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Exploring Success in the Charter Sector:

Case Studies of Six Charter Schools Engaged in Promising Practices for Children with Disabilities

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Public Impact
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Executive Summary

Introduction

A charter presents the opportunity to create a new school. While charter schools must abide by many of the same regulations that govern all public schools, they are typically granted autonomy to contemplate new approaches to instruction. Ideally, charter developers use this autonomy to develop new robust educational options for all children, including children with disabilities. This report presents findings from exploratory case studies of six charter schools identified due to their reported success educating children with disabilities. The case studies were exploratory in nature in that we aimed to document what charter schools are offering children with disabilities and we selected schools perceived to be innovative or particularly successful with children with disabilities.

The six schools are located in different states, each with its own distinctive policy environment. And, the schools are each unique in their own right. Yet, collectively, they provide insight into practices that hold promise for educating children with disabilities in both traditional and charter public schools striving to develop high quality special education programs. This report presents the cross-case findings and descriptions of the individual case study schools.

CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

- o Charyl Stockwell Academy, Howell, Michigan
- o CHIME Institute's Arnold Schwarzenegger Elementary School and CHIME Charter Middle School, Woodland Hills, California
- o ISUS Construction Technology Charter School, Dayton, Ohio
- o Metro Deaf School, St. Paul, Minnesota
- o Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, Boston, Massachusetts
- o Woodland Elementary Charter School, Atlanta, Georgia

Methodology

We conducted case studies of six schools identified because they are experiencing success with students with disabilities and perceived to be engaged in innovative or promising instructional practices. To identify the six case-study schools, we sought nominations from experts with knowledge of the charter sector and/or special education. Our selection criteria were: academic achievement, special education enrollment, innovative or promising practices, and diversity of schools according to multiple characteristics such as student demographics and policy environment. Using these criteria, we identified an initial pool of 33 schools. From this pool we then selected six schools based on the degree to which they reflected our selection criteria.

We conducted day-long school site visits between December 2007 and February 2008. During the site visits, we toured the schools and interviewed a minimum of three people. We also reviewed multiple documents for each school (e.g., annual reports, renewal applications, and

school report cards) and school websites. To verify data, we triangulated interview data from multiple informants and data collected from our document reviews. Based on the interviews and document reviews, we developed individual school case studies which we then analyzed to identify recurring characteristics and practices.

Findings

Our cross-case analysis revealed unique features at each school that were credited with boosting the academic performance of children with disabilities receiving special education services. Although the schools were each unique in their own way, they were all identified and subsequently selected for case study due to their apparent success with students with disabilities according to specific, but in some cases different, outcome metrics (e.g., demonstrating AYP, graduation rate, success post-graduation). Consequently, while the schools were diverse, we found the recurring characteristics and practices that emerged across the schools noteworthy.

In conducting the exploratory case studies, we sought to identify both innovative and promising practices and anticipated defining these practices as approaches or instructional models that are inventive or original, or identified as particularly successful for children with disabilities. Our research drove us to revise our definition of the construct of innovative to include practices that are arguably not original but rather, *relatively novel* in a public school setting. For instance, teaching children in inclusive settings or striving to reduce the number of children referred to special education by

> *In conducting the exploratory case studies, we sought to identify both innovative and promising practices and anticipated defining these practices as approaches or instructional models that are inventive or original, or identified as particularly successful for children with disabilities. Our*

providing intensive early intervention strategies is arguably not innovative. However, considering the generally poor academic performance of children with disabilities in many public schools (see National Council on Disability, 2008), successfully implementing these practices in a public school and achieving strong academic gains is arguably novel. As such, part of our exploration was to discern what conditions (e.g., degree to autonomy or leadership) are credited with fostering the implementation of promising practices.

In some instances, the practices identified were specifically implemented to benefit children with disabilities (e.g. CHIME, Charyl Stockwell, and Metro Deaf School). In other instances, the practices were not developed or implemented specifically for students with disabilities but were credited with improving outcomes for all students, including this group of students (e.g., ISUS, Roxbury Preparatory, and Woodland).

In examining the six case studies, we identified 4 broad and 12 specific recurring characteristics and practices that were credited with building strong instructional programs for children with disabilities. While these characteristics were not necessarily observed in every single school, we deemed that they were noteworthy if we documented them in at least half of the schools. The exploratory nature of the cases limited their generalizability. Nevertheless, given the diversity of the schools, we found the recurring nature of the following characteristics and practices significant.

1) Powerful school mission
   - leadership, and specifically a core commitment to incorporating children with disabilities in the overall school program;
   - a common sense of ownership and responsibility among general education teachers and school leadership for the academic performance of all of their students, including students with disabilities; and,
   - a commitment to the tenets of the IDEA beyond basic compliance and embracing the spirit of the law to provide meaningful and inclusive services to students with disabilities.

2) Strong support for teachers
   - Professional development to support meaningful access to the general education curriculum to children with disabilities; and,
   - early intervention and highly individualized instruction based on formative assessment data that inform and influence instruction.

3) Strong support for students
   - highly individualized programs for *all* students, general and special education alike, that "normalize" special education in general and the IEP in particular;
   - best instructional practices for children *without* disabilities benefit children *with* disabilities and conversely, interventions typically noted in IEPs (e.g., written directions, assistance with organizational skills, behavioral modification, and redirection) that benefit students *without* disabilities; and,
   - a safe and supportive environment in which students with disabilities felt comfortable participating as full members of the classroom.

4) Transferability to traditional public schools
   - autonomy from district policies and procedures, and specifically the ability to hire and/or fire teachers;
   - special education resources;
   - high levels of parent involvement; and,
   - leadership that is receptive to change and committed to developing strong special education programs.

Discussion

Our research inquiry was based on the hypothesis that charter schools can use their autonomy to develop innovative and implement best practices for children with di*sa*bilities. The exploratory case studies of charter schools identified as successfully educating children with disabilities revealed that the six charter schools are using a variety of approaches to educate children with disabilities.

Not all of the practices are innovative but they do appear to reflect established best practices (e.g., early intervention strategies, supportive school culture, and co-teaching); practices that can be observed in other good schools, traditional and charter alike. Furthermore, the six case studies revealed recurring characteristics and practices that may hold promise for charter and traditional public schools. While some of the schools have intentionally created successful programs for children with disabilities, other schools have simply created successful programs that benefit children with and without disabilities.

Our exploratory case studies are limited in terms of generalizability but nonetheless, we think it is significant to acknowledge the fundamental diversity of the approaches to educating children with disabilities and more broadly, educating all children, and the success these six schools are experiencing with children with disabilities. Additional in-depth research is required to track the academic progress of children with disabilities in charter schools and thereafter, investigate instructional and organization practices that correlate with exemplary academic outcomes.

Introduction

A charter school is not a specific model or educational program but rather, an opportunity to create a new school. Charter schools must abide by many of the same regulations that govern all public schools but they are extended varying degrees of autonomy to contemplate new approaches to instruction. Ideally, charter schools leverage this autonomy to create new robust educational options for all children, including children with disabilities. Yet, we know little about special education in charter schools beyond basic enrollment data and the multiple challenges associated with amassing the requisite capacity to deliver quality services (Ahearn, Lange, McLaughlin & Rhim, 2001; Rhim, 2008).

The growing charter school sector is governed by state charter laws and distinct charter school authorizer policies and practices. Charter schools must also carry out their responsibility to implement IDEA and comply with all federal laws because they are part of the public education system. Children with disabilities are guaranteed the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While the federal law outlines the parameters of the policies and procedures for educating children with disabilities under the umbrella of special education programs and supports, states, local districts, and individual schools, including charter schools, are responsible for developing the administrative infrastructure and classroom-level specialized programs required to support their education.

Research has documented multiple policy tensions and practical challenges associated with providing special education to children with disabilities in the charter sector (Ahearn et al., 2001; Rhim & McLaughlin 2007). Although charter schools generally struggle with the same issues as traditional public schools (e.g., limited resources and short supply of qualified special education personnel) they also must cope with additional challenges associated with their small size, new organizational structure, and less than ideal relationships with existing public school structures at the district, regional, and state level. Nevertheless, the autonomy granted by charter statutes provides charter school operators the opportunity to rethink how best to educate children. In fact, there is evidence that some charter schools are leveraging their autonomy to rethink their approach to educating children with disabilities and experiencing notable success. Based on the hypothesis that some charter schools are using their charters to develop new innovative programs, we conducted exploratory case studies of six schools identified due to their reported success with children with disabilities. We sought to examine what the schools are offering children with disabilities who require special education and related services and to specifically study intensely those schools perceived to be innovative or successful. Charter schools that are experiencing success educating children with disabilities may provide rich examples of innovative or promising special education practices worthy of additional research and potentially, replication.

> *The autonomy granted by charter statutes provides charter school operators the opportunity to rethink how best to educate children. In fact, there is evidence that some charter schools are leveraging their autonomy to rethink their approach to educating children with disabilities and experiencing notable success.*

In an effort to capture these practices and identify the lessons learned that may have implications for a broad audience of chartered and traditional public schools, we sought to examine both innovative and promising practices and anticipated defining these practices as approaches or instructional models that are inventive or original, or identified as particularly successful for children with disabilities. The nomination process and our preliminary screening of the schools drove us to revise our definition of the construct of innovative to include practices that are arguably not original but rather, relatively novel in a public school setting. For instance, teaching children in inclusive settings or striving to reduce the number of children referred to special education by providing intensive early intervention strategies is arguably not innovative. However, considering the generally poor academic performance of children with disabilities in many public schools (see National Council on Disability, 2008), successfully implementing these practices in a public school, and achieving strong academic gains is arguably novel.

The six schools are located in different states, each with its own unique policy environment. Each school is distinct yet they all provide insight into practices that hold promise for educating children with disabilities. This report describes 1) our research methodology, 2) the cross-case findings, and 3) profiles of the six case study schools.

Methodology

Expert Nominations

To identify sites for case study, we sought nominations of schools 1) perceived to be engaged in promising special education practices or 2) particularly successful at educating students with disabilities. As part of a separate but related research investigation, we interviewed 16 expert informants identified because of their depth and/or breadth of knowledge of special education in charter schools and we asked them to nominate schools for case study. In addition, to augment the nominations by the special education experts, we conducted targeted outreach to select authorizers, charter school advocacy organizations, and consultants to expand our list of nominated schools. The key informants included policy makers, private consultants/service providers, representatives of state and national associations, authorizers, EMO/CMO representatives, and a university professor. The names and affiliations of all of the informants are listed in the introduction of the report under acknowledgements.

An additional strategy to identify successful or innovative special education programs entailed a targeted request for nominations of schools in Florida and Ohio. Nationwide, there are currently 71 charter schools created specifically to educate students with disabilities. While 13 states have at least one special education school, a disproportionate number of these schools are in Florida and Ohio (34 and 16 respectively) (Mead, 2008). The charter school laws in both of these states encourage the development of charter schools for students with disabilities. Based on this policy environment, we hypothesized that these two states may be particularly open to innovative or promising special education programs. Similar to our requests for nominations from the initial group of experts, we sought nominations from key informants in these two states. Our contacts in Ohio nominated multiple schools but we were not successful soliciting nominations from Florida.

All total, our requests for nominations generated a list of 33 schools.

Criteria for Selecting Case Study Schools

Determining whether a charter school is engaged in innovative, promising, and successful special education practices is difficult because there is not a single tangible and easily accessible measure of the degree to which an individual school's special education program meets these criteria. In the absence of a single tangible indicator, we developed multiple criteria that we propose that in combination, are indicators of innovation or promising practice, and success. While we did not expect that all six of the schools would meet all the outlined criteria, we used the criteria related to academic performance, enrollment, innovative/promising practices, and school characteristics to guide our school selection process. An underlying goal during the selection process was to select a diverse group of schools that would illustrate multiple approaches to educating children with a diverse range of disabilities and in different public education policy environments.

Academic Performance

Historically, children with disabilities have not performed as well academically as their non-disabled peers. Presumably successful, innovative, or promising practices lead to improved academic outcomes. Therefore, for the purposes of our research, one aspect of our definition of successful special education programs was demonstrating adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for all students, including the sub-group of students with disabilities.

Demonstrating AYP, or conversely not demonstrating AYP, is not a particularly nuanced assessment of a school's special education program. For instance, AYP may be biased based on who elects to enroll in the school. Furthermore, the academic performance of small sub-groups, such as students with disabilities, is often not reported publicly for small schools if the sub-group size does not meet state minimums. Nevertheless, given that the ultimate goal of a successful instructional program is strong academic outcomes, we used AYP as one of multiple criteria to select our case study schools. In using this criterion, we eliminated several schools that are engaged in promising practices but to date have not yet achieved at a high enough level to meet AYP. Conversely, in recognition of the limits of AYP, we included a school (ISUS) that meets the other criteria and demonstrated tangible evidence of success for students with disabilities but to date has not yet demonstrated AYP.

Enrollment

Enrolling a proportionate number of students identified as having a disability that qualifies them for services under IDEA was another criterion for selection. Presumably, charter schools that enroll a critical mass of children with disabilities devote resources to developing programs to support them and therefore have at least the opportunity to develop innovative or promising, and successful programs. Furthermore, we hypothesized that charter schools with successful special education programs, or at least reputations for successful programs, would appeal to parents of children with disabilities. Consequently, enrollment of students with disabilities that equals or exceeds national averages (11.67%) was one of the criteria for case study selection.

Innovative or Promising Practices

The next criterion was less objective than performance and enrollment and consisted of evidence that the school is engaged in innovative or promising special education practices. Examples of evidence of this criterion we sought were:

- articulating a belief that all children can learn;
- outlining a commitment to children with disabilities or unique learning needs in program descriptions;
- demonstrating in authorizer reports evidence that the school is engaged in unique, promising, or successful special education practices;
- offering programs that focus on highly individualized learning plans for all students;
- creation of, or participation in, programs/partnerships that support students with disabilities (e.g., a special education cooperative);
- implementing vigorous early intervention efforts to decrease referrals to special education;
- mobilizing resources outside of school (e.g. Medicaid funding, social services, etc) to meet individual students' needs more effectively; and
- creating innovative financial arrangements for risk and cost-sharing;
- using creative staffing models to get more qualified personnel on the case than a typical small school could usually afford

As noted previously, most of these practices are promising rather than innovative. Nevertheless, successful adoption of these practices in public schools is arguably novel and therefore, falls under the broad umbrella of innovative in this sector. Furthermore, while we sought to document these practices in the nominated case studies schools, we did not find evidence of all of these practices in the schools we selected.

Diversity of the Case Study Pool

In addition to the aforementioned individual school site selection criteria, a factor that influenced our site selection was diversity across the set of selected schools. In seeking to identify the case study schools, we aimed to select a group of schools that is diverse according to:

- size,
- student demographics,
- governance structure (i.e., managed by a CMO or EMO versus stand-alone; conversion versus new start-up),
- focus (i.e., general enrollment versus special education enrollment), and
- state education policy environment.

While each of these characteristics in and of themselves may not substantively influence a school's special education program, we wanted to examine a group of schools that reflected the wide array of conditions in which charter schools operate.

Case Study Selection

Based on nominations from the field, we conducted a preliminary screening of 33 schools in fall 2007. After the initial screening, we eliminated eight schools because they either had not been operating long enough to have an established track record of success (i.e., three years of academic data) or we could not locate information about the schools online. We then conducted a secondary screening of 25 schools. From this pool we ordered schools based on the degree to

which they met our selection criteria and narrowed our pool from 25 to 14 schools. The third and final level of screening of the ranked schools entailed calling a local contact (e.g., authorizer or resource center representative) and the school. The purpose of the calls to the local contacts was to inquire about whether they had any concerns about the school being part of the study. We also verified the preliminary data we had collected about the school. We called the schools to ask whether they would be willing to participate in the study if they were selected. Gaining access to conduct a case study can be a significant hurdle, so willingness to participate was essential. Based on the findings from the phone calls, we narrowed the pool from 14 to 6 schools. One of the six schools we initially selected decided that they did not want to participate and consequently, we selected another school from our pool of 14 that reflected similar characteristics.

The six case study schools were: CHIME Institute Charter School (elementary and middle), Charyl Stockwell Academy, ISUS Institute of Construction Technology, Metro Deaf School, Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, and Woodland Elementary Charter School. Tables I and II contain information about each school according to our selection criteria. We conducted the school site visits between December 2007 and February 2008. Following are brief descriptions of each school. Extended profiles are provided after the discussion of recurring characteristics and practices.

CHIME Institute's Arnold Schwarzenegger Elementary School and CHIME Middle School

CHIME Institute's Elementary and Middle Charter schools are small schools authorized by and located within Los Angeles Unified School District. The elementary school opened in 2001 and the middle school opened in 2003. Based on a pilot program developed by California State University, Northridge which built on a commitment to full-inclusion using co-teaching, the CHIME schools embrace full-inclusion of students with disabilities. Seamless inclusion is supported by a co-teaching model, intense classroom support, regular planning for instructional personnel, and a constructivist instructional delivery model supported by teacher training provided by Mel Levine's *Schools Attuned* program. All children enrolled at the two CHIME schools have individualized learning plans, including the children with disabilities who have individualized education plans (IEPs). The elementary school enrolls 249 students and the middle school 229 students. At both schools 20% of the students have a diagnosed disability that qualifies them for special education including children with multiple disabilities and severe disabilities that require significant supports and services. The elementary school has met AYP targets for the past three years and the middle school has met AYP two of the last three years.

CHIME was selected for case study due to its success educating children with a wide range of disabilities in a remarkably inclusive setting. The school's co-teaching model reflects a fully-integrated special education program in which general and special education teachers work as partners to support all children. The co-teaching model in place at Chime is based largely on research conducted at California State Northridge. Referred to as "layering," at Chime co-teaching reportedly allows general and special education teachers to respond to children's individual learning needs and provide supports in a highly individualized manner.

TABLE I: CASE STUDY SCHOOL OPERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

2007-2008	WOODLAND ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL, ATLANTA, GA	METRO DEAF SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MN	CHARYL STOCKWELL ACADEMY, HOWELL, MI	CHIME CHARTER SCHOOLS, LOS ANGELES, CA		ROXBURY PREPARATORY ROXBURY, MA	ISUS INSTITUTE OF CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY DAYTON, OH
				Elementary	**Middle**		
Operational Characteristics							
Grade Configuration	PK -5	PK-8	K - 8	K -5	6-8	6-8	10-12
Governance structure	Conversion charter school that is part of a local district	Independent new start-up charter school	Independent new start-up charter school	New-start-up charter school that is part of a local district and affiliated with CHIME Institute and California State University, Northridge		Independent new start-up charter school	One of three new start-up charter schools supported by Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) Corporation
Authorizer/ Sponsor	Fulton County Public Schools	Forest Lake Area School District	Central Michigan University	Los Angeles Unified School District		Massachusetts Board of Education	St. Aloysius Orphanage
Focus	Comprehensive elementary school with two special education center programs	Deaf/hard of hearing education	Rigorous academics, character education, continuous progress, and a mastery learning system in non-graded, multi-age classrooms	Inclusive environment where all students benefit from diversity using a constructivist approach and embedded differentiated instruction for all students using co-teaching		Rigorous college preparatory program	Competency-based high school education and training high school drop-outs to be employable citizens
Special Education Innovation or Promising Practice	Schoolwide enrichment model that incorporates talented and gifted teaching strategies in all general education classrooms	Bilingual immersion program-ASL and written English	Response to Intervention	Seamless inclusion supported by co-teaching and classroom-based speech and language in early grades		Seamless inclusion	Vocational education culminating in trade certification for drop-outs

TABLE II: CASE STUDY SCHOOL STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

	WOODLAND ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL, ATLANTA, GA[1]	METRO DEAF SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MN[2]	CHARYL STOCKWELL ACADEMY, HOWELL, MI[3]	CHIME CHARTER SCHOOLS, LOS ANGELES, CA[4] Elementary	Middle	ROXBURY PREPARATORY ROXBURY, MA[5]	ISUS INSTITUTE OF CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY DAYTON, OH**[6]
Student Demographics							
Total Enrollment	855	58	723	188	151	191	123
Students with Disabilities	12%	100%	8%	20%	20%	12%	27.8%
Free/reduced price meals	49%	24%	1.9%	2%	-	64%	83.4%
English Language Learners	13.6%	100%	-	-	-	1%	-
African American	42%	6.8%	0.9%	11%	12%	61%	55.2%
Hispanic	17%	10.3%	0.7%	31%	28%	31%	0%
Caucasian	30%	77.8%	97%	51%	50%	0%	39.5%
Asian	4%	5.1%	0.4%	7%	6%	0%	0%
Other	7%	0%	0.4%	<1%	4%	8%	5%
Academic Performance							
AYP 2005	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
AYP 2006	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
AYP 2007	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
School wide reading proficiency	91%	37%	84%	51%	50%	80%	60%
Special education school wide reading proficiency	84%	37%	*	65%	44%	*	*
School wide mathematics proficiency	91%	36%	74%	55%	35%	79%	20%
Special education school wide mathematics proficiency	88%	36%	*	44%	23%	*	*

* School or subgroups too small to report AYP data

[1] 2006-2007 demographic and performance data obtained from Georgia Department of Education website.
[2] 2007-2008 demographic data provided by school. 2006-2007 performance data from annual report provided by school.
[3] 2007-2008 demographic data provided by school. 2006-2007 performance data obtained from annual report.
[4] 2006-2007 enrollment and performance data obtained from California Department of Education website and school personnel.
[5] 2007-2008 demographic data provided by school. 2006-2007 performance data obtained from Massachusetts Department of Education website.
[6] 2006-2007demographic and performance data obtained from Ohio Department of Education website.

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Charyl Stockwell Academy

Charyl Stockwell Academy (CSA) is a K-8 charter school in Howell, Michigan—a small town about an hour outside of Detroit. The school opened in 1996 and enrolls 723 students, of which 8% have been identified as eligible to receive special education services. This percentage is well below the county average of 16%. CSA personnel consider this reduction a direct result of their Teacher Support Team (TST) which provides intensive interventions to all students at risk for academic failure, whether or not they qualify for special education services. The CSA Teacher Support Team program developed by the school's founders screens and assesses all students to develop appropriate individualized instructional interventions and, every 10 weeks, reevaluates progress, measures effectiveness of intervention, and maps next steps. CSA leaders reported that the TST ameliorates the need for special education labeling in many cases. For those students who are identified with disabilities, the TST also oversees the development and implementation of the IEPs. The TST is characterized by a systematic and active employment of an early intervention model that identifies students' academic, physical, and social support needs before academic failure. CSA proactively provides interventions within and outside the classroom that reduce the necessity of labeling children as eligible to receive special education.

CSA was chosen for case study because of its success with early intervention and creating a whole-school environment that fosters academic, emotional, and social success of students with disabilities. The school has made AYP for the past three years. CSA employs a continuous progress and mastery learning system that allows students to progress at their own pace in non-graded, multi-age classrooms. Students with special needs are supported in the general classroom and provided intensive push-in or pull-out interventions as needed.

The ISUS Institute of Construction Technology

Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) is a Dayton-based corporation that currently runs three drop-out recovery charter school programs. Each program is focused on teaching job skills and facilitating students' acquisition of industry-recognized certifications in Dayton-area growth industries—health sciences, construction, and manufacturing technology—while enabling students to work toward a high school diploma. ISUS opened its first charter school, the Construction Institute, in 1999. The school serves 123 students and nearly 28% of the student population has been identified as eligible to receive special education services. This percentage reflects the over-representation of students with disabilities in drop-out populations documented nationwide (Blackorby & Wagner 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 2005). ISUS has not made AYP. As is the case with most drop-out recovery programs, most students are performing below grade level. Nevertheless, ISUS has reportedly had significant success with students dramatically improving their attendance, developing marketable job skills, and earning diplomas. Eighty percent of students leaving the program are gainfully employed a full year after they leave ISUS and all are able to enter the workforce earning nearly twice minimum wage because of their job experience. In addition, from spring 2006 to spring 2007, student performance on the 11th grade Ohio graduation test improved in all subject areas.

ISUS's Construction Institute was selected for case study because it is an urban high school program that serves a special education population that is frequently overlooked—drop outs.

ISUS's "school plus" model provides all of its students—general and special education—an opportunity to obtain a high school diploma, work skills, and industry certifications while learning the importance of responsibility, community engagement and self reliance. ISUS's total integration model provides special education supports in the general education classrooms.

Metro Deaf School

Metro Deaf School (MDS) is a small charter school developed for students in the St. Paul area who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH). MDS opened in 1993 and provides a dual language approach in American Sign Language and written English in an environment designed to encourage students' development of identity and pride in their Deaf culture as well as preparing them for success in the larger, hearing culture through skill and knowledge acquisition. The school serves approximately 60 students. One quarter of the students come from economically disadvantaged families. One hundred percent of the student population has a disability that qualifies them to receive special education services.

Metro Deaf School was chosen for case study because it serves a specific special education population—deaf and hard of hearing—and provides local access to education in American Sign Language as well as access to a Deaf community and culture. The school provides role models for area students while allowing them to live at home with their families. MDS instituted a formal accountability planning process a decade ago that informs their continuous improvement programs focused on student outcomes. This process has allowed MDS personnel to continually strengthen their program and student academic performance. Due to the small size of the school, AYP data are not reported.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School is a small, urban middle school in Boston. The school opened in 1999 to provide a college-preparatory program in a high-poverty community of color traditionally underserved by Boston's public schools. Despite the difficulties faced by the students and their families, Roxbury Prep has closed the achievement gap. School personnel attributed the school's success to its structured program which includes a rigorous curriculum, strict code of conduct, character development program, dress code, extended school days and year, and after school supports such as tutoring and a homework center. Roxbury Prep serves just fewer than 200 students of which approximately 12% are students identified for special education services. Personnel report that because of its college preparatory mission, Roxbury Prep generally attracts students with more mild to moderate disabilities. That is, students who have learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder who are generally high functioning.

Roxbury Prep was chosen for case study because of its success with students with disabilities in a high-poverty, urban setting and an academically rigorous, college preparatory program. Roxbury Prep's special education program's success is attributed to the myriad supports built into the general education program which facilitates an effective inclusion program. In addition, the high expectation that all students who graduate will be prepared to succeed in college-preparatory high schools and beyond includes students with disabilities. Roxbury Prep has consistently achieved AYP each year since it opened and is the highest performing urban middle

school in Massachusetts. In fact, the school's students, 100% students of color, outperform the state average for white students.

