School Systems:

Physical, Social and Academic Processes

The What, How, When and Why about the Importance of Systems Thinking –

The Performance Effect on Low, Medium and High Socioeconomic Elementary School Settings

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Executive Summary

Systems are a necessity in both our personal and professional lives. They afford us the ability to accomplish more simply by standardizing a series of repeated tasks into an efficient process. A system can be simple, such as when we visit the grocery store, we park our car in the same general area of the lot reducing mental energies in remembering where the car is located upon exiting. Systems can also be extremely complicated with many components, but after the process is efficiently standardized, it operates smoothly with little mental effort to maintain. The overall efficiency of a system drives its effectiveness. In fact, regardless of industry, the more efficient the systematic process, the more effective – and in turn, the higher the overall performance.

Public schools operate daily with thousands of moving parts. In order to produce elevated student outcomes, systems must be designed and employed at the global physical plant level as well as downstream, such as in the classrooms with instructional and curricular resource systems. It is one of the principal's chief functions in their administrative capacity to create, design and implement systems. A lead campus administrator wears two hats with differing responsibilities. One of their roles is the physical plant manager and the other capacity is the school's instructional leader. Since the principal is in a similar capacity as a quarterback of a football team that touches the ball on every offensive down, they play a highly influential role in the operations across an elementary campus. It is for this reason the principal is the most important hire at an elementary school. If an ineffective school administrator is hired, the campus operations and academics will be adversely affected proportionally.

Disorganization and disfunction are common elements in any elementary school when there are poorly created or implemented systems. The lack of efficiency of campus systems is readily felt by all stakeholders. For instance, when parents repeatedly wait in long, static arrival and dismissal lines day after day, it is more than apparent that something is amiss in the process. When teachers consistently spend long hours after school engaged in lesson design, new school initiatives, and intervention planning/ Then, at the end of the school year, chronic academic performance continues unabated. If weekly school staff meetings and professional development sessions do <u>not</u> address teacher or student needs, then it becomes evident that the campus administration does <u>not</u> understand the problems they are trying to solve. The end result in all three of these situations is generally the same: higher than normal teacher attrition, dissatisfied parents and consistent, low student social and academic performance.

When I was a graduate student in educational administration more than two decades ago, there was not a course offering that covered systems thinking or guidance in the design, implementation and monitoring in either of the two capacities of an elementary principal. It is my professional opinion that this oversight in graduate school coursework is a major factor in the lack of administrative preparedness as well as chronically low student outcomes in the vast majority of this country's Title 1 schools.

This white paper provides new and existing elementary school administrators with a what, how, when and why of systems thinking and effective design from schoolwide to instruction, and curricular systems. As an elementary school principal, I invested an exorbitant amount of time and effort designing, implementing and refining both global and classroom systems. This document presses administrative work to concurrently address student safety concerns and improve campus logistical operations, while significantly heightening academics at either type of elementary campus – non-Title 1 or Title 1 public schools.

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About the Author

Blaine Helwig is a locally, state and nationally recognized campus administrator and was the J. Walter Graham Elementary Principal in Austin ISD for 9 years. In that time period, J. Walter Graham Elementary (an urban Title 1 school) experienced dramatic and sustained academic success with typical inner city challenging student demographics. From 2009 to 2016, Graham Elementary School's academic performance earned exemplary accountability ratings and every possible academic distinction by the Texas Education Agency. The school was honored as a 2012 National Blue-Ribbon School recipient, and the campus was featured as a National Blue Ribbon Profile School for academic excellence on the United States Department of Education's website - one of only four schools in the country to receive this prestigious honor. The Graham campus has also been recognized annually by Education Non-Profit Organizations for high and sustained academic performance. Finally, the language arts, mathematics and science stop-gap resources implemented at Graham that produced heightened student success are currently used in many other Title 1 campuses and districts with similar high percentages of English Language Learners, minority and low socioeconomic student populations.

After completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Architectural Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin in 1985, he began his professional career as a lead structural engineer designing over 100 state and federal highway bridges in Texas. He also worked as a senior project engineer for the Department of Defense with technical engineering management and oversight on the Parrotts Ferry signature bridge retrofit in California as well as environmental site mitigation at Little Dell Dam in Utah and a hydraulic conduit drainage redesign at Lake Sonoma Dam in California. At present, Mr. Helwig retains his license as a registered professional engineer in Texas with a structural engineering specialization.

In 1992, Mr. Helwig was conferred a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting. During this period of business study at the University of Texas, he pursued additional and focused coursework in both economics and finance. Mr. Helwig is extremely appreciative of the financial support from the US military throughout his years of university education and is a proud veteran of both the United States Air Force and Army.

After working as an accounting director for a large library system in central Texas, he was alternatively certified to work as an elementary teacher by the University of Texas. He taught fourth and fifth grade self-contained classrooms in the Round Rock Independent School District for six years. It was during those professional years that extensive language arts, science, social studies and mathematics curriculum were developed. The initial design work on the numeracy and literacy stop-gap resources was completed, implemented and beta-tested in intermediate classrooms. Those stop-gap intervention programs significantly evolved during his Title 1 school experience and are currently used by tens of thousands of elementary students in both traditional public schools as well as charter schools across the State of Texas.

In 2004, he was awarded a master's degree in educational administration from Texas State University and worked for two years as the assistant principal at Charlotte Cox Elementary in the Leander Independent School District, a suburban school district near Austin. He began work in the Austin Independent School District in 2006 as an Elementary Program Supervisor under the direction of the Associate Superintendent's Office. A year later, he started his principal assignment at J. Walter Graham Elementary and maintained that capacity until his retirement in the fall of 2016. In 2012, Mr. Helwig was recognized by the United States Department of Education as one of seven recipients in the country with the prestigious Terrel H. Bell award for school transformation for producing outstanding student achievement for all students regardless of race, language proficiency and socioeconomic status. He was also the 2012 recipient of the Central Texas HEB Principal Excellence in Education Award and a five-time nominee and a two-time finalist for Austin ISD Principal of the Year. Currently, Blaine Helwig is a curriculum writer and a Title 1 education consultant in rural and urban school transformation. He is a cofounder of Celestial Numeracy, a daily numeracy program that presently serves over 80,000 elementary and middle students each day as well as a cofounder of The New 3Rs Education Consulting.

School Systems – Physical, Social and Academic Processes

By Blaine Helwig

Early on in my life, I discovered the merits of implementing systematic processes to everyday, repetitive tasks, and the effect that these consistent routines yield in heightening performance. Of course, systematic processes can be simple involving only a few moving parts, or they can be comprised of a myriad of intricate components. In general, establishing predictable, repetitive routines standardizes a process and saves time and both physical and mental energy. More importantly, the standardized system invariably drives performance levels higher. Thus, in any repeatable task or routine in my life, the first thing I do is analyze the process for its overall efficiency to inevitably drive its effectiveness. Then, I rinse and repeat, reflect, and modify the system as needed until the workflow is as functional and seamless as humanly possible.

