Scaling Up First Things First

Findings from the
First Implementation Year

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Overview

Developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), First Things First is a whole-school reform that calls for changes in school structure, instruction, and governance in an effort to increase student and teacher engagement and academic achievement in low-performing schools. First tested in Kansas City, Kansas, the initiative — with support from the Institute of Education Sciences in the U.S. Department of Education — has expanded to include 6 additional schools in Kansas City as well as 12 middle and high schools in Houston, Texas; St. Louis County, Missouri; and Greenville and Shaw, Mississippi. All these schools are characterized by large percentages of nonwhite students and students at high risk of academic failure.

MDRC is evaluating the implementation and effects of the reform at the expansion schools outside of Kansas City, which were phased in over two years, in two groups. This report covers the first year of program implementation (the 2001-2002 academic year) at the first group of schools, focusing on three vehicles for putting the reform's key principles into effect: *small learning communities*, consisting of up to 350 students who study their core subjects with the same group of teachers for several years; the *Family Advocate System*, which pairs students with school staff who maintain regular contact with students and their families and work to support students' progress; and *instructional improvement strategies*, including professional development programs designed to train teachers in the use of cooperative learning methods. The report draws on quantitative data from staff and student surveys and on qualitative findings from interviews and observations.

Key Findings

- By the end of the first year of operations, the reform's basic structural elements were in place at most sites, although their implementation was far from complete.

- Teachers knew more about and felt better prepared to undertake the initiative after implementation began. Nevertheless, implementing a major reform of this kind proved difficult and stressful, and survey data point to an "implementation dip": Teachers expressed less commitment to the reform during the implementation year than they had during the planning period.

- Teachers increased their use of cooperative learning strategies during the implementation year, but lessons remained centered on memorization of facts and other low-level cognitive activities.

- At this early stage, when structural changes must be put in place, the commitment and support of the principal and leadership team appear to be more essential to successful implementation than does a high degree of staff support for the intervention.

- Students reported feeling more supported by their teachers during the implementation year than they had a year earlier, but they also reported experiencing a lower degree of academic engagement — perhaps in part because teachers' attention was diverted from instruction. This suggests that instructional improvement should be the focus of the next phase of the demonstration.

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Preface

It is widely recognized that many if not most high schools and middle schools serving large numbers of low-income students are not functioning well and that, despite the sometimes dire situations they face, attempts to reform them have often been piecemeal and short-lived. The failure of such reforms has led to frustration among practitioners and administrators and to continuing stasis.

MDRC and the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) have partnered to study the expansion of one promising alternative to "business as usual": the First Things First school reform approach. Developed by IRRE and first put in place in Kansas City, Kansas, the intervention is now being replicated and tested in additional schools and districts with funding from the U.S. Department of Education. First Things First seeks to instill in staff members an awareness of the problems their schools face and a sense of urgency about the need to make large-scale changes in the school environment in order to raise student engagement and academic achievement. The intervention's underlying theory of change calls for alterations in school structure, instructional practice, accountability, and governance, and it incorporates key strategies for putting these changes into effect.

This report uses the First Things First theory of change as a framework for examining whether and how the intervention has changed life in the schools participating in the replication effort. As many have observed, change is hard. Through longitudinal analysis, the report provides new empirical support for the often-discussed concept of an "implementation dip": Following an initial period of enthusiasm, support for a reform weakens once school staff members encounter the practical difficulties of changing their usual practices. Even so, many of the schools in this study are making substantial progress in self-transformation.

The final report on this project will assess the extent to which these reform efforts have succeeded in improving key student outcomes, thus adding valuable knowledge to our understanding of how to improve secondary schools that serve low-income students.

Gordon Berlin
Senior Vice President

Acknowledgments

Executive Summary

First Things First is a comprehensive reform that calls for transforming the structure, instructional practices, and governance of low-performing schools, with the aim of increasing engagement among both students and teachers and boosting students' academic achievement. The initiative's seven "critical features" — its underlying design principles — are shown in Table ES.1.

Developed by the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), First Things First was introduced in the Kansas City, Kansas, school system beginning in 1998. Promising early results there led the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education to support a five-year research and demonstration project to expand the initiative to an additional 18 schools and to study its implementation and impacts in these new settings; funding now comes from the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. Along with six additional secondary schools in Kansas City, the new sites include seven middle and high schools in Houston, Texas; the high school and its two feeder middle schools in the Riverview Gardens school district in suburban St. Louis County, Missouri; and the high schools in the Mississippi Delta communities of Greenville and Shaw, Mississippi. (Greenville's two high schools were subsequently consolidated into one, but because the schools maintain separate campuses and administrations and some separate policies, they are considered as two sites in this report.) All these schools serve large numbers of black and/or Hispanic students who are at significant risk of school failure.

The Scaling Up First Things First project, which began in 1999, represents a collaboration of two organizations: IRRE provides support and technical assistance to the participating schools and districts, while MDRC oversees the project and is responsible for conducting the evaluation in all sites outside Kansas City. The schools were phased in over a two-year period, in two groups; Group I includes the Mississippi and Missouri schools and two of the seven Houston schools, while Group II includes the remaining five Houston schools. An earlier report discussed site selection and the planning year for the Group I schools.[1]

This report describes the first year of implementation at the Group I sites; a later report will examine implementation and impacts for both groups of schools. This report draws on a combination of quantitative data from staff and student surveys and qualitative findings from classroom observations and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators. The report centers on three key elements of First Things First that represent vehicles for putting the critical

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[1]See Janet C. Quint, *Scaling Up First Things First: Site Selection and the Planning Year* (New York: MDRC, 2002).

The First Things First Evaluation

Table ES.1

The Seven Critical Features of First Things First

Structural changes

1. Lower student-adult ratios to 15:1 during language arts and math classes for at least 10 hours per week.[a]

2. Provide continuity of care across the school day, across the school years, and between school and home by forming small learning communities. The same core group of eight to ten professionals stays with the same group of 150-350 students for extended periods during the school day for all three years of middle school and for at least two-year periods in high school. The Family Advocate System is also aimed at ensuring continuity of care between staff of the small learning communities and students' families.

Instructional changes

3. Set high, clear, and fair academic and conduct standards that define clearly what all students will know and be able to do by the time they leave high school and at points along the way. Performance on standards-based tests is linked directly to students' advancement and grading, drives curriculum and instruction in all courses, and is discussed regularly with students and their families. Adults and students agree on conduct standards, which are reinforced by adults modeling positive behaviors and attitudes and which are sustained by clear benefits to students and adults for meeting them and consequences for violating them.

4. Provide enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, by making learning more active and connected in safe and respectful learning environments; to perform, by linking assessment strategies that use multiple modes of learning and tie performance directly to standards; and to be recognized, by creating individual and collective incentives for student achievement and by providing leadership opportunities in academic and nonacademic areas.

5. Equip, empower, and expect all staff to improve instruction by creating a shared vision and expectation of high-quality teaching and learning in all classrooms; supporting small learning communities' implementation of research-based instructional strategies to fulfill that vision; and engaging all staff in ongoing study to improve curricular and instructional approaches.

Accountability and governance changes

6. Allow for flexible allocation of available resources by teams and schools, based on instructional and interpersonal needs of students. Resources include people (students and staff); instructional facilities; time for instructional planning and professional development; and discretionary funds.

7. Assure collective responsibility by providing collective incentives and consequences for small learning communities, schools, and central office staff that are linked to change in student performance.

SOURCE: IRRE documents.

NOTE: [a]Since the planning year, IRRE expanded the scope of the first critical feature to include increased instructional time.

features in place: small learning communities, the Family Advocate System, and efforts to improve the quality of classroom instruction.

Key Findings

- By the end of the first year of operations, the reform's basic structural elements were in place at most sites, although their implementation was far from complete.

- Teachers knew more about and felt better prepared to undertake the initiative after implementation began. Nevertheless, implementing a major reform of this kind proved difficult and stressful, and survey data point to an "implementation dip": Teachers expressed less commitment to the reform during the implementation year than they had during the planning period.

- Teachers increased their use of cooperative learning strategies during the implementation year, but lessons remained centered on memorization of facts and other low-level cognitive activities.

- At this early stage, when structural changes must be put in place, the commitment and support of the principal and leadership team appear to be more essential to successful implementation than does a high degree of staff support for the intervention.

- Students reported feeling more supported by their teachers during the implementation year than they had a year earlier, but they also reported experiencing a lower degree of academic engagement — perhaps in part because teachers' attention was diverted from instruction. This suggests that instructional improvement should be the focus of the next phase of the demonstration.

Small Learning Communities

According to the initiative's theory of change, theme-based small learning communities (SLCs) — groups of up to 350 students, along with their core-subject and other key teachers, who remain together for several years — are critical to breaking down the impersonality that students often experience in large urban schools. SLCs provide settings in which mutually caring relationships between students and teachers, and among members of each group, develop; teachers can examine their instructional practices and can support each other's efforts to improve; and teachers can exercise greater decision-making authority. And the thematic nature of the SLCs unites teachers and students around shared interests and gives focus to the core curriculum.

Achieving SLC "purity" — scheduling classes so that teachers teach only students within their SLCs and students take all their core courses from SLC teachers — proved harder than expected, and major scheduling issues persisted in many schools through the first half of the implementation year. One key lesson learned is that scheduling needs to be addressed well before the start of the school year.

During their SLC meetings, teachers largely discussed individual students' conduct and academic issues, along with information handed down by administrators, field trips, award ceremonies, and the like. Instructional matters — the use of innovative instructional methods and the development of curricula reflective of the SLC's theme — received far less attention. Leadership had a great deal to do with how effectively the SLCs operated, and while some SLC coordinators had the requisite skills — the ability to delegate, openness to the ideas of others — there was consensus that SLC coordinators needed more training in being effective leaders.

Teachers' attitudes toward the SLCs were moderately positive, although not extremely so. When SLCs worked well, however, staff felt a new sense of belonging, and students, too, enjoyed the personalized atmosphere, although — because of the general lack of thematic instruction — being in an SLC did not make for a very different educational experience than in the past.

The Family Advocate System

The Family Advocate System is a key strategy for achieving the initiative's goals of creating continuity of care between the home and the school and engaging families in the education of their children. Program guidelines call for staff members to be paired with 12 to 17 students in their SLCs, for whom they serve as advocates. During a regularly scheduled Family Advocate Period, advocates meet in a group with the students to whom they are assigned; the advocates are also responsible for conducting weekly "check-in" meetings with each student and for meeting with both the students and their parents or guardians at least twice a year.

Both students and staff generally responded favorably to the Family Advocate System. The majority of students said that they felt comfortable talking to their family advocate, and the system may serve an especially important function for a substantial group of students — 43 percent — who reported not having another adult in the school besides the family advocate whom they could contact when needed. The large majority of teachers reported that the Family Advocate System was a mechanism for recognizing students' accomplishments, providing advice, and helping students to resolve problems with other adults and to do better on their schoolwork.

Implementing the system was not without its problems, however. At some schools, administrators — faced with so many changes to be made — gave lower priority to family advo-

cacy. Teachers found it hard to make effective use of the Family Advocate Period. They also were frustrated by the difficulties involved in reaching out to students' parents and by what they sometimes perceived as lack of parental receptivity to their efforts.

Instructional Improvement

The First Things First model calls for both structural and instructional changes in the classroom. One of the structural changes — block scheduling — was already in place in all but one school before the initiative was introduced. Schools lacked the personnel and other resources to implement simultaneously and for all students the other two structural changes: reduced student-adult ratios and increased instructional time in language arts and math classes. Instead, different schools made different choices about which strategy to pursue, and for which students.

IRRE was also concerned with improving the quality of instruction and, toward this end, provided the schools with technical assistance and training in the use of cooperative learning strategies to increase student participation in learning. Use of these strategies did, in fact, rise sharply between the planning year and the implementation year, although only a relatively small proportion of teachers used the strategies regularly. Students generally enjoyed the cooperative learning activities and felt that they benefited from them. During this first implementation year, however, efforts at interdisciplinary instruction and at instruction related to SLC themes were sporadic and infrequent. Moreover, even when lessons employed cooperative learning techniques, they were rarely intellectually challenging.

Early and Intermediate Outcomes of the Initiative

Early outcomes of this research include survey measures of teachers' attitudes toward each of the seven critical features of First Things First and toward the initiative as a whole. The theory of change underlying the initiative holds that high levels of positive responses are essential if implementation is to be thorough and effective.

A similar pattern characterizes teachers' responses to all the survey measures. During the implementation year, teachers were far more likely than they had been during the planning year to say that they knew "a lot" about a particular critical feature (or all the critical features collectively). They were also more likely to say that they were "well prepared" to implement the critical feature(s). At the same time, some of the optimism that had marked teachers' attitudes during the planning year appeared to have dissipated: During the implementation year, lower proportions of teachers reported feeling "positive" or "enthusiastic" about the critical features, and they also viewed their colleagues as being less supportive than during the planning year. These findings provide empirical support for the existence of an "implementation dip," which has been posited in the school reform literature, but without corroborating evidence.

Intermediate outcomes of the initiative include measures of support and engagement for both teachers and students. Between the planning year and the implementation year, there was no statistically significant difference in the extent to which teachers felt supported by administrators and the central office, nor were there differences in the proportions of teachers registering especially high or low levels of support. There was a significant decrease in teachers' scores registering behavioral and emotional engagement (the degree to which they enjoyed their work), but there was also an increase in their sense of collective engagement (the degree to which they perceived their colleagues as working hard).

Students, in contrast, registered higher levels of support from teachers during the implementation year than they had during the planning year, perhaps because the SLC structure left students feeling better known and more cared about than in the past. They also, however, registered lower levels of engagement in their schoolwork, perhaps because teachers' attention was diverted from instruction.

In summary, the first implementation year was marked by much effort and hard work, and also by the numerous disruptions that accompany the implementation of any major change. At the year's end, the basic structural elements of First Things First — the SLCs and the Family Advocate System — were in place at most schools. And with greater organizational stability, the schools were in a position to devote increased attention to instructional improvement. The final report will examine their success in achieving better educational outcomes for students.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Critics have leveled many charges against secondary schools in the United States, especially schools serving large numbers of low-income students and students of color. Because many such schools are very large, they are also depersonalized institutions in which students feel anonymous. Often students do not have the opportunity to form the ties with caring adults that are critical to positive youth development and that can significantly influence their academic experience. In addition, due to large class sizes and overwhelming schedules, teachers rarely have time to reach out to individual students, much less to the students' parents. Parents often feel that high schools are unwelcoming; they are often left in the dark about their child's academic status, and they know even less about changes in school protocol. In such schools, teachers' expectations for their students are frequently low, matching their students' academic achievement levels, and their instructional techniques fail to engage or motivate students. First Things First — a comprehensive school reform initiative that focuses on building strong relationships, improving teaching and learning, and reallocating resources to meet the first two goals — is a promising effort that attempts to address the critical issues faced by secondary schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students.[1]

This report builds on the 2002 report, *Scaling Up First Things First: Site Selection and the Planning Year,* by discussing the successes and challenges that eight schools[2] in four districts faced in the 2001-2002 academic year as they embarked on their first year of implementing First Things First. The earlier report describes the underlying rationale of the initiative and focuses on an early stage in the scaling-up effort: site selection and planning for the research and demonstration project. Principal findings from the 2002 report suggest that in the planning year for First Things First:[3]

- The capacities of IRRE's staff and consultants were stretched by the various tasks required of them (for example, site selection, the provision of technical assistance, preparation of materials, and general troubleshooting).

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[1]Klem, Levin, Bloom, and Connell, 2003, p. 2.

[2]In the 2001-2002 academic year, Greenville High School and T. L. Weston High School were merged to form one high school, Greenville-Weston High School. Because the merged high school continued to operate on two different campuses under the leadership of two different principals, this report refers to Greenville-Weston High School as two separate schools.

[3]See Quint, 2002.

- According to survey findings, the commitment to First Things First was stronger among teachers who had less experience, teachers who are non-white, teachers who perceived their principal as being responsive to their concerns, and teachers who felt that they had played an important role in decision-making.

This first chapter provides an overview of the First Things First demonstration. It then turns to the theory of change underlying First Things First and discusses the seven "critical features" of the initiative's model that fit into that theory. The chapter concludes with a description of the scope and contents of this report and discusses the data sources on which the report is based.

The Scaling Up First Things First Demonstration

First Things First was initially implemented in 1998 in Kansas City, Kansas, and over a three-year period was introduced in stages in all comprehensive high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools in the district. In 1999, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education funded Scaling Up First Things First as a five-year research and demonstration project to expand and test the reform in additional districts and schools.[4] Scaling Up First Things First represents a partnership between the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) — led by developmental psychologist James P. Connell — which initially developed the intervention and provides support and technical assistance to the participating schools and districts, and MDRC, which oversees the project and is responsible for conducting evaluation activities in all sites outside Kansas City, Kansas, where an independent evaluation is now in its seventh year.[5]

The expansion unfolded over a two-year period and involved two groups of schools (Table 1.1). Group I schools include eight sites in four school districts: two high schools in Greenville, Mississippi (that subsequently merged, although they continue to operate on two separate campuses), and the high school in Shaw, Mississippi, all located in the Mississippi Delta; one high school and its two feeder middle schools in the Riverview Gardens school district in St. Louis County, Missouri; and one high school and one middle school in Houston, Texas. These Group I schools underwent their planning year during the 2000-2001 academic year and their implementation year during the 2001-2002 academic year; these are

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[4]The demonstration is now funded through the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

[5]For the Kansas City, Kansas, evaluation, see Gambone, Klem, Moore, and Summers (2002). As noted in MDRC's first report on the project (Quint, 2002), the two evaluations are coordinated, using the same outcome measures and analytic approaches to attain the ultimate goal: assessing the impacts of First Things First on such indicators of student achievement as graduation rates and scores on standardized tests.

The First Things First Evaluation

Table 1.1

Schools Districts and Secondary Schools Implementing First Things First

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Kansas City (KS) Public Schools

    Wyandotte High School
    Central Middle School
    Northwest Middle School

    Washington High School
    Arrowhead Middle School
    Eisenhower Middle School

    Harmon High School*
    Argentine Middle School*
    Rosedale Middle School*
    Schlagle High School*
    Coronado Middle School*
    West Middle School*

Houston (TX) Independent School District

    Lee High School*[†]
    Sharpstown Middle School*[†]

    Sam Houston High School*[††]
    Sharpstown High School*[††]
    Fondren Middle School*[††]
    Fonville Middle School*[††]
    Welch Middle School*[††]

Riverview Gardens (MO) Public Schools

    Riverview Gardens High School*[†]
    Central Middle School*[†]
    East Middle School*[†]

Greenville (MS) Public Schools

    Greenville-Weston High School*[†]

Shaw (MS) Public Schools

    Shaw High School*[†]

SOURCES: IRRE and MDRC documents.

NOTES: *Denotes an expansion site under the OERI Scaling Up First Things First contract.
[†]Denotes a Group I school: planning year 2000-2001; implementation year 2001-2002.
[††]Denotes a Group II school: planning year 2001-2002; implementation year 2002-2003.

the schools whose early experience implementing the initiative is considered in this report. The Group II schools include two more high schools and three more middle schools, all in Houston. These schools underwent their planning year during the 2001-2002 academic year and their implementation year during the 2002-2003 academic year.[6]

All the expansion schools were selected according to a set of criteria devised by IRRE.[7] In short, IRRE was interested in selecting low-performing schools that served a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and that were judged to have the desire and capacity to reform according to the principles of First Things First. IRRE's site-selection mantra was "Do they need it? Do they want it? Can they do it?"

The Initiative's Program Model and Theory of Change

First Things First is a whole-school reform that calls for key changes in school structure, instruction, and governance and accountability. The initiative maps out a strategy toward achieving these key changes through a set of seven critical features that — when supplemented by a commitment to reform — present a set of conditions deemed necessary to facilitate support and engagement among students and teachers. Increased support and engagement in learning behaviors are seen as critical antecedents to the intervention's desired long-term outcomes. The model holds that creating strong, caring teacher-student relationships will give students a sense of autonomy and confidence and ultimately will contribute to an increased commitment to school through attendance and persistence and to higher academic achievement.

IRRE developed a framework for putting the seven critical features in place that requires participating districts and schools to engage in several months of preparation prior to full-on implementation. During this planning year, school personnel are acquainted with the intervention and are led through the beginning stages of reorganization according to the seven critical features. Success hinges on the consistent cooperation, commitment, and leadership of several key personnel. As part of the preparation, districts are required to appoint a School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) for each participating school. The SIF plays a critical role in bringing the initiative to the school. With help from the principal, the SIF is responsible for carrying the school forward through the process of change, while managing day-to-day developments and striving to engage all participants in the planning process. The SIF works closely with the principal, who by design supports the SIF and works on maintaining staff enthusiasm about the intervention. The superintendent's responsibilities include overseeing the progress of the intervention, keeping the central office aware of new developments, and promoting the intervention

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[6]As Table 1.1 indicates, two Kansas City, Kansas, high schools and their feeder middle schools are also part of the Scaling Up First Things First demonstration.

