

## SCHOOL PROFILE

**Frank Elementary School  
Kenosha, Wisconsin**



- Type of School:** \*Elementary (K-5)
- Location:** \*Kenosha: located between Milwaukee and Chicago  
\*Urban: 3<sup>rd</sup> largest district in WI
- Size:** \*Typically 3 classes at each grade level  
\* Number of enrolled students is increasing at a rapid rate
- Student Population:** \*Low student SES: 90% Free and reduced lunch  
\*80% non-white: 51% Black, 29% Hispanic, 30% White  
\* Highest number of students with disabilities compared to the other neighborhood elementary schools in the district (520 total students of which 100 receive special education)
- Principal:** \*Gordon Hess—Respected leader among the teachers & parents  
\*Served Frank Elementary for approximately 14 years.  
\*Strong supporter for Inclusive Education
- Teachers:** \*A mix of new and experienced teachers in the building  
\* Several teachers have assumed leadership roles in the school  
\* The majority of teachers are Caucasian

**Summary of Classrooms, Teachers, and Students Involved in the Research Study  
Frank Elementary – Kenosha, Wisconsin**

**Spring Semester, 1999:**

<b>Grade:</b>	Kindergarten/Early Childhood Combined
<b>Teachers:</b>	Lisa Ronis – Kindergarten Teacher Tina Collins – EC teacher Mrs. Janke - Paraprofessional
<b>Target Students:</b>	Heidi – Kindergarten female with autism who is non-verbal
<b>Grade:</b>	Kindergarten
<b>Teachers:</b>	Ms. Belthausen & Ms. Jane Kasianowicz
<b>Target Students:</b>	Whole class observation
<b>Class Make-up:</b>	20 students total: 9 boys; 11 girls
<b>Grade:</b>	Second Grade
<b>Teachers:</b>	Sharla Burgin – Second-grade teacher Valerie Hopkins – Special Education Teacher
<b>Target students:</b>	Jordy; Cashmire; Adrianna – (appeared to be at-risk)
<b>Grade:</b>	Second Grade
<b>Teachers:</b>	Karen Giese– Second-grade teacher Valerie Hopkins – Special Education Teacher
<b>Target students:</b>	This class includes students with LD, ED, CD, HI, VI, OHI
<b>Class Make-up:</b>	23 students total
<b>Grade:</b>	Fifth Grade
<b>Teacher:</b>	Mrs. Kertz – Fifth grade teacher Special Education Teacher Student Teacher
<b>Target Students:</b>	Cassie – Fifth grade female who is nonverbal and CDB Male student with severe emotional disturbance
<b>Class Make-up:</b>	21 students total: 10 boys; 11 girls; 9 Black; 8 White; 1 Hispanic; 3 Other
<b>Grade:</b>	Fifth Grade
<b>Teacher:</b>	Lisa Kania– Fifth grade teacher Ms. Thatcher - Itinerant Teacher for the Visually Impaired
<b>Target Students:</b>	Raymond – Fifth grade male with a visual impairment and Braille- user
<b>Class Make-up:</b>	19 students total: 10 boys; 9 girls; 11 black; 1 Hispanic; 8 white

**1999-2000 Academic Year:**

**Grade:** Kindergarten/Early Childhood Combined

**Teachers:** Lisa Ronis & Tina Collins- Job-share Kindergarten  
Becky Bresina - EC teacher teaming w/Kindergarten  
Mrs. Yolanda. - Paraprofessional

**Target Students:** Jacob– Black male functioning with severe cognitive disabilities  
and a seizure disorder  
Lucas – Emotional Disturbance  
Cody – Nonverbal (Using assistive technology to communicate)  
Jamale – Male student with a cognitive disability

**Class Make-up:** 22 students total: 11 students with disabilities; 11 nondisabled students

**Grade:** First Grade

**Teachers:** Miss Dix – 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher  
Kim Kidd – Special Education teacher  
Donna Potter - Paraprofessional

**Target Students:** Hiedi – First grade female with autism, non-verbal  
Dixie – Female with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Jack – Male with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Dierro – Male with a Learning Disability

**Class Make-up:** 23 students total: 6 White; 17 Black or Hispanic

**Grade:** Reading Group – 1<sup>st</sup> grade

**Teachers:** Kim Kidd – Special Education teacher  
Ms. Yolanda - Paraprofessional

**Target Students:** Heidi – First-grade, white female with autism, non-verbal  
Shabar – Cognitive Disabilities/Borderline; VI; Cerebral Palsy;  
Speech/Language  
Dixie – White female with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Jack – Male with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Fernando; Elizabeth, Alfred, Dierro

**Class Make-up:** 8 students total: 4 boys; 4 girls; 2 White, 3 Black, 3 Latino; This class grew to 10 by February

**Grade:** Second Grade

**Teachers:** Karen Giese – Second grade teacher  
Valerie Hopkins – Special education Teacher

**Target Students:** Shabar – Black female with a Cognitive Disabilities/Borderline;  
VI; Cerebral Palsy; Speech/Language;  
Ashley – Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Kiriontae – Black male with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Surriah – Black female with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Dionta - Black female with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
Larry - Black male with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline &  
ADHD

**Class Make-up:** 21 students total: 9 boys; 11 girls; 5 White; 11 Black; 5 Hispanic

**Grade:** Reading Group – 2<sup>nd</sup>. grade  
**Teachers:** Val Hopkins– Special Education teacher  
Student Teacher  
**Target Students:** Heaven  
**Class Make-up:** 7 students total: 4 boys, 3 girls; 5 students with a Cognitive Disability/Borderline, 2 with learning disabilities, 1 also has emotional disturbance

**Grade:** Fourth Grade  
**Teachers:** Faith Pfeiffer – Fourth Grade Teacher  
Mrs. Evans – Special Education Teacher  
Mr. L. - Student Teacher  
**Target Students:** Porsche (Shabar and Cassie’s sister)  
Raenesha- Black female with a Cognitive Disability  
Aaron – White male with a Cognitive Disability  
Rebecca- White female with a Cognitive Disability  
Cynthia- Black female with a Cognitive Disability  
Miquelle – White female with a Learning Disability  
Tarnika – Black female with Emotional Disturbance  
**Class Make-up:** 24 students total: 14 white; 7 Black; 1 Hispanic; 2 Asian

**Grade:** Music Class  
**Teacher:** –  
Valerie Hopkins – Special education Teacher  
**Target Students:** Shabar – Cognitive Disabilities/Borderline; VI; Cerebral Palsy;  
Speech/Language;  
Ashley – Cognitive Disability/Borderline  
**Class Make-up:** 20 students total: 9 boys; 11 girls; 6 white; 11 Black; 3 Hispanic

**Fall, 2000**

**Grade:** Second Grade  
**Teachers:** Helen Norman  
Valerie Hopkins – Special education Teacher  
**Target Students:** Heidi – White female with autism, non-verbal  
LaVelle – Black male with Traumatic Brain Injury  
**Class Make-up:** 20 students total

**Grade:** Second Grade  
**Teachers:** Sharla Burgin  
Valerie Hopkins – Special education Teacher  
**Target Students:** Heidi – White female with autism, non-verbal  
**Class Make-up:** 20 students total

## **Researchers who observed and recorded data**

Kim Beloin                      Spring, 1999 – Fall, 2000  
Paula DeHart                    Spring 1999  
Michelle Zeigler                Spring, 1999  
JoAnne Suomi                  Spring, 1999

## **People Interviewed**

9-23-99	Faith Pfeiffer	Fourth Grade Teacher	Interview by: Beloin
11-22-99	Loretta Tate	Parent Liaison	Interview by: Beloin
11-22-99	Val Braunshausen	Parent Orientation Worker	Interview by: Beloin
12-7-99	Valerie Hopkins	Special Educator-Grade 2	Interview by: Beloin
12-7-99	Tina Collins	Kindergarten Teacher	Interview by: Beloin
1-11-00	Lisa Ronis Becky Bresina	Kindergarten Teacher Early Childhood Teacher	Interview by: Beloin
1-11-00	Norma Merten	Parent Volunteer	Interview by: Beloin
1-11-00	Mr. Gordon Hess	School Principal	Interview by: Beloin
1-24-00	Lisa Ronis Tina Collins Becky Bresina	Kindergarten Teacher Kindergarten Teacher Early Childhood Teacher	Interview by: Beloin
1-24-00	Karen Giese Valerie Hopkins	Second Grade Teacher Special Educator-Grade 2	Interview by: Beloin
2-23-00	Kim Kidd Mrs. Potter	Special Educator-Grade 1 Paraprofessional	Interview by: Beloin
11-14-00	Ms. ___	Holly's Mother	Interview by: Beloin
10-31-00	Helen Norman Sharla Burgin Valerie Hopkins	General Educator-Grade 2 General Educator-Grade 2 Special Educator-Grade 2	Interview by: Beloin

**Curriculum:**

- Reading and Language: Formerly used Pat Cunningham materials; currently using Direct Instruction
- Math: Everyday Math; Formerly used Math Their Way
- Science – Foss Science kits; Aims project; Investigations

## **EMPOWER CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY:**

- Has a school site-based council that includes parents; council has quite a bit of decision-making power. Some decisions are still made from the district office.

