Santa Clara County Office of Education

CISC PARENT ENGAGEMENT REGIONAL LIAISONS' MEETING MINUTES
CO-HOSTED BY THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION
FEBRUARY 2, 2011
TIME CONVENED 9:30 a.m. / TIME ADJOURNED 12:00 p.m.

CISC LIAISONS

X	Michael Babb, Ventura COE – Region 8		Beth Higbee, San Bernardino COE – Region 10
X	Nancy S. Brownell, Sonoma COE – Region 1	X	Marissa Lazo-Necco, San Bernardino – Region 10
X	Mary Ann Burke, Santa Clara COE – Region 5		Martin Macias, Merced COE – Region 7
X	Jose Espinosa, San Bernardino COE – Region 10	X	Lorna Manuel, Tehama COE – Region 2
X	Vanessa Galey, Orange COE – Region 9	X	Mary Stires, Stanislaus COE – Region 6
X	Liz Guerra, Los Angeles COE – Region 11	X	Marin Trujillo, West Contra Costa USD – Region 4
	Jan Sheppard, Sacramento COE – Region 3		Deena Zacharin, San Francisco USD – Region 4

ATTENDEES

Carol Dickson	Melissa Bazamos
Geni Boyer	Marieaelaena Hwizar
Jeana Preston	
Sandra Gonzalez	

1. **Welcome, Introductions and Announcements** – *Mary Ann Burke, Santa Clara COE*
   Introductions were made and Mary Ann reviewed agenda.

2. **Agenda Item 2** – *Carol Dickson, CDE*
   Reported on the updated research per the summaries and website links below:
   - From Harvard's Family Involvement Network for Educators: *Beyond Random Acts: Family, School, and Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform*, Heather Weiss, M. Elena Lopez, and Heidi Rosenberg December 2010 http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/beyond-random-acts-family-school-and-community-engagement-as-an-integral-part-of-education-reform
     - *Beyond Random Acts* provides a research-based framing of family engagement; examines the policy levers that can drive change in promoting systemic family, school, and community engagement; and focuses on data systems as a powerful tool to engage families for twenty-first century student learning. Because education reform will succeed only when all students are prepared for the demands of the twenty-first century, the paper also examines the role of families in transforming low-performing schools.

   - Annenberg Institute for School Reform: *Education Policy for Action Series: Building Local Leadership for Change: A National Scan of Parent Leadership Training Programs* 2010 http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/HendersonProfile.pdf
     - These program profiles provide background
     - for the research report *Building Local Leadership*
     - *for Change: A National Scan of Parent*
     - *Leadership Training Programs.* The full report

- describes four types of parent leadership training
- programs identified in the scan and gives
- examples of each.
- These four types are:
  • Type 1. Parent leadership training programs

  • Type 2. Parent training programs aimed at immigrant families and families with limited English

  • Type 3. Parent academies or universities

  • Type 4. Parent leadership training to understand and influence the system

- This publication presents more detailed profiles of each of the program exemplars and the results of independent evaluations of the programs.

- Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL): *Working Systemically in Action: Family and Community* 2010 free download in pdf; print versions for sale http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/family126.html
  - Many educators recognize the importance of family and community involvement in school improvement efforts and are seeking to reframe the way they engage these groups. This publication, which supplements *Working Systemically in Action: A Facilitator's Guide*, provides practical guidance for educators who are seeking to engage family and community members in systemic school improvement efforts.
  - SEDL's Working Systemically approach is a process for school improvement—and, ultimately, increased student achievement—that focuses on key components and competencies at all levels of the local educational system. Working Systemically in Action: Engaging Family & Community provides
    - best practices,
    - an overview of the Working Systemically approach to school improvement,
    - actions and tools for involving families and community in all phases of the Working Systemically process,
    - examples of how to incorporate family and community engagement into a systemic approach, and
    - research on family and community engagement.

- Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) and the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) *Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement*, Helen Westmoreland, Heidi M. Rosenberg, M. Elena Lopez, Heather Weiss July 2009 http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement
  - Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) and the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) have teamed up to bring you this ground-breaking policy brief that examines the role of school districts in promoting family engagement.
  - *Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement* spotlights how six school districts across the country have used innovative strategies to create and sustain family engagement "systems at work." Our findings point to three core components of these successful

systems: creating district-wide strategies, building school capacity, and reaching out to and engaging families.

- Drawing from districts' diverse approaches, we highlight promising practices to ensure quality, oversight, and impact from their family engagement efforts. We also propose a set of recommendations for how federal, state, and local policies can promote district-level family engagement efforts that support student learning.

Carol also indicated that the CPM Compensatory Instrument has new parent engagement documentation required under sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 8.3. Carol will also follow-up with Linda Aceves on discussing the organization and funding for regional parent engagement leadership activities.

