THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION REFORM:
STANDARDS, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESOURCES AND POLICY

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Rapporteur’s Summary

Carol Copple, Ph.D.

The Challenge of Education Reform—Standards, Accountability, Resources and Policy was the theme of the 2005 conference sponsored by The Aspen Institute Congressional Program, held February 22-27 in Cancun, Mexico. The meeting was the twelfth in a series that examines policy options for promoting the education and well-being of children and adolescents, and thus the well-being of the nation. A bipartisan group of 15 Members of Congress participated, together with eight invited experts with relevant knowledge and experience. The Congressional Program series is not intended to yield a consensus statement of recommended policy directions. Rather, the aim is to help inform policymakers and facilitate the search for common ground on which effective American legislative policy must rest. The 2005 Congressional Program conference examined a range of issues and policy options with respect to meeting the challenges of education reform.

The endangered economy—a human capital challenge

Already American jobs are leaving our shores in large numbers. For decades, low-skill, low-pay jobs have been moving to other countries where labor costs less. Now jobs and investment dollars in sophisticated industries such as aerospace manufacturing and network computing are beginning to sail offshore. To compete in the global, technology-intensive economy, U.S. students must attain higher standards than those that were adequate for previous generations. The nation’s economy and the world context have simply changed much faster than our schools.

Sizable achievement gaps exist along economic, racial, and ethnic lines in the U.S., and the groups with whom our schools are failing are the ones that are growing fastest in numbers. Yet, even without the achievement gaps, the nation would face a formidable education challenge. American students as a group do not fare well in international studies of educational achievement. The U.S. produces only two bachelor degrees for every 10 students who start high school; other countries are producing far larger numbers. While our schools annually turn out only 2.2 million college graduates and 60,000 engineers, China and India alone graduate 5.1 million from college and 400,000 engineers.

This sharp disparity in numbers will have a marked impact on Americans; in fact, it is already beginning to do so. With new technologies favoring the better educated, virtually all family income gains in the last three decades have gone to the top fifth of U.S. families. If jobs continue to move offshore, employment and income losses for the other four-fifths of Americans are likely to increase. Moreover, truncation of the middle class poses dangers not only to America’s economy but to our civic culture as well.
No Child Left Behind

With the passing of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001, Congress vigorously responded to the looming human capital challenge. It affirmed that public education must educate all children, not simply the top fifth, and educate them to substantially higher levels than ever before. This legislation represented a step well beyond the federal government’s largely hands-off role in education. Four years later, it is clear that NCLB has focused the attention of the large, decentralized education system on raising student achievement and on closing long-entrenched achievement gaps. It has put minorities, English language learners (ELLs), and poor students on the radar screen. Also evident is that major challenges remain in order for the vision of No Child Left Behind to become a reality.

Fixing certain provisions. Even NCLB’s strongest advocates agree that some of its requirements, such as the specifics of testing requirements for students with disabilities and English Language Learners, are not practical as they stand. While some concerns are about NCLB requirements per se, others relate to the paucity of resources for meeting certain requirements. For example, although NCLB requires that ELL students should be assessed in their native language for their first three years in the system, states and schools have not received the technical assistance and resources necessary to develop tests in the many foreign languages spoken by students. Another issue often raised by critics is that the Act presently offers no flexibility to use multiple measures of student achievement.

The growth vs. proficiency debate. With some projections showing that within the next four or five years nearly all schools will fail to meet their NCLB targets, significant efforts already are underway to amend the mandated “average yearly progress” (AYP) is calculated. Some states are pushing for a model that is based on growth in student achievement levels, in some cases without the requirement of getting students to proficiency. The analytical method known as “value-added assessment” could play a key part in this process by providing schools with another alternative—identifying which schools failing the AYP in the current year were on a trajectory of growth that would get their students to proficiency by a later grade. “Growth to standards” is the shorthand for this alternative. Its advocates argue that, unlike mere growth models, it adheres to the federal government’s commitment to ensure that all students reach proficiency.

Resource adequacy. NCLB has dramatically increased standards without proportionally increasing funding, and at a time when state and local governments are experiencing financial hardships. Not surprisingly, calls for full funding of the bill have been loud and persistent.

In addition to concerns about absolute levels of funding, there are serious issues in getting it where it is most needed. Since education funding in the U.S. is predominantly local, schools with large numbers of poor and minority children typically have markedly fewer resources than schools in more affluent neighborhoods. Moreover, new research has revealed that spending also varies significantly from school to school within a district. Most of the disparities are driven by outdated, haphazard budgeting practices that are typical in large urban school districts.

Some of these practices, such as using teacher salary averages instead of true labor costs, bury real spending differences in ways that shortchange poor children. With the average-salary method of budgeting, two schools may appear to have the same per pupil budgets while the district actually spends significantly more at one school because of its more experienced and higher-paid teachers. Typically, this school is one that serves more affluent students and already has lots of resources.

The state and federal governments spend billions of dollars in categorical aid to help districts educate high-needs students, but because of district budgeting practices the full potential of these dollars is not realized. Comparable services for high-poverty students must exist before Title I funding can be accessed so that this money will serve to augment rather than replace spending on high-poverty students. Yet, with districts using average salaries to determine comparability of spending between high- and low-poverty schools—as they are now allowed to do—Title I funds are flowing to schools that are simply being shortchanged by their own cost data. Tightening the provisions to require using actual salaries or other budgeting practices, such as student-based rather than school-based allocation, will help redirect Title I dollars to where they are intended to go. Such action parallels a policy strategy often suggested for dealing with funding equity: requiring states to put in place equitable, adequate education in order to receive federal funds.

Beyond framing such requirements, however, the federal government will likely need to shoulder a larger share of education funding to offset differences in state and district wealth. Not all states are currently providing adequate levels of funding to fairly implement their own standards. While this is an area in which NCLB requirements could be particularly helpful, in its present form it does not address this critical issue.

A crucial question is this: How much money is needed to reach the standards for which NCLB holds states accountable? Largely in response to education adequacy litigations, costing-out studies have been conducted in more than two dozen states in recent years. Broadly, the costing-out approach identifies the specific resources and conditions necessary to provide all children a reasonable educational opportunity and then systematically calculates the amounts necessary to fund each of these prerequisites. Costing-out studies thus provide the empirical data that have been missing in state-level legislative deliberations on education funding. These data could also be aggregated to the national level to gauge what the total bill would be for implementing the states’ standards as required by NCLB.

If the ambitious goals of NCLB are to be achieved, adequate resources must be available to provide all students a meaningful opportunity to meet state standards. Yet, this does not mean that federal funding alone must be increased to meet all the additional costs. Rather, it means that it is critical to examine and amend NCLB in light of the resource issue. Among other things, such a focus might specify the use of mechanisms, such as state or national cost surveys, to identify those additional costs.

This information would allow serious consideration of how much states should be spending to provide all their students an adequate education. Then the appropriate level of federal contributions to this effort could be considered from an informed perspective.

As indispensable as adequate funding is, it is only part of the capacity challenges faced by states, districts, and schools.

The capacity for change

Essential to the reform agenda and realizing the goals of NCLB are qualified teachers and effective principals in all schools. Filling these needs, in turn, rests on improving other aspects of the education system, such as teacher preparation, evaluation of teachers, and moving the better principals and teachers into the schools that need them most.

At an even more fundamental level, changes in certain deep-seated ideas are vital. Most basic is to get away from the notion of intrinsic ability—that one is born with an amount of intelligence that remains constant—and recognize that the individual’s capability is a function of effort, high-quality instruction, and appropriate resources. A related change is needed in the mind-set of educators: to relinquish the bell-shaped curve and its assumption that relatively few students will achieve at a high level while the majority never get beyond a mediocre or poor level. Rather, in a standards-driven system, educators must recognize that all students can and should reach high standards.

What do teachers need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in the current context? Abundant evidence indicates that teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the subject matter in order to help students
learn. To be effective, they also need to have a solid repertoire of teaching strategies and know when to use and adapt them. Further, teachers need to be able to analyze and reflect on their practice, which includes assessing student learning and examining results to guide instruction. For teachers to engage in such reflection and analysis requires actions to reshape the school environments in which they work. For teachers to gain the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to do this work requires changes in the colleges of education.

Improving teacher preparation

Here and there, improvement efforts are underway in universities and states, although to date the prevalence and rate of change are far from sufficient to meet the urgent needs of the K-12 system. In accreditation of teacher education, standards are considerably more challenging than in the past. Catalyzed by these upgraded standards and the voices of reform, some changes are taking hold. Improvements include the redesign of education coursework and certification requirements and growth of extended degree programs (for example, 5-year programs).

Another direction of change is enhancement of the field experience component in teacher training. A growing number of institutions view earlier and more extensive field experience as a key element in good teacher preparation. Rather than having to wait until the spring before graduation to step inside a school, students in these programs may get into classrooms as early as their first semester; and they have lots of practical, hands-on classroom experience throughout their preparation program. Both education faculty and teachers in the K-12 schools are engaged with the student teachers, and this involvement appears to benefit all parties. The prospective teachers get real-life learning experiences and extensive opportunities to see if they like the work of teaching. Education faculty learn from engagement in the public schools where their students will be teaching. For their part, the classroom teachers are exposed to current knowledge and thinking as a result of the university presence; and they take on new roles that bring them respect and opportunities for collaboration.

In order to bring education schools into the university mainstream and ensure that prospective teachers get solid grounding in the disciplines, some education reformers are calling for measures to promote top-level collaboration between arts and sciences faculty and college of education faculty. Federal funding to higher education could stipulate that such collaboration occur.

Schools of education traditionally have had little role in the induction and retention of their graduates, much less in the learning outcomes of their graduates' pupils. Now a few colleges of education are beginning to work with their graduates in the all-important first years of their teaching careers and to keep tabs on their effectiveness in promoting student achievement. For schools of education to take on this novel but appropriate role is a change that may be necessary for real transformation in the preparation and launching of teachers to occur. Experience from foundation initiatives suggests that federal funding could encourage and enable colleges and universities to pursue any or all of these changes more vigorously.

Improving evaluation of teacher effectiveness

How people are evaluated in their work is very revealing. The usual approach for bringing teachers into the profession and evaluating their work sends the message that they are "casual labor" rather than professionals. The notion that the boss—in this case, the principal—is the only one who evaluates, hires and fires, and assigns positions has been displaced in much of American business, yet it is still the norm in education. Transformation of the way teachers are evaluated, many believe, can be a major point of influence for moving reform. Currently, the evaluation process is not only top-down but also subjective and highly inconsistent across schools and districts; and it appears to be largely unhelpful for instructional improvement. It rarely results in teachers with deficient skills being identified and either helped or removed. Fortunately, new ways of evaluating teachers' work offer great potential for change.

Teachers evaluating teachers. An alternative to the top-down approach is for teachers to train and evaluate teachers using standards of practice that are created by peers. In 1981, the Toledo Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, negotiated the first peer-evaluation system of its kind in the U.S.

In this model, a new teacher is assigned a consulting teacher, or mentor, for the purpose of professional development and evaluation. The evaluation process is one of continuous mutual goal-setting using classroom observations and follow-up conferences where the new teacher and consulting teacher together analyze and set practical goals for improvement based on detailed evaluation criteria. A consulting teacher may use any of a number of methods—demonstration lessons, videotaping, observations of other teachers—to assist the new teacher in meeting the goals. The consulting teacher has final responsibility for the evaluation of the new teacher with whom he or she works. This induction process is similar to that in other professions, and both the new teachers and consulting teachers believe it helps them to be more effective and to feel a spirit of teamwork in their schools. Teachers in this system appear to enjoy a more productive and mutually respectful relationship with school management, and they have changed the culture of their union. Consulting teachers and formerly mentoried teachers have become a voice for teaching excellence within the union and the profession. They see the union as a support for their teaching practice, not just a last resort when a problem with management occurs.

Value-added assessment. The method of value-added analysis follows the progress of individual students by tracking changes in their test scores from year to year. The results indicate how much each student has learned for every year of instruction in every subject tested. When data from individual students are aggregated to teacher, grade, school, and district levels, they reveal patterns of learning under each unit. Although more work is needed before the value-added methodology should be used in making high-stakes personnel decisions, results provide useful information on teaching impact and identify specific areas needing improvement. With an empirical method of identifying the student learning outcomes produced by individual educators, it will be possible to have fair accountability procedures for teachers and principals.

As previously discussed, the value-added approach also allows for tracking progress along a growth trajectory, that is, "growth to standards." It thus reveals—for individual students and for groups, such as English Language Learners or minorities—who is making achievement gains and who is losing ground. Finally, a powerful lesson from value-added assessment is its concrete contradiction of the idea that teaching does not matter very much in student achievement. Unequivocal evidence from value-added analysis shows that it does.

