

Public Education in Louisiana: A Focused Approach

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Introduction

That public education in Louisiana is broken is unquestionable. What to do about it is another matter.

A plethora of non-profit organizations, community activists, reform-minded thinkers, policymakers and education foundations have taken various approaches to the many problems plaguing the education system. Some have focused on alternative school models or small grant making, others have targeted professional development, hosted speakers and workshops, or published reports.

But heading in so many different directions diffuses the power of this potential coalition. And in the meantime, the state of education remains abysmal.

The first premise of this report is that when all these groups work together on a small set of issues, they are more effective than when they spread out their efforts in all directions. To that end, this report attempts to focus the efforts of education change-makers on a very small set of issues and on two specific ideas to address them.

The second premise is that coming up with solutions requires accurate data on the problem from those with first-hand experience. While conducting research and consulting with education experts is important, it is also critical that those who create solutions hear from those with direct knowledge of the problems. As a result, this report is based not only on research, but also on conversations with over 100 principals and teachers from all over Louisiana – who spend their lives teaching children and who care enough to try to teach them even better.

The first two sections of this report provide an in-depth summary of the principals' and teachers' conversations. The "Analysis" section compares the responses of both groups and identifies two priority issues for community leaders to address. The final section introduces and describes two ideas that target the priority issues.

Executive Summary

Improving public education requires that education reform organizations, civic leaders and policymakers focus their efforts on a few priority issues. Priority issues are ones that are important to those with first-hand experience, shown by research to impact student achievement, and within a group's locus of control. They should also be "root issues" whose solution has the potential to impact many other issues.

To identify these priority issues, principals and teachers from around the state convened at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to discuss the factors that impact student achievement. Four major issues emerged from these discussions – teacher quality, the overage student population, parent involvement and student motivation.

Two of these issues—teacher quality and the overage student population—are supported by research as having an impact on student achievement, and they are also within our "locus of control." They are also root issues in that many other issues stem from these problems, including parent involvement and student motivation.

To address the issues of teacher quality and the overage population, two ideas are proposed. First, a system of high-quality, full-time academies for overage and disruptive students would allow these students to learn in a setting that fits their needs, while allowing teachers and principals in regular public schools to do their jobs without being consumed by discipline issues. Furthermore, these schools would make it easier for students in traditional public schools to learn without the distraction of older and/or disruptive peers.

Second, a system of feed-back circles would allow for two-way communication between those in the central office who make policy decisions and the principals and teachers who implement them. This would allow those with first-hand experience to discuss important issues with people who have the ability to address them. In turn, these circles would alleviate the deep-seated distrust of authority that was palpable in the round-table discussions and that prevents the system from functioning as well as it could.

These two ideas alone will not complete the work of improving public education. But if education reformers can work together to implement them, they will have made a very good start.

PRINCIPALS' ROUND-TABLES

Summary

From Sept. 25 through Nov. 8, 2007, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation hosted seven “Principals’ Round-table” conversations. Thirty-five principals from around the state met at the Foundation to discuss issues impacting student achievement at their schools, and to debate the validity of the problems and solutions commonly cited in education research.

Principals came from East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Calcasieu, Lincoln and Rapides Parishes. They represented eighteen elementary schools¹, nine middle schools,² four high schools,³ one K-12 school⁴ and one preK-12 school.⁵ One representative from the Rapides Parish central office represented all principals in Rapides.

The conversations focused on identifying factors affecting student achievement at the principals’ schools and possible ways to improve achievement. Attendees were first asked to fill out a survey (Appendix A) in which they weighed the severity of various problems at their schools and ranked how helpful various solutions might be. Problems and solutions on the survey were selected from those commonly discussed in education research articles and studies. After the surveys were complete, participants discussed and elaborated on their answers.

After the round-tables series concluded, the results of the survey were aggregated and charted (Appendix B). An overview of the discussions can be found below. It addresses each topic discussed in the order of relative importance to the participants (as measured by participant responses).⁶

The Big Three

“There is no silver bullet.” It is a phrase repeated often to the point of absurdity in education reform circles and papers. And, as with any complex problem, it is of course true that there is no one simple solution. But as with any other complex problem, the lack of one solution does not preclude a *few* solutions that, when implemented simultaneously and carefully, can have a significant impact on the problem at hand.

The results of our principals’ round-table conversations support this concept of a *few* solutions.

1 Elementary schools represented were Audubon, Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts, Belfair Elementary, Brusly Elementary, Chamberlin Elementary, Cohn Elementary, Delmont Elementary, Dufrocq Elementary, La Belle Aire Elementary, Lukeville Upper Elementary, Magnolia Woods Elementary, Merrydale Elementary, Montessori Magnet, Park Elementary, Park Forest Elementary, South Boulevard, University Terrace Elementary, Villa Del Rey and Westdale Heights Academic Magnet.

2 Middle schools represented were Broadmoor Middle School, Brusly Middle School, Capitol Middle School, Crestworth Middle School, Devall Middle School, Glasgow Middle School, Kenilworth Middle School, Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet and Westdale Middle School.

3 High schools represented were Brusly High School, Capitol Pre-College Academy for Girls, Port Allen High School and Starks High School.

4 Bell City High School

5 Simsboro

6 For the sake of thoroughness, responses will be mentioned here even if they were only mentioned by one participant. However, if a response was mentioned by several participants, it will be indicated in this summary either explicitly (“a majority of principals felt”) or by the use of words such as “emphasized” or “stressed.”

Although they discussed many problems and solutions, the principals in our conversations narrowed in on three big problems that, if addressed, would significantly improve their students' achievement. These problems – teacher quality, the overage student population, and parent involvement – are summarized below.

I. Teacher Quality

The Problems

The interaction between a student and a teacher is often touted as the most important factor influencing student achievement. Most principals agreed that teacher quality matters greatly in their schools.⁷

Principals remarked that many teachers do not go above and beyond, that some of them seem to have “just settled” for poor behavior and academic performance. Principals cited a particular deficiency in the area of classroom management, noting that teachers may come into the classroom skilled in content knowledge but not capable of handling disruptive behavior. One principal mentioned that teachers do not know how to follow the “chain of command” in implementing the principal’s decisions.

Teacher recruitment was stressed as a critical issue as well. One principal noted that “teaching is becoming something you do on your way to something else.” Part of this is a systemic problem; principals noted that in some parishes, Human Resources departments do not recruit teachers but instead rely on principals to recruit teachers, who may or may not end up in their schools.

Another factor is that with the growth of accountability, and the resulting “micro-managing” by some districts of their schools’ curriculum, teaching is no longer fun. When districts tell teachers not just what to teach but how to teach, they destroy the “magic of teaching” which makes teachers even less likely to be attracted to the job. This does not mean accountability isn’t necessary – principals had no trouble with state benchmarks but suggested that district micro-managing can be an unnecessary burden on otherwise good teachers.

The Solutions

The following are commonly cited research-based solutions to the problem of teacher quality, as well as the reactions of the principals to each.

Increased teacher pay

Principals were overall in favor of increasing teacher pay. Participants noted that increased pay would encourage more people to enter the teaching profession, would help with recruitment and retention and would make a difference in the quality of the applicants. Principals from West Baton Rouge remarked that they have seen a difference in the quality of their applicants for teaching positions since their parish awarded all teachers a \$5000 pay raise. Pay also matters, principals noted, when districts compete to get better teachers.

Other principals noted, however, that salary isn’t as important as working conditions in determining whether or not a teacher stays in the profession. Salary also isn’t important to all teachers – some will stay and teach well regardless of how much they make, while others won’t do what’s necessary no matter how much they make.

⁷ Eleven principals listed “teacher quality” or related issues as one of the most important factors affecting student achievement at their schools.

Teacher Pay-for-Performance, or Merit Pay

Principals were wary of what is traditionally a controversial issue – teacher pay-for-performance, or merit pay. They noted that it is very hard to gauge performance fairly, because there are many factors besides a teacher’s effort that influence a student’s achievement. However, they were cautiously supportive of the “value-added” assessment system which measures a student’s growth in one year and compares it to his/her growth the previous year, controlling for such factors as the student’s home environment and past academic record.

Bonuses for teachers working in tough schools or in shortage subjects

Principals were generally supportive of bonus pay for teachers in hard schools and shortage subjects. Sixteen principals listed this as potentially one of the most effective solutions to the problem of teacher quality. A few noted that, while most teachers are committed and would be willing to work regardless, it would be nice to be able to reward them. One staff member in Rapides parish said the parish gives a \$5000 bonus to teachers for working in schools in School Improvement Level 2, but so far it has not been effective.

Better/more professional development

Principals were generally in favor of this idea, but almost all of them stressed that professional development must be more specialized, as “one shoe does not fit all.” They also emphasized that professional development must be applicable to the actual practice of teaching (rather than theoretical) and that there should be follow-up sessions so that the training has long-term impact.

Other Suggestions

Principals suggested putting student teachers at low-performing schools to help these schools with recruitment. When these teachers are ready to be hired, they are more likely to apply to the schools where they already have a relationship with faculty and students, so assigning them to low-performing schools will make it easier for these schools to recruit quality teachers.

More emphasis on classroom management in teacher preparation programs would also ensure that teachers are ready for the discipline issues they will encounter, principals said.

Principals were opposed to the tenure system which rewards low-performing teachers. Finally, they approved of the district policy of offering stipends to teachers-in-training who are receiving their masters degrees, but they thought the policy should be expanded to include current teachers as well.

II. The Overage Population

The overage population – usually defined as the population of students who are two years or more behind grade-level – is not mentioned nearly as often as the other factors in discussions of education reform. Yet this subject came up again and again in our principals’ conversations.

The “overage population” was rated as one of the top factors affecting student achievement by eight principals – more than any other factor except “teacher quality” and tied with “parent involvement.” The “overage population” was also listed as a problem that “greatly affects student achievement” more times than any other factor, including teacher quality. It’s also worthwhile to note that, of all the possible solutions on the survey, the top two most often rated as likely to “greatly improve

student achievement” both address the overage population.⁸

The Problems

Principals noted that overage students often suffer from a lack of motivation and overall disenchantment with school. They stressed that overage students are often embarrassed about their performance which frequently leads to classroom disruptions that make it hard for other students to learn. This is especially true in middle school. One principal said that unmotivated, overage students can “wreak havoc” in a school. Principals and assistant principals often find that they are so overwhelmed with discipline issues that they can not focus on other aspects of their jobs, such as teacher support.

The Solutions

Overage Academies/Vocational-Technical Schools

Principals commented on the need for a “true alternative program” for overage students. They were overwhelmingly in favor of a vocational-technical (vo-tech) school to give non-college bound students another option, and they strongly disagreed with the state’s current “one size fits all” diploma model. One elementary school principal noted that teachers of earlier grades would be more likely to hold students accountable and less likely to “socially promote” them (let them advance despite not being academically ready) if they knew there was another option at the middle or high school level. Another noted that right now, there is no option for non-college bound students except for the military. One principal suggested that small parishes work together to create an alternative school for all overage students in the parish.

Core Knowledge Accelerated Program (CKAP)

Principals were also in favor of a core knowledge acceleration program (CKAP), an in-school program designed to help overage students advance quickly. They noted that these programs are beneficial because they separate overage students from younger students, helping both learn better. However, they cautioned that these programs need “a very special kind of teacher,” and can backfire if the wrong teacher is placed there.

III. Parent Involvement

Besides quality teachers and an alternative for overage students, principals felt most strongly about the problem of parent involvement. “Parent involvement” was ranked one of the top most serious issues by eight principals, and the fact that “parents are hard to contact” was rated a very serious problem seven times.

The Problems

Principals stressed repeatedly that parents are not involved in their child’s education. Many emphasized that this is a larger societal problem, in that many parents have children at a young age and do not know themselves how to raise a child, much less how to support a child’s education. One principal commented that parents regularly call her to get parenting advice. As a result, another noted, parents end up relying on the school for discipline.

Another problem is contacting parents. As parents are increasingly mobile, phone numbers change frequently. Several principals noted that it is precisely the children whose parents you most

⁸ For these reasons, it was difficult to decide which factor to present first in this summary. Eventually, it was decided to put teacher quality first since it was rated the top issue more times overall than any other. However, a more detailed discussion of these two factors will be presented in the Analysis section of this report.

need to speak to who are most difficult to reach. This makes it difficult to get parents to come to school events or to discuss a child's academic or social problems. Instead, the principals said, you end up hearing from parents only when they *don't* like something.

Other principals pointed out that there is overall very little parental accountability, partly because you can't *require* parents to do anything.

The Solutions

Parenting Centers

The solution overwhelmingly favored by the majority of principals was a parenting center on the school's campus to teach parents how to help their children succeed in school, including how to develop basic literacy skills, and pre-natal training for expectant mothers.

Community Schools

Principals were also strongly in favor of the "community school" model, in which the school becomes a community center, with public facilities that bring the community inside the school.⁹ Such facilities might include the parent training center mentioned above, day care centers, health centers, libraries, and performing arts spaces. Principals remarked that school-based health centers and in-school babysitting for students' children would be especially helpful.

While most principals were in favor of the community schools concept, some were concerned that this might make parents even more likely to hand over responsibility for their children's upbringing to the school. Another principal cautioned that, if not handled correctly, this kind of school might be a "security nightmare."

Other Suggestions

Principals also noted that parents need to be motivated to be involved. One suggested paying parents to come to school events, while another described her school's "parent involvement cards" which are given to parents each time they attend an event and are then entered into a raffle for prizes. Another said that mailing report cards home tends to make parents more involved. Several thought that legislation should require parents to be more involved, including leveling fines for parents who refuse to engage in their children's learning.

Other Issues

"The Big Three" issues are so named because principals rated them the most important factors affecting student achievement. However, principals were also asked to weigh in on several other issues, including student motivation, school leadership, district policy, and technology. Although this report will focus on the first three issues, it is important to summarize the principals' responses to the other issues as well.

I. Student Motivation

The Problems

Principals noted that students don't seem to care about their studies and that many of them don't aspire to "be anything" when they grow up. They noted that students are often bored or asleep in

⁹ One principal noted that this concept is the "best idea" and should be implemented at all schools. Another pointed out that academic success would likely result once the community is involved.

class and do not seem to value school.

Some principals attributed this to a lack of accountability; since students know they'll be promoted to the next grade eventually (after having failed the LEAP test enough times), they don't feel responsible for achieving. Other principals commented that a lack of student motivation is directly related to teacher quality – that the better a teacher is, the more s/he will be able to motivate students to love learning.

The Solutions

Monetary Rewards

One of the more experimental ideas to increase student motivation is the concept of paying kids for academic excellence or growth.¹⁰ Principals were ambivalent about this idea. Some noted that it would help keep kids in school by giving them an income – otherwise, many would be pressured to get a job to support their family. Some principals cautioned that it might work as a temporary or “band-aid” solution but would not get at the root of the problem. Others were concerned that it would substitute an extrinsic reward (money) for an intrinsic reward (love of learning) and ultimately, extrinsic rewards are not as effective. Others pointed out that some students can not be motivated even with money.

Smaller Schools

Another possible solution, smaller schools, was much more popular. Principals noted that relationships are key in student learning and that these can only be developed in small schools. Social skills can also be developed in a smaller learning community, whereas large schools contribute to more gang and neighborhood fights simply by putting more of these groups in one place. Principals noted that Baton Rouge is considering going to larger schools and felt strongly that this plan would be harmful to student motivation and achievement.

More vo-tech options and community connections

Principals also favored the idea of creating more vo-tech and community opportunities for students, especially in high school. One principal pointed out that many high schools already have the capacity for these programs – such as wood shops and auto shops – but they are gathering dust. Partly this is because schools lack the trained faculty to oversee these programs; one principal suggested recruiting these faculty members from local unions.

Other Suggestions

Principals had many ideas for school-centered ways to increase motivation. One suggested having a ‘Get Fired Up’ academic pep rally or an “All A” luncheon. Another suggested motivational speakers and trips for teachers and students. She noted that one school took all their students with no failing grades on a field trip, which motivated students to bring their grades up so they could attend. Another principal noted that she had tried to change school culture by putting up “no excuses” signs all over the school.

¹⁰ This idea is currently being tried in New York City public schools under the direction of Harvard economist, Roland Fryer. It is also underway in smaller forms in various Louisiana parishes, including West Baton Rouge where all students who score “advanced” or “mastery” on the LEAP test will be entered into a raffle for a laptop computer. At Port Allen High, all students who score “advanced” or “mastery” on the LEAP will have their prom tickets paid for by the school. Forest Hills is currently experimenting with the TAP program, in which teachers get bonuses for students’ scores. Last year, the students’ scores did rise but the top teacher there left afterward from the stress.

Principals also agreed that one-on-one help for students who are struggling, and for their families, can make all the difference. They suggested a variety of models, including afterschool mentoring/tutoring, pairing students with a “mentor” staff member for the year,¹¹ social skills mentoring, and individual attention for low performers.

II. School Leadership

The Problems

As one principal put it, “We have all of the responsibility and none of the power.” Principals agreed that they lack the autonomy they need to make important decisions for their schools—from curriculum to scheduling. They also pointed out that they have very little discretionary spending—field trips, motivational activities, and speakers are all dependent on school fundraisers or the principal’s out-of-pocket expenses.

On top of that, of course, is the general difficulty of the job—the long hours, constant pressure, extensive responsibilities with little assistance, as assistant principals (if there are any) are usually totally preoccupied with discipline duties. Because of the administrative demands on their time, principals are rarely able to do the walk-throughs and one-on-one conferences that would allow them to help teachers improve.

As a result of central office micro-management and the overall difficulty of the job, there is an alarming shortage of new leaders interested in becoming principals.

The Solutions

A principals’ leadership academy

Principals were cautiously optimistic about this idea. They noted that there are already several of these models, including one in West Baton Rouge that trains teachers to become principals, but that they could be more effective by meeting more often. While some felt that this would be a good idea for new leaders, they also warned that any such academy must provide *practical* training, not busywork.

Expansion of autonomous schools

Some principals were uninformed about this concept; others were generally not in favor. They pointed out that there does not need to be a special type of school for principals to have more autonomy. The district system of “site-based management”, in which principals do their own professional development, and fire and hire at will, gives any traditional public school this kind of autonomy.

III. District Policy

Our discussion of district policy illuminated a variety of ways in which central office decisions affect student learning – and how changes in these decisions could improve achievement.

¹¹ At Brusly Elementary School, they have implemented a program called SOS (Save One Student), in which staff members volunteer to mentor a child for the year. This serves the added purpose of creating a network for teachers so there is someone else to speak to about a student besides a parent.

The Problems

Autocratic structure

Throughout our discussions, the principals expressed dissatisfaction with the districts' method of decision-making. Principals felt like a system is mandated from above with little research backing or discussion, and that the central office seems to have lost touch with what is actually needed. Although some districts have a principals' advisory committee that makes recommendations to the superintendent, these may or may not be implemented. Principals noted that districts often look to outside experts for advice when they could be asking their own staff, many of whom have good ideas to address the problems their schools face. In fact, it seems that many of the more specific issues discussed below could be addressed if there were a more democratic process for principals to bring forth their concerns and be heard.

Special Education

Of all the district policy issues discussed, principals were most vocal and passionate about special education. As one principal noted in frustration, "Special education is so completely messed up."

Principals observed that the special education population has been rising over the years. At the schools represented in our discussions, special education students made up on average 15% of the total school population. Many of these students require one-on-one supervision to ensure that they do not hurt themselves or others. However, principals said they often receive classes of students with emotional or behavior disorders but do not receive a corresponding number of qualified teachers to deal with them. While they might have put these students together in a "self-contained" classroom before, the drive now is toward "inclusion" classrooms where special education students are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms. However, this can only work if there is an aide for each special education student.

An even more serious problem is the way the discipline system handles special education students. Essentially, special education students can not be suspended unless they seriously injure someone. As a result, principals said, these policies enable special education students to misbehave and give them a false sense of entitlement that does not exist in the real world where they will be held responsible for their actions.

Length of the school day

After special education, the most-discussed district policy related to the length of the school day. Principals felt passionately that the school day needs to be longer. Elementary principals in particular noted that the curriculum takes up so much time – and the time is so rigidly allotted¹² – that there is no time to intervene with students who need extra attention. And because reading and math get priority, the day often ends before science and social studies can be addressed.¹³ As a result, many students reach middle school with no prior background in science and social studies. One elementary principal noted that an extra 30 minutes each day would be sufficient to meet these needs.

Funding

Principals noted that their districts tend to mandate various programs and then provide no resources to implement them. For example, "collaborative planning" between teachers of different subjects was mandated but many elementary schools lack the "auxiliary" (elective) teachers to allow for such planning.

Principals also pointed out that as schools improve, they receive less money. This not only creates

¹² Time in West Baton Rouge parish is so strictly apportioned that elementary school students get only two six-minute breaks all day.

¹³ One principal noted that a Reading First intervention program is being piloted at Cohn Elementary, but it takes up so much of the school day that students don't get substantial instruction in any other subject.

a disincentive to improve but also may hurt schools that are just barely making progress when they need the funds to sustain their growth.

