

Smart Districts

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The Smart District**
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**Working toward a Data-Driven,
People-Centered District**
Frank Till

**Creating Faculties That Support
School Communities**
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Improving Schools in the South Bronx**
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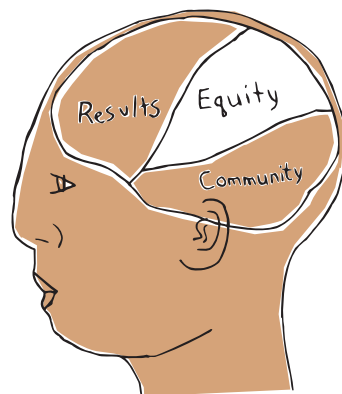
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In a low-income section of New York City, parents and community activists have organized a grassroots effort to improve teaching in local schools and succeeded in persuading school officials to implement their plan.

Urban School Districts: Part of the Solution, Not Part of the Problem

Robert Rothman

School districts have emerged as a key focus in school improvement. Policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act and foundation-funded initiatives like the Carnegie Corporation of New York’s Schools for a New Society high school reform program have placed new attention on the role of school districts in supporting school improvement. These efforts place significant responsibility on districts for providing schools with the assistance and support they need, and they also hold districts accountable for systemwide improvement.

This new focus on districts is a welcome shift. In the past, reformers have looked at districts as part of the problem, not part of the solution, and have tried to work around districts, rather than with them. Their attitude may have been justified, because districts, as they are currently designed, often stifle innovation and alienate, rather than engage, parents and communities.

Yet reformers now recognize that most schools do not improve by themselves. And only districts have the reach and capacity to support *all* schools in a community, an essential asset at a time when the goal is for all students to reach high standards. But for districts to take on this role, they must change. They must become “smart.”

As Marla Ucelli and Ellen Foley write in the introductory article in this volume, smart districts revolve around three elements: results, equity, and community. Each of these elements is essential. We need results, because all children – especially children in urban communities who have been poorly served by education systems – must perform at higher levels to succeed

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in the twenty-first century. Equity is critical because too many children, particularly poorer children and children of color, have the greatest needs and the fewest resources. And community is vital because everyone has a stake in the success of public education and a role to play in achieving that success.

The rest of the articles show vividly how various communities are changing to create smarter districts. Frank Till describes how a large, rapidly growing district – Broward County, Florida – is harnessing the power of technology to collect and use data to produce better results.

Brad Jupp shows the current inequities in the distribution of human resources within Denver and argues that district administrators and teachers unions need to focus on reversing these trends and getting the best-qualified teachers into the most challenging classrooms.

Kay James shows how bringing all segments of a community together around improving schools in Durham, North Carolina, transformed both the community’s sense of responsibility for public education and the school district’s goals and strategies.

And Ocynthia Williams describes the efforts of a grassroots coalition to bring about improvements in teaching in a New York City community.

While all of these efforts are promising, no city has yet pulled together all the components and created a truly smart district. And, at a time when “research-based” solutions are at a premium, some skeptics might ask: How do we know a smart district works? The truth is, real children in real schools and in real communities do not easily yield the type of “ironclad” evidence based on randomized trials that is favored by traditional methods of academic research. Our ability to capture and share knowledge from these leading-edge communities that are experimenting with revolutionary re-imagining of their school districts is woefully inadequate.

However, we know enough from the reform efforts of the last two decades to understand that schools need



support to improve and that the kinds of supports schools and students need demand a new type of district structure. The district-improvement efforts described in this issue of *VUE* are among an emerging body of new approaches that are consistent with what we know about good practice and effective school reform.

The growing interest in district reform on the part of policy-makers and funders suggests that they increasingly share this view. They understand that these experiments with smart districts form a new generation of fresh ideas with the potential to truly transform our school communities.

Results, Equity, and Community: The Smart District

Marla R. Ucelli and Ellen L. Foley

To succeed in educating each student, districts must take on new roles and perform others far more effectively. This new kind of district focuses on three themes – results, equity, and community – which serve to streamline and modernize its structure and functions.

Despite the central role of school districts in our education system, nearly two decades of school reform have virtually ignored the part districts can play in promoting or hindering school change.

In the late 1990s, national and state education reform discussions paid little attention to the role of school districts, except for their potential to do harm. Reformers had justifiable reasons for ignoring or bypassing school districts. Although districts successfully serve some societal functions (such as employment for adults, contracts with businesses and service industries, and vehicles for local democratic participation), most large districts are not adequate educational institutions, especially for poor and minority students in our urban centers. Because so many districts are failing in this paramount function, they are easy targets for critics who contend that their isolation from schools and communities and their outdated and ineffective structure impede, rather than enable, improvement.