These two methods of assessing teacher effectiveness have their respective benefits, and they are by no means mutually exclusive. Teachers evaluating teachers, as in The Toledo Plan, has a number of strengths, including its ability to change the culture of the school, the teaching profession, and the relation of teaching unions to management. Value-added assessment has clear benefits in providing focused information about each student's growth in each year of instruction.

Creating a professional workplace

In Japan, which has an excellent track record in student achievement, teachers work in a highly collegial environment. They meet regularly to talk about how to align their curriculum and how to improve their teaching techniques. Teachers sit in on other teachers' classes to learn from observation. This interaction is especially helpful for first-time teachers, who learn
from the expertise of their colleagues. Such evidence from other countries, as well as results in U.S. schools, suggests that when teachers are able to work together to design and deliver instruction, school improvement occurs. Analyzing student-learning data together is an important way to add focus and feedback to teachers' collaborative consideration of instruction and learning.

Examining student learning data. In the current context, many teachers are overwhelmed by data and find it more frightening than useful. The data they typically get are too broad-brushed to guide them in improving their students’ skills. Even with more specific data in hand, they would need support in understanding the data and, most important, regular opportunities to look at the information with colleagues to make sense of it and determine what to do next. When these conditions are present, progress occurs. Looking at schools closing the achievement gap (as well as seeing gains for all students) and comparing them with otherwise similar schools that were not doing so, researchers made an interesting discovery. At the gap-closing schools, teachers frequently assessed students to diagnose strengths and weaknesses, and they met often to analyze the data in order to identify student learning needs and consider how to meet them.

Teachers need structured time for such analysis and discussion built into the regular work week. Whether this analysis and discussion happens in weekly grade-level team meetings, cross-grade-level meetings, leadership team meetings or full faculty meetings, teachers need structured time together to discuss practice. With such collaboration opportunities, teaching can move beyond isolated, random acts of improvement and inspiration and into systemic improvement, with all teachers advancing and capitalizing on each others’ successes.

The principal factor

Key to a school’s progress in meeting the goals of NCLB is an effective leader—a principal who remains at the school long enough to bring instructional coherence and establish an environment in which teachers and students are committed to continuous improvement. Yet at this critical juncture in education reform, the United States is experiencing a sizable and growing principal shortage, and far too few principals are proving effective in driving change. For poorer school districts, effective school leaders are even harder to find and retain.

Providing incentives to induce capable principals, as well as master teachers, to commit themselves to three to five years in the schools where they are most needed may be a stable policy option at the federal and state levels. Further, to boost both effectiveness and retention of principals, a useful strategy is to encourage training to equip current and prospective principals for the complex job of running a school today. Training may be provided in budgeting, analyzing pertinent data, and other management skills important for them to succeed as site-based managers. For example, one notable principal-development program is New Leaders for New Schools, a public-private partnership that recruits and trains inner-city principals in instructional and organizational leadership, followed by a residency in an urban public school and follow-up coaching and mentoring for two more years. Because the principal is a linchpin in school improvement, federal support for such principal-development programs is a promising option for creating needed change.

Introduction: The Global Economic Context

Terrorism and the war in Iraq are high on the list of the nation’s concerns, but the greatest danger facing America, as Louis Gerstner recognized, is the challenge of human capital development. The nation’s public schools, the foundation for this effort, are still failing far too many of our children despite an investment of $500 billion annually.

Sadly, we’ve known about this threat for quite some time. In 1983, A Nation at Risk suggested that if the mediocrity of our schools had been imposed by an unfriendly foreign power, “we might well have viewed it as an act of war.” We understood then that companies all over the world could buy foodproducing machinery that compensated for deficient worker skills and that billions of people were willing to use that machinery for a fraction of the wages American workers wanted. But recent trends and the highly visible discussion over off-shoring and outsourcing of high-end jobs make clear that globalization is about far more than displacing our nation’s blue-collar workers.

Every job in America is at risk. China has mandated that all of its college graduates will be proficient in English, China and India alone each year graduate 5.1 million from college and 400,000 engineers, while our schools turn out 2.2 million college graduates and 60,000 engineers. We produce only two bachelor degrees for every 10 students who start high school. “The law of sheer numbers,” observes Hewlett-Packard’s former CEO Carleton Fiorina, “is fairly compelling.” The consequences for failing to meet the human capital development challenge are already severe. The last year the typical blue-collar worker earned enough for mom to stay at home and raise the kids war 1964. We maintained our standard of living despite the decline of real wages through these decades largely because women entered the labor force in record numbers and created two-income families, but that strategy has run its course. Virtually all gains in family income in the last 30 years have gone to the top fifth of American families, largely the result of new technologies that favor the better educated.
No Child Left Behind

Our last four presidents, the Congress, governors and corporate leaders came to understand that if America is to remain a stable, middle-class society, steps had to be taken to significantly improve our system of public schools. Frustrated by precious little improvement in student achievement over the last two decades, the Congress in a bipartisan consensus in 2002 passed the No Child Left Behind Act, an unprecedented expansion of the role of the federal government in K-12 education.

NCLB broke new ground. It required states to set academic standards so we could move away from norms-based testing, which compared students to each other, and learn instead what students know and can do at given ages. It required states to test annually so we could have a basis for measuring changes in achievement levels. It forced schools to focus attention on the academic progress of long-neglected low-income and minority students, which is why many believe the law is one of the great civil rights victories in our history. And it introduced consequences for schools that failed.

The legislation was necessary and, despite some design flaws that will be addressed later, there must be no retreat from its goals. Nonetheless, it would be seriously wrong to conclude that NCLB represents a sufficient response to the human capital development threat posed by globalization.

NCLB was not and—given political realities at the federal level—could not in itself be a dramatic overhaul of the K-12 system. We remain the only developed nation where the federal government neither dictates nor closely coordinates the standards, assessments and curricula that are used in its schools. Yet the reason for breaking the long-standing “hands-off” role of the federal government was that to meet our human capital development challenge and to ensure the civil rights of children our schools had to do something never done before: educate all children, not simply the top fifth, and educate them to unprecedentedly high levels. (or levels never before imagined).

NCLB cannot directly produce fundamental change in American public education, but it can help the states transform our nation’s public schools. What follows is a description of the kind of system needed and a discussion of how we can work with NCLB to encourage the states, through incentives and regulatory changes, to promote the required changes so schools can graduate students who are able to use technology, think critically, solve problems and learn throughout their lifetimes. Whether this is possible to accomplish state-by-state remains to be seen, but at this moment, bearing a sea change in the Congress, that is the best we can hope for.

America’s Public Schools: Past and Future

The system of public education now in place is largely unchanged from the nineteenth century when schools were set up to do three things: The first was to provide universal basic literacy, and America became the first nation in which virtually everyone in the labor force could read and write at the 6th grade level. The second was to socialize a highly diverse population—millions of immigrants from different nations, cultures and religions and even more millions of farmers who migrated to cities as American agriculture mechanized over the last 150 years—for success in an industrial economy. Students were taught to show up on time, respect authority, develop a work ethic and repeat monotonous tasks. Finally, using standardized tests and the bell-shaped curve, the schools identified and sorted out the top fifth of their students for higher education and the best and brightest among these went on to run the country.

The old system, concerned with quantity and cohorts rather than quality and individuals, was designed to let the cream float to the top. For the remaining 80 percent or so, there was little consequence because, for most of our history, they ventured forth into an industrial economy that provided ubiquitous jobs paying middle-class sustaining wages, but which required little in the way of advanced education or higher-level skills.

Our schools were enormously successful in these tasks, and there is no way to understand the emergence of America as an industrial powerhouse without acknowledging the key role they played. The problem is that people continue to behave as if the current school system—designed for a different century and a different economy—is the right one for the challenges ahead despite the record of the last three decades. Since 1970, notwithstanding an increase in real spending of over 100 percent per pupil, a decrease of 22 percent in the pupil-to-teacher ratio, and a doubling of the number of teachers with Masters’ degrees, student achievement has remained largely flat.

For schools to succeed in the 21st century, teachers and administrators must undergo the requisite education and training to master concepts and methods that were not necessary in the schools of an industrial economy. Educators will need to replace the "ability-based" notion that dominates the thinking of too many who work in our schools with an "effort-based" theory of learning: you are not simply born smart, but you can "get smart" with appropriate resources and high-quality instruction. They will need to see how teaching a standards-driven curriculum is very unlike using a bell-shaped curve to distinguish among students so all students must reach high standards. They will need to be proficient in using a problem-solving pedagogy in the classroom: memorization will always have a place in the learning process because no subject can be mastered without it, but it must never again serve as the dominant paradigm. They will have to learn how to differentiate instruction: "one-size-fits-all" cannot suffice in an era in which no child can be left behind and children have many different styles of learning. They must master data-driven decision making, a striking departure from an anecdotal approach that has long characterized our schools. Finally, they must learn how to shift from teacher-centered to student-centered classrooms: lectures serve the needs of some students, but everyone learns best when they bear more of the responsibility for learning.

But before our educators can master these new skills and knowledge, key problems that plague the profession of teaching must be addressed. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future: one in three teachers leave in the first three years; 46 percent in the first five years; these rates are 50 percent higher in urban districts; and the profile of the "leavers" is stronger than the "stayers." Of the 3.4 million current teachers, two million will leave in the next decade—three times as many through attrition as through retirement. To replace these teachers and to retain and attract the "best and the brightest" will require a transformed school system, one that will make teaching a more financially rewarding and intellectually satisfying experience.

A New System: Operation Public Education’s Comprehensive Reforms

The system necessary to encourage and support these changes will have to be governed through an entirely new set of rules and incentives. Many key elements of reform are already in place across the country addressing assessment, educator quality, compensation, professional development and capacity building. The challenge is to bring these together along with several striking innovations so that the typical practice of piecemeal reform that produces marginal improvements can yield sustainable systemic change.

Operation Public Education, based at the University of Pennsylvania, has done this. It has developed new and comprehensive reforms that complement the federal law and provide tools that can transform America’s schools. These reforms have been codified into legislative language and are now being promoted nationally with support from the Annenberg Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. Winning support for these progressive and controversial reforms is a difficult, but not impossible task. The Superintendent of schools and the President of the Columbus, Ohio Education Association have committed to pilotting the system and the two largest districts in Idaho—Meridian and Boise—have expressed a strong interest in forming joint district/union teams to implement the system in that state.
The OPE system provides new forms of educator evaluation that include outputs (student learning results) in addition to inputs (the observation of teachers in their classrooms). The compensation system enables outstanding teachers to earn higher salaries more quickly and is flexible enough to differentiate pay for those differential vacancies that arise from subject matter or less desirable working environments. It provides more fluid career opportunities so teachers can assume greater responsibility at earlier ages based on their effectiveness. Teachers needing remediation are required to undergo it, and ineffective teachers who are unable to improve must leave the profession. Professional development—opportunities to improve skill and obtain new knowledge—is substantially expanded so educators can continue to grow throughout their careers.

At the heart of the OPE system is an essential quid pro quo in which teachers accept accountability as individuals in return for a significantly expanded role in school management: (1) teachers are given responsibility for evaluating fellow educators through a peer-review process; (2) they play a key role in the remediation process that affects all key personnel decisions; and (3) because their success is now determined by what happens in their classrooms rather than at the bargaining table, they become full partners in the policy decisions that affect classroom, such as professional development and curricula. While collective bargaining should continue, the OPE system dissolves the hard distinction between teachers as "labor" and administrators as "management" because the difficulty of systemic reform requires close cooperation among the key parties.

Finally, the mediocre, high-stakes standardized tests found in the large majority of states need to be replaced with a new integrated assessment system that would provide not only a high-quality "summative" exam at year's end focused on the development of higher-order thinking skills, but "formative" assessments throughout the school year designed to give teachers regular feedback in the form of suggested pedagogical interventions to support improved instruction for this year's students.

Value-Added Assessment and Accountability for Individual Educators

The OPE system rests on a foundation of individual-level accountability—both teachers and administrators are held responsible as individuals for student learning results. NCLB moved in the right direction in requiring accountability, but it fell short in making the school rather than the individual educator the unit of accountability. Systemic changes of the type discussed above will be achieved only when the careers of everyone working in our public schools are tied to successful learning outcomes.

But until now efforts to hold individual educators directly responsible for student learning—sometimes referred to as "pay-for-performance" or "merit pay"—have failed either because they were too subjective or relied on achievement scores, which are strongly influenced by family income (good jobs, years of schooling, positive attitudes about education, exposing one's children to books and travel, and social and intellectual capital correlate highly with income) to differenti ate effectiveness. The unfairness of such approaches was recognized and they have largely been abandoned.

At a recent national conference, Dan Fallon, Chair of Carnegie Corporation's Education Division, explained the origins of the belief held by most Americans, say people as well as K-12 educators, that the level of academic achievement is determined largely by factors beyond a school's control. It can be traced back to James Coleman's 1966 report—"only a small part of [student achievement] is the result of school factors, in contrast to family background differences between communities," and the work of Christopher Jencks in 1972—"the character of a school's output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children." This understanding is reinforced for the public at-large when their metropolitan newspapers issue their annual "Report Card on the Schools," revealing that wealthy communities almost always have the highest test scores.