3. **Agenda Item 3** – *Mary Ann Burke, Santa Clara COE*
Regional Updates include the following:

The LEA Plan, SPSA, PI, and State Action Family Area Network (FAN) Ad Hoc Committee completed a conference call on 1/31 and included Martha Martinez, Marissa Lazo-Necco, Melissa Bazamos, Marieaelaena Hwizar, and Mary Ann Burke with the following outcomes:

- When reviewing the Compensatory Education CPM Instrument, most documentation that is required is compliance focused pertaining to parent notification letters.
- When reviewing and aligning parent engagement activities in a Local Education Agency Plan (i.e. Goal 4 that states all students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free and conducive to learning) and Single Plans for Student Achievement, most list parent participation activities but the plans do not measure the level or impact of parent engagement. Currently the Program Improvement Corrective Action Plan Monitoring Reports do not request updates on parent engagement and these reports focus primarily on curriculum and instruction and the professional development of teachers.
- Although the District Assistance Intervention Team activities include a district school climate survey and identifying Safe and Drug Free activities as part of the LEA Plan or addendum under corrective actions, not follow-up is required for program implementation from CDE staff.
- The participants of this phone conference agreed that parent engagement is successful when district and school leadership teams prioritize parent engagement as an effective school improvement strategy within a district and schools and these teams provide the essential resources required to facilitate and School Action Plans with comprehensive parent engagement activities.
- The participants of this ad hoc committee agreed that most will be attending the upcoming training by Joyce Epstein on County Office of Education's support of district and school site plans to support parent engagement activities. The team has asked Marissa Lazo-Necco to secure a room for the group to meet after the first day of training on March 3. We were informed that Jose Espinoza is creating a Local Education Agency Plan template that will capture parent engagement activities in partnership with Joyce Epstein to ensure that all mandated CDE plans are in alignment. It was also discussed that Dr. Beth Higbee, CISC Lead, will bring this template to CISC for further review after this conference.

Region 1 – Sonoma COE: The COE is using Aiming High to increase student success and to engage parents in this process. The Volunteer Center supports parents and assists students with their homework.

Region 2 – Tehama COE: The focus is to get community member involved in building an infrastructure of parent engagement in a grassroots effort to increase the graduation rate of students and college attendance rate –Expect More Tehama. The district also offers a parent literacy program. Approximately 72 school board members and community partners participated in a professional learning community and the district will sponsor two symposiums a year with parent breakout sessions to address the connection of parents, school boards, and schools and development of strategic plans.

Region 4 – West Contra Costa USD: There was no new program updates.

Region 5 - Santa Clara COE: Activities include a March 5, 2011 Conference on Effective Strategies to Support Students' Success, K-8 Trainer-of-Trainers three day training event at the Santa Clara County Office of Education from June 7 through June 9 and a Secondary Trainer-of-Trainers three day training event at the University Preparatory Academy from June 21 through June 23. Both training sessions will certify parent leaders to provide ongoing trainings to parents on parent education, health and wellness to support a healthy school climate, and make-and-take academic support activities at home that align to common core standards. Parent training curriculum will be posted in the Region 5 Parent Engagement Initiative website in July.

Region 6 – Stanislaus COE: It is hosting a California Association of Compensatory Education Conference on March 12 for 200 statewide parent and education leaders.

Region 8 - Ventura COE: Activities include that the group has developed a School Site Council implementation rubric that is attached to the minutes.

Region 9 – Orange COE: The COE is partnering with the California Parent Center in service delivery and has provided FIN Meetings on October 8 on community resources, on December 3 on parent education regarding the 40 developmental assets and social hosting, and on February 4 on keeping children safe, physical fitness and violence prevention. Added FIN meetings are scheduled for April 8 on academic support services and June 3. The California Parent Center will offer a training in May and an Parent Resource Fair will be offered in spring.

Region 10 - San Bernardino COE: Project Inspire continues to work intensively with six school districts in the study and will host a County Office and District Leadership Development Institute for School-Based Action Teams for Partnership with Dr. Joyce Epstein serving as the facilitator on March 3 through 4 at the Radisson Hotel at the Ontario Airport.

Region 11 - Los Angeles COE: Activities including rolling out of partnership meetings and trainings and using FIN meetings to build partnerships and align a Local Education Agency plan with a school's Single Plan for Student Achievement. The district will host a large Pre-K and K-12 Conference in May using curriculum from Teach Like a Champion.

4. Closure – *Mary Ann Burke, Santa Clara County Office of Education*
Action Item/s:

The next CISC Liaison meeting/video conference is scheduled for May 4, 2011.

School Site Council Rubric

	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds	Next steps
Knowledge of Responsibilities	Most or all members of the site council are not aware of any or all responsibilities. There may or may not be a plan to increase awareness of some members.	Most members of the site council are aware of most of its responsibilities, including monitoring of achievement data, implementation of SPSA, categorical expenditures, board policies, state and federal requirements, and the core instructional program. There is a plan to increase awareness among ALL members of ALL responsibilities.	ALL members of the site council are aware of ALL responsibilities. In addition, council members actively engage other members of the school community to get ideas and input.	
Composition	The site council does not meet requirements as outlined in the next column.	The site council is composed of the school principal, five parents, three teachers, and one other staff. All members except the principal have been elected by staff or parents. Middle School may include student representatives.	The site council meets requirements in "Meets." In addition, membership features both experienced and new members; timing of elections allows experienced members to train newcomers.	
Officers	The site council has not elected all of the following—chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary.	The site council has elected all of the following—chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary.	The site council has elected a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretary, as well as other officers who take roles to make the council function well.	