[7]For a detailed description of the site-selection criteria, see Quint (2002, Chapter 2).

to the community. All the while, IRRE monitors the whole evolution, providing ongoing technical support and offering advice when necessary.

At the core of the First Things First initiative is a theory of change that articulates how and why the intervention is expected to increase student achievement. This theory of change, shown in Figure 1.1, is itself grounded in substantial research conducted by Connell and others on the factors that contribute to high engagement and high achievement among adolescents, on the literature on organizational change and effective educational practices, and on the experiences of schools that have succeeded with students who might otherwise be at high risk of school failure.[8] A key premise of the model is that humans have fundamental needs to feel *competent*, to feel *autonomous,* and to feel *related.* That is, they need to feel that they can act in ways that will produce desired effects, that they can make independent choices, and that they are securely attached to important others. Two further premises are that positive development is facilitated by social contexts that meet these fundamental needs and that there are specific elements within these contexts that support or hinder such development.

Box B of Figure 1.1 shows the seven critical features of First Things First in abbreviated form; they are elaborated in Table 1.2. The order of the critical features does not denote any priority in terms of importance. Rather, all the critical features represent key elements within the context of schools that are intended to respond to both students' and teachers' fundamental human needs and to transform schools into settings where these needs are fulfilled. These critical features — seen as critical antecedents to improved student outcomes — also aim at improving and increasing support and engagement among both teachers and students. It is worth pointing out that these elements are not original or unique to First Things First. They are found, singly or in combination, in many whole-school reform initiatives and thus can be taken as reflecting the best current thinking about the aspects of schools that make them most conducive to learning. As discussed in this report, what First Things First brings to schools is not merely a set of features but also a variety of strategies for putting them in place.

The first four of these critical features describe structural and instructional changes that respond to and help satisfy students' basic needs, as follows:

1. Lower student-adult ratios and increased instructional time in language arts and math classes create opportunities for students to feel known, liked, and cared about by their teachers.

2. Continuity of care across the school day and across school years is another means of enhancing personal support. It further allows students to develop a

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[8]See, for example, Connell and Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, and Connell, 1998.

The First Things First Evaluation

Figure 1.1

The Initiative's Theory of Change

A

Initiate Change Strategies

Building education stakeholders' awareness, knowledge, engagement, and commitment to reform

B

Implement Seven Critical Features of Reform

Structural Changes
- Lower student-adult ratios
- Continuity of care

Instructional Changes
- High, clear, and fair standards
- Enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized
- Staff equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction

Accountability and Governance Changes
- Collective responsibility
- Flexible allocation of resources

C₁

Increase Support and Opportunities for Students

Students' experience of support

Students' beliefs about themselves

Student engagement

C₂

Increase Support and Opportunities for Adults in School

Adults' experience of support

Adults' beliefs about themselves and school

Adult engagement

D

Change Educational Outcomes

Student performance and adjustment

The First Things First Evaluation

Table 1.2

The Seven Critical Features of First Things First

Structural changes

1. Lower student-adult ratios to 15:1 during language arts and math classes for at least 10 hours per week.[a]

2. Provide continuity of care across the school day, across the school years, and between school and home by forming small learning communities. The same core group of eight to ten professionals stays with the same group of 150-350 students for extended periods during the school day for all three years of middle school and for at least two-year periods in high school. The Family Advocate System is also aimed at ensuring continuity of care between staff of the small learning communities and students' families.

Instructional changes

3. Set high, clear, and fair academic and conduct standards that define clearly what all students will know and be able to do by the time they leave high school and at points along the way. Performance on standards-based tests is linked directly to students' advancement and grading, drives curriculum and instruction in all courses, and is discussed regularly with students and their families. Adults and students agree on conduct standards, which are reinforced by adults modeling positive behaviors and attitudes and which are sustained by clear benefits to students and adults for meeting them and consequences for violating them.

4. Provide enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, by making learning more active and connected in safe and respectful learning environments; to perform, by linking assessment strategies that use multiple modes of learning and tie performance directly to standards; and to be recognized, by creating individual and collective incentives for student achievement and by providing leadership opportunities in academic and nonacademic areas.

5. Equip, empower, and expect all staff to improve instruction by creating a shared vision and expectation of high-quality teaching and learning in all classrooms; supporting small learning communities' implementation of research-based instructional strategies to fulfill that vision; and engaging all staff in ongoing study to improve curricular and instructional approaches.

Accountability and governance changes

6. Allow for flexible allocation of available resources by teams and schools, based on instructional and interpersonal needs of students. Resources include people (students and staff); instructional facilities; time for instructional planning and professional development; and discretionary funds.

7. Assure collective responsibility by providing collective incentives and consequences for small learning communities, schools, and central office staff that are linked to change in student performance.

SOURCE: IRRE documents.

NOTE: [a]Since the planning year, IRRE expanded the scope of the first critical feature to include increased instructional time.

clear and stable sense of their teachers' expectations and standards, against which they can evaluate their own work. Continuity of care between the home and the school is also the goal of the initiative's Family Advocate System.

3. High, clear, and fair standards provide clear benchmarks about what teachers consider high-quality work and suitable conduct; they enable students to identify and put into practice strategies for doing well and behaving appropriately.

4. Enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized offer students support for meeting higher expectations through an array of choices and options for developing and exhibiting individual capacities and strengths.

Box C1 of Figure 1.1 represents the next step in the theory of change. The theory states that implementation of the first four critical features — by increasing the interpersonal supports for learning that students receive from key adults and peers — will induce students to develop positive beliefs about themselves and school. Specifically, students will come to see themselves as more competent in relation to school, more autonomous, and more related to others in the school setting. Furthermore, students who hold positive beliefs about themselves in relation to school will, in turn, display greater engagement with academics. Such "engagement" entails a belief that doing well is personally important and a set of behaviors and feelings that back up that belief and put it into practice (for example, trying hard, preparing for class, paying attention, taking responsibility, avoiding anger and blame when academic setbacks occur, and responding positively to challenge).

Engagement is the most proximal predictor of student performance and, within the model, is expected to have the strongest association with educational outcomes, which appear in Box D. These outcomes fall under the three general rubrics of *achievement* (standardized test scores, credits), *commitment* (attendance, persistence), and *behavior* (disciplinary actions).

An analogous process exists for teachers (Box C2). Teachers' experiences of interpersonal and instructional support from their colleagues and others (for example, students, district and school administrators, parents) affect their beliefs about themselves, which in turn influence their own sense of engagement — their willingness to do the utmost to meet their students' needs.

Three critical features of the program model are directed toward teachers. The first of these straightforwardly addresses instructional change:

5. All staff will be equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction. One vehicle for achieving this goal is the formation of teacher learning communities; teachers are expected to work together in small groups to discuss and apply appropriate research-based instructional strategies to meet

students' learning needs and achieve high standards. Staff also receive training and ongoing support to implement these new practices.

The last two critical features involve changes in accountability and governance. They focus on realigning school- and district-level policies, expectations, and resources to support implementation of the preceding critical features:

6. Collective responsibility sets clear targets for improvements in instructional practice and student performance and behavior, with rewards for achieving the targets and consequences for falling short.

7. Flexible allocation of resources allows teachers and schools to better respond to the interpersonal and instructional needs of students. These resources include personnel, time (for example, for planning and professional development), space, and discretionary funds.

The vertical arrows connecting Boxes C1 and C2 in both directions indicate that there are reciprocal influences between increased supports and opportunities for students and for adults. Changes in one promote changes in the other, and vice versa. For example, teachers may modify their instruction in ways that promote student engagement, and such engagement will encourage teachers to strengthen and broaden their commitment to instructional improvement.

From a broader perspective, Box A of Figure 1.1 represents the antecedent stage in the theory of change. According to the theory, initiating whole-school change requires that key stakeholders in the community, the school districts, and the schools themselves perceive a need to change. It also calls for a clear understanding of the change that is sought, a willingness to take the first steps on the part of teachers, and an intense and sustained commitment on the part of administrators.

First Things First has a repertory of strategies for introducing change. The "early outcomes" of the initiative may be viewed in part as measures of the effectiveness of these change strategies. In this regard, key constructs that are measured include teachers' knowledge of the critical features of First Things First, their preparation to put the critical features in place, their belief that implementing these changes is important to students' academic success, and their personal and collective commitment to the reform process.

The Scope and Contents of This Report

This report covers the first year of implementation activity as the Group I schools that are featured in the 2002 report began the process of transforming themselves by adopting First

Things First. It examines the intervention's early and intermediate outcomes, presented in Table 1.3, and compares results after the first implementation year with planning-year results. It focuses on three vehicles for enacting the initiative's critical features: small learning communities, the Family Advocate System, and instructional improvement.

The First Things First Evaluation

Table 1.3

Early and Intermediate Outcomes Measured in This Report

Early outcomes (staff)

  Knowledge: Staff knowledge of the initiative's seven critical features
  Readiness: Staff feelings of preparedness to implement the critical features
  Urgency: Staff feelings that implementing the critical features is essential to improved
    student performance
  Personal commitment: Staff members' own feelings about implementing the critical features
  Collective commitment: Staff members' ratings of their colleagues' feelings about implementing
    the critical features

Intermediate outcomes (students)

  Support
  Engagement

Intermediate outcomes (staff)

  Support
  Engagement
    Behavioral and emotional engagement
    Reaction to challenge
    Collective engagement

SOURCE: IRRE documents.

The report consists of six chapters. After this introductory chapter:

- Chapter 2 examines the development of small learning communities (SLCs) that require small groups of students and their core teachers to remain together throughout the students' duration in the school. SLCs promote more personalized learning by virtue of their small size and the more long-standing and intense interactions that they permit among staff, students, and students' families. The chapter describes the structure and functioning of SLCs during the first implementation year and also discusses students' and teachers' attitudes toward their SLCs.

- Chapter 3 considers the Family Advocate System, an advisory system established to promote and maintain communication among staff, students, and students' parents. The chapter examines the system's staffing structure, the frequency of meetings among participants, and the content of their discussions. The chapter also explores students' and staff's attitudes toward the Family Advocate System and teachers' attitudes toward parents.

- Chapter 4 reflects on the progress of the intervention's changes aimed at improving instruction. The chapter takes into account teachers' attitudes toward professional development and the support, pressure, and flexibility that teachers received in implementing these changes.

- Chapter 5 summarizes teachers' perspectives on the changes in their schools during the planning and implementation years and assesses the amount of progress made in attaining the initiative's intermediate goals: increased support and engagement for both students and teachers.

- Chapter 6 concludes the report and reflects on early findings.

The report does not cover the second implementation year at the Group I schools nor the first implementation year at the Group II schools; these will be examined in the final report on the project. Chapters 2 through 4, however, do include text boxes that discuss IRRE's plans for moving forward with SLC development, the Family Advocate System, and instructional improvement efforts in the coming year.

At this juncture, it is too early to focus on whether or not First Things First raised students' levels of performance. The final report will be comprehensive and will examine the intervention's effects on this and other outcomes in all 13 schools.

Data Sources

Throughout, this report seeks to incorporate the perspectives of the program developers, administrators and school staff, and students. To achieve this goal, the report draws on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data come from a survey administered in person to staff members and students at all schools in March and April 2001 and 2002. Surveys were completed by 588 staff members and 7,023 students across the eight schools. For purposes of comparison with surveys previously conducted in the planning year, the analysis is restricted to the 528 staff members who reported on the survey that they had a role in the classroom, whether as teachers or as aides or paraprofessionals. Consequently, the views of other school personnel (administrators, counselors, librarians, and so on) are not represented in the survey analysis unless these individuals also had a role in the classroom. Because much of the

data collected through the surveys are sensitive, the schools are not identified by name in the report's tables but are simply labeled A through H.

  The qualitative data largely reflect the efforts of field researchers who have been working at the initiative's sites since the fall semester of 2000. Over the course of the 2001-2002 implementation year, among other activities, the field researchers conducted formal structured interviews with the eight SIFs responsible for leading the reform effort at the different schools, 126 teachers, and 56 students. They also observed whole-school and work-group meetings. The authors of the report also visited the sites in April and May 2002 and interviewed 25 district officials, principals, and SIFs across the sites. Published data on the school districts and schools rounded out the interview and field notes. In addition, the IRRE project manager and site coordinators were interviewed, and IRRE documents that relate to activities in the implementation year were examined.

Chapter 2

Small Learning Communities
in the First Things First Schools

The establishment of small learning communities (SLCs) — organized around such broad themes as "Science and Technology," "Health and Wellness," and "The Performing Arts" — is the fundamental structural change that First Things First introduces into schools. In the view of planners at the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), small groups are critical to breaking down the impersonality and anonymity that students often experience in large urban schools. By grouping up to 350 students with their core-subject and other key teachers and having them remain together for several years, SLCs become the key subunit of the school with which staff and students identify.[1] Such identification is fostered by the fact that each SLC occupies a distinct physical space (that is, a group of adjacent classrooms) in the school.

According to the initiative's theory of change, SLCs provide settings in which mutually caring relationships between students and teachers, and among members of each group, develop and flourish. The thematic nature of the SLCs unites teachers and students around shared interests and has implications for instruction as well as group cohesion, helping to define the electives that each community offers and giving focus to the core-subject curriculum and to the development of interdisciplinary units.[2] The SLCs are also intended to serve as "communities of inquiry," in which teachers — in regular meetings held during their common planning periods — can examine their instructional practices, support each others' efforts to innovate and im-

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[1]IRRE has changed its guideline on the number of students who can be assigned to an SLC, raising the upper limit from 250 to 350. This change was made because, over time, it became clear that the smaller the number of students in an SLC, the more likely it was that teachers would have to teach students from more than one SLC. By increasing the number of students in each SLC, the likelihood increased that staff members would be able to teach only students from one SLC.

[2]As used in this report, the term "core subjects" refers to English/language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Because of its small size, Shaw High School did not house theme-based communities. Instead, it was organized into an Upper Community of eleventh- and twelfth-graders and a Lower Community of eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-graders.

In addition, Lee High School and Riverview Gardens High School each implemented a "transitional" SLC, although of different types. Lee's community, the "Newcomers," is for beginning and intermediate-level students of English as a Second Language (ESL), who are enrolled for no more than a year in order to learn basic English skills; after that, the students select and join a thematic SLC for the remainder of their time in the school. Riverview Gardens High School's transitional SLC is an "Opportunities Center" where students who are more than two years behind in their skills and who have not been successful in ninth grade spend a year working on credit recovery so that they, too, can then select a thematic community in which they will remain until they graduate.

prove as teachers, and develop a greater sense of accountability for student outcomes. Finally, the SLCs are the vehicle through which teachers can exercise greater decision-making authority about how resources should be expended.

In the spring of the planning year, IRRE made preliminary recommendations to principals regarding staff assignments to SLCs; school administrators reviewed and sometimes revised these assignments; and teachers provided input as well. Each SLC generally contained two language arts and two math teachers, along with either one or two social studies and science teachers, depending on the theme of the SLC, and teachers of the electives associated with that theme. Along with the subject to be taught, these staff assignments took into account such factors as teachers' stated preferences and interests and the need to balance such characteristics as teaching experience, gender, and ethnicity. Each SLC also had at least one, and sometimes two, coordinators — teachers who received extra pay (typically about $2,000, an amount that was footed by the school) for taking on administrative and leadership responsibilities. One planning-year task of the newly formed SLCs was to recruit students, and teachers worked enthusiastically toward that end by designing eye-catching recruitment materials and organizing recruitment fairs. Observers judged that once teachers began to work together in planning and carrying out concrete activities, their attitude toward First Things First became more positive than had been the case earlier in the year.

It was during the implementation year, however, that SLCs became the key organizing principle of the Group I expansion-site schools (listed in Table 1.1 of Chapter 1).[3] This chapter examines four major topics associated with the SLC structure and functioning: continuity of care, SLC "purity," the frequency and uses of SLC staff meetings, and the SLC as a locus of decision-making and accountability. The chapter concludes by discussing staff members' responses to the SLCs. Chapter 4 describes the extent of thematic instruction that was fostered by the SLCs.

Continuity of Care

Along with the Family Advocate System, discussed in Chapter 3, SLCs are the primary means of implementing the concept of continuity of care, a critical feature of the initiative. As program developers envisioned it, teachers and students in the same SLC — over the years that they remained together — would build relationships marked by familiarity, trust, and mutual caring.[4]

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[3]In the Group II expansion-site schools, IRRE deliberately scheduled the SLC assignment process four to eight weeks earlier in the planning year than had been the case with the Group I schools. Teachers thus had more time to work with other members of their SLCs before implementation formally began.

[4]The concept of SLCs was not altogether unfamiliar to the Group I schools. Both middle schools in Riverview Gardens had previously implemented a structure in which groups of teachers began with incoming groups

(continued)

The developers recommended that SLCs mix students across grade levels. One implication of this approach is that teachers who had taught only a single grade in any given year (for example, seventh-grade English or ninth-grade math) now were more likely to teach more than one level of their subject. In SLCs with only one science or social studies teacher, teaching multiple "preparations" was the norm. Thus, for example, a Lee High School social studies teacher who in the past had taught only world geography to ninth-graders could also be assigned to teach world history to tenth-graders and American history to eleventh-graders.

The data indicate clearly that many teachers who during the planning year had specialized in teaching students at a certain grade level were required to broaden their efforts during the implementation year. During the planning year, 31 percent of the teachers reported that they taught students in just one grade; this proportion shrank to 7 percent during the implementation year. Conversely, during the planning year, about half the teachers (51 percent) said that they taught students in three or more different grades; during the implementation year, that figure rose to 66 percent.[5]

Teachers frequently felt stressed by these new demands. Especially at the beginning of the implementation year, there was considerable resistance and complaining about teaching multiple grades. As one School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) — a self-avowed "teacher champion" — described the situation toward the end of that year:

> They [the teachers] have worked their fannies off; they've become brand-new teachers again. The master teachers don't feel like they did a great job this year, because they're learning brand-new curricula this year, having previously taught just one grade. This year, teachers have taught what they had to teach, not just what they wanted to teach.

Across all schools, some 85 percent of the teachers reported that they felt well qualified to teach all the subjects they taught. (Differences among the schools in this regard are not statistically significant.)[6] This suggests that the opposition to multigrade instruction cited above related

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of seventh-graders and moved up with those students to teach the eighth-grade curriculum in the following year (the schools have only these two grades). After the eighth-graders advanced to high school, the teachers would drop back to start again with a new cohort of seventh-graders. IRRE recommended against this "looping" model, because experience indicates that it is not flexible enough to easily accommodate cohorts that are especially large or small.

[5]As detailed in Chapter 4, Riverview Gardens instituted multilevel instruction in its middle schools during the implementation year, so that seventh- and eighth-graders who had previously been taught separately were taught together in all their core classes. Excluding these schools from the analysis of number of grades taught does not change the overall result: Implementation-year teachers were much more likely to teach students at many grade levels than were planning-year teachers.

[6]Throughout this report, differences are described as "statistically significant" if they are unlikely to have arisen by chance. Three levels of statistical significance are identified: Differences are significant at the .10 level if

(continued)

more to teachers' annoyance about the multiple preparations involved than to their doubts about their own competence.

Over time, some teachers changed their minds and acknowledged that teaching multiple grades had been a valuable learning experience for them. For one thing, some commented that the experience had taught them to be more organized and focused, because they simply could not afford to waste time. And some noted that teaching different grade levels had given them a better sense of what students in earlier grades needed to know in order to be successful later on. Responses of this sort may be indicative of a growing sense of accountability among faculty members for their students' academic achievement.

On both the planning-year and the implementation-year surveys, teachers were asked a series of questions about their attitudes toward the seven critical features of First Things First.[7] These "early outcomes" questions tap teachers' knowledge of each critical feature, their preparation to implement it, their belief that such implementation is important for students' academic success, and both their own attitudes toward the critical feature and their assessment of their colleagues' attitudes toward it. The initiative's theory of change holds that high levels of positive responses are essential if implementation is to be thorough and effective. The findings about these responses are woven into Chapters 2 and 4 and are summarized in Chapter 5.[8]

Figure 2.1 shows how teachers responded to a series of questions about SLCs.[9] A pattern that characterizes teachers' responses to questions about each of the critical features emerges here. During the implementation year, teachers were far more likely than they had been during the planning year to say that they knew "a lot" about the critical feature (in this instance, SLCs with continuity of care): The percentage of teachers giving this response increased sharply, from 33 percent to 59 percent. They were also more likely to say that they were "well prepared" to implement it (43 percent in the implementation year, compared with 19 percent

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the probability that they arose by chance is 1 in 10 or less, at the .05 level if the probability that they arose by chance is 1 in 20 or less, and at the .01 level if the probability that they arose by chance is 1 in 100 or less.

   [7]The analysis examined the survey responses of staff who reported having classroom responsibilities. By coincidence, 528 staff members fell into this category in both the planning and the implementation years. As expected, there was considerable overlap between the two sets of survey respondents: The large majority of individuals who completed the planning-year survey remained at their schools and thus completed the implementation-year survey as well. But some teachers left their schools after the planning year, and others joined the staff during the implementation year; both of these groups therefore responded to only one of the two surveys.