## **INCLUDE ALL:**

- 99% of the students with disabilities are included in general education classes
- 1% of the students (those experiencing severe emotional disturbance) may spend part of their day in a resource room with a special education teacher.
- Special education teachers have no classrooms or offices. Each grade level has a special education teacher assigned to the grade level. Special education teachers have a desk or space in one of the three general education classrooms. Exceptions to this include one resource room used periodically for some students with emotional disturbance and a speech room.
- Students with disabilities are proportionately assigned to each of the general education classrooms. (i.e., there is no clustering of students with disabilities in general education classrooms)
- Among many students with disabilities and others who are academically at-risk, the most interesting students with disabilities who are included are:
  1. A primary age student who has multiple disabilities, no speech, physical disabilities and moderate/severe mental retardation
  2. A primary age student with autism; no speech; learning to use assistive technology to communicate.
  3. An upper elementary grade student with moderate mental retardation; very limited speech and language.
  4. A Second grade student with moderate mental retardation, cerebral palsy, very limited speech and language, visual impairment
  5. Three second grade students with mild/moderate mental retardation and limited language.

## **TEACH & ADAPT FOR DIVERSITY:**

- During the 1998/99 school year, primary grade teachers were using a literature based reading approach (which included a strong “Making Words” component).
- During the 1999/2000 school year, the Direct Instruction Model for Reading/Language Arts instruction was adopted and implemented on a school-wide basis.
- Using the Everyday Math series.
- Using Foss Science curriculum.
- Appropriate accommodations for students with and without disabilities is made by both general and special education teachers.
- No specialized or different curricula is used for students with disabilities. All student participate in the general education curriculum with adaptations and modifications.

## **BUILD COMMUNITY & SUPPORT LEARNING:**

- Team teaching occurs between general education teachers and special education teachers. Teams have been working collaboratively to team teach for more than 5 years.
- Students with autism, cognitive, or learning disabilities, visual or hearing impairments, many with emotional disturbance and others with behavioral challenges are supported by the classroom teacher, special education teacher and/or paraprofessionals within the general education classroom.

## **PARTNERING:**

- Frank Elementary employs two full-time parents- a parent liaison and a parent coordinator. Both are neighborhood parents. One parent has children currently attending Frank Elementary and the other parent's children recently completed their elementary education at Frank Elementary. Both parents were invited and attended the three-day Summer Institutes on Whole Schooling & Inclusive Education (summers 1998, 1999) with full financial and moral support provided by the school.
- Many parents and grandparents work and volunteer throughout the building. There are several options for parents to get paid or receive some form of reimbursement (based on their choosing) for their time and efforts.



## **Introduction**

Frank Elementary School is an urban school serving a diverse population of students with and without disabilities. Frank elementary was chosen as a research site because the school community exemplifies the five principles of Whole Schooling in its own unique, yet effective way. This school profile will provide specific examples illustrating how each of the Whole Schooling Principles are implemented across age, grade and ability levels.

### **Principle 1: Empower Citizens in a Democracy**

The first principle of Whole Schooling is to help students learn to function as effective citizens in a democracy. This principle is the core goal of our public education system and is exemplified in a number of different ways. The examples below are taken mainly from interviews and observations over a two-year period of time. When looking at the many examples, several main themes or findings emerged.

#### **Finding 1: Committed respected school leaders support the school community in democratic decision-making.**

Mr. Gordon Hess has been the school principal for approximately 12 years. His support to the staff, students, and parents is quite evident. One teacher stated, “I really wanted to teach here because the word across the district was that Mr. Hess is an awesome principal and supporter of what is good for children.” In a separate interview, another teacher said, “Our principal is very good at recognizing people with initiative and child centeredness. He allowed and supported us in creating the ultimate program. He would come in and watch lessons and be amazed at what the kids were achieving.” Yet another teacher further confirmed Mr. Hess’ support, “He works well with parents, and he gives 100% support with behavior concerns.”

When Mr. Hess was asked how he feels he supports the school community in democratic decision-making, he stated, “I don’t ever feel like I dictate to the staff. I feel myself stepping back more and more and letting people make the decisions.” He went on to say, “In addition, the site council, made up of 24 parents and teachers distributes \$350,000 of federal money. They make the decisions on how that money will be used. The Site-based counsel proposed and approved paying parent volunteers – for every hour they volunteer, they get a dollar worked off of the children’s activity fees. It is important to have people you trust make the decisions they need to make.”

There are many examples showing evidence of Finding 1. However, there were also counter examples of this finding. Multiple interviews with parents and school staff indicated that the district was concerned about some of the state and district-wide assessment scores in reading, and mandated that several schools in Kenosha choose a reform model from a proposed list. Furthermore, a particular reading model (i.e., Direct

Instruction) was strongly recommended, and consequently, the school staff decided to vote to use Direct Instruction as one component of the school-wide reading program that would be instituted in Fall, 1999. "From the top, our principal was told that he does a good job creating community at Frank, but the reading scores are too low so Frank must choose and use a reading reform model; and Direct Instruction was strongly recommended."

Those interviewed formally and informally made the following statements.

- "Site-based management is a facade. The District ultimately makes important decisions."
- "DI goes against everything we believe in."
- "I don't believe in DI, so I don't like coming to school everyday. We do it because we are professional and are told to do it, but we don't agree with it."
- "In one DI group, there are 8 students with disabilities. The DI consultant said it doesn't matter if they have disabilities, they are almost third graders and should be able to sit for 90 minutes without a break. She got mad at me because I let the students stand up and stretch during the 90 minute DI block."
- "The kids are miserable with DI. The sad thing is who advocates for the kids? We have tried and we get called in for not being a team player."
- "The DI Implementer from out East seems to be making the decisions at Frank this year. When we have a question, we have to run it past the Implementer. We even had to ask her what to write on the report card."
- "In the past four years, there was more creativity in teaching. This year, there is no time to teach anything but the mandated program of Direct Instruction."
- "Due to the large block of DI times, we have little time for science and social studies. This has taken its toll on the students too. They feel like we rush from one activity to another."
- "Decisions are slowly being taken away from our school. Everything is test scores."

Change is difficult. Most of these comments were made during the first year of implementation of the school-wide DI program. One of the main issues for the staff seemed to be that they believed they had voted to use DI for 30 minutes a day as one part of a school-wide reading reform endeavor. Within the first month or two, the DI Implementer/Consultants had stated that all children would need to be immersed in DI for 90 minutes each day, which left little to no room or time for additional literacy instruction, social studies, or science instruction.

The polarity between the examples and counter examples raises some analytical questions. First, although this school operates under a site-based council, is the site council truly able and encouraged to function in a democratic manner? Second, when the school staff is asked to vote on school-wide issues, is the staff fully informed and free to choose? These questions and others merit further conversation and study.

## **Finding 2: Students are involved in leadership roles and decision-making.**

Although finding 2 emerged out of the data from all eight research schools, observation and interview data did not provide evidence that finding 2 is present at Frank Elementary. However, it should be noted that this doesn't mean there are no opportunities for students to be involved in leadership roles and decision-making opportunities. It simply indicates that the researchers did not see or hear about such opportunities when conducting observational visits and interviews. This would also be an excellent area for the Frank Community to be mindful of and to explore further.