"An implicit conclusion of the analyses put forward by Coleman and Jencks," Fallon observed, is that "when it comes to student achievement, teaching doesn't matter very much."

But a spate of new studies now proves empirically that teaching matters enormously. To understand how this new conclusion can be arrived at, it is vital to grasp a fundamental distinction in the measurement of student learning. Achievement describes the absolute levels attained by students in end-of-year tests. Growth, in contrast, describes the progress in test scores made over the school year. And here is the most important implication of this difference: high absolute scores on assessments such as the SAT are best predicted by family income. But if we are predicting student growth—progress made over the year—reports by education researchers Kain, Hanushek, Sanders and others demonstrate that good instruction is 15-20 times more powerful than family background and income, race, gender, and other explanatory variables.

Given the technological limitations of their era, Coleman and Jencks focused on what they could achieve. But today, because researchers have access to data sets and technology that link the progress of individual students over time to the teachers who taught them, it is now possible to measure the impact of instruction on a student's academic growth using a powerful new methodology called value-added assessment.

Value-added assessment is often confused with simple growth because the words themselves make it easy to think about this growth as the "value" that is "added" over the last year. But the statistical method known as "value-added assessment," as developed for the state of Tennessee by Dr. William Sanders when he was a professor of statistics at the state university, is a way of isolating the impact of instruction on student learning. Its great advantage is its ability to separate the annual academic growth of students into two parts: that which can be attributed to the student and that which can be attributed to the classroom, school, or district. Because individual students rather than cohorts are traced over time, each student serves as his or her own "baseline" or control, which removes virtually all of the influence of the unvarying characteristics of the student, such as race or socioeconomic factors.

Although there are several different value-added models in use today, only the Sanders model has been mandated for use statewide: in Tennessee since 1992 and most recently in Pennsylvania and Ohio as well as in over 300 other school districts in 21 states.

Under the value-added approach, test scores are projected for students and then compared to the scores they actually achieve at the end of the school year. Classroom scores that exceed projected values indicate effective instruction. Conversely, scores that are mostly below projections suggest that the instruction was ineffective.

At the same time this approach considers student factors such as the pattern of prior test scores, both those of the individual student as well as those of other students in the same class. If a student's present performance is below projected scores, while students with comparable previous academic history in the same classes have done well, this is evidence of the student effect—external variables such as the home environment—which is outside the control of teachers and students.

Since students' projected scores are based only on their prior academic records rather than on race or socioeconomic background, value-added does not introduce bias: in other words, low-income children are not expected to do poorly and high-income students are not expected to do well. But because value-added traces the same students over time, thus accounting for family and neighborhood characteristics that so strongly bias absolute test scores, educators are not being penalized for circumstances beyond their control.

When value-added scores are collected for each classroom and averaged over three years, teachers have rich diagnostic information to improve their instruction and administrators
have an empirical basis for evaluating teacher effectiveness. When these classroom scores are aggregated over entire buildings and districts, principals and superintendents can be held accountable for student learning results.

Value-added assessment is not without controversy given the complicated statistics on which it unavoidably rests. The RAND Corporation’s major study of value-added models identified important research questions about school effects, about the comparability of the instructional difficulty at different grade levels, and about the quality of the tests used, among others. Nonetheless, it concluded that: (1) the teacher effect is real; (2) it could be very large; and (3) it persists beyond the year in which it is first evident. Despite the problems associated with existing test-based accountability systems, the RAND researchers concluded that value-added models (VAM) “might actually provide less-biased and more precise assessments of teacher effects” than existing test-based systems and that as “policymakers evaluate alternative models for school or teacher accountability, VAM should be given serious consideration even in light of its limitations.”

In a balanced accountability system no educator should ever be evaluated solely on the basis of a single measure, not even one as powerful as value-added. Value-added scores, the OPE system, for example, constitute half of an educator’s evaluation, while the other half is based on direct observation of performance using well-established protocols. Value-added models used for accountability should always be accompanied by safeguards, such as those developed by OPE, to ensure that educators are treated fairly as individuals. This is a moment when we must be willing to innovate, take risks and not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Some Problems with Adequate Yearly Progress

NCLB’s requirement that schools bring all their children to high standards by 2014 is a worthy goal. So, too, is the insistence that school-wide averages are not enough—student subgroups, including low-income, non-English-speaking, special needs and those of varied ethnicities, must meet these standards as well. The problem, however, is how to identify which schools are on target to meet these requirements. In most cases, NCLB’s AYP measures can correctly sort out successful schools from those that are failing their students. But for many schools, AYP measures do not provide a fair and complete assessment of school performance.

At the heart of this problem is the fact that AYP focuses on achievement to the exclusion of growth. The following chart helps us identify and understand AYP’s twin deficiencies. Proficiency (achievement), high and low, is tracked on the vertical axis, while growth, high and low, is tracked on the horizontal axis. In the bottom left cell are schools that are clearly not serving the needs of their students—providing them with low proficiency and low growth—and thus deserve to be sanctioned. Schools in the top right cell are performing wonderfully. They are doing what we want all schools to do: provide their students with both high proficiency and high growth. For the schools in these two cells, AYP measures accurately reflect their educational outcomes.

![Graphic](chart.png)

Unfortunately, not all schools fall in these two cells. The problems with AYP are clearly evident in the remaining two cells. In the top left are schools whose students are meeting their AYP goals, but where little growth is occurring. Most often found in affluent communities where high-test scores go hand-in-hand with family income, these schools can be referred to as “slide and glide” because they appear to be resting on the laurels of their students. It is important to understand that NCLB does nothing to hold these schools accountable for providing their students with the annual growth to which they are entitled. In a global economy characterized by fierce competition for demanding jobs that pay high salaries and benefits, this is a highly significant shortcoming.

The bottom right cell contains schools with high growth, but low proficiency. These schools have succeeded in academically “stretching” their students, but given how far behind they were when they entered school, the schools have not yet been able to raise them to proficiency. These schools, while not bringing their students to AYP-required levels, are clearly helping them improve their academic performance, yet still face sanctions under current law.

When NCLB was drafted, some educators advocated the inclusion of growth in the measurement of AYP so that schools that helped their students grow would be seen as doing their job, but their proposals were turned down. This has reinforced a conspiracy theory widespread in the K-12 world that explains the exclusion of growth in calculating AYP as part of a plot to make the nation’s schools look bad (the high failure rate of AYP) so citizens would give up on public education, thus opening the door for vouchers.

The truth, of course, is very different. The refusal to include growth as an alternative for meeting AYP was a bipartisan decision. Supporters believed that even if students—primarily of minority and low-income backgrounds—grew every year, many would never hit real-world standards by graduation because they had entered school so far behind. Their position was quite principled—“We are not going to abandon these children”—and so they rejected growth measures and insisted on holding schools accountable for getting all their students to proficiency as the sole means of hitting their AYP targets.

Can All Children Achieve High Standards?

Some observers believe that most children who enter school well below grade level will be unable to reach proficiency by graduation. In Class and Schools, for example, Richard Rodstein argues that factors beyond the control of schools have such an overwhelming impact on student achievement that only a massive infusion of new funds can overcome the major deficiencies in health, nutrition, socialization and income that hobble these students.

Others are agnostic: maybe all students can, maybe all students can’t reach high standards. For now, they argue, schools should be focused on ensuring that each student gets a year’s worth of growth every year from wherever they start in September. Knowing that schools fall far short of this goal each year—for example, 68 percent of Tennessee’s 80 active districts did not provide students a year’s worth of growth in math in 1996-97—they conclude that if schools simply did not lose ground, students would be vastly better off. Sustaining cumulative gains over years of schooling would be a dramatic improvement in the status quo. A student entering second grade on grade level in a school averaging 75 percent annual growth would graduate eighth grade at 6.5 years of academic achievement, while one attending a school averaging 19 percent would graduate at 10.4 years of academic achievement.

Still others, building on this idea, argue that an achievable and worthy goal for the nation’s schools would be to require them to stretch their students beyond a year’s worth of growth in a year. That is, not only would they not lose ground, but they would provide growth at a rate that exceeded predicted performance based on earlier achievement. This accomplishment, they argue, should qualify schools as meeting AYP even if the level of achievement fell short of proficiency.

But because NCLB is the law of the land, this is currently a philosophical discussion. Time will tell whether our schools can in fact bring all their children to proficiency by graduation. But for now let us consider how is it possible to improve AYP without abandoning the commitment that all children reach proficiency. We call this approach "Growth to Standards" and it is achievable through the introduction of value-added models.
Fixing AYP Without Abandoning Proficiency Through "Growth to Standards"  
The essence of the "Growth-to-Standards" approach is to identify schools that are putting their students on growth trajectories to reach proficiency in the future and to credit these schools for that achievement.

Schools would do this by using a value-added methodology that converts the static achievement scores of their students to dynamic growth scores. If students currently performing below their AYP target are on track to reach proficiency by the time they graduate, they would be counted among those meeting their AYP target in the current year. If a school were to place enough of these students on growth-to-standards trajectories, it could meet its AYP goal for the year. Using a growth-to-standards approach, in other words, would reduce the proportion of schools failing AYP, but without abandoning the commitment to proficiency. Several existing approaches—Northwest Evaluation Association’s growth model, Harold Dow’s REACH model and William Sanders’s value-added model—could accomplish this.

This approach may be criticized for the same reason that the existing definition of AYP is criticized: it creates what many call a “perverse incentive” for educators to focus like a laser beam on one group of students to the exclusion of all others: those close to but below proficiency. Schools choose to ignore students far below proficiency as well as those whose scores already exceed proficiency, the argument goes, because the prime directive in NCLB is for schools to hit their annual AYP targets.

While this is clearly the logic of the incentive, we do not yet know if this is supported in fact. The growth-to-standards approach described above, like AYP might simply illuminate the patterns—the gains made by those who start just below proficiency are coming at the expense of those who start the year above it—rather than exacerbate it.

We know this pattern long pre-dates NCLB and has been widespread in poor communities, whether in inner-cities or Appalachia. It explains, for example, the observation made by elementary school teachers that the proportion of precocious students in kindergarten and first grade is sharply reduced by fifth and sixth grades. Faced with so many low-performing children, the explanation goes, teachers focus on the bottom of the student distribution so that previous low-achievers get high growth while previous high-achievers get low growth. Sustaining this focus in the early years explains why so few high-achieving, low-income children are found in middle school.

When Dr. Sanders applied his growth-to-standards approach to all Tennessee schools in the 2002-03 school year, he learned that 13 percent more schools would meet their federal goals if this alternative means of calculating AYP were accepted by the U.S. Department of Education. But when Sanders looked more closely at its effects—he examined nine Memphis schools all of whose students were minority and low-income (on free and reduced price lunch)—he discovered some troubling results. While some schools met their AYP through the growth-to-standards alternative without denying any of their students adequate yearly growth, others did so apparently at the expense of students who had achieved at higher levels in the past. Seeing no sense in a trade-off that benefits one group of poor minority kids at the expense of another, Sanders is now at work on a "net" approach: schools would receive credit for students placed on a growth-to-standards trajectory and debit for formerly higher-achieving students denied adequate growth in the process. The Federal Department of Education should encourage states currently using high quality value-added or growth models to conduct pilots over the next few years to determine the impact of a growth-to-standards approach on the measurement of school performance.

Conclusion  
It is essential that school reformers understand the limits of what can be done at the federal level so they can concentrate their efforts on the states. The essential focus of NCLB was on bringing up the bottom, itself a significant and long-neglected goal of social justice. It was not and, given political realties, could not have been about ensuring that the bar was raised sufficiently high so that in the future all students can graduate as well-educated citizens in an increasingly complex society and as productive workers in the highly competitive global economy of the 21st century.

The political compromises necessary to get NCLB passed left the height of the proficiency bar to the states. Comparing the results for students considered proficient in state tests with those from the National Assessment of Educational Progress makes clear that with a few notable exceptions state standards were set low to begin with. To meet their goals under the new federal law, some states are watering down their proficiency targets. Others have "back-loaded" the time when the highest percentage gains in student performance are to be made in the hope that NCLB will not exist in later years. Still others are sitting by passively allowing schools to subtly and not so subtly encourage their lowest performing students to drop out. And in face of the high failure rates, states are being allowed to adopt "confidence intervals," a statistical adjustment that further waters down their AYP requirements.