The Minimum Foundation Program (MFP), which allocates funds to schools, was also the target of criticism. First, it calculates a school's number of teachers by taking the total number of students and dividing by the total number of teachers. However, this ignores the fact that not all teachers teach the same number of students; some are reading specialists, counselors, or special education teachers who do not teach a regular class. As a result, schools often find themselves short of teachers, which in turn drives up class sizes (see p. 14).

The MFP also penalizes districts with a wealthier tax base, because it assumes that the general population will be willing to spend money on schools. This is not always the case, partly as a result of the following issue.

Image

Many principals felt that the public schools are seen very negatively by the public. Some noted that the media does not give equal attention to magnet and regular public schools and sometimes seems to exhibit a bias against regular public schools by only reporting the negative events, not the good news.¹⁴ It was also pointed out that regular public schools are often compared to magnet schools, which is unfair since the two types of schools have significantly different student populations.

Accountability

While principals affirmed that they have no problem with the concept of being held accountable, they took issue with the way accountability has been implemented in their districts. The LEAP exam was the subject of special criticism. Principals pointed out that not holding students accountable for their scores on the science and social studies portions of the exam makes students less motivated.¹⁵ Principals also noted that there is currently no alternative to the LEAP, so that when students fail, the choice is between either holding them back indefinitely or passing them anyway. This again points to the need for alternative types of education, such as vo-tech schools (see p. 8).

Principals also noted that the way accountability is calculated, using a "School Performance Score" (SPS), is somewhat flawed. A school's SPS is based 60% on LEAP scores, 30% on iLEAP scores, and 10% on attendance, including drop-outs and expulsions.¹⁶ However, because attendance and drop-out rates are calculated as a *percentage* of students, not as a total, this method is biased against smaller schools. The SPS also does not account for differences between whole classes. For example, an elementary school with a particularly strong fifth grade class will see its score drop dramatically when that class moves on to middle school, while that middle school's scores will rise, simply by the entrance of a strong class, and regardless of whether or not the school has made any improvements.

Accountability can also have negative effects on schools. By putting a spotlight on failing schools, it can create a lot of stress for teachers and can also encourage schools to keep students who would

14 One principal brought with her an advertisement she had tried to get published in The Advocate. It showed a series of pictures of students from her school who had scored exceptionally well on a recent test. The Advocate had informed her that the price for the ad to run in a weekday paper would be \$4800, and \$5000 for the weekend.

15 One school had to bribe students to make them take science and social studies portions of the LEAP seriously because students were aware that these subjects were not weighted as heavily. The school used a \$1000 private donation to do this and split it evenly among all students who scored "advanced" or "mastery."

16 For elementary and middle schools, the 10% does not include drop-outs. For high schools, 5% of the SPS is based on attendance, the other 5% is based on drop-out rates.

ordinarily be put out for disciplinary reasons, so as to maintain a higher SPS.¹⁷

Human Resources

Many principals commented on the dearth of electives available to students, especially in elementary schools. Because of the new focus on test-driven accountability, music, arts, and languages have been sacrificed entirely in many schools. Principals pointed out that an auxiliary subject, such as art, might be the only subject in which a student can excel and therefore might be the only reason a child looks forward to school. By depriving students of these other outlets for achievement, schools decrease student motivation.

However, some schools are provided with teachers for all of these auxiliary subjects. Principals took issue with this lack of human resource equity between schools. They also noted the lack of any health education in their schools.

Other District Issues

Several principals brought up issues that are exclusive to their own districts. These issues are mentioned in the footnotes.¹⁸

The Solutions

Extended Year/Looping

While principals felt overwhelmingly that they needed more time to adequately teach all students, they also agreed that a longer school day might present even more of an obstacle to teacher recruitment. Instead, they almost unanimously voiced approval for a year-round school system. Principals felt “stuck in an agrarian model” of school and that a lot of time is wasted starting and stopping school that would be saved with a 12-month school year. Such a year might include three quarters with two-week breaks between them and a model of “instantaneous graduation,” in which students would finish 4th grade on Friday and begin 5th grade on Monday.

A corollary to this system which is also strongly favored by principals is the concept of “looping,” in which students stay with the same teacher for two or more years. This cuts down on the anxiety of starting a new school year, and gives teachers, students and parents more time to develop trusting relationships.

Smaller class sizes

Small class sizes and the subsequent lower teacher-pupil ratio was mentioned repeatedly as the number one change principals would make in their schools if they could. In elementary schools, this could be addressed by guaranteeing two full-time ancillary classes per school. Ancillary classes include physical education, music, art and languages and could help give teachers more breaks and reduce class sizes.

Human Resources

Principals were all in agreement that having a complete staff in all areas – including counselors, health care professionals, and auxiliary teachers – is key to retaining quality teachers. Auxiliary

17 One principal described how he had refrained from suspending such a student - even after the student had punched a teacher twice in the face - for fear of having his funding cut.

18 Principals in West Baton Rouge commented on their in-school expulsion system, whereby students can be sent back to the school with only a mental health professional's note after having been expelled. East Baton Rouge principals complained that the district has a punitive system for teachers in which they feel that they have to raise scores or be disciplined, so teachers leave for other districts. Calcasieu Parish K-12 schools complained of overcrowding as a result of students being bused in from far away.

teachers not only provide students with a more varied curriculum and with more opportunities to achieve, but also allow teachers time to collaborate with other teachers and get peer support.

Principals especially stressed the need for more counselors, noting that many counselors are actually “quasi-administrators,” responsible for administering numerous standardized tests and therefore not free to actually counsel students.

More Principal Input

There was a general feeling among the principals that, if given the chance to get together regularly to discuss these issues, they could come up with workable solutions. They suggested creating a network of principals who would commit to meet regularly and discuss ideas. This would allow the district to use local expertise to help solve problems and create a sense of buy-in, rather than autocratically imposing solutions from outside the district.

If such a principals network were created, here are some of the suggestions they might be asked to consider (based on those reported in our conversations):

- Bonuses for principals who stay in their schools and receive good evaluations
- Busing students to their assigned school to cut down on mobility (students who stay in one school perform better than students who switch schools frequently)
- Schools should be given credit for growth
- Address school safety by providing funds to make schools and transportation safer (one extra adult on school buses, two video cameras, etc)
- Free mailing for schools
- More buses should be procured so that all schools can start at 8:30 a.m.
- Teachers should not be pulled from classrooms and made into “coaches” in specific subjects if it leaves a void in the classroom
- Paperwork reduction, especially audits
- Human resource efficiency¹⁹
- More of a focus on high-achieving students, not just low-performers

IV. Technology and Supplies

The Problems

Improving technology—a topic that is frequently mentioned by education reform experts and now being widely implemented in New Orleans -- was the least frequently discussed topic in our principals’ conversations. Principals did note that computers were lacking,²⁰ and that it would be nice to teach students word processing skills earlier. But other principals pointed out that students can learn without the latest technology.

Principals were also ambivalent about the proposal to provide a laptop for every student, currently being tried in New Orleans. One principal noted that laptops would make students write and research when they didn’t before, and that students are “fascinated” with technology. Others felt it would be a distraction and would depend on correct teacher training.

¹⁹ One principal noted that her district’s Human Resources department fumbled the first paychecks so all teachers had to wait an additional month before getting paid.

²⁰ This is especially true in West Baton Rouge.

TEACHERS AT THE TABLE

Summary

After meeting with principals, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation extended its conversations to include teachers in a series called “Teachers at the Table.” Teachers from around the state were invited to participate in informal conversations, which focused on the same question presented to the principals: What are the top factors impeding student achievement at your school and what are the possible solutions?

Like the principals’ round-tables, the conversations focused on identifying factors affecting student achievement and possible ways to improve it. Attendees were first asked to fill out a survey in which they weighed the severity of various problems at their schools and ranked how helpful various solutions might be. Problems and solutions on the survey were selected from those commonly cited in education research articles and studies. After the survey was complete, participants discussed and elaborated on their answers.

Overall, 110 teachers participated in the conversations; 26 teachers attended the conversations at the Foundation, while 84 teachers responded to the survey via e-mail. Teachers came from four parishes²¹ and represented a combined total of 1,336.5 years of teaching experience. On average, participants had been teaching for 11.8 years, with several veterans of 30 years and more. 36 teachers came from elementary schools,²² 53 from middle schools,²³ and 15 from high schools.²⁴ One BESE representative also audited several of the conversations.

After the round-tables series concluded, the results of the survey were aggregated and charted (Appendix C). An overview of the discussions can be found below. It addresses each topic discussed in the order of relative importance to the participants (as measured by participant responses).

The Big Three

Like our Principals’ Round-tables, our conversations with teachers supported the concept of a *few* big ideas that could greatly improve student achievement. Teachers, like principals, united around three issues – parent involvement, teacher quality, and student motivation - that keep their students from achieving. These three issues are summarized below.

21 Parishes represented were East Baton Rouge (56 teachers), West Baton Rouge (17 teachers), St. Mary (16 teachers) and Lincoln (16 teachers).

22 Elementary schools represented included Brusly Elementary, Chamberlin Elementary, Cypress Springs Elementary, Hattie Watts Elementary, Hico Elementary, Hillcrest Elementary, J.B. Maitland Elementary, Ryan Elementary, Southdowns Elementary, University Terrace Elementary, and Westdale Heights Academic Magnet.

23 Middle schools represented included Broadmoor Middle, Devall Middle, Glen Oaks Middle, Ruston Junior High School, Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet, Southeast Middle, Westdale Middle, and Woodlawn Middle.

24 High schools represented included Berwick High School, Brusly High School, Capitol Pre-College Academy for Girls, Choudrant High School, Dubach High School, Port Allen High School, Ruston High School, and Simsboro High School.

I. Student Motivation

More than any other issue, teachers felt strongly that a lack of student motivation is responsible for low student achievement. 28 teachers rated “student motivation” as the top issue affecting achievement at their school.

The Problems

Overwhelmingly, teachers noted that students lack intrinsic motivation and do not seem to value their education. In every one of our conversations, student motivation was one of the first issues discussed. One teacher wrote, “Students are absent, tardy, don’t do homework. We recently started a homework center to make sure most kids get homework done.” Many teachers seemed almost to have given up hope that the problem could be solved.

The Solutions

Monetary awards for students who excel or show academic improvement

Teachers were uniformly opposed to the idea of using money to reward students for achievement or growth. Some teachers stressed that they give out too many rewards already and that motivation should be intrinsic. Others said it was “ridiculous” to pay children for what they have to do. Another noted that monetary rewards and other extrinsic motivators put the idea of “self-esteem” over “self-respect,” which comes from earning something and getting intrinsic benefit from it.

Yet another teacher commented that motivation and performance are not the same thing, and that while rewarding students might motivate them, it will not necessarily raise achievement. This teacher wrote:

The idea of paying students for performance seems as though it might make a difference in student motivation, but I’m not sure it will change performance. Our parish will be giving away [an] MP3 player and a laptop computer to students at different levels for high achievement on state tests. It will be interesting to see how this ‘carrot’ will be sought after by the students. I have doubts, though, that this will truly make a difference in student performance.

Smaller schools

If there was one idea in the entire study that garnered the approval of every single teacher present, it was the concept of smaller schools and, more importantly, smaller class sizes. Twelve teachers independently stressed the need for small class sizes, and several teachers said that if they could only do one thing to affect student achievement, they would lower their class sizes. Teachers connected class size to student motivation, pointing out that it is much easier to motivate 15 students than 30. Elementary school teachers were adamant that class sizes be no higher than 18 students and also that class sizes be equitable across and within districts.²⁵

II. Parent Involvement

After student motivation, the next most frequently discussed issue was parent involvement. 23 teachers rated “parent involvement” as the top issue affecting achievement at their school.

²⁵ Teachers observed that within a district there can be great disparity among class sizes. For example, one school has two classes of 23 second graders each, while another school in the same district has two classes of second graders with eight and nine students respectively.

The Problems

Teachers felt that some parents seem to give up responsibility for the child entirely to the school. This is particularly true with regard to disciplinary issues, which are left up to the school to deal with alone. One teacher said she feels like a “highly paid babysitter for kids who are just waiting to leave school.”

Others noted that parents don't seem to value education; while they may be involved early on – at the pre-kindergarten level – involvement fades out after that. Teachers noted that some parents are very hard to contact, others fail to show up to school events after being invited repeatedly, and many do not look at their children's homework.

Many participants felt that parents need to be held accountable – just like schools and teachers. One teacher said that while students and teachers are held accountable, parents seem to be “the missing link.” As another teacher put it, “I don't mind being held accountable, but parents need to stop putting it all on the teachers.” Perhaps the sentiment is best expressed by a teacher who wrote an entire paragraph on the issue, quoted in full below:

There is a disconnect between the accountability of the school and the level of accountability for the parents. While schools are held to strict standards of protocol, instruction and performance, parents are not held to the same level of expectations. There are many students whose basic needs are not met before they come to school, whose parents are not invested in their child's education (no-shows for conferences, do not sign for homework, unable to be contacted by phone, etc...) and whose education suffers as a result. These are things ... which not even the best teacher can overcome. Early childhood education is a top priority of our system right now so that we can reach these at-risk students early. However, no amount of increased instruction can make up for the lack of reinforcement at home.

Teachers noted that the lack of involvement might have to do with the parents' lack of resources, such as transportation or education. As one teacher wrote, “Parents want to be involved but work or have no transport. They would come [to school events] with transportation.” Other teachers pointed to the parents' own lack of education. They pointed out that they often have to explain homework to the parents, and that many parents don't know how to teach their kids reading and other basic skills. For example, many students come to kindergarten unable to use a pair of scissors and with poor social skills, such as respect for adults. Some of this may be due to the fact that many parents have had children when they themselves were young, so they do not know how to teach their children. Unfortunately, one teacher noted, the school system has failed to empower these parents, and often, the parents of kids who most need help are least empowered to get it.

The Solutions

Community Schools

Teachers were slightly less enthusiastic than principals about the community school model. Several expressed fears that, by combining multiple services at the school, parents would be even *more* likely to turn over responsibility for raising their children to the school. The majority, however, were more positive about the idea. They thought that making schools the centers of community and equipping them with the things the community needs – such as an employment center, a laundromat, and parenting classes - would be a meaningful way to get parents involved and empowered. While they were in favor of offering parenting classes at the school, both for teenage and older parents, teachers stressed that these classes should not be taught by teachers, who already carry a heavy workload. One teacher remarked that “establishing community partners is one of the most important things we can do” and suggested that these partners help with parenting classes.

Other Suggestions

Other teachers took a more hard-line view, reflecting a general sense of frustration and exasperation on this issue. They suggested forcing parents to be responsible for discipline problems and putting the accountability back on students and parents for completing homework, though it was not clear how this would be done. Others suggested legislating that students who have children attend parenting classes, and they pointed to specific parishes in which parents are arrested for not complying.²⁶

Another teacher noted that freshman academies, a key part of the high school re-design plan, tend to encourage parents to be involved.

III. Teacher Quality

Surprisingly, teachers agreed with principals in rating “teacher quality” as one of the most important factors affecting student achievement. One teacher said, “I think holding teachers to high standards is the key to creating high achievers. As long as sub-standard teachers continue to teach in our classrooms, with no way to remove them, the problem of poor student performance will persist. The solution lies in ensuring quality teachers are in classrooms that are well stocked with necessary materials.”

Like principals, teachers were concerned about teacher retention and recruitment, and they agreed that teachers are often unprepared to enter the classroom. However, unlike principals, they attributed this lack of preparation to poor teacher preparation programs and a lack of support within the school.

The Problems

Teachers did not mince words in assessing other members of their profession. One teacher remarked, “I have encountered some truly (and frighteningly) unintelligent humans who are teaching in our schools.” Many criticized new teachers, noting that they do not come in with a good work ethic, are often late, and dress unprofessionally. Even more experienced teachers were called to task for being “undisciplined” and lazy. As one teacher put it, “There are several teachers who should be at home in their rockers, not in the classroom.”

Teachers attributed this lack of quality to two specific causes – a lack of adequate preparation and a lack of in-school support. Teachers asserted that teacher preparation programs are heavy on theory but light on practicality. They also stressed that extensive student teaching experience is necessary before a teacher receives his/her degree. Teachers also need to be better prepared to deal with disruptive students. Teachers voiced concern that there is no state-mandated teacher preparation program, so there is no uniform standard of quality.

Besides the lack of preparation, teachers also stressed that once hired, they are not supported adequately by their administration and the district. The job is already a time-consuming one, but it is exacerbated by increased paperwork and a lack of planning time. As one teacher remarked, “We have quality people but they don’t have time to tie their shoes.” Teachers stressed that they have little time to plan and implement “viable, relevant and stimulating” lessons, and pointed out that some teachers need helpers in the classroom to help monitor students because of the increased amount of paperwork. One remarked, “It all still boils down to the same old thing. Teachers are expected to teach every minute without any considerations for the time it takes to plan, assess, and

²⁶ In St. Mary Parish, the district attorney’s office arrests parents who do not attend compulsory parenting education classes.

keep track of the voluminous piles of bureaucratic paperwork (most of which takes away from real interaction between the teacher and student). Teachers need more time in the classroom planning for their students.”

Perhaps as a result of the tough nature of the job, teachers expressed concern about the difficulty of retaining and recruiting teachers, and the difficulty of getting rid of poor teachers. One teacher wrote, “Recruiting and retaining outstanding teachers must be a top priority for administrators. Removing those teachers who are not committed to getting the most out of their students should be an equal priority.” Another middle school teacher observed that at his school, there is “a revolving door” of teachers leaving and new teachers coming in every year, which makes it hard to get buy-in from students. Another teacher said she feels it is “a social duty” to keep teaching because if she quits, she knows there are not enough qualified teachers to replace her. Others were concerned that not enough young people want to enter the teaching profession, partly because of its negative image in the popular imagination (see p. 19). Still others pointed out that some parishes have an easier time recruiting than others, primarily because of higher salaries.

On a related note, teachers took issue with the tenure system, pointing out that although its original purpose of preventing nepotism was worthwhile, it now prevents schools from getting rid of bad teachers. Instead, poor teachers get passed from school to school each year. At the same time, teachers worried that it might be difficult to recruit enough teachers to replace the poor ones.

The Solutions

Teacher training

Teachers urged that teacher preparation programs be much more rigorous and applicable. One teacher wrote:

Why do the smartest college students gravitate toward becoming doctors, lawyers, and engineers? If teachers were paid comparable amounts and faced a comparable amount of difficult coursework, you would have the best and brightest majoring in education and moving into our schools. Teacher training needs to be MUCH harder, and standards need to be MUCH stricter ... Increase the intelligence of the teachers and you will increase the achievement of the students.

Another teacher noted that even experienced teachers should go through training such as LaTAAP and mentor training to keep fresh and help newer teachers.

Human Resources

To address the critical issue of teachers lacking preparation and teaching time, teachers proposed a relatively simple solution – hire more staff. Not only do auxiliary teachers provide more planning and collaborative time for elementary teachers, but specific kinds of personnel could help teachers become better at what they do. Teachers were especially in favor of hiring on-site, subject-specific coaches to work with and motivate teachers. Even veteran teachers could use this help, teachers observed, because they too are faced with a new crop of children every year and they need to know the latest research on best practices.

In addition to coaches, teachers expressed a great need for other types of staff, such as counselors and behaviorists to handle discipline situations. As one teacher put it, “We just don’t have enough hands” to take care of all the problems that arise. Another teacher remarked, “Teachers are not social workers;” they can not be expected to deal with all of their students’ psychological and behavioral problems – especially not in a classroom setting.

Other teachers stressed the need for more teachers within the classroom. This is especially true for inclusion classes in which special education students are combined with regular students, a

situation that works only if a special education teacher is also present. Early childhood teachers also asked for another set of hands in the classroom, especially with large class sizes.

Teacher Support and Evaluation

More supportive evaluation could help improve teacher quality, some teachers noted. Administrators and other monitors should be expected to observe and evaluate teachers regularly, but should do so in a thorough and supportive way that could actually help teachers improve. As one wrote:

Very often administrators and external assessors are allowed to get away with decidedly minimal and mediocre assessments and evaluations of teachers because of their title and 'credentials,' while usually avoiding any real engagement beyond the usual bureaucratic milieu. Just like students, teachers and administrators should be held to a far higher standard, but should be supported and taught in the process, so that the feeling of being corrected and berated would instead be replaced by a feeling of the learning, practice, and mastery of a new skill.

Better/more professional development

Perhaps more than on any other issue, teachers came together to express frustration with the overall quality of professional development. As one teacher wrote:

[P]rofessional development [in] East Baton Rouge is abysmal. Opportunities for teachers to get into programs specifically administration are very selective (nepotistic). Principals and upper administration are regularly sent to conferences in town and out-of-town; however classroom teachers and staff are not. Professional development is home-grown, boring and uncomfortable. The room in which most professional development seminars are held is horribly uncomfortable.

Teachers stressed that professional development needs to be better-designed, more applicable to low-performing schools, less rushed and more practical. As one teacher put it, professional development “needs to actually help you do what you need to do.” A new teacher stressed that professional development should be more direct and explicit; she was never taught how to fill out a roll book. Another teacher remarked that professional development should be more specialized and geared toward areas of need, rather than “blanket professional development” for all teachers. Finally, it was suggested that professional development take the form of quality conferences put on by teaching professionals.