## **Finding 3: Schools grow and change quickly, but schools reform slowly.**

A superintendent once said that it takes a minimum of seven years for a new practice or reform effort to truly take hold and become common practice. Yet, how many schools and districts have the patience and fortitude to stay the course for more than a few years? In the midst of school reform initiatives are many changes and growing pains. Frank Elementary is not alone in their school-wide reforms efforts in reading. In 1998, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction brought forth grant incentives for school-wide reform efforts, in particular for literacy reform. These monetary incentives would help to start lasting reform in several schools throughout the state. Other schools and districts were undertaking the same reform initiatives and Frank Elementary was one of many.

When this research grant began selecting and researching the eight schools in the spring of 1999, Frank Elementary already had a long established reputation of being an inclusive school. The efforts to begin inclusive education reform began in 1991, and eight years later, it was established and working well (See inclusion reform timeline for details). In the Spring of 1999, the majority of literacy instruction at Frank Elementary was based on a literature-based model, and students of varying academic levels were able to actively participate in classroom literacy lessons. During initial observations, researchers saw children with and without disabilities enjoying reading and writing, demonstrating literacy skills and social skills while engaged with children's literature, while teachers were confident and competent in making adaptations and modifications when needed. The ability to teach such a diverse group of children in an inclusive and meaningful literacy context took great skill and time to develop. This was the outcome of long-term reform. However, more and more attention was beginning to be paid to school-wide and state-wide assessments and some of the literacy and social outcomes that resulted from this current model were not evident in the state and school-wide assessments given. As a result, change began, and it began quickly.

By Fall of 1999, Frank Elementary was using a school-wide Direct Instruction Program for Reading at all grade levels, Kindergarten through grade 5. This abrupt change brought stress, uncertainty and dissonance among the students, staff, and volunteers. From spring to fall, a whole new reading program was adopted and implemented with intensive training and monitoring by outside consultants and implementers. New reading materials were purchased for the entire school. Children with and without disabilities

rarely received their reading instruction together as reading was no longer provided by the homeroom teacher, rather the children were regrouped into smaller ability-based DI groups. Over the summer, the philosophy and approach to reading in the building was expected to change from a literature-based philosophy and approach, to a strict phonics and skill-based philosophy and approach.

In the midst of such change was growth. Sixty additional children came to Frank Elementary. This is a neighborhood school and there are many families within the neighborhood that have a low socioeconomic status and meet the poverty guidelines. However, because Frank Elementary has had such a tremendous reputation of educating a diverse student population ( i.e., ESL students, students with various disabilities; etc.), more and more families have moved into the Frank Elementary neighborhood. Only the students in the Head Start Program are bussed to Frank. All of the other students who are served at Frank Elementary are residents of the neighborhood.

In summary, Frank Elementary is a prime example of how students can grow and change quickly. The growth and change described above took place over one summer. Yet, the challenge is to build a structure that truly reforms and is able to maintain such reforms, when evidence shows that it is effective and best practice. The challenge to Frank Elementary is to manage the changes and the growth while evaluating and monitoring valuable, meaningful, and useful outcomes for students. Change happens quickly, but reform takes time.

**Finding 4: School leaders promote and believe that continual staff development, research, and collaboration improves the quality of education for all.**

Frank Elementary has been involved in staff development, research and collaboration for at least the last ten years. Mr. Hess, the school principal as well as several key parents workers and teachers have all assumed leadership roles in various staff development and research projects. For example, Ms. Hopkins, a special education teacher at Frank, took the initiative to submit the paperwork necessary for Frank Elementary to be involved in the Rural-Urban Whole Schooling Research Project. The staff has most recently been involved in intensive, on-going staff development in Direct Instruction. Furthermore, in the early to mid-1990's, the efforts of several school leaders led to Frank developing into a strong inclusive school. Overall, the staff works collaboratively every day to meet the many and unique needs of such a diverse student body. All who visit Frank Elementary see teachers team teaching, parent workers and teachers collaborating on individual children, and parent volunteers working with teachers and children at all grade levels. The collaborative working relationships developed and maintained at this school is the foundation upon which so many students get their needs met on a daily basis.

**Finding 5: Diversity across ethnicity, SES, culture, ability, etc. is accepted and valued.**

Diversity is in great abundance at Frank Elementary. Ninety percent of the student body is on free or reduced lunch, twenty percent of the students receive special education, fifty-one percent are Black and twenty-nine percent are Hispanic. There is a significant degree of racial integration in this neighborhood school with 80% of the student body being non-white. Although the student body is diverse, that diversity is not significantly reflected in the staff. There were less than a handful of Black or Hispanic staff members during the period of this research study. In spite of this, one of the parent workers stated, “The people who work here are diverse – different political persuasions, religious persuasions. We love that diversity and learn from it.”

Frank Elementary is a diverse school. Yet, the continuing challenge for the district and the school is to employ more racially diverse staff in order to more closely reflect the racial diversity in the student body. This is a common challenge among urban schools, in particular. The Frank Elementary community values diversity and continues to move in the direction of employing and soliciting volunteers, who are parents and neighbors of the students.

### **Finding 6: Students, teachers, and parents are encouraged and empowered to develop their true selves.**

In democratic schools, all people are encouraged and empowered to develop their individuality. There were many examples of this practice at Frank Elementary. During one observation of a second grade classroom, the children were starting their snack time and show and tell. Heidi (who experiences autism) got up from her desk and walked to the front of the room, picked up a book and pretended to read to the class (See illustration). She flipped through a few pages and babbled (pretending to read). The children sat and listened and then when she closed the book, the children spontaneously clapped for Heidi. Heidi smiled and looked at the kids and then went back to her desk and sat down to finish her snack. The students are comfortable and encouraged to express their individuality just as Heidi had done. This philosophy is held by many of the staff, parents, and the school principal. One parent confirmed this in an interview, “The principal at Frank supports student individuality. I definitely value his leadership and the leadership of others in the school because of this.”

In another second grade classroom, the classroom teacher modeled and demonstrated her belief in this finding by continually encouraging divergent thinking from her students. “I would have done it this way, but either way you will get the same answer because there are different ways to get the answer you are looking for.” As in the other classrooms, this teacher taught a diverse group of students and she saw diversity as a strength upon which to capitalize.

Children at Frank Elementary feel free to express themselves and their feelings, knowing that the staff understands them, cares about them and will support them. One parent stated, “We routinely see some of the children angry or troubled and then they connect with a staff member and the feel cared about and content.” Heidi, a student with autism, and her teachers continually demonstrate this understanding and support of free

expression. Heidi's desk is near a full-length mirror in the classroom. Periodically, she gets up and talks to the mirror as if it were a person. Her teachers all believe that this is serving as a friend to Heidi – a friend who speaks her language and understands her, gets excited about the same things Heidi gets excited about. She runs to the mirror and tells it that she is going out to recess, she reads a book to the mirror, etc. Because Heidi's teachers and classmates understand her and the nature of her disability, she freely expresses herself in her own unique way and continually receives their support. Heidi and other students at Frank are encouraged and empowered to be their true selves.

Given the transition to Direct Instruction, some of the staff and volunteers felt that the children were not given as many opportunities to express their individuality during the 90 minute reading block. Several interviewees expressed concern and one stated, "We used to be able to do a lot of creative activities in reading and writing, but now with DI we have to follow the script and cannot deviate from it. The rigidity of the program implementation parallels a form of brain washing or compliance training. Are the children really being taught reading and language or are they being taught to comply and recite? Children are not able to express themselves."

Given that this concern came from multiple sources, it will be important for the staff to be mindful of and monitor it closely. The Frank community has a well-earned history when it comes to encouraging and supporting student individuality. It may be a challenge to find ways in which this finding can be supported in the midst of the current reading and language curriculum block.

## **Principle 2: Include All**

The second principle of Whole Schooling supports instructional practices where All children learn together across culture, ethnicity, language, ability, gender, and age. This principle is exemplified in many different ways. The following findings and corresponding examples will demonstrate this.

### **Finding 1: Students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.**

There were numerous examples illustrating how children with disabilities had access to the general education curriculum at Frank Elementary. A brief history of how this came to be was described during an interview with one of the teachers. "The way we are working with kids within the general education classroom is better than the way we pulled them out before. One time, several years ago, I went in to observe in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade room and I realized that I had kids sitting in my special education classroom that could be working in here with just a few modifications."