   [8]One concern is that there are large numbers of missing responses to these early-outcomes questions. The researchers believe that this is attributable to the confusing layout of the survey instrument, which was self-administered, rather than to systematic biases differentiating nonrespondents from those who answered the questions. The possibility of bias cannot be eliminated, however.

   [9]The questions asked about teachers' attitudes toward "small learning communities, where teachers and other staff stay with the same group of students for multiple years," thus emphasizing the role of SLCs in ensuring continuity of care.

The First Things First Evaluation

Figure 2.1

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Multiyear Small Learning Communities**
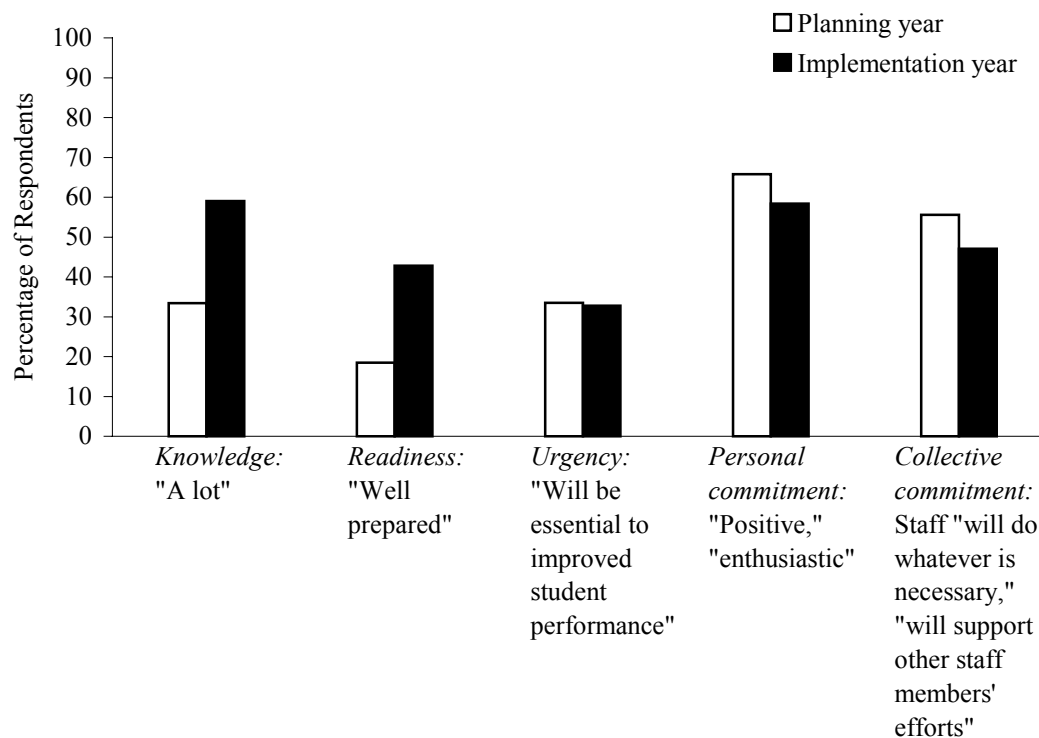
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

during the planning year). Virtually identical proportions in both years (34 percent during the planning year, 33 percent during the implementation year) opined that SLCs would "be essential" to improved student performance.

At the same time, some of the optimism that had marked teachers' attitudes toward SLCs during the planning year appeared to have dissipated. During the planning year, 66 percent of the teachers reported feeling "positive" or "enthusiastic" about SLCs; that proportion dropped to 58 percent during the implementation year. Tellingly, during the planning year, 56 percent of the teachers said that they would "support efforts to implement SLCs" or themselves "do whatever is necessary to implement SLCs"; during the implementation year, this percentage fell to 47 percent; conversely, the percentage who believed that most staff members at their school opposed SLC implementation either actively or passively rose from 19 percent to 27 percent. These changes over time may be seen as reflecting a newfound realism on the part of the teachers about the difficulties of putting a well-functioning SLC into place, as documented in this chapter.

Teachers' answers to interviewers' questions suggest a more positive view of an underlying goal of SLCs — continuity of care — than their survey responses. Most of those interviewed saw the logic of continuity of care, and most were positively disposed to it. They recognized that problems could arise when a teacher and student didn't get along but had to remain together; and they occasionally complained that they would lose touch with students not in their SLCs. But these negatives were outweighed by the advantage of getting to know their students' strengths and weaknesses better. One teacher's balanced but overall positive assessment of the concept was representative:

> I can see the good and the bad in it. It definitely gives me an advantage for the first of next year — I will already know them and know who will need more help. The disadvantage is where I don't get along with them. Overall, I think it is beneficial.

SLC "Purity"

A key hypothesis of First Things First is that, for SLCs to function effectively, teachers and students must have a clear sense of community membership. The analysis therefore examines the extent to which the intervention succeeded in creating "pure" SLCs (in which students take their core-subject classes from faculty members who belong to their SLCs) and the factors undercutting such "purity."

In response to survey questions, most teachers reported that they belonged to an SLC. Across the sites, some 92 percent of the teachers surveyed reported that they were connected to

an SLC in some way: 76 percent were members of one SLC; 5 percent were "affiliated with" an SLC; and 10 percent were members of or affiliated with more than one SLC.[10] As would be expected, schools with smaller faculties were more likely to have teachers who straddled SLCs. Also as expected, core-subject teachers were more likely than teachers of other subjects (such as foreign languages, physical education, or other "specialties") to be assigned to an SLC in the first place and to be assigned to just one SLC. The student survey assumed that all students were assigned to SLCs and did not ascertain the percentage who lacked (or did not know whether they had) such an assignment, but other sources indicate that the proportion was extremely low.

Assigning staff and students to an SLC was one thing, and the schools appear to have been quite successful on this score. It proved much harder, however, to schedule classes so that teachers taught only students within their SLCs and students took all their core courses from SLC teachers. Part of the difficulty with scheduling is inherent in the program design, which limits scheduling options: A ninth-grader, for instance, cannot be assigned to just any ninth-grade English class but only to those classes taught by a teacher in the student's SLC. The schedule has to ensure, too, that all core-subject and thematic elective teachers within an SLC share a common planning period during which they can meet.[11]

School counselors and other personnel who were charged with scheduling added to the difficulty. Some had an incomplete understanding of what they needed to do. (IRRE provided technical assistance to the sites in the person of a consultant who was gifted in figuring out solutions to complex scheduling problems, but by many accounts the consultant had a hard time explaining to others how he came up with these solutions.) Some school counselors resisted making the necessary changes — sometimes on principled grounds but other times not.[12] Then, too, despite IRRE's entreaties and warnings, many counselors figured that they could leave the job of scheduling until the two weeks before school started, as they had done in the past. Only then did they learn that the computerized scheduling programs with which they were familiar could not easily be adjusted to meet the initiative's special requirements. Some schools had to resort to hand-scheduling students at the eleventh hour, placing them into SLC classes when they could do so easily but into any available class when difficulties arose. Indeed, at one high school, scheduling problems were so severe that students did not have schedules at all when the school doors opened, and the first few days of school were essentially lost to instruction. In

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[10]These percentages do not sum to the total of 92 percent because of rounding.

[11]During the teachers' planning period, SLC students were placed in physical education, foreign language, or other classes not linked to particular SLCs. As a consequence, enrollment in these classes could be quite high.

[12]Thus, for example, some counselors were concerned with maintaining comparable class sizes in all sections of the same course (English 1, for instance), even if that meant having students take the course outside their SLC; in so doing, they gave higher priority to numerical equity than to ensuring SLC purity. On the other hand, some counselors resisted First Things First simply because they, too, were assigned to SLCs and did not want to have the same students on their caseloads for all four years of high school.

many schools, major scheduling issues persisted through the first half of the school year and were resolved only at midyear.

Data from surveys administered during the second semester indicate that schools were only partly successful in achieving SLC purity, either for teachers or for students. Core-subject teachers who were assigned to a single SLC were asked to estimate the percentage of students they taught who belonged to their SLCs. Across all schools, 68 percent of these teachers estimated that three-quarters or more of their students were members of their SLCs. Students, for their part, were asked whether their core-subject teachers belonged to the same SLCs that they did. Among students taking three or four core subjects, 55 percent reported that all three or four of their teachers belonged to their SLCs.

Moving Forward with Small Learning Communities

As a learning organization, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) constantly evaluates its past practice and, when necessary, revises its approaches in an effort to support better implementation. Recognizing that the start of the new school year plays an important role in setting the tone and expectations for the entire year to come, IRRE tackled head on the scheduling problem that sites initially faced in implementing First Things First. For one thing, it pushed both the Group I and the Group II schools to complete scheduling well before the start of the school year. To ensure this, IRRE took care to bring the counselors in the Group II schools "on board" earlier than had been the case in the Group I schools. In this way, the counselors — who bear major responsibility for scheduling in many schools — would be more familiar with, and more supportive of, the reform and would make scheduling decisions that supported rather than undermined the reform's principles, especially the principle of SLC purity. IRRE also monitored the scheduling process more closely, to see that it occurred in a timely manner.

IRRE also took extra measures to help SLCs function more effectively. All Group II schools received two days of training before they began their implementation year, and Group I schools that requested it received "refresher" training. One training day involved teachers' meeting in their SLCs to prepare to work together over the next year. (The other day was devoted to the Family Advocate System; see Chapter 3.) The training paid particular attention to the use of common planning time: how to make meetings productive, respectful, and ultimately beneficial to students. IRRE also developed a guide to help teachers use their common planning time effectively.

The data suggest that it was easier to achieve SLC purity in middle schools than in high schools. Some students in the upper grades of high school needed certain courses in order to graduate, so it was a priority to ensure that they took these courses, whether within their SLC or not. Another factor was that upper-level courses in high school — especially in science and social studies — are frequently electives; to make offering them feasible, these classes had to draw on students from more than one SLC. The same was true of Advanced Placement courses, which on occasion also had to draw students from across SLCs.

A final factor complicating achievement of SLC purity was that administrators sometimes placed higher priority on other goals. For example, one principal was especially proud of the school's wide range of electives (for instance, band) and was reluctant to limit access to these electives to the students in the SLC where the courses were housed. At this school, SLC purity took a distinct second place to the objective of preserving open enrollment in the electives.

SLC Meetings: Their Structure, Content, and Functioning

IRRE strongly recommended that SLC members meet for 180 minutes of common planning time per week. Table 2.1 shows that, across all schools, only about one in six teachers reported that their SLC met for this length of time; 35 percent of the teachers said that the SLC meetings occupied at least 120 minutes per week, while another 30 percent said that the meetings took up less than 60 minutes per week. The table also makes clear, however, that the various SLCs within a school made quite different decisions about how often to meet and how long the meetings should be.[13]

Teachers who belonged to or were affiliated with an SLC reported attending the large majority of SLC meetings (82 percent; not shown in table). Interview and observational data suggest, however, that the teachers were not always fully attentive to SLC business; some teachers simultaneously graded papers or took care of such personal matters as making phone calls or balancing their checkbook.

The First Things First staff survey also asked teachers which topics they addressed in their SLC meetings and with what degree of effectiveness. Across the sites, teachers rated individual students' conduct and academic issues as dominating the SLC discussions; instructional

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[13]SLC meetings were less developed at School A than at the other sites. Three-quarters of the teachers there reported that SLC meetings occupied less than 60 minutes per week.

The First Things First Evaluation

Table 2.1

**Teacher-Reported Time Spent in Small Learning Community Meetings per Week,
by School**

	School								All Group I Schools
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
Minutes per week (%)									
Less than 60	78.9	43.4	38.5	21.1	19.1	26.9	13.6	31.8	29.9
60-90	0.0	22.6	23.1	10.0	8.5	17.2	13.6	2.3	12.9
90-120	15.8	13.2	23.1	25.6	34.0	25.8	13.6	13.6	22.3
120-180	0.0	9.4	11.5	24.4	31.9	12.9	13.6	20.5	17.5
More than 180	5.3	11.3	3.8	18.9	6.4	17.2	45.5	31.8	17.3
Number of meetings per week (%)									
0	0.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	1.2
1	89.5	13.2	9.1	8.2	0.0	8.2	4.5	0.0	12.1
2	5.3	66.0	54.5	73.2	6.0	73.2	9.1	15.2	51.1
3	0.0	9.4	13.6	5.2	88.0	5.2	31.8	32.6	20.0
4	0.0	3.8	4.5	1.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	21.7	4.0
5	5.3	3.8	18.2	12.4	0.0	12.4	45.5	30.4	10.6
6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	0.2
Sample size	23	70	44	114	112	80	27	58	528

NOTES: The 42 teachers who were not affiliated with any SLC were excluded from this analysis. Also, the "minutes per week" and "number of meetings per week" questions had a high percentage of missing data (18 percent).

matters — the use of cooperative learning strategies or other teaching methods and the development of theme-based or interdisciplinary curricula — received much less attention. The qualitative data strongly support the quantitative findings that instructional issues were seldom discussed in SLC meetings. Teachers and others who were interviewed reported that a good deal of meeting time was spent talking about individual students' conduct and performance, calling and holding meetings with parents, reviewing information and directives handed down by administrators, arranging field trips, and preparing for SLC award ceremonies. Teachers viewed student award ceremonies as a response to the critical feature calling for "enriched and diverse opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized," and they put much thought into planning the events in the hope that students who received awards would feel more accomplished and more confident.[14]

Teachers, administrators, IRRE staff, and researchers alike also recognized that some SLCs functioned much more effectively than others. Most schools had one or more highly suc-

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[14]In fact, some teachers reported that some students who received awards continued to improve thereafter.

cessful SLCs, in which decisions were made collectively and by consensus, after respectful discussion. And all had at least one SLC that was just stumbling along. At their worst, SLC meetings were conflict-laden, and members were antagonistic toward one another. One teacher said of his SLC: "I had to stop going to the meetings. Emotionally it was too much. People were telling each other to shut up."

Leadership had a great deal to do with how effectively SLCs operated. Those coordinators who were well regarded by members of their SLCs were responsive to the teachers' input, delegated responsibility, and did not try to impose their own beliefs and preferences on others. Some coordinators lacked these leadership qualities. IRRE provided some training to the SLC coordinators at the end of the planning year and the beginning of the implementation year, as well as during periodic site visits by IRRE staff. IRRE also encouraged the School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs) to meet with and provide assistance to the coordinators — a process that occurred with varying degrees of frequency and efficacy. In general, however, there was consensus that SLC coordinators needed more training than they got.

Teachers responding to the staff survey tended to rate their SLCs' efforts to deal with the matters they discussed as being at least moderately effective. They were especially likely to view their discussions and actions with regard to student conduct as having had the desired effect. Although, as discussed further in Chapter 4, both the staff survey and the observations of SLC meetings indicate that teachers did not devote much attention to or make much progress in developing thematic and interdisciplinary curricula, some 60 percent of respondents reported that their efforts were "sort of" or "very" successful. It may be that teachers saw whatever progress they made in this area as an advance over past practice.

It appears that, at this early juncture, SLCs functioned more as a setting for teachers to discuss relatively "safe" issues concerning individual students than as a mechanism for probing their own instructional practices or those of their colleagues. This is not surprising, since the teachers had little prior experience working together. Their first task was to establish an atmosphere of trust and cooperation, which might be jeopardized if SLC members were to critique one another's performance in the very enterprise that drew them together: teaching. As one SIF put it, "Just having group meetings and working together is new and healthy."

Decision-Making and Accountability Within the SLCs

According to the First Things First model, teachers, acting in concert in their SLCs, have autonomy to make decisions about matters related to academics and to student conduct, within general building and district parameters. The SLC is also the entity in which accountability for student outcomes is lodged.

During the first implementation year, teachers in the SLCs exercised relatively limited decision-making responsibility. An early task at all schools was to come up with SLC-specific policies regarding acceptable conduct and how misbehavior would be treated and good behavior rewarded. The establishment of high, fair, and clear conduct standards is one of the intervention's critical features, and, as Figure 2.2 shows, the majority of teachers — 65 percent in the planning year and 63 percent in the implementation year — reported on the survey that putting such standards in place was critical to students' improved academic performance. The same pattern of survey responses as in Figure 2.1 holds here as well: Toward the end of the implementation year, teachers were more likely to report knowing a lot about this critical feature and being better prepared to implement it than they had been a year earlier. But they also reported feeling less positive or enthusiastic about establishing these conduct standards than they had been, and they believed that their colleagues were less positive as well.

Although the SLCs worked to establish policies for dealing with student behavior problems, what they could do was circumscribed by larger, schoolwide considerations, such as the elimination, at IRRE's recommendation, of in-school suspension as a penalty.[15] A few SLCs developed especially interesting responses; one, for example, instituted a "court" in which students who presented conduct problems were judged by their peers. Discussions about discipline often occupied a substantial amount of SLC meeting time, uniting teachers around a widely shared concern. The talks also made it apparent that some teachers lacked adequate classroom management skills and thus had special problems with student discipline.

Flexible allocation of available resources, including financial resources, is one of the initiative's seven critical features. As part of the effort to give teachers more autonomy, SLCs at most schools were given a relatively limited amount of money — about $3,000, on average — to spend as they saw fit, again within general guidelines.[16] Staff survey responses indicate that

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[15]IRRE staff reasoned that if teachers were unable to assign students to in-school suspension (which typically meant sending them to an assistant principal's office or to a study-hall room for an entire day), they would have to be more thoughtful about discipline policies and practices.

One SLC at Lee High School made the case to the principal that it should have the authority to assign students to in-school suspension, and the principal — taking seriously the precept that teachers should have decision-making authority wherever possible — agreed to let the SLC impose this penalty. Although teachers in the SLC made minimal use of this punishment, they felt that it was an effective deterrent to student misconduct, and they were gratified that the principal had acceded to their position.

[16]The Mississippi schools did not provide such allocations; administrators there expressed concern that teachers would not use these funds wisely. In Houston, the Sharpstown Middle School principal also did not allocate funds to the SLCs, noting that teachers had only to come to her with financial requests; in fact, teachers at the school appeared satisfied with this arrangement.

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Figure 2.2

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Establishing High, Clear, and Fair**
Student Conduct Standards
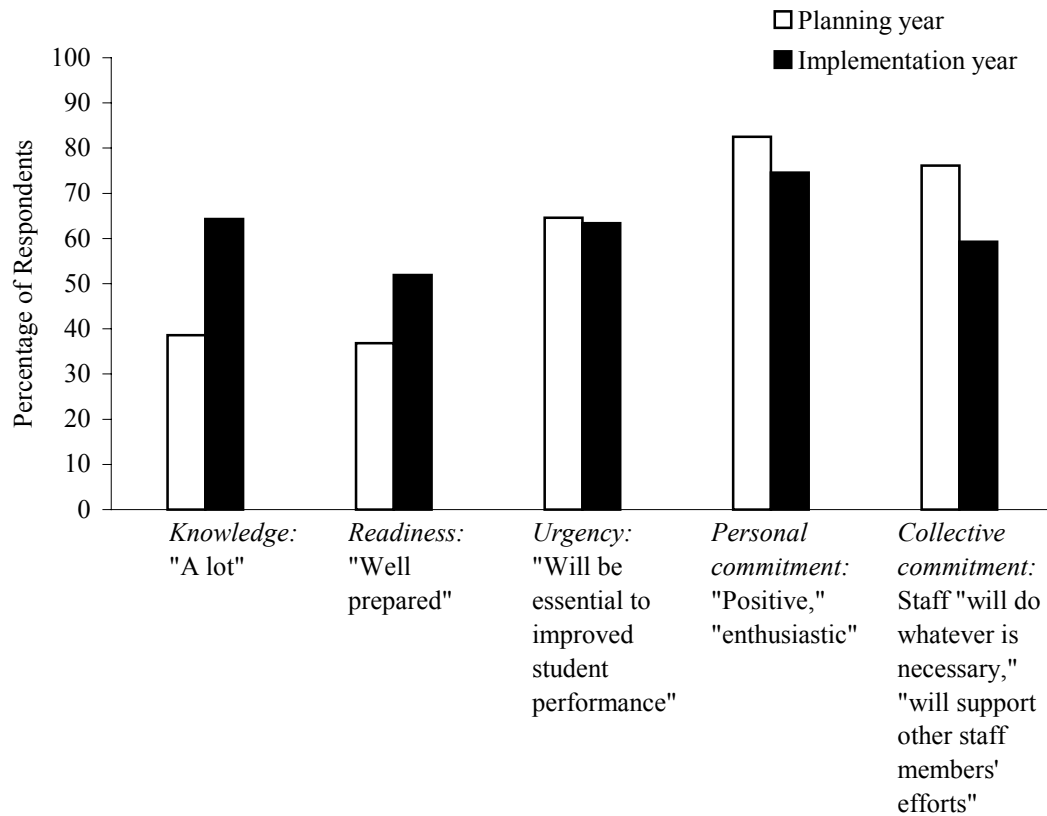
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

teachers recognized this change: The proportion of teachers saying that they had "a lot" or "some" involvement in the budgetary process in their school rose from 22 percent in the planning year to 30 percent in the implementation year, while the proportion saying that they had no involvement dropped from 40 percent to 29 percent; these differences are statistically significant. A few SLCs chose to spend part of the money to purchase additional books or to pay teachers to provide after-school tutoring for students in their SLCs. For the most part, however, the funds went to defray the cost of field trips, SLC parties, and similar events.