	Approaches	Meets	Exceeds	Next steps
Bylaws	The site council either has no bylaws or its bylaws are dated and fail to reflect present needs.	The site council follows a set of bylaws that defines terms of office, procedures, and requirements sufficient to the needs of the group.	Bylaws meet standard as described at left. Council members consult bylaws regularly and update them at least once each year.	
Open Meeting/Rules of Order/Norms	The site council has not created meeting norms, or the norms are not followed. Records are not kept. Meetings are disorganized and/or unproductive.	The site council has created norms and someone takes responsibility to enforce them. Notice is posted as required, and meetings follow agenda. Meetings are orderly and productive.	The site council has created norms and the entire group takes a role in enforcing them. The council has worked out a way to communicate its work to the school community that keeps them informed.	
Single Plan for Student Achievement	The site council plays little or no role in developing, approving and monitoring the school plan.	The site council actively reviews student data, studies the school's response to those data, approves a course of action, and monitors implementation on a continuous basis.	Meets standards as explained at left. In addition, the site council works actively with advisory groups and other members of the school community to stay appraised of best practices and effects of plan activities.	

Rúbrica del Consejo Escolar

	Acercando	Realiza la Meta	Excede	Pasos que siguen
Conocimiento de Responsabilidades	Muchos o casi todos los miembros del consejo escolar no tienen conocimiento de algunas o todas las responsabilidades. Pueden tener o no tener un plan para aumentar el conocimiento de las responsabilidades de algunos miembros.	La mayoría de los miembros del consejo escolar son conscientes de la mayor parte de sus responsabilidades, incluyendo analizando datos de logros académicos, implementación del Plan Escolar Único para el Aprovechamiento Académico de los Estudiantes (SPSA), gastos categoríales, directivas de la mesa, requisitos estatales y federales, y el programa educacional principal. Hay un plan de aumentar el conocimiento entre TODOS los miembros de TODAS las responsabilidades.	TODOS los miembros del consejo escolar son conscientes de TODAS las responsabilidades. Además, los miembros del consejo activamente contratan a otros miembros de la comunidad escolar para conseguir ideas y sugerencias.	
Composición	El consejo de sitio no encuentra exigencias como perfilado en la siguiente columna.	El consejo escolar es formado con el director, cinco padres, tres maestros/as, y un personal de la escuela. Todos los miembros excepto el director han sido elegidos por personal o padres. La Escuela Secundaria puede incluir representación de los estudiantes.	El consejo escolar llega a sus exigencias en "Metas". Además, el consejo consiste de algunos miembros con experiencia y nuevos miembros; Durante el tiempo de las elecciones permite que miembros con experiencia entrenen a los miembros que recién van llegando.	
Dirigentes	El consejo escolar no ha elegido a los siguientes-presidente, vice-presidente, secretario.	El consejo escolar ha elegido a los siguientes-presidente, vice-presidente, y secretario.	El consejo escolar ha elegido a un presidente, vice-presidente, y secretario, y a otros dirigentes quienes toman trabajos para asegurar que funcioné bien el consejo.	

	Acercamientos	Realiza la Meta	Excede	Pasos que Siguen
Estatutos	El consejo escolar no tiene ningunos estatutos o sus estatutos son anticuados y dejan de reflejar necesidades presentes.	El consejo escolar sigue estatutos establecidos que define términos de oficina, procedimientos, y exigencias suficientes a las necesidades del grupo.	Los estatutos llegan a la meta descrita en la columna izquierda. Los miembros del consejo consultan los estatutos con regularidad y los revisan al menos una vez cada año.	
Juntas/Reglas de Orden/Normas	El consejo escolar no ha creado normas, o no se siguen las normas. Los documentos no son guardados. Las juntas son desorganizadas y/o improductivas.	El consejo escolar ha creado normas y alguien toma la responsabilidad de hacerlos cumplir. El aviso es fijado como requerido, y las juntas siguen la agenda. Las juntas son ordenadas y productivas.	El consejo escolar ha creado normas y el grupo entero trabaja para cumplirlos. El consejo ha establecido modo de comunicar su trabajo a la comunidad escolar.	
Plan Escolar Único para el Aprovechamiento de los Estudiantes	El consejo escolar tiene poco o ningún trabajo en el desarrollo, aprobación y la revisada del plan escolar.	El consejo escolar activamente examina datos estudiantiles, estudia la respuesta de la escuela a aquellos datos, aprueba un curso de acción, y supervisa la implementación continuamente.	Llega a estándares como explicados en la columna izquierda. Además, el consejo escolar trabaja activamente con grupos consultivos y otros miembros de la comunidad escolar para quedarse valorados de las mejores prácticas y efectos de actividades del plan.	

Organizing Schools for **Improvement**

Research on Chicago school improvement indicates that improving elementary schools requires coherent, orchestrated action across five essential supports.

BY ANTHONY S. BRYK

Alexander Elementary School and Hancock Elementary School began the 1990s as two of the worst schools in Chicago in terms of math and reading achievement. Only two miles apart, the schools are in bordering neighborhoods and appear similar in many ways. Both enrolled nearly 100% minority students from families considered low income.

During the 1990s, both launched an array of initiatives aimed at boosting student achievement. Hancock moved impressively forward, while Alexander barely moved the needle on improvement. How did Hancock "beat the odds" while Alexander failed to do so?