For instance, as an elementary campus principal, I prepared for my morning workday with a highly systematic, replicable routine. Each morning before I left my condominium, I used my free hand to slap my two back pockets to feel for my phone and wallet while the other hand secured my computer satchel and home/car keys. In doing so, I did not forget one of four items I normally needed each workday. After a short walk to my car, I opened the trunk and retrieved my work identification badge and school keys from a secure and hidden spot; thus, wherever the car went, those two school items were always along for the ride. Invariably, I arrived at school at least 45 to 60 minutes before the children shuffled in for breakfast, so I had time to prepare for my administrative day – usually uninterrupted by teachers, parents or children.

When I entered my office, the **<u>first</u>** thing I did was place my keys and wallet in a locked drawer before I became engaged and distracted in a detailed conversation with anyone. I hung my jacket in the same place, removed any papers from my computer satchel, and placed them in the usual but secure location. I wanted to know the exact location of my car keys, important papers, jacket and wallet when it was quitting time. Otherwise, it is too easy to become distracted in an early morning conversation and misplace personal items – only to waste an extra half-hour searching for them at the end of the workday.

Once at my desk, I created and/or updated **two** quick to-do lists for that day – one list was for the quick to-do, easily completed immediate tasks that were needed for that day. The second to-do list was for upcoming tasks occurring in the next week or two that required my attendance, planning and preparation. If I had the time that day, I would engage in those items on my second to-do list – if time became available. I also turned on my computer and reviewed teacher absences to ensure they all were filled with a (reliable, familiar) substitute for the day. If a classroom with an absent teacher had students with challenging behavioral issues, I would write a post-it-note and place it next to my to-do lists to remind me to visit those specific classrooms immediately after all students had been picked up from the cafeteria or gym. Finally, I would walk the school grounds to visually check that nothing appeared out of the ordinary – that may possibly be a safety issue or require my immediate attention. After that, I was ready, calm and prepared for the staff and children to arrive.

My morning preparation system I religiously exercised every day as a campus administrator for over a decade because it was both effective and efficient. Importantly, I would not change the elements of that morning routine or system until it no longer worked. It is also imperative to understand that once a smoothly operating system is flowing, it not only affords quickly adding more elements to the overall process, but it allows the educator to address unanticipated issues with minimal disruptions to the day.

General 'Systems Thinking' – Attributes and Benefits

General school systems and systematic processes are critical to the organizational work of an elementary principal since they wear two hats – the instructional leader and physical plant manager at the campus. Efficient and effective systems dramatically reduce a principal's physical and emotional stress and the organization's employees are more productive since standardization of any repeatable process significantly decreases the probability of undesirable outcomes. Incorporation of effective systems also alleviates an educator's cognitive processing demands since so many repetitive daily operational tasks are standardized for managing a large elementary school. Moreover, they increase the safety of the campus environment, and drive overall social and academic performance upward. **In short, all systems drive varying levels of performance.** The more efficient the system that _directly_ addresses social and academic students' needs, the higher its effectiveness. Unfortunately, the converse is equally valid – the more inefficient and less direct targeting of student needs, the less the system's effectiveness! Consequently, systematic implementation of both global and classroom processes is one of the primary keys to heightening social and academic achievement at an elementary campus, especially a Title 1 school.

The varying levels of the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization's SYSTEMS determines its level of performance, regardless of the industry.

Almost all campus wide and classroom systems must be front-end loaded – meaning they take time, consistency and effort to initially set-up. However, once firmly established, these systematic processes afford time savings and control of an organization's complex and dynamic components. In the case of large elementary schools, this thinking translates to thousands of moving parts from students, parents and campus staff. The campus systems – implicitly and explicitly – help provide shared meaning, identity and purpose to the collective efforts of all stakeholders from the minute the school doors open each morning, until the end of the day, when the last student or staff member exits the premises. However, the implemented system – resulting in the expense of both time and effort and usually money, **must matter**! It must be important to implement physical, resource and instructional systems that directly make a measurable difference in performance. The campus administration must know what they are trying to accomplish at the school as well as know that the system they are implementing directly addresses those specific attributes and parameters.

Once an efficient and effective system is established, it should **NOT** be changed or altered unless performance is clearly diminished by visual/empirical or numerical data. In the situation when outcomes have dramatically declined, instead of a complete system redesign, the campus administration should first identify the smallest tweak required to re-establish the process to its original and desired performance levels. If on the other hand, performance was never high, or it has been consistently low for a prolonged period, now effective systematic processes need to be put in place, immediately. Campus administrators should not ignore or _externally_ rationalize chronic student outcomes at their campuses. *Why?* Ineffective and inefficient system processes – both school wide and instructionally have the tendency to reduce the confidence in campus leadership since they inevitably and unnecessarily increase the workload on the staff (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals, librarians and custodians). At some point, campus staff frustrations frequently culminate into a collective opinion – both implicitly and explicitly – *'management does not know what it is doing.'* At that frustrating point, personnel attrition rates dramatically climb, and parents look for alternative educational options for their children.

School-wide (Global) Systems – Physical Plant Management

The first step a newly hired principal in any type of elementary school (i.e., non-Title 1 or Title 1) should take is to evaluate the campus' school wide physical systems. Movement of students inevitably creates potential safety issues; consequently, safety is always **THE** paramount priority of any elementary or secondary campus.

The incoming principal must analyze the arrival and dismissal process for traffic patterns for all student-safety elements. Reviewing, creating and maintaining schoolwide global systems is an arduous and tedious task, but it is of chief importance – and not only for student safety. If the large global systems are chaotic and inefficient, any external observer (e.g., parent, advocate or central office administrator) to the campus will immediately suspect that the classrooms, student management and instruction are also problematic. In short, it is only logical to infer that if campus leadership did **not** prioritize the major school systems such as arrival and dismissal, then it is only reasonable to deduce that they did not press academic systems in classrooms, too – a less visible area. As a matter of fact, on any consulting trip to a campus, I always arrive at the campus when students first arrive and enter the school building to observe the efficiency of student traffic patterns and behavioral expectations – and remain in the gym or cafeteria until teachers' pick-up their students. *It is all too common in most human endeavors involving large groups of people that whatever begins poorly, inevitably continues poorly from that point forward.* Thus, the organizational inertia must be positive and directional from the outset, so the overall social and academic process is capable of yielding heightened outcomes in the classrooms.