Woodland Elementary Charter School

Woodland Elementary is a large conversion charter school authorized by and located within Fulton County School District outside of Atlanta. Woodland converted to charter status in 2001 in part to address significantly declining enrollment triggered by redistricting. Since 2001, the school has grown from less than 200 students to over 855 students, including a pre-school and school-age program for children with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities and a talented and gifted program. The school is also ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse.

Woodland Elementary was selected for case study due to the proportionate percentage of students receiving special education services (12%) and academic outcomes for students with disabilities that exceed local averages. The school's success is attributed to utilization of talented and gifted instructional techniques in all classrooms as opposed to solely for children identified as gifted. The school modeled its use of these instructional strategies on the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) developed by Dr. Joseph Renzulli. Aside from introducing this particular research-based instructional approach, the school has also successfully administered alternate state assessments for students enrolled in the special education center-based program for children with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities (i.e., students with the most significant cognitive disabilities). In the process of preparing for and implementing the alternate state assessment, teachers have reportedly increased the degree to which students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.

Data Collection

We conducted day-long school site visits to each of the six schools between December 2007 and February 2008. During the site visits, we toured the school facility, observed classrooms, and conducted a minimum of three interviews. In the initial inquiry to each of the schools, we asked at a minimum to interview the school principal/lead administrator, a special education teacher, and a parent. At all six schools, at least one of the interviews was with more than one person and generally included a general education teacher or curriculum specialist. Interviews were guided by an open-ended interview protocol. See Appendix II. We also reviewed multiple documents for each school (e.g., annual reports, renewal applications, and school report cards) and school websites. We sought academic performance information for all six schools from public websites and internal school reports. At three of the six schools, we were not able to obtain data regarding state assessments for the sub-group of students with disabilities due to the small size of the group and state reporting guidelines. In instances where we could not obtain verifiable performance data, we sought to obtain alternative evidence of academic outcomes. For instance, data reported in schools' annual reports and information related to academic growth provided by school personnel. These data are reported under the heading of "*Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities*" in each of the individual school case study reports.

To verify data, we triangulated interviews from multiple informants and information collected from our document reviews. Based on the interviews and document reviews, we developed

individual school case studies which we then analyzed to identify recurring characteristics and practices. For more detailed information about data collection at each school, see Appendix III.

Cross-Case Findings

Site visits to the six widely-varied schools revealed multiple common characteristics apparent in the special education programs. While not all of these characteristics were apparent in every school, we identified the characteristics based on the fact that they were apparent in at least three of the case study schools. Several characteristics hinge on the importance of strong leadership committed to a vision of education that fully includes students with disabilities and focused on hiring, training, and supporting all teachers to successfully educate every student. Other common characteristics of these successful programs related more to everyday practices within the schools including individualized education for all students, not just those with IEPs. In addition, several programs incorporated established special education or gifted interventions into the general education classroom because these interventions promoted general student learning and created an inclusionary environment for students with disabilities. Shoring up these highly individualized approaches are formative performance data which guide decisions made not only by teachers but also specialists and school leaders related to curriculum and instructional programming, academic and behavioral interventions, and even decisions to non-renew teachers.

Despite the varied nature of these largely-independent charter schools, there were several promising indicators that these approaches could be successfully transferred to other charter and traditional schools. In fact, there was a resounding affirmation among teachers and school leaders that these programs could be successfully implemented in district schools as long as they were accompanied by the support of district and school leadership and an initial and ongoing commitment to appropriate professional development and training necessary to effectively run the programs. In other words, these practices are not necessarily or inherently predicated on a schools' status as autonomous charter school. Although it does appear that some characteristics of charter schools (i.e., new and small) may in fact facilitate implementation of these practices. Finally, several of the case study schools' approaches to special education were reportedly successful because their general education programs were designed with an express mission to educate all children. Of particular note, implementation of these programs may result in improved learning outcomes for not only students with disabilities but struggling, average, and gifted students as well.

The following sections explore these themes and present specific evidence from the individual case study schools.

Powerful School Mission

By definition, charter schools are driven by a specific mission for which they are held accountable by their authorizer as outlined in

> ### *Recurring Characteristics and Practices*
> Powerful school mission
> - Leadership's commitment to inclusion
> - Ownership of all students
> - Commitment to IDEA
>
> Strong support for teachers
> - Targeted, relevant professional development
> - Data-based decision making
>
> Strong support for students
> - Highly individualized programs
> - Use of best instructional practices
> - Safe and supportive environment
>
> Transferability to traditional public schools
> - Effective teaching team
> - Adequate special education resources
> - Parental involvement
> - Receptiveness to change

their renewable charter. The cases revealed that the study schools are using the mission-driven nature of charter schools to enable and support development of successful special education programs. This is in contrast to traditional public schools that can adopt a mission that incorporates children with disabilities but it would require deconstructing assumptions regarding special education and existing systems and processes. Across the six schools, we observed evidence of school missions and culture that foster: 1) leadership's commitment to a philosophy of inclusion, 2) a sense of ownership of all students, and 3) a commitment to complying with the spirit of IDEA as a starting point rather than a postscript.

Leadership's Commitment to Inclusion

School leaders at five of the six case study schools expressed a core commitment to incorporating children with disabilities in the overall school program. The schools fell into two general categories: 1) those that explicitly designed their programs to be fully inclusive of students with disabilities and 2) those schools with general education programs that work well with, and are conducive to, supporting special education programs even though they were not designed with that purpose in mind.

Three schools, CHIME, Metro Deaf School (MDS), and Charyl Stockwell Academy (CSA), were designed with special education populations foremost in the thinking of their founders. Metro Deaf School, as a school with a mission to educate students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, had an explicit special education focus from the beginning. MDS has also developed a highly-adaptive environment to effectively educate students who have multiple disabilities including students who are deaf with autism, are deaf/blind, or have CHARGE syndrome[7] along with their deaf peers who are typical or gifted learners.

Charyl Stockwell Academy was designed with the goal of developing an inclusive program that serves all students' individual needs through early assessment and intervention. In the process, children with disabilities are provided comprehensive evaluation and early interventions that, in many cases, have reduced or removed the need for special education services and labeling. CSA's founders stressed that their approach, while it provides significant, targeted supports to children with disabilities, also prevents learning failure in students who do not qualify for special education.

The two CHIME schools grew out of a pilot program developed at the California State University Northridge explicitly designed to develop inclusive instructional environments supported by co-teaching. The school's core commitment to inclusion is part of its mission and reflected in every aspect of its program (e.g., teacher and parent handbook, marketing materials, hiring process, and professional development). In addition, the school strives to serve as a model that other schools could emulate and incorporates research and teaching others about their model into the program. The school is a training site for student teachers and the school has produced a DVD about developing IEPs for inclusive settings.

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[7] CHARGE syndrome is a genetic syndrome representing a complex set of physical and cognitive disabilities. While there is a great deal of variability in characteristics of children with CHARGE syndrome, hearing problems frequently a component of the syndrome (The CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, 2008, retrieved online March, 6, 2008 from: http://www.chargesyndrome.org/).

In the other three case-study schools for which special education was not a key factor in program design, (i.e., Roxbury Prep, ISUS, and Woodland) children with disabilities reportedly succeed because their general education programs work. Roxbury Prep and ISUS provide small classrooms, individualized education, and integrated behavioral programs that stress self control and mutual respect. Woodland's extensive use of gifted and talented teaching strategies and high degree of teacher accountability were credited with boosting academic performance for all students. The school leaders, teachers, and parents we spoke with at these schools believe that these factors create an environment where students with disabilities can be as successful at their typically developing peers.

Sense of Ownership of all Children

In addition to strong leadership fostering a vision of inclusion, personnel at four of the schools expressed a common sense of ownership and responsibility for the achievement of students with disabilities. For instance, school personnel noted that the general education teachers feel responsible for the education of *all* of their students and do not abdicate their responsibility for a specific student simply because a special educator is in the classroom to provide assistance to the child. At CHIME, parents reported that under the co-teaching model, their child did not differentiate between the general and special education teacher. During observations of CHIME classrooms, we could not determine which teacher was the general versus special educator because they appeared to share responsibility for large group *as well* as individualized instruction in the classroom.

At Charyl Stockwell Academy, teachers have open relationships with parents and the Teacher Support Team to facilitate conversations about student needs. Parents of twins who had been identified with autism when they were two commented that their children's teacher would call them up and say, "Something happened today and I was hoping you could help me figure out how to approach the situation if it happens again." The parents and general education teacher would work together to identify a solution. This close working relationship is a cornerstone of the support services at CSA that have allowed these students to avoid a special education label and, ultimately, may have helped result in both of these twins no longer meeting the criteria for special education eligibility. The parents reported that both of their children now have a strong social network and that the nine-year-olds are reading at or near a high school level.

At Roxbury Prep, building a sense of ownership among teachers for the academic success of all students begins with rigorous hiring practices that identify teachers who are committed to the program's full-inclusion policy. Because all students with disabilities are in the general education classroom nearly 100% of the time, the co-director reported, it is critical that teachers understand from the start that the education of students with disabilities is primarily their responsibility.

Commitment to Tenets of IDEA

Personnel from five of the case study charter schools espoused a commitment to the core tenets of IDEA (i.e., free appropriate public education and least restrictive environment). Rather than viewing IDEA as a law for which they had to demonstrate procedural compliance alone,

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personnel saw the law as a starting point. The spirit of the law—to provide meaningful, inclusive, and individualized services to students with disabilities to maximize their learning potential—was the focus rather than minimally meeting the procedural requirements.

At Roxbury Prep, for example, the co-director noted that all student-level progress data are closely monitored by the faculty and administration and used to guide the curriculum and individualized evaluation and instruction. "College for certain," is their goal for all Roxbury Prep students, and through the individualized approach, she asserted, each student—regardless of ability or disability—is given the remediation, instruction, and supplemental activities he or she needs to develop college-ready skills.

At ISUS, the special education director strives to make certain that pull-out services are aligned directly with IEP goals and do not devolve into tutoring sessions. The special education director noted that because most students come to ISUS with academic deficits, students may request help with their coursework during their pull-out sessions. In order to keep students with disabilities in the general education classroom as much as possible, the special education director is working to maximize the pull-out sessions by maintaining a focus on specific IEP goals.

Because Metro Deaf School's students are all deaf or hard of hearing, it may seem at first that the school does not adhere to an inclusive view of special education or the tenets of a "least restrictive environment." The founders and leaders at Metro Deaf, however, believe that providing students with hearing deficits an environment in which they can communicate with every student and staff member via American Sign Language *is* providing the least restrictive environment in which their students can learn. They believe that access to fluent ASL communicators develops the students' abilities to express themselves, progress academically, and develop the social skills necessary to succeed in the world.

The founder of Charyl Stockwell Academy admitted he was not always a supporter of strict compliance with the procedural aspects of special education law; he felt that compliance could be met and students' needs still ignored. To address the gap between compliance and education, he sought to develop a school that did provide the least restrictive, fully inclusive, and highly individualized academic environment that was necessary for every student to learn at their greatest potential. In this sense, the school reflects a true commitment to what we consider the core intent of IDEA and NCLB.

Strong Support for Teachers

Strong support for teachers was documented across the case study sites and attributed with created strong special education program. Specific practices in the case study schools advance 1) teachers' understanding of their responsibilities toward students with disabilities and 2) their ability to evaluate their own impact on student learning for all students. Building on the overall commitment to students with disabilities and the core tenets of IDEA, school leaders reported focusing on specialized professional development and data-driven decision making.

Targeted and Relevant Professional Development

Leaders and special educators at all of the case study schools identified targeted, relevant professional development as key to implementing a successful special education program and as an important element of building buy-in from all teachers related to educating children with disabilities. Two weeks of professional development at the beginning of the year and half-day professional development and teacher collaboration every week at Charyl Stockwell Academy provide teachers ample opportunities to learn not only about effective implementation of the school's Teacher Support Team program but also about indicators of a learning problem, specific disabilities, and appropriate interventions.

Routine professional development is also a hallmark of Roxbury Prep's program where the special needs coordinator noted that requests from general education teachers guide their professional development sessions. Recently, for example, the special needs coordinator provided training on non-verbal learning disabilities at the request of the teaching staff.

Metro Deaf School requires an intensive ASL teaching methods program for new teachers to promote effective ASL fluency in their students. In addition, MDS's special needs teacher provides information, training, and guidance to teachers who have students with dual/multiple disabilities in their classroom. For example, she has significant training in deaf/blind education and has developed a solid understanding of both CHARGE syndrome and students who are deaf and have autism which she shares with the teaching staff through in-house trainings and one-on-one teacher support when brain-storming interventions for specific students.

The special education director at ISUS guides teachers through their first referral process to familiarize them with the appropriate steps and has developed a guide book to assist general education teachers to complete the necessary forms on their own in the future. In this way, she said she strives to build the general educators' confidence in the referral process and make certain that the teachers recognize that they cannot use special education referrals to shift responsibility for a student to the special education staff members.

At Woodward, the principal reallocated monies assigned to a designated talented and gifted (TAG) teacher to hire a TAG trainer to work with all teachers. The TAG trainer is responsible not only for training but also regularly observes classrooms to verify and support the integration of the TAG instructional techniques. This specialized professional development was credited with developing the skills required to support school-wide adoption of TAG instructional strategies which was in turn credited with raising academic outcomes for all students.

Data-Based Decision Making

In addition to supporting teachers via professional development, every case study school reported using formative assessment data to inform and influence instruction and interventions. Data-driven decision making, wherein teachers use assessment data to inform instructional practices, is a prominent practice advanced under the No Child Left Behind Act. Diagnostic data appear to be a key component of programs built on a commitment to early intervention and

highly individualized instruction. For three schools, it is crucial to implementing their response to intervention (RtI) approaches.[8]

Charyl Stockwell Academy relies on a variety of data to inform initial assessments of new students and interventions that are implemented by the Teacher Support Team. Pre- and post-intervention testing enables school personnel to evaluate the efficacy of the intervention and informs not only the services given to the child, but is collected in aggregate to identify those resources that work most effectively with their students. CSA's leaders have developed a secure web-based database that houses individual student assessment data that are retrieved when the TST discusses individual students. School personnel reported that the database provides an at-a-glance view of every assessment conducted, with scores, as well as each intervention implemented and the results. With this database, student rates of progress as well as intervention history can inform any new discussions about the child and prevent duplicative efforts or loss of information.

ISUS has just installed the Rediker student information system to more effectively monitor student data and inform school programming. The Rediker system allows them to follow interventions, tests, assessments, programs, attendance, and other descriptive indicators for every student. While relatively new, school personnel anticipate that the database will allow them to prepare reports in minutes on student performance, graduation rates, and other data of interest.

At Roxbury Prep, pre- and post-tests for each class and routine progress tests throughout the year are central to developing the educational program. Because most students enter Roxbury Prep one or more grade levels behind, the school provides intensive evaluation to tailor teaching to the areas of greatest need. In addition, Roxbury Prep provides practice testing for various standardized and entrance exams to college preparatory high schools to preemptively identify shortfalls and aid teachers in providing any necessary remedial supports. School personnel report that this process has been highly effective as every Roxbury Prep graduate has been accepted to a college preparatory exam, magnet, parochial, or private school in the Boston area.

Personnel at Woodland Elementary reported that data are central to their classroom decision-making and critical to holding teachers accountable for their instructional practices. Special education administrator Jackie Radford explained that, "We have a curriculum specialist and test scores are turned in to her. She receives the scores and will make comments back to the teachers. She will make recommendations about instruction. For example, we had a [classroom] where all the students failed all the assessments. Our curriculum specialist went into the math classroom and they worked on improving his instruction. They looked at what the problems were and she went from there. Sometimes it might require additional staff development so she might suggest a course. We use test scores to change instruction. We are very data-driven. It is crucial to our success."

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[8] Response to Intervention (RtI) is an early intervention process incorporating highly targeted interventions using quality instruction coupled with progress monitoring employed to help children before they fail and, consequently, require special education services and supports. IDEA 2004 explicitly encourages use of RtI and grants schools authority to use special education dollars to support RtI.

Meeting Each Student's Needs

In addition to providing supports that help teachers implement the special education program, the case study schools provide numerous supports to develop an environment in which educators can respond to every student's needs. Examples that emerged from the case studies are 1) highly individualized programs that "normalize" individual services, 2) successful programs, and 3) fostering a safe and supportive environment.

Highly Individualized Programs

Five of the six case study schools provide highly individualized programs for *all* of their students, general and special education alike. Leaders and teachers asserted that this individualization essentially "normalizes" the IEP and special education in general. The high level of individualization appears to foster ownership of children with disabilities by all teachers because a child with an IEP receiving individualized services is not substantively different from a child without an IEP receiving individualized services. This "normalization" of individualized education also appears to facilitate access to the general education curriculum and academic success for students with disabilities.

At CHIME charter schools, all children are provided with an individual learning plan (an individual *education* plan for children with disabilities and an individualized *instructional* plan for children without disabilities). The high level of inclusion supported by co-teaching reportedly removes any demarcation between general and special education. Each classroom has two teachers and most have additional adults who are either para-educators or student teachers from a nearby university. In addition, the school places speech therapists in classrooms in the early grades to provide assistance to all students. The speech therapists are reportedly very effective at helping all children improve phonetic awareness which supports development of early reading skills. The individualized learning plans and the number of adults in the room coupled with the specialized skills of the special educators reportedly create a highly individualized environment for all students. In addition, parents of CHIME students remarked that the school removes labels and their children refer to their friends by a variety of traits (e.g., brown hair, freckles, or tall) but never by their disability. The parents reported that they perceived this lack of labeling as an indication that children with disabilities are naturally included at the school.

At Roxbury Prep, a strongly data driven approach informs the individualization of each student's program. And because Roxbury Prep implements a full-inclusion program for its students with disabilities, teachers recognize that they will be teaching all children in their classrooms. The special education teachers that serve as in-class supports help all students with coursework when necessary and they believe this further de-stigmatizes "extra help" in the classroom. All students are tutored and individually mentored, a process that mirrors the individual supports provided to students in special education. For this reason, co-director Dana Lehman noted, most students at Roxbury Prep do not know who is and who is not identified for special education services. Everyone gets extra help, so no-one is singled out. Individualized services follow Roxbury Prep students even after they graduate the 8th grade. The Graduate Services Program (GSP) works with its former students as they navigate the college selection and application process and the GSP serves as a support system while those students are in college. Roxbury Prep's leaders believe that this intensive, long-term assistance has significantly contributed to the fact that all of

their graduates who had been identified for special education services graduated high school and enrolled in college. Three out of four are still enrolled.

At ISUS, each student—either a drop out or at risk of becoming so—comes in with varying levels of academic deficits, whether or not they are students with disabilities. Even students without disabilities are reportedly entering ISUS as high school students with significant reading deficits. For this reason, students are organized by ability rather than grade or age. This allows students with disabilities to learn alongside their like-skilled peers and the small classrooms facilitate student learning at an individual pace. As one ISUS student noted, "We all need extra help, that's why we're here."

At Metro Deaf School, individualization of the program extends beyond the individual supports outlined in students' IEPs. Among MDS's student population, as with a typical district school, student abilities vary widely from academically gifted to profoundly cognitively delayed. Because deafness is a low-incidence disability, there are generally only 5 to 10 students in each grade; small class size can support individualization and allow each student to develop at their own rate. Individualization efforts affect even the teacher assignments and class configuration at MDS. Administrators assign teachers to different grades, and vary the number of students with multiple needs in the classroom, as the student population fluctuates from year to year. Teachers at MDS expressed a willingness and flexibility to move around and saw it as part of their mission to respond to the needs of the students at the expense of a set routine.

At Charyl Stockwell Academy, all students are given assessments upon entering the program and students identified with special needs are brought to the Teacher Support Team to receive interventions and services. In addition, because CSA is a continuous progress model that allows students that have demonstrated mastery of a body of material to move on to the next material at their pace, every student has individual work. It is not unusual for students working next to each other to be completing different assignments; students with disabilities are not singled out. Principal Shelley Stockwell noted that this is how CSA can seamlessly incorporate special education services in what is "normal" at Stockwell, thereby further decreasing any potential stigmatization that may accompany the label of special education.

Best Instructional Practices

All of the schools that served both a general and a special education population found that best instructional practices for children *without* disabilities benefit children *with* disabilities and vice a versa. Personnel from nearly all the schools commented that best practices for general or gifted education can benefit students with disabilities as well. Conversely, personnel from several case study schools found that interventions typically noted in IEPs (e.g., written directions, assistance with organizational skills, behavioral modification, and redirection) can benefit students *without* disabilities and, when implemented in the general education classroom, can facilitate a full-inclusion program.

At Roxbury Prep, the co-director noted that special education works at Roxbury Prep because general education works at Roxbury Prep. At Roxbury Prep, the plan for each class and homework assignments are written on the blackboard, students are assisted with keeping a school planner and everyone is reminded to read through the directions. In addition, the school's strict

behavioral program provides redirection to all students, not just those with an IEP. Such supports, school personnel reported, benefit all students and the orderly environment can promote inclusion of students with disabilities for whom these supports are necessary and outlined in an IEP. Roxbury Prep's special education teachers noted that they frequently take students off IEPs developed at other schools because they are too general and may require interventions that are already embedded in the general education program at Roxbury Prep. The teachers noted that students are reevaluated as they near 8th grade graduation to determine if an IEP would be valuable to the student in high school or if the child has internalized the supports provided in Roxbury Prep's classroom and no longer needs special education services.

The special education director at ISUS stated that her program also provides assistance to low-functioning students who need remediation but who do not have disabilities and thus do not qualify for special education services. In this way, ISUS employs special education interventions to remediate all struggling students regardless of disability status.

Charyl Stockwell Academy operates an intense intervention model (the Teacher Support Team or TST) that provides services not just to children identified for special education but also to a third of the school's students throughout the year. The school's model, the founders noted, enables school personnel to provide interventions that get the students back on track and prevent learning failure.

At Woodland Elementary, school leadership has explicitly and nearly universally incorporated talented and gifted teaching approaches throughout the school. TAG instructional approaches such as circle of knowledge, inductive learning, and metaphorical expressions reportedly provide new and varied strategies to teach academic content. While these strategies have typically been reserved for students identified as gifted, at Woodland teachers reported that they have been excited by the success they have experienced with these strategies, including for their students with disabilities. One teacher shared an example of a student with a disability demonstrating critical thinking skills that she had not witnessed prior to using the TAG strategies. The TAG coordinator reflected, "I am blown away by what my special education kids say. It did not require rote memory. It is not that type of baseline thinking. There is more than one right answer. For their self-esteem it is beautiful. It is very rewarding to hear from a teacher that special education and ESL kids are excelling with the TAG. They will come up with the response. Wow, [absent the TAG training] the teacher may have missed out on that kind of teaching for a child."

Safe and Supportive Environment

Ultimately, individualized programs, intensive teacher training, and the normalization of individual help would be meaningless in an environment that did not feel safe and inclusive for students. Identified as central to an effective culture at five of the six case study schools was a purposeful development of the feeling of "family" in addition to a no-tolerance policy on teasing, bullying, and disrespectful behavior. While not explicitly identified the catalyst, the feeling of family is most likely fostered by the relatively small size of the five schools

At CHIME, the core commitment to inclusion, and specifically the co-teaching model, was credited with creating a safe environment in which seamless modification of the curriculum and accommodations in the general education classroom create a space that is safe for all students.

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CHIME enrolls a wide range of children with disabilities, including children with significant physical impairments who require careful attention to physical space. Nevertheless, all children participate in all aspects of the classroom and broader school activities. For instance, the parent of a child who uses a wheel chair reflected that her child had had one of the lead roles as king in a school production because the role was built around the child sitting on a throne and subjects moving around the king. This type of authentic inclusion was credited with making all children feel welcome in all aspects of the school.

At ISUS, they hold morning and afternoon "family meetings" where students can share concerns, publicly thank people, or call out those who have been disrespectful. School personnel reported that this daily routine helps students learn to effectively deal with conflict and come to understand that their behavior comes with consequences. They believe these meetings—in addition to therapy, training and support in developing self-control, and life skills courses— combine to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect among the students and with the staff. Ann Higdon proudly noted, "Even though 80% of our students have been court involved, there are no metal detectors in this school. Students know they are safe here and that they do not have to bring weapons to protect themselves."

Roxbury Prep has a no tolerance policy for teasing or laughing at others, using derogatory terms like "retarded" or "sped," or play fighting. Students who break these rules, even once, are suspended. Co-director Dana Lehman explained that because they make a big deal out of little things, they do not have to deal with bigger issues. The special education teachers believe the no-tolerance policies have created an atmosphere where students with disabilities feel safe. One noted that even her students who read excruciatingly slowly are proud to read aloud and are comfortable doing so because they know they will be treated with respect and kindness.

Even at Metro Deaf School, where 100% of the students have a disability, tolerance training is necessary to promote a supportive and inclusive environment. Special needs coordinator Kelly Anderson recently simulated for the students what it would be like to be deaf and also have autism or be legally blind. For the autism simulation, Ms. Anderson had the students sit on four tennis balls (to make them feel unbalanced), pinned itchy material in the backs of their shirts (like a clothing tag), flashed the lights on and off rapidly, and signed "at the speed of light" on an unfamiliar topic. When the students were then given a test on the topic, they realized how difficult it is for children with autism to focus on their lessons. The mother of MDS students who participated in this activity said her children shared their experience with her and the children reportedly empathized with how difficult it must be for children with autism to pay attention. Ms. Anderson hopes that this empathy extends to how deaf children at the school treat their peers with other type of disabilities.

Overall, in the five schools in which a safe environment was identified as critical to their success with children with disabilities, teachers, leaders, and parents frequently stated that it was safe for students in special education to try and risk failure in the general education classroom because they knew they would not be teased or treated disrespectfully. In the end, this seemed the most important aspect of a school program. Individuals who identified a safe environment as a central part of their school's success argued that if students are afraid to try, they will never have the opportunity to succeed.