This puzzle led us to undertake a systematic longitudinal investigation of *hundreds* of elementary schools in Chicago, just like Alexander and Hancock. Beginning in 1990, the Consortium on Chicago School Research initiated an intensive longitudinal study of the internal workings and external community conditions that distinguished improving elementary schools from those that failed to improve. That unique 15-year

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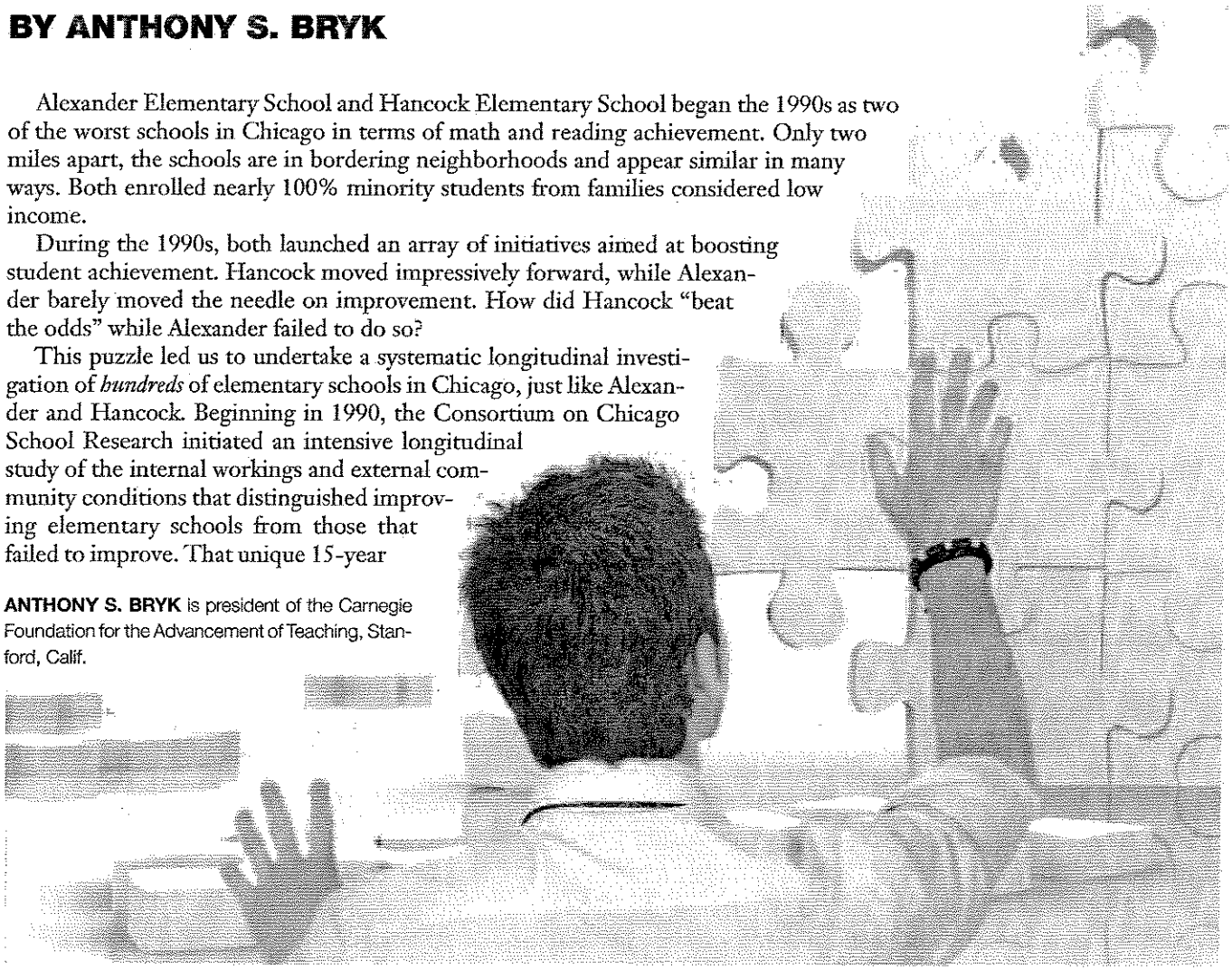

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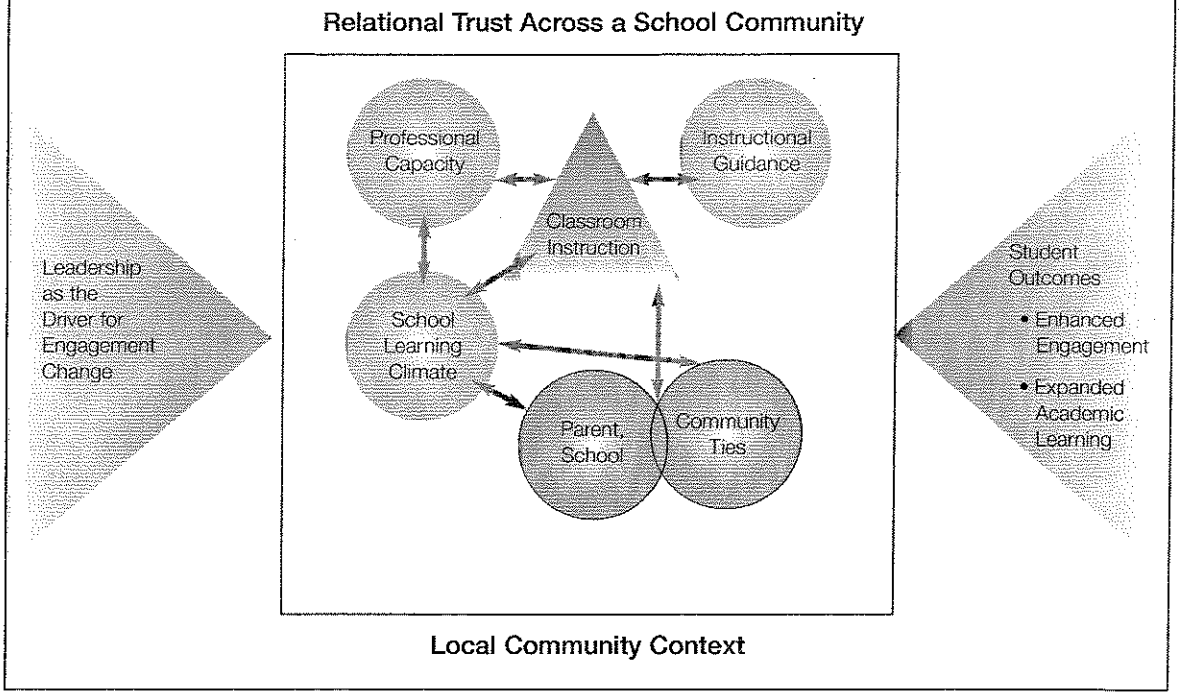
FIG. 1.
Organizational Features of Schools That Interact to Advance Student Achievement