Figure 2.3 compares teachers' responses across the two years to a number of survey questions about flexible allocation of resources. The pattern of findings holds no surprises: During the implementation year, the proportion of teachers saying that they knew "a lot" about this critical feature doubled, from 15 percent to 30 percent, and the proportion saying that they were "well prepared" to implement the feature more than doubled, from 10 percent in the planning year to 22 percent in the implementation year. But while more than half the teachers reported that they felt "positive" or "enthusiastic" about this feature, the proportion who said so declined from the planning year (53 percent) to the implementation year (67 percent). And according to the implementation-year survey, fewer than half the teachers (45 percent) believed that their colleagues supported this critical feature — a sharp drop from the planning-year figure (65 percent).

In interviews, teachers were asked to what extent they felt accountable for their students' outcomes and whether they felt any differently than they had in the past. The vast majority said that they did feel accountable, although many emphasized that students and their parents also needed to take responsibility, and some noted the difficulty of achieving the desired gains when students had been ill-prepared in earlier grades. While most teachers said that they had always felt accountable and that they did not feel any different because of First Things First, a few commented that having students in their SLC increased their sense of collective responsibility. As one teacher explained:

> I've always felt that way with kids in my class, but now I feel like that about kids in the SLC that I don't have. It's definitely more broad than it has been in the past. It's a lot more personal than it was before. We try to establish that in the [student-teacher] conferences — I introduce myself as their future English teacher.

Figure 2.4 graphs teachers' responses to the survey questions about collective responsibility and shows the same pattern of results as the three previous figures. It registers an increase between the planning year and the implementation year in teachers' knowledge of the critical feature and their preparation to implement it, a similar sense of the feature's importance in both years, and a decrease in both personal commitment to the feature and perceived collective commitment to it.

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Figure 2.3

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Flexible Allocation of Resources**
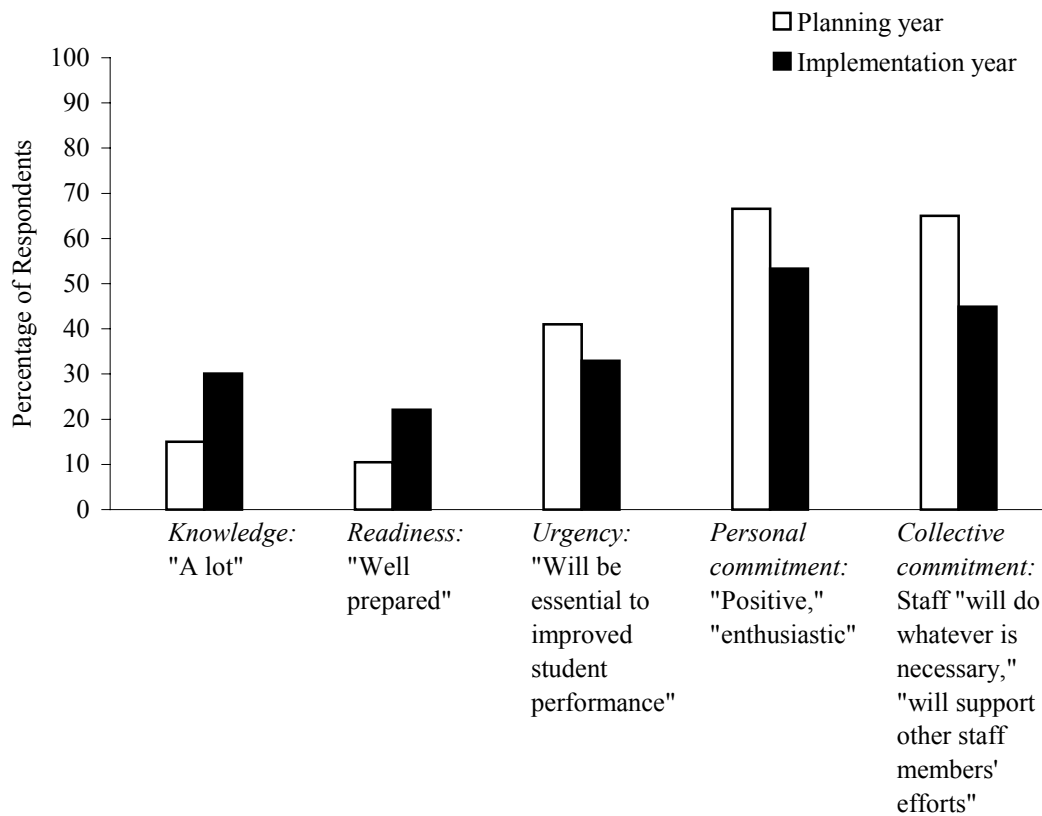
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

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Figure 2.4

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Collective Responsibility for Students' Meeting Academic and Behavioral Standards**
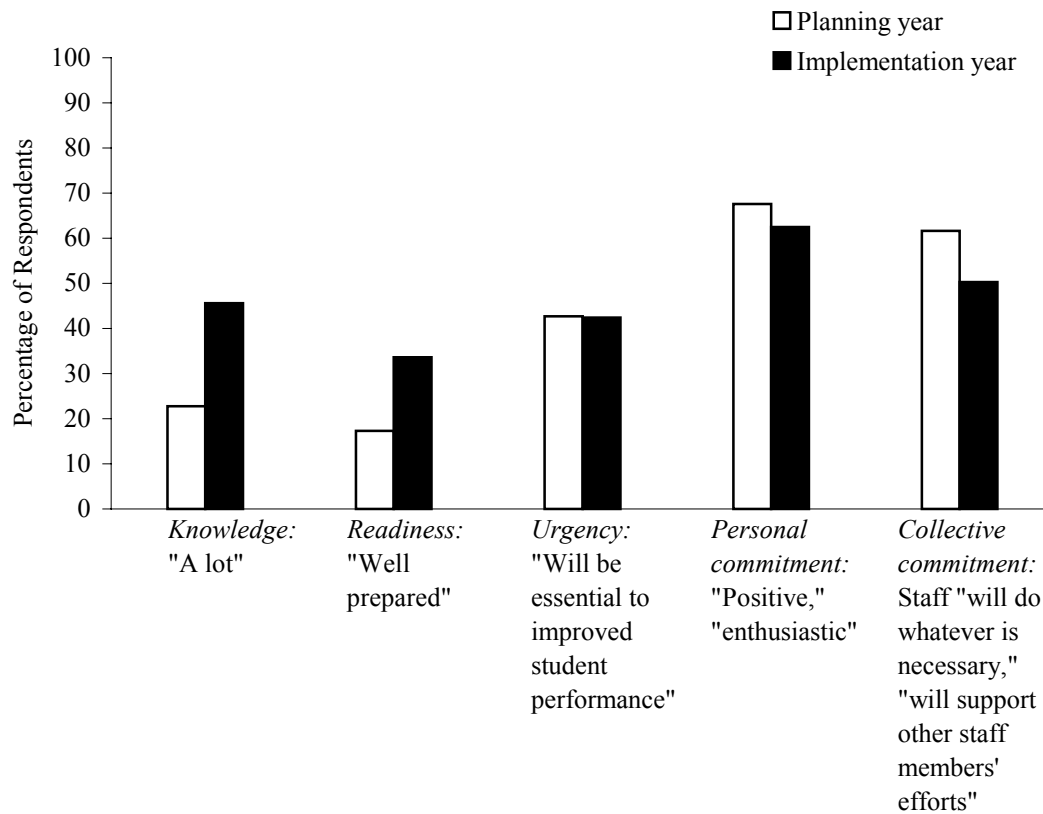
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

Teachers' and Students' General Attitudes Toward the SLCs

Across the schools, teachers' attitudes toward their SLCs were moderately positive, though not extremely so. The largest proportion of teachers — 45 percent — saw their SLCs as "pretty effective." Another 14 percent saw them as "extremely effective," while 18 percent viewed them as "pretty" or "extremely" ineffective. The remaining 23 percent were neutral, rating their SLCs as neither effective nor ineffective.

When SLCs worked well, they infused a new sense of belonging into their members. One coordinator recounted an incident that offered evidence of this:

> Sometimes we have so much to do, the [SLC] meetings seem like a chore. For example, during testing [administration of the state tests], the question came up of maybe we don't need to meet this week because we were so busy. I thought that would be great, but one of the other teachers said, "I feel so disconnected when we don't meet." That's when I knew that this was working, and we had a consensus to meet even if it might only be for a short time. Even though we were tired, we met.

The coordinator also talked about her personal experience with the SLC:

> It's really changed things for me. I don't venture out much. I used to only know a few people and would keep to myself most of the time. It's helped me get past some of my own obstacles. It really works. . . . I realized that I needed to move past some of the things that I normally do. Before, if I had an issue with you, then I would just walk away and not talk to you. I can't do that now in an SLC. It's been a good learning experience for me.

Students, too, were interviewed about the experience of being in an SLC. A number mentioned that they enjoyed the personalized atmosphere. As one girl put it, "I like it because instead of going to classes with people that you don't know, you are in classes with people that you know." Another noted that having SLC classrooms located in a specific part of the campus provided a reassuring sense that her teachers all knew each other. Some students also expressed the hope that the SLC would help them learn about possible careers.

At this early juncture, however, being in an SLC did not create a very different educational experience than in the past for many students. Perhaps most important — as discussed in Chapter 4 — SLC core courses generally did not reflect the SLCs' themes, disappointing students who had hoped that these classes would relate to their expressed areas of interest. Furthermore, as noted above, many eleventh- and twelfth-graders took core courses outside their SLC, while many younger students were not yet scheduled to take thematic electives. The significance of SLC membership was thereby diminished for both groups. When asked whether

being in a particular SLC might help him improve in any way, one tenth-grader expressed cautious optimism:

> Well, so far it hasn't, but I know it will. I really didn't expect much of First Things First when it was introduced to us last year. [But] I know there are certain classes that I will be required to take [in my SLC] that will help me in the future.

Chapter 3

The Family Advocate System

Introduction

The Family Advocate System is a key strategy for achieving two goals of First Things First: (1) improving relationships between and among students, teachers, and students' families and (2) engaging families in the education of their children.[1] Although the Family Advocate System is not one of the seven critical features of the initiative, it is a structural mechanism that supports the "continuity of care" component of the reform by combining an advisory system for students with a parental involvement program. According to the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE), the Family Advocate System is the bridge that links the school and home throughout the student's tenure in the school by "draw[ing] the parents, along with the student, into the process of establishing what it will take to help the student both set [academic and behavior] goals and reach them."[2]

The intended goal of the Family Advocate System is to facilitate a personalized learning environment for each student. It does this by pairing a student with a staff member who is either a full-time faculty member in the student's small learning community (SLC) or an affiliate of the SLC of which the student is a member. Affiliate staff include faculty in the "planning lanes"[3] and administrators or counselors who are assigned to the SLC. Although faculty serve as advocates in most cases, support staff also fulfill this role in some schools. Envisioned as the primary contact for students and their families, the family advocate is expected to develop supportive relationships with both by maintaining regular contact; monitoring students' academic, social, and emotional progress; advocating on students' behalf; and referring students and families to support services within or outside the school as needed. An important structural aspect of the system is the Family Advocate Period (discussed below), a specific time in the school day that is reserved for students and staff to meet, either one-on-one or in a group setting.

At the end of the planning year for First Things First, school staff participate in a full day of training that addresses the Family Advocate System. IRRE expects that, prior to the start of the academic year (or during enrollment), the School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) will work with staff in pairing students and family advocates. To maintain manageable caseloads,

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[1]IRRE, 2002a, p. 1.

[2]Klem, Levin, Bloom, and Connell, 2003, p. 10.

[3]"Planning-lane faculty" are teachers of electives (for example, physical education, art, and Reserve Officers' Training Corps [ROTC]) who are affiliated with the SLCs but are not full-time members. Students take classes with such affiliate staff when the SLC faculty meet for common planning time.

IRRE suggests matching advocates with no more than 12 to 17 students in their SLC — preferably, students whom they teach. In the first few weeks of school, family advocates are encouraged to present this feature of the reform to students and their families through a letter of introduction, telephone calls, and/or welcoming events. In keeping with the idea that the Family Advocate System is mutually beneficial and facilitates ongoing communication among school staff, students, and students' families, advocates are responsible for maintaining personal contact with students and their parent(s) throughout the school year, by:

- Conducting weekly 5-minute face-to-face check-ins with the student that can occur within the Family Advocate Period, before or after school, between classes, or whenever possible[4]

- Maintaining monthly contacts with parents

- Holding at least one 30- or 40-minute conference with the student and student's family each semester to discuss the student's academic and personal accomplishments and challenges

This chapter discusses the primary issues confronted and the lessons learned during the first year that the Family Advocate System was implemented in the First Things First demonstration.

Findings from the First Year of Implementation

Overall, school administrators who were interviewed reported that the Family Advocate System was a positive aspect of the First Things First reform. Respondents reported that — based on their observations during the first implementation year — the system was a key component in building relationships among students and staff and in increasing contact and communication among staff, students, and students' families. According to one principal: "Teachers are reaching out to more parents because they believe they have a mechanism that allows them to do this. When everybody is doing it, it makes it easier for them. There's a recognition that relationships need to move beyond the Parent Teacher Organization."

Fully implementing the Family Advocate System was not without its challenges, however. Across the schools, the task of simultaneously implementing the various components of First Things First took a toll on the implementation of the advocacy system. In more than one case, administrators made the decision to scale back the implementation effort when it became clear that staff were overwhelmed by the various changes involved in launching the entire re-

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[4]IRRE, 2002a, p. 19.

form initiative. In two schools, the Family Advocate System was introduced later in the academic year, and one of those schools limited it to students in certain grades. Another school gave attention to the system at the beginning of the year, but when the principal's focus was diverted to other issues associated with launching First Things First, the effort to implement the advocacy program was put on hold.

Still, during the implementation year, basic elements of the Family Advocate System were in place in most of the schools. As Table 3.1 shows, 90 percent of school staff who were surveyed reported having received family advocate assignments. Of those respondents, 55 percent reported having been assigned 11 to 15 students (a caseload consistent with IRRE's guidelines of 12 to 17 students), and 23 percent reported having been assigned 16 to 20 students. Of the students who were surveyed, 81 percent reported having been assigned a family advocate, and 75 percent of those respondents reported that their assigned family advocate was a teacher in their SLC. The qualitative data suggest that, in some schools, students were unfamiliar with the term "family advocate," which may explain why 19 percent of student respondents said that they had not been assigned an advocate. However, when asked during interviews whether they had been assigned to an adult who performed the duties of an advocate, most students replied in the affirmative.[5]

The Family Advocate Period

During the first implementation year, most schools had a Family Advocate Period: a time in the weekly schedule that is devoted to students' meeting with their family advocate. To accommodate each school's schedule, the sites had the autonomy to determine the length of the period and the time of day that it would be scheduled. As a result, across the schools, the Family Advocate Period varied in terms of its length and the frequency with which students met with their assigned advocate. For example, at one school, groups of students met with their advocates for 9 minutes each day, while students at another school met with their advocates twice weekly for 30-minute sessions.

Scheduling issues surfaced as a common problem during the first implementation year. In one school, competing activities that took place during the Family Advocate Period made it difficult for advocates and students to form more than superficial relationships. Contrary to IRRE's recommendation, the period in this school was reduced to 9 minutes per day. Staff complained not only that the short time frame was insufficient for advocates to bond with their

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[5]For example, in one school where all students in a specific homeroom were assigned to the same advocate, the students commonly referred to this advocate as their "homeroom" teacher. In a school where the Family Advocate Period replaced the homeroom period, students also referred to their advocate as their "homeroom" teacher.

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Table 3.1

**Staffing Structure of the Family Advocate System,
as Reported by Teachers and Students in the Implementation Year**

	All Group I Schools
Teacher reports	
Percentage of staff with family advocate assignments	90.4
Number of assignments	
1-5	3.7
6-10	17.9
11-15	54.5
16-20	22.7
More than 20	1.3
Number of families not yet met[a]	
0	17.7
1-2	22.8
3-5	33.0
6-10	19.7
More than 10	6.8
Sample size	528
Student reports	
Percentage of students with a family advocate assigned	80.6
Your family advocate is…	
A teacher in your SLC	75.2
A teacher **not** in your SLC	14.1
Some other adult in the school	10.7
Sample size	7,023

SOURCES: 2002 First Things First staff and student surveys.

NOTE: [a]These items are missing 20 percent or more of responses.

students but also that the actual time for building relationships with students was limited, because staff were expected to use the period as well to check attendance and adherence to the dress code, to document disciplinary infractions, and to make daily announcements.

In another school, where the Family Advocate System was not implemented until late in the fall semester and where only ninth- and tenth-graders participated, the Family Advocate Period was changed from a daily 35-minute session at the end of the day to a weekly 35-minute session, also at the end of the day. This change was enacted in response to high rates of absenteeism among students, who viewed the Family Advocate Period as a "free period," did not take the meetings seriously, or left school early to accommodate their work schedules.

Schools also had the latitude to use the Family Advocate Period as administrators saw fit, as long as the resulting activities were consistent with the goals of the Family Advocate System. However, interviews with staff suggest that "inappropriate use" of the period, such as using it as a regular homeroom or a free period, reflected a confluence of variables at work. Some staff expressed the opinion that confusion about expectations and how best to use the allocated time resulted from insufficient training and guidance — just one full day of training during the planning year. IRRE staff responded to this concern by strengthening the training for the next year, as described in the text box entitled "Looking Forward." Some staff wondered how the Family Advocate System differed from existing programs that offered an advisory component (such as Tech Prep, Mississippi's statewide school-to-careers transition program). Staff also reported that, in the absence of an accountability system, those who resisted the idea of the Family Advocate System were free to use the period as they chose without facing any consequences.

In at least one school, the pressure to prepare students for the state's mandatory testing led administrators to use the Family Advocate Period for that purpose. Reflecting on this decision, a staff member commented: "We decided to put TAAS prep into that time [preparation for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, a high-stakes test that measures proficiency of the objectives presented in the Texas curriculum]. I don't think it was the right thing to do — to put an academic focus when trying to emphasize relationships." Yet the demands made by the state examinations took precedence in this case. Staff at another school reported that the Family Advocate Period was sometimes canceled altogether and was used by school leadership for other purposes. An SLC coordinator commented: "There hasn't been much incentive to adopt a family advocacy system when we can go three weeks and not even have our one 30-minute session with our kids. If something is going to be dumped, it happens during the 30-minute [Family Advocate] Period."

Moving Forward with the Family Advocate System

In preparation for the start of the 2002-2003 academic year, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) provided each new school in the demonstration with a day of training on the Family Advocate System. The training laid out the basics of the advocacy system, the expectations about both student and family contacts and some strategies for meeting them, and tips on promoting relationship-building among staff, students, and parents.

In response to additional staff concerns that had been generated during the first implementation year, IRRE developed and distributed to all schools the planning tool *A Guide for Family Advocates.** In keeping with the one-day training, the guide explains the role and responsibilities of the family advocates and provides suggestions for ways to implement the system. It also offers strategies for using the Family Advocate Period effectively. Specifically, it includes team-building activities and journal-writing exercises to promote communication between advocates and their students; items (forms, questions, an "action plan") that can be used to generate discussion during the family conferences; and a sample resource directory that advocates can consult when referring students and families to the appropriate local service agencies.

*Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2002a.

Family Advocate Meetings

Although the implementation of the Family Advocate System varied across the First Things First sites, many advocates and their students reported that their meetings did occur with the intended level of frequency. As Table 3.2 shows, of those participating in the system, 34 percent of staff and 31 percent of students reported meeting about once per week, and 27 percent of staff and 22 percent of students reported meeting almost daily. However, whereas 10 percent of teachers reported meeting with their assigned students roughly once per month or less, a larger percentage of students (25 percent) reported meeting monthly or less.

Staff and student responses varied regarding the frequency of meetings that involved students' families. The qualitative data suggest that, in general, students were not informed about the contacts between their advocate and parent. During interviews, many students responded that they knew that their advocate had contacted their parent, because it was through contact with the advocate that the parent knew when to retrieve the student's report card. Yet the students were unable to comment in detail about the conversation between the adults or whether the adults had communicated on other occasions. It is not surprising, then, that, across

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Table 3.2

**Time Spent in Family Advocate Meetings,
as Reported by Teachers and Students in the Implementation Year**

	All Group I Schools
Teacher reports	
How often do you talk with family advocate students, outside of classroom activities?	
Almost every day	26.7
More than once a week	24.1
About once a week	33.5
About twice a month	5.7
Roughly once a month or less	10.1
Has had planned meetings that included both the student and the student's family	63.1
(Of teachers who met with families) Number of times you met with each family	
Once	64.1
Twice	26.1
Three times	3.6
More than three times	6.2
Sample size	477
Student reports	
How often do you talk with your family advocate, outside of classroom activities?	
Almost every day	21.6
More than once a week	16.9
About once a week	31.4
About twice a month	5.3
Roughly once a month or less	24.7
Has had planned meetings that included both the student and the student's family	32.1
(Of students whose family advocate met with family) Number of times your family advocate met with family	
Once	68.6
Twice	15.9
Three times	6.7
More than three times	8.8
Sample size	5,657

SOURCES: 2002 First Things First staff and student surveys.

the schools, 63 percent of teachers reported having held planned meetings that involved the student and the student's family, whereas only 32 percent of students reported that such meetings had occurred (Table 3.2).