Transferability to Traditional Public Schools

A key goal of our research was to identify the extent to which the innovative or promising practices identified in the charter schools may be transferable to other schools, including schools that may not have autonomy from traditional district rules and regulations. While in some cases, the school's status as a charter school may have facilitated ready adoption of promising practices, implementation did not appear to be dependent upon the school's charter status, and specifically the

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autonomy granted charter schools. Rather, personnel at all six schools proposed that their program could be replicated in other schools; including traditional public schools. However, the cases revealed specific conditions that may or, alternatively, may not be required to increase transferability of the innovative or promising practices. Namely, informants discussed the relative importance of, 1) an effective teaching team, 2) adequate resources, 3) parental involvement, and 4) receptiveness to change. It is the last point, receptiveness to change, that case study school leaders most believe affects transferability of these programs to a district setting. Above and beyond the characteristics identified by school personnel, we identified two additional factors that potentially impact transferability; status as schools of choice and small size.

Building an Effective Teaching Team

Most of the teachers and leaders at the case study schools believed there was nothing about their special education program that was unique to the charter sector or particularly possible due to their school's charter status. Most of the individuals affiliated with the six case study schools proposed that their school's approaches, techniques, and classroom supports could be transferred to other schools—charter or district. One issue that did emerge that may affect transferability is the ability of individual school leaders to build their own team of teachers. Four of the six school leaders we spoke with noted that autonomy from district policies and procedures, and specifically collective bargaining agreements (the ability to hire and/or fire teachers), can be an extremely valuable asset to developing a cohesive team of teachers committed to the school's general and special education programs. Yet, personnel from two of the schools that operate within the parameter of district personnel policies (CHIME and Woodland Elementary), noted that they were able to successfully hire and train instructional personnel to support their school mission even absent broad autonomy; a skill arguably utilized by most strong school leaders.

At CHIME, potential applicants need to be willing to share a classroom with their co-teaching counterpart—not always a natural situation for all teachers. Furthermore, they have to buy-into the full inclusion model and be flexible enough to manage potentially multiple para-educators and student teachers in their classroom. While not a pre-requisite for employment, the majority of the teachers at CHIME reportedly has been trained or have experience with co-teaching. Again, these hiring practices are not unique to charter schools or necessarily fostered by charter status. Rather, they reflect what most principals would see as best practices. That is, hire teachers who understand and are skilled in the instructional techniques embraced by the school.

Director Dyan Sherwood of Metro Deaf School said she greatly appreciates her ability to hand pick her team of teachers. She noted that she will not hire someone simply because they are deaf or fluent in American Sign Language. Rather, there is a host of skills in addition to a specific academic outlook that she seeks in her teachers and she will wait to hire until she finds the right fit.

Co-director Dana Lehman at Roxbury Prep noted that she had two hundred applications for four teacher slots last year. Despite the number of applicants, however, she said it was difficult to find the teachers who would fit in with the disciplined approach of the school and who could commit the time and effort necessary to bring sixth graders from behind and make them, by eighth grade, ready for a college preparatory high school.

In addition to control over hiring, the ability to fire or non-renew teachers is another benefit of freedom from collective bargaining agreements that case study principals appreciated. Director Stockwell of Charyl Stockwell Academy noted that she non-renews, on average, one teacher per year. She stressed, however, that it is not necessarily because the person is a poor teacher, but because the teacher is a poor fit for their specific program and approach. In her school where a co-teaching approach in multi-age, non-graded classrooms is central to their mission, many traditionally-trained teachers may have difficulty adjusting to that environment. The freedom from collective bargaining agreements is relatively distinct to the charter sector. However, some states (e.g., Massachusetts' pilot school program) are creating new opportunities for public schools to enjoy some flexibility to alter collective bargaining agreements.

Special Education Resources[9]

Funding adequate special education programs is a challenge for most public schools. Yet, personnel from half of the schools (Charyl Stockwell, Roxbury Prep, and Woodland) projected that the special education programs at their schools could be transferred to other charter and district schools without additional resources. Operating the academic program at the other three schools reportedly requires additional resources to support their instruction model (CHIME, ISUS, Metro Deaf School). Our interviews in the former three schools revealed that additional resources, above and beyond standard district special education funding mechanisms, were not required to introduce the innovative or promising special education practices. In addition, although effective professional development was required upfront to help teachers and leaders acclimate to their approach, in the long term, the programs would reportedly not require additional resources above and beyond typical per-pupil allocations.

Not only would some of these programs not require additional resources, some of the programs may even require fewer resources than traditional special education approaches. Charyl

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[9] Special education finance is complex and differs between, and even within states, according to district policy. Furthermore, it is complicated based on whether a charter school is its own independent school district or a school within a district. If a charter is part of a local district, it may receive federal, state, and local special education funds directly, receive services in lieu of funds, or a combination of some funds and some services. We did not conduct an in-depth analysis of special education finance of the case study schools. Rather, we asked school personnel whether they were able to operate their school, and ostensibly their special education program, with the average per pupil allocation provided to charter schools.

Stockwell Academy, for example, conducts a comprehensive series of evaluations of all students when they enter the school. Any areas of concern or discrepancies are sent to the Teacher Support Team. CSA personnel stated that this approach has resulted in fewer students needing special education labeling to receive services and has also reduced the costs associated with special education by ameliorating many students' problems with short-term interventions and decreasing the need to provide longer-term special education services. One of the founders of CSA noted that if districts could decrease the number of students who require special education services by providing timely, short-term, and intensive interventions, districts could potentially save millions of dollars and provide better services and educational opportunities to their students. About 8% of the students at Charyl Stockwell Academy are identified for special education; this is in stark contrast to the state average of about 14.4% and the regional average of nearly 16%.[10] Reducing the number of students receiving special education and related services by nearly half, while maintaining achievement levels, may in fact reduce the cost of special education in the long run. However, more research is required to assess the cost of widespread early intervention services.

Woodland, arguably the most traditional of all our six case-study schools, is operating with the same per pupil allocation as local traditional public schools. However, they have used the autonomy granted by their charter to alter their existing budget to support TAG training for all teachers. While the school initially enjoyed a transfusion of dollars from the federal charter school program when it first converted to charter status, seven years later, the school no longer qualifies for these dollars. Furthermore, given that it, like the other conversion charter schools in Georgia, are not schools of choice, the school cannot tap into programs targeted to support schools of choice (e.g., federal dissemination grants).

In contrast to Roxbury, CSA and Woodland, three schools allocate more per pupil than their local district school average. Metro Deaf School is arguably not comparable to the local public school given that 100% of its students are in special education. Moreover, MDS has a low personnel-to-student ratio which can raise the program cost significantly. The special education funding formula in Minnesota allows MDS to bill back local districts for extra costs associated with education children with disabilities. Similar to MDS, CHIME is also not directly comparable to local traditional public schools because it enrolls students with moderate and severe disabilities who otherwise might be educated in a highly restrictive--and potentially costly--placement. Depending on the type of services provided, Chime may receive additional dollars from a state low-incidence disability fund. In addition the school relies on external donors and in-kind contributions to support their school model. For instance, the PTA is responsible for paying part of the art and music teachers' salaries.

ISUS's Construction Institute costs $17,000 per student when not considering the annual construction budget of $800,000. ISUS founder, Ann Higdon noted that because state education dollars cannot be used for a construction program, they must raise the entire construction budget from donor and grant sources. The total cost of educating an ISUS student is nearly triple the average cost per student in the district. However, the program provides a unique vocational

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[10] Charyl Stockwell Academy 2006-07 Annual Report. Available at
http://www.csaschool.org/pdfs/FinalAR0607.pdf

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training program that requires significant investment to create a safe, full-scale construction environment in which ISUS students can learn every aspect of working in the construction industry. Higdon noted, as well, that all ISUS students are giving back to the community while in an ISUS program, in the form of new houses in formerly blighted neighborhoods, refurbished computers for Dayton children, and volunteer hours at the city's hospitals. Further, she contended, as ISUS students develop marketable job skills and earn a high school diploma, they are less likely to require social services or become court involved. She argued that the short and long-term results with ISUS students are well worth the initial investment. Similar to the costs at MDS and CHIME, ISUS is arguably a highly specialized program so comparing its costs to the per pupil allocation at a traditional public school is not appropriate.

Parental Involvement

A recurring assumption about charter schools is that high levels of parental involvement typically associated with schools of choice are integral to their success. This is not the case for at least three of the case study schools. Furthermore, even for those schools with reportedly high levels of parental involvement, it does not appear to be a critical component of the success of the special education programs beyond the typical involvement with developing the IEP.

At Metro Deaf School, some students commute from an hour away to attend the school. Such distances can limit parental involvement. In addition, some parents of MDS students are immigrants and neither English nor American Sign Language are used in the home which school personnel reported can also limit parents' ability to communicate with the school. MDS is focused on reaching out more to parents, but recognizes that, like all schools, it has a blend of parental involvement from highly to rarely involved and that their program must continue to thrive for the students, regardless of the levels of parental support.

At ISUS, a drop-out recovery program, parents may not even be present in their children's lives. ISUS actively nurtures a close-knit atmosphere at the school to compensate for this frequent lack of family support. During the twice-daily "family meetings," student self and peer redirection, and life-skills coaching work together to make the students what Ann Higdon calls "trancenders." Through these types of in-school supports, she noted, students develop the skills necessary to transcend their limitations—academic, social, and familial—and learn to become self-reliant.

Roxbury Prep's students come from Roxbury and surrounding Boston neighborhoods of generally poor and working-class families of color. Many parents do not speak English and school personnel projected that they may limit their involvement in school due to the language barrier. Further, all three parents interviewed for the case study had four children which stretched thin the amount of time they said they could spend being involved in any one child's school.

Ironically, Woodland Elementary the one conversion school, and the school we found to be most similar to large traditional public elementary schools, relies the most notably on parental involvement and requires that all parents contribute 10 volunteer hours each year. The school employs a parental involvement coordinator and the volunteers' hours are monitored electronically. Parents are offered multiple different opportunities (both in school and outside of school) to meet the volunteer hour commitment and parents are credited with supporting the

school's success. For instance, parents can volunteer through the Parent Involvement Coordinator or through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA maintains multiple committees that organize a plethora of activities (e.g., back to school picnic, radical readers, math/science lab, family computer classes, literacy night for parents, school-wide socials, book closet, cultural arts events, annual yearbook, and science convention). However, the parental role is valued generally as opposed to specifically for students with disabilities.

It should be noted that personnel from all of the schools reported actively soliciting parental involvement, working to make parents who want to be involved welcome in the school, and providing opportunities for them to be engaged in their children's education. Charyl Stockwell Academy has an "open door" policy which allows parents to come in at any time and observe the class. Roxbury Prep requires parents to participate in an initial orientation meeting when their children are enrolled to help the parents understand the academic rigor, conduct requirements, and homework routines that are integral to the school's mission. CHIME parents reported that the school actively and substantively engages parents in developing appropriate supports for children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In this way, the six case study schools encourage parental involvement, as most schools do, but they do not appear to rely heavily on parental involvement for their schools' successes.

Receptiveness to Change

All school personnel were optimistic that the innovative or best practices documented in the case study schools could be adopted in traditional public schools *if* leadership is committed to developing strong special education programs. Below we briefly highlight the issues that affect transferability of each case study school's program to a district setting. For more detail, please see the full case studies later in this report.

At Charyl Stockwell Academy, school leaders have already begun to disseminate the Teacher Support Team program and are working on disseminating their Smart Character Choices program. They have found that their TST program can accommodate different theories, approaches, and interventions but that the core—early assessment, intensive and short-term interventions, and reassessment—can be applied anywhere. Chuck Stockwell noted that once a team of school leaders and teachers were on board with the TST program, the major difficulty they have encountered when introducing the program to a district setting is the initial professional development requirement which is critical, Stockwell argues, to effectively implementing the TST program.

CHIME's inclusion model, rather than treating children with disabilities under a traditional medical model that aims to "cure" or "fix" their disability to enable them to fit into broader society, adjusts the general education program to ensure that children with disabilities can participate fully. School personnel proposed that the CHIME model could be adopted in other schools if leadership is committed to supporting the model and genuinely buys into the notion that *all* children can benefit from rigorous individualized instruction in inclusive classrooms. However, school personnel also acknowledged the central role the schools' partnership with a local university plays in securing adequate numbers of qualified personnel to support the intensive inclusion model.

At ISUS, where the special education program is not—on its own—particularly innovative, it is the combination of special education supports and hands-on career development opportunities that create an environment that appeals to those that learn by doing and those that have experienced significant academic failure in other school settings. While it may be difficult for a district or school to provide the numerous services and supports necessary to develop a full construction program like that of ISUS, founder Ann Higdon asserted that numerous community development organizations across the country would serve as excellent partners in developing such programs in collaboration with districts. What would be required, she noted, is a commitment to open collaboration and innovation with an outside organization and a willingness to bring in experts who could effectively guide the program.

Personnel from Metro Deaf School contended that their dual language approach could easily be transferred to self-contained deaf education classrooms in districts provided there was a "critical mass" of students to facilitate language acquisition. Special educator Kelly Anderson commented that students learn language from one another more than from their teachers! All school informants believed what is most innovative about MDS's approach is that they have devoted themselves to one proven method alone—the dual-language approach—and do not employ other approaches or tools for deaf education (such as cued speech, lip reading, or oral/aural language for students with cochlear implants). They understand it can be difficult to balance the coherence of a deaf education program with individualization guaranteed by IDEA, but they believe deaf education is uniquely fractured in district schools and would benefit from adopting a unified approach within a classroom.

Roxbury Prep personnel stated that they are implementing a collection of educational best practices that have ultimately supported a successful special education program, and that the program could arguably be implemented in any school that focused on creating an orderly, safe, and rigorous academic atmosphere for all students.

Woodland Elementary is large and diverse according to race, economics, language, and ability. Furthermore, unlike most charter schools, it is not a school of choice and does not enjoy the agility of a new small school. Based on the vision of the principal who initiated the school's conversion to charter status, Woodland has used its charter to alter its academic focus and professional development to support widespread use of talented and gifted instructional strategies for all students. School personnel at Woodland praised the principal's vision and commitment to introducing programs that spurred improved academic outcomes. They also projected that their model could easily be adopted in other public schools.

Discussion

Our research inquiry was based on the hypothesis that charter schools can use their autonomy to develop innovative and implement best practices for children with disabilities. The exploratory case studies of charter schools nominated due to their success; or in the case of the smallest school for which sub-group data are not publicly reported, perceived success; with children with disabilities revealed that the six charter schools are using a variety of approaches to educate children with disabilities.

While not all of the practices are innovative, they do appear to reflect established best practices (e.g., early intervention strategies, supportive school culture, and co-teaching); practices that can be observed in other good schools, traditional and charter alike. The schools appear to be leveraging their charter status to implement a clear, unifying focus. For instance, at Charyl Stockwell Academy, school personnel use knowledge of working within social protocols to help children with emotional and behavioral disabilities.[11] This is not a unique approach and in fact, it has been documented in the literature to be an effective approach but, the charter school has been able to actually ingrain the approach into the school's culture.

And, with the exception of the large conversion charter school, the schools also appear to benefit from being small relative to traditional public schools. Finally, they appear to benefit from the ability to do things (e.g., raise money for the construction program and control the allocation of funds within their building) without having to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles traditional public schools administrators would have to jump to introduce similar changes. In theory, administrators could restructure traditional public schools to provide more of these contextual variables which could in turn foster introduction of the effective practices we observed in the charter schools.

Of note, the six case studies revealed recurring characteristics and practices that may hold promise for charter and traditional public schools. While some of the schools have intentionally created successful programs for children with disabilities, other schools have simply created successful programs that benefit children with and without disabilities. Furthermore, leaders of the six case study schools highlighted in this report stressed that their programs could work elsewhere if there is a commitment on the part of school leaders to build buy-in from general educators accompanied by appropriate professional development and adequate resources.

Interestingly, the cases also reflect the diversity of philosophies and convictions related to special education. For instance, CHIME is based on a commitment to inclusive classrooms for all students with disabilities while at the other end of the spectrum, Metro Deaf School is based on an explicit separation of children who are deaf or hearing impaired from children without hearing impairments. In contrast, Woodland operates a relatively traditional special education program with both inclusive and self-contained classrooms and Charyl Stockwell explicitly strives to decrease the number of students identified to receive special education services. Yet, all the programs appear to have demonstrated a degree of success with their student population that is noteworthy.

While our exploratory case studies are limited in terms of generalizability, we think it is significant to acknowledge the fundamental diversity of the approaches to educating children

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[11] For more information about effective strategies for emotional an d behavior disabilities, including use of social protocols, see Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (1991). *Effective schooling practices: A research synthesis.* Portland, OR: Author;   Scott, T. M. (2001). Positive behavioral support: A school-wide example. Journal of *Positive Behavioral Interventions*, 3, 88–94; Sugai, G., Horner, R. H., Dunlap, Hieneman, M., Lewis, T. J., C. M., et al. (2000). Applying positive behavioral support functional assessment in schools. *Journal of Positive Behavioral Interventions*, 2, 131–143.

with disabilities and more broadly, educating all children. Additional in-depth research is required to track the academic progress of children with disabilities in charter schools and thereafter, investigate instructional and organizational practices that correlate with exemplary academic outcomes. A study of academic outcomes of children with disabilities in California revealed that students enrolled in special education programs in charter schools performed as well or better than their peers in traditional public schools (Rhim, Faukner, & McLaughlin, 2007). However, the study was quantitative in nature and did not delve into the instructional programs offered by the more successful charter schools.

An underlying question that needs further investigation is the degree to which the schools attract children that fit their model or, alternatively, the schools accommodate the children who choose to enroll. As schools of choice, charter schools are typically driven by an explicit mission, a mission that most likely attracts families who believe in the mission or perceive that the instructional program would be a good fit for their child. This is in contrast to traditional comprehensive public schools that enroll students by neighborhood catchment areas and then accommodate individual children's needs. In other words, while the schools may in fact be implementing promising or best practices, part of their success may be due to attracting students, general and special education alike, who will succeed given the school's instructional approach. If the issue of choice is in factor in the schools success with students with disabilities, the absence of choice may be an impediment to replication.

A nagging limitation of the study is the lack of access to tangible outcome data for three of the six schools. While the schools were nominated by experts (i.e., state officials, authorizers, charter support organizations) with first-hand knowledge of the schools, due to small sub-group size, we could not verify the academic proficiency rates of students at MDS, Roxbury Preparatory or ISUS. While the degree of success overall is a loose proxy for performance of students with disabilities, it is imperfect at best. Furthermore, for the unique populations served by MDS and ISUS (i.e., deaf and hard of hearing and drop-outs respectively), traditional performance metrics may not be appropriate. Rather, attendance, academic progress, and success post-graduation may be more appropriate metrics of success. Nevertheless, efforts to generalize require more in-depth research.

Overall, the cases confirm that the charter sector may be a fruitful arena for introducing innovative approaches and implementing established best practices for children with disabilities. Furthermore, the cases appear to indicate that while a school's charter status may facilitate adoption of specific practices, it does not appear that autonomy from district rules and regulations is required to successfully adopt these practices. Table III contains a summary of the recurring characteristics identified in each of the schools.

TABLE III: SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS SYNTHESIS*

Schools	MISSION DRIVEN			SUPPORTING TEACHERS		SUPPORTING STUDENTS			IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSFERABILITY			
	Leadership and a philosophy of inclusion	Sense of ownership of students with disabilities	Commitment to tenets of IDEA	Professional development	Data-driven methods	Highly individualized programs that normalized special education	What works for special education works for general education	Safe and supportive environment	Effective teaching team	Additional resources not necessary	Strong parent involvement	Receptiveness to change
Charyl Stockwell Academy, Howell, MI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CHIME Charter Elementary and Middle Schools, Los Angeles, CA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
ISUS Institute of Construction Technology, Dayton, OH	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Metro Deaf School, St. Paul, MN		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Roxbury Preparatory Charter, Roxbury, MA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Woodland Elementary, Atlanta, GA				✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

* Check is an indication that informants mentioned this characteristic or we observed evidence of this characteristic while visiting the school. Absence of a check does not necessarily mean that this characteristic is not present in the school.

School Profiles

The following sections provide extended descriptions of each of the six case study schools. Each case includes background information, descriptive data tables, and a description of the school staff, promising special education practices, evidence of success with children with disabilities and a discussion of the implications of the case for traditional schools.

Charyl Stockwell Academy (Formerly Livingston Developmental Academy)

Background

Based in large part on his frustrations working as special education director and principal in public school districts near Detroit, Chuck Stockwell founded Livingston Developmental Academy to create a better school that would actively work to reduce early learning failure and in turn reduce the number of children identified as having disabilities. Under the auspices of the inclusion movement, he saw children who most needed services—the 3-5% of the population with the most severe disabilities—lose them in the name of "mainstreaming" and cost cutting. He was further frustrated that, with the greater awareness of special education, more students were identified with disabilities who may not have been identified before—including those now broadly labeled with specific learning disabilities.[12] More generally, Stockwell was concerned that increased special education interventions were not, in many instances, resulting in improved learning outcomes for students referred to special education. Chuck Stockwell lamented that, "they created a whole new group of special education children to get thrown away." What Stockwell interpreted as over identification of children with disabilities worried him and the persistent pattern of children experiencing significant learning failure before they were provided interventions and services was particularly disheartening. In reflecting on his decision to create Livingston Developmental Academy, Stockwell recalled thinking, "There had to be a better way."

> *Stockwell was concerned that increased special education interventions were not, in many instances, resulting in improved learning outcomes for students referred to special education. He lamented that, "they created a whole new group of special education children to get thrown away." Charyl Stockwell Founder, Chuck*

Chuck, and his wife Shelley, Stockwell's professional concerns about the growing population of students referred to special education were reinforced when their daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor that affected her learning abilities. The personal experiences of having a child labeled as having special needs and the lack of answers they received from the education specialists who worked with Charyl, prompted the Stockwells to begin researching *why* kids experienced learning failure and how to prevent it, in an attempt to mitigate the need for special education labeling. The Stockwells' belief became that students should be diagnosed in order to prevent and/or correct learning failure instead of to label in order to enter into special education services. The Stockwells came to believe that most learning and even emotional or behavioral "disabilities" were largely manifestations of untreated reading problems and poor social and emotional skills and limited knowledge about working within social protocols.

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[12] "Specific learning disabilities" is a broad category of disabilities that, according to IDEA, inhibit a child's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

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Chuck Stockwell founded Livingston Developmental Academy in 1996 (The board changed the school's name to the Charyl Stockwell Academy (CSA) after the Stockwell's daughter passed away in 2001) and based the school's intervention programs on the founders' belief that reading problems stem from a variety of sensory, motor and language delays that, with early and intensive intervention, can be effectively remedied.

Believing that a major problem with traditional schools is the strict age-grade connection, the founders sought to create a safe and engaging school where all children are allowed to develop at their own individual pace. "All children have asynchronous development" Director Shelley Stockwell noted. "A 7-year-old child might be 10 intellectually and 6 emotionally." To accommodate the asynchronous development of all children, the school operates a continuous progress/mastery learning program consisting of multi-age learning families co-taught by two teachers. Learning families typically consist of about 40 students and span the equivalent of 2 grade-levels. Students move through the curriculum aligned with the Michigan Curriculum Framework at their pace with much of the coursework completed at "learning centers" which cover topics at varying levels of difficulty (e.g. the "star" activity may be of medium difficulty and the "square" may be most difficult). Students begin with the level with which they feel comfortable. As one teacher noted, however, they are monitored to make sure students are encouraged to challenge themselves.

> *"All children have asynchronous development,"* Principal Stockwell noted. *"A 7-year-old child might be 10 intellectually and 6 emotionally."*

Authorized by Central Michigan University, CSA serves the predominantly white, relatively affluent communities surrounding Howell, Michigan. The school enrolls 723 students of which 58, or 8%, have been identified as eligible to receive special education services. The proportion of CSA students receiving special education services is significantly lower than surrounding districts and the state average which hovers around 14%. School personnel reported that the lower rate does not reflect fewer children with disabilities enrolling in the school, but rather, a concerted effort by CSA staff and leadership to avoid labeling temporary delays in young children as a disability that qualifies them to receive special education and related services.

CSA continues to make AYP each year and their students with disabilities do not have the typical grade-level discrepancy seen in public schools nationwide. Rather than being an average of three grades behind their peers, CSA's students with IEPs are less than one year behind and gain more than one grade level per year, on average.[13]

Charyl Stockwell Academy	
Address	9758 E. Highland Rd., Howell, MI 48843
First year of operation	1996

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[13] Personal communication with Teri Pettit, CSA Special Education Director on February 1, 2008.

Authorizer	Central Michigan University
Governance structure	Independent with an authorizer-appointed Board of Directors
Focus/mission	To provide a safe and enriching place for students to develop at their own pace within a continued mastery setting of multi-age, non-graded classrooms.
Grades Served	K-8
Total Enrollment (2007-08)	723
Annual cost per student (2006-07)	$8,000*
Special education program/innovation/success	Teacher Support Team program developed in-house (similar to a Response to Intervention model) which focuses on evaluating all students—regardless of special education status—for early identification of risk for learning failure, intensive intervention, and reevaluation.

Source: School leader self-report and annual report available on school website: http://www.csaschool.org/pdfs/FinalAR0607.pdf.
*In Michigan, the per pupil amount for each student enrolled in a charter school is set by the state and paid directly to the charter school.

Demographics (2007-2008)	
Total Enrollment	723
African-American	0.9%
Caucasian	97.2%
Hispanic	0.7%
Asian	0.4%
Other	0.4%
Special Education Enrollment	8.31%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	1.9%
English Language Learners	0.0%

Source: School leader self-report.

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency					
		Adequate Yearly Progress?	**% Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math**	**%Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading**	
2005 AYP		Yes	N/A	N/A	
2006 AYP		Yes	N/A	N/A	
2007 AYP		Yes	N/A	N/A	

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Performance				
Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the State Standardized Assessment				
		2004-05	**2005-06**	**2006-07**
3rd Grade	**Reading**	N/A	78.1	74.1
	Math	N/A	89.2	89.6
4th Grade	**Reading**	62.5	74.1	73.4
	Math	63.3	82.9	75.0
5th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	67.3	73.5
	Math	N/A	65.4	67.6
6th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	87.1	82.4
	Math	N/A	70.3	61.4
7th Grade	**Reading**	63.6	93.7	86.7
	Math	N/A	59.4	73.3
8th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	74.2	91.7
	Math	75.0	54.8	87.5

Source: Annual report available at: http://www.csaschool.org/pdfs/FinalAR0607.pdf and school leader self report for 2004-05 information not available on website.
Note: N/A indicates that no data were available for the grade and year under consideration.