Of course, an arrival system is easier to evaluate since children are dropped off, walk or ride their bikes to school, and unlike dismissal, there is not the extra step required when school staff must match a parent with a specific child. However, an arrival system must ensure that whether a child chooses to eat breakfast or not, all arriving students report to a specified and clearly marked location to quietly sit and read until their teacher arrives to pick them up to begin the instructional day. For the daily dismissal process, an accountable process should be set up independently whether a student walked or rode their bike home, attended an after-school activity, boarded a school bus, or was a car rider. The dismissal process is the moment in time when the responsibility of students' safety and welfare is transferred back to parents or an after-school care organization. However, it is imperative to stress that the traffic patterns for either an arrival or dismissal process must ensure that elementary students are not permitted the opportunity to access areas of the school that are not supervised at that time of the day.

The next system that must be created is the master schedule that includes lunch, recess, teacher planning periods, essential areas and instructional time periods for all content areas (i.e., math, reading, writing, science and social studies). The schedule should be prioritized for students receiving special education or specialized services since campus personnel must meet legal requirements in students' IEPs (Individual Education Plans). For content blocks, I always scheduled mathematics blocks during the first part of the day for the intermediate elementary grade levels when students were usually the most alert. Another scheduling preference of mine was that fifth grade was blocked in the last essential area period of the instructional day. Students at that age can proceed directly to the dismissal areas at the end of their essential area period (i.e., physical education, art or music) and minimize one last transition back to the classroom.

It is also vital to create physical maps indicating traffic patterns for arrival, dismissal, lockdown, fire and tornado/disaster schematics as well as the hard copies for the master schedule. Each of these maps should be neatly printed and clearly displayed near the door in ALL classrooms on campus. I also required teachers to place those same documents in their emergency substitute plans 'red folder' on their desk for quick reference, as needed. It is also a good idea to create a faculty list of home and classroom phone numbers for each teacher. Many of these schedules and maps can be stored in smart phones; however, I strongly recommend both physical hard copies of teachers' school phone numbers placed in each classroom in the event of immediate reference need by substitute personnel.

I strongly recommend hanging nine (9) month (Quartet) physical wall calendars on the principal's office wall as a <u>master</u> yearly calendar. These individual month calendars make it possible to plan the entire school year with all the important dates listed **<u>visually</u>** throughout the school year in plain view. Consequently, I was always aware immediately of important dates for meetings or activities weeks or months out. If I was on my office or mobile cellular phone and I needed to schedule an event or meeting, a quick visual survey at the row of wall calendars immediately determined if I had a conflict. Wall calendars also permitted grade level team leaders to schedule and plan field trips and any other grade level presentations, so conflicts for open space and dates with the gym, cafeteria and auditorium were always avoided. Additionally, any parent visiting the office could view the row of monthly calendars and realize that the school their child attended had an organized plan for the entire school year. Another major advantage as a principal was that I could use my phone camera and quickly snap a picture of the current month to aid me in creating my weekly newsletter and subsequent events at home in my leisure. That weekly calendar and newsletter was emailed to staff each Sunday afternoon. Finally, all staff had access to a physical yearly calendar from custodians and paraprofessionals to teachers that they could check to ensure that there was not a future event that they may need to support or plan around. Of course, a digital process can be used, but to this day, I would incorporate this type of physical yearly planning system and its transparency for the explicit benefits listed above and <u>management control</u> reasons as well as for any staff members that lack technological expertise with mobile phones and computers.

All these physical plant systems should be the first step in the principal's planning workflow for the upcoming school year. It is recommended that the campus principals begin planning by 'GOING BIG' – school wide and then and only then, methodically drill down to plan instruction, curricular resources and other systems at each grade level from prekindergarten through fifth grade.

Another global management system that every school administrator should put in place is a scheduled computer back-up of their personal files and documents. Today, I believe far too many administrators place too much of their work on Google Drives. There are legal ramifications in administrative work with confidential records and documents; consequently, I placed the bare minimum of my professional work on shared drives. It is for this reason that I recommend that an administrator saves all their files in ONE file with sub-folders inside that ONE file on their office personal computer/laptop. That way, on the first of each month, an administrator can retrieve a separate hard drive from a locked desk drawer, and back-up all their files quickly. Continuing, on the first day of the new month, drag the ONE desktop file to the portable hard drive, and label the back-up file with some easily recognizable file name, such as, "9-1-24 Principal Back-Up." Done in under a minute! If the campus or district administrator opts NOT to do this process, they may discover their error in judgement after a message pops up on their dark computer screen that reads, "Drive C Corrupted." Unfortunately, if that happens, they are forced to recreate years of documents and planning work. Of course, a computer specialist *may* be able to recover parts of the data, but why risk it? Take control of your physical plant workflow with simple systemic steps that avoid any reliance on luck and good fortune.

Finally, another imperative school system employed at my campus was a co-principal school leadership model. In this leadership system, the assistant principal ran the front office all day, and I only stopped back at my

office sporadically during the day to check-in, review my incoming emails, and phone messages to determine if there was pressing correspondence. If not, I would leave all my emails and return phone calls for that night – at home. This system allowed me to spend my entire day in classrooms – modeling pedagogy, working with students in numeracy and literacy interventions, or observing and assisting teachers in checking an application curricular resource. The administrative visibility of this model reaps both implicit and explicit benefits. One of the chief benefits of this dual leadership system between the assistant principal and the principal was crucial to pressing student achievement at a Title 1 elementary campus with challenging student demographics. In fact, this system produced on par academic performance of our Title 1 elementary school with the highest socioeconomic status (non-title 1) elementary schools in the State of Texas.

Classroom Systems – Instructional Leadership Management

These systems directly impact student learning, and they can be separated into three (3) discrete areas: effective student management, efficient daily routines, and instruction – pedagogy and curricular resources. The first two classroom areas – student management and daily routines – fulfill the same demand regardless if the elementary school is classified as a medium to high socioeconomic status school (non-Title 1) or a low-income campus (Title 1). The main intention of both systems is to preserve instructional minutes; thus, with sound systems, students learn more content since children spend more minutes each day engaged in active learning. The principal should focus on these two (2) areas (every August, without exception) during the fall professional development (PD) session as new teachers and returning faculty prepare for a new school year. As a matter of fact, I emphasized the importance of these two areas during that initial PD by providing specific non-negotiables with staff since both preserve instructional minutes, heighten student learning and significantly reduce student disruptions.

Effective Student Management

Effective student management must begin on day one of a new school year, and a classroom teacher must methodically establish 3 to 5 classroom rules that provide and ensure every student with a safe and equitable learning environment. Of course, each teacher can choose their own rules, but they must be consistent in applying them throughout the school year. I also emphasized that too many stated rules are not always a viable behavioral model since students must be able to readily remember them. As an example, I provided several basic examples with my staff of a general student behavioral framework: 1.) Be respectful. 2.) Be responsible. 3.) Raise your hand (be recognized) before speaking. 4.) Effort, Caring and Pride come from within. During fall PD session, the principal conveys his or her classroom expectations to their teachers as analogously as classroom teachers are providing their specific classroom expectations to their students. Clarity of campus expectations should be one of the administrator's central objectives during August PD.