IRRE guidelines call for family conferences to take place at least twice per year. On the question of how many conferences had included both the student and the student's family, of those students whose advocate had met with the student and the family — the majority of students across all the schools — 69 percent said that one meeting had occurred during the implementation year. Only 16 percent of these students reported that two meetings had occurred (Table 3.2). Of those advocates who reported having met with the student and the student's family, 64 percent said that one meeting had occurred during the implementation year, and 26 percent reported two meetings. (Because surveys were administered between late March and early May, it is possible that the data do not capture family meetings that were held at the end of the spring semester.) Within schools, staff and students differed in their responses to how often they had met during the first implementation year. In several instances, teachers reported meeting with students — and with students and parents — more often than did students.

As Table 3.3 shows, the majority of staff and students who participated in family conferences reported that the meetings took place on-site in the school building. While IRRE did not require or expect staff to conduct home visits, several staff in one site chose to do so. However, in most of the sites, it was rare for family conferences to take place at the student's home or in a location other than school. Of those advocates who held family conferences, 60 percent reported that the meetings had occurred during school hours. Of students who reported that they had had a family conference, 46 percent said that the meeting had occurred during the school day. It is plausible that this discrepancy reflects teachers' and students' different perceptions of what a school day constitutes. Staff may envision the school day as including any teaching or non-teaching-related work that is conducted while "in the office" (including time before classes start or after school lets out), whereas the students who reported that the meetings were held outside of school hours may envision the school day as beginning with their first class and ending after their last class.

Relationship-Building: The Students' View

Students reported that family conferences with their advocate centered on the student's progress, behavior, and accomplishments in school. In interviews, many students who indicated that they had turned to their advocate for assistance reported that the advocate had helped by counseling the student about conflicts and potential physical confrontations with other students and by assisting with disciplinary issues and, on occasion, with assignments,

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Table 3.3

Context and Settings for Family Advocate Meetings,
as Reported by Teachers and Students in the Implementation Year

	All Group I Schools
Teacher reports	
Met in school	
Usually	87.8
Occasionally	7.3
Rarely	3.2
Never	1.7
Met at family's home	
Usually	1.9
Occasionally	7.3
Rarely	6.6
Never	84.2
Met in another place (for example, church, restaurant)	
Usually	2.2
Occasionally	9.9
Rarely	6.1
Never	81.8
Met during school hours	
Usually	59.6
Occasionally	23.5
Rarely	7.2
Never	9.6
Met outside of school hours	
Usually	22.5
Occasionally	34.2
Rarely	14.2
Never	29.2
Sample size	301
Student reports	
Where was the most recent family advocate meeting?	
In school	83.7
At home	10.5
In another place (for example, church, restaurant)	5.8
When did the last family advocate meeting happen?	
During school hours	45.7
Outside of school hours	54.3
Sample size	1,814

SOURCES: 2002 First Things First staff and student surveys.

scheduling, and balancing the demands of coursework and extracurricular activities. A few student respondents reported consulting with their advocate about non-school-related matters (for example, family crises).

Survey results suggest that students' attitudes about the Family Advocate System were generally positive. Among student respondents, 71 percent reported feeling comfortable talking to their family advocate, and 70 percent reported that the advocate had served the role of being someone to talk to when the student was in need.

The interviews reveal that students' experiences with the Family Advocate System varied. A number of students reported that their assigned advocate was someone whom they could approach if needed, even though they had not yet done so. Many students identified the advocate's approachability as a critical variable, and a common theme throughout the interviews was that students seek out an adult who is trustworthy and will protect confidentiality.[6] Describing her advocate, a ninth-grader commented: "[He is] very comfortable to be around. Even kids that don't have his class, they come up and talk to him. He doesn't pick sides. He understands from the teacher's point of view and from the student's point of view, too." Similarly, a seventh-grader reported that her advocate had created a safe atmosphere in which to discuss issues: "She said [that] anything said in this room will not go outside." A few students were very enthusiastic about their relationship with their advocate. Describing her positive relationship with her advocate, an eighth-grader commented: "She's real nice. I love that person. She can be rough with me sometimes, but I know that it's good for me."

Other students, however, expressed feelings of uneasiness about approaching their assigned advocate, especially when that individual was someone with whom they had yet to develop a relationship. Asked how she felt about her advocate, a tenth-grader addressed this point directly: "I don't like the way they set up [the] Family Advocate [System]. They assign you to a certain person, and you can't trust just anybody."

According to the survey data, 57 percent of all students who said that they had been assigned an advocate reported that there were also other adults in the school who had informally served the advocacy function. During the interviews, many students were able to name at least two additional adults in the school whom they felt they could approach when needed. Often these adults were teachers, administrators, or coaches with whom the students had already established a strong relationship before being assigned an advocate. However, the Family Advocate System may serve an especially important function for the remaining 43 percent of students

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[6]In addition, students who had reached out to an adult in school — whether or not that adult was the student's assigned advocate — characterized these adults as individuals who tried to understand the student's point of view and who would share honest opinions with the student.

who reported not having an adult in the school other than the family advocate to whom they could turn when needed.

Relationship-Building: The Staff's View

Survey responses indicate that, overall, the staff's attitudes toward the Family Advocate System were positive. In fact, the adult respondents were even more positive than the students: 90 percent of staff reported that the Family Advocate System gave students someone to talk to when needed, and more than 80 percent of staff reported that the system served as a mechanism for recognizing students' accomplishments, dispensing advice on personal matters, helping students to resolve problems with other adults in the school, and helping students to do better on their schoolwork.

Once again, the qualitative data reveal that staff, too, had mixed responses to the Family Advocate System. A number of advocates reported that in the first year they had begun the process of developing relationships with their students and that, for the most part, they enjoyed the opportunity to get to know their students better. One teacher said: "I've really enjoyed it. I have an amazingly great group of kids. . . . I've gotten a lot out of it." More often, however, staff replied that although they thought the Family Advocate System was good in concept, they were frustrated by its poor implementation. Many staff distinguished between how they felt about the system as an advising component and how they felt about program operations during the first year of implementation. One teacher stated: "On the whole, as far as an idea [goes], I really, really like it and think it's necessary. As far as implementation went, I didn't like the structure." Another teacher at the same school expressed a similar view: "I think the advocacy program is making the school a more welcoming place for the students, even if it is a kind of hassle." Yet another teacher expressed the complaint succinctly: "Good intention, bad execution."

Staff frustration resulting from problematic program implementation is exemplified in the following comments made by an SLC coordinator in a school that implemented the advising system in the middle of the spring semester. After acknowledging the critical link between the Family Advocate System and the concept of continuity of care, this faculty member stated: "We're doing family advocacy to different degrees of success. . . . Right now it's something that I'm not that concerned with. And it's hard for me to get that concerned when I've got eighth-graders, and it's March, and I won't be seeing them again. [Advocacy is] taking a back seat. It would have been better to do it next year." According to this individual, waning interest in the Family Advocate System was a direct response to the school leadership's delayed implementation of the advising component.

In some cases, less positive attitudes among staff reflected dissatisfaction with being required to take on responsibilities that some perceived as duplicating the school counselor's role

and as being "above the call of duty." One teacher commented: "Honestly, I think the Family Advocate System is the counselors' job. We do some on our own. We already are family advocates. But the extra responsibility, it's too much. It can run a person into the ground." Others were dissatisfied with the way in which staff and students were assigned. Administrators reported that, on occasion, some planning-lane faculty resisted the idea of serving as the family advocate for students with whom they did not share an SLC. More often, however, staff resistance to the student-staff assignments was a result of staff members' being paired in an SLC with students whom they did not teach. Staff in this situation felt that serving as the advocate for a student with whom they were unfamiliar made the job all the more challenging, particularly when interacting with parents. Reflecting on her experience as the advocate of an unfamiliar student, one teacher commented: "I resent having to be the one closest to the kid when I am not closest to the kid. For example, if someone needs special education services, I may not know that. Some parent conferences I did over the phone, and when the parent asked why the kid has a D in math, I couldn't [say]." Another teacher reiterated this point: "If I don't teach them, I can't talk to parents about their children."

Perhaps the most prevalent theme that surfaced in interviews with staff is the lack of parental involvement in school and the frustrations that resulted because of it. While some parents have been receptive to staff contact, many staff commented that reaching out to parents presented its own set of challenges. They cited difficulties maintaining contact with parents whose jobs made them unavailable during school hours, who either lacked a telephone or whose telephone number changed frequently, whose negative prior experiences with the school system made them reluctant to follow up with staff, or who were not native English speakers so that language was a barrier. According to one SLC coordinator who observed such obstacles: "Some of the motivation was lost" when teachers tried to reach out to parents but their efforts were not reciprocated. One advocate described the situation this way: "The third part of the picture is missing — the parent. I contact them, and me and the kid are here, but not the parent." Even though this was frustrating, the teacher was quick to comment: "In the SLC meetings, though, it has worked out well, because you can find out right away if other teachers have problems with the same kids, and we can work on it. But, again, the parent is missing."

Concerns about parental involvement are reflected in the staff survey as well. During the planning year, 87 percent of staff thought that their colleagues would state that most parents were not sufficiently involved in their children's education. During the first implementation year, staff views of parents remained the same, with 89 percent reporting that their colleagues would state that most parents were not sufficiently involved in their children's education. According to student interviews, it appears that students and their parents had not discussed the Family Advocate System at length, if at all. When asked what her parents thought about the advising system, one middle school student commented: "They think the Family Advocate System is good because if something was to happen, there would be good communication between

the teachers and my parents, and the advocate person." This was the most extensive comment from a student on this topic. Most students' response to this question was that their parent(s) did not have an opinion about the Family Advocate System. It is worth noting that because some advocates failed to reach out to parents or failed to make contact with those whom they had tried to reach, some parents may not have been fully apprised of the Family Advocate System.

Although making contact with some parents is a frustrating task, one high school principal explained that reaching out to parents is beneficial, especially when the contact has a positive purpose. The principal stated that when staff call parents to inform them of a child's accomplishments, parents are sometimes surprised but appreciative. "A lot of times parents say, 'People normally don't call me to tell me good things.' So that line of communication is good to have." This comment suggests that, in all the sites, it may take an extended period of time to change the culture surrounding contact between parents and staff.

Overall, the manner in which the Family Advocate System was implemented contributed to staff attitudes. Although some staff critiqued the structure of the advising program in their school, the qualitative data suggest that many of the staff saw the system's potential usefulness. The underlying message communicated in many interviews is that there was room for improvement in all the sites. "I think it has the potential to be something special," commented one teacher. "I think it's a good idea, but we have not lived up to First Things First's expectations," said another. For the most part, staff appeared willing to do the work needed to improve the Family Advocate System. In fact, in several cases, staff indicated that meetings aimed at strengthening the system were already under way.

* * *

Across all the schools in the First Things First demonstration, the Family Advocate System was susceptible to partial implementation in the first year. Delayed implementation and scheduling of the Family Advocate Period surfaced as an issue in some schools, but it did offer a formal mechanism that some staff used to reach out to their assigned students. The quality of relationships that developed among staff, students, and students' parents varied according to each party's interest in participating in the advising system. In particular, staff in all sites continued to struggle in their efforts to connect with parents. The lack of parental involvement dampened enthusiasm among some staff members, and often the "family" component of the Family Advocate System remained to be realized.

Although the practical issues that surfaced when implementing the Family Advocate System led some staff to offer mixed reviews, many others viewed this component of First Things First positively and were encouraged that the advocacy program would be refined and strengthened in the second year.

Chapter 4

Improving Instruction

Forging stronger bonds between teachers and students through small learning communities (SLCs) and the Family Advocate System is an important avenue toward improved student achievement, according to the First Things First theory of change. Knowing that teachers care about them gives students the incentive and motivation to attend regularly, work hard, and become engaged in their schooling. And having more personalized relationships with students gives teachers a greater stake in working to increase students' academic success.

But the initiative's theory of change also holds that stronger socioemotional ties are a necessary but not sufficient condition of improved achievement. Changing the nature of what happens in the classroom is at the heart of several critical features of the First Things First program model — those related to lower student-adult ratios; high, clear, and fair academic standards; enriched and diverse opportunities for students to learn, perform, and be recognized; and heightened expectations that staff will improve instruction and that districts and schools will provide the professional development needed to achieve this goal. Over time, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) has articulated ever more clearly specific strategies for putting these instruction-related critical features into place.

This chapter discusses the experiences of the Group I sites in implementing both structural and instructional changes in the classroom. It considers efforts to reduce student-adult ratios in language arts and mathematics classes and to create extended instructional periods, as well as efforts to alter teachers' practices by adding both pedagogical techniques and new content to their instructional repertoires. Finally, it examines the larger instructional climate of the schools and changes in this climate between the demonstration's planning and implementation years.

Structural Changes to Improve Instruction

First Things First includes three structural measures for improving instruction:

1. Ensuring student-adult ratios of 15:1 or less in language arts and math classes for at least 10 hours a week so that students can receive more individual attention in these key subjects

2. Implementing block scheduling (classes lasting longer than 1 hour)

3. Adding increased time for math and language arts instruction

Item 1 is also the first of the reform's seven critical features (see Table 1.2 in Chapter 1). Item 2 is an aspect of "continuity of care" and relates to the second critical feature. Item 3 — increasing instructional time in language arts and math by 50 percent or even 100 percent — was not formally considered to be a critical feature at the outset of the demonstration but is nonetheless deemed vital to the academic success of many, if not most, students.[1]

Reduced Student-Adult Ratios

As IRRE conceived of it, reduced student-adult ratios were to be achieved not only by reducing class size but also by having other personnel assist the primary teacher in the class-room. These auxiliary personnel were to be "qualified" but not necessarily certified in the subjects they were teaching; indeed, to fulfill this role, schools could turn to people in the community rather than to other teachers.

No school achieved the goal of implementing student-adult ratios of 15:1 in language arts and math on a consistent, schoolwide basis, although Shaw High School and the Greenville campus of Greenville-Weston High School came close. Shaw's principal explained that a couple math classes had 22 or 23 students; a couple classes had 18 to 20 students; and the rest had even lower ratios. Starting at a significant advantage — Shaw is a very small school to begin with, with a reported student-adult ratio of 12:1 — this school was able to keep math and English classes small by having special education teachers assist the main instructors. When administrators at the Greenville campus of Greenville-Weston radically overhauled student schedules for the second semester, they were able to achieve reduced ratios for the large majority of English and math classes, but not all of them.

Elsewhere, Riverview Gardens High School was able to achieve the specified ratio, but only for ninth- and tenth-grade classes. Administrators reasoned that although they did not have enough staff resources to decrease ratios for all students, ensuring that freshmen and sophomores received greater individual attention would increase their probability of educational success later on. At the other schools, some classes met the initiative's standard, but many did not.

The main reason that schools found it difficult to meet the 15:1 criterion was that there were not enough able and willing personnel to go around; as one principal commented, "We're just not flush with people out here." In several districts, for example, special education teachers resisted departing from their traditional role in order to work with non–special education students. This problem was highlighted in one district because the special education teachers were able to reject the new assignment with impunity, since they were employed not by the district

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[1]Increased instructional time has since been incorporated into the first critical feature, which calls for reduced student-adult ratios.

but by a countywide administrative entity. Some schools gave classroom responsibilities to administrative staff and counselors but found that such aid could be unreliable because the staff were often called away to handle pressing situations. At least one principal, too, was reluctant to assign teachers of other subjects to assist the math and language arts teachers. He commented: "This goes against my core values. You hire teachers to be instructors in the areas in which they are best suited. To ask teachers to give up time — and increase class sizes for other courses — and help in an area in which they are less qualified isn't wise."

Across the eight campuses of the Group I schools, about a third of all math and language arts teachers reported on the staff survey that they received assistance from another adult in their classes — a proportion that varied greatly by school (from 15 percent at the Greenville campus to 71 percent at Shaw). Three-quarters of those who reported receiving any assistance got help from another teacher; usually, such assistance was provided for five hours or less per week. Taken together, these data suggest that students were usually exposed to only one adult in their language arts and math classes, and Classroom Observation Study data confirm that more than one teacher was seldom present.

The survey respondents who said that they had received assistance in their classes generally reported being "very satisfied" (42 percent) or "somewhat satisfied" (47 percent) with the help. They were, however, considerably more likely to say that they were "very satisfied" if the aid came from a fellow teacher — whether of their own subject or a different one — than if the aid came from a nonteacher (58 percent versus 33 percent, respectively). Qualitative data offer insights into teachers' mixed responses to having other people help out in their classes. For example, one high school math teacher said that he valued the assistance of a teacher with a similar teaching style and approach to discipline, along with the fact that this assistance was provided in what he considered his toughest class. Another math teacher at the same school who also received assistance was disappointed with the arrangement because, in his view, the other teacher was too passive and did not participate enough in lesson planning and instruction.

The staff survey asked teachers a series of questions regarding their knowledge of, preparation for, and attitudes about implementing lower student-adult ratios. In general, the pattern of results was similar to that for the critical features, discussed in Chapter 2. As Figure 4.1 shows, as the implementation year drew to a close, teachers were generally more likely to report knowing "a lot" about lower student-adult ratios than they had been during the planning year (32 percent versus 18 percent, respectively); they were also more likely to feel well prepared to implement these lower ratios (29 percent versus 13 percent). Similar and high proportions of teachers in both years felt that lower ratios were helpful or essential to improving student performance; indeed, over 50 percent of the teachers felt they were essential. One might imagine lower student-adult ratios to be the educational equivalent of "motherhood and apple pie," and

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Figure 4.1

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Reduced Student-Adult Ratios in Language Arts and Math Instruction**
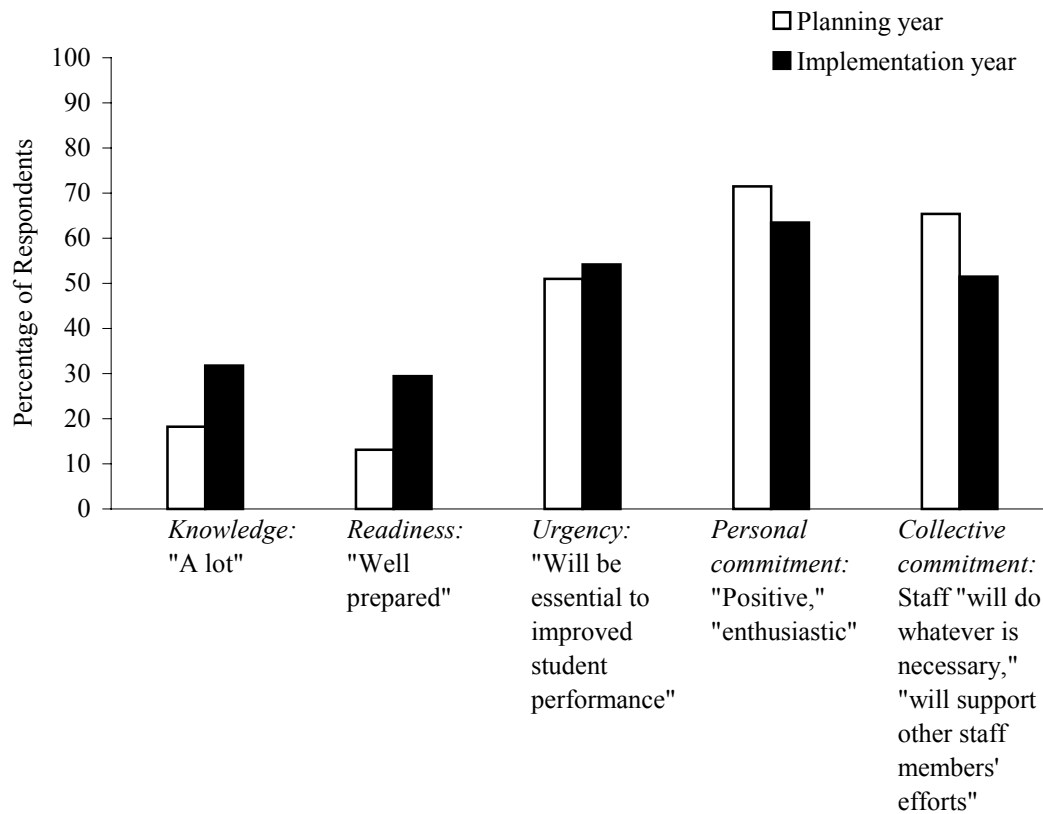
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

— in response to a question on the implementation year's staff survey — the majority of teachers (some 63 percent) reported feeling "positive" or "enthusiastic" about this program feature. The percentage was, however, lower than the 71 percent who reported such sentiments on the planning-year survey. More strikingly, over the same period, staff reported that their colleagues'

enthusiasm for this critical feature had diminished considerably: Only 51 percent believed that their colleagues would "support other staff members' efforts" to implement this critical feature or would "do whatever is necessary to make it happen," compared with 65 percent during the planning year. One possibility is that the problems that teachers experienced when putting this particular program element in place increased their negativity toward it. It seems equally plausible, however, that — as with other critical features — staff survey responses reflect more general attitudes about the difficulty of implementing *all* the features of First Things First, not just reduced student-adult ratios.