School Staff

CSA employs an executive director who facilitates and directs a five-person administrative leadership team which includes the coordinator of the Teacher Support Team.[14] In addition to more than 30 general education teachers, CSA has a full time resource room teacher, a speech and language therapist, and a social worker. A host of ancillary staff are available, as needed, including physical and occupational therapists, a psychologist, and other consultants. A group of assistants administer individual interventions. The director of educational services organizes all of the Teacher Support Team specialists and ensures CSA complies with all legal requirements for IEPs and special education service delivery.

CSA personnel reported that they deploy their specialists to maximize efficient use of their time. For instance, rather than providing one-on-one intervention for several students all day, CSA pinpoints the precise needs of children who may otherwise have continuous one-on-one assistants and redeploys their specialists to serve more students and classrooms throughout the day. This approach does not remove one-on-one assistance from those children who need

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[14] The term "teacher support team" is widely used in public schools to mean a variety of approaches to assist classroom teachers in addressing learning problems. The CSA TST, however, is an intensive set of strategies woven into the school structure to prevent learning problems and, when needed, to provide concentrated assistance to students who need special support to succeed.

frequent intervention, but rather—through evaluation by members of the Teacher Support Team—identifies those students who may be better served by scheduled "sensory breaks" that provide an opportunity to blow off steam and regain focus.

To supplement the work of specialists and intervention assistants, CSA provides professional development for half a day every Friday so general education teachers can not only plan lessons and interpret data together, but that they also understand and can effectively implement interventions and accommodations identified by the Teacher Support Team for some of their students. School leaders provide this significant level of professional development because they believe it is what allows their teachers to 1) embrace their role in educating every child and 2) equip them with the tools to do so. One teacher noted that CSA "provides an immense amount of professional development—more than any other school I've ever seen." She stated that each school year begins with two solid weeks of teacher professional development focused on providing concrete examples, not just theory. Through well-established processes, the teacher reported that she knows what she needs to do when she sees a child having difficulty. She said she is confident that issues will be addressed in a short time and effective interventions will be identified for implementation.

Despite the significant amount of professional development and support CSA leadership provides its teachers, Director Stockwell noted that she non-renews, on average, one teacher per year. She stressed, however, that it is not generally because the person is a poor teacher, but because the teacher is a poor fit for their specific program and approach. In her school where a co-teaching approach in multi-age, non-graded classrooms is central to their mission, many traditionally-trained teachers may have difficulty adjusting to that environment. The ability to craft a team of teachers committed to CSA's educational philosophy has, Stockwell believes, allowed CSA to become a successful program.

Special Education Promising Practices

The general education program at CSA is designed to be inclusive of all learners. A series of benchmarks delineate progress through the coursework within each learning family. Students can move through the sequence at their pace and they may complete coursework sooner if able. Students at CSA have an opportunity to move up into the next learning family at three points in the school year in December, March, and June. During these transitions, CSA personnel consider the development of the whole child across four components: 1) cognitive/academic/intellectual, 2) social/emotional, 3) physical/sensory, and 4) character/moral. A child who needs a bit more time with younger peers can remain with the learning family for a few months, rather than being kept back an entire school year. And because everyone in the classroom is working at their own level, a teacher noted, the child that is spending more time in a learning family is not sitting through the same lessons, classroom projects, and worksheets as the year before. In addition, since at least half of the class includes the younger students who did not advance to the next learning family, the child that is kept back does not lose all of their peers and their established social network.

In this setting, the founders asserted, children can develop in their own way—both emotionally and academically—whether they are gifted in several areas, struggle with a specific topic, or are particularly apt in a couple of subjects. Differentiation for each child across every subject can

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allow a child to shine in certain areas even if they are average in others and it allows all students, regardless of ability, to learn alongside one another in the classroom. "Differentiation means every kid is doing something different," said one teacher. She believes this creates a classroom where 'different' is not singled out in a negative way and allows a child with disabilities to work with confidence next to a student who is a typical or gifted learner.

For example, every student is given their own, individual spelling test based on their progress through spelling lists. This, one teacher noted, allows students who pick it up quickly to move ahead and those who need more practice to remain challenged but engaged. This differentiation extends as well to a child's reading level. Each child is informed of his or her current reading level (e.g. level B or level J) and the reading library in the classroom is clearly marked with those levels. During independent reading time, students reportedly know which books to choose that will be at or slightly above their level. The teacher noted that this also signals to the child when they have improved their own reading level, which can serve as motivation to the child. School personnel reported that this classroom environment allows students who might otherwise have been pulled out for special education services to remain with their peers.

In the event that a child appears to have difficulty maintaining an expected rate of development, he or she may be identified for assessment and early intervention before the struggle translates into learning failure. CSA's philosophy is that prevention of learning failure keeps children engaged in their education. Embedded in this philosophy is the belief that learning difficulties—and most special education identification—are generally a result of problems with reading or behavioral issues that stem from not understanding how to work within social protocols.

CSA personnel have developed two integrated approaches to address reading and behavioral problems. The first approach centers around the Teacher Support Team (TST) which was developed in-house by CSA's founders and leaders because as parents, teachers, and school administrators, they believed they should focus on 1) early and short-term intervention, 2) preventing learning failure, and 3) a reduction in the need for special education labeling. Most students, they felt, had to experience significant learning failure in district schools before being identified for intervention services. In addition, the Stockwells were concerned that special education labeling is a long-term identification which stays with a child throughout his or her school career. CSA's leaders were convinced that they could find a better approach. They found that the traditional education establishment was not supportive of, or receptive to, their ideas, but as an independent charter school, however, CSA was able to realize their vision of how to educate children who face academic and/or adjustment challenges.

The Teacher Support Team consists of school leadership, specialists, and some teachers and convenes monthly. The TST assesses every new student. Upon entering CSA, children complete a battery of assessments that evaluate fine and gross motor skills, auditory and visual perception and integration, motor/sensory integration, language development and internal control processes. Delays in motor and sensory development which may be temporary, school personnel believe, are most frequently the cause of early reading difficulties (e.g. a delay in the acquisition of phonemic awareness, the development of discrete skills like the eyes' ability to scan the page, or the integration of auditory and visual senses). Because a child does not develop in a linear fashion along the age-grade continuum, he or she may be identified with disabilities in a typical

public school setting. At CSA, rather, students are provided short-term interventions designed to address specific problems in these areas and, the special education director noted, result in improved reading abilities and averted learning failure.

In addition to new student assessments, the TST also reassesses those students identified as having difficulty in a class. The TST discusses students identified by teachers as in need of evaluation, interprets assessments, and identifies intensive, short-term interventions designed to ameliorate or alleviate learning and developmental difficulties. Specific areas of concern are teased out and CSA uses a series of identified approaches and interventions that are implemented with students over 10 week periods. After each 10 week period, the TST reassesses the students to determine their responses to the intervention and to identify next steps.

CSA's leaders have developed a secure web-based database that houses individual student assessment data that is retrieved when the TST discusses the student cases. School personnel reported that the database provides an at-a-glance view of: every assessment conducted, student scores, interventions implemented, and the results. With this database, students' rates of progress as well as intervention history can inform any new discussions about the child and prevent duplicative efforts or lost information.

Response to Intervention (RtI) is an early intervention process incorporating highly targeted interventions using quality instruction coupled with progress monitoring employed to help children before they fail and, consequently, require special education services and supports. Director Shelley Stockwell explained that CSA has been practicing RtI since 2002 as the central tenet of their Teacher Support Team approach which relies on research-based interventions and frequent reevaluations to determine whether the interventions have led to measurable improvement. While the TST serves as the pre-referral entity for special education, it does not serve only this purpose. The TST also allows CSA personnel to pursue their philosophy of preventing learning failure among all students and decreasing the need for special education referral. Because the TST approach is used for every child that has difficulty—regardless of whether or not the child may be believed to have a disability—the TST approach enables school personnel to provide short-term interventions for more than a third of the entire student population each year. Early intervention, CSA personnel believe, has had a positive effect on all students that receive interventions and has significantly decreased the numbers of students in their school who qualify for special education services. In addition to reducing special education labels, the TST can potentially provide relatively inexpensive and effective interventions to students who many not otherwise have qualified for supplemental services through an IEP but who may benefit from short-term interventions.

In addition to addressing learning difficulties students may experience, CSA personnel also work with all of their students to remedy any adjustment problems that can negatively impact learning. Focusing on an internal locus of control rather than a behavioral modification approach based on rewards and punishment, CSA personnel have developed the "Smart Character Choices" program which builds on six character traits: respect, responsibility, kindness, getting along, optimism, and work ethic. The program is infused with elements of internal control psychology and CSA supports this approach by teaching established social protocols so that the students learn how to succeed in multi-age classrooms where students are doing different activities at the

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same time. The founders expressed a commitment to this approach—learning social protocols and developing an internal sense of control—because they believe it benefits children not only while they are in school, but prepares them for success in a democratic society more effectively than an autocratic approach common in many schools. An internal-control approach, they assert, decreases adjustment problems because children are taught social protocols and how to function within socially-accepted boundaries. They believe that many adjustment problems stem from a lack of understanding about social expectations and that is why "Smart Character Choices" is integral to the educational approach at CSA.

School personnel reported that these two programs (i.e., the Teacher Support Team and Smart Character Choices) are central to supporting all children. When identified for TST intervention, children are typically pulled out for focused intervention or teachers provide interventions in the classroom. For a child who has adjustment problems, the TST may recommend a "sensory break" every morning when the child first comes to class during which the student gets to go run three laps around the gym before class to release some energy and heighten focus. This quick intervention may be all that child needs until lunch. The one-on-one assistant that would have been provided to that child in another school is redeployed to pull other children for sensory breaks or to provide other interventions. In this way, the TST model can reduce costs by maximizing the effective use of specialists and decreasing the need for one-on-one services to individual children.

This whole child approach—focused on sensory/motor, character, and academic development—is carried out by everyone in the school and with special support from the TST. In addition, CSA personnel welcome the involvement of and input from parents. There is a sign welcoming them at the front door and an established "open door" policy for all classrooms where parents can come in and observe or help in their children's classroom whenever they choose. Parental involvement, however, does not seem to be critical to the efficacy of the TST in working with students with disabilities. The TST does work with parents who request special education assessment and services for their children. Because the TST meets regularly, however, and children do not need an IEP to get intervention services, children's needs are reportedly met quickly and efficiently.

Evidence of Success with Children with Disabilities

School personnel noted that CSA has experienced significant success with the TST approach. During the 2006-07 school year, 12 of the 70 children identified for special education exited their IEPs. These children no longer qualified for identification as students with disabilities. Half of these children were receiving speech services and it is common to have children work through

> *School personnel noted that CSA has experienced significant success with the TST approach. During the 2006-07 school year, 12 of the 70 children identified for special education exited their IEPs. These children no longer qualified for identification as students with disabilities.*

those issues. Of more interest, however, are the three children who had been identified as learning disabled: one as cognitively impaired, one with Asperger syndrome, and one with autism. Founder Chuck Stockwell reflected that at CSA, these children have been able to effectively benefit from the general education classroom and do not need special education

services. The child who had been identified with autism in another school, through effective assessment and intervention at CSA was actually identified as extremely gifted and his "autistic behaviors" were a result of being under stimulated and challenged, said Teri Pettit, Special Education Director. At CSA, their Teacher Support Team approach and thorough child evaluation process allowed them to see the whole child and not rush to identify "what's wrong." Chuck Stockwell explained that when a child is identified as having difficulty, many special education programs approach the situation trying to figure out which boxes to check rather than looking at the whole child and their experiences and abilities. In the case of a child identified as having autism, he had demonstrated multiple behaviors on the autism spectrum, but after careful monitoring, school personnel determined that the etiology of those behaviors was not in fact autism.

> *"The way that they taught [at CSA], and how they taught the individual person and addressed individual strengths and weaknesses and not a specific label—a negative label that there was an assumption that the child could only amount to 'this much' because of that label—I just couldn't believe the school was twelve minutes from me. We both were thrilled."*
> Parent of a child enrolled at Charyl Stockwell Academy

A mother of two children initially identified with autism greatly appreciated CSA's inclusive and individualized approach. After she and her husband had searched for private programs and identified expensive intervention options, she explained, "The way that they taught [at CSA], and how they taught the individual person and addressed individual strengths and weaknesses and not a specific label—a negative label that there was an assumption that the child could only amount to 'this much' because of that label—I just couldn't believe the school was twelve minutes from me. We both were thrilled."

The father of the two children previously noted concurred that many educators and specialists in public education look for "what's wrong." He recalled from his experiences before placing his two children at CSA, that most specialists said "Here is what he's got. Here's what we will always expect of him. Don't expect this of him. Here are his limitations and here's what we're going to do to help him work with his limitations." The father reflected that previous schools and specialists were so focused on setting him up as a parent to have low expectations for his children that his children's strengths and abilities were ignored. At CSA, in contrast, he noted that teachers have open relationships with parents and the Teacher Support Team to facilitate conversations about student needs. The father recalled how his son's teacher would call him and say, "Something happened today and I was hoping you could help me figure out how to approach the situation if it happens again." The parents and general education teacher would work together to identify a solution. This close working relationship is a cornerstone of the support services at CSA that have allowed some students to

> *"Before coming to CSA, most specialists said 'Here is what he's got. Here's what we will always expect of him. Don't expect this of him. Here are his limitations and here's what we're going to do to help him work with his limitations.'"*
> Parent of students enrolled in Charyl Stockwell Academy

avoid a special education label and, ultimately, may have helped result in both of these twins no longer meeting the criteria for autism. Today, the father reported, both children are doing well

academically (the third graders read at or near a high school level) and have a strong network of friends.

In addition to exiting children from special education, CSA personnel have found that their students with disabilities are less than one year behind their non-disabled peers (on average .7-.9 grade level behind). Further, their students in special education gain, on average, 1.2 grades per year in Language Arts and 1.6 grades per year in math, often allowing them to close the learning gap with their nondisabled peers before leaving CSA in the 8th grade.[15]

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

CSA's Teacher Support Team model is not necessarily limited to implementation in schools that share a similar anti-labeling philosophy about special education. In fact, the TST model has been successfully disseminated to more than a dozen schools which have their own approaches to special education and assessment. The TST framework at CSA does rely on routine assessment, early identification, choosing research-proven, short-term interventions, and reassessment to determine next steps—but the types of students identified for intervention, interventions chosen, the implementation period, and the evaluations used can be tailored to the needs of students and the philosophy of school personnel.

As previously noted, CSA founders, funded by the Michigan Department of Education Charter Schools Office, have disseminated the TST program to more than a dozen other schools—traditional and charter—and have begun to disseminate their Smart Character Choices program as well. CSA personnel have found that their TST program can accommodate different theories, approaches, and interventions and that the core—early assessment, intensive and short-term interventions, and reassessment—can be applied anywhere. Teri Pettit noted that the only problems they have encountered when introducing the program to a district setting are the initial professional development requirements. In one instance, Pettit recalled, the teachers and school leaders were eager to implement the program, but the district had removed professional development funding for the year and refused to pay the teachers for the professional development that was necessary to start the program. Further complicating the situation, the local teachers' union rules would not allow teachers to attend the sessions—on their own time without pay—even if they wanted to.

The requisite professional development to get teachers on board with the program and to be able to effectively implement the program requires a significant up-front investment. However, the CSA founders insisted that the initial investment pays dividends in the form of lower rates of special education identification and the redeployment of specialist resources that can save significant funds. CSA personnel stated that the TST approach has also reduced the costs associated with special education by ameliorating many students' problems with short-term interventions and decreasing the need to provide longer-term special education services. Chuck Stockwell noted that districts could save millions of dollars and provide better services and educational opportunities to their students if they employed the TST approach. For example, about 8% of the students at CSA are identified for special education; this is in stark contrast to

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[15] Personal communication with Teri Pettit, CSA Special Education Director, on February 1, 2008.

the state average of about 14.3% and the regional average of 15.8%.[16] Reducing the number of students receiving special education and related services by nearly half while maintaining academic outcomes demonstrates the efficacy of the RtI approach CSA employs.

Finally, it should be highlighted that the TST is not simply about special education; at CSA the TST provided interventions to more than 230 individual students in the 2006-07 school year, or more than three times the special education population. The TST seeks to provide a quick, targeted response to problems students are having, decrease the chance of learning failure for all students, and ultimately protect the love of learning in children. This, the Stockwells argued, is the real goal of the TST and what leads to well-adjusted and happy students and, eventually, adults.

Community Honoring Inclusive Model Education (CHIME)

Charter Elementary and Middle Schools

Background

The CHIME Institute is a non-profit organization that operates multiple early education programs and two charter schools. Originally founded as a model demonstration project based at the California State University Northridge (CSUN) Michael E. Eisner College of Education and funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the organization oversees inclusive learning environments for hundreds of students each year. Opened in 2001 and 2003 respectively, the elementary and middle charter schools are small schools located outside of Los Angeles and operate as part of Los Angeles Unified School District. As outlined in its employee training materials, the core mission of the CHIME Institute is to create "model education programs in family, school, and community centered environments that support <u>all</u> children including those who are typically developing, gifted, or have special needs to achieve their maximum intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential". In addition to the commitment to inclusion, the CHIME Institute is dedicated to creating a learning environment that 1) is based on research, 2) provides training to teachers, and 3) disseminates best practices to the broader education community.

> *"The CHIME Institute provides model education programs in family, school, and community centered environments that support all children included those who are typically developing, gifted, or have special needs to achieve their maximum intellectual, social, emotional, and physical potential"* (Chime Institute, 2007).

The schools' curriculum is based on the California state standards and the schools purchase commercial materials (e.g., Hartcourt-Brace and Houghton-Mifflin) to teach specific content. Seamless inclusion is supported by a co-teaching model, intense classroom support, regular planning for instructional personnel, and a constructivist instructional delivery model that views the teacher as the facilitator of developmentally appropriate learning. In line with this approach, all children enrolled at both CHIME schools have individualized learning plans, including Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) developed

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[16] Charyl Stockwell Academy 2006-07 Annual Report. Available at http://www.csaschool.org/pdfs/FinalAR0607.pdf

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specifically for children with diagnosed disabilities that qualify them for special education and related services. CHIME maintains a very active PTA and school materials emphasize the key role parents play in supporting their child's education at the school.

In 2006-2007, the elementary and middle schools enrolled 248 and 229 students respectively. Approximately 20% of the students at the elementary school and the middle school had a diagnosed disability that qualified them for special education; including children with multiple and/or severe disabilities who require significant supports and services. The elementary school has met adequate yearly progress targets for the past three years and the middle school for two of the last three years. In 2006, CHIME Charter Elementary was named "Charter School of the Year" by the California Charter Schools Association. The two CHIME schools were selected for case study due to their success educating children with a wide range of disabilities in a remarkably inclusive and arguably, innovative instructional setting. While inclusion as a concept is not new or particularly innovative, successful adoption of inclusive practices for children with a wide array of disabilities is still relatively novel in public schools.

CHIME Charter Schools		
	Elementary	Middle School
First year of operation	2001	2003
Authorizer	Los Angeles Unified School District	
Governance structure	New-start-up charter school that is part of a local district and affiliated with CHIME Institute and California State University Northridge	
Focus/mission	Inclusive environment where all students benefit from diversity using a constructivist approach and embedded differentiated instruction for all students using co-teaching	
Grades Served (2007-2008)	K - 5	6 - 8
Annual cost per student (2007-2008)	$8,799*	$7,699*
Special Education Program	Seamless inclusion supported by co-teaching	

Source: Schoolmatters.com:
http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sl/sid=83888/midx=DistrictFinancialInfo and school personnel self-report
*This figure represents the per pupil allocation at the two schools. The elementary school allocation is greater than the middle school allocation due to K-3 class size reduction funding. In addition to the per pupil allocation, the school receives related services (i.e., occupational and speech therapy) from the district and for select students with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., visual impairment, server orthopedic impairment, or hearing impairment), the school can access additional funds from a state low-incidence fund.

Demographics (2006-2007)		
	Elementary*	Middle*
Total Enrollment	248	229
African-American	8%	10%

White	60%	51%
Latino	20%	29%
Asian	11%	7%
Other	2%	4%
Special Education Enrollment	20%	20%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	0%	0%
English Language Learners	0%	0%

Sources: California Department of Education (2008). California Public Schools-School Report. Available online: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/SearchName.asp?rbTimeFrame=oneyear&rYear=2007-08&cName=chime&Topic=Enrollment&Level=School and school leader self-report.

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency							
	CHIME Elementary				**CHIME Middle School**		
	Adequate Yearly Progress	**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math**	**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading**		**Adequate Yearly Progress**	**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math**	**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading**
2005 AYP	Yes	37%	33%		Yes	10%*	20%*
2006 AYP	Yes	55%	55%		Yes	13%*	30%*
2007 AYP	Yes	44%	65%		No	44%*	23%*

Source: California Department of Education (2008), 2006-07 Accountability Progress Reporting. Available online: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/AcntRpt2007/2007APRSchAYPChart.aspx?allcds=19647336119531
* Not applicable to AYP determination due to small sub-group size

Performance **Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the** **California Standards Test**					
			2004-05	**2005-06**	**2006-07**
Elementary School	**3rd Grade**	**Reading**	56%	40%	43%
		Math	61%	60%	52%
	4th Grade	**Reading**	52%	62%	45%
		Math	56%	57%	33%
	5th Grade	**Reading**	41%	60%	54%
		Math	28%	35%	18%
Middle S	**6th Grade**	**Reading**	45%	46%	57%
		Math	40%	29%	24%

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7th Grade	**Reading**	45%	57%	56%
	Math	20%	44%	28%
8th Grade	**Reading**	53%	47%	47%
	Math	22%	31%	41%

Source: California Department of Education (2008) California Standard Testing and Reporting Testing Results. Available online: http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/

School Staff

The founder and director of CHIME charter schools also serves as the principal of the elementary school and the middle school employs its own an administrator. The CHIME model is personnel intense; in addition to general and special education teachers; the schools employ multiple related services specialists (e.g., speech and occupational therapists), instructional assistants, and student interns from CSUN who all work in general education classrooms. This integrated service delivery model is in contrast to the pull-out approach that has been used extensively in special education in the past and continues to be used in many traditional public schools.

> *"Children are whole beings, not isolated sets of skills. Instead of single therapy unites that treat one skill at a time (e.g., speech time, physical therapy time, etc.), we provide many opportunities for children to participate in coordinated activities in which a variety of skills may be worked on at one time within the classroom setting. The teachers, therapists, and family jointly develop these activities. Activities are provided within the center and classroom settings, and children are not pulled out to work on specific skills" (CHIME Institute, 2007, p. 11).*

While the number of, and heavy reliance on, student interns and instructional assistants could potentially cause problems related to turnover, administrators, teachers and parents did not see that as a problem. A parent of a child with significant disabilities explained: "They get young energetic people who want to be here. The aides in Chicago were not young or interested, [my daughter] needs to be fed and they were just shoving food in her mouth, and it was just a job."

Reflecting the schools' commitment to inclusion and shared responsibility for educating all children, the handbook for student intern notes: *"Children are whole beings, not isolated sets of skills. Instead of single therapy units that treat one skill at a time (e.g., speech time, physical therapy time, etc.), we provide many opportunities for children to participate in coordinated activities in which a variety of skills may be worked on at one time within the classroom setting. The teachers, therapists, and family jointly develop these activities. Activities are provided within the center and classroom settings, and children are not pulled out to work on specific skills."* In visiting both schools, it was not unusual to see four or five adults in every classroom working with multiple students. Confirming the apparently seamless line, and shared responsibility, between general and special education teachers, a parent of a child with a disability noted that if you talk to her daughter and "Ask who her teacher is, she would say both

the general education and special... There are real partnerships with special education and general education and key paraprofessionals."

> *"There are real partnerships with special education and general education and key paraprofessionals."*
> Parent of a child with disabilities enrolled at CHIME Middle School.

The partnership with CSUN is central to the school's core mission and the student teachers serve a vital role in CHIME classrooms. At CHIME, potential applicants need to be willing and able to share a classroom with their co-teaching counterpart, instructional assistants, and student interns. Furthermore, they also carry some responsibility for teaching student interns. While not a pre-requisite for employment, most of the teachers at CHIME have reportedly been trained or had experience with co-teaching. According to a strategic plan developed for the school in fall of 2005, the CHIME Institute, through its educational programs and schools, has trained a total of 332 student teachers from CSUN. The training includes the in-school practicum leading up to obtaining teacher credentials.

Special Education Promising Practices

Promising special education practices are the center piece of the CHIME model. In the school's 2006 strategic plan, inclusion is described as not only the right thing to do but also the best pedagogical approach for all students (CHIME Institute, 2006). The school's core commitment to inclusion is reflected in every aspect of its program (e.g., teacher and parent handbook, marketing materials, hiring process, and professional development). The school's co-teaching model reflects a fully-integrated special education program in which general and special education teachers work as partners to support all children. Referred to as "layering," co-teaching reportedly allows general and special education teachers to respond to children's individual learning needs and provide supports in a highly individualized manner. A parent of a child with a disability who previously worked as a teacher reflected that she had never seen such an inclusive environment. She noted "there is real collaboration here. As a teacher, I did not have support to include children."

Complementing the co-teaching approach, the school places speech therapists in classrooms in the early grades to provide assistance to all students. The speech therapists are reportedly very effective; helping all children improve phonetic awareness which supports development of early reading skills. Principal Julie Fabrocini reflected that "phonological awareness is the building block for literacy, having speech pathologist in kindergarten and first grade classrooms is key to addressing students who are at risk for literacy failure." The number of adults in the room coupled with the specialized skills of the special educators reportedly creates a highly individualized environment for all students.