On the first day of school, it is not advisable that a teacher quickly read through their classroom behavioral rules and move on to another topic. These rules are too important. Student understanding of the behavioral expectations must be thorough – and the meaning of each rule must not be ambiguous. Students cannot be confused; they must comprehend the rule's meaning so they can choose or not choose to break it. It is always a child's choice to abide or not abide by classroom rules, but the 'breaking' of a rule cannot come as a surprise to them. Pragmatically, classroom educators are overtly communicating with clarity the appropriate conduct expectations to their students: *"These classroom rules are the stated expectations when we interact with each other!"*

The teacher should also focus on the consequences of breaking the rules – and the consequences must be consistent, equitable and reasonable. Interestingly, after the impact of the George Floyd incident in Minneapolis, far too many educators felt that classroom rules were oppressive. Not only were many of their classrooms chaotic as a result, but they also missed the entire point of that heinous law enforcement incident. The police officers did NOT follow the rules – the very rules that they took an oath to enforce. It was for this reason that criminal charges were brought against those police officers – for breaking the specified rules of law enforcement engagement regarding the civil rights of George Floyd. Rules are the reason we can operate in this world with civility and predictability. Without them, it is chaos and randomness that leads to inequity since the expectations and consequences are not universally known and understood among the citizenry.

It is also important at the initial August PD session that the principal emphasizes the fundamental need for positive relationship building and establishing trust with their students. These are the human attributes that are earned over time with consistent engagement, and they inevitably cement the cornerstone of impactful student learning every day of the school year. Additionally, the principal should emphasize that teachers' classrooms be neat and orderly and above all functional – a model for student work and their learning space. Finally, the teacher should place posters on the wall and anchors of support that provide meaningful messaging to students – not items simply to fill empty wall space.

Efficient Daily Routines

The second classroom system that the principal must stress to their staff is the importance of efficient daily routines. These systems are all about traffic flows, daily homework distribution and collection, and other repetitive tasks that expend valuable minutes if they are haphazardly designed and implemented. Again, I stressed these systems to teachers **every** August during our professional development sessions to ensure my classroom management expectations were crystal clear.

The paramount importance of efficient daily routines can be quantified based on lost instructional minutes via the following ratio: If a teacher loses 15 minutes a day – everyday – throughout the school year, that lost quarter hour translates into the *cumulative* total loss of 9 instructional days by the end of May. Consequently, an empirical ratio exists, 15:9. The most efficient teacher will lose at least 15 minutes a day in transitions and normal activities; however, it is a ratio – a multiples ratio. For every 15 minutes lost – a total of 9 instructional days are gone. 30 minutes lost per day and 18 instructional days are lost, etc. Of course, the students are physically present and at school on those lost learning days. No, they are not, in fact, absent from school, and the 15:9 ratio exemplifies the expensive student learning cost of inefficient daily classroom routines.

I also recommended intermediate grade level teachers use the same group of students that were highly effective to pass out or collect items, as needed, during the day. Teachers must also create a system for early finishers of independent work on core lessons, so there is no 'down time' with that group of children. Of course, the last item on an early finisher list should always be: 'reading.'

Lastly, I advised the teacher to make use of an instructional 'working table' that contained all the items (e.g., practice pages or manipulatives) needed for that day's core lessons. In general, organization and well established, predictable systems are needed to preserve instructional minutes and heighten student learning. I pressed teachers of the need for a well-run and planned classroom, so students are actively engaged in learning for as many minutes of the instructional day, as humanly possible.

The additional classroom personnel commonly employed at a Title 1 campus must be used effectively. These educators **cannot** be mini administrators – walking around evaluating teachers as if they were the lead administrator. They must be directly addressing student groups as well as assisting teachers - daily. In short, they must be accountable to their daily tasks in the overall pedagogical system. They must be addressing stopgap measures and be highly competent in their work in that specific intervention area. The short blog, *"Instructional Coaches – What do they do all day?"* addresses this specific management area in detail. It can be read at the website in the footer of this document, under the blog tab. **Cautionary - Management Note:** One of the most egregious mistakes a principal makes is not problem-solving daily tasks and duties with their coaches and intervention personnel that address student academic needs. All too often, support personnel are frequently wasted on 30,000 feet work that has little to nothing to alter the academic and social direction of the campus. A successful and impactful administrator must know what's important and press it!

Instruction – Pedagogy and Curricular Resources

Instruction and curricular resources are classroom systems that drive both the social and academic performance at a public school; however, it is important to note that the system set-up and implementation is highly dependent upon the percentage of low-income children. On a campus with approximately **10 percent or less** of low economically disadvantaged students, most of the children at those schools are already on grade level in reading and math; consequently, the campus administration of non-Title 1 schools is in an enviable academic position. However, non-Title 1 school principals should focus and target that small group of students **not** passing grade level standardized assessments with the instructional and academic systems listed below. Those students should not be ignored for any reason, including one of equity and morality. The overall academic performance of non-Title1 campuses should **not** have a significant percentage – more than 5 to 10 percent – of students failing grade level standardized tests in any content area.

In comparison, a low-income Title 1 campus principal lives in another world of instructional management. A Title 1 campus administrator **must** understand that a complicated process of any kind (e.g., curricular, personnel management or physical plant task) must be separated into smaller solvable parts to achieve an overall solution; in fact, this organizational attribute is one of the key traits of an adept problem solver. Specifically, it is the executive function thinking in campus system design and implementation that separates highly acclaimed Title 1 educators from their peers who do not grasp the importance of this style of cognitive processing. Moreover, nowhere is this skill set more on display than in the instructional and curricular resource end of their administrative duties.

The outline of the pedagogical and curricular resource systems listed below are primarily intended for an elementary campus with 10 percent or higher of enrolled students classified as economically disadvantaged. As the percentage of economically disadvantaged students increases, the more important it is to implement these systems both efficiently and effectively since the low-economically disadvantaged percentage of enrolled students at a campus generally correlates to higher numbers of students that are academically behind – meaning they are not on grade level in one or more content areas. It is important to note that these systems will work with academically struggling students at any elementary campus type; however, most of the time a non-Title 1 elementary campus administrator does not need to implement the literacy stop-gap resources except for a small, targeted group of students that are struggling academically.

A typical and major issue in Title 1 elementary schools is the large number of students that are academically behind. The large number of students **not** on grade level can appear overwhelming to campus administrators as well as classroom teachers. In general, it is difficult for educators to discern which students are academically behind and which students may have deeper learning issues since they all commonly struggle with grade level

concepts. Consequently, the Title 1 administrator's overriding instructional and curricular resource objective must be to rapidly accelerate as many academically struggling students as possible back to grade level proficiency. At that point, only a small group of students that are not progressing remain and are readily identifiable. It is these remaining students that specialized personnel may be needed for identifying students with potential language and mathematics' processing disorders or potential learning disabilities. Historically, the size of this small group of children will be approximately 10 percent of the total student population – a manageable number of students requiring specialized diagnostic investigation. Furthermore, this type of instructional and curricular resource system approach in Title 1 elementary schools prevents an over identification of students receiving special education services or other unique student services.