Block Scheduling

IRRE program planners reasoned that teachers would be more likely to deliver engaging instruction — including project-based learning — if class periods lasted longer than 45 or 50 minutes. They thought of block scheduling (operationally defined as class periods longer than an hour in duration) as an important aspect of continuity of care.

All but one of the eight Group I campuses had block scheduling in place before they adopted First Things First. The remaining school, Central Middle School, introduced block scheduling during the implementation year.

Figure 4.2 shows staff members' attitudes toward this program feature. The same pattern of responses that is seen in Figure 4.1 is also evident here: From the planning year to the implementation year, staff reported increased knowledge of block scheduling and preparedness to implement it but also showed reduced support for this program element. Again, these results appear to be evidence of general reservations about the amount and pace of change required by First Things First.

Increased Instructional Time in Language Arts and Math

IRRE called on schools to schedule increased time for language arts and math during the implementation year, above and beyond the amount of instruction in these subjects during the planning year.[2] All the Group I campuses arranged schedules so that students did receive additional instruction in language arts and math during the implementation year.

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[2]It is worth noting that block scheduling can, but need not, be associated with increased instructional time. For example, a school that switched from five 45-minute periods of math per week to two 90-minute blocks in Week A and three 90-minute blocks in Week B would neither gain nor lose instructional time. On the other hand, a school that began with daily 90-minute blocks of math instruction, but only during the first semester, would gain instructional time if it added 45-minute math classes to the students' schedule during the second semester.

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Figure 4.2

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Program Feature: **Class Periods Lasting Longer Than One Hour**
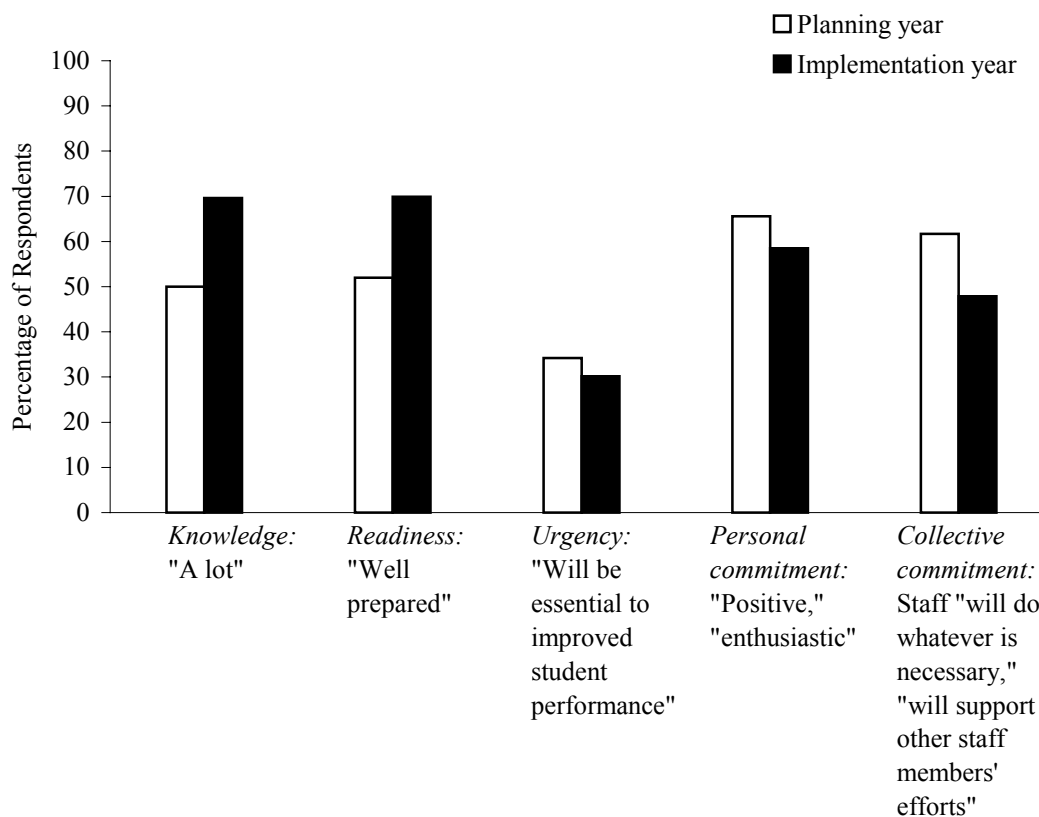
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

Adding instructional time requires that teachers be available to cover the expanded class hours. For this reason, most of the schools that increased instructional time did not do so for all grades or for both subjects. At Sharpstown Middle School, students received additional instruction in language arts but not in math. At both Lee High School and Riverview Gardens High

School, additional instructional time was reserved for students in the ninth and tenth grades only, and the same was essentially true in Greenville. The principals of both Lee and Riverview Gardens High Schools agreed that it was impossible to achieve increased instructional time and reduced student-adult ratios simultaneously for all students with the existing staff complement.[3] As one explained it:

> The school may have to decide which of the two is more important. If we have increased instructional time, class sizes will be closer to 27 or 28 to 1, with a reduced ratio for 45 out of 135 minutes a day. If we don't have increased time, the ratio will be 17 to 1 in our freshman and sophomore classes for the whole 90 minutes.

His counterpart at the other school echoed the sentiment:

> The school could reduce the student-teacher ratio if we cut English and math times back to the norm. But the resources just aren't there to do both. We're supposed to get $600,000 in Title I funds for next year. If we [used the money to] hire only English teachers, in all SLCs, this would reduce ratios in those classes to 20 to 1, and this still leaves math. It would take two or three times that amount of money to get ratios down in both.

Interestingly, the two principals made different choices about which objective was more important, with one selecting reduced student-adult ratios and the other opting for increased instructional time.

Efforts to Change the Nature and Content of Instruction

IRRE was concerned not only with increasing the *intensity* of instruction — through reduced student-adult ratios, block scheduling, and increased time on task — but also with improving the *quality* of instruction, by making it more meaningful and more engaging for students. The most important vehicle for achieving this goal was the technical assistance and training that IRRE provided in the use of "Kagan cooperative learning structures," or strategies for increasing student participation in learning. The thematic nature of the SLCs offered a second potential avenue toward this end, allowing teachers an opportunity to relate the existing curriculum to the theme of the SLC and to create new interdisciplinary units centered on that theme. Finally, the Riverview Gardens school district conducted its own experiment with mixed-level instruction in its two middle schools. These three approaches and the schools' experiences with them are discussed below.

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[3]IRRE also granted that this was an impossibility, asking schools only to do the maximum possible.

Kagan Cooperative Learning Structures

These instructional strategies — developed by Spencer Kagan, a former clinical psychologist and professor — are designed to ensure that all students participate actively in learning. Typically, students are arranged in pairs or small groups to ask each other questions, share opinions, or otherwise reflect on the content of what they are learning. What distinguishes the Kagan cooperative learning structures from more generic "groupwork" is that the Kagan strategies demand participation from each and every student whereas, in groupwork, equal participation is not insisted on and a few students can carry the entire group.

After learning about Kagan and his team from their work with educational leaders in the Kansas City, Kansas, school district — who had identified this approach as one that could increase student engagement — IRRE decided that the Kagan instructional strategies offered promise for the teachers at all the schools implementing First Things First. Observations during the planning year indicated that much of the teaching in the schools joining the demonstration was highly traditional and left many students unengaged. Kagan and his associates had a well-developed system for providing technical assistance and helping teachers in all disciplines master a large repertory of cooperative learning structures. IRRE therefore contracted with Kagan Cooperative Learning, Inc., to deliver a full-day introduction to the approach and at least two half-day training sessions each semester to all teachers at each of the program schools.[4] Training began in the fall in the Riverview Gardens schools and during the second semester at the other schools.

Teachers' responses to the Kagan training appeared to vary, depending in large part on who the trainer was. Some trainers were liked and respected and presented the strategies in ways that spurred teachers to want to try the new approaches. Other trainers were perceived as condescending and as lacking expertise in using the techniques in a secondary school context. Teachers sometimes complained that the trainers treated them as though they were elementary school teachers, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, some came to see the Kagan strategies as more appropriate for younger students than for the middle school and high school students in their classes. (In this regard, it did not help that some of the illustrations in the training materials showed children who appeared to be of elementary school age.) In addition to the formal train-

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[4]In addition, a number of staff members from each school attended a week of intensive Kagan training held in Orlando, Florida, or local and regional training sessions during the summer following the implementation year. Those attending the training would then be in a position to coach other teachers in using the Kagan structures in their classrooms.

In making the Kagan structures the focus of instructional improvement efforts, IRRE moved away from the instructional strategies it had introduced during the planning year — "read-alouds" and "think-alouds." IRRE staff members believed that a wider repertory of instructional strategies was needed; they were aware, too, that many teachers — especially math and science teachers — had voiced the opinion that think-alouds and read-alouds were not well suited to their disciplines. Finally, a better-developed delivery system was available for providing training on cooperative learning strategies than on think-alouds and read-alouds.

ing sessions, School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs) sometimes modeled the Kagan strategies for the teachers; at Shaw High School, the principal demonstrated their use before an assembly of students and teachers.

Teachers at all schools were expected to become familiar with the Kagan structures and use them in their classes. Indeed, in Riverview Gardens, a high-level central office administrator announced that all teachers were to use these structures in every class every day — an edict that predictably aroused teachers' resentment but may also have led them to use the methods more than they would have otherwise. In the Riverview Gardens schools, as elsewhere, principals, other administrators, or SIFs sometimes dropped in on classes to monitor teachers' use of the methods or asked to see lesson plans showing their use. But while use of the Kagan strategies was strongly encouraged in all the schools, only at Shaw High School were teachers told that failure to use the structures might result in a lower rating on their performance review.[5]

Staff and student surveys, along with the Classroom Observation Study, sought to ascertain the frequency with which cooperative learning techniques were employed in the classroom. Without using the term "Kagan structures," the staff surveys queried all teachers about the frequency with which students worked in small groups or pairs in their classes. And the student surveys asked all students about the frequency with which they worked in small groups or pairs in their math and language arts classes. (Subsequent analysis indicated that the responses of language arts and math teachers were very similar to those of all teachers.)

The two groups offered widely disparate answers. Thus, 73 percent of math and language arts teachers reported that students worked in small groups or pairs "in almost every class" or "in a lot of classes." Only 30 percent of the students reported that small-group or paired work took place with this degree of frequency. Findings from the Classroom Observation Study suggest that, as per the cliché, the truth may lie somewhere in-between: Paired or small-group work was seen in 44 percent of the implementation-year observations.[6] The study also confirms that use of these instructional techniques increased markedly from the planning year, when only 21 percent of the planning-year observations across the two districts registered use of cooperative learning strategies. Considering that the teachers had received the Kagan training only a matter of weeks before the implementation-year observations began, this increase is all the more notable.

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[5]Because classroom observations were not conducted at the Mississippi sites during the first implementation year, it is impossible to determine whether the negative incentives at Shaw made a difference in increasing use of the strategies.

[6]During the implementation year, 50-minute-long observations were conducted in 102 Houston and Riverview Gardens math and language arts classes. Since observers did not capture classroom activities after the 50 minutes had elapsed, it is possible that additional unrecorded paired or small-group learning took place after the cutoff point.

By all accounts, however, only a relatively small proportion of teachers used the strategies regularly. The observations and interviews suggest that some teachers were especially resistant to their use while others were more receptive. Thus, the observations indicate that paired or small-group instruction took place somewhat more frequently in English classes (where such instruction was present in 48 percent of all observations) than in math classes (where it was seen in 39 percent of the observations). Qualitative data, too, suggest that math teachers had difficulty figuring out how to incorporate the Kagan strategies into their lessons. Some math teachers felt that these strategies were more suitable for subjects where students were called on to express their opinions than for their own classes, where a single correct answer obtained. Moreover, since math is a subject consistently tested on standardized tests, math teachers were reluctant to risk "wasting time" on activities whose instructional value they questioned.

Interviews with teachers and administrators also suggest that while there were certainly exceptions to the rule, relatively new teachers were more open to the Kagan strategies than were their more seasoned counterparts. While new teachers — precisely because of their inexperience — were willing to try new strategies, veteran teachers tended to complain that the structures were "cutesy" or "gimmicky" or to say that they were already using cooperative learning techniques in their classrooms.

Teachers voiced other concerns about the structures. A number complained that students' limited social skills made cooperative learning activities hard to put in place, and they feared that discipline problems would result. Implementing the Kagan structures successfully also takes planning, and teachers sometimes said that with everything else they had to do, they could not take the time for this additional task. As one put it: "If it fits with the lesson I am teaching, I use it. But I am not going to sit up all night after doing my lesson planning trying to figure out which Kagan strategy I am going to fit into the lesson plan." And a SIF proposed still another reason for the teachers' failure to use the Kagan structures more regularly:

> There's a disconnect between teachers' perceptions of what they need and what the administration thinks they need. Student engagement was identified as something teachers needed to work on by the administrators, but teachers don't perceive that as an issue. This led to a conflict around Kagan — teachers don't think they need Kagan. They think that kids are already engaged.

Nonetheless, even teachers who did not regularly use the techniques that they had been trained on experimented with them. Many cited at least one strategy that they used regularly to good effect, even when they had not yet discovered how to incorporate others. In conclusion, both the quantitative and the qualitative data indicate that the new emphasis placed on cooperative learning was slowly altering teachers' instructional practices.

The data indicate that students were indeed engaged by cooperative learning activities and generally enjoyed and felt that they benefited from them. Although some of the students who were interviewed about their experiences with these activities said that they did not like being in the position of being the stronger student in a cooperative learning structure, many commented that their fellow students could sometimes explain things in a different way or more clearly than the teacher. One candid ninth-grader spoke for many of his fellow students. Asked whether the cooperative learning structures helped him learn more, he replied: "Yes, because you can learn more from your peers, because you listen to your peers when you might sometimes tune the teacher out. Your peer might be able to explain it more clearly."

The data in Figure 4.3 indicate that the majority of teachers believed that implementing the critical feature calling for high, clear, and fair academic standards was essential to students' improved performance; reported that they knew a lot about this critical feature; were well prepared to put it in place; and said that both they and their colleagues supported it. Data from the Classroom Observation Study indicate, however, that lessons were rarely intellectually challenging (and this was true even when teachers used the Kagan structures).

The study used a modified version of a widely used taxonomy originally developed by Benjamin Bloom and others to describe each lesson's learning objective — that is, the dominant cognitive process and the type of knowledge that it embodied.[7] All the lessons that were observed — irrespective of site, discipline, or program year — involved the relatively low-level cognitive processes of remembering, understanding, and applying. None involved the higher-level processes of analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The type of knowledge transmitted in most English classes was heavily factual; in math classes, it was heavily procedural. Overall, there was much room for improvement in providing students with challenging learning objectives. (Figure 4.4 shows teachers' attitudes toward the critical feature of providing students with diverse opportunities to learn, perform, and be recognized.)

Thematic Instruction

As IRRE planners conceived of small learning communities (SLCs), one potential benefit of organizing instruction around broad themes was that teachers could relate the subjects they were teaching to these themes and thereby could appeal to students' expressed interests. Thus, for example, a novel in an English class or a topic in a history class could be tied to a theme like "Science and Technology," "Law and Justice," or "The Performing Arts." Teachers of other subjects could also join in creating interdisciplinary units reflective of their SLC's theme.

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[7]See Bloom et al. (1956) for the original taxonomy and Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) for the modified version.

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Figure 4.3

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year
Critical Feature: **Establishing High, Clear, and Fair Academic Standards**
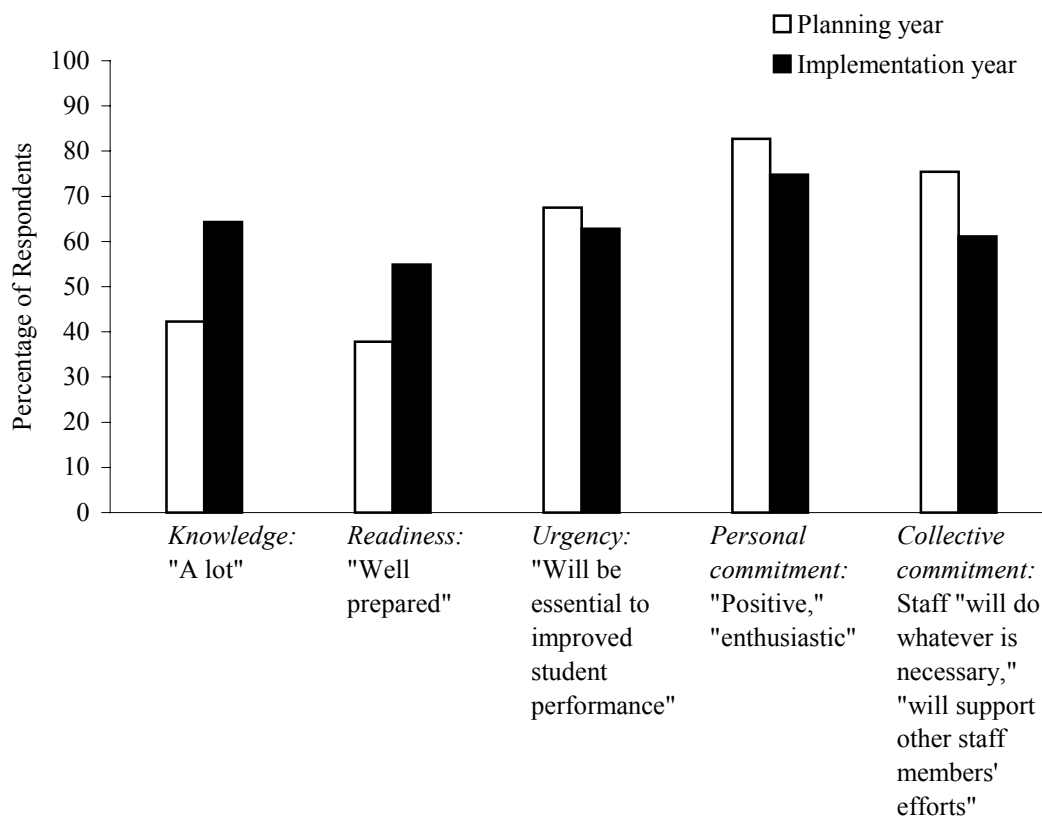
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

The First Things First Evaluation

Figure 4.4

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Critical Feature: **Providing Diverse Opportunities for Students to Learn, Perform, and Be Recognized**
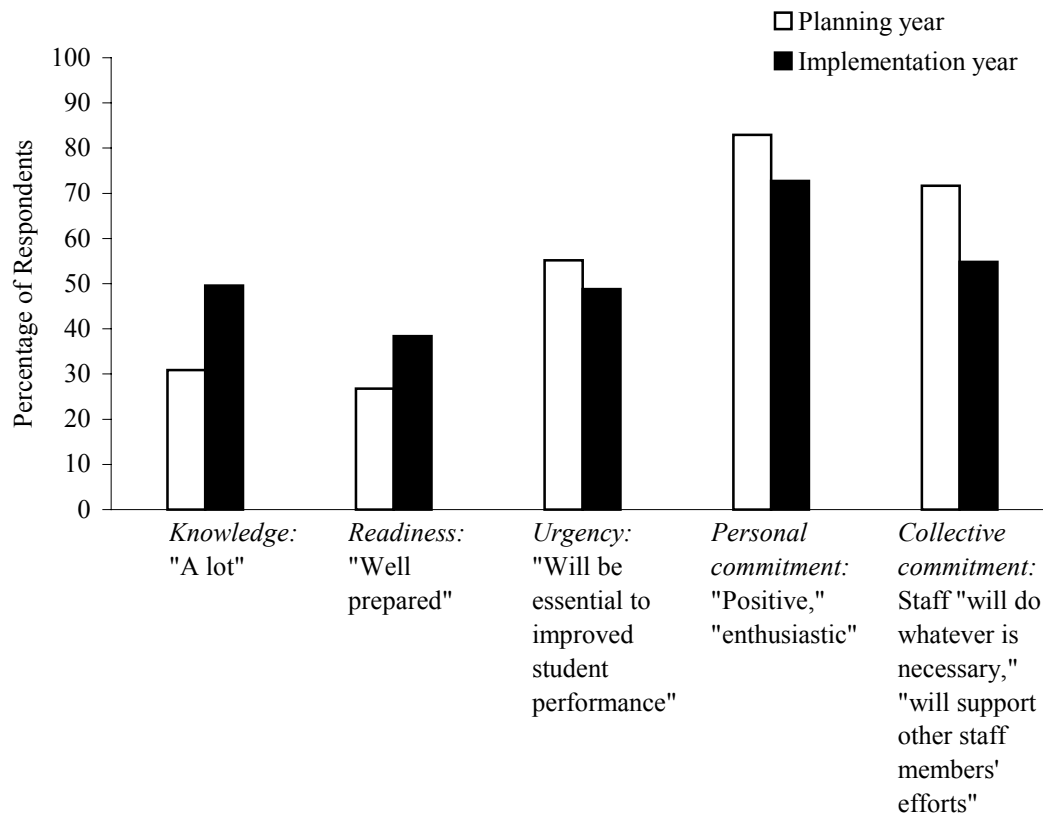
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

Some teachers and some SLCs were able to link their lessons to such themes. In one Riverview Gardens High School language arts class in the Law and Human Services Academy, for example, students conducted a mock trial. Some students had prepared roles to play on the witness stand, while others taking the role of attorneys had prepared examinations and cross-examinations; some of the action was rehearsed and some ad-libbed, but it all played out in a realistic — and highly engaging — manner. At East Middle School in the same district, teachers in the Health and Wellness SLC brought information about nutrition, the human body, exercise, and other related topics into lessons in a coordinated manner throughout the year. During the second semester, the Law and Government SLC at Lee High School began planning two classes that would be team-taught the next year. One course, on civil disobedience as a mean of addressing social injustice, brought together an English teacher and a social studies teacher; the other, taught by an English teacher and a science teacher, discussed issues of injustice and inequality that could result from applications of scientific knowledge (for example, eugenics). More commonly, SLCs planned field trips that were reflective of their themes. On the Greenville campus of Greenville-Weston High School, for instance, the Law and Criminal Justice SLC took a field trip to visit the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee, while the Media and Technology SLC took a trip to Jackson, Mississippi, to participate in a computer workshop.