Specialized professional development and the school schedule were also developed to support the co-teaching model. Multiple teachers and administrators identified regular co-planning periods and the daily collaborative debrief (i.e., "collab") as critical to successful co-teaching. Each school day, the first hour is dedicated to co-planning. During this time, general and special education teachers collaborate on lessons and strategize about appropriate supports and

modifications. At the end of the day, grade-level teams meet to review their day. Each team member shares a challenge and a success from the day. Collabs are limited to 30 minutes and follow a set of rules developed to make certain that each member participates equally and the time is used productively. For instance, everyone is expected to share a success and a challenge and a child cannot be identified as a challenge, rather, a behavior may be identified as a challenge. Teachers explained that collab allows teachers to review their day in a constructive way which helps them prepare for the next day. During the collab we observed, the team shared ideas about how to address a child's particularly challenging behavior and a teacher expressed regret about not handling a discipline issue in a more positive manner. In response to the teacher's self-identified challenge, other teachers expressed support for her frustrations and then discussed alternate approaches. Teacher Rachel Knopf explained that successful collabs are predicated on instructional staff trusting one another enough to share their challenges. She described them as invaluable to teachers working as a team and being prepared to work with students. At both the elementary and the middle school, both teachers and administrators stressed the importance of regular and ongoing communication to successful co-teaching.

At CHIME, the high level of inclusion reportedly removes any demarcation between general and special education. Parents of CHIME students commented that their children do not differentiate between the general or special education teachers. During our classroom observations, we saw co-teachers working together to present material and alternate leading the lesson in multiple classrooms. Furthermore, as the teachers alternated leading the class and working with individual students, it was difficult to discern typical versus specialized support provided to students. Parents of CHIME students remarked that the school removes labels and their children refer to their friends by a variety of traits (e.g., brown hair, freckles, or tall) but never by their disability. The parents reported that they perceived this lack of labeling as an indication that children with disabilities are naturally and authentically included at the school.

CHIME's inclusion model arguably reflects the core tenets of IDEA and even broader efforts to normalize the education of children with disabilities. Rather than treating children with disabilities under a traditional medical model that aims to "cure" or "fix" their disability to enable them to fit into broader society, the

> *"We don't question who belongs. We only debate how to support belonging. We have worked to remove the 'mystery' surrounding disabilities. Children naturally do this much more readily than adults."* Director Julie Fabrocini in Association of American Educators article

CHIME schools adjust the general education program so that children with disabilities can participate fully. In an article about CHIME for the Association of American Educators, Founder and the Director of the Elementary School Julie Fabrocini explained "We don't question who belongs. We only debate how to support belonging. We have worked to remove the 'mystery' surrounding disabilities. Children naturally do this much more readily than adults."

Classroom modifications range from physical accommodations to allow children using wheelchairs to navigate the classroom to increasing the size of the font in print materials to modifying the actual academic content within individual classrooms. For instance, in reflecting on a science unit on the human body, a mother of a child with a cognitive impairment explained that, "They were working on a skeleton. Her homework was a skeleton website. I thought 'this is not a seventh grade website.' It did not have the official names of the bones on the website but

she had to take her mouse and identify the bones. I asked her what part is that? She knew the upper and lower arm bone and moved it over and inserted it in the box. This was really good for her, she got it, and it was at her level. The modifications, the summary of the chapter, the jobs that the bones do. It was really a good modification of what the other kids were doing. It kept her involved and it is interesting." School personnel stressed the importance of students with disabilities being provided age appropriate accommodations. For instance, rather than having a middle school student with significant cognitive impairments practice their numbers by playing with blocks in a segregated setting, the teacher might ask the child to count out beekers or other age-appropriate material for the day's science lesson. A parent of a child with a disability enrolled at the elementary school explained the benefits of inclusion as follows: "I used to think that she could benefit from pull-out but now, because the teachers teach at different levels, it is brilliant what they do here. The children get so much out of a lesson when they are looking at the whole picture."

CHIME is devoted to inclusion but school personnel and parents were quick to point out that the school is not just about inclusion, it is about delivering a rigorous academic program to all students, including students who are identified as academically gifted. A parent of a second

grader without a disability
school that just focuses on
more than inclusion.
cutting edge instruction.
poetry in sixth grade, the
dressed up as beatniks
created the environment.
Who are the beatniks?
the language arts part of
lesson but using it. They
This creates an
learners."

> *A parent of a child with a disability enrolled at the elementary school explained the benefits of inclusion as follows: "I used to think that she could benefit from pull-out but now, because the teachers teach at different levels, it is brilliant what they do here. The children get so*

explained: "It is not a
inclusion. It is so much
Teachers are expected to do
For example, when teaching
kids came into school
and they had a cafe. They
They learned about history.
They actually learned about
poetry...not just taking a
have the freedom to do that.
environment of lifetime

As part of its mission, the school strives to serve as a model that other schools can emulate and incorporates teaching others about their model into the program. The school is a training site for student teachers and the school has produced a DVD about developing IEPs for inclusive settings. The school also welcomes visitors and encourages external researchers to study their model.

In aggregate, the CHIME model's core philosophical approach and the administration's commitment to creating the systems and structures required to support the model appear to craft an environment that is authentically inclusive while still academically rigorous. Children with disabilities are not simply being educated in general education classrooms. Rather, our interviews, observations, and the plethora of research that has been published about the practices implemented at the two CHIME schools indicate that all classrooms are designed to educate

children in individualized and developmentally appropriate ways that lead to high academic achievement for all children.[17]

Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities

The most tangible evidence of success with students with disabilities at the two CHIME schools is that the students are in fact being educated in general education classrooms and they are meeting annual measurable objectives, sometimes at higher levels of proficiency than their peers without disabilities. Furthermore, the schools appear to be very popular with parents. In fact, the creation of the middle school was reportedly largely driven by parent demand and the administration is under pressure to create a high school program. The parent of a child with a disability and one of the founders of the middle school described the CHIME schools in the following manner: "I don't know what my life or [my daughter's] life would be without CHIME. It has changed our lives, it really has. It is hard to think about leaving." From a different perspective, when asked about evidence of the school's success, a parent of a child without disabilities enrolled in the elementary school reflected that she has observed that her child does not notice disabilities and attributed this acceptance to the manner in which the school authentically integrates all children.

> *I don't know what my life or [my daughter's] life would be without CHIME. It has changed our lives, it really has. It is hard to think about leaving.*
> Parent of a child with a disability attending CHIME Middle School

In addition to successfully educating children with disabilities, school personnel are reportedly committed to developing teachers to teach in inclusive environments and serving as a research and demonstration site for educators to learn about inclusion and co-teaching. Principal Fabrocini reported that the school hosts dozens of visitors from across the country and overseas; educators and policy makers interested in emulating CHIME's full inclusion model.

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

The two CHIME schools are part of the Los Angeles Unified School District and consequently, they must abide by most of the district's rules and regulations; including most policies related to teacher collective bargaining. Nevertheless, the schools' founders have been able to create an instructional program that is very innovative within these parameters. While acknowledging the potential challenges of cultivating buy-in and training teachers, school personnel projected that the CHIME model could be adopted in traditional public schools.

School personnel acknowledged that their model is human resources intense but the administration uses multiple strategies to control costs, strategies that other schools may or may

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[17] See: Cook, L., & Friend, M., (1995). Co-Teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 2*8 (3) p. 1-16.; Downing, J. E. Spencer, S., & Cavallaire (2004). Development of an Inclusive Elementary School: Lessons Learned. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities. 29*, (1). P. 11-24; Hunt, P., Soto, G., Maier, J., & Doering, K, (2003). Collaborative teaming to support students at risk and students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms. *Exceptional Children, 69*, 315-332; or Hunt, P., Doering, K., Hirose-Hatao, A., Maier, J., Goetz, L., (2001). Across-program collaboration to support students with and without disabilities in a general education classroom. *Journal of Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps 26*, (4). P. 240-256.

not consider appealing. First, school personnel reported that given their longer hours, they are paid slightly less than teachers in traditional public schools. Interestingly and perhaps reflecting its appeal as a dynamic and innovative learning community, the school reportedly does not have a problem recruiting or retaining teachers. School personnel acknowledged the central role the schools' partnership with CSUN plays in securing adequate numbers of qualified personnel, in the form of student interns, and eventually credentialed teachers, to support the inclusion model. Nevertheless, there are costs associated with continuously training and supporting new teachers to ensure that they are providing high quality services to the students enrolled in the school as well as receiving quality training themselves. Finally, paraprofessionals are reportedly paid less at CHIME than at most traditional district schools.

Even with these strategies in place, compared to traditional public schools, CHIME's cost per student is higher and the school has to rely on some external donors and grants to support the model. However, it is arguably not appropriate to compare the per pupil allocation cost at CHIME to traditional public schools considering the fact that most traditional public schools would not enroll the same number of children with more moderate or severe disabilities. Rather, many of the children with low-incidence disabilities might attend school in highly segregated, and potentially higher cost, center-based programs.

As noted previously, training new teachers to work in inclusive environment is a priority for the CHIME schools. In addition, the school encourages researchers to study the schools' inclusive practices. In combination, CHIME Institute's commitment to disseminating their successful practices has implications for other public schools in that not only does the school exemplify inclusive practices; it leverages its practices to increase knowledge and, specifically teacher capacity, related to inclusion. In this way, CHIME personnel have the potential to notably influence instructional practice beyond the walls of their small schools.

ISUS Institute of Construction Technology

Background

Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) was founded by Ann Higdon in 1992 in an attempt to 1) solve the significant drop-out situation in Dayton, 2) provide at-risk students with marketable skills in growth industries in the Dayton area, and 3) help students become "transcenders," those that rise above their current difficult situations to become productive, healthy, and conscientious citizens. When ISUS began, Higdon recalled, two-thirds of Montgomery County's entire budget was spent on the systems serving the indigent and court-involved and more than half of all Dayton public school students dropped out of school. Recognizing that access to education and marketable job skills limit court involvement and the need for social services,

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Higdon sought to create an integrated program that could provide these services to those most at risk—drop outs—and revitalize Dayton's neighborhoods at the same time.

Although initially begun as a program to build relationships between area businesses and district schools, ISUS opened its first charter schools in 1999 to provide all of the services under a single umbrella organization. Higdon had found the difficulties of navigating the bureaucracies of district schools a hindrance to the program's progress and believed that she could bring the necessary community members together more effectively in a charter school environment. She opened the Construction Institute first and added the healthcare and advanced manufacturing technology programs as ISUS grew and matured. Each school holds its own charter and ISUS, Inc. is a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit entity that oversees the business aspects of the various schools (e.g. ISUS, Inc. purchases the homes for the Construction Institute and hires the lawyers and realtors to oversee the various partnership contracts and sale of the homes). These programs

> *Recognizing that access to education and marketable job skills limit court involvement and the need for social services, Higdon sought to create an integrated program that could provide these services to those most at risk—drop outs—and revitalize Dayton's neighborhoods at the same time.*

combine an academic program that supports students in obtaining their high school diploma while giving them real-world experience and providing opportunities to earn industry-recognized certifications.

Today, more than three quarters of ISUS students were former drop outs who are returning to school and the other quarter were generally experiencing difficulties in district schools and sought the more individualized, hands-on approach offered at ISUS. Roughly half of ISUS students are African Americans and half are white students, many of whom are of Appalachian heritage from rural Kentucky. ISUS serves a predominantly poor student population, but the experiences of the urban and rural poor are often quite disparate. The blend of experiences and backgrounds among students could be a

> *"It's a habit to get along here."*
> ISUS Student

significant challenge, but ISUS has a no tolerance policy for aggression and violence; in addition, there is a culture of everyone working together as a team, both in class and on work sites. This has encouraged students to move beyond racial and other tensions that have led to recent riots in nearby district schools. As one student noted, "It's a habit to get along here." Although more than a quarter of the students have been identified for special education services, all four of the students interviewed—some of whom did not have disabilities—recognized that they are there because they need help and believed that ISUS staff work to help them become productive adults.

ISUS charter school programs serve about 475 students and the construction program is one of the largest, serving 222 students during the 2006-07 school year. Students entering an ISUS institute are offered a variety of services including an academic program of continuous-learning coursework designed to help students pass all five Ohio Graduation Tests. Because students generally come to ISUS after experiencing academic failure or a period of time out of school, ISUS students face significant academic challenges. ISUS staff members provide myriad supports to remediate students and, thus, many students graduate. ISUS has not made AYP, but

Higdon noted that the state of Ohio's calculation of AYP is "inappropriate to evaluate a program like ISUS which has the specific mission of working only with those students who have experienced academic failure in the past." ISUS measures its success through student attainment of a diploma, industry-recognized certifications, and college or career placement. In these ways, Higdon noted, ISUS students have experienced success.

In addition to the academic coursework, ISUS provides social and emotional support from counselors and life-skills educators, on-the-job training, a daily stipend, and career or post-secondary education placement assistance. Leaders at ISUS have developed deep relationships with area businesses and work closely with Montgomery County, the Dayton city government, Rotary Club, and Sinclair Community College among others to fund the school's programs, guide community revitalization efforts, and prepare ISUS students for secondary education if they choose that path.

> *ISUS measures its success through student attainment of a diploma, industry-recognized certifications, and college or career placement. In these ways, Higdon noted, ISUS students have experienced success.*

The Construction Institute, specifically, provides a series of class coursework, safety training, and significant on-the-job experience in the construction industry. In addition to construction skills such as carpentry, dry walling, and electrical work, Construction Institute students have the opportunity to become certified to use heavy equipment such as bobcats and forklifts and the program has started teaching green-build techniques including geothermal and photovoltaic technologies. Each student receives a daily stipend of $12-30 whether they are in class, at vocational training, or on the construction site. Founder Ann Higdon noted that 95% attendance and above average performance are requirements for a student to earn a stipend, and that this stipend not only serves as an incentive to students who have a pattern of non-attendance, but for many students living on their own, it is a necessary source of income that may allow them to stay in school.

Construction Institute students have built 30 houses in one Dayton community since 2002 and have plans to build 30 more. Higdon eagerly shared the story of community development begun by the students' construction projects. ISUS builds homes in significantly declining neighborhoods in an attempt to revitalize sections of Dayton that have long-remained blighted. ISUS acquires properties through neighborhood associations that have purchased some abandoned homes, through the city reaping properties that are abandoned and tax-delinquent, or by strategic purchasing of properties in areas ISUS wants to build. ISUS students tear down the old homes and rebuild them. Since appraisals are based on comparable homes in the neighborhood, the first home ISUS students built had $20 thousand *more* in materials than the amount for which it was appraised. "But we kept building," Higdon noted. She said "The first house the students renovated on one block appraised at $79 thousand. The most recent home the students finished was appraised at $165 thousand. Over the course of five years, property values have doubled in the neighborhood." Increased home values have reportedly allowed long-term homeowners in the neighborhood secure loans for their own renovations. As an additional sign of community revitalization, Dayton School District is building a new school on the site of an

old school that was slated for permanent closing because the neighborhood had been in such decline.

Despite the eventual increase in property values in the communities where ISUS is building, ISUS does not make a profit from the homes. First, the homes are sold to low-income families for an amount usually below market—whatever the lending bank approves. Second, middle-income families pay the appraised amount, usually low at the beginning of a project. And finally, the construction teachers are skilled craftsmen and journeymen who are paid a competitive salary by ISUS. Of course, ISUS, Inc. personnel do their best to not lose money on their projects so that they can continue to run the program, but they realize that the reason commercial builders could not come into the neighborhoods where ISUS builds is because it is impossible to return a profit. Recently, Higdon noted, due to higher home values and neighborhood revitalization, commercial builders have begun projects in the neighborhoods where ISUS students have paved the way.

ISUS students said they are proud of the buildings they build. One student pointed out the long wall of large, framed photos of each completed home and said he was impressed that ISUS students had built them. Another student commented that he would love to buy one himself someday. Higdon noted that a former student had tried to do just that, but found he did not qualify to purchase the home because he made too much money!

ISUS Institute Of Construction Technology	
Address	140 North Keowee St., Dayton, OH 45402
First year of operation	1999
Authorizer/Sponsor	Ohio Board of Education/St. Aloysius Orphanage
Governance structure	Independently chartered, created by ISUS, Inc.
Focus/mission	Drop-out prevention and reentry
Grades Served	High school, ages 16-21
Total Enrollment (2006-07)	123[18]
Annual cost per student (2006-07)	$17,000*
Special education program/innovation/success	Inclusion model with focused-pull-out services; academic remediation, apprenticeship-type job training, community service opportunities, and social/emotional support in a safe environment.

Source: School leader and special education director self-report and annual report card: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf

* This is the cost per student to fund the school programs (e.g., classes, resources, counselors, job coaches, and special education). The total cost per construction student is $30K. The construction budget is not allowed to come from any source designed for school funding. Construction costs are supported by donations, home sales, and corporate relationships.

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[18] This is the average enrollment for the 2006-2007 school year. The Construction Institute served 222 individual students during the school year. Because ISUS accepts students each quarter and students can exit the program or graduate throughout the year, this "average enrollment" number is much lower than total students served.

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Demographics (2006-2007)*

Total Enrollment	123
African-American	39.5%
Caucasian	55.2%
Hispanic	N/A
Asian	N/A
Other	5.3%
Special Education Enrollment	27.8%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	83.4%
English Language Learners	N/A

Sources: Annual school report card: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf.

*Because ISUS accepts students each quarter, annual demographics are not available until the close of the school year. For this reason, these demographics are drawn from the school report card for the 2006-07 school year.

Graduation

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Graduation	46.4	48.1	22.7*

Source: Prior school report cards provided by school and current report card available: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf
*Ohio raised the required performance level for graduation by one full year and consequently, graduation rate dropped considerably in spring 2007.

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency

	Adequate Yearly Progress?		Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math		Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading	
2005 AYP	No		N/A		N/A	
2006 AYP	No		N/A		N/A	
2007 AYP	No		N/A		N/A	

Source: 2004-05 and 2005-06 report cards provided by the school and 2006-07 report card available at: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf.
Note: N/A indicates that no data were available for the grade and year under consideration.

Performance
Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the Ohio Achievement Test

		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
10th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	N/A	33.3%

	Math	N/A	N/A	40.0%
11th Grade	Reading	N/A	60.0%	63.8%
	Math	N/A	20.0%	44.4%

Source: 2004-05 and 2005-06 report cards provided by the school and 2006-07 report card available at: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf.
Note: N/A indicates that no data were available for the grade and year under consideration.

School Staff

The founder of ISUS, Ann Higdon, serves as the CEO of ISUS Inc. A superintendent oversees all of the ISUS institutes and each institute is headed by its own principal. Each institute also has an intervention specialist who supports students with in-class assistance and pull-out programs such as Wilson reading. ISUS recently hired a special education coordinator to serve all the schools and to provide a more unified special education approach throughout the schools. She is also responsible for related professional development trainings for academic instructors.

There are also a number of specialists on staff with ISUS to provide the necessary range of supports for their students who have frequently experienced academic failure, familial estrangement, abuse, and court involvement. ISUS provides access to therapists, a job and career counselor, and life skills training to supplement the academic and job skills aspects of the program.

Special Education Promising Practices

Because students entering ISUS programs have generally dropped out of school or experienced repeated academic failure, most students come with significant deficits. ISUS serves 16-21 year olds with a wide range of experiences and abilities. Consequently, students are grouped by ability rather than age or grade. Teachers work with students to prepare them to pass the Ohio Graduation Tests in the five subject areas of reading, writing, math, social studies and science. In addition, classes prepare students to "go on site" and develop work skills. With the construction program, students must complete the initial safety training and construction courses before going on-site. One student with disabilities noted that he liked the approach of applying on site what they are learning in class. He said he learns by doing and he believes that is why he has learned so much at ISUS. Several other students agreed that one of the primary reasons they had trouble with school before enrolling at ISUS was that they could not see why what they were learning was important. At ISUS, the students said they are shown how what they are learning applies to the "real world."

In addition to an opportunity for hands-on learning, all students benefit from small classrooms and individualized attention. While students in special education are predominantly in the general education classroom, pull-out sessions are provided by learning specialists to address specific IEP goals and student needs. The special education director strives to make certain that pull-out services are aligned directly with IEP goals and do not devolve into tutoring sessions. She noted that students sometimes request help with their coursework during one-on-one sessions, but that the intervention specialists are focused on providing goal-specific assistance and helping the student return to the general education classroom.

The special education program at ISUS is a combination of push-in and pull-out services. The individual teachers at each school vary their time in inclusion or resource-room services depending on the needs of the students. All of the teachers at ISUS have been trained in the Wilson reading program because most students at ISUS come in with reading levels between first and fourth grade regardless of whether or not they have a disability. For this reason, students who have been identified for special education services are not singled out or seen as different. One student noted, "We all need extra help, that's why we're here."

The special education director reported that she supports students with disabilities by helping the teachers embrace their responsibilities in educating students with disabilities. She said she guides teachers through their first referral process to familiarize them with the appropriate steps and has developed a guide book to assist teachers with completing the necessary forms on their own. She said she strives to build the educators' confidence in the referral process so than instructors are not inclined to shift responsibility for a student.

Access to student data reportedly helps teachers identify specific areas of need and individualize student lessons. To manage student data, ISUS has just installed the Rediker student information system. This is expected to allow ISUS staff to more effectively monitor student data and develop school programming. The Rediker system allows them to follow interventions, tests, assessments, programs, attendance, graduation rates, and other relevant data. ISUS leader Ann Higdon anticipates this system will improve all student services.

Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities

ISUS personnel reported that they have had significant progress with its students with disabilities as well as those who are low-performing but do not have a diagnosed disability. Ann Higdon, founder, attributes their progress with students with disabilities to the combination of intensive social and emotional supports and the pride developed while students 1) develop work skills, 2) work toward a high school diploma, and 3) acquire industry certifications. Higdon recalled that when she and other ISUS staff talk with students about why they dropped out, they often replied, "No one cared about me at my other school" and "I didn't know how any of what they were teaching applied to real life." Higdon believed that she could create a program that focused on ameliorating both of these reasons and ISUS staff work to develop a "family" atmosphere and apply what students learn to real-world experiences.

Parental involvement at ISUS varies. One involved parent noted that she feared her child would not graduate without intensive, individual support. She "just knew" that her daughter would be lost in a larger school system, so she urged her child to go to ISUS. Many parents, however, are not involved and some ISUS students have been on their own for years. They may be living in temporary circumstances or with friends and are used to making their own decisions. Ann Higdon said that staff at ISUS strive to help students become their own supports, just in case parental support is not there. She reports that students learn to rise above the negative influences that had pulled them down—even if they were friends and family. When speaking with a group of four students, all four young men mentioned "hanging with the wrong crowd" before attending ISUS and a few figured they would be in jail if it were not for ISUS. The intensive

supports ISUS provides allowed those students to envision a future with promise. "I want to be somebody," one student said.

Several school personnel noted that they model mutual respect which helps students to listen to their peers and share feelings. Staff reported that they help students in developing an understanding of how to conduct themselves out in the world when challenges arise. Every morning and afternoon all students and staff participate in "family meetings" where students can share concerns, publicly thank people, or call out those who have been disrespectful. School personnel reported that this daily routine helps students learn to effectively deal with conflict and come to understand that their behavior comes with consequences. They believe these meetings— in addition to therapy, training and support in developing self-control and life skills—combine to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect among the students and with the staff. Ann Higdon proudly noted, "Even though 80% of our students have been court involved, there are no metal detectors in this school. Every student and staff member is responsible for keeping the family safe. Students do not have to bring weapons to protect themselves."

In addition to developing self control and feelings of self worth in school, ISUS students also have ample opportunities to build job skills and a strong work ethic on the construction site. For those students with disabilities who reportedly learn best by doing, they get an opportunity to do just that. And, construction sites appear to be excellent places to apply what students are learning in class. "Everything is a learning opportunity," Higdon noted. "If you dig a footer and concrete comes in cubic yards, students know why they need to learn how to measure it." Everything from reading instructions on materials to blueprints applies classroom subjects to a real-world setting. Working on a construction site while at ISUS does more than reinforce academic learning, it can also serve to build pride and self-confidence in students who once had little going for them, Higdon noted. All of the school personnel interviewed were visibly excited about the work they do and the lives they affect. Their excitement does not go unnoticed by the students, either. As one student with disabilities noted, "If *they* [ISUS staff] want me to have an education that much, then how much should *I* want my education?"

Of the 372 students that have graduated from the ISUS Institute for Construction Technology since 2003, 32 had IEPs. Many students earn diplomas and some even go on to attend community college or other secondary education. Of more importance to many students is the fact that they can leave ISUS with industry-recognized training and certifications and start out earning nearly twice the minimum wage in Dayton. Because ISUS has designed its programs—health care, manufacturing, and construction—around growth industries in Dayton, school personnel believe that these skills improve students' chances of finding meaningful employment in the area.

> *"If they [ISUS staff] want me to have an education that much, then how much should I want my education?"*
> Student with disability enrolled at ISUS

ISUS provides transition services to all of their graduates. The career placement counselor posts a "hot jobs" list of current opportunities, helps students develop resumes, and works with them through the interview process. Of the 29 ISUS graduates with IEPs who have worked with the career placement counselor since 2003, half have full-time jobs and another quarter have

enrolled in college. Roughly a quarter (27.5%) of the graduates with IEPs have not yet been placed in positions; 20.6% of their non-disabled peers have not been placed.[19]

In addition to providing transition services in career and college opportunities, the special education staff and counselors also remain as a support network for graduates. The special education director said that many students call or stop by to share their progress or ask for help if necessary. A few students stay even more connected to their ISUS family after graduation; they are employed by ISUS as construction crew leaders.

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

The special education program at ISUS includes social and emotional supports as well as significant individualized attention in the classroom. The small class size enables like-skilled peers—with or without disabilities—to work alongside one another. And, a respectful atmosphere, according to ISUS leaders, makes students feel safe and willing to open up and try. These aspects of the program could be adopted in district schools and may not require significantly more resources.

One aspect of ISUS's construction program, the on-site job skill training and industry certification acquisition, is not necessarily a part of their special education program but it is perceived to be a significant draw for students—including those with disabilities. For those students who had negative school experiences, were not benefiting from special education interventions in a district setting, and who chose to drop out, the promise of both a chance for a diploma and to develop significant job skills at ISUS can reportedly be enough to bring them back to school. The hands-on learning opportunities in this program reportedly appeal to those students who learn better by doing than by being told how to do something. For these students, school personnel noted that ISUS may be their only option. On-the-job training and credentialing aspects of the construction program require significant funding; the neighborhood development budget is about $800 thousand. Further, because state education dollars cannot be used for a construction program, that ISUS must raise the entire construction budget from donor and grant sources. The total cost of educating an ISUS student is nearly triple the average cost per student in Dayton. However, the program provides a unique vocational training program that requires significant investment to create a safe, full-scale construction environment in which ISUS students can learn every aspect of working in the construction industry.