It is also important to realize that the resources listed below 'make a significant difference' in the academic reformation of a Title 1 elementary school. However, the school may choose to use additional resources, but they should not compete with and diminish the effect of the stop-gap curricular literacy and numeracy resources. In short, *the **supplemental** stop-gap resources listed below **must** be used since they address students' academic needs who are struggling with grade level work.* If these resources are consistently pressed with fidelity, the academic turnaround time for math and science is one school year and literacy is between 1 to 2 years. Specifically, students must be pressed to grade level proficiency by the end of third grade; at that point, children transition to fourth and fifth grade on level with minimal intervention demand beyond consistent Tier 1 implementation. Newly enrolled students in third through fifth grade must be specifically targeted so they are also rapidly pressed to grade level proficiency, too. It is the principal's primary responsibility to enact a systematic plan, so all students, whether continuously enrolled or newly

> ## Caveat Emptor
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> Do **NOT** implement a curricular resource or programming that competes with the stop-gap resource systems. Those resources directly address students' academic intervention needs.
>
> **TIME is a mutually exclusive attribute.**

matriculated, are provided equitable education. This latter group of children is relatively small (e.g., usually between 10 to 25 percent mobility rates); thus, the same stop-gap curricular systems that were effective in the primary grades with their peers are also manageable and viable for them in the intermediate grades.

Final note: The objective of stop-gap fluency/non-negotiable word programs as well as an effective daily numeracy skill-based program must be clearly understood. The point of the stopgap (i.e., SG) resources in math and literacy presses the mass of students academically behind to grade level, quickly. Then, only the students that remain academically behind should be investigated further for potential language processing or potential learning disabilities. The central point is that these remaining students are – at that point - easily identified in a Title 1 school, and then diagnostically evaluated and provided with any services that **may** be needed to meet their academic and social needs. Otherwise, academically struggling students are frequently overidentified with language processing disorders or special education services, since their academic literacy and numeracy gaps are usually indistinguishable from children in need of specialized services. *In short, it is empirically impossible to tell which students are **only** academically behind and which students require specialized services.* This systematic intervention process affords the principal the ability to confidently recommend and refer students for further evaluation by diagnostic specialists in their area of student need. If a school's administration does not realize that the academic literacy gaps (word fluency/non-negotiable orthography) and numeracy gaps must be rapidly closed via a systematic process targeting **each child**, there is little hope for academic reformation at the campus.

The curricular resources listed below are an engineer's methodology and approach to academic reformation – identifying and isolating the problem and then providing the systematic means to create both an effective and efficient solution. It is important to note that there are specific white papers for the supplemental curricular

resources and their implementation for these systems available for free download provided at the website listed in the footer of this document. Thus, the resource or pedagogical technique is listed with the *briefest of descriptions*, and the interested reader can download the specific document, for free, to better understand the full accounting of the process (e.g., implementation, accountability and monitoring).

A.) **Mathematics** – a standard 90-minute math block has four (4) primary components: daily numeracy (5 to 10 minutes), spaced repetition (5 to 10 minutes), core lesson block (45 minutes) and a daily problem-solving session (30 minutes). However, if the daily numeracy program is Formative Loop – a stop gap program, it is usually implemented at the onset of school day when students initially arrive each morning to the classroom. Thus, those 5 to 10 minutes of the daily numeracy program are not expended in the math block, and that time savings may extend in any of the other three (3) areas of the standard math block. The numeracy program will press students to grade level quickly as it focuses on **each student discretely** and works symbiotically with the other three components of the math block. It is recommended that the interested educator download and peruse the following white papers: <u>The 90-Minute Math Block</u>, <u>Spaced Repetition System</u>, <u>Math Fact Mastery – Easy to Do!</u> and <u>Academic Turnaround (Math) – Do What Matters!</u> These white papers are available for free download at the website address provided in the footer of this document.

It is important to note that pressing this model will result in academic turnaround in mathematics of any elementary school in only one (1) school year. The academic numeracy gap foments in the primary grades (i.e., kindergarten – second grade) and widens in the intermediate grade levels (i.e., third – fifth). The Formative Loop numeracy program guarantees that students are pressed back to grade level; however, the primary math program must be an administrators' focal point as well to prevent academic numeracy gaps from initially forming.

B.) **Literacy – Reading and Writing –** The academic literacy gap – unlike the numeracy gap – starts prior to children enrolling in an elementary (Title 1) school. Thus, if a child hails from a low-income home, it is highly probable that the child will be academically behind in both 'listening' and 'speaking' skills in the language acquisition process much more than their more affluent counterpart that enrolls in a medium to high socioeconomic elementary school. These two-language acquisition and processing skills translate into a word gap – the quantifiable size of this word gap is unknown. However, what is important is the word gap is threshold – **meaning that it matters in reading ability**. *It directly impacts a child's ability to read on-grade level*. Consequently, it must be addressed directly, or the mass of children remain academically behind as they progress through the elementary and secondary grades.

The academic literacy gap for impoverished children can be dramatically addressed and rectified with the Science of Reading (SOR) process as prescribed by current curricular thinking as well as the implementation of two <u>supplemental</u> stop-gap literacy programs that address both word fluency (i.e., 1,000-word fluency program) and the *deep* orthographic nature of a language like English (i.e., 800 non-negotiable word program).   If these specific stop-gap **supplemental** literacy programs are not used, then impoverished children's academic literacy gap will not be addressed, and their literacy rates will continue to academically lag behind their more affluent peers. As is commonly known, the difference in academic literacy ability is demonstrated by the infamous achievement gap when standardized assessment outcomes are compared between low-

income students and medium to high income children beginning in third grade. Moreover, it provides ALL students with a fundamental level of reading and spelling affording the teacher to spring off a common set of skills across the classroom. Tier 1 lessons are invariably much more effective since students are prepared to learn grade level grammar lessons without scattered interventions on the most basic of elementary skills. This factor is key to any classroom teacher that has tried to teach students that cannot correctly spell the most fundamental words in the English language.