Increased Teacher Pay

While most teachers pointed out that teachers are not “in it for the money,” they agreed that paying teachers more would help attract good people to the profession. One teacher wrote, “I believe that most teachers want to be in the classroom to make a difference in student achievement. Making sure the right teachers are in the classroom for the right reasons is critical . . . In order to attract top quality personnel to teach, salaries must be attractive.” Teachers also observed that raising salaries would make a statement that teaching is a professional vocation, which could improve the popular perception of teaching. Finally, teachers remarked that paying substitute teachers more could attract higher quality substitutes.

Teacher pay-for-performance

The idea of paying effective teachers more is typically controversial. In our discussions, many teachers acknowledged the value of rewarding those who are more effective. However, most teachers doubted that such a system could be implemented fairly. One teacher noted, “I strongly believe in MERIT raises; however, the nepotistic climate (nepotism does not necessarily mean just familial relationships; how about sororities, alumni of institutions, friends, children of friends, etc.) of East Baton Rouge makes a fair merit system impossible.”

Other teachers were concerned that there would be no way to fairly measure student growth

because the standardized tests change over the years. Others pointed out that ancillary teachers (art, music, physical education, language) would be at a disadvantage under this system because students do not take standardized tests in these subjects. Still others worried that such a system might make teachers compete against one another, which would result in a negative school climate.

Bonuses to teachers for working in tough, urban schools or hard-to-staff areas

Giving bonuses to teachers who teach in the toughest schools or in hard-to-staff subject areas was much more popular. Teachers stressed that the bonuses must be given only to *excellent* teachers in these schools but were otherwise strongly in favor of the idea, especially for giving bonuses to teachers in areas like special education.

OTHER ISSUES

While “the big three” were the most talked-about and most significant issues, teachers were asked to weigh in on several other issues as well, including the overage population, district policy, technology and supplies, leadership and discipline. These issues are summarized below in order of how highly they were rated by teachers.

I. The Overage Population

Like principals, teachers felt strongly that the overage student population is a factor that negatively impacts student achievement. While middle school teachers were most vocal about this topic, elementary teachers acknowledged that the overage problem begins at their level, when a school has to decide whether a child should be socially promoted. Teachers noted that the trend is toward social promotion at the lower grades because “they really don’t like children to repeat grades anymore.” This, however, can become a problem once a child faces the LEAP; if a child is unable to pass, s/he is held back for at least two years and will then be an overage student who is missing requisite skills.

Even among teachers who did not think the overage population was particularly disruptive, the lack of alternative educational options for students was troubling. Teachers noted that the school system lacks any other options for kids who do not learn the same way,²⁷ so students who are not on the college track are made to feel like failures and then give up.

The Solutions

Overage academies/vo-tech schools/charter schools

“We need this!!!” one teacher wrote next to this option – and indeed, teachers were generally in favor of expanding vo-tech options. “Student aptitudes need to be taken into consideration and more choices should be available,” one teacher wrote. Participants noted that vo-tech schools could improve student motivation by tying academics to real-world skills. Besides, they said, we need trade people as well as college graduates. They cautioned that such alternative schools would need to be run well and that they should use educational models that have worked elsewhere. Teachers also noted that charter schools would cut out the bureaucracy and allow teachers to go directly to someone who can make decisions.

²⁷ This teacher referred to districts in other states where students take one class in the morning and one in the afternoon for a month. They are able to learn the same amount but because it is broken up differently, some students learn better.

II. District Policy

Many of the problems brought up by teachers throughout our discussions were issues that could only be addressed by the district's school board, or by a change of state or federal policy. In the hopes that these decision-makers might be interested in hearing from those whom their decisions affect, these issues and participants' suggested solutions are summarized below.

The Problems and Solutions

Autocratic structure

Like the principals, teachers expressed frustration with a central office that seems totally disconnected from their work in the classroom. One teacher commented that it often seems like "policy is dictated by people who don't have a clue."

Teachers did not have many suggestions for how to bridge this disconnect, besides that BESE staff be required to substitute in classrooms to get a feel for the actual situation in schools. In general, though, it seemed that both teachers and principals would be happy with a more democratic decision-making process, in which they have the chance to weigh in on school board decisions. If district offices were to implement such a policy, they might be urged to address some of the following issues.

Length of school day/school year

To teachers, one of the most important district-determined policies is the length of the school day and school year. Participants pointed out that, under the current system, they do not have enough time to accomplish all of the objectives in the comprehensive curriculum.

While some participants favored longer school days, others agreed with principals that the school day is long enough and suggested a longer school year instead. Participants were strongly in favor of year-round school because it cuts out the time and effort required to open and close a school. Other teachers pointed out that teachers who teach in year-round systems "love it" because there is much less stress; teachers teach for the same amount of days but receive more frequent breaks and do not have the stress of re-acclimating themselves and their students to a new school year. Some teachers, however, worried that year-round school might make it even more difficult to recruit new teachers to the profession.

Curriculum issues

Several teachers took issue with the nature of the comprehensive curriculum. Early elementary teachers observed that the curriculum is "too mandated and militaristic" for young children. "It is not natural for five year-olds to sit quietly and confined for six hours," one wrote, and stressed the need for more organic experiences. Another kindergarten teacher remarked that the curriculum is so regimented at that age that there is no time for play or naps.

Other teachers criticized the curriculum for emphasizing seat work, instead of organic learning experiences. They noted that there are so many objectives (GLEs) that teachers never have time to teach anything to mastery, so they just touch on it and move on. Furthermore, teachers noted that they are so restricted by the comprehensive curriculum and its frenetic pacing guide that they have no freedom to make lessons interesting.²⁸

²⁸ There is considerable disparity between parishes in terms of how they view the comprehensive curriculum – some mandate all the activities while others see it as a general guide to be followed more loosely. One teacher felt that the East Baton Rouge version of the curriculum sets particularly low standards for students.

Many teachers also remarked on the profusion of new programs that they are constantly expected to adopt. One wrote, “East Baton Rouge just this year has started four or five new initiatives (Language for Learning, Calendar Math, a new Social Studies adoption, Second Step and others), each with all of its included materials. This is OVERWHELMING for the classroom teacher.”

To address this issue, teachers suggested going “back to basics,” or revising the comprehensive curriculum so that there are fewer mandated programs and activities. This would give teachers more time to teach required concepts in depth. Early elementary teachers also suggested incorporating more play in the curriculum for younger students and allowing time for naps in pre-school and kindergarten.

Accountability

Related to curriculum issues is the question of accountability, including standardized tests and district-developed “quality support teams” that periodically observe teachers at work. Teachers observed that they are now forced to focus more on paperwork than on teaching. They noted that there is too much time spent on formal assessments, for the purpose of accountability, and not enough time spent teaching. One teacher pointed out that the LEAP and the GEE are not the best measurement of a particular teacher’s efficiency because they often test subjects that were taught many grades earlier, by other teachers. Instead, this teacher recommended implementing subject-based tests that can truly hold teachers accountable for the subject they taught that year.

Others noted that an accountability system that rests solely on the teacher is unrealistic. As one teacher put it, “No Child Left Behind is doing just the opposite. Quit expecting the classroom teacher to be the ‘be all and end all’ for every student. It’s not fair to the student or the teacher.”

Special Education

One teacher observed, “I know the laws are supposed to protect special education students, however special education students seem to tend to abuse these protections. They misbehave, don’t do work, refuse to try, yet we have to keep them here when they can’t/won’t keep up or misbehave and cause disruption.” Another remarked that special education is “disaster recovery, not disaster prevention.”

Many took issue with the policy of inclusion classrooms, in which students with special needs are mainstreamed into regular classrooms – often without a special education teacher to accompany them. Teachers felt that this policy is a disservice to regular students and regular classroom teachers who were not trained to teach special education and do not know how to accommodate their special needs students. One teacher wrote, “Do something about ‘special ed.’ Put them in a smaller setting with extra teachers and more individualized help. I did not go to school to teach special education. I believe it is a major and something that people get a degree in. I did not. I am not trained to handle those children.”

As long as a special education teacher is present in the classroom, teachers had no problem with inclusion. However they stressed that even a 1:10 teacher-pupil ratio is too great when children are having tantrums or soiling themselves.

Image

Teachers were quick to point out that the community does not respect teaching as a profession and that its perception of public education is decidedly unfavorable. Like principals, they attributed this in part to a distinct lack of positive publicity for public schools; teachers observed that the media is quick to point out the failures of public schools but rarely publicizes its successes. Teachers connected community perception to student motivation, noting that the more parents and the community value education and believe in public schools, the more students will too.

Although this problem is not directly the result of district policy, the school district could take

responsibility for solving it. Teachers suggested hiring a professional public relations consultant to improve the image of public schools and, possibly, of the teaching profession itself. An improved image could garner additional parental support and attract more teachers to the profession.

III. Technology and supplies

The Problems

Many teachers commented on the lack of technology, especially computers,²⁹ while others noted that they end up paying for supplies that should be provided by the school. However, many teachers agreed that technology is only as good as those using it – or those training others to use it. One teacher wrote, “Most administration is wowed by technology; however, once installed they expect miracles with little help. Tech training [in] East Baton Rouge [Parish] is ok; the people who are training know how to do the technology – they do not know how to train!”

The Solutions

Better classroom technology

Teachers were overwhelmingly in favor of better classroom technology. They pointed out that technology directly improves student achievement by increasing student motivation. One teacher remarked “Equipping classrooms with adequate technology that is maintained and supported is key for improvement,” while another was in favor of an “Elmo in every room.” However, teachers observed that technology needs to be equitably distributed, and not just allocated to schools with huge Title One funds or urban schools. However, one teacher mentioned that there is very little time for technology because teachers are too busy teaching to the test.

A laptop for every student

Teachers were much more skeptical about the proposal to give each student a laptop computer. Some teachers said they would prefer a computer lab in their school; others noted, “Our students need books in their homes, not laptops.” Some middle school teachers thought laptops might work in older grades but would be “unrealistic” for middle school students. Finally, others pointed out that great technology is worthless without great teaching.

IV. Leadership

Teachers agreed that leadership makes a big difference in a school. They noted that good leaders can improve teacher morale which makes for better teachers, and that teachers depend on a supportive administration.

The Problems

Although they agreed that great leaders are critical, many teachers were unhappy with the quality of the leaders they have. One teacher wrote, “I don’t think principals know what to do to motivate [staff and students].” Teachers observed that principal assignments are based on what courses a candidate took in school and who the candidate knows, rather than on intrinsic leadership qualities. Others noted that many principals have no concept of academics; as one teacher remarked, “[the] education system is political not educational.”

²⁹ It is important to note that many participants came from West Baton Rouge Parish where technology is particularly lacking. Technology needs vary greatly by parish.

Teachers also disagreed with the autocratic approach employed by many principals; some described their systems as “dictatorships” that do not treat teachers as true professionals. Teachers agreed that a more democratic approach would improve faculty morale and that dialogue is preferable to a “top-down” approach.

Finally, teachers expressed concern over the leadership shortage. They speculated that potential leaders are afraid to be principals because of the job’s enormous liability and responsibility for both students and faculty.

The Solutions

Teachers had few solutions for the leadership problems they discussed. They were not enthusiastic about the expansion of autonomous schools, noting that several of these schools, especially the CAN schools, have been unsuccessful to date. For an autonomous school to work, it needs to have a great leader to begin with, they pointed out. Generally, teachers seemed to feel that schools should have greater fiscal discretion but that this did not necessarily have to be in the form of an autonomous school.

V. Discipline

The Problems

Although the issue of discipline was not explicitly raised by the survey teachers completed during our discussion, they – like the principals – brought this one up on their own. As one teacher remarked, “Something must be done about disruptive students.” Others affirmed that while well-behaved students are in the majority, a few disruptive students can prevent other students from learning. Likewise, when disruptive students are removed, other students can achieve.

Teachers stressed that “discipline with teeth” is necessary and that the schools’ current discipline systems are ineffective. The new state-mandated system of “Positive Behavior Support” (PBS) was especially criticized for taking up too much time from teaching because of the massive amounts of paperwork it requires. Others pointed out that under the PBS system, disruptive students are either eliminated early on or else teachers feel sorry for them and end up purposely rewarding them for sub-standard behavior and ignoring better behaved students.

Besides PBS, schools have few disciplinary options. Teachers noted that, because excessive behavior referrals reflect poorly on a school – and suspensions/expulsions affect its School Performance Score (SPS) – their principals are reluctant to support their disciplinary decisions. On the other hand, teachers remarked, principals are often hesitant to suspend students because they feel the students’ home environment is worse than school.

The Solutions

While some teachers longed for the days of paddling, pointing out that there is a difference between punishment and abuse, the majority advocated for separating students with “major behavior problems (who should be in classes of no more than 5!) from students who have at least average appropriate social behavior.” One teacher noted that her school’s in-school expulsion system, in which each disruptive student is paired with a monitor to work on computer enrichment activities, is particularly effective. Others objected that such a one-on-one system requires a huge investment of staff time and money.

Still other teachers tied discipline issues to parent involvement, or to teacher quality. They observed

that often discipline problems occur when students forget to take their medications -- or whose parents do not make sure that they do so. Some teachers remarked that discipline problems only arise in classrooms that lack engaging teachers, so the problem could be addressed by raising teacher quality and ensuring that teachers are there “for the right reasons.”

Finally, teachers noted that discipline problems are often exacerbated by the way they are handled by administrators and office personnel. One teacher wrote:

[M]ore sophisticated and extensive training for classroom and behavior management ... would circumvent some of the attitude-based escalation that happens when students are confronted by [the] administration. Faculty and administration often do not properly rationalize the consequences that follow misbehavior, which leads to resentment and a (sometimes permanent) communication breakdown that hinders performance, attendance, and prevents real solutions to many nagging behavior issues. Having a more supportive network in the school office would help to educate students about their poor choices, rather than simply punish and remove them from classes for unnecessarily long suspensions, which often condemn students to failure and mediocre performance when they return.

ANALYSIS

I. Introduction

The primary purpose of the round-table discussions was to identify a few specific priority issues that can and should be addressed if substantive change in public education is to occur. This analysis will examine the data summarized in the earlier sections to compare principals' and teachers' viewpoints and arrive at a few priority areas where action is necessary and possible.

While all of the problems discussed in our conversations were serious and demand attention, only a few will be identified as priorities. This is for an important reason. Especially with a problem as complicated as education, the tendency is to tackle multiple problems in an effort to address all the failures of the system at once. Unfortunately, this approach disperses and weakens the power of education organizations and community leaders to make change. The plethora of programs, summits, speakers series, and workshops that result also exhaust an interested but not inexhaustible pool of funders. If focused on one stream of action, however, these change agents could be extremely powerful.

More importantly, this multi-faceted approach is not necessary. Although education is very complicated, many of the problems with the system actually stem from a few fundamental “root issues.” By identifying and tackling the root issues, all of the stem problems can be addressed as well.

With this in mind, four criteria will be used to identify our priority issues from the myriad problems discussed in our round-tables. First, a priority issue should be a “root issue.” It must be the kind of problem which, when addressed properly, will also solve many other related problems.

Second, a priority issue must be within our locus of control as policymakers, education reform leaders, and foundations. Although these groups have great power, problems that are rooted in social injustice or individual decision-making are beyond even their control. While our goals should be ambitious, they must also be achievable.

Third, a priority issue should be one that has been shown by research to affect student achievement.

Finally, our priority issues should reflect the priorities expressed in the principals' and teachers' discussions, as these are the people closest to the problem and most knowledgeable about the real situation in their schools. To that end, we will first apply these criteria to "the big three" most important issues identified by principals and teachers.

II. Principals and Teachers: The Big Three

As the summaries show, principals and teachers agreed that teacher quality and parent involvement were two of the most important factors affecting student achievement. Principals and many teachers, especially middle school teachers, also identified the population of overage students as a serious problem in their schools. Finally, teachers pointed to student motivation as another major issue holding their students back. As each of these issues is already a high priority for principals and teachers, we will now examine them to see whether they are also root issues, within our locus of control, and backed by research.

Teacher quality

Research shows that teacher quality directly impacts student achievement. How teachers perform on assessments, their level of literacy, their mastery of content as indicated by a major/minor in the field in which they teach (especially in math and science), and their experience (especially after the first two years) are all strongly correlated with student achievement. When researchers at the Illinois Education Research Council combined all these measures of teacher quality, the results were clear. Students in the poorest high schools with the best teachers were twice as likely to meet state standards as students in similarly poor high schools with low-quality teachers. The same was true for elementary and middle school.³⁰

Perhaps more importantly, good teachers matter *more* to poor students. A Tennessee study found that students who fail the state's fourth-grade exam are six times more likely to pass the graduation exam if they have a sequence of highly effective teachers than if they have a sequence of the least effective teachers.³¹

Teacher quality is also a clear root issue in that it affects both student motivation and parent involvement. Great teachers can motivate even the most uninterested students to learn, and better teachers are also more likely to reach out to parents, to call home regularly with updates on their student's progress, and to come up with creative ways to get parents involved.

Finally, teacher quality is within our locus of control. All of the solutions summarized in the previous sections, such as mandating a stricter teacher preparation program, ameliorating working conditions and raising teacher pay to attract quality people to the profession, can be implemented -- should a school board or reform-minded organization make teacher quality a priority.

Teacher quality is certainly a priority issue.

Parent involvement

Research has consistently shown that when parents are involved with their children's education, their children do better in school. The more parents help their children with reading, the more they talk with their children about school, the more they help with homework and monitor their children's

30 "Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality." Education Trust, June 2006.

31 Ibid.

work time, the more likely their children are to achieve.³²

Parent involvement can also be said to be a root issue in that parental involvement can increase student motivation, although it does not necessarily affect teacher quality.

However, parental involvement is not within our locus of control. Many factors contribute to a parent's level of involvement, including whether or not a parent (or a grandparent, as is often the case) is single, has other children to look after, works two or more jobs, has medical issues, moves frequently, or has access to a car or a telephone. Each of those issues reflects broad social trends which are beyond the scope of any education organization or community foundation, at least in the immediate future.

Parental involvement, then, can not be a priority issue because it can not be solved efficiently by the organizations and individuals to whom this paper is addressed.

Overage Students

Data supports the principals' concerns about the numbers of overage students in their classrooms. In Louisiana, 64,327 students are at least *two years* overage for their grade level. That represents 10% of all students in the state.³³ In East Baton Rouge Parish, 7,497 students (14%) are at least one year overage. Of those, 2,052 students (four percent overall) are at least two years overage. In middle school, the problem is even worse. More than one in five middle school students in East Baton Rouge is at least one year overage and eight percent are two or more years overage.

Furthermore, principals and teachers identified overage students as a particularly disruptive population, possibly because they do not understand the material and also because they stand out in the company of much younger students and may act out to avoid being embarrassed.

Research indicates that Louisiana is particularly ill-equipped to handle these discipline problems. In a study of 40 states and their discipline policies, Louisiana ranked 39th.³⁴

Research also shows that discipline is a major factor in a teacher's decision to leave the profession. Roughly 50 percent of new teachers quit teaching in Louisiana's public schools within five years, with a majority citing classroom behavior as the top reason.³⁵ This is especially true in East Baton Rouge Parish, where "student disciplinary problems" was one of the top reasons cited by teachers who left the East Baton Rouge system.³⁶ And while many teachers cited "class size" as a very important issue, this may be partly in response to discipline problems. Several teachers asserted that they would prefer a larger class of well-behaved students to a smaller class with one or two disruptive students.

The overage population is also perhaps the strongest root issue of all. Overage students affect student motivation, not only because they themselves are unmotivated after several years of failing the same grade, but also because they set the bar lower for other students. When 12 year old sixth graders sit next to 15 year olds, they learn either that it is normal to fail several times or, if they already struggle in school, that they should expect to fail.

Even more important, the overage population may affect teacher quality, our other priority issue. Research shows that it is working conditions – not pay – that makes it difficult to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. A 2007 report by the Manhattan Institute found that public school teachers nationally earned 61% more than private sector teachers. The Public Affairs Research Council

32 National Education Association, <http://www.nea.org/parents/index.html>.

33 From information obtained from a source at the Louisiana Department of Education.

34 "State of the Strategies: A Report on District core and Supporting Strategies." March 2007

35 Ibid.

36 "Teaching Matters: Promoting Quality Instruction in East Baton Rouge Parish." 2002.

notes that this comparison “can be viewed as a huge disconnect with the market or as an indication of the tremendous value private school teachers place on their relative working conditions.”³⁷

A large part of a teacher’s working conditions is determined by the students with whom s/he interacts daily. If a teacher teaches classes with even a few overage, disruptive students, the teacher’s working conditions will be significantly tougher.

Furthermore, the fewer discipline problems principals have to deal with, the more time they have to observe and mentor teachers - something many principals said they would like to do if they had more time. This in turn improves working conditions as teachers receive more administrative support. In that sense, the overage population is a root issue that affects teacher quality.³⁸

Finally, the overage population is within our locus of control. Overage academies, vocational-technical options, and the Core Knowledge Acceleration Program (CKAP) can all be implemented by education reformers, or even schools themselves.

The overage population is clearly a priority issue.

