

# Calvert

## A Summary of:

### “Implementing a Highly Specialized, Curricular, Instructional, and Organizational School Design in a High-Poverty, Urban Elementary School: Three-Year Results”

(July 1998) Johns Hopkins University. By Barbara McHugh and Sam Stringfield.

#### Focus

- Early Childhood
- ✓ Primary School
- Middle School
- Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- Extended Learning

## Overview

The report evaluates the Calvert program after it was implemented at Dr. Carter Goodwin Woodson Elementary School (Woodson Elementary). Calvert is a private elementary school with a long history of providing a high-quality education to several generations of children from many of Baltimore’s most affluent families. Woodson Elementary is a public school located in a predominantly African American community, and more than 90% of its students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Calvert’s philosophy of education includes high expectations, time-on-task, rapid pace of instruction, frequent evaluations, immediate feedback and student accuracy. The students are required to learn with attention to detail, including correct spelling and punctuation. Each month,

## POPULATION

During the 1996-97 school year, 90% of the students attending Calvert were white, 6% were African American and 4% were Asian or Latino. One hundred percent of Woodson’s 400 students in grades K-5 were African American. The tuition at Calvert was \$9,000 per year. The percentage of Woodson students (90%) eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was nearly triple the 1996 Maryland state average (31.1%) and well above the Baltimore City average of 70.4%.

parents receive report cards and representative samples of students’ academic work. Calvert produces a “book” of each student’s nine monthly folders of work and presents the book to the student at the end of each year.

## Key Findings

Evaluators used the Comprehensive Testing Program III to assess the impact of the program. They compared average percentile scores of first and second graders at Woodson prior to the implementation of the program (the “comparison group” for this study) with scores of the three cohorts of first graders who were taught under the program during school years 1994-95 to 1996-97 (see table).

- ◆ In first grade reading comprehension, the average score for the comparison group was at the 18<sup>th</sup> percentile. After one year in the

program, the first cohort of students scored on average at the 49<sup>th</sup> percentile, the second cohort scored at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile and the third cohort scored at the 49<sup>th</sup> percentile. The program effect size was calculated in +2.8, +2.1 and +2.9 respectively.

- ◆ In terms of first graders reading at the lowest levels, 72% of the comparison group scored in the lowest quartile, compared to 16% of the first cohort, 35% of the second cohort and 6% of the third cohort.

### Comparison Groups and Cohorts

School Year	Pre-Calvert (Comparison Group)*	1 <sup>st</sup> cohort	2 <sup>nd</sup> cohort	3 <sup>rd</sup> cohort
1993-1994	1 <sup>st</sup> grade (tested for baseline)			
1994-1995	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade (tested for baseline)	1 <sup>st</sup> grade		
1995-1996		2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	
1996-1997		3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	1 <sup>st</sup> grade

\* As the baseline comparison group, this cohort (of 18 students) was not exposed to the program. See *Study Methodology* for further clarification.

- ◆ In terms of first graders reading at the highest levels, no student in the comparison group scored in the third and highest quartiles. In the first cohort, 47% scored in the two highest quartiles, 24% did so in the second cohort, and 42% did so in the third.
- ◆ Reading gains continued in the second grade, with 44% of the first cohort scoring in the two highest quartiles and 72% of the second cohort. Only 6% of second graders in the comparison group scored at the third quartile (none at the highest).
- ◆ For writing, the comparison group scored on average at the 36<sup>th</sup> percentile, while the first cohort scored on average at the 71<sup>st</sup> percentile and the second cohort at the 67<sup>th</sup> percentile. The third cohort did not take the test that was administered only to second graders. The effect sizes of the program were +2.7 and +2.4.
- ◆ For mathematics, 89% of the comparison group scored in the two lowest quartiles, 11% in the third quartile and none in the highest quartile. For the first cohort, 22% scored in the second

lowest quartile (none in the lowest) and 78% in the two highest quartiles. For the third cohort, 24% scored in the two lowest quartiles and 76% in the two highest.

Note: In the Maryland State tests (MSAP) done in spring of 1997, Woodson third graders scored significantly above the 1996 Woodson third graders (pre-Calvert), but still below Maryland statewide average. Seventy-percent of the group taking the test belonged to the first Calvert cohort while 30% were new arrivals. Results for the past two school years show a steady improvement in test scores, although the school has yet to reach satisfactory status (70% of the students passing) in any of the subjects.