While this program may be difficult for a district or school to replicate on its own, Higdon asserted that various community development organizations can serve as excellent partners in developing such a program in collaboration with a district. What would be required, she noted, is a commitment to open collaboration with an outside organization and a willingness to rely on field experts who could effectively guide the program. Higdon stressed, as well, that the significant costs of the program come with significant rewards—both immediately and long term. Higdon noted that all ISUS students are giving back to the

> *While this program may be difficult for a district or school to replicate on its own, Higdon asserted that various community development organizations can serve as excellent partners in developing such a program in collaboration with a district.*

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[19] Calculations done by Dana Brinson based on placement information provided by career placement program.

community while in an ISUS program in the form of new houses in formerly blighted neighborhoods, refurbished computers for Dayton children, and volunteer hours at the city's hospitals. Further, she contended, as ISUS students develop marketable job skills and earn a high school diploma, they are less likely to require social services or become court involved. She believes that these results are well worth the initial investment.

For those schools that do not have significant community partners with whom they can develop a collaborative program, school leaders can focus on project-based learning and other opportunities for students with disabilities, who may learn in different ways, to be included in a more hands-on and real-world academic learning which may potentially lead to some of the successes experienced at ISUS.

Metro Deaf School

Background

Metro Deaf School (MDS) in St. Paul, MN typically serves students who are deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) who live in the greater metro area. Director Dyan Sherwood co-founded MDS to continue a dual-language American Sign Language (ASL)/written English program she had been piloting in St. Paul Public School for two years. After twenty years as a teacher of

> *After twenty years as a teacher of the D/HH population in the district's self-contained classrooms, Sherwood and a group of committed parents and teachers grasped the newly-available charter school opportunity and opened a school focused solely on D/HH education*

the D/HH population in the district's self-contained classrooms, Sherwood and a group of committed parents and teachers grasped the newly-available charter school opportunity and opened a school focused solely on D/HH education through a dual-language approach. Director Sherwood had grown frustrated with district schools trying to "be all things to all people." She had experienced the fractured environment of deaf classrooms where teachers employed a variety of approaches to deaf education—including ASL, cued speech, lip reading, oral/aural, or other approaches—simultaneously in an attempt to use each method requested by parents. Sherwood noted that the results of these efforts were confused classrooms, poor language development, missed opportunities for social and emotional development, and no access to role models who are deaf.

Sponsored by the Forest Lake Area School District, MDS opened in 1993. MDS's leaders, teachers and parents have developed a program to provide deaf children access to language at an early age to facilitate social and emotional growth, academic development, and becoming global citizens who can communicate within both their deaf community and the larger hearing community.

Because MDS serves students with a low-incidence disability, the school has remained small.[20] Their newly-renovated school building can comfortably hold 100 students, but the average student population is 60. Director Sherwood believes the increase in cochlear implants in deaf children may also be decreasing enrollment as these children are often taught in general education district classrooms. In addition to a small number of new pre-K students to MDS each

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[20] Nationally, students who are deaf or hearing impaired represent approximately 1% of the school age population (U.S. Department of Education, 2005)

year, school administrators have found that there is a large influx of fourth or fifth graders each year who have attended their district schools and have not been successful with an interpreter or with cochlear implants.[21] Director Sherwood recalled from her 35 years in deaf education that many deaf students around the age of 10 begin to advocate for themselves, seek to be around other kids who are deaf or hard of hearing, and want to learn to communicate more effectively with them.

For these students as well as the students who come to MDS as early as age three, MDS personnel aim to provide an academically rigorous, socially supportive, and engaging environment. Teachers provide instruction in math, language arts, science, and art to all students. In one class, during a science lesson, a teacher was introducing vocabulary for and concepts of electric motors. The teacher had parts of a small electrical motor—battery, wire, the motor, and a switch. As he held up the parts for the students to see, he signed the appropriate ASL sign and then held up a card with the written English word for each part. Sometimes he would hold up the written word and ask the students to sign the word. After identifying the parts, the students were allowed to work together to assemble the motor and make it run. In another class, hanging on the wall was a series of photos of someone making the ASL signs that made up a phrase and then the written English translation was written next to it. In these and other ways, teachers reinforce the importance of both ASL and written English to their students.

This intensive dual-language approach, the director said, is most beneficial when reinforced by parents. At MDS, however, some students commute from an hour away to attend the school, and such distances can limit parental involvement. In addition, some parents of MDS students are immigrants and neither English nor American Sign Language are used in the home which school personnel reported can also limit parents' ability to both reinforce their child's learning and their ability to communicate with the school. MDS is focused on reaching out more to parents, but recognizes that, like all schools, it has a blend of parental involvement from highly to rarely involved and that their program must continue to thrive for all students, regardless of the levels of parental support.

To evaluate academic progress, MDS's students do participate in the state standardized tests, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments II (MCA IIs), but the school does not report the information publicly due to small sub-group sizes. Despite some challenges associated with administering standardized tests designed for hearing children to assess deaf students (the tests frequently include questions requiring experience with phonics, decoding, or identifying what words sound alike), 37% of MDS's students score proficient or better on the state exam. In addition to the state exam, MDS administers the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) tests because the teachers believe it provides more diagnostic information for each student because it is computerized and adjusts to each student's academic level. The MAP test allows the teachers to identify where students (and teachers) are gaining or losing ground.

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[21] Cochlear implants are small electronic devices that are surgically placed inside an individual's ear to help them hear sound. The device does not restore hearing but can help a person who is profoundly deaf or hard of hearing hear sound that can help them understand language. Use of the implants requires therapy to teach the individual how to use the sound they hear. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, (2008) Retrieved online March 6, 2008 from: http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/coch.asp

School personnel reported that MDS student performance on the standardized tests can vary widely and they attributed the variability to two factors: 1) the routine influx of students that enter MDS during their fourth or fifth grade year and arrive with poorly-developed language skills—in either ASL or English—and having experienced academic difficulty, and 2) many students at MDS have dual or multiple disabilities including blindness, autism, CHARGE syndrome,[22] or developmental cognitive delays which may hamper the rate at which they progress academically. Director Sherwood explained that "if there aren't other complicating factors, the kids can be on grade level if given access to a language—ASL—early."

One parent, who is also deaf, noted about her children, "Of course they're both willing to take the test, but knowing that for their reading and writing it's a bit harder for them because their first language is not English" because ASL is the language used at home. Despite the difficulties, the parent noted that she appreciates seeing how her children perform compared to their hearing peers.

Metro Deaf School	
Address	1471 Brewster St., St. Paul, MN 55108
First year of operation	1993
Authorizer	Forest Lake Area School District
Governance structure	Independent
Focus/mission	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Education
Grades Served	Pre K-8
Total Enrollment (2007-08)	58
Annual cost per student (2006-07)	$22,000*
Special education program/innovation/success	Dual language approach with American Sign Language and written English which provides deaf and hard of hearing children access to a language (ASL) that improves both academic achievement and facilitates access to deaf culture and role models.

Source: School leader self-report and annual report provided by school.
*In Minnesota, charter schools are allowed to bill their local district for excess costs associated with educating children with disabilities above and beyond typical per pupil allocations.

Demographics (2007-2008)	
Total Enrollment	58
African-American	6.8%

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[22] CHARGE syndrome is a genetic syndrome representing a complex set of physical and cognitive disabilities. While there is a great deal of variability in characteristics of children with CHARGE syndrome, hearing loss or deafness is common (The CHARGE Syndrome Foundation, 2008, retrieved online March, 6, 2008 from: http://www.chargesyndrome.org/).

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Caucasian	77.8%
Hispanic	10.3%
Asian	5.1%
Other	0%
Special Education Enrollment	100%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	24%
English Language Learners	100%

Source: School leader self-report.

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency				
	Adequate Yearly Progress?		**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math**	**Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading**	
2005 AYP	N/A		N/A	N/A	
2006 AYP	N/A		N/A	N/A	
2007 AYP	N/A		36%	37%	

Source: Annual report provided by school.

Performance — Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments II				
		2004-05	**2005-06**	**2006-07**
3rd Grade	**Reading**	N/A	NA	40%
	Math	N/A	29%	20%
4th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	0	33%
	Math	N/A	0	40%
5th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	63%	20%
	Math	N/A	38%	0
6th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	57%	50%
	Math	N/A	71%	50%
7th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	60%	62%
	Math	N/A	0	62%
8th Grade	**Reading**	N/A	17%	0
	Math	N/A	25%	20%

Source: School leader self-report and annual report provided by school.
Note: N/A indicates that no data were available for the grade and year under consideration.

School Staff

The current director is the original director who helped start the school. She is hearing, but like all staff at MDS, she is fluent in ASL. Director Sherwood stated that the administrations' goal is to have individuals who are deaf comprise at least half of the teaching staff, but that 30% of the current faculty is deaf. MDS has had as high as 60% of teachers who are deaf, but due to turnover and difficulty recruiting deaf teachers, this percentage fluctuates. She emphasized, as well, that administrators and staff are more focused on hiring highly qualified teachers and that simply being deaf and a licensed teacher is not enough. All teachers at MDS have master's degrees and are certified in D/HH education. All paraprofessionals who work with students one-on-one are deaf and fluent in ASL.

In addition to highly-qualified teachers, MDS employs part-time occupational and physical therapists and 1.5 speech clinicians to work with students in resource-room programs. A school social worker is at MDS four days a week and a licensed school psychologist comes one day per week; both are deaf. Fluent in ASL, these specialists work with the IEP team to develop social and emotional goals for the students as well as provide student and family support.

The director noted that the school provides professional development to help MDS staff build the skills necessary to educate the school's diverse population. In addition, one of the full-time teachers at the school, Kelly Anderson, is responsible for providing support to teachers working with students with dual or multiple disabilities. She shares ideas and possible approaches with the faculty on educating deaf children with autism, developmental cognitive delays, or other disabilities. Anderson credited MDS's focus on an ASL/written English approach with freeing up the staff to learn more about the specific disabilities of their students rather than having to develop and maintain skills in a variety of approaches to general deaf education (e.g., cued speech, signed exact English, lip reading, etc.) that are based on spoken English. Absent the need to dedicate time to providing accommodations to support spoken English, teachers are able to learn to understand the needs of children with autism and the specific health and learning issues of their students with CHARGE syndrome.

> *The director, "does a magnificent job of when a first year teacher comes in—when possible—they get the class that is full of typical learners, and the teachers who have experience and breadth of knowledge get the class of kids who have some behavior [problems] and other disabilities because [those teachers] have more tools in their belt."*
> Teacher, Metro Deaf School

The director and special needs teacher identified professional development as a critical aspect of maintaining their strong program for children with a diverse array of disabilities. During the 2006-2007 school year, teachers participated in monthly staff development meetings on topics such as effective use of bilingual methodology or technology implementation. New teachers (with less than two years at MDS) were also required to participate in ASL/English bilingual professional development during the summer and throughout the second semester.

In addition to providing regular and appropriate professional development, MDS provides monthly mentoring meetings to its first and second year teachers to facilitate skill development and improve teacher retention. When possible, new teachers are given classrooms that do not

have as many students with multiple special needs. One teacher reflected that the director, "does a magnificent job of when a first year teacher comes in—when possible—they get the class that is full of typical learners, and the teachers who have experience and breadth of knowledge get the class of kids who have some behavior [problems] and other disabilities because [those teachers] have more tools in their belt." Because of the fluctuating nature of the student population (e.g. some years there are no students in a particular grade) teachers are reassigned their teaching positions each year depending on the needs of the students and the skills of the teachers. If, for example, there are no students in kindergarten one year, the first grade teacher that year will likely be reassigned the following year to another grade because there will be no rising first graders. If there is only one student in a grade, MDS leaders may combine grades to form a split classroom. Each decision is made on the basis of teacher availability and experience and student needs. One said, smiling, "I've been here four years and never had the same position for more than one year." She clearly accepted this as the "norm" at MDS and, like several other teachers, said she went where she was needed.

Special Education Promising Practices

Because the school's charter specifically outlines that its mission is to educate children with hearing impairments, 100% of MDS's students are students with disabilities. Because all students are all deaf or hard of hearing, it may seem at first that the school does not adhere to an inclusive view of special education or the tenets of a "least restrictive environment." The founders and leaders at Metro Deaf, however, believe that providing students with hearing deficits an environment in which they can communicate with every student and staff member via American Sign Language *is* providing the least restrictive environment in which their students can learn. They believe that access to fluent ASL communicators develops the students' abilities to express themselves, progress academically, and develop the social skills necessary to succeed in the world.

MDS's administrators and teachers expressed a core commitment to providing a dual-language program in American Sign Language (ASL) and written English to these students. The director and other founding members based MDS's philosophy of bilingual education on their beliefs and experience that demonstrates that access to language early in the development of a child who is D/HH, via ASL, can facilitate fluency in communication and ease acquisition of written English skills later. MDS's dual-language approach is based on the methodology developed at the Center on ASL/English Bilingual Education and Research (CAEBER) program run by Dr. Steve Nover—a deaf linguist.[23]

Director Sherwood has focused on the dual-language approach because she believes that access to language during the early years of a child's development impacts their ability to later learn to read and write. Just as hearing children learn to speak long before they learn to read and write, children with hearing impairments exposed to ASL early develop a relationship with language that fosters easier acquisition of written English later. Even though written English is structurally different from ASL, MDS's educators have found, they noted, that it is easier for a child to access a second language later in their development if they have fully grasped a first language.

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[23] For more on the Center see: http://caeber.gallaudet.edu/

Early access to a first language is not automatic for D/HH children. For a child with hearing impairments born into a hearing family, early language development may be difficult if the parents do not learn ASL or, if a cochlear implant is used, if the implant is not effective at aiding the acquisition of spoken language. Reflecting on an ongoing debate between the medical profession, parents, and advocates for children who are hearing impaired, Director Sherwood argued that, "in Minnesota, the situation is: the medical profession will put a cochlear implant in a deaf child and tell the parents to speak only to their child and not sign in order to get the child to learn to hear and speak. At the same time, there's all this research being done on sign language for hearing babies who will sign sooner than they speak. The medical profession is not going down that road with deaf kids." Sherwood acknowledged that cochlear implants work for some children, but if they do not and a child has not received any sign language exposure during the important early formative years, language acquisition may be very difficult for that child throughout his or her education. Sherwood asked, "Why would you deny a child access to language? When you're encouraging sign language with hearing babies, why wouldn't you encourage it for deaf kids as well? It's not right."

The bilingual ASL/English approach has also been adopted by about 20 state schools for the deaf. While MDS's approach is not itself innovative, MDS's decision to focus only on an ASL/written English approach sets it apart from many other public schools. Many public schools, they noted, employ a variety of approaches to deaf education such as cued speech, lip reading, oral/aural for students with cochlear implants, etc. This mixed-bag of approaches is often based on the individual requests of parents. MDS's leaders and teachers believe that a single, language-based approach is more effective at developing fluency and literacy in children and that it also creates a more unified and less distracting education environment.

Director Sherwood noted that there is disagreement in the field of deaf education as to which approaches may be more effective. Indeed, she said there was a good program for the deaf a half hour or so from St. Paul that devoted its program to the cued speech approach. When she receives an application from a parent who wants their child to be taught to use cued speech, Director Sherwood refers the parent to the other school. What Director Sherwood believes is most important is for a single approach to be implemented throughout a deaf education program because her experience has shown her that it facilitates communication between students, the development of social skills, and improved academic performance.

> *"Why would you deny a child access to language? When you're encouraging sign language with hearing babies, why wouldn't you encourage it for deaf kids as well? It's not right."*
> Director, Metro Deaf School

To access the school's ASL/written English program, MDS's students come from as far as an hour away to attend the school. Before coming to MDS, a student must be identified by their home district and come to MDS with an IEP. This process provides two benefits: 1) home districts know which students are in their district and 2) if districts identify the student and refer them to MDS, the student is provided with public transportation to MDS. Access to transportation reportedly allows students of all economic backgrounds to access MDS's dual-language program, regardless of income or parents' ability to reliably transport children to the school.

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Once at MDS, students receive highly individualized educations. Individualization extends beyond the individual supports outlined in students' IEPs. Among MDS's student population, as with a typical district school, student abilities vary widely from academically gifted to profound cognitive delays. Because deafness is a low-incidence disability, there are generally only 5 to 10 students in each grade; small class size can support individualization and allow each student to develop at their own rate. MDS leadership even groups students in the way that reportedly best supports individualization. For example, four fourth and fifth grade students with similar cognitive delays are grouped together, allowing them to receive a tailored approach to their education with like-skilled peers.

In addition to offering an individualized education to students while at MDS, staff seek to establish a framework for services later in students' lives. "They are not going to be students forever," the due-process coordinator noted. For the deaf population she serves—and especially those that have multiple diagnoses—conducting the appropriate assessments and filing the correct forms affects the students not only while they are in school, but later in their adult life. The due process coordinator mentioned that it was not only due to her responsibility to ensure their school, as a school of choice, is in compliance with the law, but also to make certain that MDS's students are poised to access disability services as adults, should they need them, once they are out of the public education system.

MDS personnel provide not only access to language and an individualized education to D/HH students, but they seek to develop social skills, acceptance of differences, and empathy for peers. The special needs coordinator provides tolerance training to students in order to promote a supportive and inclusive environment at MDS. She recently simulated for the students what it would be like to be deaf and also have autism or be legally blind. For the autism simulation, Ms. Anderson had the students sit on four tennis balls (to make them feel unbalanced), pinned itchy material in the backs of their shirts (like a clothing tag), flashed the lights on and off rapidly, and signed "at the speed of light" on an unfamiliar topic. When the students were then given a test on the topic, they realized how difficult it can be for children with autism to focus on their lessons. The mother of MDS students who participated in this activity said her children shared their experience with her and the children reportedly empathized with how difficult it must be for children with autism to pay attention. Ms. Anderson explained that she hopes that this empathy extends to how deaf children treat their peers—both in school and beyond—with other type of disabilities.

Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities

MDS measures student success in several ways through: 1) the development of ASL fluency, 2) academic skills, and 3) an understanding and adherence to social and behavioral norms. In these areas, MDS personnel perceive that they have had significant success in serving all members of their student population, including those with multiple disabilities.

> *MDS measures student success in several ways through: 1) the development of ASL fluency, 2) academic skills, and 3) an understanding and adherence to social and behavioral norms.*

Because all school personnel are fluent in ASL, students have unfettered access to communicating with everyone at MDS and deaf parents are fully integrated into the school as well. While globally only about 10% of deaf children have a parent who is deaf, at MDS, roughly a third of the students have parents who are deaf. The director speculated this is because, for deaf parents whose first language is ASL, the opportunity for their children to be educated in their first language is highly appreciated. A mother who is deaf explained that having the opportunity to have her two children who are also deaf educated in their first language is one of the primary reasons she chose MDS. "I firmly believe that ASL is their foundation language," she noted. And as both a parent and a volunteer at the school she says MDS is "wonderful because…it's a signing environment all day long. We don't need to use interpreters in the class. And it's nice that we have a social worker and a psychologist that work with us who are also fluent in ASL." It is not only ease of communication that is important to this parent, however, but her daughters' access to Deaf culture and peers is equally a priority. She said she appreciates that "there are multiple opportunities for our students to participate in many things at their level such as sports, being a part of "battle of the books" program, they can participate in ASL programs—like poetry contests—and be able to compete amongst each other with their own peers." She believes that in a general public school that if "you were the only deaf child, I don't believe you would have as many opportunities as the kids do here."

Academically, MDS personnel characterize the academic program as rigorous and credit the program with nearly 40% of their students scoring proficient or advanced on state standardized tests designed for the hearing population. Half of MDS's 4th-8th grade students scored at or above average on the MAP tests for language and mathematics.[24]

At MDS, each student's needs are also considered when developing a classroom placement plan. In some cases, students with multiple or severe disabilities attend class alongside their peers who are typical learners. In others, a small classroom of children with multiple disabilities provides an environment that, the class teacher noted, allows them to move between academic work and play breaks that help the students stay on task. One special educator stressed that while inclusion is "a wonderful thing for some kids" that it should not be done without an individual evaluation of each student. For some of their students with dual or multiple diagnoses, she said, if you put them in a large group with students who are typical learners, their anxiety can increase and that can lead to more behavior problems. For others, she noted, inclusion with typical learners can facilitate social and emotional development opportunities that "they need as much as academic opportunities."

For example, one teacher eagerly discussed the success story of her foster son, a former MDS student who is deaf and legally blind (he can see images up close). He is seventeen and currently attending MDS's sister charter high school, Minnesota North Star Academy, and is learning alongside his peers who are deaf. She noted that he has friends. He is doing 7th or 8th grade math and reading independently at a 2nd grade level. While this level may seem very low for a 17 year

One teacher noted, *"Our students have self confidence, they feel good about themselves, and they know how to do what they need to do to make it in this world. So I think that is our biggest success."*

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[24] Metro Deaf School 2006-07 Annual Report provided by school.

old, she reflected that this success was hard won. At age 10, after attending a district school with an interpreter and an intervener and having a history of serious behavior problems and poor language acquisition, he enrolled at MDS. At the time, he exhibited several developmental delays typically identified as characteristics of children with autism. At MDS, he was able to develop his sign language and written language skills among his deaf peers. This outlet for communication improved his behavior and ameliorated his developmental delays which were related, this teacher noted, to his lack of language and communication skills. This teacher stated that her foster son credits MDS for these positive changes. In fact, he recently won an award for an essay he wrote sharing how attending MDS changed his life.[25]

Other measures of MDS's success can be found in what students do after they leave MDS. Graduates head to a variety of high school programs after the 8th grade. Some head to state high schools for the deaf, others return to their districts, and several have chosen to go to the new sister charter high school of MDS. MDS strives to prepare deaf children for life after high school as well. By developing students' language skills, providing them with world knowledge, and allowing them to develop independently, the director and several teachers noted that they prepare their students to become "global citizens." Ninety-five percent of students have graduated from high school and gone on to Gallaudet University[26] or other institutions of higher education, and others are reportedly ready to get jobs.

One teacher noted that even more important than academic performance for their students are the holistic measures of success that are outlined on the IEP. These measures can be particularly important for students with dual or multiple diagnoses. MDS measures student success by asking, "Does the child have strong ASL skills? Does he or she have friends? Does the child know how to act in a social environment appropriately? And does the child have the skills necessary to hold a job someday? She said that according to these measures, their students are successful as well. She said, "Our students have self confidence, they feel good about themselves, and they know how to do what they need to do to make it in this world. So I think that is our biggest success."

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

Both Director Sherwood and special educator Kelly Anderson believe that MDS's dual-language approach could be effectively implemented in district schools if the leadership is willing to devote their program entirely to dual-language education and not try to "be all things to all people." More than 20 state schools for the deaf are implementing the bilingual approach exclusively. The director and the special needs teacher believe the bilingual approach could be implemented in separate deaf classrooms in a district setting. Anderson suggested that a "critical mass" of students would be necessary, though, because her experience has shown her that most language development occurs between the children. If the separate classroom for deaf students

[25] Retrieved March 12, 2008 from:
http://www.centerforschoolchange.org/images/stories/resource_center/07essaybooklet.pdf
[26] Gallaudet University, the world's only university in which all programs and services are specifically designed to accommodate students who are deaf or hard of hearing, was founded in 1864 by an Act of Congress, and its charter was signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

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had only two typical learners and one student with more profound disabilities, it may be more difficult to develop a thriving bilingual program. Sherwood and Anderson argued, however, that communicating with one student via ASL, another through cued speech and a third with spoken English/lip reading is an even less rich environment. Strong leadership supporting the adoption of a single approach, they suggested, is the most effective means of educating students who are D/HH. In their case, MDS leaders believe a dual-language approach is the most effective approach to D/HH education; but another approach—if proven to be effective and chosen as the single approach of the program—may elicit similar benefits, Sherwood speculated. Individualization at the cost of coherence, she said, is not a strength of a special education program.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Background

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School is a small, urban middle school located in the economically challenged Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. Roxbury Prep was authorized by the Massachusetts Department of Education in 1998 and opened in 1999 to provide a rigorous, college preparatory program for underserved youth in Roxbury and surrounding communities. Roxbury Prep initially opened to serve sixth grade students and added one grade per year until it became the sixth, seventh and eighth grade program it is today. The school enrolls about 200 students and has deliberately remained small. Roxbury Prep only accepts 75 students through a lottery at the beginning of their sixth grade year. Student attrition results in fewer students in the seventh and eighth grades but reportedly enables Roxbury Prep teachers to acclimate students to the school's culture and rigorous academic program before they enter seventh and eighth grades.

> *Roxbury Prep's mission is to prepare all students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. The school was "founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to and can succeed in college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum is rigorous, engaging, and well-planned; 2) the school emphasizes student character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities; and 3) a community network*

Roxbury Prep's mission is to prepare all students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college. The school was "founded on the philosophy that all students are entitled to and can succeed in college preparatory programs when: 1) the curriculum is rigorous, engaging, and well-planned; 2) the school emphasizes student character, community responsibility, and exposure to life's possibilities; and 3) a community network supports students' academic, social, and physical well-being."[27] Roxbury Prep's teachers develop their entire curriculum in-house. For three weeks during August, teachers meet to develop and refine the curriculum. School leaders reported that the curriculum meets all requirements of the Massachusetts state standards, but also meets Roxbury Prep's own standards which use Advance Placement and other college preparatory

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[27] Roxbury Preparatory Charter School 2006-07 Annual Report. (2007). Retrieved 28 January 2008 at: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2007/annual/0484.pdf.

programs and exams to inform their academic curriculum. Roxbury Prep provides double math and double English classes every day. School personnel reported that this serves both to remediate those students who come to Roxbury Prep with achievement deficits as well as push proficient students further toward mastery.