We need, therefore, to create incentives at the federal level to encourage the states to move in different and more desirable directions because it is at the state level that the school system of the 21st century will be created. We’ve argued that value-added assessment could serve as a powerful catalyst for change. Momentum for its use is building. Beyond Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, where the Sanders model has been adopted for statewide use, Arkansas, Minnesota, Colorado and Florida have passed legislation calling for the introduction of value-added models. These states have recognized value-added’s many advantages. It traces the academic progress of individual students rather than cohorts. It focuses on ensuring that all students, not simply the lowest performers, receive at least a year’s worth of growth in a year. It provides educators with rich diagnostics to improve instruction. And, if allowed, value-added would help schools legitimately meet their AYP goals without abandoning the new federal commitment that poor and minority children graduate from school having met proficiency standards.

But the real prize in having value-added assessment widely adopted is that as the basis for individual-level accountability, it serves as the foundation for the comprehensive reforms, like OPE’s, that will change the organization and governance of K-12 schools. Only then will we have in place the means to bring all American students to internationally competitive standards and help meet the nation’s human capital development challenge.
Many a Slip ‘tween Cup and Lip: District Fiscal Practices and Their Effect on School Spending

, Marguerite Roza, Ph.D.
Research Assistant Professor
The Center on Reinventing Public Education
Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington

Imagine an urban school district spending $2,900 more per pupil in one school than in another—generating an additional $800,000 for the school. One might speculate that the additional spending is driven by student needs, but in this real life example, it has nothing at all to do with the kids. The reality is that spending varies significantly from school to school within a district. And, while some spending variation among schools results from differing student needs, much more is driven by the antiquated, often haphazard, budgeting practices typical in large urban school districts.

How can district policymakers and parents allow such blatant spending differences to persist among their own schools? The bottom line is that they probably don’t know that they exist, as district budgeting and accounting practices make it incredibly difficult to determine exactly how much a district spends on any one school.

For the last five years, researchers at the Center on Reinventing Public Education have been digging deep into district spending, uncovering spending patterns in ten different districts. We began in the first district by asking what we thought was a simple question: How much does the district spend on each school it operates? Many districts later, we are now no longer surprised that this question is not easily answered. We are now accustomed to getting the answer to this question only by starting at the school level and building up the expenditures for each by tracing every dollar spent by districts.

The results of our work in several major urban districts are startling. They suggest that spending among schools varies substantially and often indiscriminately within districts, and that district leaders are largely unaware of where their dollars are going. And while this state of affairs lay hidden for years, more than ever, there is now very good reason to take a look beneath the school district lid.

Here’s how it works
It is not easy to trace most dollars appropriated to students. Outsized district financial practices focus more on programs and line items, than on schools or kids. If you ask a district leader how money is spent, they will likely show you a thick board-approved budget that details spending by items (e.g., teacher full-time equivalents or FTEs, supplies, and administration) and by programs or departments (e.g., elementary education, professional development, student services, and bilingual education). But reams of such data tell us nothing about how much is spent on any one school versus another.

Our research highlights three ways in which district budgeting practice shapes the distribution of resources to individual schools—often to the disadvantage of the neediest students.

1. School budgets yield only a partial and blurry view of school spending differences

Districts that create individual school budgets (not all do) are taking steps toward track-
ing a portion of their spending by school. In most cases, a staff-based formula is used to allocate full-time staff based on increments of student enrollment (e.g., a teacher for every 25 students and a vice principal when enrollment exceeds 400). Districts then allocate additional staff on a case-by-case basis, such as a music teacher for a specific magnet school or a bilingual education teacher for schools with higher concentrations of non-English speaking students. The district then totals up the number of full-time equivalent staff positions and converts them into dollars using district-wide average salaries for each type of staff.

Per-pupil spending disparities appear when fixed staff allocations are divided among different enrollments, but even more significant disparities are created because of line-item staff additions. Sometimes the staff allocations make sense because they address the particular needs of a school’s student population. Other times, the disparities are simply by-products of political influence, or history (“we’ve always had an extra librarian”), and/or the special interests of central department leaders. In many cases, the non-formulaic allocations add up to create some pretty significant spending differences for some schools. Extra staff allocations for a Montessori focus in one school amounted to a 74 percent increase in spending over the district average.

With staff-based allocations, year-to-year adjustments are made in terms of cutting staff or programs (not dollars), which incites near rebellion at the local level. In one district, when budget cuts threatened to eliminate a non-formulaic music teacher, students playing instruments turned out en masse to school board meetings until the idea was abandoned. Staff positions, whether justified or not, become sacred and untouchable. Those principals that know how to work the system can often rake in the lion’s share of these non-formulaic allocations. In Denver, without exception, the newest schools with no history working the system receive less per pupil than the rest of the district’s schools.

2. Using salary averages, instead of true labor costs, buries real spending differences in ways that hurt poor children

Further problems are created by the near universal practice of salary averaging—accounting for labor costs by using the average district salary for each school staff position rather than the real salary earned by individual employees. Relying on average salaries can greatly inflate, or deflate, the actual expenditures at any given school. As a result, two schools may appear to have the same per pupil budgets while, in reality, the district spends significantly more at the school with more experienced (and higher paid) teachers. As a 2002 analysis of Baltimore City showed, teachers at one high-poverty school were paid an average of $37,618 as compared to over $70,000 at another school in the same district.

Spending differences from school to school, after we adjust for salary averaging, are not random. As has been widely documented, teacher preferences dictate assignment in ways such that the greenest teachers generally serve in the most struggling schools, and thus the real spending on a teacher in a high-poverty school is less than on the district’s average teacher. By choosing to use only average salaries in district budgeting practices, these spending differences that shortchange high-poverty schools fly well below the radar.

3. Uneven central spending is undocumented at the school level

Central budgets reflect spending not represented in school budgets, amounting to 40-60 percent of a district’s total operating expenditures. While some of this spending does not directly affect students (e.g., debt financing, Office of the General Counsel, and Human Resources), other spending represents supplemental funds and/or services that schools receive above and beyond those reported in the school budgets. In many cases, central spending ends up benefiting select schools more than others (e.g., special program staff, focused professional development, roaming specialists, truancy programs, etc.). In Denver, central spending increased the overall resources available to district schools by nearly one third.

Central spending drives significant variation in school level resources and yet districts have little means for assessing (or even coordinating) the distribution of these resources. Much of central spending is carved up and overseen by numerous departmental staff who create their own unique rules for distribution of their resources. For example, central budgets might fund a special art appreciation program in three schools, planetarium field trips for two schools, specialists instructed to respond to school requests, roaming therapists that can choose where to spend their day, matching funds for elective teacher education costs, and so on and so on. Allocation of central budgets is anything but strategic. In our research, the allocation of centrally-controlled resources drove more inequality in school spending than school budget staffing formulas or the use of average-price accounting.

Adding it up, the impact of spending differences within districts is alarming

Together, these three budgeting practices can lead to significant differences in spending from one school to the next. And, most district leaders simply don’t have a clear sense of the magnitude of the total differences in spending across schools.

In district after district, my research team has found multiple examples where one school received less than half the resources of another with similar students. In one case, we found a school that received over three times the per-pupil expenditures of another in the same district, even after taking into account the added spending for students with special needs. What’s more, we’ve found many cases where expenditures for students with special needs essentially offset deficiencies in base funding, and thus did little to augment the total spending levels for students with special needs. How is it possible that local leaders and constituents accept such erratic spending patterns? The most important answer is that they don’t know about real spending patterns and in many cases are wrong about what kinds of schools are getting the most money. In one district we studied, the school board was determined to increase funding for middle schools, which it thought received less money than other schools; as we discovered, middle schools were already receiving more money per pupil than elementary and high schools but the district didn’t know it. Another district proposed to close its small schools thinking they were more expensive per pupil, but in fact some of its small schools were operating at lower than average cost.

With no systematic accounting mechanisms that allow for comparing apples to apples, surface real spending differences is no simple task. Reporters recently accessed spending data from Chicago Public Schools for a story on how spending compared in predominantly African American schools to that in predominantly Hispanic schools. District leaders responded that such spending comparisons simply were not possible. District spending figures combined costs for preschool, special education, and vocational education services, making any spending comparisons across schools with existing financial data invalid. The bottom line is that most district leaders simply don’t have a clear sense of the magnitude of the total differences in spending across schools.

One thing is clear: The amount spent on any one type of child—say a non-English speaking student—varies tremendously within a district depending on what school the child attends. Unlike the variations in spending across districts, these variations within districts have nothing to do with access to resources. The spending differences among schools within a district have to do with staffing patterns, choices about where particular programs are placed, special staff assignments, and other oddities of allocation practices.
Fiscal practices undermine district efforts to manage money.

These fiscal practices do more than just hinder our understanding of how districts spend money. Clear spending information is critical for both financial stability and efforts to spend money strategically. With some 200,000 line items and floating averages used in place of real costs, it is no surprise that district leaders struggle to keep track of spending. Plugging the budget and reliance on false averages is exactly what led Seattle’s former chief to trouble, driving a roughly $30 million deficit that district leaders didn’t see coming. In that same year, superintendents in Baltimore and Oakland were also ousted because of unsuspected deficits in the tens of millions.

And without good spending data, most district leaders must make difficult decisions about where to place, or eliminate, programs without any insight into how these decisions impact the relative spending at any one school as compared to another. In one district, a recent decision to eliminate a $300,000 program benefiting Latino students was made without recognition that the schools benefiting from the program were already shortchanged over $400,000 each year because of salary averaging.

The existing fiscal practices are not only difficult to manage, they reward political influence, and fuel distrust for district leaders. In a system that lacks transparency, the subunits (in this case school leaders) assume that the squeaky wheel gets the grease and as a result, squeal a lot. Teacher unions assume district leaders are hiding pots of cash and, consequently, contract negotiations start out hostile. As constituents distrust district-level spending decisions, voter approved levies come with increasingly prescriptive instructions for how levy money can be used; and the education beat stays on the lookout for spending scandals. The distrust creates an adversarial environment for district leadership, further complicating an already near impossible job.

District spending practices thwart policy efforts to improve education.

For years, policy makers at the state and federal levels have attempted to do their part in addressing achievement with designated funding for high-needs students, accountability requirements, and incentives for new school models. Yet, these types of policy efforts are undoubtedly hindered by school districts’ fiscal practices.

In the case of categorical aid, billions of dollars are spent by states and the federal government to help districts educate high-needs students. But, because of district budgeting practices, the potential impact of programs like that established by federal Title I legislation are not fully realized. Title I requires that comparable services for high-poverty kids exist before Title I funding can be accessed so that this money will serve to augment spending on high-poverty students. However, Title I allows districts to use average salaries in determining whether spending has been comparable among high- and low-poverty schools. Further, districts fail to account for central spending and their impact on high-poverty schools. With current budgeting practices in play, how can Title I comparability be measured with any degree of confidence? We can be sure that in many cases, Title I funds flow to schools being shortchanged by their own districts.

In the case of accountability legislation that holds schools accountable for student performance; without a doubt, success hinges upon equitable allocation of resources. Yet, as we have seen, district budgeting practices do little to ensure that schools have access to similar resource levels and mask the resources that they actually receive. Current budgeting practices that yield drastic spending differences among schools certainly undermine efforts to hold all schools to the same standards.

In recent years, we’ve also seen efforts to encourage new options for schooling—another effort that requires spending data at the level of the school. In order for new schooling options to be viable, policy makers must have confidence that they receive the same funds as spent on existing public schools. Similarly, there is no way for policy makers to assess the cost effectiveness of new schooling models without accurate cost estimates. And on a practical level, districts with school choice will need some mechanism by which public funds can be transferred as students transfer from one school option to the next within a district.

The challenge: improved budgeting policies through spending transparency.

Especially in today’s policy environment, a clear case can be made for gaining transparency into district spending. The good news is that change is taking place in some districts, so new models do exist. New formulas and online tools are being developed to help districts take stock of their spending which a few districts are electing to do. New accounting methods help districts adapt their old systems with minimal changes to yield accurate spending data by school. And some districts are even adopting new methods for allocating resources to schools. School districts in Houston and Cincinnati, for example, have implemented "student based budgeting" (or "weighted student funding")—spending to fund students rather than school staff positions. By identifying different spending increments for a regular education student versus a bilingual student, a gifted student, etc., districts are able to allocate money to schools based on their specific student population. Oakland has gone a step further and is now experimenting with using real salaries in its school allocations.

Changing the way a district allocates resources is not easy, as it generally means some schools will lose out in the transition. Yet, in this case, change is needed. As more states expand fiscal data collection to the school level (currently less than half the states collect any fiscal data down to the level of the school) and policy makers close loopholes in categorical funding requirements for comparability, we can anticipate that districts will reshape their fiscal policies. And as they do, we can expect less "slip" between a district’s total resources and what gets spent on any one school.