The staff at Frank Elementary are very skilled in making modifications to the general curriculum as well as adaptations to the instructional setting. The staff believes that the children can succeed when the modifications and adaptations are made. As an observer,

it was impossible to tell who has a disability, given the curriculum and instruction in math and science classes. One classroom teacher stated, "I include everyone to their ability. I rephrase questions, modify math problems, incorporate manipulatives, have students work together in partner and groups, etc." Another teacher added, "Modifying is difficult, but the goal is to have children achieve and be the best they can be and not to always be doing the same things."

This finding was also evident for children with more significant disabilities and with those who have very limited verbal skills. The following examples illustrate this. Students in this second grade class were working on money in math class. After some practice in partners, the teacher called the class together. Students were asked to take turns coming up to the overhead to demonstrate the answers to the money problems. Ms. N. called Holly up to the overhead. "Tell us how much money you have, Heidi." Heidi: put the coins that were in her hands on the overhead. Ms. N: "Class, how much money does Heidi have?" Heidi: Heidi tried to count with the children by nodding her head and making a noise for each number. Class: "500 dollars." Ms. N: "Very good Heidi!" Class: Spontaneously claps for Heidi. Heidi: Looks at the class, smiles, runs back to her desk, and puts her hands up in the air saying, "I did it!" Ms. N: "Isn't she a joy to have in class! She is so excited and so much fun!"

Another example of Heidi accessing the general education curriculum occurred during the reading block of Direct Instruction. Heidi was working in her small reading group with Ms. B. (another second grade teacher). Heidi was able to demonstrate all of the sounds that her group was working on. Some of the sounds were: Sh, u, I. Heidi pronounced all sounds accurately. Ms. P. (a paraprofessional) gave her a cue for the "Sh" sound by putting her finger to her mouth. Heidi then took a turn playing the teacher for the other children in her group. She took the pointer and pointed to each of the sounds. The group of 4 girls waited for Heidi to point and then recited the sounds in unison. (See illustration). When Heidi was finished with the group, she sat down to do her seatwork. With support at the elbow, she wrote the letters in her name.

One of Heidi's classmates is Latrelle. Latrelle was in a car accident last year and as a result has traumatic brain injury. He made a lot of progress last year according to his special education teacher. After the accident, he returned to Frank school in a wheelchair and had to relearn everything. On this particular fall day, he is sitting at a desk, watching the other children as models and participating in the same math lesson as the class. He has a walker that he uses at times, and he continues to get therapy in and outside of school.

Heidi, Latrelle, and many other students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and the general education environment. They are full and

participating members in their grade level classrooms. The teaching staff holds high, yet reasonable expectations for the students, and they live up to the challenge.

The only counter example that was observed was that of a Kindergarten student with significant disabilities, Jacob. Jacob is nonverbal. His teacher reports, “Jacob functions at about a six-to-nine month level. “He really needs someone working individually with him when the class is doing Direct Instruction.” Jacob plays in the sand table, strings beads, or listens to music or stories on the headphones while his classmates are working on reading. Although Jacob is not involved in the general education curriculum of his peers during reading and language, it is an opportune time for him to work on his own IEP goals and objectives, given that support is provided for him at that time.

## **Finding 2: Inclusion is valuable for kids with disabilities.**

Although students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and environment, is it a valuable time and experience for them? The examples from Frank span over two years and reveal that their inclusion with non-disabled peers has produced some valuable outcomes. Heidi (who experiences autism) has been a part of the research from Kindergarten through second grade, and has exemplified this very finding. Three of Heidi’s teachers talked about how far she has progressed in the two years, with regard to broadening her interests, increasing effort, and developing academic skills. “Heidi has made so much progress in the last two years. Her classmates are good peer supports to her and each other. They really have included Heidi in all that they do and yet allow her choices and flexibility in order to get her needs met.”

In Kindergarten, Heidi rarely made eye contact or interacted with her classmates. By second grade, this had changes quite a bit. Ms. P said, “Look at how Heidi watches all of the other children to see what they are doing and then she does the same.” During one observation, Heidi was sitting at her desk using the math manipulatives, as were the other children. The classroom teacher, Ms. N. was modeling and teaching on the overhead. Heidi looked around at the other children from time to time to see what they were doing. She looked up to see what Ms. N. had on the overhead. Heidi continued watching and working on math with the class for 15 minutes. During another observation, Heidi watched her classmates writing their names on their papers. She was interested in doing the same and wrote four of the letters in her first name. Heidi appeared to thrive in structured situations that involved her non-disabled classmates. She held herself to the same expectations as her peers and gradually began to develop new skills through the modeling of her peers and teachers.

There are quite a few students with disabilities who appeared to thrive in this inclusive environment. In one particular class, the observer notes that the children with mental retardation kept up with the rest of the kids in math. A stranger would not be able to pick out the students with disabilities or the one’s with adapted materials. At times, the pacing or rate of work completion was slower for some of the students. However, those students with even slightly modified materials were able to pick up their pace and keep up with a similar rate of work completion as their nondisabled classmates.



Only one particular case emerged as a counter example to this finding. Jacob, the kindergarten student with significant disabilities did not always appear to have his unique needs met in the inclusive setting he was in. His teachers were quite experienced in creating a supportive inclusive environment and had served similar students over the years. However, due to the school-wide reading curriculum that was being implemented, Jacob was unable to participate and often was a peripheral part of the class during that 90 minute time period. He would spend this time standing by the window watching the sunlight shine through the blinds, making guttural sounds, walking around the room, or playing by himself. Jacob was certainly welcomed and accepted by his classmates, but he was not benefiting from the curriculum during this time block. If Jacob or other students like him are to be educated at Frank Elementary, the staff will need the support, resources, and flexibility necessary to truly meet the individualized needs of the student. This challenge is important for Jacob and possibly other students at Frank and warrants further discussion.

### **Finding 3: Inclusion improves the educational experience for all kids.**

It is also critical to investigate the impact of inclusive programming of students without disabilities. The strongest examples of this finding came from interviews with the parents. One parent stated, “I value the inclusion at this school. I had one child who was gifted and I wasn’t sure about inclusion for her, but I soon changed my mind. There is more to school than academics. I am a full supporter.” Another parent commented, “We are an inclusive school. A few parents think inclusion infringes on their child’s right to learn. I always explain to them that every child has a right to be here and learn. I would like to have more parents aware that having different people in their child’s classroom enriches the life of their child. I think the majority of parents feel the same as I do.”

The staff at Frank Elementary works very collaboratively. There is one special educator for each grade level. The special educator has a desk right in one of the general education classrooms and willingly works with all of the children at the grade when needed. Sometimes the special education teacher teaches a large group lesson to the entire class, sometimes s/he teaches a small group or works with an individual. The students at each grade level essentially get an additional teacher to help meet their needs as an individual and as a grade level group. This is beneficial to all of the children. Special education paraprofessionals also serve students within the general education classrooms and assist non-disabled students as well. This additional staff is a strong and consistent support to all.

### **Finding 4: Inclusion provides positive, proactive supports for student communication.**

The inclusive classroom has been a supportive environment for several students with limited communication. These children are immersed in communication and are anxious to find ways to communicate with peers. At one point in time over the two-year period, Heidi was introduced to a touch talker. She would use the computerized communication

device to initiate and respond to her peers. In addition, Heidi also began to attempt more and more speech sounds and to imitate those sounds and words used by her classmates. In first grade, she often used the word “baw” for ball when playing with classmates at recess. Jacob was introduced to a pressure switch as a tool for requesting a toy and he often attempted to sign “more” when participating in snack time with his classmates.

Although there isn’t sufficient data to confidently support this premise, observational data from multiple visits over a one-year period indicated that Heidi was very much engaged in the reading and language curriculum and was making progress with sounds, time on task, and some pre-writing skills. Perhaps the scripted Direct Instruction materials work for Heidi given that she seems to flourish in the context of predictability and following patterns and routines. This repetitious exposure to sounds likely helped to launch Heidi into producing more speech sounds, words, and some short phrases. Given the positive progress made by Heidi, one of her teachers continually questioned if Heidi would accomplish even more at a faster rate if she were immersed in sign language as a method of communication. Sign language as a viable option for Heidi should not be dismissed. It may be a good communication method to supplement Heidi’s limited communication at some point in her life. It is an option to keep in mind.