Student Motivation

Research has shown that student motivation—especially intrinsic motivation that does not depend on receiving a reward—affects student achievement. Students who are not motivated to focus in class, do their homework and try their hardest on tests will not achieve academically. On the other hand, students who are intrinsically motivated will use strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply, and will tend to employ more logical decision-making approaches than students who are not motivated or who are only motivated by a reward. They are also more likely to take on challenging tasks than other students.³⁹

Student motivation is also within our locus of control. As mentioned previously, good teachers can design lessons to engage even the most disenchanted learners. There are also research-backed approaches, such as rewarding students with field trips or prizes for academic excellence or growth, which can be attempted by a reform-minded principal or district. Rapides Parish and West Baton Rouge Parish have already begun offering rewards to motivate students to score well on the LEAP test.

However, student motivation is not a root issue. Rather, it is the *result* of almost every other issue discussed. Addressing any of the other issues – teacher quality, parent involvement, the overage student population – would also contribute to student motivation and, in turn, achievement.

Because student motivation will be affected by any other issue we choose, it does not make sense to give it priority.

III. Conclusion

Using our four criteria, we have identified two priority issues – teacher quality and the overage population. Not only are these two issues important to teachers and principals, but studies have also confirmed that they affect student achievement, they are within our locus of control and, as “root issues,” their solution has the potential to help solve many other problems as well. The next section will describe two proposals that address these issues.

37 PAR, “Teacher and School Employee Pay: A Strategic Approach.” May 2007.

38 This is not to say that a poor teacher will become a better teacher if they do not teach overage students. It is only to point out that average or excellent teachers are prevented from teaching to the best of their ability by these students, and thus encouraged to leave the profession.

39 http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/Student_Motivatation.html.

TWO IDEAS

We have identified two priority issues: teacher quality and the overage student population. This section will outline one idea that targets both of these issues, and one idea to address the general distrust of authority that emerged throughout the round-table discussions.

While each idea will be explained and details may be suggested, they are purposely described in a general form. This is not intended to detract from the urgency and practicality of each suggestion. Rather, these ideas were left in a vague form because it is critical that we work with our many experienced and knowledgeable partners in the education community to work out the specifics necessary to see these two ideas through.

The following sections will elaborate on these two ideas: the creation of academies for overage and disruptive students, and the implementation of state-wide feedback circles.

I. Overage/Behavior Academies

The first suggestion is to create a system of academies to provide an excellent education for students who are two years or more behind in school and/or who have disruptive discipline problems.⁴⁰ These schools would be full-time, year-long institutions that would use the best practices of similar schools from around the country to craft an educational plan fitted to the specific needs of overage and disruptive children. Below, we will elaborate on the merits of this idea, and explain it in further detail.

The Advantages

A separate academy for overage and disruptive students meets the needs of two sets of students – the students who will attend these academies and all of their former classmates.

Often, overage students are behind because they have missed critical skills early on and are permanently handicapped in the classroom as a result. Many of these students will repeat a grade three or more times before passing to the next grade or being socially promoted.

Disruptive students are often caught in a similar pattern that may be hard to break. They misbehave – often to hide the fact that they are academically behind, they are suspended from school, they return even more behind, they misbehave again, they are suspended from school and so on until they are finally expelled. Once expelled, some of these students will attend an “alternative school” but many will be expelled from these institutions as well, or will choose not to attend. In the fall, they will return to their original school – now a year behind in their studies and thus, even more likely to be disruptive.

In order to break this pattern, both overage and disruptive students need services that the

⁴⁰ As was noted in the “Analysis” section, these are often – but not always – the same students. While many overage students are also disruptive, there are also well-behaved overage students and normal-aged disruptive students. Both of these populations could benefit from individual, high-quality attention in a non-traditional classroom setting. The proposed academies should be designed to meet the needs of these groups as well.

traditional public schools are not staffed or structured to provide. They need, first, a place where they do not stand out, where their age or their behavior does not attract the kind of attention that often reinforces disruptive actions. They need a discipline system that does not reward them for misbehavior by putting them out of school – not much of a punishment, in many cases. They need the highest quality teachers who know how to make a curriculum interesting to even the most disengaged and unmotivated students. They need small class sizes where those teachers can get to know them and be especially effective in classroom management.

They also need one-on-one professional attention, both to identify and redress their specific academic deficiencies (and possibly diagnose a learning or physical disability that often goes untreated) but also to give them the mental, behavior, and life skills counseling many of these students need in order to take control of their lives.

The traditional public schools simply do not have enough staff with the right qualifications to help these students. Nor should they. Public schools are not and should not be psychological clinics or corrective centers because most students in public schools are well-behaved, at the appropriate grade level and ready to learn. But students who need these services also deserve an appropriate education.

Besides helping the overage/disruptive students themselves, special academies would benefit the students at the schools these students leave. As was mentioned above, most students in public schools are well-behaved, eager learners. But as principals and teachers observed repeatedly, these students are often prevented from learning by overage or disruptive students in their classrooms.

For one thing, overage students are poor role models for the other students who often look up to them because of their age and begin to imitate their behaviors. Having overage students in a classroom also lowers the standards of regular age children by showing them that it is normal or “cool” to fail a year or more. This contributes to the problem of student motivation, which teachers ranked as the top issue preventing their students from achieving.

More importantly, disruptive students prevent teachers from teaching well. An engaging lesson carefully prepared by a high quality teacher can be derailed by one disruptive student. There is simply not much one can teach when a student refuses to sit down, stop talking, stop throwing objects, etc.

Nor can teachers always count on administrative support in these situations. As the principals mentioned, they are reluctant to discipline students in a way that might lead to a suspension or expulsion because these incidents lower their School Performance Score and might lead to a cut in funding. To avoid this, many schools make it difficult for teachers to put these students out of class – either by crafting discipline policies that lower the standard of what is considered acceptable behavior, or by simply not having enough staff to deal with students who truly need to be removed. When schools do remove such students, they will often be put in a “time out room” (TOR) or another form of in-school suspension, in which students wait out the period with their equally misbehaved peers while missing the academic lesson. They return to class with the same teacher the next day -- resentful, behind, and with behavior usually unchanged.

These poor “working conditions” are what teachers point to when they leave the profession – half of them after just three years of teaching. Reports of horrifying disciplinary incidents also keep many quality teachers from entering the profession in the first place. Instead, they choose private schools where pay is lower but where they will not have to deal with the same extent of misbehavior. Even teachers who repeatedly mentioned “class size” as a major issue in our conversations acknowledged that they would prefer a large class with well-behaved students to a smaller class with just a few disruptive ones. Creating special academies for these students will greatly improve

working conditions for these teachers and could thus improve teacher quality.

Finally, disruptive students prevent principals from perhaps the most important part of their jobs – observing and mentoring teachers. Principals often find that they spend most of their day talking to disruptive students and their parents. This leaves little time to walk through the school, monitor teachers in their classrooms, meet one-on-one with faculty and come up with innovative whole-school strategies for increasing achievement. Even at larger schools where principals are fortunate enough to have the help of an assistant principal or two, these assistants are often totally pre-occupied with handling discipline issues. Principals are then left to monitor their entire (larger) school and deal with mounds of paperwork. Removing these disruptive and overage students to a separate school would free up principals to provide more administrative support to teachers, which would not only improve teachers' working conditions, but also allow principals time to develop and implement their visions for the school.⁴¹

The Current Situation

Louisiana has taken two approaches to target this overage and disruptive population. One is the Options program administered by the state Department of Education. The other is a system of alternative schools. As will be shown below, these solutions are not sufficient to meet the need of Louisiana's overage-student population.

The Options Program

All schools in the state are required to offer the Options program to all children 16 and over who are academically behind or overage. Students take pre-GED classes and receive vo-tech training and counseling. This occurs at either their home school or at an alternate site. In East Baton Rouge, for example, students are in GED classes for three hours, and spend the rest of the day working in one of several skill areas, including welding, culinary arts, childcare, graphic arts, fast food service, and retail. Students may leave with just a skills certificate and no GED, but they must stay in the program for at least two years before they can exit. Students also have the opportunity to earn Carnegie units (which count toward a diploma), but they will be very behind if they ever re-enter their original high school. The program is housed at five area high schools,⁴² but students can attend from any high school.

While the program sounds good in theory, in reality it has several problems. First, it is unclear how many districts are actually offering the program. According to a spokesperson at the state Department of Education, there are currently 70 districts offering the Options program at 200 alternative sites. However, this spokesperson acknowledged that the state has no way to ensure that these programs are even taking place, let alone following state guidelines. Although the state previously maintained a small staff that could monitor at least a third of the Options programs every year, those funds have since been reallocated, leaving *no* staff to monitor *any* of the programs.

Furthermore, there is significant reason to doubt that all schools are implementing the Options program because it is an unfunded mandate. While schools receive some additional money for at-risk students, they are not nearly compensated sufficiently to provide for the 1:15 teacher-pupil ratio

41 At our principals' round-tables, many principals described elaborate ideas for their schools that, if implemented, could greatly improve student achievement. One principal wanted to transform his school into a real-world community in which each student had a job (such as erasing blackboards, cleaning the hallways, making copies) and would get "paid." Their money would be handled by student "bankers" and they could cash in their earnings at an end-of-semester auction where lucrative prizes would be available (possibly from private donations). As usual, however, principals are overwhelmed with discipline and other administrative duties and have little time to put such plans into effect.

42 The program has bases at Belaire, Glen Oaks, Capitol, Lee and McKinley High Schools. Another program will be added soon at Sharp Station High School.

that is recommended for the Options program. As we have seen in our principals and teachers' conversations, schools struggle to implement even those programs for which they receive adequate funding. There seems reason to doubt that schools are thoroughly implementing a program for which they lack the resources.

Even assuming that all districts are indeed offering the Options program, they are not serving nearly enough students to make a dent in the overall overage and disruptive student population. The state Options spokesperson said that 7,000 students state-wide are in the Options program any given year. While there were no state-wide figures available for the total number of overage students who are at least 16 years old, the number in East Baton Rouge Parish alone is 1,100 students. Even assuming that the number is half that large in other districts, this means that in the 70 districts offering the Options program, there are 35,600 eligible students in the state. Even if all of the state's Options programs were actually being implemented, they would only be sufficient to handle one in five overage students. In East Baton Rouge Parish, the Options programs can accommodate a maximum of 200 students. This represents only 18% of the 1,100 eligible students in Baton Rouge.

Even if the program were able to accommodate all eligible students in the state, it still only serves students who are at least 16 years old. But many students are already at least one year behind grade level as young as nine years old. In East Baton Rouge Parish, there are 947 overage students under 16 years old; they make up 46% of the entire overage population in the district. These students are equally likely to be disruptive and prevent other students from learning as their older peers—but they currently have no other options.

Finally, even if the Options program could be revised to accommodate *all* overage students in the state, the success rate of these schools—at least as measured by the results in East Baton Rouge Parish—is less than optimal. While the East Baton Rouge Options program has served around 150 students over the past two years, only four of these students earned a GED and only 20 have received a skills certificate. In part, this may be the result of poor attendance; a representative of the program said the majority of students “never come to school” and that 8-10 drop out each year. But it also may be because these schools' classrooms are not substantively different from traditional classrooms and because there is no more attention paid to teacher quality in these schools than in regular schools. Without this additional attention, no student of any age, let alone overage and disruptive students, can achieve at their highest potential.

Alternative Schools

The 102 alternative schools in Louisiana mostly focus on disruptive students. The majority only serve students who have been suspended or expelled from their regular schools, or who have been assigned there by an officer of the court. As a result, most of these schools are temporary institutions where the average student stay is less than two months,⁴³ and where students enter and leave throughout the school year. While these schools work well as temporary “holding grounds” for students who must be removed from traditional schools, they are not focused on rehabilitation or permanent behavior change. Many have only one counselor for more than 50 students, while several have only one counselor for more than 100 students.⁴⁴ They also do not use methods substantially different from those employed in traditional classrooms. In contrast, the system of overage academies proposed below will provide students with a more stable, long-term learning environment, in which they remain at the school for an entire year, and in which the focus is on restructuring the traditional classroom to make it better fit these students' needs.

It should be noted that there are two full-time alternative schools in East Baton Rouge Parish,

⁴³ This information is based on documents received from the Louisiana Department of Education, as well as an informal e-mail survey conducted by the Foundation with principals of alternative schools.

⁴⁴ Based on the survey mentioned above.

Mohican Education Center and Staring Education Center, which serve overage students. However, their combined capacity is only 270 students and they only serve students in the 5th-8th grade. While these grades are important, there are also significant numbers of overage students in both 4th and 9th grades who must be addressed.

Perhaps a more significant issue with both Mohican and Staring is that they have admission requirements that prohibit a student with severe discipline issues from enrolling. A student who has been expelled once the previous year, for example, is ineligible to enter. This rules out many of the overage students who most need this kind of program. In addition, neither facility has the capacity to handle more than a few students with special needs.

Finally, parental consent is required for a child to be admitted to either school. But as one principal from a traditional middle school observed, it is often hard to convince parents that their students need an alternative setting. As we will observe in the next section, alternative education may need to be mandatory if it is to be truly effective.

The Idea

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, the details of each of these ideas need to be worked out in cooperation with the knowledgeable and experienced education reform organizations and leaders in our state. However, a framework is suggested below as a starting point for conversation.

First, the academies for overage/disruptive students would be full-time, regular schools, accepting students at the beginning of the year and enrolling them for the entirety of the year. This is directly in contrast to the current system of alternative schools described above.

The student population could be determined in many ways, but it is suggested that any student should be eligible who will be at least two years older than is appropriate for the grade s/he will be entering. In addition, students who have been suspended a certain number of times or expelled in the previous year could also be admitted. The academies should be grades 6-12 to minimize transitions within the academy environment.

Instead of the traditional grade structure, these academies might want to experiment with a “rolling” system of acceleration, in which student progress is measured by achievement, not time elapsed. This would mean that when a student reaches proficiency for a grade level, s/he immediately moves up to the next grade, thus allowing students who are very behind to catch up quickly as long as they are willing to work hard. When students know that the only thing keeping them from advancing is how hard they are willing to work, and that they will not have to wait years to reach their appropriate grade, they are more likely to be motivated and less likely to give up and drop out.

At the end of each school year, students should be given the opportunity to return to their traditional school. Pending evaluation by faculty at the academy and at the traditional school to determine whether or not the student is prepared for re-entry, the student should be allowed to re-enroll at the traditional school and should be monitored for a set period to ensure that the transition occurs smoothly.

Each academy should serve a specific traditional school or several of these schools. This is for two reasons. First, faculty at the academy can develop relationships with teachers at the traditional school to facilitate communication about each student. This is important not only to smooth the transition when students enter the academy but also when and if they return to their traditional schools. Second, the impact of these schools will be measured not only by the retention and graduation rates and their students’ achievement data, but also by the achievement of students at the traditional schools they left behind. If these traditional schools make no substantive changes

in their practices, a controlled study could evaluate how removing overage and disruptive students affects student achievement. On the other hand, if achievement remains stagnant even after these students have been removed, principals and teachers will know that they can no longer blame this population and must find the real factor affecting achievement.

Details of the academies' curriculum and structure should be based on the best practices used in similar models elsewhere, the advice of education professionals, and the vision of the exemplary principal hired at each academy. However, the structure may need to be vastly different from that at a traditional school – because it is precisely under this structure that these students did not succeed in the first place. Middle school students might spend half the day in traditional academics and half the day in hands-on, interactive activities intended to build social skills and interpersonal communication. Similarly, high school students might spend the afternoon in vocational-technical activities where they learn real-world skills that connect to their academic lessons in the morning. Students with serious emotional or behavioral issues might need daily time with a counselor or social worker. The school must be flexible enough to allow for all of this.

These schools may also be “community schools,” in which the school becomes a public space with amenities such as libraries, health care services, performance spaces, continuing education classes and day care centers.⁴⁵ Many teachers and principals noted that making schools community centers would increase parental involvement in the school, not only by attracting parents to the services but also by offering parent education classes at the school to help parents help their children. By allowing the general public access to the school, this strategy might encourage community members to become more involved in and aware of their public schools, which might in turn help improve the image of public schools.

Finally, it can not be stressed enough that these academies must be of the *highest quality*. Unlike the current system of alternative schools, these will not be mere holding pens for students until the end of their suspension period or the school year. They must provide a quality education that meets these students' needs.

To do so, these academies must be fully staffed with the best instructors, administrators, social workers and guidance counselors available. In addition, to facilitate the best relationships between faculty and students—which is essential to prevent discipline problems and earn trust—the academies must be no larger than 100 students and enough quality teachers should be recruited to keep class sizes small as well. This may require the school to pay higher salaries and/or recruit out of state, but this attention to quality is critical if the schools are to succeed, and as we have seen, their success is critical if the rest of the system is to improve.

The Implementation

Like all new ideas, this one should only be implemented after the details are thoroughly worked out with all community partners and education experts. However, the process should proceed efficiently because Louisiana students simply do not have time to wait.

It is recommended that the academies begin with a pilot school to open in fall 2009. Because the idea is relatively new, and because it will take time to convince a school board of its validity before

⁴⁵ There are many exciting examples of these schools across the country. Several take advantage of their proximity to public institutions to allow students to learn in a real-world classroom. For example, the new Henry Ford Academy schools are “located in prominent public spaces, such as cultural institutions, community organizations, or universities, providing students with a content-rich and visible learning experience often lacking in traditional school models” (news release, Henry Ford Learning Institute).

it has been tried out (and even then), this school may need to be a privately-funded charter school. This will allow the principal the flexibility to change the curriculum as necessary to accommodate the different student population, and to hire the highest quality teachers at the most competitive salaries.

Creating the pilot school as a charter would have an additional benefit. There is well-documented opposition to charter schools from the traditional public school movement. Often this is because charters are seen as “creaming” the best students from the public schools and leaving them with less money and harder students to teach. Even charter schools that do not explicitly attract the best students still require parents to *choose* to enroll their children there – an automatic process of self-selection that guarantees at least a minimal level of parental involvement, which our surveys have shown is sorely lacking at many traditional public schools.

But the proposed academies would serve the explicit purpose of attracting the students who are typically the most disruptive and the hardest to teach. These are the students whom principals and teachers at our round-tables wished would magically disappear. If a charter school presented itself as a help to public schools, rather than as a talent-and-funding drain, the relationship between charters and traditional schools—and school boards and teachers unions—might be greatly improved. This in turn would make it easier to create future charter schools of all kinds.

Of course, a key component in implementation will be to determine an effective method of evaluation. This method should include the achievement of both the overage/disruptive students and their peers at the traditional public schools they have left behind. If the pilot model is judged to be successful, more academies should be formed. School boards may choose to partially fund these new academies, adopting the “autonomous school” hybrid model, or these could continue as charter schools. Ideally, these schools would eventually be recognized as a critical component of any system’s student achievement, and would be adopted into the system as full, publicly funded schools.

It may also eventually be necessary to require overage and disruptive students to attend these academies by law. Primarily this is because research indicates that school choice does not always work. A Public Affairs Research Council (PAR) study observed, “Of the approximately 40,485 students eligible for school choice statewide, only 1% of students actually transferred to another school.” This is partly due to a lack of alternatives – other schools in a parish may not be significantly better than the school offering choice. PAR continued, “Roughly half of all ‘receiving’ schools throughout the state are in the first level of school improvement.” But it may also be a lack of initiative or genuine reluctance on the part of parents to enroll their students in a new school. These schools will only be effective if they can actually enroll the students they seek to serve.

Conclusion

The word “public” has fallen into disrepair lately. Participation in the “public sphere” was once considered to be the highest virtue, and “public” facilities the best around. But today, public phones, public restrooms and public schools have taken on a different image.

In Louisiana, the assumption seems to be that public education is for all those who can not afford to go to a better school. As a result, students from wealthy families attend one set of schools, while children from poor families attend school with children who do not want to learn, children who are years too old for their grade, children who are disruptive or even violent. These students are the vast minority, but they are capable of determining the quality of education received by all.

A paradigm shift in mentality is needed. Instead of wealthy children and all the rest, the division should be between students who are well-behaved and can learn in a traditional classroom setting

and those who may need special attention and different educational options. Wealthy children and poor children should learn together in the same schools, while those who are disruptive or academically behind receive special attention in quality schools designed to meet their needs.

This shift in mentality may not happen with the first of these schools or the first hundred. Creating a system of overage academies may not cause wealthy parents to start running back toward the public schools, or the news media to take a different approach in their coverage. But these effects would be incidental to the point. By setting standards of behavior for the public schools and removing students who need special attention, Louisiana would be making a strong statement about the nature of public education – that it is not a holding area for those who can not afford better but a place where students will be held to academic and behavioral standards and taught in an environment where they are truly free to learn.

II. Feedback Circles

The system of academies for overage and disruptive students described above will go a long way toward addressing the top issues identified by principals and teachers, such as teacher quality, parent involvement and student motivation.

The second idea is intended to address the lack of two-way communication between those who make decisions and those who implement them. We suggest creating a system of “feedback circles” that would allow local school board members, BESE officials, principals, teachers and possibly parents and students to discuss the problems facing their schools and to weigh in on prospective policy changes.

The following sections will elaborate on the reasons for feedback circles and explain the idea in further detail.