In order to prepare all of their students for success, Roxbury Prep personnel reported that they work diligently to include parents in the school and their children's success. When beginning the sixth grade, new students and their parents must attend orientation events that outline the goals of the school, clarify rules and expectations, and seek to prepare students and their families for the transition to a college preparatory program. Regular communication from the school in the form of letters or phone calls (provided in English, Spanish, and other languages) keep parents up-to-date with their children's progress and any challenges they are facing. Parents are also welcome to visit the school and receive prompt responses to questions or requests and parents of students with special needs are integral to the development of their children's IEPs. A number of barriers still exist that may prevent significant involvement from some parents. Roxbury Prep's students come from local neighborhoods of mostly poor and working-class families of color. Many parents do not speak English and school personnel projected that they may limit their involvement in school due to a language barrier. Further, all three parents interviewed for the case study had four children, worked full time, and one was also taking college courses. They noted that this stretched thin the amount of time they said they could spend being involved in their child's school.

Roxbury Prep initially envisioned growing into a high school as well, to provide their middle school students a strong college preparatory program and guidance to get into and graduate from college. Believing it was better to focus on maintaining a strong middle school and fearing expansion to a high school may spread their program too thin, Roxbury Prep's leaders chose, instead, to create a High School Placement program to assist students and families in applying to college preparatory independent, parochial, exam, pilot, and charter high schools. The school then went on to develop a Graduate Services Program (GSP) to guide their former middle school students through the end of college. Roxbury Prep's GSP employs two full-time coordinators who offer continued guidance to its graduates as they choose and apply to college preparatory high schools, select courses in high school that will prepare them for college, and apply for summer internships or academic camps during high school. The coordinators make weekly phone calls to graduates and provide weekend workshops on relevant college preparatory topics. The alumni program also works with its former students as they navigate the college selection and application process and the GSP serves as a support system while those students are in college. Roxbury Prep's leaders stated that this intensive, long-term assistance has significantly contributed to the fact that 87% of Roxbury Prep's graduates who have since graduated high school are currently enrolled in college. This long-term support is especially helpful for their former students with disabilities and through this intensive support, all of their graduates who had been identified for special education services graduated high school and enrolled in college. Three out of four are still enrolled.

Roxbury Prep's students are 100% students of color and two thirds qualify for free or reduced price meals. Students typically enter Roxbury Prep from the Boston Public Schools system and generally require significant remediation during the sixth grade to successfully graduate from the

program. Twelve percent of Roxbury Prep's students have an IEP for special education and related services. Despite Roxbury Prep's students fitting the often-cited demographics for "at-risk"—poor, urban, students of color—the school's efforts have effectively closed racial and economic achievement gaps. In 2006, on six of the seven state exams administered, the number of Roxbury Prep students scoring proficient or advanced outnumbered the average for Massachusetts' white students. In addition, for the fourth consecutive year, Roxbury Prep was the highest performing urban middle school in the state.

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School	
Address	120 Fisher Avenue, Roxbury, MA 02120
First year of operation	1999
Authorizer	Massachusetts Board of Education
Governance structure	Independent
Focus/mission	College Preparatory
Grades Served	6-8
Total Enrollment (2007-08)	192
Annual cost per student (2006-07)	$15,000*
Special education program/innovation/success	Seamless special education inclusion with college preparatory mission for all students.

Source: School leader self-report, and Massachusetts Dept. of Ed report card: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2007/annual/0484.pdf.
*Cost per pupil in Massachusetts reflects the demographics, grade levels, and special education needs of the students who enroll in the charter school.

Demographics (2007-2008)	
Total Enrollment	192
African-American	67%
Caucasian	0%
Hispanic	32%
Asian	0%
Other	1%
Special Education Enrollment	12%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	68%
English Language Learners	1%

Source: School leader self-report.

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency

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	Adequate Yearly Progress?		Special Education Subgroup Proficient Math		Special Education Subgroup Proficient Reading	
2005 AYP	Yes		N/A		N/A	
2006 AYP	Yes		N/A		N/A	
2007 AYP	Yes		N/A		N/A	

Source: School leader self-report and Massachusetts Dept. of Ed report card:
http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2007/annual/0484.pdf.
 Note: N/A indicates that the sub-group size was too small to report.

Performance Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)				
		2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
6th Grade	Reading	N/A	56%	67%
	Math	71%	62%	76%
7th Grade	Reading	81%	77%	86%
	Math	N/A	58%	72%
8th Grade	Reading	N/A	91%	92%
	Math	82%	90%	94%

Source: School leader self-report, school website: http://www.roxburyprep.org, and Massachusetts Dept. of
Ed report card: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2007/annual/0484.pdf.
Note: N/A indicates that no data are available for the grade and year under consideration.

School Staff

Roxbury Prep is led by two co-directors who were originally teachers at the school before moving into administrative positions. The school's founders reportedly thought it was important for their successors to understand and be committed to the school's approach to education. The co-directors are intensively involved in recruiting and training teachers who can succeed in their program. Most of the 20 academic teachers are young and came to Roxbury Prep with 3 to 5 years experience. Teachers generally put in a 60 hour week. Roxbury Prep students have contact information for their teachers and often call them until 8 p.m. for assistance with homework and other projects. Despite this heavy workload, the co-director for curriculum and instruction noted that Roxbury Prep typically experiences a turnover rate of only 15-20% per year and teachers do not generally leave to teach at other schools in the area. They leave, rather, to go to graduate school, because they have started families, or because a spouse is moving. Replacing these teachers can be a challenge, the co-director noted. She received over 1,000 applications and conducted 200 interviews for 4 teacher slots last year. Despite the number of applicants, she said it was difficult to find the teachers that would fit in with the disciplined approach of the school and who could commit the time and effort necessary to bring sixth graders from behind and make them, by eighth grade, ready for a college preparatory high school.

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Roxbury Prep employs two full-time special educators—an individual needs coordinator and a learning specialist. These special educators maintain IEPs and provide inclusion and pull-out supports for all students identified with special education needs. They spend at least 60% of their day in the classroom providing push-in services for students with IEPs. In addition to supporting general education teachers in the classroom, the special educators provide professional development for them as well. The special needs coordinator noted that requests from general education teachers guide their professional development sessions. Recently, for example, she worked with an outside expert to conduct a training session on non-verbal learning disabilities at the request of the teaching staff.

Although primarily there to provide assistance to students with disabilities, the special education staff also help other students as needed. They believe that this model de-stigmatizes in-class supports received by students with disabilities while it helps the general education teacher teach more effectively. Roxbury Prep conducts internal professional development and the special educators provide training on various special education topics, generally in response to requests or questions by staff.

In addition to teachers, Roxbury Prep employs a counselor who provides individual, family, and small group counseling. Specialists are brought in on an as-needed basis, including a speech therapist and a psychologist who provides student evaluations and helps with IEP development when necessary.

Special Education Promising Practices

The special education program at Roxbury Prep serves students with a variety of mild to moderate disabilities. The co-director for curriculum and instruction noted that their special education population generally does not include students with severe disabilities. Parents of students with more severe disabilities have not generally chosen to enroll their child in Roxbury Prep. For their students with mild to moderate disabilities, the individual needs coordinator noted that they are able to remain in the general education classroom because accommodations that typically appear on IEPs—such as repeating or providing written directions, behavioral redirections as necessary, and assistance with organizational skills—are a regular part of their general education classroom.

While the administrator and teachers articulated it differently, all of the school personnel we interviewed noted that special education works at Roxbury Prep because general education works at Roxbury Prep. The co-director noted that it is Roxbury Prep's high academic expectations of all students regardless of special education status, strict behavioral expectations, and classroom organization and management programs that support all students in achieving academic success.

> *School personnel we interviewed noted that special education works at Roxbury Prep because general education works at Roxbury Prep.*

Roxbury Prep's full-inclusion model places students with disabilities in the general education class nearly 100% of the time and seeks to provide all students, including students with disabilities, with the supports they need to succeed in that environment. For example, at the beginning of every class, the goal and plan for each lesson and homework assignments are

written on the blackboard, students are assisted with keeping a school planner, and everyone is reminded to read through the directions.

Push-in supports include a special education teacher providing assistance in the general education classroom as well as providing the general education teacher with appropriate accommodations and interventions related to each student's IEP. "Most students would not know there was special education at Roxbury Prep," said Co-Director Dana Lehman, "because we do not have a separate classroom where special education students disappear to all day as is sometimes seen in other public schools." When students are given pull-out supports, such as the Wilson Reading Program, the assistance is generally provided during the enrichment period at the end of the day when all students are doing a variety of activities including: receiving tutoring, meeting with a mentor, or participating in music, dance, and sports.

> *Most students would not know there was special education at Roxbury Prep," said Co-Director Dana Lehman, "because we do not have a separate classroom where special education students disappear to all day as is sometimes seen in other public schools."*

At Roxbury Prep, pre- and post-tests for each class and routine interim assessments throughout the year are central to developing highly individualized educational program for all students. Because most students enter Roxbury Prep one or more grade levels behind, the school provides intensive evaluation to tailor teaching to the areas of greatest need. In addition, Roxbury Prep provides practice testing for various standardized and entrance exams to college preparatory high schools to preemptively identify shortfalls and aid teachers in providing any necessary remedial supports. School personnel report that this process has been highly effective as every Roxbury Prep graduate has been accepted to a college preparatory exam, charter, pilot, parochial, or private school in the Boston area.

A consequence of individualization for all students is that it assigns ownership for children with disabilities to general education teachers because a child with an IEP receiving individualized services is no different from a child without an IEP receiving individualized services. This "normalization" of individualized education appears to facilitate access to the general education curriculum and academic success for students with disabilities. For example, a strongly data driven approach informs the individualization of each student's program. And because Roxbury Prep implements a full-inclusion program for its students with disabilities, teachers reportedly recognize that they will be teaching all children in their classrooms. The special education teachers that serve as in-class supports assist all students with coursework when necessary and they believe this further de-stigmatizes "extra help" in the classroom.

The strong behavioral program reportedly also supports students with disabilities. The program requires silence in the halls, enforces a strict dress code, and maintains a no-tolerance policy for teasing or laughing at others, using derogatory terms like "retarded" or "sped," physical or verbal aggression, or play fighting. Students who break these rules, even once, are suspended. Co-Director Dana Lehman explained that because they make a big deal out of little things, they do not often see bigger issues. In addition to punishing undesirable behavior, Roxbury Prep personnel positively reinforce good conduct through a fully-integrated "creed deeds" and demerit system. School personnel reported that this behavioral program creates a safe atmosphere that is

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conducive to learning and encourages students to take academic risks because students know they will be treated with respect. One special education teacher noted that even her students who read excruciatingly slowly are proud to read aloud and are comfortable doing so because they know they will be treated with kindness by their peers.

Beyond providing push-in services and building special education supports into the general education program, Roxbury Prep is characterized by an understanding that general education teachers are responsible for all of their students, whether or not they are identified with special needs. Several of those interviewed noted that, in other schools, special education identification can serve as a means for a general education teacher to remove a difficult student from their classroom. At Roxbury Prep, they reported a feeling of ownership for the performance of their students that may stem from the atmosphere that many parents and teachers liken to family. Teachers feel responsible for their students' learning regardless of background, achievement, or ability. Shoring up this feeling are the school's leaders and special educators helping general education teachers understand the needs of their students and how best to present material to them. The manner in which the school administrator and teachers spoke about special education indicated that the ideals of inclusion are backed up with actionable supports.

In addition to the various aspects of Roxbury Prep's educational and behavioral programs that support students with disabilities, weekly meetings between the co-director and the two special education teachers provide an opportunity to identify students experiencing challenges, brainstorm interventions, and determine what specialists to bring in to evaluate the students. Conversely, school personnel indicated that these conversations can center on students doing well enough that they no longer need special education services.

Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities

Roxbury Prep and, specifically, students with disabilities, have reportedly experienced many successes. In general, Roxbury Prep has succeeded in bringing a rigorous college preparatory program to students least likely to make it to, and be prepared for, college via the traditional urban public school system. One hundred percent of Roxbury Prep's students have been accepted to charter, pilot, exam, private or parochial high schools with college preparatory missions and based on data collected by the Graduate Services Program administrators, 87% of their college-aged alumni are currently enrolled in some form of post-secondary education. This success with their student population as a whole includes students with disabilities.

School personnel reported that students with disabilities are responding well to Roxbury Prep's highly-structured and rigorous program. The integrated behavioral program provides redirection to all students, not just those with an IEP. Such supports, school personnel reported, benefit all students and the orderly environment can promote inclusion of students with disabilities for whom these supports are necessary and outlined in an IEP. Roxbury Prep's special education teachers noted that they frequently take students off IEPs developed at other schools because they are too general and may require interventions that are already embedded in the general education program at Roxbury Prep. Only three months into the 2007-

> "[The staff] *never says to me, 'No.' They always say, 'That's OK, we can do that'...This is my second family here. My son is so happy.*" Mother of a student with disabilities enrolled at Roxbury Prep

08 school year, Roxbury Prep had already taken two students off an IEP because the students no longer needed any special accommodations. Acknowledging that one of the important values of an IEP is to institutionalize supports for students, teachers noted that students are reevaluated as they near eighth grade graduation to determine if an IEP would be valuable to the student in high school or if the child has internalized the supports provided in Roxbury Prep's classroom and no longer needs special education services.

One mother of a student with disabilities enthusiastically shared the story of her son who has only been at Roxbury Prep for a few months. At his previous school, his reading and writing grades were Cs, she reported. At Roxbury Prep he is now earning As and Bs. In the short time he has been at the school, she has seen marked improvement and even though he is only in sixth grade, she said he is already saying that he now wants to choose an academically challenging high school. She credited this change to the dedication of the school personnel. She says, regarding her requests for help and support for her son, "They never say to me, 'No.' They always say, 'That's OK, we can do that.'" The mother also appreciates more than the academic program; she reflected, "This is my second family here. My son is so happy."

An enduring reflection of Roxbury Prep's impact on students with disabilities is perhaps evident in the later success of their graduates. Of the four students who had IEPs while attending Roxbury Prep and are now college age, all four graduated high school and were accepted to college; three are currently enrolled in college.

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

School personnel reflected that Roxbury Prep's special education program could be transferred to a district school if those aspects of the general education program that teachers and leaders at Roxbury Prep attribute to its success were also implemented. Roxbury Prep's teachers believe that without a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, intensive classroom structure and procedures, commitment to thorough data analysis focusing on individuals, and a fully integrated behavior program, their special education program would not be as successful.

The actual special education program does not require significant additional resources and is focused on providing in-class and pull-out resources necessary to supplement the general education program which already includes double math and double language arts classes to bring every student up to and beyond grade level. Their "bare bones" special education program reportedly provides exactly what the teachers need to effectively implement programs and does not spend limited resources on unproven or unnecessary supplementary programs. Despite this streamlined approach to program costs, both special educators at Roxbury Prep stated that they could always get what they needed for their programs in a timely manner.

School personnel acknowledged that while the school is open to all students who apply in accordance with state law due to the explicit college preparatory mission of the school they typically do not receive applications from students with more severe disabilities. Consequently, Roxbury Prep's population of students with disabilities arguably does not reflect the spectrum of students with disabilities typically found in a comprehensive middle school. For this reason, Roxbury Prep's special education program may be able to run on a tighter special education budget than a typical district school.

Woodland Elementary Charter School

Background

Woodland Elementary Charter School is a large, comprehensive elementary school that converted to charter status in 2001. It was the first public school to convert in Fulton County School District, a suburb of Atlanta. Woodland became a charter school in part to address significantly declining enrollment triggered by redistricting that had reportedly reduced total enrollment to fewer than 600 students. In 2006, the school successfully renewed its charter based on demonstrating that it had attained multiple academic performance goals and outperformed comparable schools in the district. Seven years since converting to charter status, the school enrolls over 800 students, including a pre-school and school-age program for children with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities as well as a talented and gifted program. The school is also ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse. (See demographic tables).

Approximately 12% of the students at Woodland have a disability that qualifies them for special education and related services. This figure includes children enrolled in the Pre-Kindergarten center-based program for children and the center-based programs for school-aged children. The charter school operates as part of the district and, in–line with state charter policy, the school provides the district with copies of all IEPs, uses school district transportation, and the district provides related services when required. Special education costs are largely drawn from their per pupil allocation provided by their district.

The school has used the limited autonomy extended under its charter to alter the allocation of existing per pupil funds to support the implementation of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model developed in the 1970's by Joseph Renzulli.[28] The model embeds talented and gifted instructional strategies in all classrooms. The school uses the district's curriculum which aligns with the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and augments the curriculum with targeted specialized programs such as Pearson's NCS Learn Successmaker Enterprise Program, Windows on Science, Harcourt materials, and specialized reading programs for students identified as underperforming. Woodland also: has a science lab (reportedly relatively unique for an elementary school in Fulton County), operates a planetarium in the building, offers a Suzuki violin program to all students; requires students to wear uniforms, and maintains a mandatory parental participation policy. The school also operates a school within a school model for children experiencing emotional or behavior problems that impact their academic progress. The school has demonstrated adequate yearly progress under NCLB for the past seven years and is a Title I School of Distinction. Woodland has won multiple other awards for excellence since converting to charter school status in 2001, including the prior principal winning the Georgia Distinguished Principal Award in 2007 for her work at the school. The prior principal was

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[28] According to the Neag Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development at the University of Connecticut: "The Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) is a detailed blueprint for total school improvement that allows each school the flexibility to develop its own unique programs based on local resources, student demographics, and school dynamics as well as faculty strengths and creativity. Although this research-based model is based on highly successful practices that originated in special programs for the gifted and talented students, its major goal is to promote both challenging and enjoyable high-end learning across a wide range of school types, levels and demographic differences." For more information, see: http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semexec.html

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credited with being the driving force behind the conversion and having the vision for the changes implemented once the school converted.

Woodland Elementary was selected for case study due to the proportionate percentage of students receiving special education services relative to the district average and academic outcomes for students with disabilities that exceed local averages. In spring 2007, 64% of the students with disabilities district wide met or exceeded the state standard in math whereas 88% of the students with disabilities at Woodland met or exceeded standards. In reading, district wide, 75% of the students with disabilities met or exceeded standards in reading in contrast to 84% at Woodland. School personnel attribute the school's academic achievements to a collection of organizational and instructional best practices, most notably, utilization of talented and gifted (TAG) instructional techniques in all classrooms--made possible by extensive training in these instructional strategies--as opposed to solely for children identified as gifted.

Woodland Elementary Charter School	
First year of operation	2001
Authorizer	Fulton County School District
Governance structure	Part of local school district
Focus/mission	Comprehensive elementary school
Grades Served (2007-2008)	Pre-K - 5th
Annual cost per student (2007-2008)	$7,619*
Special Education Program	Schoolwide talented and gifted teaching strategies in all general education classrooms

* **Source**: Projected per pupil costs reported in charter school renewal application submitted in December 2005.

Demographics (2006-2007)	
Total Enrollment	835
African-American	40%
Caucasian	31%
Hispanic	16%
Asian	5%
Other	8%
Special Education Enrollment	12%
Free/Reduced Price Meals	46%
English Language Learners	14%

Source: Georgia Department of Education. Woodland Elementary School Accountability Report: Available online**:** http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/Reports/2007/660/0702/Reportcard/PDF/OSA-K12-660-702.pdf

Adequate Yearly Progress and Special Education Subgroup Proficiency			
	Adequate Yearly Progress?	**% Special Education Subgroup Proficient in Math**	**% Special Education Subgroup Proficient in Reading**
2005 AYP	Yes	82%	84%
2006 AYP	Yes	93%	88%
2007 AYP	Yes	88%	84%

Source: Georgia Department of Education. (2008). Woodland Elementary Adequate Yearly Progress Report Available online**:** http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/aypnclb2006.aspx

Performance Percent Scoring Proficient or Above on the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)				
		2004-05	**2005-06**	**2006-07**
Grade 1	**Reading**	96%	98%	96%
	Math	94%	93%	91%
Grade 2	**Reading**	94%	95%	93%
	Math	93%	91%	75%
Grade 3	**Reading**	97%	94%	88%
	Math	96%	98%	92%
Grade 4	**Reading**	89%	87%	92%
	Math	79%	87%	87%
Grade 5	**Reading**	99%	96%	92%
	Math	95%	98%	95%

Source: Georgia Department of Education. (2008). Woodland Elementary School Accountability Report. Available online**:** http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/Reports/2007/660/0702/Reportcard/PDF/OSA-K12-660-702.pdf

School Staff

Woodland is a large school and maintains a staff of approximately 130 instructional personnel and support staff. The current principal assumed leadership of the school in fall of 2007. The school also employs a resource teacher for every grade level and the local district provides related services personnel as requested.

The school is part of Fulton County Public Schools and consequently, must abide by most district rules and regulations; including hiring policies and procedures. Teachers do not have a union contract. Although the state charter law does not require charter school teachers to be certified, Woodland's charter requires the school to hire certified teachers and the school follows the district's salary schedule. But, the school's charter explicitly excludes the school from district involuntary school transfer policies. Reflecting their commitment to training all teachers in TAG instructional strategies, the school's renewal application notes: "Our charter requires very unique

training needs and long-term commitments on the part of our teachers and we need, therefore, to be very selective about our teachers and their placement to insure success."

Principal Baskerville explained that teachers are required to complete a nine-week gifted education instruction strategies training class. In addition, Woodland employs cluster TAG teachers (i.e., teachers with gifted education endorsement) on each grade level. The school uses the funds allocated to hire a full-time talented and gifted teacher to hire a gifted-endorsed teacher to provide ongoing training to all teachers in TAG teaching strategies. She explained that rather than using the full-time equivalent teacher "to benefit some kids, it benefits all kids." Baskerville described the teacher as a "support coach." "Her goals are to get all teachers trained in higher order skills. She goes in the classrooms and models strategies...she embeds the training into the lessons." According to the school's charter renewal application, the school's charter explicitly commits the school to providing gifted education instructional training to teachers and according to the renewal application, in 2005, 90% of the teachers had completed the training. Optional TAG endorsement training is provided free of cost to teachers but the charter requires teachers to repay the cost of the training if they leave the school within three years of completing the training.

TAG liaison Anita Lindsley described the value of training and simultaneously having them practicing the strategies in the classrooms on a daily basis in the following manner: "It is intense, not hard, but challenging, akin to learning a foreign language. It is outside of [teachers'] comfort zone. As teachers are learning each different instructional strategy, I model the strategy for them. These strategies look good on paper, but it is even better in action. This hands-on implementation results in their receiving valuable student response....making it possible to develop not just a good lesson -- but the **right** lesson."

*These strategies look good on paper, but it is even better in action. This hands-on implementation results in their receiving valuable student response....making it possible to develop not just a good lesson -- but the **right** lesson."*
~~Anita Lindsley, TAG Liaison~~

Reportedly complimenting the TAG strategies and implemented to make the most of teachers' relationships with students, the school practices looping wherein classroom teachers rise with their students in two year cycles. According to the school's renewal application, with looping "the quality of learning time is increased because students and teachers do not experience discontinuity and separation commonly found in the straight-grade class; and students transfer both content and class-management knowledge to a higher degree. In addition, having cohort groups of students for multiple years reportedly facilitates bonding among children, teacher, and parents."[29]

Focused and regular professional development for teachers is also a component of Woodland's instructional program. Once a month, the school closes early and teachers participate in professional development. Professional development reportedly: "improves student achievement

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[29] Woodland Elementary Charter, Renewal Application, 2006, p. 74.

by allowing more time for professional learning communities, vertical teaming, staff training, team planning, and parent conferences" [30]

Special Education Promising Practices

Woodland's special education philosophy is relatively traditional and it appears that the school's apparent success with children with disabilities is a consequence of its success overall rather than targeted efforts to create an innovative special education program. For instance, children with mild disabilities attend general education classrooms while children with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities attend class in segregated settings, receiving limited amounts of their instruction in general education classrooms. Our interviews confirmed that the school operates a relatively typical IEP referral process. Children who struggle academically are provided targeted interventions and if appropriate, eventually formally referred to be assessed to determine whether they are eligible to receive special education and related services to help them succeed.

Individuals interviewed attribute the schools' success with children with disabilities to the integration of 1) TAG instructional techniques, 2) a commitment to teacher accountability based on a data driven culture, 3) ongoing training, and collaboration between general education and special education, and 4) an explicit expectation that all parents volunteer at the school. While this collection of practices in and of itself is not particularly innovative or new, it does reflect generally accepted good instructional practices. The leadership of the school appears to have successfully used the school's charter to introduce these practices in what is arguably a very traditional comprehensive elementary public school in a manner that has raised and maintains academic achievement above comparable schools.

As noted previously, under the Schoolwide Enrichment model, the school dedicates a full-time staff member to in-house training and classroom observations conducted to monitor the integration of the TAG strategies. Reflecting the sentiments expressed by other school personnel, Principal Baskerville credits the school's "high test scores to the TAG training. We are a Title I School and we are Title I Distinguished." A centerpiece of the school's commitment to integrating TAG strategies is the monthly "Brain Power Day." (See textboxes). Brain Power Day activities reportedly further develop the cultivation of abstract and critical thinking skills for all students; including children with mild and moderate disabilities. According to school materials, Brain Power Days consist of full-day, school-wide enrichment activities using "problem-based, information-gathering experiences." Activities are generally tied to some aspect of the curriculum but teachers are provided with latitude related to picking topics. The TAG

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[30] Woodland Elementary School, Renewal Application, 2006.

Woodland Elementary Charter School: Brain Power Day

A full day of **school wide enrichment** for EVERY child regardless of their learning level and/or diversity**....a day designed to educate all students to be conceptual thinkers - to gain experience** in how to use information, skills, and technologies to construct new knowledge and to solve problems, integrate concepts and ideas across disciplines, communicate effectively orally and in writing, and work in diverse group. This **monthly event** involves students in many tailored "*thinking and doing*" activities to foster/promote development of thinking skills.

On BRAIN POWER DAY, students learn valuable lessons about constructing meaning through problem-based information-gathering experiences. Planned activities are designed to help students to identify not only their conceptual understanding but also developing their thinking strategies. **Focused activities offer students the opportunity to practice higher order thinking skills.** Like many other skills, the more we practice, the better we develop our skills.

*In preparing for this day, **teachers share areas of training, expertise, and personal interest to provide different techniques for meeting the diverse needs and styles of learners.** BRAIN POWER DAY **provides teachers an opportunity to increase implementation of differentiated teaching strategies and techniques learned through Woodland provided staff development workshops**:*
- **Gifted Education Program teaching strategies** to promote use of higher order thinking skills, AND foster the development of creative and critical thinking skills
- **Creative Problem Solving hands on activities** to promote divergent/creative thinking. AND teamwork. This method teaches students to be independent critical thinkers and apply problem solving skills to many aspects of daily life...and to understand *"a scientific discovery in never the work of a single person"* – LOUIS PASTEUR
- **Authentic Assessment Performance Tasks using multiple intelligences** to better meet the interest level of each student and make connections between classroom content learned and real life scenarios.
- **Choice Boards using Blooms' Taxonomy of thinking skills** to better meet the individual readiness level of students.