### **Finding 5: Inclusion promotes the natural distribution of students.**

Students with and without disabilities are naturally distributed among grade level classrooms at Frank Elementary. There is a high preponderance of students receiving special education at Frank (i.e., 20%) and there is also a high preponderance of students who are at-risk or have educational needs, but do not qualify for special education. All of these students are equally distributed among their age-mates and served in general education classrooms. For example, in one second-grade classroom, there are seven students who experience a range of disabilities from speech/language disorders to mental retardation to visual impairments. This number may seem high to an outsider, but the number of students with disabilities and special needs in the school are high due to poverty, transiency, and other community influences.

The only clustered classroom at Frank is that of a few students with severe emotional disturbance, who are grouped together in a special education classroom. The only other example of clustering practices involved 8 students with disabilities in one of the Direct Instruction groupings. In this particular group, there were 5 students with cognitive disabilities, 2 students with learning disabilities and one with an emotional disability. The staff was opposed to clustering this group together, but was instructed to do so by an outside consultant and implementer.

Given that special educators are assigned to grade level teams and have no special classrooms or offices out of which they work, it is necessary for all of the students to be equally distributed among grade level teachers. Aside from the two counter examples already stated, Frank elementary is certainly distributing and serving students by using a natural proportion distribution strategy and should be commended for their commitment to this practice.

### **Principle 3: Teach and Adapt for Diversity**

The third principle of Whole Schooling promotes the philosophy and practice of designing instruction for diverse learners that engage them in active learning in meaningful, real-world activities. One method for supporting this principle is by developing accommodations and adaptations for learners with diverse needs, interests, and abilities. The following findings and examples illustrate how Frank Elementary implements this principle.

#### **Finding 1: Instructional practices are responsive to learner’s needs, interests and abilities.**

There are multiple examples across classrooms and children that demonstrate responsiveness to students’ needs, interests and abilities. Perhaps, it is best said by one of the parents, “The Frank staff try to educate the whole child; teach each child the way they best learn which is not always the same or equal.”

In one fourth-grade class, the classroom teacher stated, “The children all learn at different rates. Some children finish a math assignment in 2 minutes and other take longer and need individualized help. Sometimes I pair the students together – one student who needs more help or time with one who doesn’t.” This same classroom teacher not only uses peers in supportive and creative ways, but also holds herself accountable for responding to individual learner’s needs. Here is an example to illustrate. A fourth-grader, Phillip didn’t know how to read the word, “peninsula,” so Ms. P asked James to read the sentence while she walked back to Phillip, smiled, and asked him to try it again. He read the sentence and pronounced all of the words correctly. Ms. P held Phillip accountable, offered her support to help, reinforced his reading with a warm smile and positive praise and then asked him to say “peninsula” again later for the class. Phillip appeared to feel like the star of the class when it came to pronouncing and spelling the word, “penninsula.” This teacher’s daily instructional practices consistently demonstrated her commitment to reaching and responding to individual learners.

In another classroom, students were all working on math. It was initially evident to the observer that the teacher had developed and passed out two different versions of the math graph; one has larger squares for those students with motor difficulties. This small adaptation was in response to the needs of a couple of students and allowed those students to achieve the same academic outcomes as their classmates.

Frank Elementary places a strong emphasis on computer skills. All students have computer class in the computer lab for four to five days each week. This computer time is used to enhance and reinforce different academic areas. For example, the computerized math curriculum that is used is the Millikin Math series. This series allows

for differentiated instruction for individual students. Consequently, this math computer program is leveled to be responsive to individual needs and abilities. During one observation of a computer class, most of the children were using the computer program to practice adding three single-digit numbers. Others were using the same program to practice single-digit addition and subtraction. Another subset of the class was working on number recognition, counting, and combining sets with sums or differences of 1 or 2.

Heidi, who has such limited communication skills, is really skilled on the computer. Her abilities and intelligence really show when she works on different computer programs in math, reading, etc. Given what Heidi is able to do on the computer and Frank's commitment to computerized instruction, it is recommended that further investigation be pursued to see how the computer and corresponding technology can further assist Heidi and other students with limited communication skills.

As stated earlier, Frank Elementary also began using Direct Instruction as a school-wide reading and language curriculum. For some students, this curriculum appears to be responsive to their needs and abilities, yet it is lacking in the response to student interests. Some of the staff felt that the former reading program left some students behind. In one interview, the following comment was shared, "With DI, the kids are more involved and getting instruction at their level. To be honest, we are still struggling with the implementation of DI. For too long, we have seen some kids with special needs flounder in the curriculum, so there is no doubt in my mind that these kids are getting a better opportunity with DI." Heidi was one of the children that was making some progress with Direct Instruction. In Heidi's first-grade group, it was surprising to see how many sounds Heidi could imitate, given that she had such limited oral communication skills. Yet, Heidi needed to be physically moving around the room in order to imitate the sound. When she was sitting still, she had a more difficult time with the same task. Other accommodations needed to be made for Heidi as well. During Direct Instruction, Ms. K. was showing colorful pictures in the DI manual and asking the kids questions like, "What did the girl do first? What did she do after?" Ms. K. asked Heidi to come and point to pictures in the DI manual (This is the adaptation for Heidi not being able to orally respond) and Heidi got up and pointed to the correct pictures successfully. In another classroom, reading groups looked like they were engaged in the DI activities during one observation. Students in Ms. R. class were reading single words such as, "Sock, Feet, On, A." Ms. R's second group was blending sounds to make the words, "In, seat, on, man." One of the boys was very engaged and being successful with the sound blending. For some of the students, this curriculum allowed them to gain skills and feel successful.

Prior to Direct Instruction, other students were more able to feel successful with the previous reading/language curriculum. Teachers felt they had more authority to make curricular decisions that would be responsive to individual needs, abilities and interests. One teacher said, "Before DI, everything was adapted for the kids. Curriculum was multi-level. Everyone could succeed by doing the same activity in their own way." Another teacher stated, "Before we spent so much time on DI, we used to start out everyday with work jobs where each child had a job that was individualized and developmentally leveled. Some did puzzles, pegs, colors, worked on their names, etc. By 9:15 they

checked in with the teacher so everyday we had individualized assessment on every child and could see what their strengths were.” Finally, another staff member added, “For a long time we have done a nice job with the social element of inclusion. Through our curriculum, we are now starting to meet the academic needs of the kids as well.”

Finally, there were times when individualized instruction was needed in order to be responsive to the needs of certain students. Once again, here is an example of the staff’s responsive to Heidi’s interests, abilities and needs. Mrs. P. suggested they do a language lesson. Heidi was VERY excited about the story they were going to reread about the worm that would “wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, and dig, dig, dig.” Heidi loved the story as Mrs. P. read it. Mrs. P. would have Heidi partner read by expecting her to recite certain parts of the pattern story. Heidi’s favorite part was to attempt to say, “Dig, Dig, Dig.” At times, Heidi would sign some of the parts of the story (mostly the actions that the other animals in the story were doing, like Fly, Roar, etc.). Heidi was very engaged in the story and stayed with the story from start to finish. She would use her Touch Talker to tell Mrs. P. to “Turn the page.” Heidi had very engaging eye contact with Mrs. P. throughout this story, the poem that followed, and the next story (see illustration).

On another occasion, Mrs. P. worked with Heidi in the computer lab on a new reading program. Heidi didn’t like it at first. It was the story, “Going on a Bear Hunt.” Slowly, she was introduced to the story with the sound. Within 5 minutes, Heidi loved this program and was using it independently to read and follow the story. She was laughing and giggling with each new event in the story. Her legs were swinging, she put the headphones on and worked through the story program. When she finished, she decided to do it again. Holly really loves to reread stories. This is yet another strong example that illustrates how children’s needs, not labels, drive the majority of decisions regarding student supports needed and appropriate curriculum.

The majority of counter examples to this finding were due to the transition to Direct Instruction. During various interviews, different staff expressed these concerns.

- “We have a few students with more severe disabilities that aren’t getting anything out of our school-wide reading program. We don’t have enough time to work with them on their IEP goals and objectives when we are all involved in teaching Direct Instruction groups. One or two of the students would make so much more progress if more sign language was incorporated into their language and reading instruction.”
- “With DI, we teach straight to the middle, there is no multi-level to it. DI points out everything the kids can’t do. Given this, I think some of the children would benefit from individualized reading rather than being in a DI group. I have never said that before because individualized pull-out instruction wasn’t needed, given the way we used to structure reading.”
- “DI is too fast-paced for many of our students. The students are having trouble with transitioning and the school is seeing more behavioral referrals because of it.”