Communication Breakdown

Throughout the conversations, there was an overriding sense of frustration on the part of both principals and teachers. Both groups stressed that there is a serious disconnect between the people who make decisions and the people who will carry them out, and more important, the students who will be affected by them.

Principals and teachers observed that the higher-ups frequently make decisions that will affect them and their students without listening to their views. Perhaps the best indication of how deeply teachers and principals want to be heard was the incredible response to our round-table conversations. The conversations were publicized very informally and took place over a relatively short period. Yet not only did we have an overwhelming response - 110 participants in all - but many principals and teachers came from far-flung parishes like Lincoln and Calcasieu, some driving for five hours, just to participate. As one teacher said at the end of her session, “Thank you for calling us here. It’s just so rare that people want to listen to us.”

The result of this communication breakdown is a palpable distrust of “the system” among both principals and teachers. Principals wondered aloud whether the frequently changing policies they are asked to implement are based on actual research. Teachers worried that central office employees have not set foot in a classroom since they were students themselves and do not understand the challenges teachers face in today’s classrooms. With this level of distrust, district policies will be implemented reluctantly and inconsistently at best.

This lack of communication is perhaps most troubling because many of the problems discussed

in our conversations could be easily addressed by a school board or district office. Many are so specific and urgent that, if a school board member were aware of them, they would be addressed immediately. But there is no reliable system⁴⁶ in place to allow principals and teachers to communicate their needs to central office employees, and for the district to inform schools of their policies in advance and consider principal and teacher input.

A system in which the followers do not trust their leaders is dysfunctional at best and can not serve the students for whom it exists.

The Suggestion

Fortunately, the solution to this issue is fairly straightforward and there is already a network naturally positioned to implement it.

A system of “feedback circles,” in which school board members, BESE officials, teachers and principals meet to discuss concerns and possible policy changes could help ameliorate this pervasive sense of distrust. Local education funds (LEFs), if willing, are well positioned to organize and host these meetings.

The meetings would need to be scheduled at regular intervals, preferably monthly. Interested parties, including schools, would be asked to send at least one representative to these meetings. The specific structure and content of these meetings could be worked out by the LEF or other organizer, but they might choose to focus on a specific topic each time. The issues discussed in our conversations, such as teacher recruitment, administrative paperwork, discretionary spending, accountability, special education, fully-staffed schools, would make excellent topics. By only discussing one of these at a time, each subject could be treated in-depth.

Another positive result of the feedback circles could be an improved image of the public school system as it is portrayed in the media. The meetings should either be open to the public, or minutes should be sent to members of the press. That way, the general public will see principals, teachers, and school board members working together, instead of griping about each other.

In order for the feedback circles to improve the image of the schools, however, they must not devolve into regular venting sessions. To this end, the circles should be led by an experienced facilitator, and they should lead to action. Meetings should end with specific goals and should begin with reports on what has been accomplished since the last session. Any significant accomplishments should be made public and celebrated.

III. Conclusion

In this section, we have presented two specific ideas that, if implemented, will address the root issues that keep students from achieving. High-quality academies for overage and disruptive students will allow all students to learn better and will improve working conditions for teachers. A system of state-wide feedback circles will allow teachers and principals to bring their ideas directly to policymakers, and will let them weigh in on policies that will affect them. This will increase trust between those who make the decisions and those who implement them, and could help improve the image of the public school system.

⁴⁶ The reliability of the system is key. While East Baton Rouge principals acknowledged that there is a committee that meets periodically with the superintendent to make recommendations, and that it is sometimes effective, they did not seem to have faith that this system would reliably solicit and consider their input. The fact that this issue was brought up despite the existence of this system speaks volumes about its effectiveness in principals' eyes.

Conclusion

While the creation of this document is important as a record of the round-table discussions for community leaders, education policymakers, and the participants themselves, it was not the primary purpose of the conversations.

The purpose of this report is to help focus the efforts of civic leaders, education organizations, social reformers, and community foundations on two ambitious but achievable ideas – academies for overage/disruptive students and state-wide feedback circles. Its premise was that when these parties work together on a *few* root issues that matter to those with first-hand experience, public education can be improved.

Clearly, these suggestions are not exhaustive and they will not address every issue the education system faces. On the contrary, they represent a very targeted approach to issues that principals and teachers have identified as priorities. Hopefully, this will leave the door open for readers to seize on other issues presented here and implement their own solutions.

But these ideas target the most critical root issues, which means they have the potential to impact many other problems as well. If they can be effectively implemented, our education system will become more fully functional and effective for all students.

Appendix A: Round Table Survey

APPENDIX A: Round-Table Survey

School: _____

Grade level/Subject You Teach: _____

#of Years Teaching: _____

The Problems

Please rate the following factors according to how much they affect student achievement at your school. Please use the scale below. Feel free to use the additional space to comment on your choices. Then, please circle the top 2 problems at your school.

0 – not a problem at my school

1 – does not affect my students' achievement at all

2 – somewhat affects my students' achievement

3 – greatly affects my students' achievement

Teacher quality

- teachers do not have high expectations of students _____
- teachers are not well-trained in classroom management _____
- teachers do not cooperate with administration _____
- hard to recruit/retain teachers, etc. _____

Leadership

- principals are not given the autonomy to make important decisions for their schools _____
- principals do not have discretionary spending _____
- principals are poor managers and/or are unable to motivate the faculty and student body, etc. _____

Student motivation

- students are not interested in subject matter _____
- students do not see the value in school _____
- students are bored or asleep in class, etc. _____

Parent involvement

- parents are not informed or involved in their child's education _____
- parents are hard to contact _____
- parents do not respond to invitations to come to open houses or other school events, etc. _____

Overage population

- overage students interfere with the learning process of other students _____
- overage students are allowed to "slip through the cracks", etc. _____

Technology and supplies

- a lack of books, paper, writing materials, computers _____
- faculty does not know how to use technology, etc. _____

System problems

- school system is slow in responding to maintenance or technology requests _____
- school starts/ends too early _____
- schedules are not ready by the start of school _____
- books and other supplies are not available at the start of school, etc. _____

Other problems

The Solutions?

Please rate the following ideas based on how they would affect student achievement at your school. Feel free to use the additional space to comment on your choices. Then, please circle the 2 solutions you feel would make the greatest difference.

0 - would negatively impact my students' achievement

1 - would make very little difference in my students' achievement

2 - would moderately improve my students' achievement

3 - would greatly improve my students' achievement

Teacher Quality

- Increased teacher pay _____
- Teacher pay-for-performance _____
- Bonuses to teachers for working in tough, urban schools _____
- Bonuses for teachers teaching in hard-to-staff areas (math, science, special ed) _____
- Better/more professional development _____

Leadership

- A principal's leadership academy _____
- Expansion of “autonomous schools” – schools that are still under school board control but where principals have autonomy over hiring/firing, curriculum, spending, etc. _____
- Charter schools/more school choice _____
- Student Motivation _____
- Monetary awards for students who excel or show academic improvement _____
- Smaller schools _____
- More vo-tech options/community connections _____
- Parent Involvement _____
- Community schools – schools with day care centers, health centers, libraries and performing arts spaces that are open to the public _____

Overage Population

- Overage academies/vo-tech schools _____
- CKAP program (program that helps overage students advance quickly, usually housed within a school) _____
- Technology and supplies
- A laptop for every student _____
- Better classroom technology _____
- System Problems
- Extended day/year programs _____
- School board/central office trainings (to improve efficiency, communication, etc) _____

Other Ideas

Appendix B:

Principal results charts

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPALS' RESULTS

Results - All Principals

Red = elementary, blue = middle, black= high school

Problems

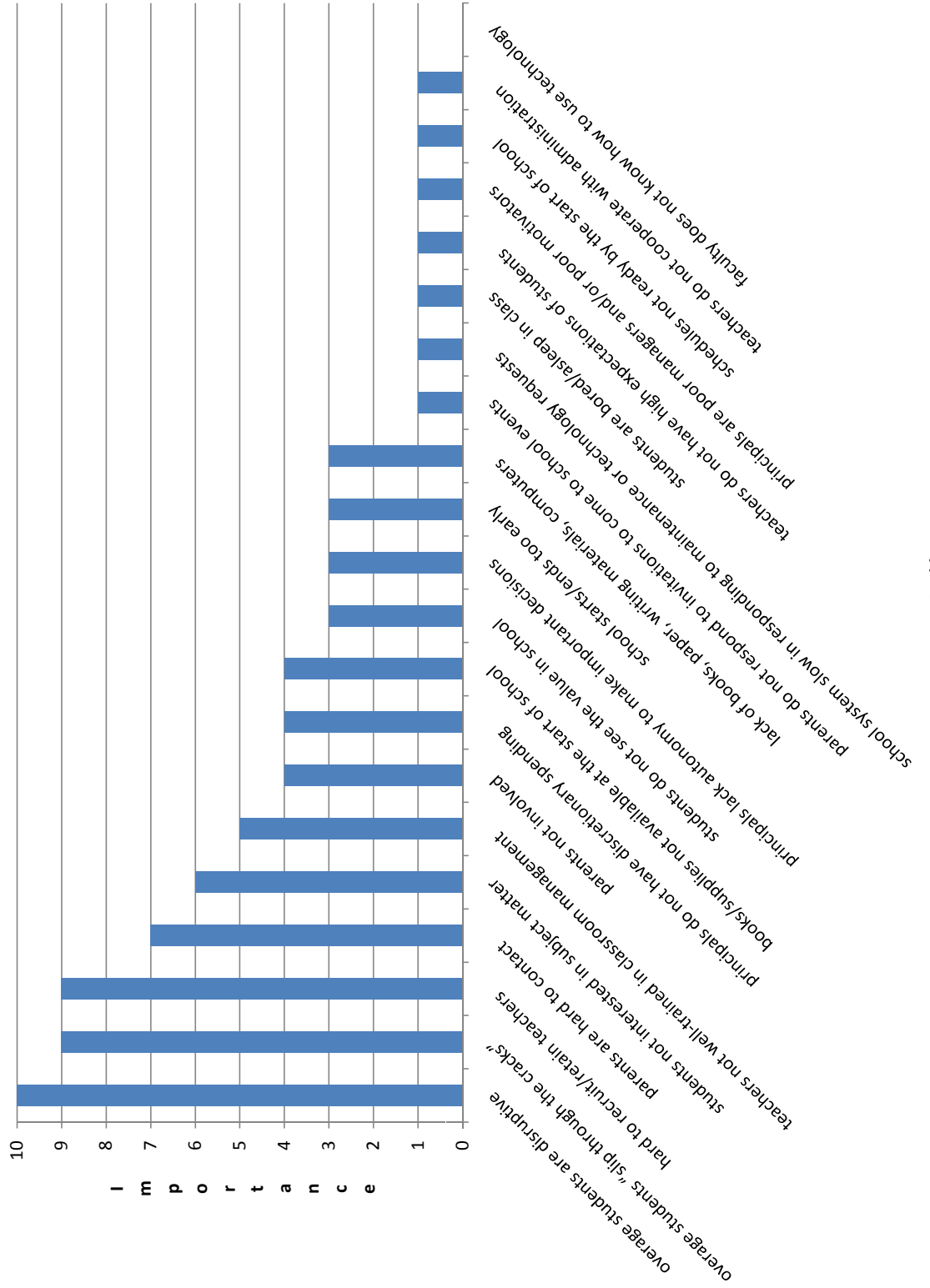
overage students are disruptive	3 3 2 # # 2 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 0 0 2 0 0 1 0 3 0 0 3 2 3	10
overage students "slip through the cracks"	2 3 1 # # 2 3 3 2 2 2 2 3 0 2 0 0 0 0 3 0 0 3 2 3 3	9
hard to recruit/retain teachers	3 1 1 # # 2 0 3 2 3 3 3 3 0 0 0 3 2 0 2 3 0 0 3 0	9
parents are hard to contact	1 0 # # 3 2 2 2 2 3 2 3 3 0 2 1 2 1 0 2 0 1 3 3 2 2	7
students not interested in subject matter	3 1 1 # # 2 2 3 2 2 3 3 2 3 0 2 0 0 1 2 3 0 0 2 2 2	6
teachers not well-trained in classroom management	2 2 0 # # 2 0 3 2 2 2 3 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 3 0 2 0 3 2 3	5
parents not involved	1 2 # # 2 0 2 2 2 2 3 3 0 0 2 0 2 1 2 1 0 0 2 3 2 3	4
principals do not have discretionary spending	1 1 # # 1 0 2 3 3 2 1 1 2 0 2 2 0 0 0 2 2 0 0 0 2 3	4
books/supplies not available at the start of school	1 0 # # 2 3 3 3 0 2 0 2 3 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 2	4
students do not see the value in school	2 1 2 # # 2 2 3 2 2 3 3 2 2 0 2 0 0 1 0 2 2 0 2 2 2	3
principals lack autonomy to make important decisions	0 0 # # 0 0 2 3 2 1 2 1 0 2 2 0 2 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 3	3
school starts/ends too early	1 0 # # 2 0 2 0 0 3 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 2 2 0 3 0 0 1 1 3	3
lack of books, paper, writing materials, computers	0 1 0 # # 0 2 3 2 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 2 0 0 0 0	3
parents do not respond to invitations to come to school events	1 1 # # 2 2 2 0 2 2 2 3 0 0 2 0 2 1 0 0 2 0 2 2 2 2	1
school system slow in responding to maintenance or technology requests	1 0 # # 0 0 2 2 1 3 1 2 2 0 2 2 0 1 1 1 0 1 2 2 1	1
students are bored/asleep in class	1 1 0 # # 0 2 3 2 0 0 0 2 2 0 2 0 0 2 0 0 2 0 2 0 1	1
teachers do not have high expectations of students	0 0 # # 1 0 3 2 2 2 0 2 2 0 2 0 0 2 0 1 0 0 2 0 0	1
principals are poor managers and/or poor motivators	1 0 # # 1 0 3 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 1	1
schedules not ready by the start of school	0 0 # # 2 0 3 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 2 0	1
teachers do not cooperate with administration	1 0 # # 0 0 3 2 0 0 0 2 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0	1
faculty does not know how to use technology	0 2 1 # # 0 2 2 2 2 2 1 2 0 0 1 1 0 0 0 0 0 2 2 0 0 2	0

Solutions

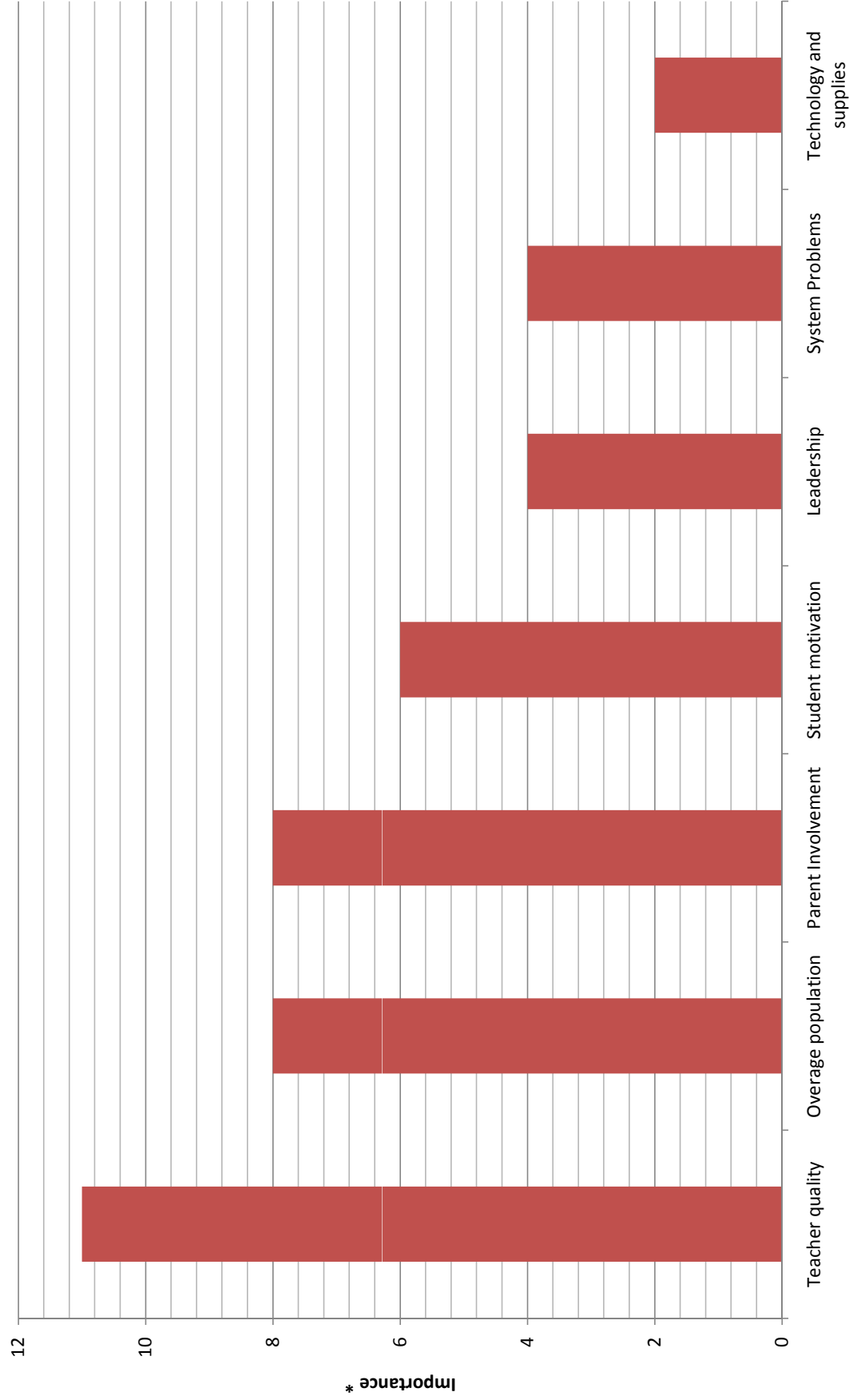
overage academies/votech schools	3 3 # 3 3 3 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 1 1 3 2 2 3 3 3	18
CKAP (core knowledge acceleration program)	3 3 # 3 3 3 3 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 1 2 3 3 1 3 3	17
bonuses to teachers working in tough, urban schools	1 3 # 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 1 3 3 3 1 3 2 1 2 1 2 3	16
smaller schools	1 3 # 3 3 3 3 2 3 3 2 3 3 2 1 1 1 3 2 1 3 1 3	15
extended day/year programs	1 2 # 3 3 1 1 1 1 3 3 3 3 1 2 3 3 3 3 1 1 3	14
community schools	3 2 # 3 3 3 3 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 2 1 3 2 3 3 1 1 2 3	10
better/more prof. dev	2 3 # 3 2 3 3 3 2 2 3 2 2 2 2 1 1 2 2 3 2 1 2 0 3	9
Increased teacher pay	3 2 # 3 3 2 1 2 2 3 3 1 1 2 0 1 1 2 3 2 2 3 2 1	8
more vo-tech options/community connections	3 2 # 0 2 3 2 2 3 3 3 3 2 1 2 3 2 2 3 2 3	8
better classroom technology	2 3 # 1 2 1 1 0 1 2 2 1 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 3 3 1	7
bonuses for teachers in hard-to-staff areas	1 3 # 2 3 3 2 2 0 2 1 3 3 3 1 3 3 2 2 1 2 1	7
teacher pay-for-performance	1 2 # 2 3 3 3 1 3 1 3 2 2 1 3 1 2 2 2 2 2	7
more autonomous schools	2 # 3 2 3 2 2 3 1 2 1 3 3 1 2 2 0 2 2 2 3 3	6
monetary awards for students	1 2 # 3 1 1 3 1 3 1 2 3 1 0 1 3 1 2 2 3 1 2	6
laptops for every student	2 1 # 1 2 1 1 0 1 2 1 1 3 2 3 1 3 2 3 3 2 1 1	5
principals' leadership academy	0 2 # 0 3 3 2 2 3 1 1 3 3 1 1 1 2 3 2 2 2 1	5
school board/central office trainings	1 2 # 3 1 3 1 1 1 3 1 3 2 1 1 2 3 2 2 1 1	5
more charter schools/school choice	1 1 # 0 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 2 2 1 1 1 0 0 2 0 3 3 3	0