Curricular literacy programming is a little more complicated than mathematics since that content area possesses fundamental math facts and processing skills that are finite in number – and relatively easily applied in application word (or story) problems. Literacy is more processed driven; thus, it requires approximately 18 to 24 months for a _complete_ academic literacy turnaround. _However, dramatic reading and writing improvement will take place within one school year_. In addition to the standard components of a literacy program (e.g., phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary and comprehension), as noted previously, specific targeting of each child must be pressed in word fluency and orthography to academically 'catch' students up and press them to grade level work. The following white papers and literacy framework can be used to understand the importance and implementation process: How to Improve Fluency and Heighten Reading Proficiency; K-6th Grade - Aligning Reading to State Standards (CCSS or TEKS) - Framework for ELA Title 1 Program Academic Success; Guided Novel Instruction (GNI) 'Improving Literacy Outcomes'; Independent Readers - Educators' Ultimate Literacy Goal, and Academic Turnaround (Literacy) – Do What Matters!

C.) **Science** – Science content is very similar to mathematics in that it has finite skills to master to be proficient. Like mathematics, students must possess the ability to read with comprehension to understand the demands of a science 'word' or 'story' problem. Hence, for obvious reasons, _effective_ literacy instruction must be a paramount focus in elementary school.

Students are usually assessed in science at the end of their fifth-grade year. Since elementary school educator certifications are general and not specific to a content area as required in middle and high school, it is often advantageous to rotate classroom content areas and assign only one teacher the science instruction for the entire grade level. In doing so, that teacher can focus and become highly specialized in the science content area. Also, they are required to solely plan for only one core lesson per day. If that one teacher leaves the campus at the end of the school year, the principal only needs to train one teacher to do science – not multiple teachers in a specialized content area on the grade level. It is for this reason that as a lead administrator, I always had a preselected teacher mentally ready to transition to a fifth-grade science position in the event it was needed the following school year. Finally, almost all the state science standards for every grade (PK – fourth) in an elementary school can be taught during the fifth-grade school year; consequently, if students missed grade

level science content in earlier grades, it is easily mitigated with sound fifth grade Tier 1 instruction.

Instructionally, there should be a daily science warm-up system used to press repetition and mastery of content followed by a short, 5-to-10-minute spaced repetition session to continually review prior core content. As with mathematics, vocabulary in science is **<u>NOT</u>** contextual. Thus, students must own to mastery precise definitions of words such as density, mass, inertia, gravity, radiation, etc. It is highly recommended that a kinesthetic vocabulary program be implemented to improve the long-term retention of specialized content vocabulary in both math and science. Lastly, core lessons should have a measurable objective, so students exit the lesson with a thorough understanding of the scientific principle. For example, if the lesson was on electrical-magnetism, students should understand that an electrical current in a wire produces a magnetic field about the wire like the magnetic flux lines of a bar magnet. In effect, the scientific principle must be clear and understood by the students – for any core lesson. Thus, that singular scientific point and principle is easily reviewed during a spaced repetition session on subsequent days.

It is critical that elementary educators understand that an instruction and curricular system should begin with paper-pencil applications (e.g., reading comprehension or problem solving) and not via a laptop or computer. This process should be implemented for two reasons. First, students are engaged in writing – a learning modality that assists them in long-term retention. Second, the teacher can control and provide predictable structure to their learning system, so it is fundamentally sound prior to moving to a digital medium. If not, and the digital medium is initially employed, the classroom educator is attempting to hold all students accountable in an intricate process that has too many moving parts. If the system is clearly established on paper-pencil, then the only new moving part is for students to conduct their methodology via only adding in one new item – the computer or laptop. However, it is paramount that the paper-pencil learning process/system emulates the digital medium – in that students show their work on a separate sheet of paper from the application resource – as if the paper-pencil curricular resource were a computer screen.

*Language Acquisition Curricular Programming – <u>**Caveat Emptor**</u>*

There is no doubt that the ability to fluently listen, speak, read and write in two or more languages is a valuable skill. I believe it impossible to find a rational person in the world that would think otherwise. However, in any learning situation, the conditions must be favorable – especially with children. For the last two and a half decades, language acquisition programs in low-income schools continue to be implemented despite horrific student outcomes. The reason for the continuance of ineffective curricular programming in Title 1 elementary schools is not due to malicious intent from school personnel or overwhelming parental support of these curricular programs. It is largely due to the value that educators place on dogmatic curricular programming that is wholly independent of the performance data. Empirically, many educators support ideologically driven curricular programming as opposed to data driven programming. Since the level of accountability in the public schools is usually not high, it affords both campus and district administrators tremendous latitude to press their philosophy regardless of student performance. Each year as student outcomes indicate chronic stagnation of low literacy and math levels in low-income schools, the probability of personal accountability for those outcomes is small. Thus, the normal course of action is to continue what

is not effective, rationalize the outcomes externally not internally, and convince the school board trustees that the situation will improve in the not-so-distant future. These efforts generally buy the current administration at least another one to three years before another excuse or deception is presented to the local school board. Since there is a lack of incentive to counter failure, this 3-year cycle has been occurring for as long as I have been associated with school districts in the public education system.

Language acquisition programs began using a late exit bilingual model in the late 1990's and transitioned into one-way and two-way dual language bilingual models shortly after the turn of the millennium. Many times, the same language acquisition programs are implemented in both medium to high income schools as they are in Title 1 schools; however, the results are much higher in the former setting than the latter. There is a reason for that – students in non-Title 1 elementary schools have many implicit educational advantages that low-income students do not. For this reason, academically high performing low-income campuses and almost all charter public schools that serve economically disadvantaged children with non-native English speakers opt to **NOT** implement dual language programs – and focus their reading and writing language block solely on English instruction.

It is important to note that curricular bilingual programs are a curricular language acquisition *system*, **and like all systems, they produce a specific and consistent level of outcomes.** Those student outcomes in Title 1 elementary and middle schools are chronically much lower when it is implemented – if proficiency of two languages is evaluated as a successful metric of its implementation. If a dual language or language acquisition program is implemented at a campus with a significant percentage of children classified as economically disadvantaged, the student performance outcomes in literacy will be lower by as much as 50 to 60 percent – dependent upon the language (e.g., English or Spanish) that students are assessed on a State's accountability assessment at the end of the school year. For example, the percentage of 'on-grade level readers' at elementary campuses can vary greatly because outcomes are masked in a 'language of testing' other than English for third through fifth grades. However, when the elementary students transition to middle school, the majority of State's Education Agencies require that all students must be assessed in English. Since students cannot test in a native language, it is at this time that low levels of English literacy proficiency become readily known for many low-income sixth (6th) grade students. Unfortunately, their teachers discover that this group of children are between 1 to 4 grade levels behind in grade level English literacy due to a poorly designed elementary school language acquisition system.

Listed below are several reasons that bilingual acquisition programs are **NOT** performance effective at elementary campuses with a large numbers of non-native (low-income) English speakers and low-income students, in general.