1. For instance, a principal in a school of 200 costs more per pupil than the same principal overseeing 300 students. In addition, inequities are created when a school’s enrollment is on the cusp of a range, say 390 versus 400 when a position like a vice principal is allocated only for enrollments of 400 or greater.
2. "Plugging the budget" is a practice Seattle used to fill existing holes in the budget by inflating projections of future revenues.
3. School Communities That Work, an initiative of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, has an online tool, entitled Assessing Patterns of Resource Distribution, that allows school spending variations taking into account the differing needs of students. This tool is available at http://www.schoolcommunities.org/resources/APRD/weformce.php.
Standards-Based Reform and Resource Equity: Fulfilling the Promise of Educational Opportunity for All Our Children

Michael A. Rebell, L.L.B
Executive Director, Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc.
Adjunct Professor of Law, Columbia University

Standards-based education reform, which has been adopted by 49 of the 50 states, combined with state court mandates to provide all students the opportunity for an adequate education—issued so far in almost half of the states—give promise of actually achieving meaningful educational opportunity to all students nationwide within the next decade. The federal No Child Left Behind Act, which seeks a similar goal, has not, however, sufficiently recognized and supported these efforts. Unless current state and federal policy are effectively coordinated, the unique historical opportunity to both raise educational standards and actually achieve the vision of Brown v. Board of Education will be lost.

It is now more than 50 years since the United States Supreme Court held in its famous decision in Brown v. Board of Education that each state, in providing the opportunity for education, must make it available “to all on equal terms.” Unfortunately, Brown’s vision of equal educational opportunity is still far from being realized today. Despite some narrowing of the achievement gap in the 1970s and 80s, the typical African-American “still scores below 75% of American whites on most standardized tests” (Jencks and Phillips, 1998, p.1). The reasons for this achievement gap are clear: despite their greater educational needs, African-American and Latino public school students—over 70% of whom attend predominantly minority schools (Orfield, 2001, p. 32; Orfield, 1999, pp. 39-41)—are educated in schools that receive less funding and have fewer qualified teachers, larger classes, and inferior facilities than schools attended by more affluent white students (CFE v. State, 2003; Council of the Great City Schools, 2001; Hoke County Bd. of Educ. v. State of North Carolina, 2004).

In recent years, important new state and federal education policy initiatives have sought to eliminate this achievement gap, and constitutional rulings from dozens of state courts have significantly bolstered these efforts. Forty-nine of the 50 states have adopted thorough-going standards-based reforms that aim to simultaneously enhance the quality of public education and ensure meaningful opportunities for poor and minority students. Since 1989, the courts in 21 different states—with cases currently pending in six additional jurisdictions—have ordered states to revise their education funding systems to ensure that all students are, in fact, provided the resources they need to meet the challenging new state standards. The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is complementing these efforts by establishing as a prime national policy that all students throughout the United States will meet their state’s educational standards by 2014 and by imposing a broad range of accountability requirements to spur the states to ensure that they do.

This joint federal/state/judicial endeavor to
raise educational standards and ensure mean-
ingful opportunities for all students to meet them is the most profound and extensive edu-
cation reform in modern American history. It re-
resents a rare coalescing of liberal and con-
servative reform initiatives, and an unprece-
dented coordinated collegy between legisla-
tures and state courts. If federal, state, and judi-
cial policies can progress in tandem to meet their common goal, Brown's vision of equal edu-
cational opportunity can actually be realized within the next decade. There are, however, indications that federal, state, and judicial ini-
tiatives are beginning to operate at cross-pur-
poses, and if these trends continue, the unique historic chance to provide millions of poor and minority students a meaningful educational op-
portunity—and to better prepare all of our students to compete in the global economy and to function productively as citizens in a democ-
ratic society—will have been lost.

I. Standards-Based Reform

In the mid-1980s a slew of commission reports warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in American education that was undermining the nation's ability to compete in the global economy. These concerns culminated in the 1989 National Education Summit, convened by President George H. W. Bush and attended by all 50 of the nation's governors and a cadre of major corporate CEOs, where a new education-

This ruling precluded the possibility of obtain-
ing fiscal equity relief from the federal courts.

Surprisingly, however, the state courts, which historically had not been innovators in consti-
tutional civil rights issues, have become the prime constitutional innovators in this area. Shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in Rodriguez, the California Supreme Court held that even if education was not a funda-
mental right under the federal constitution, it clearly was so under the California constitu-
tion (Serrano v. Priest, 1976). Soon thereafter, courts in half a dozen other states also declared their state education finance systems unconsti-
tutional under their state constitutions.

At the remedy stage, however, the practical problems of untangling the complexities of local property tax systems and surrounding leg-
islative machinations to preserve the status quo tended to strain judicial capabilities. Difficulties in actually achieving fiscal equity in the initial cases, therefore, seem to have dissuaded other state courts from venturing down this path (Rebell, 2002). Despite an initial flurry of pro-

II. Education Adequacy Litigations

The enormous inequities and inadequacies in the financing of public education that have stymied attempts to provide educational opportu-

nities to poor and minority students in most states were classically illustrated by Rodríguez v. San Antonio Independent School District, a case decided by the United States Supreme Court in 1973. The Rodríguez plaintiffs lived in Edgewood, a district in the San Antonio, Texas metropolitan area whose students were approxi-
mately 90% Mexican-American and 6% African-American. The district's average assessed property value per student was so low that even with a relatively high local tax rate and supplemental state and federal education funding, the district had insufficient funds to support an ordinary array of educational pro-
grams. By way of contrast, neighboring Alamo Heights, which was a predominantly "Anglo" school district, had such high property wealth that it could tax itself at a rate 20% below that of its poorer neighbor and still generate twice the funding per student than its poorer neigh-
boring district.

The Supreme Court agreed that Texas' school finance system was inequitable, but, neverthe-
less, it denied the plaintiffs' claim, primarily because it held that education is not a "funda-
mental interest" under the federal constitution.1

cases where the courts have found the funding systems violate the state constitutions. Instead of focusing on the intricacies of mill rates and property tax reforms, the Courts need only insist that the states properly implement the standards they themselves have adopted and ensure that sufficient funds are available in all districts to provide all students a genuine opportunity to meet the standards (Rebell, 2002).

The new wave of school funding litigations is based on provisions in state constitutions that guarantee all students some level of "adequate education," rather than on state equal protec-
tion clauses. State standards have provided courts the concepts and content to interpret and apply these constitutional clauses—most of which were written more than a century ago— to relate to twenty-first century needs. Adequacy also tends to invoke less political resistance than the earlier "equity" approach because rather than raising fears of "levying down" educational opportunities currently available to affluent students, it offers the promise of "levying up" academic expectations for all other students.

III. The Federal NCLB Act

Congress' sweeping reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, under the title of the No Child Left Behind Act, heralded a vastly expanded federal role in K-12 education. Under NCLB, states must: establish "challenging academic content standards" that define an adequate education for all students in the state; create annual standard-
dized tests in literacy, mathematics and sci-
ence that are aligned with the standards; report the results of performance on these tests and other valid indicators for individual schools and for all relevant ethnic and socioeconomic sub-
populations within those schools; set goals for adequate yearly progress (AYP); and ensure that students in all the relevant sub-populations can be expected to meet the state standard of profi-
ciency by 2014; ensure that schools hire only "highly qualified teachers;" and provide techni-
cal assistance or intervene in schools that have
persistently failed to meet their AYP goals.

Schools that fail to meet AYP must develop corrective action plans. If a school fails to meet its AYP goals for at least three of the preceding four years, it must permit low-income students to use their federal funds for supplemental education at private providers chosen by the students and their parents. Students in schools that fail to make AYP for two consecutive years may transfer to a different public school of their choice located in the same school district, with transportation provided by the district. Schools that fail to meet their annual improvement goals for five years must be closed or completely reconstituted. The Act also contains extensive provisions for notifying parents and the public of the school's progress and for parental involvement in improvement planning processes.

IV. Problem Issues

A. Integrity of the Standards

Responding to the call from the national education summits for challenging educational standards, most states have, in fact, adopted relatively rigorous academic content standards. Court rulings or some aspects of NCLB could, however, cause the states to water down these standards and undermine the integrity of the entire standards-based reform process.

Although there was some concern early on that courts would define "adequacy" for constitutional purposes in minimalist terms, the state courts have tended to endorse meaningful and challenging educational standards. Thus, the Supreme Court of Kentucky articulated a definition of a constitutionally adequate education (that has also been adopted by six other state courts), which emphasizes, among other things, providing all students sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable them to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; sufficient knowledge of economic, social and political systems to enable students to make informed choices; and sufficient levels of academic or vocational skills to enable public school graduates to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market (Rowe v. Council for Better Education, 1989). In New York, although an intermediate appeals court had held that the state constitution required the state to equip students with 8th to 9th grade level skills the state's highest court reversed and held that students must be provided with a "meaningful high school education" that will equip them to function as capable and productive civic participants (CPF v. State, 2005).

A greater challenge to the integrity of state standards is, ironically, posed by NCLB. Its strict accountability requirements are geared to the standards in effect in each of the states, but the Act provides no substantive national benchmarks for these standards. Similarly, although the Act mandates that a "highly qualified teacher" must be in every classroom by 2006, the qualifications are essentially defined by state certification standards, with no meaningful federal oversight of the state certification requirements. Moreover, because of its heavy sanctions and unrealistic assumptions about how much academic progress children can reasonably make in a year, NCLB's AYP mandates actually provide a strong perverse incentive for states to lower their academic standards (Ryan, 2004).

B. Consistency of Accountability Requirements

Plaintiffs' victories in the fiscal equity and education adequacy cases have led to both a narrowing of the intra-state spending disparities among school districts and substantial increases in student test scores in formerly underfunded schools. Although a precise determination as to whether increases in expenditures or better management of existing resources were needed to improve student achievement dominated the early litigations, the courts and the econometric literature have now essentially converged to agree that both additional funds and accountability are necessary to provide meaningful opportunities for all students to meet challenging state standards. Accordingly, the recent cases call for increases in expenditures, reform of state funding formulas, and enhancements to state accountability systems (See, e.g., CPF v. State of New York, 2003; Hancock v. Driscoll, 2004).

In New York, following a model originated in Maryland, the linchpin of the recommended accountability reform is a mandate that school districts develop comprehensive multi-year plans which explain in detail how school funds will be spent to meet the specific goals of improving public education and eliminating the achievement gap. These plans must also contain specific benchmarks and output measures and are subject to annual review and modification, with substantial public input. In Massachusetts, the Court's specific focus is on the need to build the capacity of low-performing schools and districts to meet the state standards and the state education department's capacity to assist in this endeavor.

NCLB's stringent accountability requirements, modeled in part after the accountability system Texas adopted in response to its funding reform litigation, does not fit well with the accountability concepts that have emerged in the recent cases and in the education policy literature. For example, comprehensive planning and public input put a premium on community commitment to improve local schools; NCLB transfer provisions and requirements for supplemental services to be provided by outside vendors tend to undermine these processes. Moreover, NCLB testing requirements, which only apply to certain grades and certain subject areas, weaken state efforts to enforce standards in other areas and in areas that cannot be fully assessed through standardized testing.

In short, NCLB's emphasis on accountability is important, but it needs to be applied in a manner that will encourage states and state courts to continue to develop accountability mechanisms that meet their particular requirements and will actually lead to attainment of the Act's ambitious goals.

C. Adequate Resources

The education adequacy litigations have bolstered the standards-based reform movement by insisting that sufficient resources are provided to ensure that all students are actually provided a meaningful opportunity to meet state standards. Costing-out studies, which use a variety of professional methodologies to determine the level of funding that is needed for these purposes, have been conducted in about 25 states in recent years. These studies provide the kind of empirical data that have been missing in legislative decision making to determine education funding in most states. These methodologies can be further improved by using them more directly to state standards, education research, and specific accountability concepts. A major problem, of course, is that not all states have undertaken such cost studies and not all states are currently providing adequate levels of funding to fairly implement their own standards. This is an area in which NCLB requirements could be particularly helpful. Ironically, however, the Act is totally silent on this critical issue. There is an implicit assumption in NCLB that stringent demands for better performance from all schools will necessarily result in higher achievement. But the adequacy litigations have clearly shown that schools in poor areas with inexperienced teachers, large classes, inadequate facilities, and other resource deficiencies simply lack the capacity to help their students meet state standards.

Ensuring that adequate resources are available to provide all students a meaningful opportunity to meet state standards is absolutely necessary if the ambitious goals of NCLB are to be achieved. This does not mean, of course, that federal funding must be dramatically increased to meet all of these needs. It does mean, however, that NCLB should be amended to focus on the resource issue. Such a focus could mean including specific mechanisms, like state-level or national costing-out studies that would provide realistic cost data that would allow for serious analysis and discussion of how much states should be spending to provide all of their students an adequate education. The appropriate level of federal contributions to this effort could then be considered from an informed perspective.
References


1 The Court left open the possibility, however, that a future case showing students were not receiving the "quantum of education" they need to acquire the basic skills necessary for the enjoyment of the rights of speech and of full participation in the political process might establish a valid federal claim under the First Amendment. 411 U.S. 1, 24, 94-47 (1973).