database allowed us to develop, test, and validate a framework of essential supports for school improvement. These data provided an extraordinary window to examine the complex interplay of how schools are organized and interact with the local community to alter dramatically the odds for improving student achievement. The lessons learned offer guidance for teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and civic leaders in their efforts to improve schools across the country.

FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Students' academic learning occurs principally in classrooms as students interact with teachers around subject matter. How we organize and operate a school has a major effect on the instructional exchanges in its classrooms. Put simply, whether classroom learning proceeds depends in large measure on how the school as a social context supports teaching and sustains student engagement. Through our research, we identified five organizational features of schools that interact with life inside classrooms and are essential to advancing student achievement. (See Figure 1.)

1. **Coherent instructional guidance system.** Schools in which student learning improves have coherent instructional guidance systems that articulate the what and how of instruction. The learning tasks posed for students are key here, as are the assessments that make manifest what students actually need to know and provide feedback to inform subsequent instruction. Coordinated with this are the materials, tools, and instructional routines shared across a faculty that scaffold instruction. Although individual teachers may have substantial discretion in how they use these resources, the efficacy of individual teacher efforts depends on the quality of the supports and the local community of practice that forms around their use and refinement.
2. **Professional capacity.** Schooling is a human-resource-intensive enterprise. Schools are only as good as the quality of faculty, the professional development that supports their learning, and the faculty's capacity to work together to improve instruction. This support directs our attention to a school's ability to recruit and retain capable staff, the efficacy of performance feedback and professional development, and the social resources within a staff to work together to solve local problems.
3. **Strong parent-community-school ties.** The disconnect between local school professionals and the parents and community that a school is intended to serve is a persistent concern in many urban contexts. The absence of vital ties

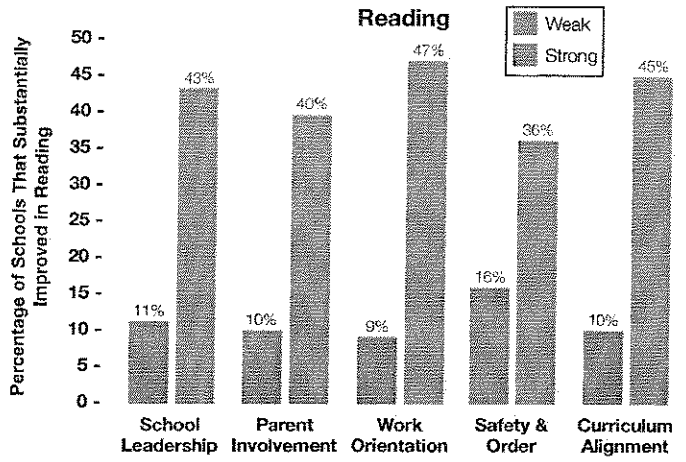
is a problem; their presence is a multifaceted resource for improvement. The quality of these ties links directly to students' motivation and school participation and can provide a critical resource for classrooms.

4. **Student-centered learning climate.** All adults in a school community forge a climate that enables students to think of themselves as learners. At a minimum, improving schools establish a safe and orderly environment — the most basic prerequisite for learning. They endorse ambitious academic work coupled with support for each student. The combination allows students to believe in themselves, to persist, and ultimately to achieve.
5. **Leadership drives change.** Principals in improving schools engage in a dynamic interplay of instructional and inclusive-facilitative leadership. On the instructional side, school leaders influence local activity around core instructional programs, supplemental academic and social supports, and the hiring and development of staff. They establish strategic priorities for using resources and buffer externalities that might distract from coherent reform. Working in tandem with this, principals build relationships across the school community. Improving teaching and learning places demands on these relationships. In carrying out their daily activities, school leaders advance instrumental objectives while also trying to enlist teachers in the change effort. In the process, principals cultivate a growing cadre of leaders (teachers, parents, and community members) who can help expand the reach of this work and share overall responsibility for improvement.

Using extensive survey data collected by the consortium from teachers, principals, and students, we were able to develop school indicators for each of the five essential supports, chart changes in these indicators over time, and then relate these organizational conditions to subsequent changes in student attendance and learning gains in reading and mathematics. Among our findings:

- Schools with strong indicators on most supports were 10 times more likely to improve than schools with weak supports.
- Half of the schools strong on most supports improved substantially in reading.
- Not a single school weak on most supports improved in mathematics.
- A material weakness in any one support, sustained over several years, undermined other change efforts, and improvement rarely resulted.