While these challenges have not evaporated, researchers, practitioners, funders, and policy-makers (notably School Communities that Work, a national task force established by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform)

have now shifted their attention to the role of districts in reform. Research findings from such credible sources as the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas–Austin, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Richard Elmore of Harvard University, and MDRC have bolstered the idea that districts can positively influence school performance.¹ The focus of key policies, especially the No Child Left Behind Act, and large philanthropic initiatives such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York’s Schools for a New Society initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s small schools efforts, and the MacArthur Foundation’s Learning Partnership increasingly target not individual schools, but whole school systems. And city leaders, such as mayors Michael Bloomberg of New York City and Richard Daley of Chicago, are staking their political reputations and futures on making progress in improving whole school systems.

Marla R. Ucelli is director of district redesign and Ellen L. Foley is a principal associate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

¹ For summaries of this and other work, see “School Districts and Educational Improvement: An Annotated Bibliography of Research, 1988 to Present,” available at <www.schoolcommunities.org> in the Resources tab.

From School District to Smart District

Urban school districts are now seen as much a part of the solution as they are a part of the problem. But most are struggling to meet the growing demands on them. In many respects, this struggle is a predictable result of their design. In the first decades of the last century, an earlier breed of reformers – known as administrative progressives – sought a remedy for the patronage and provincialism of the highly localized school governance system of the nineteenth century. Taking their cue from the growing manufacturing economy, they tried to create the “one best system” (Tyack 1974) that would produce assimilated, productive citizens as efficiently as Ford’s factories produced cars. Their intent was to separate schooling

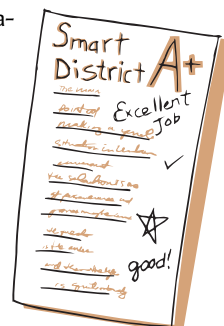
inequities abound, and communities have little say in the education of their children. Good instruction and good schools are idiosyncratic rather than pervasive, and lessons from successful schools and districts are not widely learned or heeded.

To succeed in educating each student, whatever his or her background, districts must take on new roles and perform others far more effectively. This new kind of district, what we like to call a “smart district,” focuses on three themes – results, equity, and community – which serve to streamline and modernize its structure and functions.

Results

The current imperative to improve results – to raise achievement for all students and close achievement gaps – requires high-quality data on student and school performance. Districts collect a wealth of data, but the information is often inadequate, and data gathered about youth relies heavily on narrow measures like test scores and school graduation and promotion rates. These indicators, while important, do not tell the whole story. They do not provide information about other aspects of youth development, such as health or well-being, or of a community’s supports for children and families; they seldom show student growth over time; and they do not say much about what schools and their partners need to do to improve results.

In addition, test scores and other indicators typically collected usually arrive too late to help individual children or schools who are struggling. For example, we already know that most urban schools do



Test scores and other indicators typically collected usually arrive too late to help individual children or schools who are struggling.

from politics through corporate-style “scientific management,” led by an expert superintendent and his board of directors. Like corporate managers, these professionals were to make and enforce policies that would be carried out by the “workers” in the schools. Standardization – of inputs, not outputs – was the goal.

A century later, this structure is an anachronism. By rewarding compliance over professional judgment and separating the schools from the community, the administrative progressives of the early twentieth century created a system that almost guarantees that innovation will be thwarted. Results are abysmal,

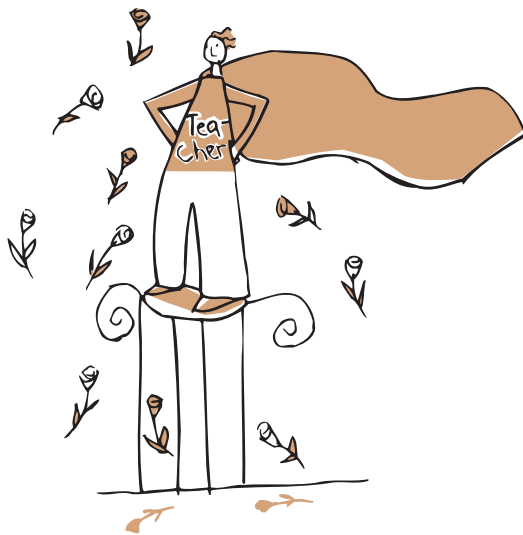
not meet state or district performance standards. These measures do not tell us whether schools or districts are investing in the types of instructional changes or providing the kinds of supports that will lead to higher performance down the road.

While standardized-test scores remain an important feature for assessing performance, smart districts increase the kinds of data available, make it more accessible through technology tools like data warehousing, and, most importantly, use it to inform plans for student, teacher, school, and district progress. By focusing on results, smart districts monitor performance, make decisions, and hold themselves accountable with data. Smart districts integrate not only the collection of data, but also the serious and regular examination of data, into the normal operating procedures for schools and districts.