Systemic K-16 Educational Reform:

The El Paso Story

Diana Natalicio, Ph.D.
President
The University of Texas at El Paso

The Context

The University of Texas at El Paso celebrates this year the 90th anniversary of its establishment in 1914 as the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy, whose mission was to serve as a source of geologists and engineers for the mining industry in the southwestern U.S. and in Mexico. This regional mission has been sustained and expanded during the past 90 years, as El Paso-Juarez has grown into a binational metropolitan area—a "borderplex"—of more than two million people.

Today, UTEP is a Doctoral Research Intensive University enrolling 19,000 students in 81 bachelor's, 74 master's, and 12 doctoral programs in Engineering, Science, Liberal Arts, Education, Business, and Health Sciences. Slightly more than 80% of UTEP's students are from El Paso County, and another 10% come from Mexico. Most of the Mexican students commute to the campus by crossing the international bridge that links the two cities. Enlightened state policy that recognized the economic interdependency of this binational region permits Mexican students to pay Texas resident tuition at UTEP, if they can demonstrate financial need. As a result, UTEP enrolls the largest concentration of Mexicans at any U.S. university, some 15% of the total number studying in the U.S. (~10,000).

Of the 80% of UTEP's students who are from El Paso County, more than 70% are Mexican-American and more than half are the first in their families to attend college. More than 80% receive financial aid, and nearly all are employed while attending the university. UTEP ranks second among all universities nationally in the number of bachelor's degrees awarded annually to Hispanics, and first in Engineering.

As the only major university in far west Texas, UTEP represents the primary higher education opportunity for a fast-growing and severely under-educated region. Hispanics represent the fastest growing segment of the Texas and U.S. populations, and they are also the least well educated. El Paso is at the forefront of attempts to deal with these divergent and potentially disruptive demographic trends, and UTEP has increasingly sought to play a major role in identifying ways in which higher education can respond more effectively to the human and economic development challenges that they present.

The Challenge

During the 1970s and 1980s, UTEP's Latino enrollment began to grow, slowly but steadily, as the population of the region became increasingly Hispanic. However, the enrollment demographics did not come close to reflecting the population of the region from which it drew more than 80% of its students. There were a number of reasons for this disparity, all of which appeared, directly or indirectly, to be the result of low expectations, and the resulting low achievement, of Latino students. Students, par-
ents, teachers, counselors, university personnel and civic leaders expected few Hispanic students to aspire to, or to be qualified for, post-secondary education. An examination of enrollment patterns at UTEP from area high schools during the 1980s revealed that the more affluent and Anglo high schools were well represented while the lower income and majority-Hispanic high schools provided a disproportionately small number of entering students at UTEP. It wasn't until 1986 that Hispanics represented more than 50% of UTEP's total student population, at a time when the County's total school-age population was well above 70% Hispanic.

With a shrinking Anglo population in the region and under-representation of Hispanics among high school graduates and UTEP's student body, UTEP faced an uncertain future. In addition, UTEP faculty had begun to articulate dissatisfaction with the quality of entering students, and proposals for improvement primarily involved raising the SAT minimum for admission. There was also lively dialogue about how UTEP might seek to recruit students from other parts of the U.S., apparently based on an assumption that the region from which the university had traditionally drawn nearly all of its students was incapable of supplying the number or quality of undergraduates to sustain the university's current level of activity, much less continue its growth and development.

El Paso's business community appeared ready to accept as its destiny a low-wage, low-skill economic model. Once the largest and most economically viable metropolitan area in the southwestern U.S., El Paso stood on the sidelines while Phoenix, Denver, Albuquerque and Tucson continued to grow and develop. El Paso appeared well on its way toward becoming another marginalized "border town."

El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence

In the late 1980s, UTEP initiated a strategic planning process, which began with an in-depth and sometimes painful analysis of what kind of institution we were and whom we served. We examined such slogans as "Harvard on the Border" to understand that they were more sad than funny, reflecting a longing to be something that we shouldn't want to be. We specifically examined the failure of many of the proposals advanced at the time to help UTEP address the rapidly changing demographic challenges it faced, and came to understand the university's traditional role as the primary higher education resource for the surrounding area. We recognized that it was critical to reaffirm the institution's mission and to develop strategies to serve the new population of the region. In other words, we concluded that as a publicly supported institution founded to serve the far west Texas region, we had a responsibility to play the cards that we were dealt, rather than wish for a better hand.

Among the many goals that were articulated at that time, high priority was given to: increase the number of Latino high school graduates; raise aspirations of Latino students to pursue post-secondary education; prepare high school graduates for success in post-secondary education; and change the demographic mix of UTEP's student population to better reflect the region's population.

An analysis of UTEP's role in providing higher education opportunities for this fast-growing metropolitan area revealed the extent of the interdependencies between UTEP and all of the other educational institutions in the region: 80% of UTEP's students were products of El Paso County schools, and 60% of the teachers in the schools from which these students were drawn had received degrees from UTEP. This "closed loop" among all educational institutions in the region underscored the importance of working together, rather than assigning each other blame for the region's low educational attainment. And we concluded that if UTEP faculty were dissatisfied with the quality of entering students, they should begin to reach out to help strengthen the pre-college preparation provided by the school districts from which most of these students graduated, and involve themselves more actively in preparing future teachers for the next generations of UTEP students.

By 1991, we had expanded our analysis to include data on pre-college students' standardized test scores, high school course enrollments and pass rates, and high school drop-out rates, and discovered a pattern of unacceptably low levels of educational attainment. We also learned that although all students could perform better, there was a major achievement gap between ethnic-minority and poor students and that of their Anglo and more affluent counterparts. Given the rapidly changing demographics of the region, a continuation of these achievement patterns would inevitably accelerate El Paso's self-destructive downward spiral.

Although there were many special programs that sought to bridge the achievement gap that was identified, they were often small, of short duration, and isolated. What was needed was a systemic approach to educational reform, drawing together business, civic and education leaders in a joint effort to bring about fundamental and systemic improvement in the educational attainment of all children in our community.

To that end, a group of community leaders formed the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence. Among them were the superintendent of the local school districts in the County, which enrolled more than 135,000 students; the presidents of the El Paso Community College and the University of Texas at El Paso; the mayor; the county judge; the executive director of the Texas Education Agency's regional service center in El Paso; the lead organizer of a grass-roots organization affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation; and the presidents of the Greater El Paso and El Paso Hispanic chambers of commerce.

The Collaborative set forth an agenda that emphasized four priorities:

- Implementation of a high-quality standards-based curriculum and instruction program for all students, coupled with professional development to enable all school professions to implement it;
- Preparation of the best teachers possible, who are equipped to implement standards-based learning;
- Leadership committed to high achievement in school districts as well as in the community college and university;
- Engagement of the broad community to foster understanding and ensure support of the educational renewal efforts.

For nearly 15 years, the Collaborative has worked steadily to implement this ambitious agenda. During this time, many of the individual faces have changed, but the commitment has not wavered. Major sponsors such as the National Science Foundation's Urban Systemic Initiative and Math/Science Partnership programs have made key investments in the Collaborative's work. The NSF funding, and that of major foundations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie, have not only provided direct support, but also served as a catalyst to stimulate the investment and re-direction of local funds. We could not have accomplished what we have without these partners.

UTEP has been an active participant in the Collaborative's work. I have served as chair of the Collaborative board since its inception and remain fully engaged in its work. The provost, deans and faculty members in the colleges of Science, Engineering, Liberal Arts and Education have made many strong commitments to the Collaborative's agenda. We have undertaken institutional culture change. Instead of waiting for a few talented El Paso area students to find their way to enroll at UTEP, the university has been a major presence in the community and particularly in area schools, partnering with our colleagues in the school districts and community college to provide a seamless pathway toward high educational attainment.

UTEP has a particularly important role to play in the preparation of teachers. As the primary supplier of teachers for school districts throughout this region, UTEP must be committed to graduate more and better prepared teachers. At UTEP, teacher education is not the exclusive...
puview of the College of Education. All colleges take responsibility for ensuring that our graduates are as well prepared as possible, because faculty members understand that the teachers we prepare today will, in turn, play a major role in ensuring the quality of UTEP students in the years ahead. More importantly, they recognize that the future of this region and its quality of life will be shaped by the teachers we prepare. UTEP is honored that these efforts to improve teacher preparation were recognized with an invitation to participate in the Carnegie Corporation’s “Teachers for a New Era (TNE)” program, which we anticipate will enable us to contribute even more effectively to the success of systemic educational reform in El Paso.

Outcomes and Continuing Challenges

The most visible signs of the success of the Collaborative’s work have been in the area of student achievement gains. Texas statewide standardized test scores have risen for all El Paso area students, and the gap between Latino and Anglo students’ performances has narrowed considerably. Equally dramatic have been improvements in college preparatory course enrollments, especially in math and science, and high school graduation rates. In fact, despite its apparently challenging demographics, El Paso now ranks first among all major metropolitan areas in Texas in Hispanic high school graduation rates. Although we are very proud of these gains, we also recognize that there are still too many under-achievers and drop-outs, and we know that continuing to raise the level of pre-college achievement remains a work in progress.

In the area of teacher preparation, UTEP now graduates more and better prepared teachers. The number of students earning initial teacher certification at UTEP has increased from 378 in 2000 to 719 in 2004, and performance of these new teachers on the state certification exam has improved dramatically during the past several years. Special emphasis has been placed on producing teachers in areas of high demand such as mathematics, science, and bilingual education. Once again, however, although we can be proud of the growth in the production of new teachers, we continue to be challenged by an accelerating demand for area school districts for even more teachers, as they experience the same early attrition from the profession that is occurring elsewhere in the U.S. Consequently, one of the priorities in UTEP’s TNE program is to strengthen support for new teachers during the critical first—"induction"—year.

Perhaps the most important outcome of our work, however, has been a change in attitudes throughout the El Paso community about the critical role that educational attainment must play in this region’s future development. Parents, educators, civic and business leaders all understand that El Paso’s fast-growing Hispanic population is not a potential liability, but rather our greatest asset...if we ensure that all young people in this community, whatever their ethnicity or socioeconomic status, aspire to and achieve high academic standards. They understand that by raising the bar on educational aspirations and achievement, we can also set our collective sights higher for the kind of community that we want to be. We are no longer satisfied to market ourselves as a low-wage, low-skill economy, and are well on our way toward expecting, even demanding, far more of—and for—ourselves.

*This report and the work of the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence would not have been possible without the commitment and leadership of Dr. Susana Navaarro, Executive Director. Her contributions to this report are gratefully acknowledged.

Top-Down to Team Work:
Unraveling the Resistance to Reform

Dal Lawrence, M.A.
Past President, Toledo Federation of Teachers

Reform of public school education, with the goal of improving student achievement, will not be successful until we critically examine the roles of adults in our schools. Traditional methods of top-down teacher evaluation do not provide the incentives for improvement that peer review methods can produce. Toledo Public Schools are the highest rated urban district in Ohio. It is no coincidence that the Toledo district has operated a teacher peer review program for over 20 years.

Our nation’s public schools are as familiar as family. Most of us have spent enough time in school to assume we know intimately how our public education system works. That familiarity in part explains why school reform is so elusive. No wonder our assumptions about schools are so rarely challenged. Efforts to fix schools often fail, not because of what we don’t know, but because of what we do know, even if what we know doesn’t always work.

There are several key questions that are seldom asked about schools and the people who work in them. Can we improve student results by ignoring the relationships among adults in schools? In what other occupation is success and recognition gained by never having to again do the essential work? Is it enough to introduce new materials and teaching strategies to an ever-changing work force? How do we change a top-down governance model to one that features collaboration and teamwork focused on student achievement?

Highly complex work is normally performed by workers who are valued. Teaching is complex work, yet nearly half of all new teachers leave the occupation within five years. If one looks even casually, one can see that the school workplace needs a makeover. If we continue to run schools like American automobile plants in the 1950s, is it any wonder that many frustrated policymakers suggest that competition will produce better students, or schools?

It is my contention that until we challenge the way schools are run by rearranging roles and responsibilities of teachers and managers, most reform efforts will continue to be marginal at best. I know many will disagree, but I suggest that those who do are the ones most comfortable, or familiar, with existing adult relationships in schools.

This paper is about an initiative we put in place twenty-four years ago that changed teacher and principal roles and responsibilities and produced more effective student results. It is aimed at the very heart of teacher effectiveness. It gets results. Teachers train and evaluate teachers using standards of practice created by teachers. Principals do not evaluate. It’s called the Toledo Plan.

We started by asking questions that are basic to restructuring the school workplace. What do teachers really want? And how does one go about building a profession with high stan-
It should be obvious that without teacher ownership there will be no buy-in to standards. The isolated world in which teachers perform fits nicely with the top-down model of school governance. When Ms. Wright has problems down the hall, it's always the principal's responsibility. Contrast that to medicine or other professions where a sense of concern for competence exists within an entire professional community.