- “With DI, we don’t teach the material at the rate the children need. We rush through it because we have to get through lesson 150 or we get reprimanded by the implementer.”
- “With DI there is overkill on the repetition. Then most of the kids are squirrely and start moving around in their seats. I do think that DI has some benefits. It is good for corrective reading, but the kids can really only handle 40 minute, not 90 minute blocks. After 40 minutes they have trouble processing information and boredom sets in.”
- “Second-graders didn’t begin reading their first DI story until January, Lesson 44. Their first story consisted of 21 words and had no comprehension qualities. The lowest second-grade DI group worked on the same 5 sounds for six weeks.”

Researcher observational data parallels some of these concerns. During a DI lesson in April of the first year, it appeared that the children were just going through the motions. They didn’t even look at the pictures in the manual before responding. They were looking around the room and wiggling in their chairs. All of the kids appeared lethargic and uninterested. Perhaps the time change is a contributing factor or maybe it is because it has been 8 months of the same reading routine everyday for 90 minutes.

In another observation, the researcher looked through the fourth-grade Reasoning and Writing book for DI. The students were on Lesson 21, which said, “Write the letter of each picture that shows what the sentence says, “He held a bottle. A person held a container. She held a container, he held a container.” In the next section, “Fill in the blank with “He, she or it.” Next, “Put in capitals and periods.” Not only were some of the directions confusing (e.g., the first set of directions), but the content was not engaging for the students. If this class gets to lesson 110 this year, they will be identifying nouns, adjectives, verbs and pronouns by filling in the blanks of worksheets. The writing expectations for these fourth-graders appears to be quite low.

Yet another counter example focused on the new math curriculum. One teacher expressed concern over the math curriculum’s ability to be responsive to the students. “We used to use Math their Way, but now we started using Everyday Math (University of Chicago). It is a hands-on program which is very good, but it is also a spiral curriculum and covers too many topics. We are teaching tetrahedrons and they haven’t grasped money, time and computation skills yet. The old math program focused on mastery. This one focuses on exposure. The vocabulary is a struggle and well beyond many of the kids and even their parents for whom English is their second language.

In closing, given the concerns, It will be very important for the staff to have the authority to evaluate and supplement these school-wide curricular programs with additional literacy and math curriculum. This would provide a vehicle that would better respond to the students’ needs, abilities and interests. One of the many strengths of the Frank Elementary staff is that the staff consists of some very engaging teachers. Their skills will be best used and student outcomes will be greater if those engaging teachers are given the power to use engaging curriculum throughout the day.

## **Finding 2: Motivating instruction reduces the need for individual accommodations.**

As just stated, Frank Elementary is fortunate to have such engaging and motivating teachers. The ability of so many teachers to motivate and maintain engagement during instruction reduces the need for many individual accommodations that would need to be made.

The science and social studies curriculum and instruction requires hands-on involvement from the students. For example, the Aims project was used for science. One lesson required that the students dig dirt out of different places and then bring in the samples to analyze and study. In social studies, Mrs. P made Wisconsin history and geography more meaningful for the students by having students create posters on Wisconsin agriculture and Wisconsin sports. She also asks them engaging questions such as: “Where would I go if I wanted to see or pick cherries in the summer?” and “Door County is a peninsula. Why do we call it a peninsula?”

Music also played a role in motivating the students. One of the teachers sings a lot to her students. In music class, the music teacher includes all of the children with disabilities by making slight modifications. The students regularly use instruments to demonstrate and practice patterns and rhythms and the teacher chooses motivating songs and chants for the children to sing and learn. Many times their music lesson incorporated information from other cultures, customs and holidays. These are but a few examples to illustrate this finding.

## **Finding 3: “Authentic” curriculum and instructional practices are implemented (Authentic: Involving the construction of knowledge; disciplined inquiry; value beyond school).**

Generally, that curricula which students find to be motivating is also useful and authentic in some form. Consequently, many of the examples above also fit under finding three. There were additional examples that will be shared here.

Starting with fourth-grade, during one observation, the students were using the Investigations Science Curriculum to study earth materials. They had lab manuals, rock trays and a supply bag to use for their investigation. They had a penny, paper clip, and piece of chalk in each supply bag. Their task was to do scratch tests on the rocks and minerals in order to identify different properties and uses for each rock or mineral. Mrs. P, “Yesterday we looked at all four of our minerals and talked about their properties. What were some of the properties of your minerals?” Students replied, “It was rough. “It was shiny. Clear. Scratchy. Jagged. It’s white. When you shine light in it, you can see a rainbow. It’s hard. It’s luster sparkles. It’s dull. It’s flat. Glittery.” The students talked

about luster, texture, color, etc. The students really seemed to see themselves as scientists as they conducted these experiments and made observations.

During another observation, the children were all doing a research project on a famous person or place in WI. They chose the person or place and they chose the type of project. Some made a poster illustrating the qualities of their famous person or the unique features of their chosen place. They each wrote to the chamber of commerce to get information on different cities and people.

In another classroom, the teacher and children often incorporated different cultures and traditions into the daily curriculum. Since 29% of the students at Frank Elementary are Hispanic, this class celebrated Cinco de Mayo, learned the Mexican hat dance and discussed Mexican culture and customs as they were celebrated by different students in the class.

There were also counter examples for this finding, all of which were grounded in the transition to Direction Instruction as the Reading and Language Curriculum. Staff and parents who were interviewed expressed the following concerns.

- “Our DI consultant insists that the children are prohibited from writing anything until they have mastered all of the sounds and corresponding letters. The consultant also prohibits them from having access to children’s storybooks. Only the advanced group has a little book that they are using for reading. The other groups work on sounds, blending and worksheets. The whole story in this little book (if you would call it a story) is: ‘We save rocks. We sit on rocks. We give an old man lots of rocks.’ That’s it. Most days they are completely bored with their literacy instruction and now they hate reading.”
- “Our new reading program is very phonics and skills-based. It doesn’t focus on comprehension. It will take some time for everyone to get used to it. I think it might benefit some of the kids. The strength of it is that all of the children are learning at their level and all of the teachers are using the same reading program. The weakness is that in some of the classrooms there are as many as nine reading groups, the repetition isn’t fun, the children aren’t able to even look at books, and I think the children should be doing more writing.”
- “With DI, the kids aren’t supposed to be writing. They have to do worksheet and after worksheet for their writing instruction. Some of the DI workbook activities are confusing, e.g., ‘Cross out the box that does not have the right first step.’ When I looked at the children’s workbooks, four of the five children did not get it correct. This worksheet is supposed to reinforce the concept of ‘first’ but the page is very confusing and the children don’t find it interesting or useful. Other directions on the DI workbook pages often include multiple directions, e.g., ‘Use a blue crayon to cross out the one that is not first. There is too much for some of the children to remember. Another DI worksheet stated, ‘Circle the baskets that are not empty.’ Is the worksheet checking for understanding of “empty” or “full?” “Not empty” only seems



to add a new level of confusion for the kids. It seems that the purpose of these workbook activities is to learn to follow directions and not to learn concepts.”

These multiple comments from different sources strongly point out some concerns with the literacy curriculum. Careful monitoring of the curriculum’s authenticity, usefulness and value within and beyond school will be critical to the success of these young children becoming skilled and interested readers and writers.

#### **Finding 4: Instructional practices integrate curriculum.**

Some of the teachers are also very skilled at integrating the curriculum and showing students the connections between different academic disciplines. The integration of curriculum can also help the students see the relevancy and usefulness of what they are learning. This is especially important for students with disabilities or students who are at-risk, since they are continually challenged by the curricular demands. One teacher reported, “One summer, we worked on integrating math, science and literature in a multi-level manner because of all of the students that are included.” During an observation, the researcher noted the integration of literature with math. Ms. G read, “Gray Rabbit’s Odd One Out” as the introduction to the math lesson on sorting and graphing by colored jelly beans. Reading strategies, such as the use of prediction were also taught and reinforced throughout this math lesson.