FIG 2.
Likelihood of Substantial Improvement, Given Weak or Strong Supports



This statistical evidence affords a strong warrant that how we organize schools is critical for student achievement. Improving schools entails coherent, orchestrated action across all five essential supports. Put simply, there is no one silver bullet.

DYNAMICS OF IMPROVEMENT

Schools are complex organizations consisting of multiple interacting subsystems (that is, the five essential organizational supports). Personal and social

ARTICLE AT A GLANCE

Why do some schools improve dramatically while similar schools fail? A study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that how schools are organized and how they interact with their communities can make the difference.

The researchers found five essential supports for school improvement. Those supports are:

- A coherent instructional guidance system;
- The school's professional capacity;
- Strong parent-community-school ties;
- A student-centered learning climate; and
- Leadership that drives change.

Schools with strong indicators for these supports were much more likely to improve than were schools with weak indicators.

considerations mix deeply in the day-to-day workings of a school. These interactions are bound by various rules, roles, and prevailing practices that, in combination with technical resources, constitute schools as formal organizations. In a sense, almost everything interacts with everything else. That means that a true picture of what enables some schools to improve and others to stagnate requires identifying the critical interconnections among the five essential supports: *How do these five essential supports function together to substantially change the odds for enhancing student engagement and academic learning?*

Schools that improved student attendance over time strengthened their ties to parents and community and used these ties as a core resource for enhancing safety and order across the school. This growing sense of routine and security further combined with a better-aligned curriculum that continually exposed students to new tasks and ideas. Engaging pedagogy afforded students active learning roles in the classroom. High-quality professional development aimed at enhancing teachers' capacity to orchestrate such activity under trying circumstances made this instruction work. When this combination of conditions existed, the basic recipe for improving student attendance was activated.

In terms of the organizational mechanisms influencing academic achievement, this can be told in two contrasting stories. Schools that stagnated — no learning improvement over several years — were characterized by clear weaknesses in their instructional guidance system. They had poor curriculum alignment coupled with relatively little emphasis on active student engagement in learning. These instructional weaknesses combined with weak faculty commitments to the school, to innovation, and to working together as a professional community. Undergirding all of this were anemic school-parent-community ties.

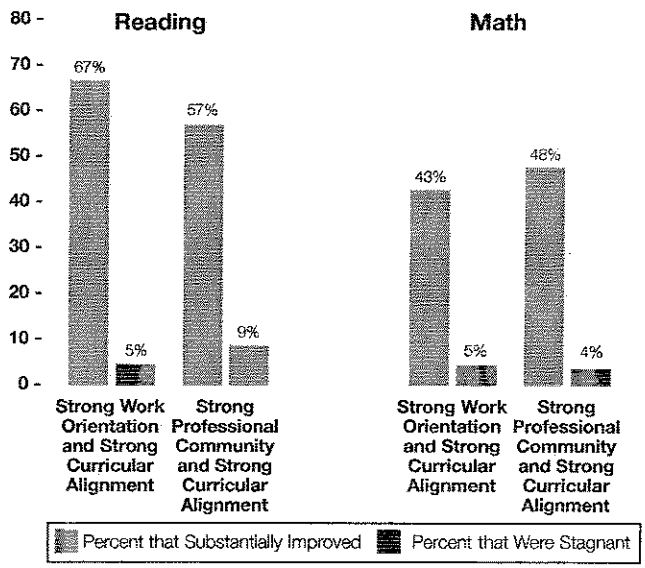
In contrast, schools in which student learning improved used high-quality professional development as a key instrument for change. They had maximum leverage when these opportunities for teachers occurred in a supportive environment (that is, a school-based professional community) and when teaching was guided by a common, coherent, and aligned instructional system. Undergirding all of this, in turn, was a solid base of parent-community-school ties.

There is a logic to reading Figure 1 from left to right — leadership drives change in the four other organizational supports — but the actual execution of improvement is more organic and dynamic. Good teachers advance high-quality instruction, but developing good teachers and retaining them in a particular school depends on supportive school leadership and positive work relations with colleagues. Meaningful parent and community involvement can be a resource for solving problems of safety and order; but, in a reciprocal fashion, these ties are likely to be stronger in safe and orderly schools. This reciprocity carries over to leadership as the driver for change. While a principal commands formal authority to effect changes in the four other organizational supports, a school with some strengths in these four supports is also easier to lead.

Arguing for the significance of one individual support over another is tempting, but we ultimately came to view the five supports as an organized system of elements in dynamic interaction with one another. As such, primary value lies in their integration and mutual reinforcement. In this sense, school development is much like baking a cake. By analogy, you need an appropriate mix of flour, sugar, eggs, oil, baking powder, and flavoring to produce a light, delicious cake. Without sugar, it will be tasteless. Without eggs or baking powder, the cake will be flat and chewy. Marginal changes in a single ingredient — for example, a bit more flour, large versus extra-large eggs — may not have noticeable effects. But, if one ingredient is absent, it is just not a cake.

Similarly, strong local leadership acting on the four other organizational elements constitutes the essential ingredients for spurring school development. Broad-based instructional change and improved student learning entail coordinated action

FIG 3.
Schools with Strong Teacher Cooperative Relationships Focused on Curricular Alignment Were Very Likely to Show Substantial Academic Improvements



across these various domains. Correspondingly, student outcomes are likely to stagnate if a material weakness persists in any of the supports. The ensemble of supports is what's essential for improvement. Taken together, they constitute the core organizational ingredients for advancing student engagement and achievement.