By transferring responsibility for instructional competence to teachers, The Toledo Plan has created a professional model where all teachers have an interest in teaching success. That is a mighty blow at teacher isolation and its fragmented sense of responsibility for excellent work that dominates our schools today.

The design of the Toledo Plan is not complicated. We reduce exemplary "consulting" teachers for three years to mentor and evaluate, on average, ten teachers newly hired in the district. The consultant's work is governed by a joint nine-member union-management board called the PAR panel (for peer assistance and review). Each consultant reports on each intern's evaluation after each semester of the new teacher's first year in the district. The consultant can accept or reject the consultant's recommendation about continuing employment for each one. The Toledo Plan also addresses veteran teachers experiencing serious classroom performance problems. Recommendations for "intervention" are forwarded to the union-management review panel. A consulting teacher will then be assigned to assist the veteran teacher in his or her effort to meet the performance criteria—standards that apply to all teachers, veterans and novices alike. Are principals completely cut out of the process? Absolutely not in our model principals do retain evaluation responsibilities for second-year teachers although they have had to recommend non-renewal of contracts only four times over the twenty-four years. Most teachers are not formally evaluated at all after the second year.

In the twenty-three completed academic years of the program's existence, over 400 teachers have failed to meet basic standards and were dismissed; fifty-nine were veteran teachers.

Despite these terminations the Toledo Plan consistently has won 9-1 support in polling that the union conducts every three years. That consensus could only exist where there is a communal sense of responsibility for overall competence and pride in seeing it accomplished.

Does it work? Ohio has a school district grading system composed of five levels heavily dependent on student scores for state-required proficiency tests. Without exception, ranking closely corresponds to socioeconomic data. Among the state's eight urban districts, Toledo is the only one rated third. The others are at the bottom or one level above, and each one evaluates teachers annually.

Our teacher retention has improved, and individual schools lagging behind comparable schools based on economic factors receive help from teams of teachers, not supervisors or administrators. There is buy-in and pride attached to student success. Teachers and their union see responsibility for competent practice and student results as the work of teachers and their union.

Was it easy? Not at all. It took nine years (from 1972) to convince school management that traditional principal evaluations were counterproductive and ineffective. It was an attorney, another professional, who recognized the outlines of an emerging profession and convinced management to give it a try in 1981. The Toledo Plan is quite different, and in the beginning there were bruised egos, but within months this new way of bringing novice teachers into the profession was gaining acceptance from principals and top officials. In our case, the management union demanded its own peer evaluation and mentoring program two years after we initiated peer review even though it had blocked the idea for nine years prior to 1981. Both programs thrive today. With few exceptions, principals change their minds once they see peer review in action. The initial reluctance melts away once they see how seriously the standards are taken and the amount of time that is devoted to mentoring.
There are unanticipated consequences anytime you strike out in a new direction. Changes can often bring nasty little surprises, but peer review led to a number of surprises that were both unanticipated and positive. Teachers now have an induction process similar to other real professionals. They have taken a major step to overcome their culture of isolation. They have created a new, more dignified, and productive relationship with school management. And equally important, they have changed the culture of their union.

Traditionally, union officials see their role as one of defending their members against unfair management decisions. Those on the union side spend an inordinate amount of time and dues money defending members whose practice is virtually unknown to us—and that makes no sense at all. But as the number of consulting teachers grows, they become a voice for teaching excellence within the union. So do the former interns who were successful and who appreciated the help they received during their intern year. They see their union as a support for their teaching practice and not just a place to go when a problem occurs. Union officials begin to hear positive comments from members about teaching excellence to balance the negative events that traditional school governance generates.

Two other initiatives resulted from the trust and collaboration that grew out of the Toledo Plan. By 1989, union and school officials had created a new pay incentive system with peer review of teaching performance a threshold factor. Teachers can earn between five and fifteen percent above their scheduled pay by accepting additional responsibilities jointly approved and scheduled by another union-management panel. And in a targeted effort to address student achievement, the principal and union rep in underperforming schools are called before a School Improvement Committee composed of the superintendent, teacher union president, and the head of the principals’ union. Data are actually shared and plans are submitted to bring student success in line with comparable student bodies. The process is unique in urban districts, and it has played a critical role in Toledo’s success despite a state “grade card” designed to showcase how “poorly” Ohio’s city schools perform.

Trust is a basic element in forging collaborative union-management focus on student results. Too often, however, we see an unwillingness to try new ideas “because we can’t trust them.” Trust has to be created. You can’t wait for it to happen because our current school governance model virtually insures that it won’t. The joint union-management panel that reviews the work of the consulting teachers creates a forum where people must work together to ensure teacher competence.

In 1972, we suspected teachers wanted to be real professionals with real responsibilities. By describing how induction is influenced by practitioners in medicine and law, teachers were able to overcome their reluctance to critique each others work. At last the district was catching up with modern management techniques. Auto plants now build cars with teams of workers. The traditional foreman is gone. Consumers get better cars, and in Toledo we’re getting better student test scores.

It is not easy to convince union officials and school managers to adopt new roles and responsibilities. Comfort comes from knowing what you know and there are always plenty of others to blame when mistakes are made. But success is hard to ignore, and peer review is demonstratively better than the old way. There is a fundamental shift in attitude about one’s work in relation to the work of others with a new focus on excellence. The workplace transformation occurs naturally. Most importantly, teachers see a common effort by all to observe standards of practice. That new mind set is the basis for a profession that is respected for its excellence.

After the Test: How Schools Can Use Data to Close the Achievement Gap

Kiley Walsh, M.P.P.
Policy Director
Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC)

What types of resources and support do schools need to accelerate the learning of low-achieving students while continuing to improve achievement for all? Research conducted by the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), a non-partisan, non-profit organization based in San Francisco, suggests that schools having success narrowing the achievement gap are data-driven. Teachers in gap-closing schools:

1. Assess students frequently to diagnose strengths and weaknesses,
2. Analyze and discuss data to both identify the kids in need and determine what exactly those needs are, and
3. Act on a schoolwide equity plan, taking advantage of coaching and collaborating with colleagues to improve their practice so that they can work more effectively with low-achieving students.

Currently, many teachers are overwhelmed by data because 1) it’s too broad-brushed to give them specific feedback on how to take action to improve their students’ skills; 2) they lack the skills to understand the data; 3) they lack the time to analyze and discuss the data with colleagues to make sense of it; and 4) they don’t know what to do next. In this current policy context, teachers can associate data solely with a stick or carrot—something over which they have little control but tremendous public accountability.

BASRC’s research suggests that teachers in schools narrowing the achievement gap are using data in a variety of ways to engage in a continual improvement process. Those closing the gap are constantly examining strengths and weaknesses, trying new strategies, and evaluating progress. In gap-closing schools, data is a catalyst toward capacity building. Data, alone, doesn’t improve schools, but when teachers have access to high-quality, diagnostic information on students’ strengths and weaknesses combined with effective professional development including coaching and collaboration time with colleagues, schools can make real and exciting progress toward closing the achievement gap.

What We Studied
In order to identify effective school level policies and strategies, BASRC surveyed 32 K-8 schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and compared responses from schools narrowing the gap with schools maintaining or widening the gap. Schools’ gaps were measured using California’s Academic Performance Index ranking system over the four-year time period between 1998-99 and 2001-2002. We defined “gap-closing” schools as those schools where all students made improvement, but low-performing students made more rapid progress; conversely, we defined “non-gap-closing” schools as
those schools where high-performing students made more improvement than low-performing. The two groups of schools had no statistically significant differences regarding their student demographics or their teacher credentials and experience. We also conducted case studies of three schools making outstanding progress narrowing the achievement gap.

Findings
The survey explored policies and practices on a variety of issues, from the role of leaders to instructional strategies. Stark differences between the gap-closing and non-gap-closing groups emerged regarding use of data, painting a distinctive picture of what happens in gap-closing schools. Findings from our study are grouped into three categories—Assess, Analyze and Act—with case studies after each to illuminate what survey findings can look like in practice. All reported findings are statistically significant.

1. **ASSESS**

**Use Frequent Diagnostic Assessments**
Teachers at gap-closing schools are more likely to:

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | Almost all administer student assessments at least monthly, with over half administering weekly assessments. |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | About a quarter only administer assessments a few times a year and a little less than half do monthly assessments. |

2. **Use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students,**

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | About two-thirds use data to understand skill gaps on a weekly or monthly basis. |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | 75% use data to understand skill gaps only a few times a year or never. |

3. **Recommend using data when asked “What should schools do to close the gap?”**

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | Just under two-thirds recommended using data. |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | One-third recommended using data. |

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**Case Study: Belle Air Elementary School**
A K-6 school located just south of San Francisco in San Bruno, about two-thirds of Belle Air Elementary's students are Hispanic/Latino, about 20% are Asian/Pacific Islander and 15% are white. Fifty-seven percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. While all student groups improved between 1998-99 and 2001-02, Hispanic/Latino students made almost three times the achievement gains of white/Asian students. Teachers at Belle Air are constantly using data to ask questions, challenge themselves to try new approaches and evaluate results. Each grade level has its own inquiry question to investigate, analyzing how that grade can contribute to the school's goal of closing the achievement gap; similarly, each teacher conducts inquiry into his/her own classroom practice. The school uses a variety of diagnostic assessments and teachers have time built into the schedule for collaboration. Data prompted Belle Air to focus more intensively on literacy; students now spend a minimum of 2 1/2 to 3 hours daily on reading, and all grades use the Open Court reading program. In addition to student achievement gains, teachers cited many changes linked to using data, including richer professional interactions, an increased focus on supporting low-performing Hispanic/Latino students, and full faculty buy-in to a "no blame, no shame, no excuses" culture.

2. **ANALYZE**

**Practice Data-Driven Leadership**
Gap-closing schools are more likely to have:

1. Leaders who set measurable goals for closing the gap.

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | Almost all agreed that their leaders set measurable goals, with just under half "strongly agreeing." |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | Over a quarter disagreed that their leaders set measurable goals; of those who agreed the majority "somewhat agreed." |

2. Leaders who encourage or lead systematic inquiry into the gap.

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | Every single respondent agreed that their school leaders encourage or lead inquiry into the gap with 82% "strongly agreeing." |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | About a quarter disagreed that their school leaders encourage or lead inquiry into the gap and just under half "somewhat agreed." |

3. Leaders for whom closing the gap is a primary goal.

| Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools | The vast majority, or 86% "strongly agreed" that their leaders hold closing the gap as a primary goal. |
| Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools | Just over one-third "somewhat agreed" that their leaders hold closing the gap as a primary goal and just over one-half "strongly agreed." |
4. Leaders who provide structured opportunities for faculty to discuss race and ethnicity.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Over 90% agreed that they have structured opportunities to discuss race and ethnicity.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: Two-thirds disagreed that they have structured opportunities to discuss race and ethnicity with 42% "strongly disagreeing."

Support Teachers to Make Meaning of Data
Teachers at gap-closing schools are more likely to have:

1. Professional development on analyzing low-performing student data.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: All had some professional development on this topic, with half receiving it a few times a month.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: Half had professional development on this topic a few times a year, and 11% had never received any.

2. Discussions with colleagues about low-performing student achievement data.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Over three-quarters discuss data at least a few times a month; about a third of these indicate that they talk about data a few times a week.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: Just about half only discuss data with colleagues a few times a year.

Case Study: Roosevelt Middle School
Located in the East Bay in the city of Oakland, Roosevelt Middle School serves children in grades 6-8. About half of the students are Asian—the largest ethnicity Chinese/jewish over a quarter are Hispanic/Latino and just under a quarter are African-American. Sixty-nine percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. While all student groups improved between 1998-99 and 2001-02, African-Americans made about three times the achievement gains of Asian students. In 1998, the principal, Darcel Stockey, conducted a needs assessment of the school with a focus on the lowest achieving students: African-Americans. Teachers, student and parent focus groups indicated that African-Americans were missing a lot of class time due to discipline problems. Stockey disaggregated school suspension data and discovered that in 1997-98, 60%—three out of every five African-American students—received suspensions. Stockey gave the faculty structured time to analyze the data—both understanding the patterns and talking about why, including how race/ethnicity influences classroom interactions. Stockey also provided teachers with professional development and coaching on effective methods of classroom management. By 2002-03, not only had the suspension rate for African-American students dropped to 18%, a decrease of 70%, but the overall suspension rate for the school had been cut in half.

3. ACT
Develop a Plan of Action
Gap-closing schools are more likely to have:

1. An explicit definition of equity which the school community developed and agreed upon.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Well over three-quarters agree their school community developed an explicit definition of equity, with just under half "strongly agreeing."
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: The majority disagreed that their school had an agreed-upon definition of equity, with over a quarter "strongly disagreeing."

2. A narrow reform focus

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Only 2% claimed that their school was focusing on 10 or more areas of reform.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: About one-fifth claimed that their school was focusing on 10 or more areas of reform.