Not only are academic subjects integrated, but the music teacher is also skilled at integrating the arts with academics. She incorporates reading strategies into music class by having the students do choral reading, rhyming and echo reading. She also integrates music with social studies in the following example, She addressed the children, “I know that you are working on finding things in the library about Australia. I want you to look in the encyclopedia or a book about Australia and find a picture of a Kookaburra. If you find a picture and bring it to music class the next time, you will get extra credit. Another thing you could do at home for fun is to make a Didgeridoo. Take a paper towel holder and decorate it and then you can hum into it.” The students were so motivated and interested in getting to the library and making the Didgeridoo. They were discussing it with each other as they left class.

#### **Finding 5: School staff implement a number of major determiners of learning, including: small class size, high expectations, time on task, accountability, effective management strategies, predictability, structure and routine, high attendance and participation rates, and relevant curriculum.**

Many of these major determiners of learning were visible in the classrooms at Frank Elementary. In one parent interview, the following comment was shared, “We have even higher academic standards for the kids than ever, and the kids are performing at higher levels than we ever expected.” For, example, when comparing student work samples, one researcher observed that Heidi’s art work and math work were posted on the wall along

with the work of her classmates. It was very difficult to see any differences in Heidi's work samples in art and math versus the work samples of nondisabled classmates.

Actually, in spite of the many concerns expressed about using Direct Instruction at Frank Elementary, it does contain major determiners of learning. Direct Instruction promotes a swift lesson pace, increased time on task, repetition and modeling. The challenge is not to overdue or overuse some of these characteristics to the detriment of student learning. For example, a swift lesson pace keeps students engaged, yet a lesson pace that is too swift will leave students behind. We know that modeling and repetition through practice often helps learning occur, but overuse of repetition can leave students bored and unengaged. This raises an analytical question for further consideration and discussion. Is reading achievement affected by the school-wide use of a specific reading model or is student achievement the result of: 1) A school-wide increase in time on task for reading, 2) School-wide commitment, structure, consistency and focus on reading achievement, 3) Commitment to smaller pupil-teacher ratios during reading instruction, and 4) Higher expectations and accountability for student learning?

Accountability can also be a major determiner of learning. If students are not held accountable in some way for their own growth and learning, it is less likely that they will stay engaged or use what they have learned in the future. One parent stated, "Testing is okay with me. It is one way to help us be accountable." The school principal also commented on testing, "In past years we haven't felt comfortable testing our students with special needs, but this year we tested everyone except one child." Parents and staff also commented on student progress reports as an accountability tool. "We moved away from grades and some parents didn't like that. Parents needed more information. Once I understood why we moved away from grades and toward reporting on student competencies, I was all for it. I don't care if my child gets an "A" on the report card. I want to know what s/he can do."

As previously mentioned, the staff also possesses some critical teacher qualities that enhance learning for their students. Many are nurturing, respectful, and hold high expectations for each one of their students. A paraprofessional, Mrs. P. supports and encourages Heidi and the interactions between Heidi and her classmates. She promotes independence and holds Heidi to high standards. She knows when to step back and let Heidi work independently or with the other children. One of the classroom teachers, Mrs. P., has a warm and professional manner. She is an excellent model for her students. She holds the students accountable, relates information to their interests and experiences and projects a very caring attitude toward each individual student. She has a lot of students with different needs in her class, as well as a diverse cultural mix and many students living in poverty.

There are multiple factors that help to promote learning. These examples were a small illustration of how some of these learning determiners are implemented at Frank Elementary. Some cautions or concerns were also addressed regarding the overuse of certain determiners. It is important to be mindful of these factors in the sense that some

could be capitalized on further while others are being over used and may be affecting learning in negative ways.

#### **Principle 4: Build Community & Support Learning**

Principle four focuses on the school's practices for building an effective and supportive learning community. This often requires the use of specialized school and community resources (e.g., special education, Title 1, gifted education) to build support for students, parents, and teachers. This principle also focuses on building community and mutual support within the classroom. Finally, providing proactive supports for students with behavioral challenges is a necessary ingredient. The following findings and examples illustrate Frank Elementary's commitment to principle four.

#### **Finding 1: The creative use of available time, staff, parents, and peers benefits and supports ALL students.**

Creativity can be a tremendous asset and resource when it comes to supporting the needs of students. As described earlier, in the last ten years, the Frank staff realigned positions so that every grade level has a special education teacher to help support all of the students. The special educators teach and assist students with and without disabilities, just as the general educators do. They take turns teaching the whole class, working with small groups, and assisting individual students. Having this extra teacher at every grade is a great asset to all of the children. The school principal commented, "In all of the years we have had inclusion, I haven't had one parent come in and tell me they didn't like it or have a concern with it."

Another noteworthy practice is the creative use of parents and volunteers at Frank. The school utilizes many parents and volunteers as classroom assistants, lunch and recess supervisors, office assistants, and parent liaisons. Parents are given an option to pay their child's school fees by volunteering time instead of paying money. For each hour volunteered, one dollar is deducted from the child's school fees. One foster parent, Norma, volunteers full-time all year round. Through her time donation, she pays off her foster daughter's fees and then donates the rest of the year to paying off the fees of other children for whom paying the fee may cause an undue burden on the family. Norma is a remarkable person and is highly regarded and valued by the students and staff.

In the kindergarten classroom, parents are invited to participate in the Sock-it-to-me program. Parents volunteer to come in and read a book to the children while wearing silly socks. Some parents don't read or speak English, so they read in Spanish. It gives the parents confidence and practice too. Children would ask the parents when they learned to read. Some would say, "When I was 16."

One counter example that surfaced periodically was that some special educators were not active members of the grade level teaching team. At times, the special educator wasn't in

the classroom when scheduled to be there, and the students and classroom teacher were in need of the support. During one of these times, the classroom teacher commented, “I don’t know where Ms. X. is. She is supposed to be working with these girls and she has their assignments. That is why they are wandering around the room and have nothing to do.” On a few other occasions, the grade level special educator would be sitting at her desk while the students were asking all of their questions to the classroom teacher. This is one concern to be mindful of if it appears to be a continuing pattern at certain grade levels.

## **Finding 2: Peers serve as natural supports for their classmates.**

The students often served as supports and coaches for each other as well. This was a two-way street. Researchers saw students without disabilities assisting others with disabilities, but the same was true for students with mental retardation or other disabilities assisting their nondisabled classmates. One classroom teacher talked about how she encourages peer support. “The children all learn at different rates. Some children finish a math assignment in 2 minutes and others take longer and need individualized help. Sometimes I pair the students together – one student who needs more help or time with one who doesn’t.”

There were many examples of Heidi using her peers as natural supports. During one observation, Heidi sat in the semicircle with the other children. She reached for a little boy’s hand and clapped her hand to his while she said the different sounds that her teacher modeled (“E” “I” “a” “th” “s” “n” “A” “t” “m” “c” “h”). He had a big smile on his face and went along with her clapping. On another occasion, a little girl, Cindy, wanted to sit by Heidi and took Heidi’s hand and sat down next to Heidi. The teacher addressed the class, “Let’s use the number chart and count how many children are in our classroom. Next, would number 2 and number 4 stand up.” Cindy stood up (she was number 4). Heidi mumbled, number 4 and held up four fingers. The teacher continued, “Numbers 1, 3, and 5 stand up.” Cindy said, “Heidi, stand up. You are number 5.” Heidi stood next to Cindy with a smile on their faces. Finally, during classroom read aloud time, Mrs. P. was reading to the class. Heidi laid down and put one hand in front of one little boy next to her and another hand in front of one little girl on the other side of her. The two children stared rubbing Heidi’s hands. (They appear to know what she wanted and contributed to meeting her needs.) The children appear to be very concerned about Heidi being okay and being a part of the class. They continue to rub her back from time to time and tell her it is okay as they listen to the story. One of Heidi’s teachers stated, “Heidi’s mom is very pleased with her schooling. She can’t believe how good the other kids are with Heidi and how much they teach her.” This was confirmed when the researcher interviewed Heidi’s mother.

## **Finding 3: Whole Schools provide positive, proactive supports to manage behaviors.**

Managing behaviors is an ongoing struggle in most urban schools in particular, due to the multitude of urban issues influences. The challenge to the staff is to develop and

implement positive and proactive strategies to minimize and change inappropriate behaviors that interfere with the learning process. The staff at Frank routinely and effectively used many long-standing management strategies such as wait time, redirection, and motivating instruction. Some of the teachers also taught problem solving skills and held students accountable for using those skills. During an observation, two boys began to fight over a pencil. The classroom teacher addressed both boys, “How are you going to work it out? Remember, I’m not involved. You have to figure out to solve the problem.”