- Many low-income, non-native English speakers enroll in public school academically behind in oral language skills in both their native language as well as English. Consequently, these children are attempting to learn two languages in the same amount of time that a typical ELA block provides for mastering only one language. Moreover, the group of low-income students are usually exposed to English ONLY in a formal school setting, and that RLA program provides them less practice, not more – allowing many students to fall further behind academically. Once academically behind, most general education students remain in that depressed state in both elementary and middle school despite 'research' that indicates otherwise.
- The reading language arts (RLA) block is cut in two to accommodate the instruction of two languages. Again, providing less practice for students. Additionally, many impoverished children's parents do not possess academic language skills as well as the financial resources to close the academic literacy gaps as do more affluent children's parents.

- In the primary grades, students in bilingual programs miss a lot of content and mastery in English phonology instruction since practice is limited. The accepted fluency word rates for the top 10 percent of students for end-of-year (EOY) first graders should be approximately 110 words per minute in English, but in most Title 1 classrooms, the mass of students is about 50 to 60 percent of that mark.
- Most of the time, teachers with zero to four years classroom experience have difficulty implementing any curricular program that is complicated. Dual language programs require a lot of planning, expertise and experience. Teachers discover that their children possess scattered skills and academic language gaps. It is difficult to teach a class of 20 plus students using a Tier 1 curriculum that is designed upon the assumption students possess NO academic gaps – again, in half the allotted time in a typical language arts block.
- Most non-native English speakers hailing from low-income homes enroll at school as prekindergarten and kindergarten students without listening and speaking skills in English due to lack of exposure as they do in their home language. Note: This is the time and opportunity in the primary grades to stress English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills when the content is at its embryonic level and at its simplest grammatical structure.
- English is classified as a deep orthographic language in which many common word pronunciations do not match their corresponding spelling. Professional linguists estimate that approximately 25% of English words do not follow a phonics rule regarding associated word spelling/orthography. Consequently, English is a difficult and 'tuff' language to learn in comparison with a *shallow* orthographic language such as Spanish, Italian, Turkish, and Finnish – especially when a typical low-income student arrives at school academically behind and without academic home support.
- In low-income schools, a bilingual language program not only competes with other academic programs designed to close literacy gaps in English, but since the students practice English less, most of the time, it widens the literacy gap – as school data indicates from third through eighth grade.
- Educators must have a specific certification to be classified as a bilingual teacher, so campuses that implement these programs are always searching for qualified teachers with a specialized certification. With the current supply and demand issues of classroom teachers across the country, many large school districts recruit teachers from foreign Spanish speaking countries to satisfy specialization certifications. The recruitment expense in conducting international job fairs is significant.

Repeating for emphasis – acquiring two or more languages is an incredibly valuable skill, but the conditions must be present for any curricular program to be effective. **Otherwise, the program likely creates more inequity for low-income children.** The student data over the last 15 plus years clearly indicates these language acquisition programs are not effective in Title 1 schools that specifically serve low-income students. The long-term issue indicates low-income, immigrant students and low-income native-English speakers receive inequitable educations; furthermore, as they mature to adults, they are **not** educationally ready to enter the reality and demands of a modern-day STEM skill-base work force. Thus, their inequitable public-school educations press them into lower paying service industry level jobs.

There are other salient costs of bilingual programs since a campus principal is required to hire a teacher with a specific bilingual certification – many times there is an additional stipend or monetary compensation associated with hiring a certified teacher. Unfortunately, an elementary principal must hire a specific educator with a bilingual certification required by the State Board, often passing on other non-bilingual teacher candidates with more teaching experience. Thus, the program is expensive to implement, and it yields lower student performance – a double whammy.

A curious and analytical reader likely asks at this point, *"Why do curricular programs continue when the academic results they produce are chronically low?"* There are several reasons. One, the performance data
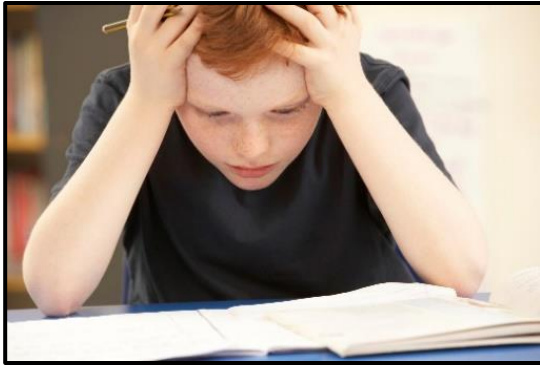
is willfully ignored since it does not ostensibly support some educators' philosophy of education. Two, educators – due to the lack of accountability – place more value on cultural considerations and/or personal profit (i.e., agency cost) over students' social and academic needs – and eventually, on low-income students' long-term economic plight. It is not that educators and advocates of non-performing curriculum do not understand the situation. **That is not the case.** It has been my professional experience that most do understand. Most educators do **not** push back on the idealistic status quo of their school system despite knowing that it is not effective. They understand it is probable there will be professional consequences for openly disagreeing with their superiors, such as future promotional considerations and annual compensation increases that negatively impact long-term retirement benefits. As Upton Sinclair eloquently stated, *"It is hard to make a person understand something, when their salary is dependent upon them not understanding."*

Finally, it would be remiss to not consider alterations to the dual language programming in Title 1 elementary schools to make it more effective. A possibility to better student outcomes in a dual language program is to extend the school day by an hour each day to allow for an extended RLA/ELA block of time to accommodate both languages. Another possibility is to reduce the native, non-English language to a 30-minute enrichment block each day as well as reducing the reducing the science and social studies each by 15 minutes to accommodate the enrichment period. Another possibility is to provide an afterschool language enrichment class for non-native English speakers in their native tongue, if funding is available. Any of these options would heighten student outcomes since the standard English language block is not so drastically reduced in time allotment for English instruction. If administrators believe that a specific core content such as robotics or acquiring a second language is important, they will focus their efforts on making it a reality at their campus or district campuses. Currently, and unfortunately, it is easier for administrators to allow a system to continue that does not meet children's social and academic needs than by opposing it with the potential personal costs to one's professional career.

Important Takeaways

All systems drive a level of performance. The more efficient the system, the better its effectiveness – driving performance higher. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. In designing and implementing an effective system, one of the most important points that must be thoroughly understood is that the process must address the specific target areas that *elevate* overall performance. In the case of public-school academic systems, the system must directly address and eradicate academic numeracy and literacy gaps from prior grade levels while concurrently addressing grade level state standards to *application proficiency*.

In general, a campus principal must address both global systems like arrival and dismissal as well as instructional and curricular systems that impact each classroom. It is advisable to evaluate and address the schoolwide systems and methodically drill down to the classroom level to examine classroom management, efficient classroom routines, and both pedagogy and curricular resources.

In a word, the administrator's primary focus of a public elementary school must be viewed as an academic center. Children arrive at an elementary school for positive social interactions and above all, an academic education that prepares them for secondary school and university. Consequently, a school principal – especially a Title 1 administrator must understand the academic climate and invariably the need for academic reformation at their campus. Fortunately, for elementary schools, academic reformation is not that difficult of a task for several reasons.