In general, however, efforts at thematic instruction were sporadic and infrequent. Some teachers said that they would liked to have done more of this but that their common planning time meetings were completely absorbed by other topics — student discipline and performance, family advocacy, and the "nuts and bolts" of school and SLC operations. At one high school, math teachers in particular cited other reasons for their failure to introduce thematic instruction: that the theme of their SLC did not lend itself to mathematical applications or that thematic instruction diverted them from the important task of preparing students for the state's high-stakes mandatory tests. In general, SLC members and coordinators said that they would work more on thematic instruction during the following year.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that students who were interviewed in three of the four districts (Shaw's SLCs are not thematic in nature) reported that, as far as instruction went, school did not feel very different than it had in the past. Some students, in fact, reported disappointment at not getting — outside of elective courses — the theme-based learning that they had expected to receive under First Things First.

Multilevel Instruction in the Riverview Gardens Middle Schools

In Riverview Gardens, the school district's Assistant Superintendent for Instruction was enthusiastic about the concept of mixing students from different grades in a single classroom,

with the focus on teaching crosscutting concepts that students in all grades needed to know to meet state standards, rather than adhering to the specific curriculum of any single grade. The assistant superintendent announced that multilevel instruction would be adopted in the four core subject areas in the district's two middle schools during the First Things First implementation year, so that all teachers of communication arts, math, social studies, and science would teach both seventh- and eighth-graders together. Consequently, although this practice is not part of the reform initiative's model, teachers in the Riverview Gardens middle schools tended to see multilevel classrooms as one of the many changes that First Things First brought to their district.[8]

Moving Forward with Changes to Improve Instruction

During the implementation year of First Things First, the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) began developing a Curriculum Assessment and Instruction (CAI) Library that eventually will serve all the schools in the demonstration. The impetus for this work is to ensure that all teachers use standards-based instructional activities that are engaging, challenging, accessible, and adaptable to students who perform at various levels. Curriculum units for the library are initially identified and created by "librarians" (typically, curriculum specialists and master teachers) and eventually will be created by classroom teachers themselves, who are learning to develop their own standards-based learning activities through the initiative's professional development efforts.

A meeting to kick off the library project took place early in the implementation year. Most of the two-day meeting was focused on three points: (1) ensuring that each site's "power standards" overlap enough so that the learning activities that are created for the library meet the needs of all sites; (2) refining a rubric for determining the quality of learning activities to go into the library; and (3) resolving technology issues to ensure that the learning activities are accessible to all the sites, regardless of their technological capacity. The goal is to ensure that all teachers have convenient access to the materials at school and, eventually, from home.

Work continued on the CAI Library throughout the implementation year. The Riverview Gardens and Mississippi sites participated in creating learning activities, while Houston decided to work independently and to make its products available in exchange for access to the national library. IRRE projects that the CAI Library will be fully operational within two years.

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[8]Although IRRE staff members initially encouraged this curricular reform, once they saw the dissatisfaction that it created, they urged the assistant superintendent to abandon the concept, to no avail.

The Riverview Gardens teachers were upset about this innovation. They felt that the decision to introduce this type of instruction had been made without consulting them. They complained, moreover, that they felt ill-equipped to make this change, having received no training in how to teach students with such a wide range of skills and knowledge — from struggling seventh-graders to accelerated eighth-graders — in a single classroom. The difficulties that they experienced probably help to account for their reservations about First Things First.

The Instructional Climate of the Schools

First Things First introduced a number of specific measures to improve instruction. But did teachers feel both greater support for instruction and greater pressure to improve it than they had felt prior to the initiative's implementation? And is there any evidence that what might be called a "culture of continuous improvement" was starting to develop in the schools?

The planning-year and implementation-year staff surveys both questioned teachers about the degree of support, flexibility, and pressure to improve instruction that they experienced from their fellow teachers, their principal, and the district's central office. Responses were similar across the two years. In both years, for instance, teachers were more likely to report receiving the right amount of support and flexibility from their peers than from administrators. On the other hand, in both years, teachers were also much more likely to report receiving too much pressure to improve instruction from principals and from central office administrators than from their fellow teachers.

The questions about support, flexibility, and pressure, along with six other items, compose a scale aimed at measuring the extent to which a school's culture emphasizes teachers' ongoing growth and improvement (see Table 4.1). The average scale score — 2.7 on a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 denoting a high level of emphasis on continuous improvement — did not change between the planning year and the implementation year, which suggests that such a culture was not well developed. Over two-thirds of the respondents (68 percent) said that they felt either "positive" or "enthusiastic" about the critical feature calling for staff to be "equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction," although only a little more than half of them (54 percent) felt that implementing this critical feature would be "essential" to improved student performance.[9]

Nonetheless, there were indications that teachers' professional growth might be accelerating. For one thing, although teachers had mixed reactions to the Kagan training, as noted

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[9]It is not possible to compare teachers' implementation-year and planning-year responses because, in the interim, IRRE revised the definition of this critical feature in such a way that any comparison would be invalid. (The planning-year survey framed the critical feature as "giving school staff more instructional autonomy.")

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Table 4.1

**Items Used to Create a Scale That Measures
the Presence of a Culture of Continuous Improvement**

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1. Staff in this school encourage each other to do well.

2. Staff in this school share resources with one another.

3. My colleagues support my efforts to improve how I teach.

4. Excellence in teaching is expected at this school.

5. Teachers here share a common view of what constitutes good teaching.

6. Teachers here are eager to learn and improve as teachers.

7. Staff here get the support they need to improve instruction from each other.

8. Staff here get the support they need to improve instruction from the principal.

9. Staff here get the support they need to improve instruction from the central office.

10. Staff here get the pressure they need to improve instruction from each other.

11. Staff here get the pressure they need to improve instruction from the principal.

12. Staff here get the pressure they need to improve instruction from the central office.

13. Staff here get the flexibility they need to improve instruction from each other.

14. Staff here get the flexibility they need to improve instruction from the principal.

15. Staff here get the flexibility they need to improve instruction from the central office.

SOURCE: 2002 First Things First staff survey.

NOTES: All items were rated on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = not at all true, 2 = not very true, 3 = sort of true, and 4 = very true.
   The standardized alpha coefficient for the scale was .86.

above, they tended to see the in-service training that they received during the implementation year as being more helpful than in the past. Thus, 51 percent of the implementation-year teachers said it was "very true" or "sort of true" that the in-service training was "relevant to what we need to get done in the classroom," compared with 45 percent of the planning-year teachers — a statistically significant difference.[10]

It also appears that the SLCs may provide a forum in which teachers can discuss problems and learn from each other. New questions that were developed for the implementation-year staff survey asked about teachers' willingness to discuss problems in teaching with one another. Some four-fifths of the teachers said that it was "very true" or "sort of true" that "teachers here are comfortable asking other teachers for help when they face problems with their teaching"; conversely, only 22 percent said that it was "very true" or "sort of true" that "teachers here don't like to discuss problems they're having in the classroom with one another."[11] Since these items were not available on the planning-year survey, it is impossible to determine whether teachers' attitudes changed over the course of the implementation year. But the responses suggest that the SLCs may indeed be — or may have the potential to be — "learning communities" for staff as well as for students.

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[10]Correspondingly, a lower proportion of teachers in the implementation year than in the planning year reported that it was "very true" or "sort of true" that "when we have in-service training, I just tune out and put in my time" (33 percent versus 29 percent, respectively — a difference that borders on statistical significance: p = 0.15).

[11]One caveat may be noted: 7 percent of the respondents said that it was "very true" and 40 percent said that it was "sort of true" that "teachers here prefer to face problems in the classroom on their own — even if it takes longer — rather than ask for help/advice from others." This suggests that teachers are indeed willing to talk about problems with others — but only when they feel that they can no longer manage the problems on their own.

Staff and Student Responses
to the Implementation Year of First Things First

Chapters 2 through 4 looked at the implementation of the three central components of First Things First: small learning communities (SLCs), the Family Advocate System, and new efforts to improve instruction. These components, it was noted, are the vehicles through which the seven critical features underlying the initiative are expressed. The earlier chapters examined staff and student attitudes toward the specific critical features associated with each component as well as their attitudes toward the components more generally.

This chapter first considers staff attitudes toward the First Things First initiative in its entirety, as these emerge from survey and interview data. It then turns to outcomes associated with the post-implementation stage of the intervention's theory of change: feelings of support and engagement among both staff and students.

Staff Attitudes Toward First Things First

Responses to the Reform as a Whole

Given the strikingly consistent pattern of staff survey responses regarding the individual critical features of First Things First, it is not surprising that teachers had similar views of the initiative as a whole. Figure 5.1 shows how teachers answered a series of survey questions about their knowledge of, preparation to implement, and support of all the critical features of First Things First, in both the planning and the implementation years. Predictably, teachers were much more likely to say that they knew "a lot" about the program on the implementation-year survey than on the planning-year survey (34 percent versus 15 percent), and they were more likely to say that they were "well prepared" to implement it (22 percent versus 11 percent). On the other hand, a somewhat smaller percentage of implementation-year teachers than planning-year teachers said that putting in place all the critical features would "be essential" to improve student achievement (30 percent versus 35 percent); they were also less likely to say that they were "positive" or "enthusiastic" about implementing all the critical features (54 percent versus 61 percent). The proportion who saw their colleagues as positively disposed toward the intervention shrank to 40 percent (versus 53 percent during the planning year).

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Figure 5.1

Changes in Teachers' Attitudes from Planning Year to Implementation Year

Attitudes Toward Implementing All the Critical Features of First Things First
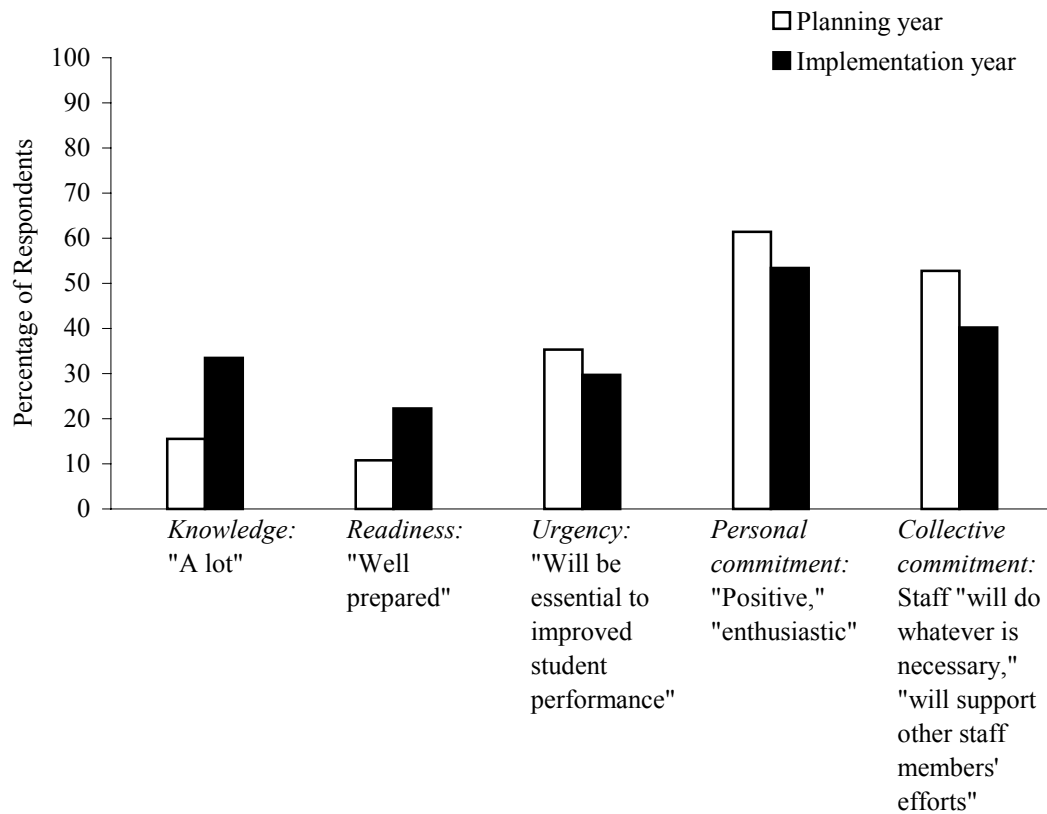
SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First staff surveys.

Responses to Individual Critical Features

Table 5.1 shows how staff members responded to the individual critical features of First Things First, vis-à-vis their attitudes toward the reform as a whole.[1] Looking across all the outcomes in the table, it is clear that staff responded most favorably to two critical features. That is, they reported knowing most about, feeling most positive about, and being best prepared to implement high, clear, and fair conduct and academic standards and enriched and diverse opportunities for students to learn, perform, and be recognized. They were also quite positive in their assessment of the notion that teachers should be equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction. Interestingly, only one of these critical features stands out in the planning-year responses: high, clear, and fair academic and conduct standards. It seems plausible that the implementation year enhanced staff members' understanding of what both students and teachers need for successful teaching and learning.

By comparing Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1, it is also apparent that staff were more positive about many of the individual features than they were about the initiative as a whole. For example, while only 40 percent of the teachers, as noted above, felt that their colleagues were supportive of all the intervention's critical features, more than half believed that their colleagues favored five of the nine reform elements shown in the table. Similarly, while only about a third of the respondents said they knew "a lot" about implementing all the critical features of the reform, higher percentages reported knowing "a lot" about seven of the nine elements.

Indeed, in responding to the survey questions, it appears that teachers reacted more negatively to the label "First Things First" and to the concept of broad-scale change that the initiative implies than to the specific changes that the reform sought to introduce. Interviews with teachers confirm that many staff members felt overwhelmed by the number of new tasks they faced: frequent meetings with fellow members of their SLCs, new responsibilities for handling student discipline, the demands of being a family advocate, the requirement that they try new instructional techniques — all on top of (in many instances) having to teach different preparations and different grades than the ones to which they were accustomed.

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[1]The survey items and Table 5.1 distinguish between two aspects of the second critical feature, continuity of care: (1) continuity of care across school years, as embodied by SLCs, and (2) continuity of care across the school day, as promoted by block scheduling. The third critical feature actually calls for "high, fair, and clear student conduct *and* academic standards." These two kinds of standards are distinguished in this report because they are conceptually distinct.

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Table 5.1

**School Staff Members' Responses to Individual Critical Features of
First Things First**

Critical Feature	Know a Lot About	Prepared to Implement	View as Essential	Feel Positive About	Colleagues Are Supportive
Structural changes					
Lowered student-adult ratios for 10 hours/week in language arts and math			X	X	X
Small learning communities for same students and teachers	X	X			
Class periods lasting more than one hour	X	X			
Instructional changes					
High, fair, clear student conduct standards	X	X	X	X	X
High, fair, clear academic standards	X	X	X	X	X
Opportunities provided for students to learn, perform, and be recognized	X	X	X	X	X
Accountability and governance changes					
Staff equipped, empowered, and expected to improve instruction	X	X	X	X	
Staff collectively responsible for students' meeting academic behavioral standards	X	X	X		X
Teams of staff decide how to allocate available resources	X	X	X	X	X

SOURCE: 2002 First Things First staff survey.

NOTE: X indicates that the proportion of staff members who responded favorably about the feature in question was at least 10 percentage points higher than the proportion who responded favorably about all the features collectively.

Responses Analyzed by School

Table 5.2 examines the extent to which responses to the intervention varied by school and whether some schools emerged as more positive or more negative in their ratings across a variety of outcome measures.[2] The table shows that teachers at School A provided unusually positive responses to the teacher survey, while teachers at School D were more negative than the norm.

The theory of change underlying First Things First holds that, over time, teachers' positive attitudes toward the intervention will lead to more complete implementation. Yet there was consensus among both the Institute for Research and Reform in Education (IRRE) staff and the research staff that implementation progressed furthest at School D and was especially troubled and incomplete at School A — the exact opposite, at least at this early point, of what the theory of change predicts. It may be that buy-in and commitment from teachers come only *after* the reform has been implemented and teachers can see improvement both in their own situation and that of their students. It may be, too, that the survey questions tapping the early outcomes — which evaluators have used since the project's inception in Kansas City, Kansas — are not fine-tuned enough to gauge respondents' real attitudes. Or respondents at School A may have been more disposed to give socially desirable survey responses than those at School D. Or it may be that teachers at School A were most favorable toward the reform precisely *because* the least change was required of them, whereas teachers at School D were most negative precisely because change posed real challenges for school staff.

What is clear, however, is that the principal and School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) at School D were both strongly committed to First Things First and strategized constantly about how best to move the initiative forward. The same cannot be said of the leadership at School A. One possible conclusion is that, at least at the outset, winning teachers' support for First Things First (or, arguably, any other school reform) is less critical to the initiative's success than is ensuring that school leadership is solidly behind the changes.[3] Future surveys will indicate whether teachers at School D become more positive in their attitudes as the reforms take hold and whether teachers at School A become disillusioned by the site's limited progress in launching the initiative.

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[2]A school was rated higher than average if its mean rating on the measure was at least 25 percent of a standard deviation higher than the mean rating for all schools; and it was rated lower than average if its mean score was at least .25 standard deviation lower than the mean rating for all schools.

[3]IRRE suggests a similar point in its publication *Getting Off the Dime: First Steps Toward Implementing First Things First* (2002b).

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Table 5.2

Receptivity to First Things First as a Whole, by School

School	Know a Lot About	Prepared to Implement	View as Essential	Feel Positive About	Colleagues Are Supportive
A	X	X	X		
B			X	X	
C		(--)			X
D				(--)	(--)
E					
F				X	X
G			X		
H					

SOURCE: 2002 First Things First staff survey.

NOTES: X indicates that the mean response for the school was at least .25 standard deviation higher than the mean response for all schools.

(--) indicates that the mean response for the school was at least .25 standard deviation lower than the mean response for all schools.

A blank indicates that the mean response for the school was within .25 standard deviation of the mean response for all schools.

Explaining the Outcomes

This section examines a number of characteristics and attributes frequently cited as important in the school reform literature, to see whether or not they are associated with different responses to the early outcomes measures of First Things First. The discussion relies on multiple regression analysis, a statistical technique whereby the importance of each factor can be assessed while holding the other factors constant. Included in the regression analysis are personal characteristics, perceived characteristics of the school leadership and climate, and the effects — above and beyond these characteristics — of being a staff member at a particular school.

Table 5.3 presents the results of the regression analysis. The table's rows show the independent variables (the variables whose explanatory power is being tested), and its columns show the dependent variables (the early outcomes — knowledge, readiness, and so on), whose

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Table 5.3

Factors Associated with the Initiative's Early Outcomes

Variable	Knowledge Know a Lot About		Readiness Prepared to Implement	Urgency View as Essential		Commitment	
						Feel Positive About	Colleagues Are Supportive
Gender (being male)	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.		n.s	n.s.
Greater length of teaching experience	0.156 (0.062)	**	n.s.	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.
Positive prior experience with school reform	n.s.		n.s.	-0.131 -0.064	**	n.s.	n.s.
Negative prior experience with school reform	n.s.		n.s.	-0.136 (.063)	**	-0.128 (.062) **	n.s.
Ethnicity (being nonwhite)	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.
More responsiveness to staff on the part of the principal	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.
Greater perception of a culture of continuous improvement	n.s.		n.s.	n.s.		n.s.	0.247 *** (0.072)
Staff perception of more parental involvement	0.127 (0.067)	*	n.s.	n.s.		0.142 (.068) **	n.s.