In another classroom, Ms. G stacked three colored plastic cups in the center of each desk grouping of three or four students. They all had a green cup on top of the yellow cup and the red cup was on the bottom. She stated, “The green cup means GO ahead and work. If the group gets too noisy, I will come around and change the green cup to the yellow, which means you have a warning for being too loud while working. If the group continues to be loud, I will change the top cup to red, which means you must stop working and put the laboratory materials away.” This was a very effective and proactive management strategy for managing instruction and behaviors in this classroom.

Through interviews, parents and teachers reinforced the staff’s creative use of positive and proactive management strategies. One parent commented, “Sometimes a child with behavior problems can make a class unteachable, but the staff is creative and original in positively addressing the behaviors.” Another parent stated, “We routinely see some of the children angry and troubled, and then they connect with a staff member and they feel cared about and happy.” Finally, a teacher added, “Our principal cares about all of the children getting a good education, especially those with behavior problems. He doesn’t send them home. He helps us figure out how to support the children.”

There were only a couple of counter examples that surfaced. One parent felt that, “Frank could use more one-on-one instruction for some students. Less time-outs would happen with the more one-on-one.” And another interview indicated, “DI is too fast-paced for many of our students with disabilities. These students are having trouble with transitioning and the school is seeing more behavioral referrals because of it.” This concern was also expressed by a classroom teacher when she was discussing one of her students with emotional disturbance, “Linus has really been off-task. He has had the most trouble and behavioral outbursts with this Direct Instruction structure.” As noted earlier, the transition to Direct Instruction has surfaced some concerns including concerns around student behaviors. It will be important to continually monitor this and make changes if needed.

## **Principle 5: Partnering**

The last principle of Whole Schooling is Partnering. This principle requires that schools build genuine collaborative relationships within the school and with families and the community. It further promotes that schools take an active role in strengthening the community as well as providing guidance to engage students, parents, teachers and others

in decision-making and the direction of learning and school activities. Frank Elementary exemplifies this principle in concrete ways that will be described below.

### **Finding 1: Joining together with families, community members and university faculty mutually benefits all.**

As previously stated under the first four principles of Whole Schooling, there are many opportunities for parent involvement at Frank Elementary. This may also be the case at many other schools, however, the degree of involvement by parents and neighborhood volunteers is unique for a poor urban school such as this. The principal commented, “We communicate to parents through classroom, building and district newsletters. I had 100% attendance at parent-teacher conferences. The parent workers push to get the parents here and involved.” One staff member showed her appreciation to the parents when she stated, “The children improve because the parents show interest.” When interviewing various parents, the following statements were made.

- “The school staff is so encouraging. We moved here from another state and were an at-risk family. One day, my daughter’s teacher asked me to come and help in the classroom and from then on I became a valuable resource in the school. I am now a valuable employee at this school as well as a few other parents. I would put up with a lot before I would leave this school. They have done so much for me. They gave me confidence and taught me that I am a pretty remarkable person and parent.”
- “The Frank staff is a strength. We are like a family in that we all share the same vision here for the children. The teachers are open to parents and work well with parents.”
- “This is a parent-friendly school. No parent is ever turned away at any time.”
- “Parents are impressed with Frank because staff call and visit when children don’t report for school. It is a safe school, one that the neighborhood is proud of even though it is in the inner city.
- “This school is a community center and not just a school. We have Family Fun Nights where parents are exposed to school resources, and can win useful prizes and items.”
- “I think parents trust us a lot, but I think they should keep their eyes open and keep us on our toes. Parents feel better when they know other parents are working in the school because they think a parent will watch for what is in the best interest of parents and children.”

This finding is supported by the strong connection to and influence of parents at Frank Elementary. It goes without saying that the practice of collaborating with parents should certainly be maintained. This is an invaluable resource and relationship that has been established within the Frank Elementary community.

### **Finding 2: Collaboration and Co-Teaching strengthen the overall school community and learning experiences.**

Collaborative and co-teaching are abundant at Frank. The collaborative relationships with parents were described in the former finding and will not be repeated here even though many of the examples span both findings. One teacher shared, “Inclusion works so well here because of the collaborative planning. Our team plans together every week. It is a strong team.” Another teacher added, “I enjoy team teaching with our special education teacher. However, we all enjoyed it more last year when we had more flexibility with the curriculum.” The strength of collaborative and co-teaching relations was also observed by the research team. The flow of team teaching between one special educator and her colleagues was very smooth. It was clear to see that they work together a lot and enjoy doing it.

Many additional examples of this finding have already been mentioned in previous findings under the four other Whole Schooling principles. To avoid being redundant, those examples will not be repeated again under this finding. The reader is referred back to the previous findings for additional examples of support.

### **Finding 3: Parents and students feel supported by school staff.**

Previous principles and their corresponding findings also hold valuable examples to support this finding. However, a few additional examples are unique to this finding and illustrate the support that parents and students feel from the Frank Elementary staff. The majority of examples came from multiple interviews with different parents. Parents shared the following.

- “Mr. H. is a good principal. He’s out on the playground, let’s kids give him a hug and does whatever is needed to help the kids. Parents want to send their kids here and there is a waiting list of kids who want to be transferred here from other neighborhoods.”
- “The entire staff is so supportive and encouraging. I have a volunteer award displayed in the office with my name on it.”
- “The parent workers will go to a child’s house at 7:00 at night and talk with the parents if that is the most convenient time for the parents. The parent workers go above and beyond their job to support the families.”
- “I think parents put a lot of trust in our school. They feel confident that we are meeting the needs of their children.”
- “The principal opens the door to all parents, leans toward the positive and doesn’t focus on the negative.”
- “As a parent worker, I do home visits. Sometimes a child needs a permission slip signed. Sometimes a child is sick and needs a ride home. At other times a parent just needs another parent to talk to.”
- “The teachers at Frank are really good. They are always there to talk and answer questions.”

Additional supporting information came from interviews with the school staff.

- “We hire really good people. At times there may be a candidate that is more academically competent, but not as parent and child centered as the one we hire.”
- Mr. H. confirmed, “I have always been a person who is outside on the playground, talking to parents, or going to a parent’s house when they have a concern. We have few complaints that ever get to the district level because the parents support me too and let me try to help solve issues at the building level first.”
- Mr. H. stated, “Sometimes parents come in and ask me if I will join them for their child’s IEP meeting, and I do that. When teachers ask me to come, I do that too. I personally review every IEP.”

During one observation, the researcher also witnessed the intense need for the staff to provide support to the children and their families. During an observation, the special educator came over to tell the researcher that the little boy sitting in front of her witnessed his father murder his mother one day before school last year. Then the father took off and was killed in a high-speed chase. The child currently lives with an aunt and is experiencing a lot of emotional problems due to this trauma. The daily issues that arise and must be endured by many of the children at Frank Elementary require a staff that can and will continually offer support. The staff are to be commended for their ongoing dedication and efforts to educating and supporting the children and families they serve.

## **Conclusions**

When reviewing all of the research data, there were some additional items or issues that emerged and warrant further discussion and investigation. First, both staff and parents are concerned about the neighborhood transiency problem. This is a community issue, but it has a tremendous impact on the children at Frank Elementary. Any ideas and efforts that can be devoted to this problems would be worthwhile. Second, due to the increasing number of bilingual parents, the staff and parents have expressed their desire and commitment to employing a bilingual parent and to having a bilingual parent come and speak at a Family Fun Night. Third, although there is a lot of parent involvement already, some suggestions for expanding that involvement included a monthly parent support group meeting with childcare available and the hiring of an additional parent to plan and implement more structured games during lunch and recess times. Fourth, health issues are becoming greater and greater for the children. The staff would like to investigate ways to develop and staff a health center within the building. Fifth, due to the transiency and poverty issues, among others, there is a preponderance of children who come to school quite far behind in their academics. The staff would like to look at some creative and perhaps unconventional ways to get students caught up academically. Finally, it has been a great privilege and pleasure to have Frank Elementary as a research site in this project. Thank you for your patience and cooperation in this project so that others can benefit from your good work.