Support Teachers to Improve Their Practice
Teachers at gap-closing schools are more likely to:

1. Receive professional development on:
   a. Linking low-performing student data to instructional strategies.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Half had professional development on this topic a few times a week or a month.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: Three-quarters only had professional development on this topic a few times a year or never.

   b. Literacy instruction for low-performing students.

- Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools: Just under two-thirds had professional development on this topic a few times a week or month.
- Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools: Just under half had professional development on this topic a few times a year or never.
2. Visit colleagues’ classrooms to observe instructional strategies.

Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools
- Almost all visit colleagues’ classrooms a few times a month or a few times a year.

Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools
- Just under half had never visited colleagues’ classrooms.

3. Recommend teacher collaboration when asked “What should schools do to close the gap?”

Teachers in Gap-Closing Schools
- About one-quarter recommended teacher collaboration.

Teachers in Non-Gap Closing Schools
- Only 12% recommended teacher collaboration.

**Case Study: Musick Elementary School**

Located in the East Bay in the city of Newark, Musick Elementary School serves students in grades K-6. Its two largest student groups are Hispanic/Latino (half of all students) and white (one quarter of all students). Forty percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. While all student groups improved between 1998-99 and 2001-02, Hispanic/Latino students made about five and a half times the achievement gains of white students. Nearly a decade ago, analysis of Musick's student achievement data revealed a weakness in reading, particularly in the early grades. In response, time and resources have been dedicated to developing teacher competency in literacy instruction with a focus on working with struggling readers. All Musick teachers participated in intensive, classroom-based training on strategies to teach reading comprehension. The school has released a teacher full-time as a literacy coordinator to provide schoolwide professional development, and all teachers have a minimum release day every week for grade-level and whole-school collaboration focused on literacy instruction. Use of guided reading, Running Records and a data-oriented K-3 reading specialist give students at Musick an early advantage, bringing most up to grade level by the 3rd grade.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. **ASSESS:** Teachers need frequent information on students’ individual strengths and weaknesses to guide instruction.

   **A. MULTIPLE ASSESSMENTS**
   
   Instead of the kind of “big picture” data that annual summative assessments provide, teachers need information about the specific skills with which students struggle. Formative assessments provide critical information to determine which skills students are lacking, what to teach, how students are doing in response to the instruction and whether students have mastered content. Some examples of these kinds of assessments are:
   - Diagnostic assessments that identify specific skills gaps.
   - Brief, timed fluency tests on oral proficiency.
   - Regular, ongoing program assessments demonstrating whether students have mastered discrete material.
   - Writing prompts given three times a year that assess the extent to which, over time, students are improving their writing skills against a common standard.

B. **FREQUENT ADMINISTRATION**

   To engage in a continual improvement process, teachers need quarterly, monthly, even weekly feedback on student progress. Waiting until results come back from annual standardized testing doesn’t provide teachers with the kind of information that they can use. Gap-closing schools at the very least administer tri-annual assessments to measure progress; many rely on weekly assessments to guide curriculum pacing and instructional strategies.

2. **ANALYZE:** Teachers and school-site administrators need both the ability and multiple opportunities to reflect on and discuss data.

   **A. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON HOW TO UNDERSTAND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT DATA**

   Understanding data is a new requirement in the teaching profession. Teachers need training in how to understand results so that they can gain an accurate understanding of their students’ strengths and weaknesses. They need to know what the achievement gap looks like at their school—not just which students are falling to master important standards, but which skills these students lack—before they can target action to close the gap. Once teachers have the ability to analyze data, they can then be active participants in the work of inquiring, goal setting and strategic planning, making the school a true learning community.

B. **STRUCTURED, DATA-BASED DISCUSSIONS FOCUSED ON ACHIEVEMENT GAP DATA**

   Almost every school in the nation has an achievement gap, or many gaps between different races, ethnicities and socio-economic strata. Teachers need structured time to discuss and fully understand not just their school-wide achievement gap, but their grade-level and classroom-level achievement gaps. This transforms abstract numbers into something more personal, and prompts teachers to question how systemic gaps are either reinforced or challenged by their own classroom practice. Teachers also need structured time to discuss why gaps exist, considering how factors such as race/ethnicity, poverty and family background impact children’s learning experiences. When teachers are given time and support to analyze disaggregated data, the achievement gap can rise to the foreground in each teachers’ understanding of their individual goals, spurring the kind of momentum that leads to real change.

3. **ACT:** Teachers need structure and support to make targeted changes to meet the needs of all students.

   **A. AN ACTION PLAN WITH GOALS AND A CLEAR DEFINITION OF EQUITY**

   School communities that are closing the gap develop and agree on an explicit definition of equity. This can be an exercise in vision-building, spending time discussing the big picture so that all faculty share the same end goal. It can also mean discussing a general goal, e.g., all children learn at or above grade level, and getting specific about what that would look like at a particular school site. Gap-closing schools then establish reasonable roadmaps to achieve their vision, setting measurable goals for each racial or ethnic subgroup to close the achievement gap. Any school can hang a banner declaring it a place where all children can learn; schools that are closing the gap actually define what high expectations mean and look like in practice. Teachers can easily dismiss externally imposed goals, such as federal growth targets, as being too removed from schools’ specific situations to have real bearing. While the school collectively strives toward Adequate Yearly Progress targets, teach-
ers need to be given the assignment to translate these into their own achievement goals. With measurable, individualized goals, “closing the gap” becomes more than just a saying or an impossible utopian dream; personalized equity goals give teachers the opportunity to strive for and celebrate step-by-step progress.

B. SCHOOLWIDE FOCUS

Schools are pulled in so many different directions that sometimes the hardest challenge of all is focusing. Schools that are successful don’t try to do it all; they select a couple of things that matter and do them well. Case study schools that focused on a small student group—the lowest-performing student group—reported big gains for the school as a whole. In Belle Air Elementary, a focus on supporting Hispanic/Latino boys helped teachers hone their skills at differentiating instruction for all. In Roosevelt Middle, a focus on African-American suspensions resulted in a reduced suspension rate for all students. It may seem counterintuitive, but focusing on a few students can lead to the kinds of deep changes that promote whole school change.

C. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON HOW TO TAKE ACTION ON DATA

Once teachers get student achievement results, they need to be able to know what to do next and how to do it. They require a wealth of information about instructional strategies and curricula so they can make well-informed choices regarding how to meet identified needs. Much of the negative reaction some teachers have regarding data stems from a feeling of impotence—they get numbers back that tell them they’re not doing a good job, but are then sent back to their classrooms without support, time or tools to improve.

High quality professional development, particularly when delivered through classroom-based coaching, can help teachers meet the challenge of helping all students to thrive. While many teachers have years of experience, many more are new to the profession, and no one teacher has a monopoly on good ideas. By being given access to outside expertise, particularly in the rapidly-advancing field of reading instruction, teachers can increase their repertoire of strategies. If data shows a weakness in, for example, decoding text, then teachers need time with experts on decoding so that they can learn how to become more effective. Experts can also diagnose gaps in curriculum and advise appropriate materials to meet students’ needs. The leap from testing to classroom practice can seem like a chasm; professional development can provide a bridge, helping teachers connect their practice to their students’ needs.

D. COLLABORATION TIME FOR TEACHERS TO WORK ON BEST PRACTICES

Teachers need time built into the weekly school schedule to help one another implement successful instructional strategies. Productive professional interactions about classroom challenges and successes can’t happen in the lunch room or on weekends; collaboration time needs to be built into the school schedule as part of the regular work week. Whether it happens in weekly grade-level team meetings, cross-grade-level meetings, leadership team meetings or full faculty meetings, teachers need structured time together to discuss practice. Innovations happen every day in the field of teaching, but too often they only happen behind closed classroom doors. Regularly scheduled collaboration time ensures that change and improvement spreads, and one teacher’s breakthrough can become a grade-level’s, or even a school’s transformation. One important form of collaboration is teachers visiting other teachers’ classrooms. Talk can be helpful, but seeing how a colleague teaches can provide the structured, practical support teachers need to change their practice. This open classroom approach is fairly counter-cultural to the teaching profession, but a collaborative environment needs to become the new norm in schools. Collaboration time takes teaching into the 21st century, away from isolated, random acts of improvement and inspiration and into systematic improvement, with all teachers advancing and capitalizing on each other’s successes.

THE WORK TO BE DONE

To inspire schools to close the achievement gap, policymakers have emphasized annual testing and explicit achievement goals. These strategies have helped to create a sense of urgency around the need to close the gap and have helped policymakers and the public in gauging general school quality. Too often, however, annual testing results do not inspire school improvement. In the worst case scenario, data actually have a negative impact, contributing to teacher burnout and a sense of helplessness.

To make data an effective tool not just for overall school improvement but for closing the achievement gap, teachers need access to frequent, diagnostic assessments and high-quality professional development including coaching and collaboration time with colleagues. With the right building blocks, time and tools, teachers can then use data to make real and exciting changes. This is the crucial step, "after the test," and it is the area in which policymakers have the greatest opportunity to make a difference—supporting teachers to act on data. There is a tremendous gap between student achievement data and classroom practice. It’s not because teachers don’t care enough or don’t want to do a good job; it’s because teachers need time and tools to improve and focus their efforts. Policymakers need to build the bridges of professional development, collaboration time and coaching so that teachers know what to do after the test. Data, alone, doesn’t improve schools, but data used effectively can lead schools to narrow and ultimately close the achievement gap.
The Challenge of Education Reform: Standards, Accountability, Resources and Policy

CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Cancun, Mexico
February 22-27, 2005

Members of Congress

Senator Lamar Alexander
Representative Michael Castle and Jane Castle
Representative Jim Cooper
Senator James Jeffords and Elizabeth Jeffords
Senator Dick Lugar and Charlene Lugar
Representative George Miller
Representative Ed Pastor and Verma Pastor
Representative Donald Payne and William Payne
Representative Ralph Regula and Mary Regula
Representative Bobby Rush
Representative Hilda Solis
Representative Pete Stark and Deborah Stark
Representative John Tierney and Patricia Tierney
Representative Melvin Watt and Eulalia Watt
Representative Lynn Woolsey

Scholars/Experts

Christopher Edley
University of California/Berkeley Law School

Daniel Fallon
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Theodore Hernberg
University of Pennsylvania

Dal Lawrence
Toledo Federation of Teachers

Diana Natalicio
University of Texas

Michael Rebell
Campaign for Fiscal Equity

Marguerite Roza
University of Washington

Kiley Walsh
Bay Area School Reform Collaborative

Observers

Alison Bernstein
The Ford Foundation

Neil Grabois
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Adele Simmons
Congressional Program Advisory Committee

Constancia Warren
Carnegie Corporation of New York
The Challenge of Education Reform:
Standards, Accountability, Resources and Policy

CONFERENCE AGENDA
Cancun, Mexico
February 22-27, 2005

No Child Left Behind—The New Civil Rights
Remarks by Christopher Edley, University of California/Berkeley School of Law

Value-Added Assessment and Accountability
Theodore Hershberg, University of Pennsylvania

Discussion Questions
• What are the comparative strengths and limitations of value-added assessment? What kinds of technical resources are needed to implement it properly? How are states and school districts using value-added assessment measures to improve student learning and narrow achievement gaps?
• How might value-added assessment and cross-sectional assessment measures be combined as part of federal and state accountability systems?
• What are the potential implications of value-added assessment for measuring student, school, and district progress under No Child Left Behind?

Fiscal Policy in Education
Michael Rebell, Campaign for Fiscal Equity
Marguerite Roza, University of Washington

Discussion Questions
• What are the factors leading to inequitable education spending patterns, both between and within school districts? How does the use of adequacy as a standard help advance efforts to improve education in large school districts?
• What are the political factors that must be considered in exploring and addressing fiscal disparities between and within districts? How can federal policies help address these issues and help assure that the outcomes yield improvements in education for students?
Providing High Quality Teachers in Every Classroom
Dal Lawrence, Toledo Federation of Teachers
Diana Natalicio, University of Texas at El Paso

Discussion Questions
- How can universities' resources be leveraged to improve the quality of education in the cities that host them? What are the opportunities and barriers involved in building partnerships between universities and school systems?
- How can teacher organizations play an active role in building the capacity of all teachers to support student learning? What are the elements of a working partnership between the leadership in district and teacher organizations that are essential to improving teacher quality?

Using Data to Close the Achievement Gap
Kiley Walsh, Bay Area School Reform Collaborative

Discussion Questions
- What kinds of data are most useful at the individual school level to improve student learning and narrow achievement gaps between different groups of students? How can school districts build the capacity of principals and teachers to use data regularly to shape school-level decisions about teaching and learning?
- What kinds of technical support do districts and schools need to take advantage of the data now available to them through assessments? What other kinds of data are needed?
- What kinds of technology do districts need for schools to use data effectively to improve practice? What kinds of data are most useful for informing school-level practice and how well does this data intersect with federal and state assessment requirements?