*this was subn *this w *preK-12 school

All Principals - Problems



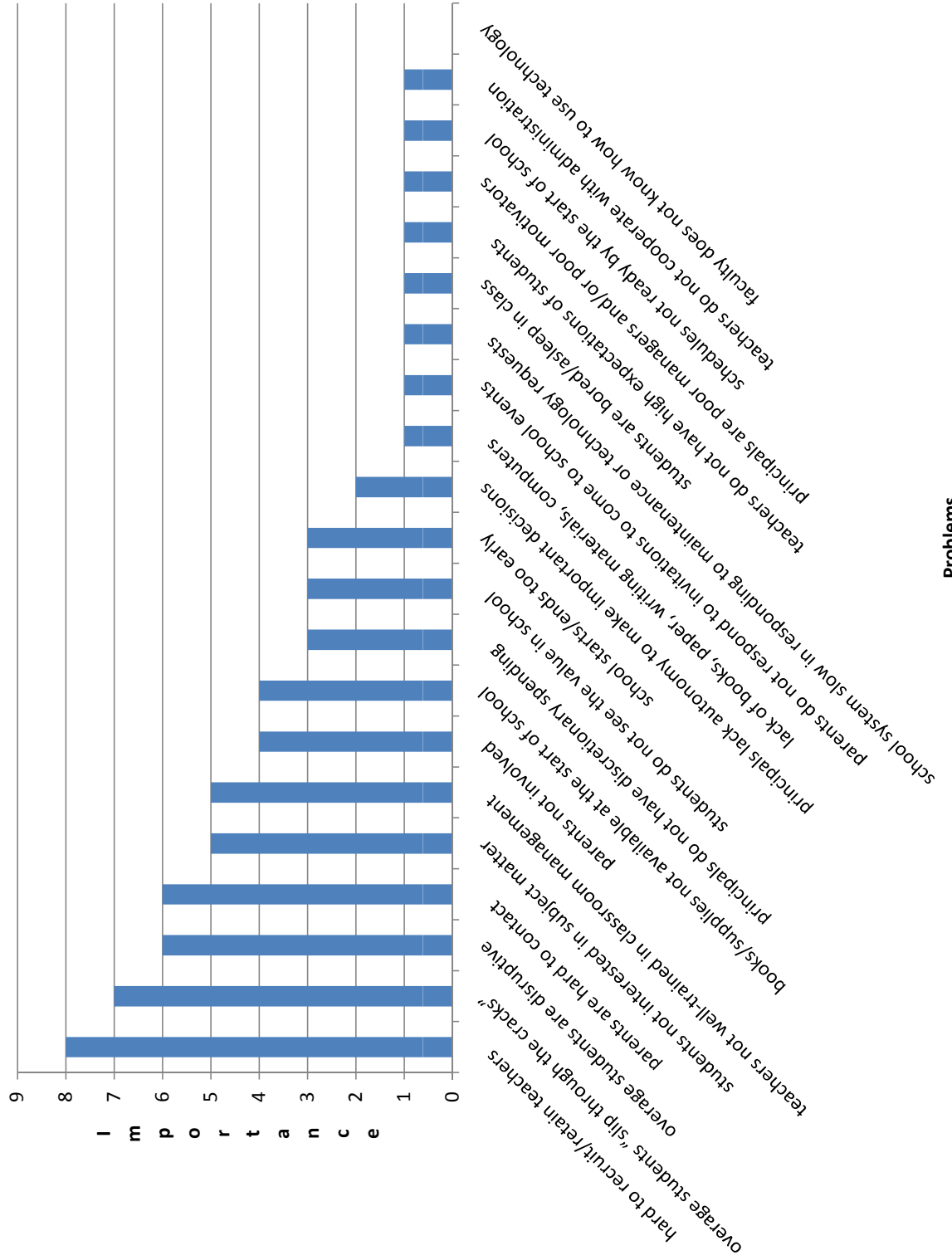
All Principals - "Most Important Problem"



Factors Affecting Student Achievement

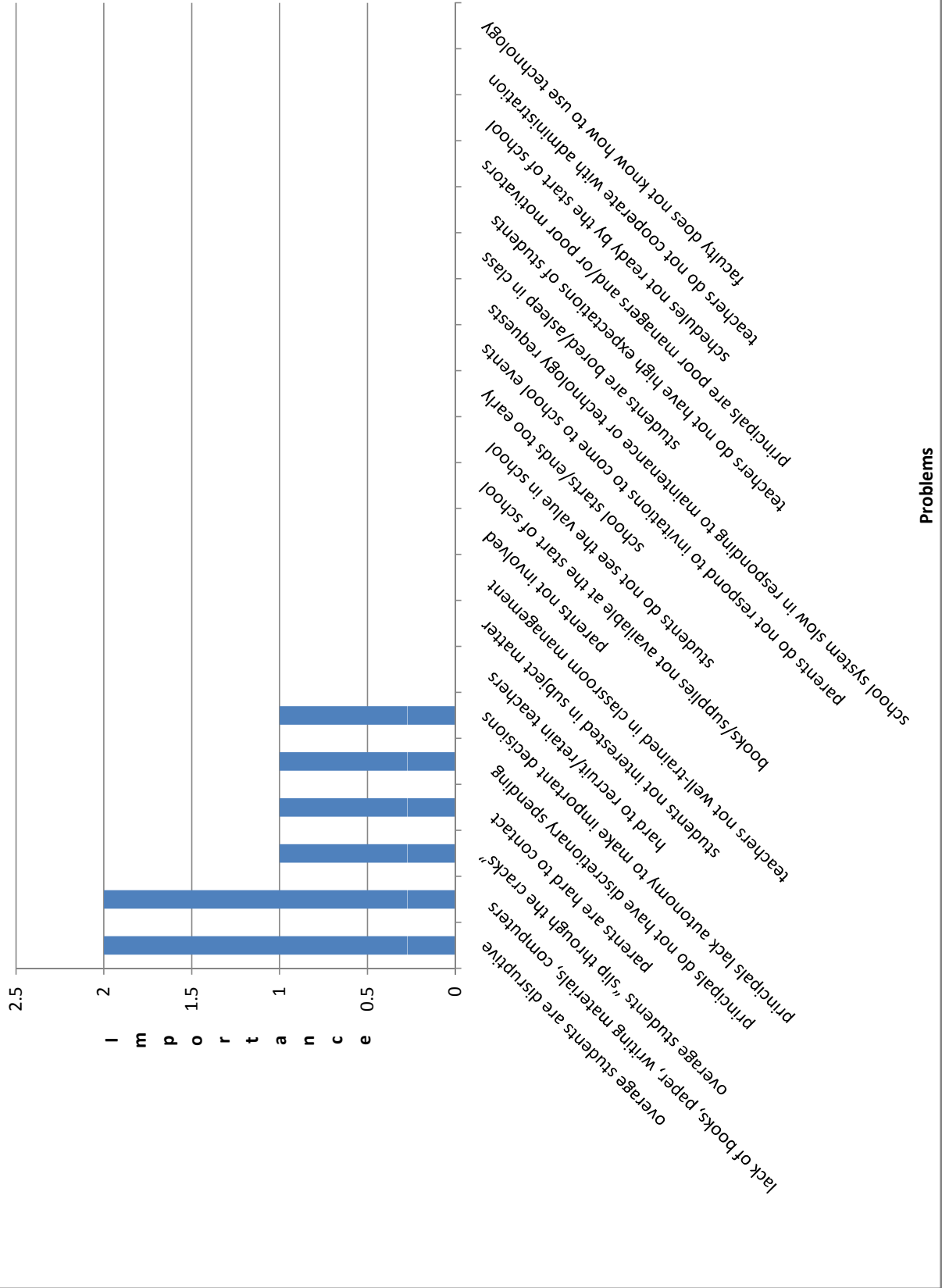
*Importance was measured by how many times each factor was rated as one of the most important factors by principals.

Elementary Principals - Problems

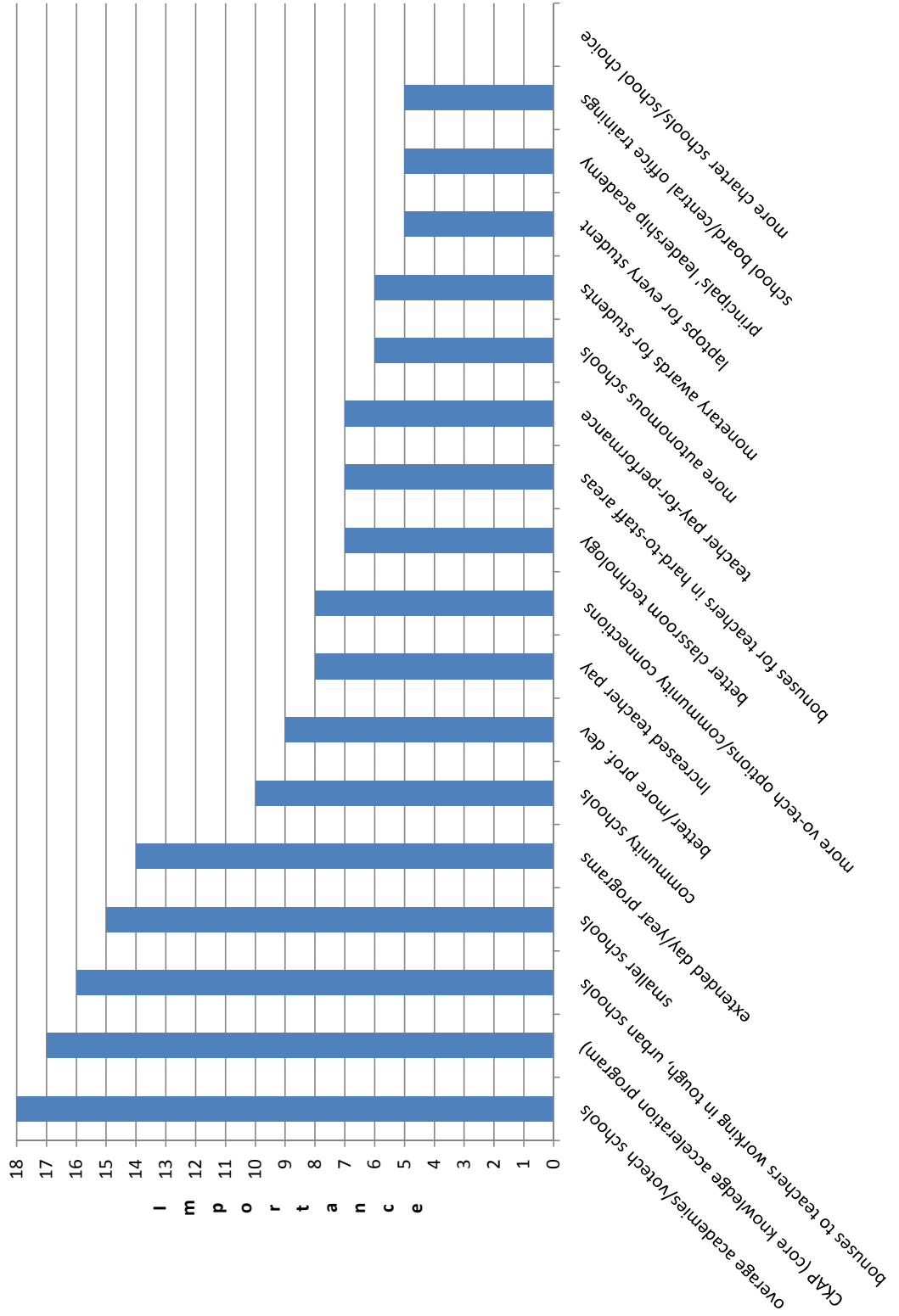


Problems

Middle School Principals - Problems

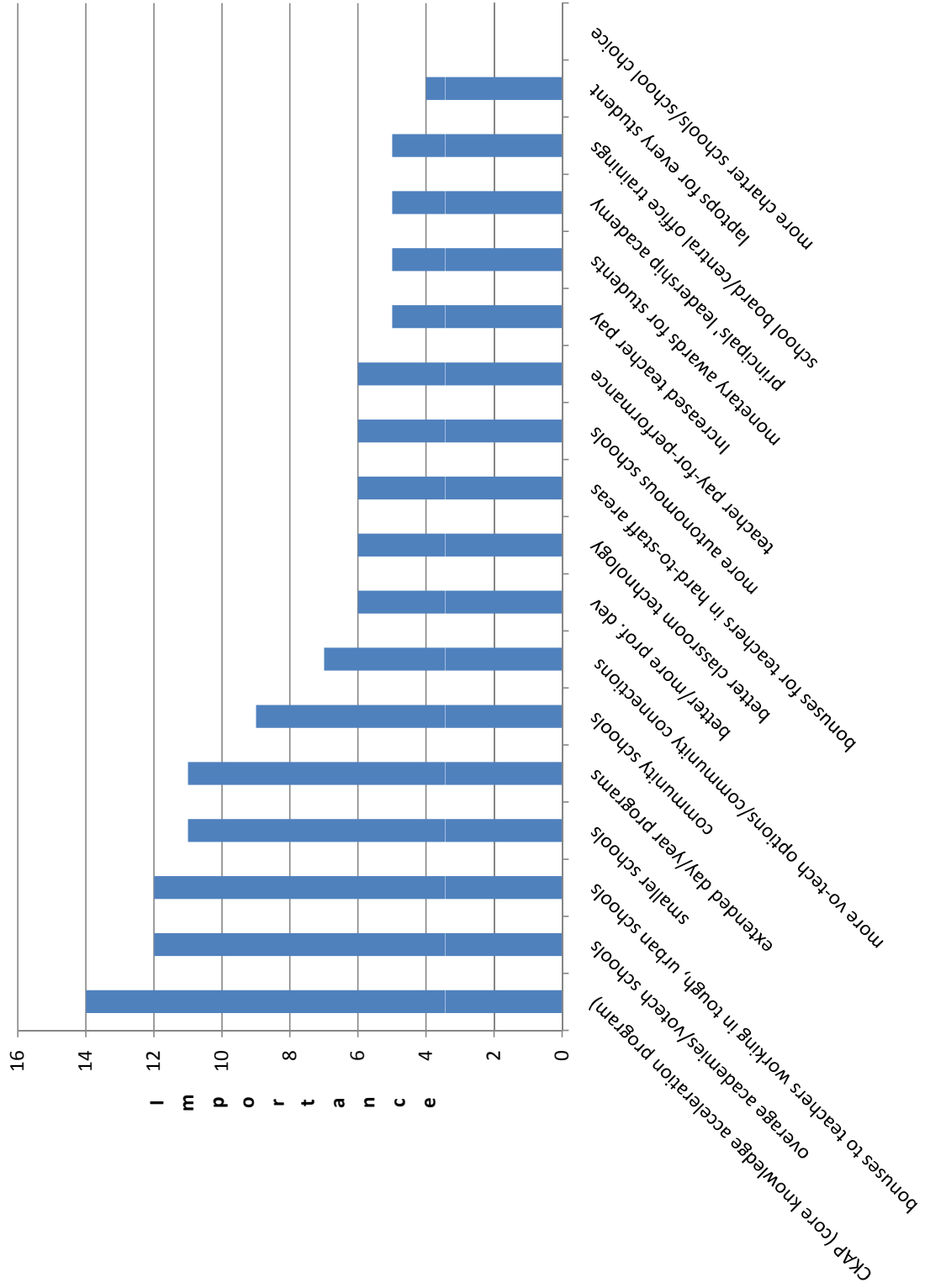


All Principals - Solutions



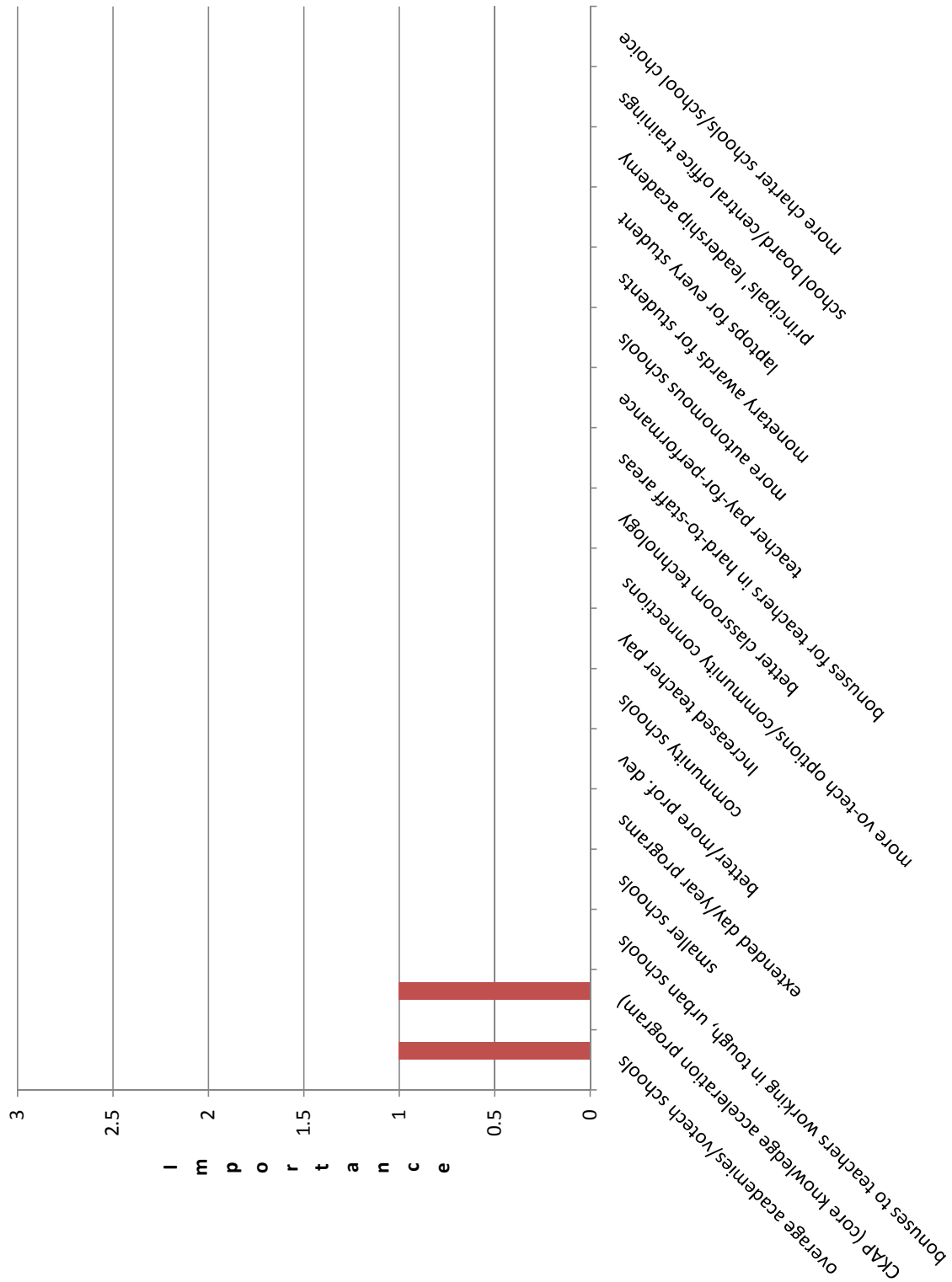
Solutions

Elementary Principals - Solutions



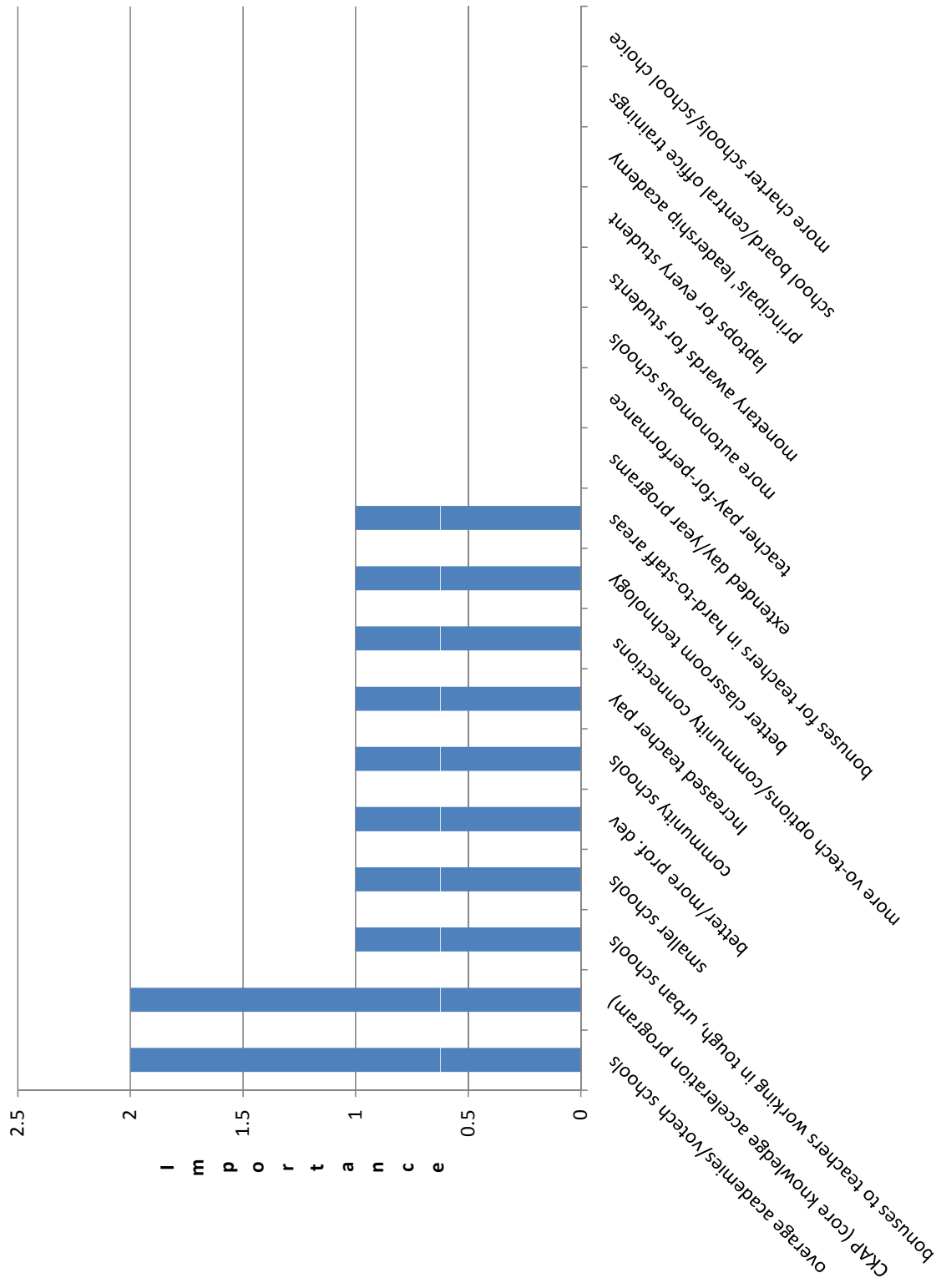
Solutions

Middle School Principals - Solutions



Solutions

High School Principals - Solutions



Solutions

Appendix C:

Teacher results charts

APPENDIX C: TEACHERS AT THE TABLE RESULTS

Results - All Teachers

Red - elementary, blue - middle, black = high

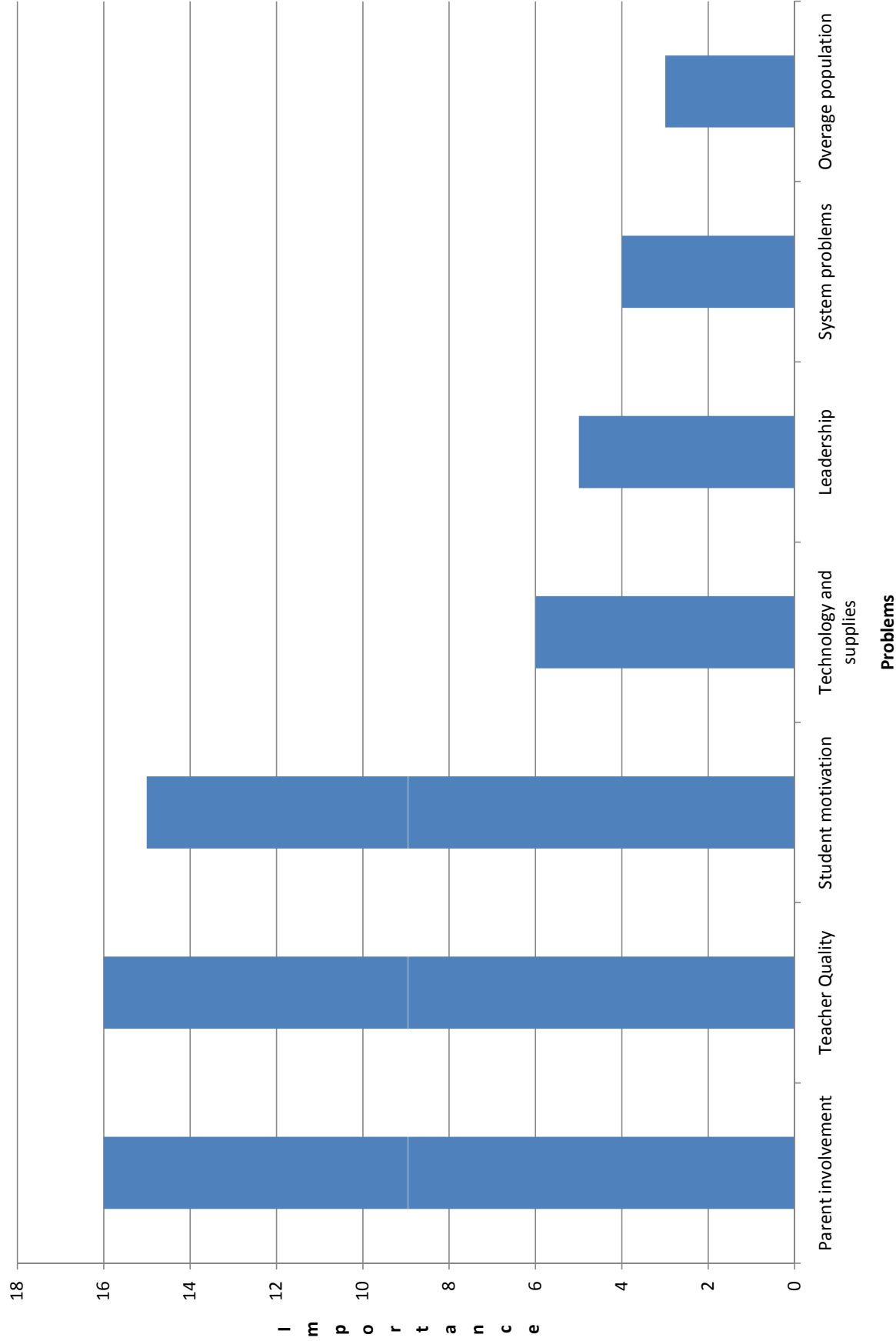
Problems

students do not see the value in school	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	1			
parents do not respond to invitations to come to school even	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1			
parents not involved	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	0	2	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0			
parents are hard to contact	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	3	2	2	2	1		
overage students are disruptive	3	3	2	2	3	3	0	3	1	3	3	2	1	2	3	2	3	1	1	3	2	3	0	3	1	1	3	2	3	0	3
overage students "slip through the cracks"	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	1	1	3	3	3	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	2	3	1	1	2	0	3	0	3	0	3
students not interested in subject matter	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	1	3	2	3	3	1	2	2	3	3	1	2	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	
students are bored/asleep in class	2	3	2	2	3	3	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	1	0	2	3	1	1	3	3	2	0	2	0	2	0	2
school system slow in responding to maintenance or technology	0	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	0	0	1	2	0	2	3	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
hard to recruit/retain teachers	3	0	0	1	1	3	3	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	1	2	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	
principals lack autonomy to make important decisions	2	0	1	1	3	1	1	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
school starts/ends too early	0	0	0	0	1	3	3	1	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
teachers do not have high expectations of students	0	1	0	0	3	3	1	0	2	0	0	2	3	0	0	3	1	2	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
teachers not well-trained in classroom management	0	3	0	2	2	3	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	3	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
books/supplies not available at the start of school	3	0	0	3	2	3	1	1	1	2	3	1	0	3	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	
principals do not have discretionary spending	3	0	2	1	3	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	0	2	1	2	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
lack of books, paper, writing materials, computers	0	3	2	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	2	3	0	2	2	1	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
schedules not ready by the start of school	3	0	0	3	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	
principals are poor managers and/or poor motivators	0	0	1	1	3	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
teachers do not cooperate with administration	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	3	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1		
faculty does not know how to use technology	0	1	2	1	2	2	2	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	2	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Solutions

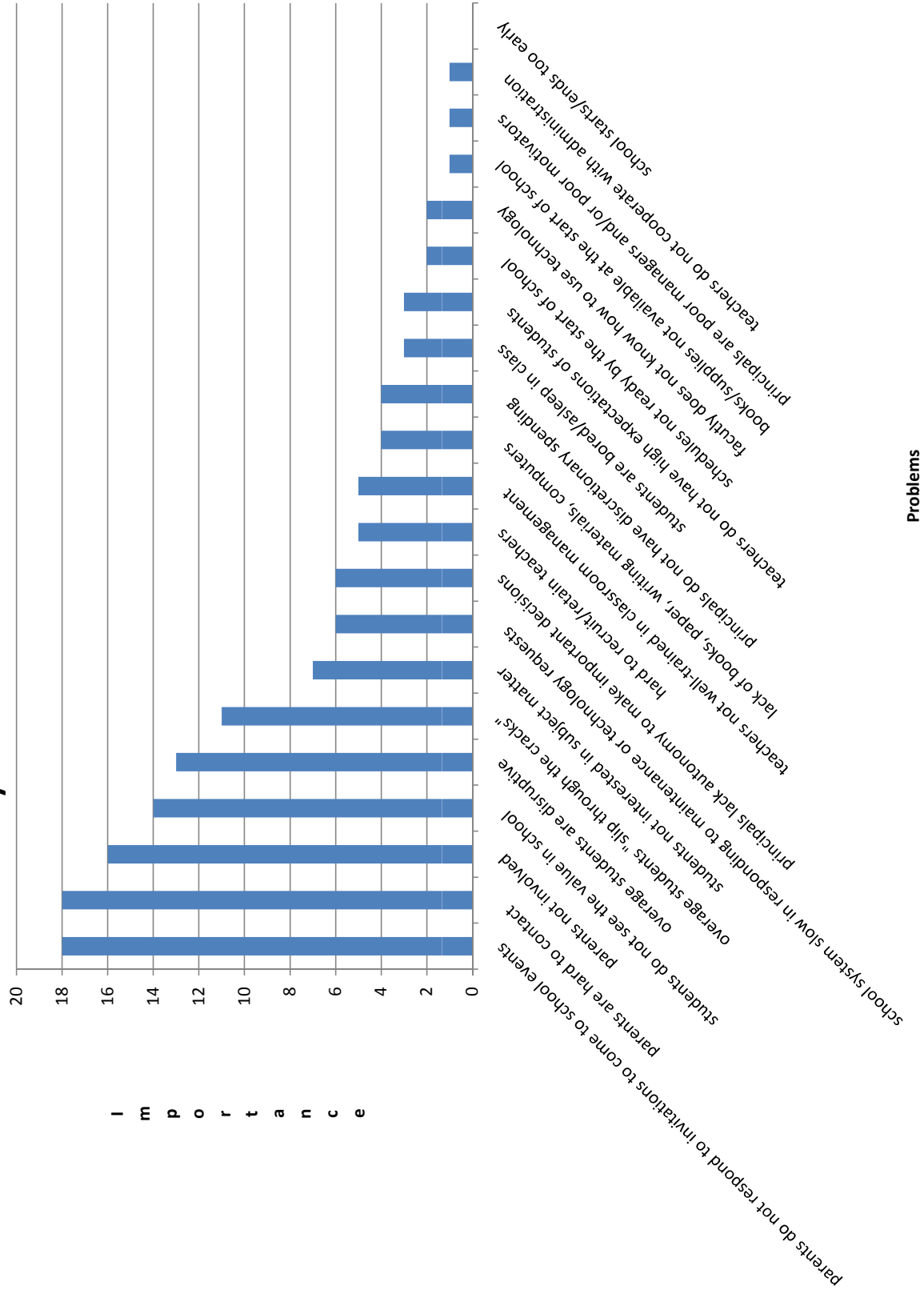
smaller schools	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	1	2	3	2	1	3	0	2	2	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	2	2	3	
more vo-tech options/community connections	3	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	2	3	
better/more prof. dev	3	3	3	1	3	3	1	2	3	3	2	1	3	1	3	1	3	2	2	3	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	2
community schools	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
overage academies/votech schools	3	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3

Teachers - Most Important Problem



* Importance was measured by how many times each factor was rated as one of the most important factors by teachers.