BUILDING TRUST

Affecting a coherent improvement plan across the essential supports can be a daunting challenge. Embracing a coherent improvement plan challenges longstanding norms about teacher autonomy in the classroom and a laissez-faire orientation toward professional development and innovative practice. Not surprisingly, cultivating teacher buy-in and commitment becomes a central concern in promoting the deep cultural changes required for such an initiative to be successful. At this juncture, concerns about building relational trust come forcefully into play.

Some of the most powerful relationships found in our data are associated with relational trust and how it operates as both a lubricant for organizational change and a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of local school improvement. Absent such trust, schools find it nearly impossible to strengthen parent-community ties, build professional capacity, and enable a student-centered learning climate. The reverse is also true: Low trust is linked to weaker developments across these organizational supports.

Given the asymmetry of power in urban school communities, principals play a key role in nurturing trust formation. Principals establish both respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns, and eschew arbitrary actions. If principals couple this empathy with a compelling school vision, and if teachers see their behavior as advancing this vision, their personal integrity is also affirmed. Then, assuming principals are competent at managing routine school affairs, an overall ethos conducive to building trust is likely to emerge.

Such leadership uses power constructively to jump-start change. In the initial stages, school leaders cultivate low-risk collaborations among faculty members who are predisposed to working together. School-based professional development is designed to advance instructional improvement and enhance a sense of community and shared commitments among faculty. Similarly, principals engage parents and other community members in activities that en-

able participants to contribute to the school and advance the learning of their own children and thus experience a sense of efficacy. "Small wins" gradually build a school community's capacity for the greater challenges (and higher-risk social exchanges) that may lie ahead.

On balance, as principals seek to initiate change in a school, not everyone is necessarily affirmed or afforded an equal voice. Relational trust can emerge only if participants show their commitment to engage in the hard work of reform and see others doing the same. Principals must take the lead and extend themselves by reaching out to others. On occasion, they may be called on to demonstrate trust in colleagues who may not fully reciprocate, at least initially. But in the end, principals also must be prepared to use their authority to reform the school community through professional norms. Interestingly, such authority may rarely be needed once new norms are firmly established.

UNRECOGNIZED CHALLENGES

In many recent discussions about school reform, ideas about parent involvement and school community contexts fade into the background. Some school reform advocates believe only instruction and instructional leadership matter. This perspective assumes that a school's social and personal connections with local families and communities play a small role in reform. Our evidence, however, offers a strong challenge. To be sure, instruction matters — a lot. But social context matters too. We have documented that strength across all five essential supports, including parent-school-community ties, is critical for improvement to occur in all kinds of urban schools. Unfortunately, we have also learned that this organizational development is much harder to initiate and sustain in some community contexts than others.

As data accumulated in Chicago and school-by-school trends in attendance and student learning gains became clear, a complex pattern of results emerged. Improving schools could be found in all kinds of neighborhoods varying by socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition. Stagnating schools, in contrast, piled up in very poor, racially isolated African-American neighborhoods. We became haunted by the question, "Why? What made reform so much more difficult to advance in some school communities?"

Our analyses led us to two different answers. First, the social capital of a neighborhood is a signif-

icant resource for improving its local school. We found that the latter was much more likely in neighborhoods where residents had a history of working together. In contrast, the absence of such collective efficacy in the surrounding community increased the likelihood that a troubled school would continue to stagnate. Correspondingly, communities with strong institutions, especially religious institutions, were more supportive contexts for school improvement. These institutions afford a network of social ties that can be appropriated for other purposes, such as improving schools. They also create connections that can bring new outside resources into isolated neighborhoods.

So, differences among neighborhoods in their bonding and bridging social capital help explain why the essential supports were more likely to develop in some neighborhoods than others. But this was only a partial answer for a subset of the school communities.

A second mechanism was also at work. We found that the proportion of children who were living under extraordinary circumstances — neglect and abuse, homeless, foster care, domestic violence — also created a significant barrier to improvement in some schools. To be clear, these students were learning at about the same rates as their classmates in whatever school they were enrolled. So, the learning gains for these particular students were not depressing the overall results for their schools. But the odds of school stagnation soared when a concentration of these students appeared in the same place. On balance, schools are principally about teaching and learning, not solving all of the social problems of a community. However, when palpable personal and social needs walk through doors every day, school staff can't be expected to ignore those needs. Our evidence suggests that when the proportion of these needs remains high and pressing, the capacity of a school staff to sustain attention to developing the five essential supports falls by the wayside. A few schools managed to succeed under these circumstances, but most did not.

In sum, a nettlesome problem came into focus on improving student learning to truly disadvantaged communities where social capital is scarce and human need sometimes overwhelming. These schools face a "three-strike" problem. Not only are the schools highly stressed organizations, but they exist in challenged communities and confront an extraordinary density of human needs every day.

