, as there was a balance of interaction, lecturing, and other teaching practices. In some classes, the special education teacher looked at all assignments submitted by students on that caseload so that grades might be adjusted if necessary. Special education teachers were available for reading tests orally, adapting assignments, and planning lessons.

Not all students take part in the team-taught classes, but they are very popular. Those students determined to have the greatest need are scheduled in team-taught classes. In this manner, all students are equal; no one knows who is a special education student and who is a general education student. According to the district Principal of Special Education, "doing business this way is the norm, people accept it here."

### **Including All Students**

In addition to the team-taught classes, Rogers houses a center TMI (trainably mentally impaired) program as well as an SXI (severely multiply impaired) program. Each of these programs is physically located at the base of "senior hallway" near the main entrance of the school. Initially there was discussion about where to locate these programs. Often, such programs are located in the back of the school, hidden away from public view. However, at Rogers, they are visible to emphasize the presence students in these programs have, and that they are very much a part of the school. The students in the SXI program are responsible, with their aides, for collecting the morning attendance reports from all the classrooms. Moreover, the students in this program can elect to attend regular classes such as orchestra, horticulture, vocational education, art, and physical education. Students in the SXI program attend pep rallies and eat in the cafeteria. A service-learning program pairs general education students with students in the SXI program during classroom times and at lunch. In this way, students in the

general education program earn credit for service learning for assisting their peers with severe disabilities.

Freshman, sophomore, Junior, and senior class meetings are held the first Monday of every semester, and are facilitated by the principal, in which she meets with class officers. In addition to the regularly scheduled meetings, the principal approaches class officers when there are school issues that need to be addressed. Officers then take the issues to their classes until they are resolved. One year, for example, there was a problem with littering. Instead of the principal instituting a rule against littering, she presented her view of the problem to the class officers. They in turn met with students in their classes, and amongst themselves came up with a solution and a plan.

One teacher, in particular, has been significant in drawing attention to the abilities of all students: Ben, the art teacher. General education students and special education students,



Co-teaching in an economics class.

including those from the center programs, all participated in his art classes. Most notably, under Ben's leadership, has been the creation of floor to ceiling murals in the office and along the corridors of the school. The murals were initiated by one student's interest. Charles was a special education student, for whom Ben felt it was important to follow a mural through to completion, and ultimately this enhanced his school experience. From that point on, many students wanted to make murals. Because making murals is ideal for collaborative work, students of all ability levels have participated.

As has been said, all students, regardless of their ability are accepted at Rogers, and whenever possible, they are included in the general education

classroom, the cafeteria, and all other locations. Curricular adaptations are made to accommodate diversity using multiple intelligences teaching strategies and team teaching. A mentoring program for freshmen is offered by National Honor Society students. At Rogers, the staff not only seeks to provide the optimal educational environment for all learners, but also to promote an atmosphere that embraces individual differences. Many students have clearly been influenced by this philosophy as is demonstrated in the acceptance of students with special needs.

## Instruction

Curricular adaptations are made as needed. In the case of the team-taught Earth Science class, the special education teacher reads tests individually to students who request this. He also grades the tests, and the general education teacher defers to his judgment when grading students who have special education labels. The Earth Science teacher feels strongly about teaching one content in her classes, yet also makes an effort to use a variety of modalities to appeal to different learning styles. These include drawing, looking at student projects from previous years, reading or looking at two-dimensional examples in the text, or looking at and feeling three-dimensional models in class. Similarly, in Biology, tape recorders are available for use by those who cannot take notes well.

## Dealing With Behavioral Challenges

Behavioral problems are minimal at Rogers, but there are several programs in place for dealing with them. One program consists of having a security guard stationed at the school as well as having assistant principals patrolling the hallways. Codes of conduct are printed inside the students Handbook and Academic planner, and include behavioral guidelines, attendance policies, and dress codes. Marlene, the principal, is “very proactive about any acting out” and regularly calls parents in for conferences.



One of the special education teachers, Andy, is assigned to work with approximately ten students who are considered “high risk” and need additional support. He receives an extra prep hour in which he meets with this group of students. The period is handled much like a support group and they discuss problems during this time.

In other classes, the majority of the problems consist of “acting up,” failure to complete homework, and lack of attention span. The teachers respond to these problems by having students work together to complete many of their assignments, with students motivating each other in a friendly, competitive way. If problems get out of hand, the student is removed from the class and taken to the office. In gym, when behavior problems do occur, the teacher says they are dealt with primarily by excluding the student from a fun activity or in more extreme cases, detention and loss of a day’s participation grade.

Students coming from the middle school who have been assigned special education labels are scheduled for resource room instruction for English during their freshman year. A gradual weaning off the resource room instruction is completed according to the pace of the student. By the time students are juniors, they often go to the resource room only once per week. The ninth graders also have in-services on the topic of high school behavior, including such issues as sexual harassment and drug abuse.

## Democracy, Leadership, Professional Development

A strength of Rogers High School is its diverse community and the culture of acceptance of students with differing needs and abilities. A good deal of the structure of Rogers High School is centered on the student government and the student officers who represent their classes. At least once per grading period, half days are scheduled so that the classes can hold meetings. The class officers are required to have an agenda and the meetings are attended by the principal. In this way, student leaders are mentored.

Community programs help prepare students for jobs following graduation. One of the most active programs is the Horticulture program, which includes greenhouse, floral shop, and landscaping programs. Students maintain the section of the median strip on the road outside the school as part of the landscaping program. In the greenhouse and florist shop, students perform



real jobs for which the school florist shop has been hired. Every year, there is flower show in the community and students submit arrangements. In class, students are taught the entire range of jobs they might be required to perform once they have been hired in horticultural businesses after graduation. During one class, we observed students learning to write formal business letters related to their submissions to the flower show. In all these classes, the general education students and special education students (including some from the center programs) are in attendance together.

Taking school-to-work more broadly, in-service programs cover topics about the world of work. Special guest speakers from a wide range of businesses and agencies come to describe the types of responsibilities their jobs entail.

### **Partnering With The Community**

At Rogers, the staff has worked in close conjunction with the community to help students prepare for jobs in the community in which they reside. There are a number of vocational programs and cooperative education programs. The horticulture program described above is one such program. A number of cooperative educational programs exist such as the one at a local hospital. Like the horticulture program, programs in auto mechanics and machine shop provide direction to many students who will enter the job force directly from high school.

### **Lessons Learned, Questions To Ask**

It is evident that the special education faculty is a very close team at Rogers. They share an office together so that there is an ongoing opportunity to talk about issues as they arise, and also to offer consistent support to one another. The teachers at Rogers have been team teaching for longer than any other school in the area, and have been pleased with their efforts so far.

As the result of a meeting in which the faculty discussed team teaching, however, some of the instructors expressed needs to have more time to plan with their partners. Therefore, we wondered about how this school of dedicated teachers might be assisted in taking further steps to build upon their team teaching model, such as finding more time for teacher dialogue and planning, and also for more interactive or didactic methods of teaching and learning.

The center programs for students with severe disabilities housed at Rogers pose a challenge to the school community. Although there is a claim that these students are included in some non-academic activities, genuine participation appeared minimal. Activities within the SXI classroom, which serves young adult students through the age of 26, were not age appropriate and did not reflect current with respect to adults with severe disabilities. The teacher made it clear that she was concerned about these issues, but lacked both training and support to address them. If Rogers is to continue to evolve as an inclusive school, considerable attention will have to be paid to the education and experiences afforded to the students attending the center programs.