Elementary School Teachers - Problems

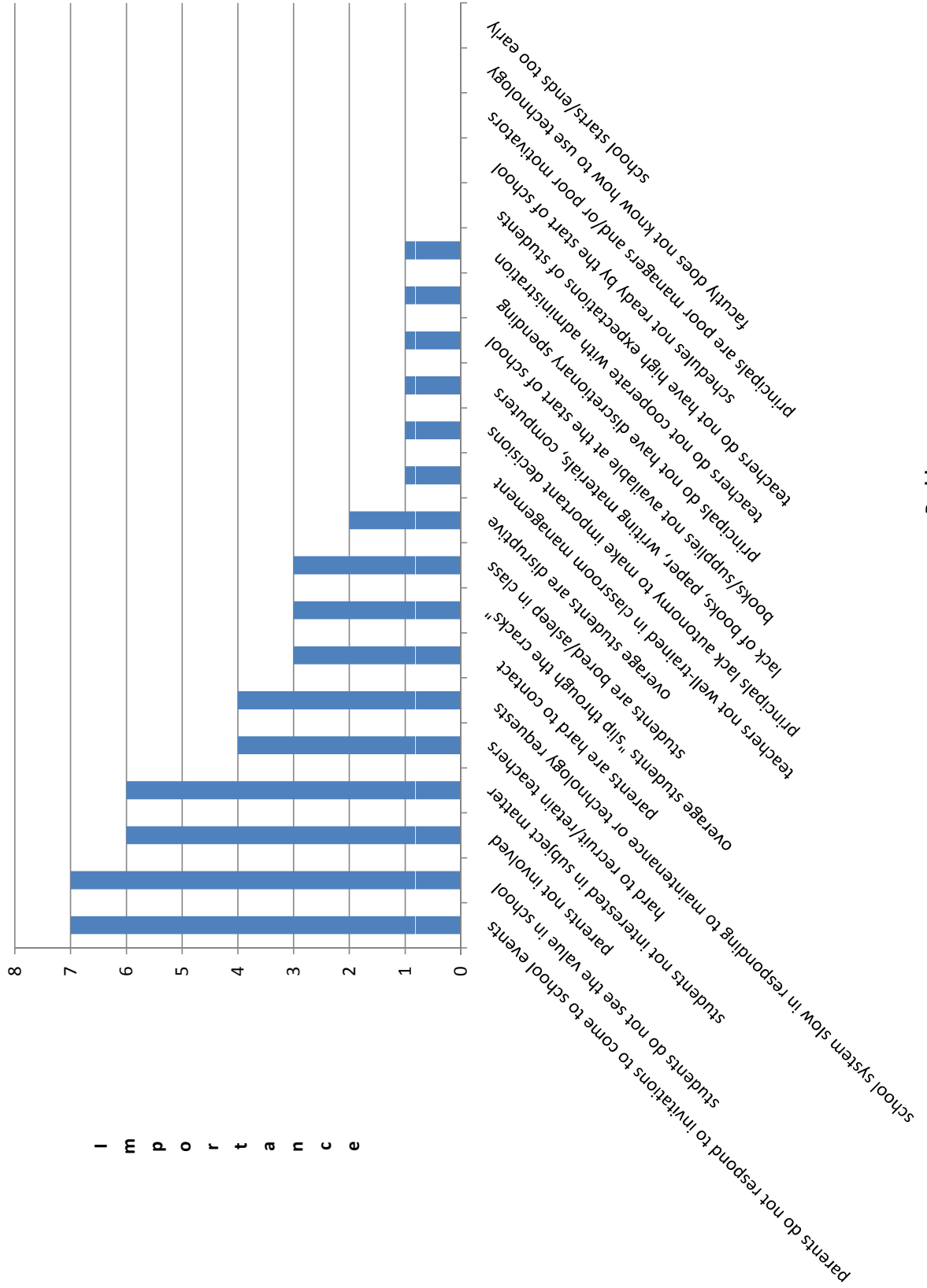


Middle School Teachers - Problems

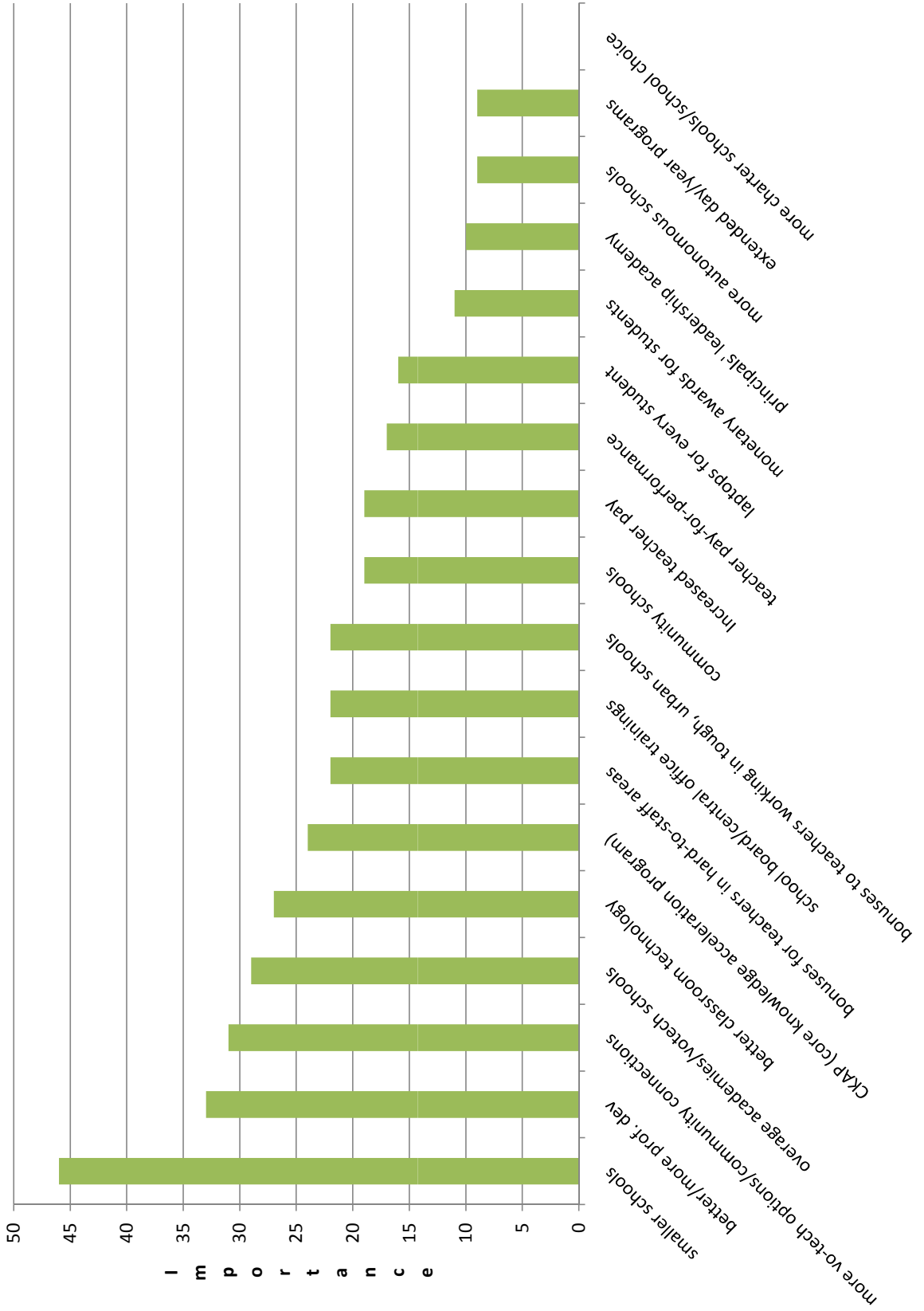


Problems

High School Teachers - Problems

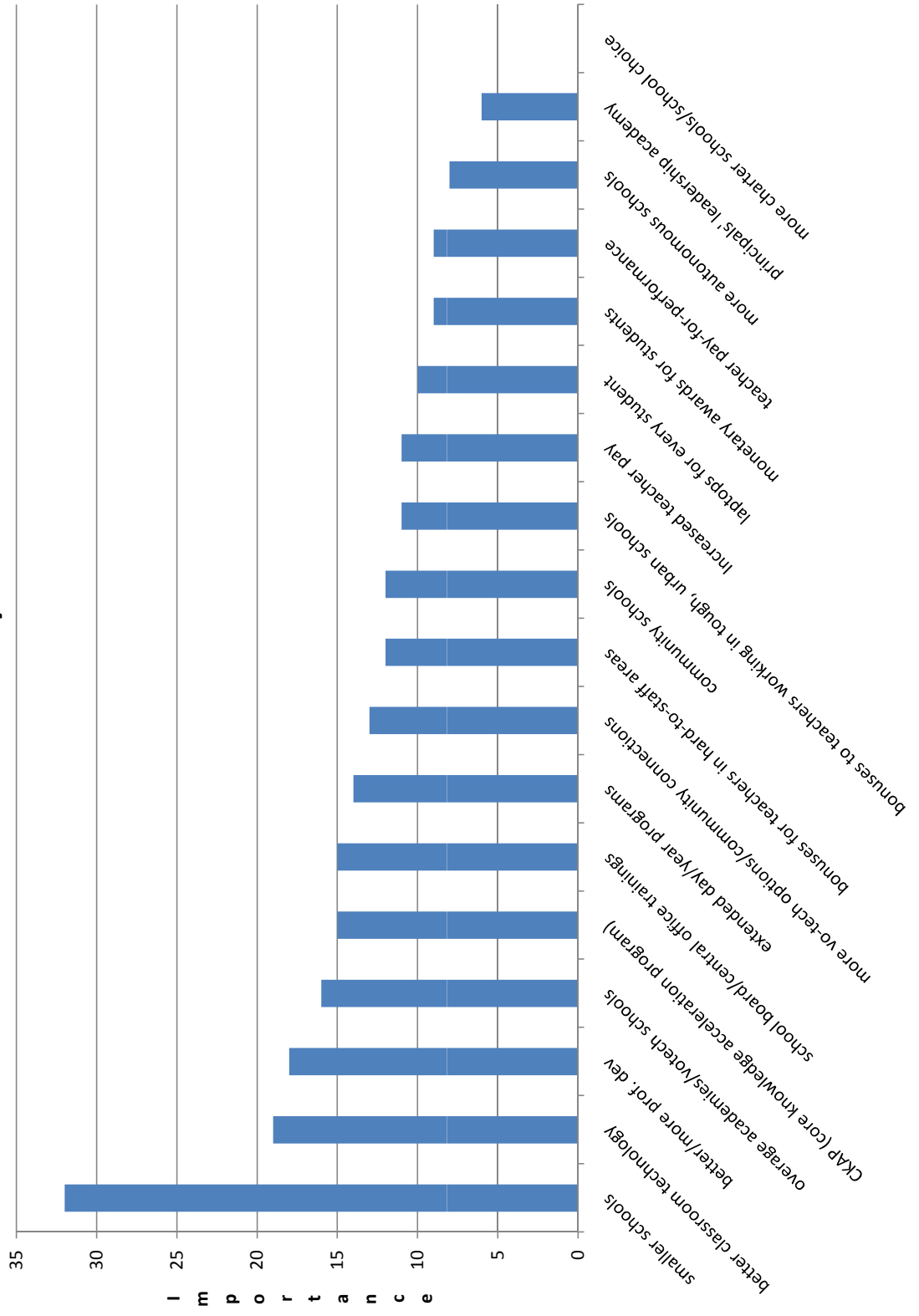


All Teachers - Solutions



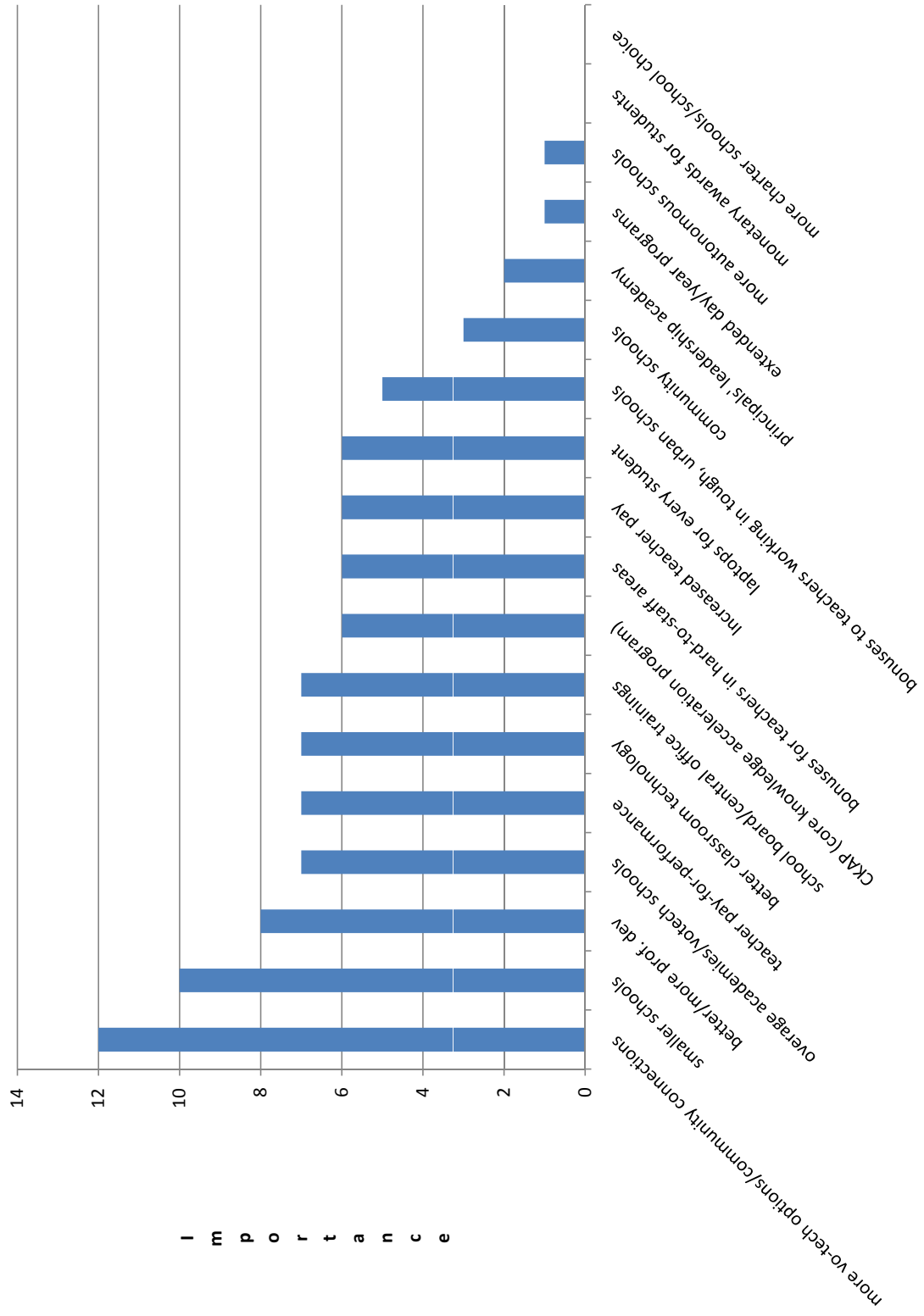
Solutions

Elementary School Teachers - Solutions



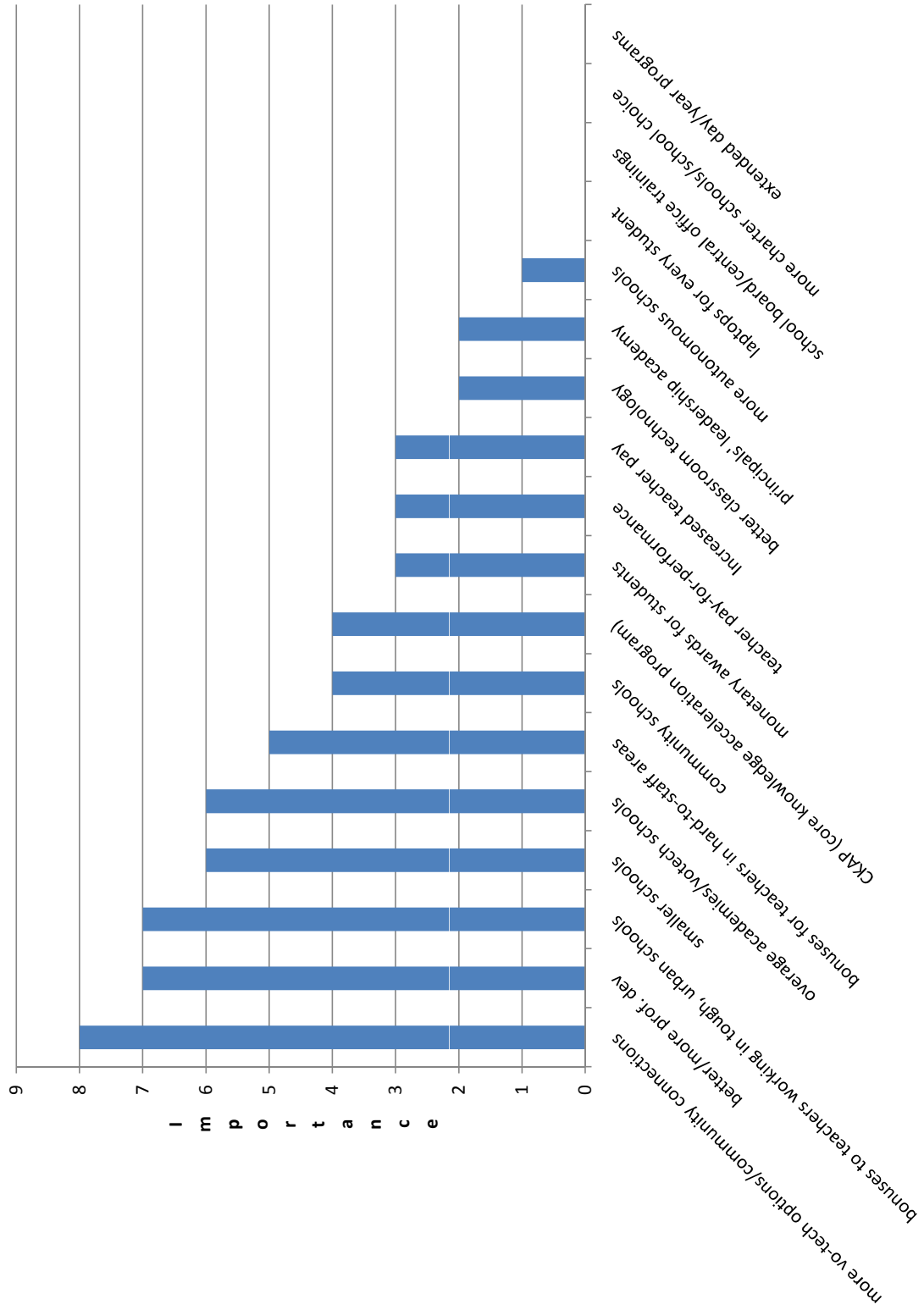
Solutions

Middle School Teachers - Solutions



Solutions

High School Teachers - Solutions



Solutions

Appendix D:

Overage population data

APPENDIX D: OVERAGE DATA

Total population: 52,502

2052 overage by 2 years or more

4% overage by 2 years or more

7497 overage by 1 year or more

14% overage by 1 year or more

High School:

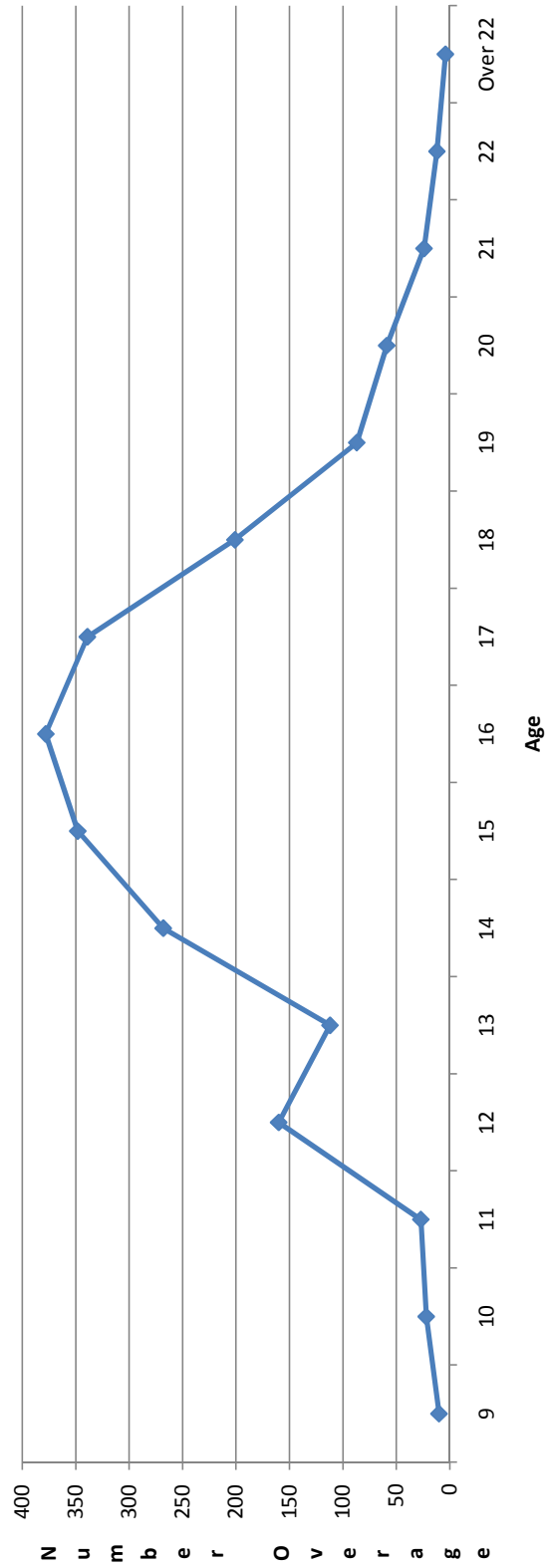
2296 (16%) one year or more, 660 (5%) 2 years or more

Middle school:

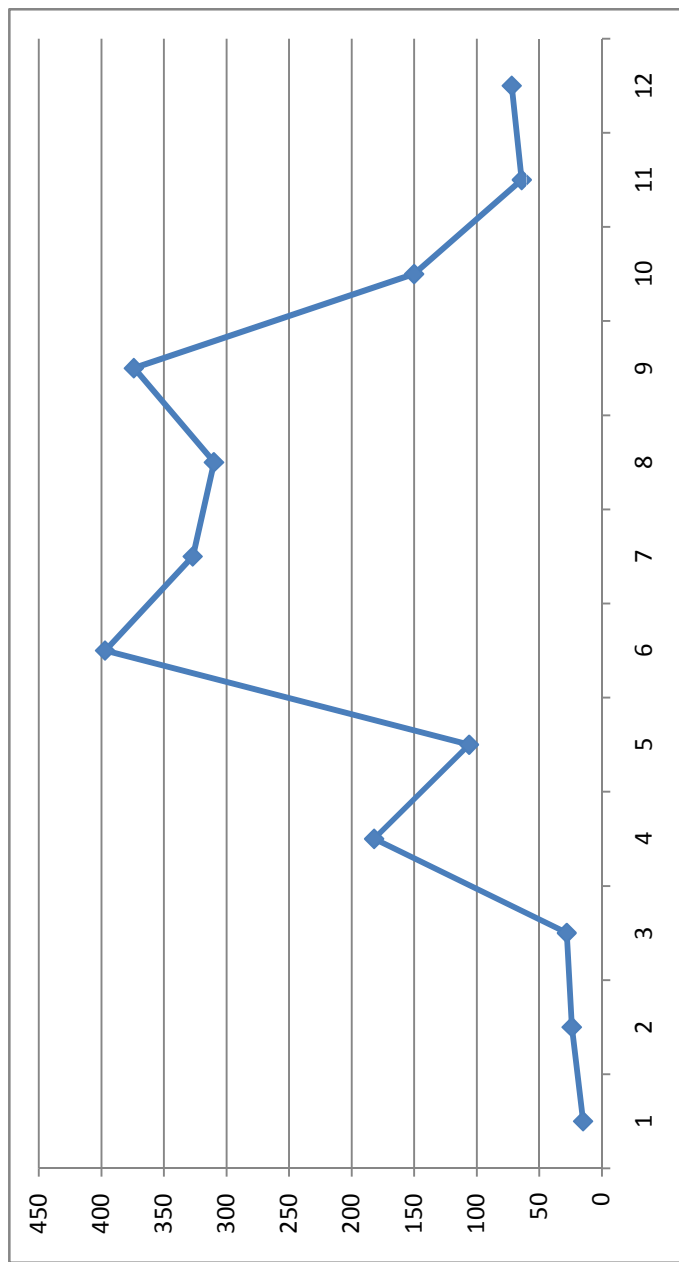
2959 (23%) one year or more; 1034 (8%) 2 years or more

Age	# of Overage Students
9	10
10	22
11	27
12	160
13	112
14	268
15	348
16	378
17	339
18	201
19	87
20	59
21	24
22	12
Over 22	4

Overage Students - By Age



Grade	# of overage students
1	15
2	24
3	28
4	182
5	106
6	397
7	327
8	310
9	374
10	150
11	64
12	72



Appendix E: Alternative schools data

APPENDIX E: ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS DATA

Alternative Education Survey Results

Florida Parishes Juvenile Detention Center (Tangipahoa)

Current enrollment 68 (but usually 80-95)
Total capacity 103
Population served incarcerated students
Can students return to original schools? yes
Length of stay 1-2 weeks
Percentage to college?
Percentage to employment?
Percentage of highly qualified teachers 100%
Average class size 10 to 15 students
Vo-tech? one career ed class
of guidance counselors 3

Livingston Parish Alternative Program (Livingston)

Current enrollment 32
Total capacity 70
Population served students recommended for expulsion
Can students return to original schools? yes
Length of stay 45-50 days
Percentage to college?
Percentage to employment?
Percentage of highly qualified teachers 80%
Average class size 8
Vo-tech? no
of guidance counselors 1

Andrew Price (Terrebonne)

Current enrollment 120 long-term, 25-30 short-term
Total capacity 200-250
Population served susp/expelled, overage, discipline issues,
transition students from juvenile/adult
facilities, gifted students - all except students
with severe/profound disabilities
Can students return to original schools? yes - pending their court hearings and
compliance with rules while at alt. school
Length of stay from 30 days to 4 complete semesters. Now,
most are there for the rest of the school year
Percentage to college?
Percentage to employment?
Percentage of highly qualified teachers 44%
Average class size 20
Vo-tech? yes - off-campus
of guidance counselors 1 social worker

Beauregard Alternative (Beauregard)

Current enrollment	30
Total capacity	55
Population served	expelled students
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	middle school: 9 weeks; high school: one semester
Percentage to college?	50%
Percentage to employment?	50%
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	77%
Average class size	10%
Vo-tech?	yes
# of guidance counselors	1%

SW La Marine Institute (Beauregard, Calcasieu, Jeff Davis, Allen and Cameron)

Current enrollment	37
Total capacity	40
Population served	suspended/expelled or community-referred
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	6 months or less
Percentage to college?	5%
Percentage to employment?	90%
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	90%
Average class size	8 or less
Vo-tech?	yes
# of guidance counselors	2

Alt. Learning Institute (Orleans)

Current enrollment	300
Total capacity	400
Population served	prison population 21 and under
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	6-9 months
Percentage to college?	less than 1%
Percentage to employment?	65%
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	100%
average class size	20
vo-tech?	no
# of guidance counselors	1

NE La Marine Institute (Madison)

Current enrollment	32
Total capacity	32
Population served	court-appointed, adjudicated youth
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	6 mo
Percentage to college?	most go back to regular school except those who obtain GED or are placed in alternative settings
Percentage to employment?	
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	4 highly qualified, 2 certified
Average class size	8
Vo-tech?	no but meeting with LTC about cooperation
# of guidance counselors	1 director of treatment, 1 counselor, 2 case managers

Lincoln Center (Lincoln)

Current enrollment	50
Total capacity	60
Population served	average students, students with academic/behavior issues
Can students return to original schools?	depending on their progress and the SBLC committee's decision
Length of stay	1-3 years
Percentage to college?	NA (grades 4-6 only).
Percentage to employment?	NA (grades 4-6 only).
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	100%
Average class size	10 to 15
Vo-tech?	NA (grades 4-6 only).
# of guidance counselors	0

East Street Alt. School (Terrebonne)

Current enrollment	64
Total capacity	150+
Population served	susp/expelled, average, drop out prevention, sp ed/reg ed
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	45 days unless drugs, battery on teachers, weapons
Percentage to college?	
Percentage to employment?	
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	8%
average class size	12
vo-tech?	yes
# of guidance counselors	1 social worker

Vernon Parish Optional School (Vernon)

Current enrollment	4
Total capacity	20
Population served	all susp/exp students from parish
Can students return to original schools?	yes
Length of stay	reg ed: 1 semester after 4 suspensions; spec ed: 45 days unless IEP suggests otherwise; weapons/drugs: 2-4 semesters depending on age
Percentage to college?	
Percentage to employment?	
Percentage of highly qualified teachers	2 teachers, only considered highly qualified in one subject area that they teach
average class size	10
vo-tech?	no
# of guidance counselors	1

Butler Educational Complex (Bossier)

Current enrollment 179
 Total capacity 200
 Population served overage 8th graders, option 3 pre-GED skills,
 credit recovery computer lab
 Can students return to original schools? yes - at certain break points
 Length of stay 15-24 months
 Percentage to college? 10-15%
 Percentage to employment? 75-85%
 Percentage of highly qualified teachers 100%
 Average class size 15
 Vo-tech? yes
 # of guidance counselors 1 but principal is also counselor-certified and works
 with students a lot on vocational issues

Spark (Sabine)

Current enrollment 50
 Total capacity 90
 Population served susp/exp, option III, short-term for suspension, overage
 Can students return to original schools? yes
 Length of stay 1 year
 Percentage to college? 90% do either college, emp, or military
 Percentage to employment?
 Percentage of highly qualified teachers 50%
 Average class size 12
 Vo-tech? yes
 # of guidance counselors 1

Calcasieu Alternative Site for Elementary Students (Calcasieu)

Current enrollment will open in 1/08
 Total capacity 48
 Population served suspended
 Can students return to original schools? yes
 Length of stay 45 days max
 Percentage to college?
 Percentage to employment?
 Percentage of highly qualified teachers 100%
 average class size 12
 vo-tech?
 # of guidance counselors 1

Northwood High School (Tangipahoa Parish)

Current enrollment 182 in boot camp, 70 in Option III
 Total capacity 200 boot camp, 120 Option III
 Population served susp/expelled, overage, potential dropouts
 Can students return to original schools? after 45-day boot camp
 Length of stay boot camp lasts 45 days
 Percentage to college? students in Option III will enter workforce
 Percentage to employment?
 Percentage of highly qualified teachers 71%
 average class size 15
 vo-tech? Option III
 # of guidance counselors 2