(continued)

Table 5.3 (continued)

Variable	Knowledge Know a Lot About	Readiness Prepared to Implement	Urgency View as Essential		Commitment Feel Positive About		Commitment Colleagues Are Supportive	
School A	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.		0.115 (.064)	*	0.134 (.062)	**
School B	n.s.	n.s.	.207 (0.073)	***	0.156 (.072)	**	0.185 (.070)	***
School C	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.		n.s..		0.148 (.066)	**
School D	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
School F	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.		0.184 (.091)	**	0.221 (.088)	**
School G	n.s.	n.s.	0.206	***	n.s.		n.s.	
School H	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.		n.s.		n.s.	
Adjusted R^2	0.018	0.019	0.068		0.092		0.130	

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from the 2002 First Things First staff survey.

NOTES: The first number in each cell is the standardized regression coefficient; it represents the amount of change in the dependent variable, expressed in standard deviation units, created by a change of 1 standard deviation in the independent variable or, in the case of dummy variables, a change from one status to the status represented by the dummy.

    Only statistically significant coefficients are shown; "n.s." denotes that the coefficient is not significant.

    The number in parentheses is the standard error.

    School E was omitted to allow for the creation of dummy variables.

    * = Differences among schools are statistically significant at the .10 level.

    ** = Differences among schools are statistically significant at the .05 level.

    *** = Differences among schools are statistically significant at the .01 level.

determinants the researchers are trying to explain. The table shows those regression coefficients for variables that proved to be statistically significant at at least the .10 level.[4]

The findings indicate that, for the most part, the independent variables included in the analysis were not strongly associated with the outcomes in question.[5] Among the personal characteristics that were examined, as might be expected, teachers with greater experience believed themselves to be more knowledgeable about the First Things First critical features than those with less experience. A negative prior experience with school reform made teachers less inclined to view First Things First positively, as well as less likely to believe that implementing it would be important for improved student performance. (Interestingly, a *positive* prior experience with school reform also was associated with a lessened sense of urgency — perhaps because teachers with any prior experience with reform have become accustomed to seeing reforms come and go without being fully implemented or without having the impact to which the reforms initially laid claim.)[6]

One suggestive finding is that staff members who perceived parents as more involved with their children's education felt more knowledgeable about and were more positively disposed toward First Things First. How this should be interpreted is not clear. Perhaps teachers who were initially more inclined to see parents as involved in their children's education were more likely to approve of and seek to learn more about a reform that strongly emphasizes outreach to families. Such teachers may also be less likely to "give up on" children, in the belief that what schools do is futile in the face of a negative home environment, and thus the teachers may be supportive of school improvement efforts. Or it may be that successful involvement in the Family Advocate System made some teachers more positively disposed toward First Things

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[4]Both the independent and the dependent variables have been standardized, so that the coefficients represent the difference from the mean score on the dependent variable, measured in standard deviation units, that is created by a change of 1 standard deviation in the independent variable (or, for dichotomous variables like gender, a change from one status to another). An important benefit of standardizing the coefficients is that because they are all measured in the same unit, their sizes can be compared to determine whether one variable has a larger influence on an outcome than another does.

[5]This is in marked contrast to a similar analysis of the early outcomes conducted during the planning year. In the earlier analysis, both personal and school-related characteristics were associated with responses to the early outcomes questions. In particular, the analysis indicated that commitment to First Things First was stronger among teachers who had less experience, teachers who are nonwhite, and teachers who perceived their principal as being responsive to their concerns. An independent variable specific to the planning year — teachers' sense that they had played an important role in planning-year decision-making — also proved significantly and positively associated with a number of these early outcomes. It may well be that as the reform progresses, teachers' predilections or earlier experiences become less predictive than what is actually occurring in their own schools and classrooms.

[6]Changes in leadership at the building or district level or cessation of external funding often mean that reforms are not implemented as planned.

First in general, as well as more likely to recognize that parents are interested in their children's school progress.

Finally, Table 5.3 shows that, independent of the characteristics of teachers at those schools, staff at Schools A, B, and F held more favorable attitudes toward First Things First than their counterparts at other schools.

Experiences of Support and Engagement

As a look back at Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1 makes clear, the First Things First theory of change hypothesizes that *support* and *engagement* are the two central constructs that mediate between the initiative's short-term and long-term outcomes. That is, teachers' increased knowledge of, preparation for, and support of the First Things First critical features lead to more complete program implementation; implementation, in turn, makes for increased experiences of support and engagement among both students and staff; and increased support and engagement lead to the desired long-term outcomes for students (improved attendance, persistence, and achievement).

Measures of support and engagement for teachers and students that were developed by IRRE were incorporated into the staff and student surveys administered during both the planning year and the implementation year.[7] Given survey indications that teachers' knowledge of and preparation for the initiative increased but that support for it diminished between the planning year and the implementation years — along with the fact that full implementation of the framework's elements was far from complete at the one-year mark — it may be unrealistic to expect large changes on these measures for either teachers or students. Nonetheless, a look at the early findings may be instructive in highlighting the complexity of people's responses to a new intervention.

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[7]The analysis of support and engagement for teachers compared the planning-year survey responses of between 522 and 528 members with the implementation-year responses of between 522 and 527 staff members (depending on the specific outcome measured). Only the responses of staff members who had classroom responsibilities were included. Because of staff departures and new hires, there was considerable, but incomplete, overlap in sample members across the two years.

The analysis of support and engagement for students compared the planning-year survey responses of between 6,376 and 6,987 students with the implementation-year responses of between 6,549 and 7,008 students (again depending on the outcome measured). Planning-year students who graduated from high school and middle school and others who left the schools were not included in the implementation-year survey. Conversely, those who entered the middle and high schools during the implementation year were not included in the planning-year survey.

Support and Engagement Among Teachers

The items that constitute the measures of support and engagement for teachers, as well as the planning-year and implementation-year values of the constructs, appear in Table 5.4. The extent to which teachers felt supported by administrators and the central office was assessed using an eight-item scale. As Table 5.4 indicates, no statistically significant difference was registered between the planning and implementation years: Across all schools, the mean scale score was 2.8 in both years. Nor was there a statistically significant difference in the proportions of teachers registering especially high or low levels of support (15-16 percent of the sample, and 31-35 percent, respectively).[8]

With respect to engagement, a more complex story emerges. Table 5.4 shows that the construct of engagement includes an overall measure and three components of engagement. Two of these components — *behavioral and emotional engagement* and *reaction to challenge* — reflect respondents' own engagement; the third component — *collective engagement* — reflects their perception of their colleagues' responses. There was no change on the overall measure. Teachers' scores on the scale of behavioral and emotional engagement, however, declined significantly, from 3.22 in the planning year to 3.11 in the implementation year, although the magnitude of the change, expressed in terms of "effect size," was fairly small.[9] Perhaps in part because the surveys were administered toward the end of an especially stressful year, teachers who responded to the implementation-year survey were less apt to report that they looked forward to going to work or felt happy when they were teaching than was the case a year earlier.

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[8]The original intention was to define "high" and "low" levels statistically, with high levels being those 1 standard deviation above the mean and low levels being those 1 standard deviation below it. It was noted, however, that most of the means that were examined hovered around 3.0 and that most of the standard deviations were close to 0.5. A convenient rule of thumb, therefore, was to consider a score of 3.5 or greater to be "high" and a score of 2.5 or less to be "low."

[9]"Effect size" is a metric used to compare the relative magnitudes of different effects. Statistically, it is calculated according to the formula

$$\text{effect size} = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_0}{s_0}$$

where

$\bar{x}_1 =$ the mean score on an outcome at Time 1 (after a change has been introduced)

$\bar{x}_0 =$ the mean score at baseline

$s_0 =$ the standard deviation of the distribution of scores at baseline

A rule of thumb is that effect sizes between 0 and .32 should be considered small, between .33 and .55 should be considered moderate, and over .55 should be considered large. See Lipsey, 1990.

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Table 5.4

Support and Engagement Among Teachers

	Planning Year	Implementation Year	Difference		Effect Size[a]
Support	2.79	2.77	-0.02	n.s.	-0.04
Staff get professional development support from the central office.					
Administrators help staff get what they need from the central office.					
Job expectations are made clear in this school.					
Administrators support staff decision-making about students.					
Staff get resources from the central office to support work with students.					
Staff get support from administrators to do what they need to do.					
Excellence in teaching is expected.					
The central office supports staff for educational innovations they want to try.					
Overall engagement	3.02	3.10	0.09	n.s.	0.01
Behavioral and emotional engagement	3.22	3.11	-0.11	***	-0.17
I look forward to going to work.					
My job has become just a matter of putting in time.					
When I am teaching I feel discouraged.					
When I am teaching I feel happy.					
Reaction to challenge	2.88	2.92	-0.03	n.s.	0.06
When I see something about the system that I think is not good for kids…					
I let somebody else deal with it.					
I talk to all people involved.					
I ignore it.					
If I didn't like the way a staff member was handling a student…					
I would talk to a staff member and try to straighten it out.					
I would ignore it.					
Collective engagement	3.01	3.10	0.09	**	0.13
Staff don't give up when difficulties arise.					
Staff do what is necessary to get the job done right.					
Staff go beyond the call of duty to do the best job they can.					
Sample size	528	528			

(continued)

Table 5.4 (continued)

Scores on the measure of collective engagement, on the other hand, increased significantly during the same time period, from 2.95 to 3.04. It may be that, precisely in the face of unusual stress, teachers recognized the effort that they and their colleagues had made.[10]

Support and Engagement Among Students

Table 5.5 presents the items that constitute the measures of support and engagement for students. Between the planning and implementation years, there was a small but significant increase, from 2.80 to 2.84, in mean scores on the scale measuring students' experiences of support from their teachers. Thus, students in the implementation year were more likely to agree with such statements as "My teachers like to be with me," "My teachers are fair with me," and "My teachers care about how I do in school" than was the case a year earlier. All but one school either remained the same or registered an increase on this measure; the exception was a school where planning-year scores were already unusually high. It may well be that the SLC structure left students feeling better known and more cared about than had been true in the past.

Students, however, also registered lower levels of engagement in the implementation year than in the planning year. Thus, they were less likely to agree that they worked very hard on schoolwork and paid attention in class and were more likely to agree that they came to class unprepared. Why this should be the case is not clear, although it is worth recalling that, as noted in Chapter 4, the overall quality of instruction also changed little over the course of the two years. Chapter 6 returns to this theme.

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[10]No difference between the planning and implementation years was evident on the scale measuring reaction to challenge.

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Table 5.5

Support and Engagement Among Students

	Planning Year	Implementation Year	Difference		Effect Size[a]
Teacher support	2.80	2.84	0.45	***	0.08
My teachers like to be with me.					
My teacher likes the other kids in my class better than me.					
My teacher interrupts me when I have something to say.					
My teachers are fair with me.					
My teachers' expectations for me are way off base.					
My teachers aren't fair with me.					
My teachers don't make clear what they expect of me in school.					
My teachers care about how I do in school.					
Overall engagement	3.32	3.25	-0.075	***	-0.23
I work very hard on my schoolwork.					
I don't try very hard in school.					
I pay attention in class.					
I often come to class unprepared.					
When something bad happens to me in school…					
I get angry at the teacher.					
I try to see what I did wrong.					
I say it was the teacher's fault.					
Sample size	7,015	7,023			

SOURCES: 2001 and 2002 First Things First student surveys.

NOTES: Scales are scored from 1 to 4, with 4 always being the positive outcome. The numbers presented in this table are the mean values of the scales. Negatively worded items are scored in reverse.

  *** = Differences between the planning year and the implementation year are statistically significant at the .01 level.

  [a]"Effect size" is a metric used to describe the magnitude of a difference. Effect sizes between 0 and .32 may be considered small.

Chapter 6

Concluding Reflections

"Nobody likes change but a wet baby."

— A superintendent of schools in a district implementing First Things First

The key message of this report is: "Change is hard." That this is a cliché does not make it any less true. The decline in teachers' personal and collective commitment to First Things First between the planning year and the implementation year most likely reflects the general difficulty of initiating any major change — as well as the many problems that schools faced in putting this specific intervention in place.

Indeed, the evaluation findings provide empirical evidence for the concept of the "implementation dip" frequently cited in the school reform literature. Coined by Michael Fullan, the term is defined as "literally a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings."[1] Much of the education reform literature indicates that the implementation dip is a commonly accepted and almost inevitable reality. In fact, Fullan goes on to say, "One of our most consistent findings and understandings about the change process in education is that *all* successful schools experience 'implementation dips' as they move forward." Few prior studies, however, have provided qualitative or quantitative data addressing shifts in attitude associated with large-scale school change; both the surveys and the staff interviews that were conducted as part of this study address the phenomenon head-on.[2]

First Things First requires change in every aspect of school operations: structure, scheduling, instruction, leadership roles, interpersonal relations, and governance. Ensuring that these changes are made places sizable demands on School Improvement Facilitators (SIFs), principals, and other administrators in schools and in central office positions. To be maximally effective, SIFs must hold a clear vision of the initiative as a whole, and they must be able to persuade, cajole, and prod both administrators and teachers to carry out the actions necessary to implement it — without having line authority over either group. Principals must be willing to

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[1]Fullan, 2001, p. 40.

[2]Huberman and Miles (1984) and Louis and Miles (1990) do offer some qualitative evidence of the implementation dip. Interviews and observations conducted by these researchers at schools involved in reform efforts found consistent problems with teachers' morale and confidence. Neither study, however, provides data about attitudes *prior* to the reform that would make it possible to assess whether there was, in fact, an implementation *dip* — that is, a *decline* in confidence and morale.

make changes that are likely to involve some loss of their own authority in order to empower the teachers in their schools.

With teachers being the front line of any meaningful reform, First Things First expects them to make major changes and requires them to take on a variety of new roles. (The Institute for Research and Reform in Education [IRRE] also provides some support for these new roles.) As family advocates, teachers must now become mentors and advisors to students. As members of small learning communities (SLCs), they must interact with colleagues from disparate disciplines who share the same students and together take on collective responsibility for those students. Within their classrooms, they must learn and practice new pedagogical techniques (some of which may seem to them inappropriate for the subjects and the students that they teach). They must develop new thematic and interdisciplinary curricula. They must engage in collective decision-making about individual students, SLC policies, and financial matters. Undoubtedly, some of these roles and activities were familiar to some teachers in the demonstration's schools before the initiative was implemented. But — to ensure broad enough and deep enough implementation to reach all students — First Things First requires that virtually *all* teachers take on *all* these new responsibilities.

IRRE provided technical assistance and training on many aspects of the initiative to site personnel at all levels. But the organization's own resources to aid implementation in the Group I schools were often thinly stretched as it simultaneously sought to move the Group II schools through the planning year and toward implementation. Even if IRRE had been able to do more, however, schools still have only a certain number of professional development days at their disposal. In any event, more teachers than in the past reported that the professional development they received was valuable.

Given all the demands that schools and their staff members faced — and the very early period covered by this report — it is not surprising that although all of the reform's elements were present at every site, at least in nascent form, implementation of the initiative was incomplete. Noting the multiplicity of challenges, one observer commented, "Something had to give." Sometimes administrators considered thoughtfully and in advance what could and could not be done with the available resources, deciding, for example, that only ninth- and tenth-graders would be assigned family advocates or would be placed in classes with reduced student-adult ratios. At other times, what "gave" was more a matter of happenstance: In some cases, it was SLC purity; in others, the Family Advocate System; in others, careful monitoring of cooperative learning; in still others, teacher decision-making. Nearly always, thematic and interdisciplinary instruction occupied the back burner.

In light of these findings, it is tempting to ask whether a better approach would have been to implement some aspects of the reform more thoroughly in the first year and to defer other as-

pects (for example, the Family Advocate System) until the intervention was more fully under way. This question is fundamentally unanswerable, of course, since no school in the demonstration was expected to implement the complete design in planned stages. Supporting the position that it is better to introduce all the changes at once, IRRE has cited the case of Kansas City, Kansas, where schools implemented an earlier version of the intervention that lacked, among other things, a family advocacy component. Teachers in that site resented the subsequent requirement that they adopt this new element of First Things First, along with other strategies devised by IRRE and district staff to realize the initiative's seven critical features more fully. This example is not entirely relevant, however, since Kansas City's teachers were being asked to add newly conceived components and standards with which they were unfamiliar. Perhaps one lesson is that if a model really is to be implemented in stages, those who put it in place must understand the entire model from the outset — both its elements and the thresholds of quality associated with each element — and they must constantly be reminded that there is more to come.

While the implementation of First Things First was incomplete at all sites in the demonstration, it unquestionably progressed further at some schools than at others. IRRE staff members and researchers concurred that the sites making the greatest progress were those where the principal and the SIF were fully committed to the reform, were supported (or minimally inhibited) by their central office supervisors, worked well as a team, and exercised strong leadership on behalf of the intervention's goals. The sites that lagged behind were those marked by weaker leadership efforts: Principals did not appear to support the initiative as fully, and SIFs were frequently called away to perform other duties or were reluctant to confront or direct teachers (who were sometimes their former colleagues) when such direction was needed.

Although the First Things First theory of change is not very specific as to the role of leadership, it predicts that the greater the staff support for the intervention, the more complete the implementation will be. Early findings do not support this hypothesis: At least at this early point, the depth of implementation was not associated with the degree of staff support for the intervention. As noted in Chapter 5 (Table 5.2), the school where staff members expressed greatest approval of the intervention implemented it the least during this first implementation year, whereas the school where staff members were the most negative made the greatest progress. Perhaps this finding confirms the slogan "No pain, no gain." It may not be possible for school staff to experience such an enormous shake-up of existing arrangements without negative feelings coming to the fore. Teachers' responses on subsequent rounds of the First Things First staff survey will indicate whether this negativism subsides over time if and when the hard, painful work begins to pay off in terms of their own and their students' success. It may well be that — as the changes made under First Things First become the new norm and as teachers come to perceive the predicted benefits to their students and themselves — those teachers who were initially the most negative may become the most supportive of the intervention.

In accord with the initiative's theory of change, students' experiences of staff support increased somewhat between the planning and the implementation years; at the same time, and contrary to the theory, their feelings of academic engagement declined significantly. One possible inference is that liking their teachers more and feeling that their teachers like them are not enough to make students work hard, pay attention, come to class prepared, and the like. Rather, students may be more likely to work hard when they get more challenging assignments (provided, of course, that the assignments stretch their capacities but do not surpass them). The results of the Classroom Observation Study suggest that, even when teachers used cooperative learning strategies, the tasks that students were asked to do were at a low level, requiring memorization and application rather than analysis and creation. It may be, too, that students who opted for particular SLCs because their themes promised instruction that would be tied to the students' interests were especially disappointed when the thematic instruction did not materialize early on.

The First Things First theory of change holds that increased student engagement is a key contributor to better long-term outcomes: improved attendance, increased achievement, and higher graduation rates. If the low level of meaningful instructional change in the first year of implementation is what has prevented increases in student engagement, then the importance of improving instruction is all the more clear. The difficulties of achieving this should not be underestimated; as one principal commented, "Classroom instruction is still the biggest hurdle, and efforts to improve it get the most resistance." The findings in this report suggest that the basic structural elements of First Things First (SLCs, the Family Advocate System) had been put in place by the end of the first year of implementation and that attention now should focus on what happens in the classroom — the very core of the educational process.

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This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

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Accelerated Schools

This study examines the implementation and impacts on achievement of the Accelerated Schools model, a whole-school reform targeted at at-risk students.

Evaluating the Accelerated Schools Approach: A Look at Early Implementation and Impacts on Student Achievement in Eight Elementary Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom, Sandra Ham, Laura Melton, Julienne O'Brien.

Extended-Service Schools Initiative

Conducted in partnership with Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), this evaluation of after-school programs operated as part of the Extended-Service Schools Initiative examines the programs' implementation, quality, cost, and effects on students.

Multiple Choices After School: Findings from the Extended-Service Schools Initiative (P/PV). 2002. Jean Baldwin Grossman, Marilyn Price, Veronica Fellerath, Linda Jucovy, Lauren Kotloff, Rebecca Raley, Karen Walker.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

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A discussion of the factors that determine whether an impact analysis of a social program is feasible and warranted, using an evaluation of a new family literacy initiative as a case study.

An Evaluability Assessment of the Toyota Families in Schools Program. 2001. Janet Quint.

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LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

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Opening Doors

An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers. 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.
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A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.
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How Welfare and Work Policies for Parents Affect Adolescents: A Synthesis of Research. 2002. Lisa Gennetian, Greg Duncan, Virginia Knox, Wanda Vargas, Elizabeth Clark-Kauffman, Andrew London.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

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