Such an enrichment day teaches the students the importance of going beyond a mere assimilation of facts, and they begin to think more critically. Our current implementation of these teaching strategies and techniques has resulted in our students growth towards reaching their potential, as we have observed them becoming self-disciplined, have a positive self-image, show self – confidence, and become more self-motivated. The more self-motivated our students become, the greater the possibility of fulfilling their own potential. **Woodland's monthly BRAIN POWER DAY provides ALL the students in our school increased opportunities to practice thinking skills that help breed success in life!**

Source: Developed for Woodland Elementary Charter/Anita Lindsley 2006

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Brain Power Day Agenda Excerpt, March 2008

8:45 –10:15*ish***......select one** (of 3) **TAG teaching strategy**

- "*Form Follows Function*"" – COMPARE CONTRAST /math – geometry and spatial sense, patterns and relationships, measurement
  Lesson overview *(60 minutes)*.... In this inquiry-based lesson, students will create a set of mathematical criteria to record data as they examine two objects. Venn diagrams will be created in order to compare/contrast the two objects. Finally, after considering why the two objects were designed the way they were, students will design their own functional objects in a real world situation.

- "*Our Town*"" - DECISION MAKING/social studies – economics/civics
  Lesson overview (*90 minutes*).... Students will explore the difference in the terms local, state, and national. They will then survey their friends and family members to see things about their community they would like to be changed. Students will then work with a group to identify some problems in the local community and try to come up with solutions. **PRIOR TO THE LESSON: Have students take home** survey to complete AND bring back for the lesson (see lesson plan - step 2 HANDOUT)

- "*Georgia Flag*" - DECISION MAKING/social studies
  Lesson overview (*90+ minutes*).... The students will need to help the state decide on the symbol would be the best representation on a flag for our state. Choosing from 4-5 alternatives, students weigh the pros/cons of each before making a final decision.

Source: March 2008, Brainpower Day agenda for third grade class provided by TAG liaison Anita Lindsley

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liaison provides a basic agenda with suggested instruction strategies to use during the day. Principal Baskerville noted that during Brain Power Day, teacher use "embedded hands-on activities. It is very group oriented. Children learn it is not always right or wrong. The process is what is important. The kids love Brain Power Days." TAG liaison and the developer of Brain Power Day at Woodland, Anita Lindsley provided an example of a topic that might be covered during a typical brainpower day. "It is a small part of the day that is a specific lesson, using a TAG strategy to enhance. [For example], in state history at the 5th grade, they would do a metaphorical strategy. They would be comparing a democracy to trees. This is a TAG strategy. The rest of the day is focused on problem solving or perhaps, think tank activities. Each month it is different. This month was elaborative thinking and originality. The teacher decides based on the needs of her class that month and building on the specific classroom setting."

TAG Liaison Lindsley described these breaks with the traditional program as "everything out of the box all day." Principal Baskerville noted that children really enjoy Brain Power Day but that

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some teachers find them to be a "chore" to plan. (See textboxes for an extended description of Brain Power Days).

Both teachers and administrators recalled stories of children with disabilities responding well to TAG instructional strategies; in some instances, reportedly surprising their teachers with their abilities. TAG liaison Lindsley noted: "I am blown away by what my kids [with disabilities] say. It did not require rote memory. It is not that type of baseline thinking. There is more than one right answer. For their self-esteem it is beautiful. It is very rewarding to hear from a teacher that kids in special education and ESL are excelling with the TAG strategies. They will come up with the response and Wow, the teacher realizes they could have missed out on that kind of teaching for a child." Praising the value of TAG strategies, principal Baskerville noted: "When [children with disabilities] are in a group activity, more auditory, kinesthetic, more modalities, they learn better. It helps with attention span. It makes it more exciting. It is amazing how some of these kids excel when they are involved with project oriented things."

> Principal Baskerville noted:
> *"When [children with disabilities] are in a group activity, more auditory, kinesthetic, more modalities, they learn better. It helps with attention span. It makes it more exciting. It is amazing how some of these kids excel when they*

Distinct from, but reportedly aligned with, TAG instructional strategies is data-driven decision making. Personnel at Woodland Elementary reported that data are central to their classroom decision-making and specifically, critical to holding teachers accountable for their instructional practices. Teachers administer regular formative assessments and the results of these assessments reportedly drive instructional decision-making. Instructional Support Teacher Jackie Radford explained that "We have a curriculum specialist and test scores are turned into her. She receives the scores and will make comments back to the teachers. She will make recommendations about instruction. For example, we had a [classroom] where all the students failed all the assessments. Our curriculum specialist went into the math classroom and they worked on improving his instruction. They looked at what the problems were and she went from there. Sometimes it might require additional staff development so she might suggest a course. We use test scores to change instruction. We are very data-driven. It is crucial to our success." Radford noted that the high level of teacher accountability can be difficult for teachers who are new to the school but that teachers quickly see the value of using data to inform their classroom practice.

Radford further expounded that: "Coming from another school, our test scores are high here because teachers have to turn in scores of their assessments. There is lots of accountability for teachers and to me it really impacts [classroom practice]. The prior principal just never let up. If you don't want to do this then you can move. We are here for the kids. All kids can learn. We have a very diverse population."

School personnel reported that the school does operate inclusive classrooms but full inclusion is not an explicit or primary goal at the school. For the children with mild disabilities who are attending inclusive classrooms, specialists provide support in what Principal Baskerville referred to as a "push-in model." She explained that "the resource room teacher goes in and she makes modifications as needed. Push-in is part of the planning. We have common planning and special

education lines up with general education grade team. Every team meets once a month. But they work with just those kids. We push the special education teacher with the grade."

When asked about the type of curricula modifications school personnel make to support classroom inclusion, Radford explained "If they have 3rd graders, they have to look at the GPS [Georgia performance standards] for third grade and they need to modify and teach some of the elements and strands and that is what is in the portfolio. This is what they have taught. For example, one of the teachers this year, it was a science project on energy; form or something; and students had to show that two things can be the same but look different. It might about been physical measurement. They showed two different forms, so the kids could say, that is a cup even though it looked different." To support push-in services, the school provides ongoing training to general and special education teachers. The school has monthly early release days during which teachers receive training.

The final promising practice that reportedly drives student achievement for all students at Woodland is a deep emphasis on parental involvement. Ironically, as the one conversion school we examined, and the school arguably most similar to large traditional public elementary schools, Woodland depends the most notably on parental involvement and requires that all parents contribute 10 volunteer hours each year.

Based on research related to the positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, the school sought a waiver to expand Fulton County's Family and Community Involvement Policy to allow the school to require parents to contribute 10 hours to the school. According to the school's charter renewal application, the purpose of increasing parental involvement is to support academic performance for all children. Parents are offered multiple different opportunities (both in school and outside of school) to meet the volunteer hour commitment and parents are credited with supporting the schools success. For instance, parents can volunteer through the Parent Involvement Coordinator or through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA maintains multiple committees that organize a plethora of activities (e.g., back to school picnic, radical readers, math/science lab, family computer classes, literacy night for parents, school-wide socials, book closet, cultural arts events, annual yearbook, and science convention). Examples of strategies that Woodland personnel reportedly use to engage parents include but are not limited to: translating materials to multiple languages, visiting homes, and creating a warm school environment that is more welcoming to parents.

The school has developed an electronic tracking system and parents are required to log their volunteer hours so that the parent liaison can monitor parent's hours. School personnel could not recall ever asking a family to leave the school due to not fulfilling the obligation, but they did note that the parent liaison reaches out to parents and nearly all parents meet their obligation. Furthermore, while school personnel identified parental involved as a key component of the school model but the parental role appears to be valued generally as opposed to specifically for students with disabilities.

> *"It is well documented that the most important factor in a child's educational success is not class size, teacher training, or modern facilities. The most important factor is parental involvement. To encourage that involvement, WECS has implemented a number of unique approaches to build our students' support community and our parents' involvement opportunities."*
> (Woodland Elementary Charter School, Charter Renewal Application 2005, p. 68).

Evidence of Success with Students with Disabilities

Children with disabilities at Woodland outperform their peers at the two other local elementary schools in the district. Aside from this very tangible indicator, students are reportedly demonstrating growth in their critical thinking skills as demonstrated by their responses to the TAG instructional strategies captured in the quotations presented above.

For children who have more severe disabilities, the school has reportedly increased the degree to which they are exposed to the general education curriculum and the increase was attributed to the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA). The GAA is a portfolio-based alternate assessment aligned with the alternate achievement standards developed by the state for children with the most significant cognitive impairments. In spring 2007, 17 students with disabilities at Woodland took the GAA and nearly all of them met the proficiency standard. Completing the GAA reportedly depends heavily on the special education teacher following extensive directions related to documenting what the child has been exposed to in class and where they have demonstrated academic progress. While school personnel acknowledged that the high proficiency rate may reflect a less than robust measure of academic skills, they noted that the testing requirement had driven a notable increase in the degree to which children with more severe disabilities are gaining access to the general education curriculum; arguably an important goal of both IDEA and NCLB. Radford explained: "Before standards, their instruction was IEP driven and now the instruction is driven by the standards of the grade level. It all kind of happened at the same time so it might have happened even if not for the GAA. Not all because of the GAA, but because of the GAA, they are having to document what they are teaching."

Implications for Traditional Public Schools

The most traditional of all our six case-study schools, Principal Baskerville noted that the school: "gets the same budget as a traditional public school." School administrators have used the autonomy granted by their charter to reallocate the budget to support TAG training for all teachers. While the school initially enjoyed a transfusion of dollars from the federal charter school program when it first converted to charter status, seven years after converting to charter status, the school no longer qualifies for these dollars. Furthermore, due to the fact that all three elementary schools in the district have now converted to charter status and are overenrolled, similar to other conversion charter schools in Georgia, Woodland is no longer a school of choice. Consequently, the school cannot tap into programs targeted to support schools of choice and presumably, the student population is not shaped by any selection bias associated with school

choice. In aggregate, the school has limited autonomy and equivalent dollars and therefore, the successful strategies identified at Woodland may likely be easily transferred to other schools. As with other identified promising practices, the key factor that appears to influence the introduction of these strategies is leadership vision and commitment to introduce new programs that hold promise to improve student outcomes.

Appendix

Appendix I: References

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National Council on Disability. (2008). *The No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: A Progress Report.* Washington, DC: Author.

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U.S. Department of Education. (2005). The 27th *Annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Retrieved December 1, 2007 from http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/2005/parts-b-c/index.html

Appendix II: Interview Protocols

Special Education Site Visit Protocol: Principal & Teacher

Opening statement regarding purpose of case study

o   Thank you for making time to talk to me today. As you know, Public Impact has been hired by the Center on Reinventing Public Education to conduct a series of case studies of charter schools identified as having successful and innovative or promising special education programs. I am not here to evaluate you or your school, but rather to gain an understanding of how you educate children with disabilities. As part of the interview, I would like you to review and sign this consent form. The form notes that you are aware that your participation is voluntary. I would like to make an audio recording of the interview as a backup. The recording will not be transcribed or published. However, I do plan to include quotations from school personnel in the case study. If there's any point at which they'd like to speak off the record I will be happy to turn off the recorder and put down my pen. Are you comfortable with us attributing quotations to you in our case?

o   I want to find out as much as I can about the work you have been doing and get a lot of input from you in the short time we have, so please excuse me in advance if I interrupt or redirect our conversation during the interview.

o   I am now turning on the tape recorder. I am going to take notes during our conversation but I would like to tape it as a backup should I miss something in my notes, do I have your permission to tape the conversation?

_____

BACKGROUND

What is your title, how long have you worked at the school and what are your primary responsibilities in the school?

o   Duration?
o   Admin?
o   Instructional?
o   Leadership team?

I have read about your school and have a general understanding about its history, but can you tell me about the history of your school so that I can verify my understanding?

o   Opened?
o   Grades served?
o   Authorizer?
o   Mission?

What are your responsibilities related to educating students with disabilities?

_____

ENROLLMENT

Please tell me about your total student population.

o   Total student population?

o   Primary means of recruiting students?
o   Changes in enrollment over time?

Will you please tell me about your special education population?
o   # of students with disabilities?
o   # of students with disabilities by disability category?

SCHOOL MISSION/FOCUS

I understand that the mission of your school is XXX. Will you please tell me more about your mission and how it is implemented on a day to day basis?

(If appropriate) How do children with disabilities fit into your mission?
o   Special education philosophy?
o   Big picture accommodations/modifications to program?

Do you think a traditional public school could adopt a similar mission?
o   If yes, why do you think more have not adopted your mission?
o   If no, why not?
o   Have you encountered any conflict between your school's mission and making accommodations for students with disabilities?

What aspects of the state charter school law have enabled you to fulfill your mission?
o   Curriculum?
o   Instructional approach?
o   Schedule?
o   Hiring practices?
o   Is your charter school its own LEA or part of an LEA?
o   Do you have control over special education funds in the charter school?

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM

I would like to talk to you about individualized education programs and specifically, how do you determine if a student newly enrolled in your school has an existing IEP?
o   Question on application about having an IEP?
o   Application interview?
o   Access to district student data files?
o   Records transfer?
o   Parent?

What process does the school follow when it appears that a student may have special needs that may not be addressed adequately by what the school typically offers?
o   Intervention strategies?
o   Tangible examples of successes?

How about your referral process?
o   How is the process typically initiated? (Parent request, teacher referral, other?)

o   What is the process?

(If an elementary school) Are you familiar with the term response to intervention or RTI? If yes, can you describe how RtI is implemented in your school?
o   Awareness?
o   Levels of intervention?
o   Degree to which RtI is used successfully to avoid special education label?

What is the process of developing an IEP (relate the exact wording to the LEA status – is the IEP team a part of the charter school or provided by the LEA)?
o   Role of authorizer or local school district?
o   Boilerplate or blank slate?
o   Depth of discussion among IEP members?
o   Level of individualization?

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

We have talked a little about the students with disabilities enrolled in your school, but I would like to learn more about the special education and related services you provide to your students with disabilities.

How many of your students are served in the general education classroom 100% of the day?
o   more than 80% of the day but not 100%
o   less than 80% of the day?

When the students are in the general education classroom, who provides necessary supports?

How do your general and special education teachers work together to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
o   Consulting?
o   Co-teaching?

What steps do you take to ensure that children with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and what checks are in place to assess the access?

How do you balance fulfilling your unique school mission with the needs of children with multiple types of disabilities who need a variety of supports and accommodations?
o   Examples of modifications and accommodations?

Does your approach to special education require additional resources?
o   Number/type of instructional personnel?
o   Professional development?
o   Assistive technology?
o   Source of resources?
o   Estimate cost-per-pupil in special education?
o   Access to state risk pool for low-incidence kids?

Have you established any partnerships or contracts with external partners to help provide special education and related services?
- o   Infrastructures?
- o   Tangle examples?

Your approach to special education is somewhat atypical - what factors do you think helped you develop your approach to educating children with disabilities?
- o   State charter school law?
- o   Authorizer policies?
- o   Relationship with authorizer?
- o   Relationship with local district?
- o   Relationship with other external partner?
- o   Available technical assistance providers?

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
Parental involvement can be a very important part of a successful special education program. Can you tell me about the degree to which parents are involved in your school and specifically, the special education program?
- o   Pre-referral to special education?
- o   Response to intervention efforts?
- o   IEP meetings?

What strategies do you use to engage parents?

OUTCOMES
How do you carry out assessments required under NCLB?

I understand your school did/did not make AYP last year? How did your students with disabilities perform?
- o   Reading?
- o   Mathematics?

Do you have any students enrolled who are eligible for an alternate assessment? (i.e., students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?)
- o   If yes, how many in each grade?
- o   How did they perform?

Aside from AYP, are there any tangible measures of your special education program's success?
- o   Additional state accountability systems?
- o   Internal assessments?
- o   Special education monitoring reports?
- o   Annual reports?
- o   Students exiting special education?
- o   Parental satisfaction?
- o   Other?

INNOVATIVE/PROMISING PRACTICES
Your school was nominated for this study because one of our experts described it as successful and innovative or promising for students with disabilities. In closing, besides what you have already shared, is there anything else you are doing for children with disabilities that you think is innovative or promising?

Thank you for your time. Here is my card. Please give me a call if you have any questions or think of anything else you would like to share after we leave.

Special Education Site Visit Protocol: Parent

Opening statement regarding purpose of case study
o   Thank you for making time to talk to me today. My firm, Public Impact has been hired to conduct a series of case studies of charter schools identified as having successful and promising special education programs. I am not here to evaluate the school or your child's teacher, but rather, to gain an understanding of how the school educates children with disabilities. As part of the interview, I would like you to review and sign this consent form. The form notes that you are aware that your participation is voluntary. I would like to make an audio recording of the interview as a back up for me. The recording will not be transcribed or published. However, I do plan to include quotations from interviews in the case study. If there's any point at which they'd like to speak off the record, I will be happy to turn off the recorder and put down my pen. Are you comfortable with us attributing quotations to you in our case?
o   I want to find out as much as I can about the work you have been doing and get a lot of input from you in the short time we have, so please excuse me in advance if I interrupt or redirect our conversation during the interview.

o   I am now turning on the tape recorder. I am going to take notes during our conversation but I would like to tape it as a backup should I miss something in my notes, do I have your permission to tape the conversation?

_____

BACKGROUND
Can you share with me a little bit about your knowledge of the school?
o   Years of having a student enrolled?
o   Number and ages of children enrolled?
o   Child with a disability?
o   Satisfaction level?

Do you consider yourself knowledgeable about the special education program at the school?
o   Base of knowledge?
o   Satisfaction level?

_____

ENROLLMENT
Please tell me about your child?
o   Duration at the school?
o   Grade?
o   Type of disability?
o   Level of services provided?

_____

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM
I would like to talk about your child's individualized education program.
o   When was the IEP developed and by whom?
o   Did you request that your child be referred for special education or did someone from school recommend?

o   To what degree did you shape the special education and related services your child is provided?

What was the process for referring your son/daughter to special education?

(If IEP from prior school) Were there any changes when your child enrolled in this school?

(If IEP at this school) From your perspective, do you think the referral process was a positive experience for you and your child?

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

From your perspective, does the school embrace a particular mission or philosophy related to educating students with disabilities?

(If not already answered) What special education and related services does your child receive?
o   General education classroom?
o   Pull-out?
o   Role of general and special education teachers?
o   Related services?
o   Modifications/accommodations?
o   Assistive technology?

When your child is in the general education classroom, who provides necessary supports?

(If appropriate) Will you tell me about how general and special education teachers work together to support your child in the general education classroom?
o   Consulting?
o   Co-teaching?

How does the school ensure that children with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and?

How do you think school personnel balance fulfilling the school mission with the needs of children with multiple types of disabilities who need a variety of supports and accommodations? (both specific to the child or in general)
o   Examples of modifications and accommodations?
o   Programmatic compromises?
o   Fiscal constraints?

Are you satisfied with the special education and related services provided to your child as outlined in his/her IEP?
o   If yes, will you provide an example of a service/support that you think is particularly successful?
o   If no, please tell me why you are not satisfied?

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Can you tell me about the degree to which you are involved in the school and specifically, the special education program?
o   Pre-referral to special education?
o   Response to intervention efforts?
o   IEP meetings?
o   Typical of all parents or unique

What strategies does the school use to engage parents?

OUTCOMES

What is the name of the state assessment your child takes?

(Ask if relevant) Does your child take an alternative assessment?

Did your child take the traditional state assessment or the alternate assessment?
o   How did they perform?

Schools are typically judged based on performance on state tests. However, can you think of other ways that tell you this school is succeeding with students with disabilities? Can you give examples?
o   Special education monitoring reports?
o   Additional state accountability systems?
o   Annual reports?
o   Students exiting special education?
o   Parental satisfaction
o   Other?

INNOVATIVE/PROMISING PRACTICES

Your charter school was nominated for this study because one of our experts described it as successful and innovative or promising for students with disabilities. In closing, besides what you have already shared, is there anything else the school is doing for children with disabilities that you think is innovative or promising?

Thank you for your time. Here is my card. Please give me a call if you have any questions or think of anything else you would like to share after we leave.

Appendix III: Case Study Procedures and References

In conducting the case studies, we sought to visit each school and interview a minimum of three people: ideally the principal, a teacher, and a parent of a child enrolled in the school. Our interviews were guided by role specific interview protocols. We also sought to obtain documents related to the history, philosophy, and operations of the schools. As typical with case study research, our data collection methods varied slightly at each school based on the particulars of the school and our ability to access key individuals and documents. Following is a summary of our data collection efforts in each of the six case study schools.

Charyl Stockwell Academy

Dana Brinson and Joanne Jacobs visited Charyl Stockwell Academy on February 1, 2008 to tour the school (although students were not there because of a snow day) and interview the following informants: Shelley Stockwell, Director; Chuck Stockwell, Founder and former principal; Teri Pettit, Director of Educational Services; Jessica Wojtowicz, Elementary Teacher; and Paul and Lisa Ventimiglia, Parents. Mark Weinberg, Director of Academic Services at Central Michigan University's Center for Charter Schools, CSA's authorizer, provided helpful information during the site-selection process.

Dana Brinson also conducted a phone interview on February 20, 2008 with parents of two students who were formerly identified for special education services, but no longer qualify.

In addition to self-reported information provided by interview informants, we gathered additional data from:
- Charyl Stockwell Academy 2006-07 Annual report: http://www.csaschool.org/pdfs/FinalAR0607.pdf
- Michigan Department of Education website: http://michigan.gov/mde
- Charyl Stockwell Academy website: www.csaschool.org

CHIME

Lauren Morando Rhim and Joanne Jacobs visited the CHIME charter elementary school on January 16th, 2008. They toured the schools and interviewed: Sheri Browner, Teacher; Julie Fabrocini, Founder & Principal; Mary Herbert, parent; Rachel Knopf, teacher; and, Elena Polansky, parent. We also observed multiple classrooms and observed an afternoon collaborative debriefing of a grade level team of general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and student teachers.

On January 17th, Lauren Morando Rhim visited the CHIME middle school, toured the school, observed classrooms, and interviewed: Michelle Chennelle, teacher; Andrienne Johnston, teacher; Cathy Koch parent; and, Jennifer Lockwood, principal. She had a follow-up e-mail exchange with Peggy Berrenson from the Chime Financial Office.

In addition to the self-reported information provided by the individuals interviewed and observations, we gathered additional information from:

- CHIME Employee Handbook (August 19, 2005).
- Charter Renewal Evaluation: CHIME Charter Elementary School (2005)Renewal application
- CHIME Institute: Strategic Growth (September 28, 2006)
- Downing, J. E. Spencer, S., & Cavallaire (2004). Development of an Inclusive Elementary School: Lessons Learned. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities.* 29, (1). P. 11-24.
- Fabrocini, J. (2004). When all children Learn: CHIME charter school's collaborative model for special education. The Charter Journal. California Charter Schools Association
- Parent Handbook: CHIME Charter Elementary School (2007-2008)

ISUS Institute for Construction Technology

Dana Brinson and Joanne Jacobs visited ISUS on January 31, 2008. They toured the main campus, the health sciences building, and current ISUS construction sites. In addition, they interviewed the following informants: Ann Higdon, CEO and founder of ISUS, Inc.; Malaika Dedrick, Special Education Director; Lolita Stevenson, Assistant to the Superintendent; Sally Gordon, Intervention Specialist and four ISUS Construction Institute students. Dave Cash, a contractor for St. Aloysius Orphanage—ISUS's sponsor—provided helpful information during the site-selection process.

Dana Brinson and Joanne Jacobs also conducted a phone interview on February 12, 2008 with Allison Crandon, parent of a former ISUS student who received special education services.

We gathered additional data from:

- State Department of Education report card: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2006-2007/BUILD/133744.pdf
- School Website: http://www.isusinc.com
- Student data provided by ISUS

Metro Deaf School

Dana Brinson visited MDS on February 5, 2008, toured the school, and interviewed the following informants: Dyan Sherwood, Director and co-founder; Kelly Anderson, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; and a foster parent of a former MDS student. Gina Alvarado provided ASL interpretation services during the parent interview and classroom observations by Dana Brinson. Lynn Steenblock, charter school liaison of Forest Lake Area School District, Metro Deaf School's sponsor, provided helpful information during the site-selection process.

We gathered additional data from:

- Annual report provided by the school
- State Department of Education website: *state DoE website: http://education.state.mn.us/ReportCard2005/schoolDistrictInfo.do?SCHOOL_NUM=00 0&DISTRICT_NUM=4005&DISTRICT_TYPE=07*

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- School Website: http://www.metrodeafschool.org/

Roxbury Preparatory Charter School

Dana Brinson, Lauren Morando Rhim, and Joanne Jacobs visited Roxbury Prep on December 6, 2007, toured the school and interviewed the following informants: Dana Lehman, Co-director; Jamie Thornton, Special Needs Coordinator; Jenna Leary, Learning Specialist; and Yarmin Rosario, Maria Carmona, and Stacey Glass, parents of students receiving special education services.

We gathered additional data from:
- Annual report: http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2007/annual/0484.pdf
- Massachusetts State Department of Education website: http://profiles1.doe.mass.edu/home.asp?mode=so&so=2046-13&ot=12&o=2045&view=enr
- School Website: http://www.roxburyprep.org/index.htm

Woodland Elementary Charter School

Lauren Morando Rhim visited Woodland Elementary on January 28, 2008 to tour the school and interview the following informants: Ruth Baskerville, Principal; Jackie Radford, Instructional Support Teacher; Anita Lindsley, TAG Coordinator and Trainer; and Barbara Liptak, Assistant Principal.

We gathered additional data from:
- Georgia State Department of Education website: school profile and AYP information http://www.gadoe.org/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=101&PID=63&PTID=214&SchoolId=43818&T=0&FY=2007
- Woodland Elementary Charter School Renewal Proposal (December, 2005)
- Woodland Elementary Charter School Website: http://www.fultonschools.org/school/woodlandes/main/index.htm

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