One, the children are in the beginning of their education years; consequently, the academic gaps are not extensive.

Two, children are usually assigned (i.e., self-contained) to the same class all day. A teacher has access to students all day for the instructional day; thus, a teacher can take advantage of scheduling small blocks of time throughout the day for targeted interventions, as needed.

Three, unlike the literacy word gap, the numeracy or mathematics gap forms in the primary grades. It is relatively easy to address that content issue in the primary grades. However, if it is unaddressed until the intermediate grades (i.e., third through fifth grades); it is a little more work, but it is still a manageable intervention process to address the co-dependent math skills that late in an elementary school. Fortunately, a global, school-wide numeracy program is easily implemented, and the co-dependent skill gaps can be eradicated externally from the classroom. This type of program is the most effective due to the high levels of quality control. Then, teachers can focus primarily on literacy pedagogy and strategic interventions with guaranteed high math performance at every elementary grade level independent of the percentage of economically children enrolled.

Four, the literacy interventions that address the literacy word gap supplementary resources are so simply designed (and free) that teachers of all experienced levels can implement them to the same high level of efficacy.

Five, once the academic gaps are eradicated, children are at grade level – prepared and ready for Tier 1 instruction; thus, they are all fundamentally proficient in prior grade level skills as prescribed by state standards. The benefits to the majority of students on grade level have far reaching implications, such as a reduction of student disciplinary issues, heightened time on task, and reduced lesson preparation for interventions. Most importantly, teachers are successful in their daily work and their students confidently complete assignments independently – on grade level. Moreover, students' self-esteem is heightened, and learning becomes an intrinsic satisfying experience.

Lastly, once the system is front-end loaded and functional, the classroom systems produce sustained high academic results over and over – year after year. It also affords time for additional extracurricular activities for students since there is less of a requirement for constant academic intervention.

There is another extremely important point that must be stressed when beginning an academic reformation process in Title 1 public schools. Initially, there is usually a slew of students academically behind due to prior grade level gaps. Classroom teachers are inevitably questioning, *"Which students have learning disabilities, language processing skills, and which students are **only** academically behind due to prior grade level numeracy and literacy gaps?" **Why?*** For the majority of students that are struggling academically, neither a novice teacher nor an experienced educator can usually answer that question since the students all appear to 'look' the same when they are engaged in a learning activity. Quite simply, it is difficult to ascertain the root cause of a struggling learning when students possess so many different combinations of underlined, co-dependent, prior grade level skills, and they are unable to consistently complete grade level work. However, when a structured system possesses the functionality to rapidly accelerate large numbers of academically struggling students to grade level, there will always be a small cluster of students that remain. It is this small

> **If the campus administration does not understand that the academic literacy and numeracy gaps must be targeted and eradicated for <u>each</u> student via a systematic process, a Title 1 school's academic performance will be proportionally limited.**

group of students that frequently requires more attention and evaluation to determine if there is a deeper learning issue at play. *A systematic process that isolates that small group of students in only one school year at a large Title 1 elementary school possesses inherent intervention functionality and value.* It affords an administrator <u>to scale</u> academic progress for **each** student from first grade through fifth grade, so that each student receives the required attention so that their educational social and academic needs are met. This process is systematically possible when the academic literacy and numeracy gaps are thoroughly understood. Once the academic reformation is completed, a Title 1 school 'performs' like its more affluent counterpart. The Tier 1 curriculum works with minimal interventions since the children are at grade level proficiency.

The academic reformation systems and related issues at an elementary campus are different depending on the number of children classified as economically disadvantaged. If the school is a medium to high socioeconomic school with only a small percentage of students that struggle academically, these classroom systems presented in this document will be effective for their academic needs. However, a campus that has a low number of students that are academically behind is a very forgiving academic environment for both the staff and campus administration. In a sentence, a lack of academic issues at the campus removes the academic need for significant intervention and monitoring duties by the principal. Of course, those schools still have problems with stakeholders that most low-income or Title 1 schools do not, and it takes a principal with specific skill sets to diplomatically address and handle those stakeholders. A non-Title 1 principal can afford to be less concerned about their campus's academic performance – which is already high, but their professional survival and legacy at the campus is based primarily on their level of diplomatic problem solving as an adept politician.

In a Title 1 elementary school the most important personnel hired at the campus is the principal. *Why?* The lead administrator hires the teachers. They establish the priorities – social and academic. They determine if there is a structured, systematic approach to targeting students' academic literacy and numeracy gaps. They determine the administrative level of classroom support with regard to student behavior. They set the school culture – what is important and what is not!

Basically, at the end of the day, they are the major decider on ALL levels of classroom support that is provided to both entry-level and veteran teachers. Moreover, they determine the level of system functionality and implementation as described above at the school-wide and classroom levels to address the academic plight (i.e., stop-gap resource implementation and curricular resources) of the campus. Therefore, if a low-income elementary school is not rapidly improving from year to year or the campus academics are relatively flat, then the principal is not leading the campus, instructionally. In fact, the campus dynamics are leading them. For all practical purposes, they are a retroactive principal commonly referred to as a 'physical plant manager' – a figurehead or place holder managing the physical operations of the building. Unfortunately, if an ineffective administrator is permitted to hold the capacity of elementary school principal, it is highly probable the same chronic student outcomes will continue as an annual rite of passage. It is apparent after several years that management does not know what it's doing, and they do not know what to do to change the direction of the academic direction

at their campus. Of course, to increase performance it is inevitable that changes must occur. In the case of a physical plant manager principal, the first change that must take place is the hiring of a new lead administrator who fully comprehends the paramount importance of the instructional leadership role at the campus.

The systems described above delivers 90 plus percent of enrolled students meeting standards with high mastery rates (40 to 60 percent) in an urban Title 1 elementary campus with the following challenging student demographics: 90 percent plus classified as economically disadvantaged and 65 percent classified as bilingual emergent (i.e., English Language Learners). It is commonly stated that it takes between 4 to 5 years to academically change a school to this level of student outcomes, **but this is not accurate**. The academic turnaround window for this level of improvement is only 1 year for mathematics and 2 years (maximum)for literacy. However, there is a caveat. The systems both school-wide and classroom described above must be implemented with intentional purpose, consistently pressed and monitored. These initiatives cannot be treated like a January 1st New Year's Resolution where many self-improvement promises are abandoned by the first to second week of February. Then, the principal states, *"Those systems did not work at my campus with our students!"* Of course, they did not work! There was not the required effort in implementation, consistency or monitoring on the part of the campus administration over the course of an entire school year. In short, the school principal did not value academic reformation from a professional philosophy, an effort based rational, or the consequences of the fear of continued failure at their elementary campus.