*“The clearest conclusion that can be drawn from Woodson Elementary is that the Calvert curricular and instructional program, when implemented with determination and drive, can make a dramatic difference in the educational lives of young, urban children.”*

—Barbara McHugh, et al.,  
evaluators, Calvert program

### Program Components

Woodson Elementary School has about 400 students in grades K-5. At the time the evaluation was conducted, the Calvert School model was integrated into grades 1-3, with grades 4-5 to be added within the next year. Teachers learned to use the Calvert model through a two-week training held the summer before implementation for teachers and other staff, who

learned about weekly homework sheets, monthly report cards, and other Calvert approaches. K-5 students, in classes of approximately 24 students, each had one primary teacher who used Calvert approaches and curriculum in all classes across all subject areas. Calvert stressed the following approaches to learning that went across subject areas:

- ◆ Each school day began with a 30-minute “correction period” for students to correct previous work, complete unfinished work, perfect folder papers, read independently or do other instructionally related tasks.
- ◆ Getting meaning out of reading was stressed in early grades. Students were taught to read for a specific purpose, and there was also time during each school day to read for enjoyment.
- ◆ Sight words and phonemic skills were a formal part of the Calvert curriculum, as were timed fact drills on basic mathematics facts.
- ◆ Beginning in January of first grade, all students wrote a composition each week.
- ◆ Teachers coordinated students’ compilations of “error-free” papers for insertion into students’ monthly folders. The folders were sent home at the end of each month and were part of school-parent communications.

School-parent interactions were both formal and informal. All parents received folders of student work at the end of each month. Some parents and grandparents, mainly in first grade, helped out during the corrections period. Additional activities such as a trip to the movies, bowling

*“These kindergarten through third-grade results leave little doubt that impoverished urban children, given appropriate curriculum and instruction, are capable of achieving at levels that are much higher than current urban averages.”*

—Barbara McHugh, et al.,  
evaluators, Calvert program

alley or skating rink, were scheduled periodically for students with perfect attendance. The school also made daily announcements of which classes had perfect attendance on the previous day.

After the Calvert School agreed to share its model with Woodson, the Abell Foundation financed the implementation, including funds to pay teachers or other staff from Calvert who trained Woodson staff. Besides paying for staff costs, Calvert did not charge a “usage fee” for its model. After providing the curriculum and initial training, Calvert staff were available on an informal consultative basis, though their formal involvement in training ended. Woodson shared its evaluation information and reports with Calvert. The Abell Foundation also reviewed evaluations and student progress reports, though the foundation was not directly involved in implementation of the model.

## Contributing Factors

### ***Gradual Implementation/Faithful Replication***

Woodson adopted the Calvert model grade by grade, allowing full implementation in one grade before moving on to another. All teachers were pre-trained and a full-time facilitator (funded by the Abell Foundation) was onsite throughout the implementation. For the most part, Woodson teachers seemed to faithfully replicate the Calvert model with few exceptions.

### ***High Expectations***

The Calvert model was built on high expectations combined with a high degree of structure. The curriculum centered around a rapid pace of instruction and student accuracy – including correct

spelling and punctuation – was considered fundamental. Timed drills – particularly in math – were used on nearly a daily basis.

### ***Frequent Evaluations/Immediate Feedback***

The Calvert program not only gave immediate feedback to students through teacher commentary and grading but also shared frequent evaluations with parents and school administrators regarding overall student performance. Parents received monthly report cards accompanied by representative samples of a student’s work. In addition, the full-time facilitator provided constant feedback to staff during the implementation process.

**Focus on Results**

The Calvert model was a results-oriented one. Student attendance, work quality and performance on national tests were regularly monitored and evaluated. Students were consistently required to correct work until it was error free. Even students in upper grades were given weekly spelling tests.

**Professional Development**

In addition to the two-week training and support from the full-time facilitator, Woodson teachers also participated in school-wide seminars in which teachers exchanged ideas and discussed problems. Woodson teachers also reviewed lessons on their

own time through Calvert's home-schooling curriculum. Teacher input was used to decide which textbooks to purchase in order to increase implementation success.

**Communication with Families**

In addition to monthly report cards, parents and grandparents also participated in monthly parent's meetings. Parents and grandparents were asked to volunteer to be on site in the classroom helping students complete or correct work. Parents and grandparents also helped arrange classrooms, participated in recreational activities and listened to students read.

**STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The school implemented the Calvert program gradually, starting with kindergarten and first grade, and adding another grade every year. The report focuses on the third year of the program implementation. Data is given per cohort. The comparison group started first grade in September 1993 before the program was implemented (18 students). The first cohort started first grade in September 1994, when the program was implemented (32 students). The second cohort started first grade in September 1995 (29 students), and the third cohort started first grade in September 1996 (50 students). There was no attrition of these cohorts. All students were tested on the Comprehensive Testing Program III, a norm-referenced test used in private schools. Their scores, given in Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE), were compared to those of students who were in first grade prior to the implementation of the program. Results of the analyses were then converted to percentiles. Effect sizes were calculated as cohort mean NCE minus comparison mean NCE divided by comparison standard deviation.

**EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING**

The evaluation was funded by Johns Hopkins University. Implementation of the Calvert program at Woodson was funded by the Abell Foundation. Before funding implementation at Woodson, The Abell Foundation also funded implementation of the Calvert program at another public Baltimore school, Barclay Elementary and Middle School.

**GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**

Calvert and Woodson are located in Baltimore. The program has also been implemented at Barclay Elementary and Middle School. Some 16,000 children worldwide are home-schooled using the Calvert program.

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