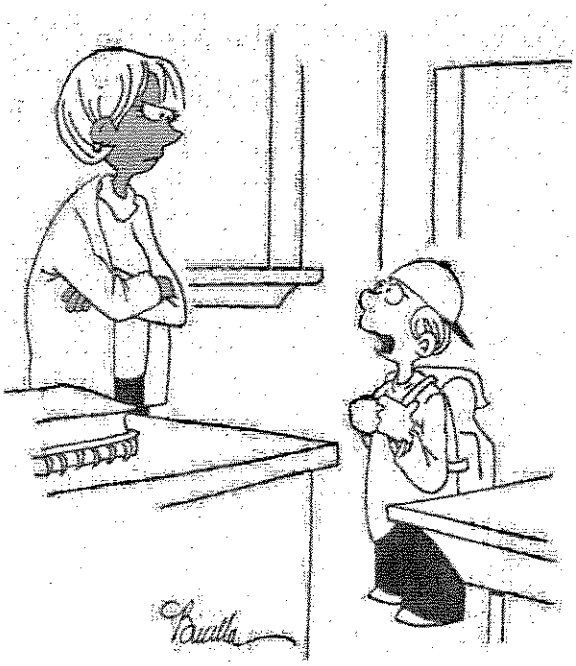
Our findings about schooling in truly disadvan-

taged communities offer a sobering antidote to a heady political rhetoric of "beating the odds" and "no excuses." To be sure, we believe that all schools can and must improve. Such claims represent our highest, most noble aspirations for our children, our schools, and systems of schools. They are ideas worthy of our beliefs and action. But there are also facts, sometimes brutal facts. Not all school communities start out in the same place and confront the same problems. Unless we recognize this, unless we understand more deeply the dynamics of school stagnation, especially in our most neglected communities, we seem bound to repeat the failures of the past.

Our concluding point is straightforward — it is hard to improve what we do not understand.

We need more attention on how to improve schools in these specific contexts. All plausible ideas for educational improvement deserve serious consideration. Absent systematic analysis of not only where we succeed but also where and why we fail, we will continue to relegate many of our students and their teachers to a similar fate.

This article is drawn from *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, published in December by the University of Chicago Press. The authors of the book either are or previously were part of the Consortium on Chicago School Research. They are Anthony S. Bryk, now president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Penny Bender Sebring and Elaine Allensworth, the consortium's interim co-executive directors; Stuart Luppescu, its chief psychometrician; and John Q. Easton, the consortium's former director and now director of the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.



"I can't take it off. It's a childproof cap."

BELIEF AND DOUBT

Our work has been motivated by a deep belief that schools can and must do much better if we are to revitalize the American dream of opportunity for every child. A good education is now more important than ever in creating the pathway to this opportunity. Unfortunately, for far too many, this pathway is now closed, and opportunity dies early. Thomas Jefferson's observation about America's noble experiment in democracy — "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be" — is truer today than ever before.

However, a belief in the power of schooling and in our ability to improve this institution must also coexist with a modicum of doubt — a critical perspective — about the wisdom of any particular reform effort. Virtually every initiative involves at least some zone of wishful thinking, and even good designs typically require executing a strategy for which there is no established game plan. We now know, for example, that some schools, especially in poorer African-American neighborhoods, were disproportionately left behind. This is a brutal fact that had to be told; our role as an agent informing reform meant bringing it to light. Absent our inquiry, this result could easily have remained hidden in a more casual accounting of the overall positive test score trends.

But we must also do more than just tell the facts. We must seek to understand, and we must also ask why. To see race and class differences in rates of improvement and to just stop there without probing deeper simply creates more fodder for conflict among critics and apologists of the current state of affairs. This dysfunctional discourse advances no common understandings and helps no children and no families. What is really going on in these school communities, and why are the important tasks of improving schools so difficult to advance? Asking these questions, bringing evidence to bear on them, and in the process advancing public discourse about the improvement of public education is a vital role that applied social inquiry can and should fill in a technically complex and politically diverse democratic society. In the end, melding strong, independent disciplined inquiry with a sustained commitment among civic leaders to improve schooling is the only long-term assurance that an education of value for all may finally emerge. K

California Parent Center

College of Education
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Parent.sdsu.edu

Closing the Achievement Gap:
Using Parent Involvement as a School Improvement Strategy

The California Parent Center (CPC) is a state level technical assistance center for organizing school, family, and community partnerships to support increased student achievement. CPC provides regional trainings for (P-12) educators and parent leaders at schools across the state. CPC also provides a professional development certificate for parent coordinators, liaisons, and those who supervise them.

All trainings:

- **Refocus and enhance existing family involvement programs**
- **Use research-based strategies and best practices**
- **Meet Title I requirements for districts to provide training for staff and parents**
- **Are a compliant use of Title I funds for parental involvement and professional development funds, ARRA funds, school improvement funds and other grants with parental involvement components.**

CPC also provides assistance to individual districts with planning, training and resources to implement successful family involvement programs at schools.

Using Parent Involvement as a School Improvement Strategy	
LEVEL I-TWO-DAY REGIONAL TRAININGS	
"Closing the Achievement Gap" *Using Parent Involvement to Increase Student Success and Academic Achievement* **Designed for Educators and Parent Leaders**	**Date: Feb. 14-15, 2011** **Location:** Riverside County Office of Education
LEVEL II-PARENT LIAISON CERTIFICATE PROGRAM	
Parent Liaison Certificate Professional Development Certificate Program Designed especially for those who coordinate or supervise parent involvement programs	**Date: March 3-4, 2011** **Location:** Los Angeles County Office of Education **Date: May 3-4, 2011** **Location:** Orange County Department of Education
PRE-CONFERENCE TRAININGS FOR: **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ANNUAL TITLE I CONFERENCES**	
California Parent Center will provide a one-day Pre-Conference training prior to the California Department of Education (CDE) Statewide Title I Conferences in April and May 2011. **Dates and locations of Conferences to be announced**	

For Registration Information Go To Our Website: parent.sdsu.edu

For Information on Individual Trainings for your District:
Please contact Melissa Popovich for available dates and more information
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