Appraising results regularly and leveraging data that already exist can also help the partners involved in smart districts to hold each other accountable for improved service delivery. Smart districts share information widely and work with community partners to help ensure distributed responsibility and accountability for results. Reliable, shared data can be used for planning and evaluation, understanding trends, mapping service availability, and catalyzing wide civic involvement in and advocacy for child and family issues.

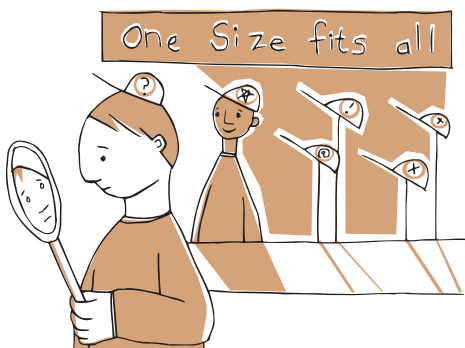
Equity

Educators and policy-makers increasingly recognize that results and equity are not mutually exclusive; they go hand in hand. The goal of ensuring that all students reach proficiency recognizes the interrelatedness of results and equity. Yet achieving equitable results requires a different approach to supporting schools than districts typically employ.



School districts have long provided instructional supports to schools, such as curriculum guides and professional development. Too often, though, these supports have been one-size-fits-all. Research on school-by-school reform efforts provides abundant evidence that schools need better supports and stronger incentives to improve, particularly if they are already low performing. The challenge is that each school, based on the resources of its students, faculty, and community, needs different kinds and combinations of supports to succeed.

Human resources, such as teachers and principals, and fiscal resources are also usually centrally distributed by school districts, without regard to the specific needs or composition of the school. As a result, in many districts, schools vary widely in their budgets and teacher experience and quality. And the



By focusing on equity, smart districts provide schools, students, and teachers with resources, authority, and supports tailored to their specific needs and capacities.

schools serving the most disadvantaged and disenfranchised families tend to end up with the least support.

By focusing on equity, smart districts provide schools, students, and teachers with resources, authority, and supports tailored to their specific needs and capacities. District staff work closely with school-based staff to identify needs. They meet those needs by working interdepartmentally and collaborating with teachers unions to alter district-wide policies about budgeting, curriculum and instruction, and teacher hiring. Smart districts also strategically vary how all these resources are distributed to schools. Variations that are the result of politics, inertia, or happenstance are minimized.

Smart districts also intervene in a timely manner if schools do not make progress. It is important to emphasize the word *timely*: reviews of efforts to intervene once schools have failed show that such rescue attempts are grueling, unpredictable, and expensive. Early intervention and support have been shown to produce huge rewards in the case of students; the same kind of monitoring, diagnosis, and support might make sense when dealing with schools in “turn-around” conditions. Again, these interventions must be calibrated to the unique needs of each school. The remedy should be appropriate to the situation – not based on a one-size-fits-all policy prescription – and should be accompanied by the support necessary to produce results.

Community

The professionalization of school districts established by the administrative progressives has frequently led to a fissure between the districts and the communities they serve. Individual schools often have some kind of community involvement – parent organiza-

tions, volunteer programs, etc. – but most districts lack the capacity and sometimes the desire for serious partnerships with civic and community-based organizations. This not only limits opportunities for parents, students, and community members to influence district policies; it also leaves districts out of the distribution of other community resources that might support education. These resources – parks, youth-serving organizations, after-school homework clubs, internships, and many other nonschool activities – are often distributed just as inequitably as district funds and human resources.

By focusing on community, smart districts expand the notion of who is a district leader. Many different individuals and organizations – including schools, parents and families, civic groups, research groups, unions, community- and faith-based organizations, private-sector companies, and city agencies – already work together to support and sustain the healthy learning and development of children and youth. But a smart district deepens the level of connection with the community and engages the community – not only in support and advocacy, but also to help lead and critique the district and hold it accountable. Accountability among these partners ought to be distributed; that is, each partner is accountable for its part in improving results, in proportion to its responsibility, and the partners share their unique strengths to bring about better results. In other words, districts and their communities need to work together to create a “smart district.”

The Challenges of Scale

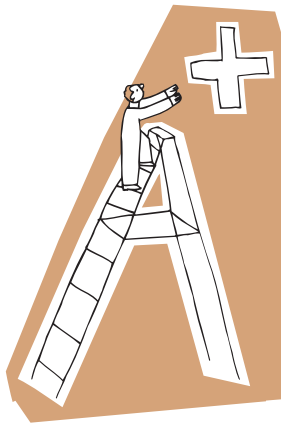
Becoming a smart district requires a simultaneous focus on results, equity, and community. The three themes are inextricably linked; neglecting even one jeopardizes reaching the goal of creat-

Creating a whole system of successful schools (or bringing reform “to scale”) is much more complex than a set of technical challenges.

ing a system that works for each student. As Cynthia Coburn (2003) has described, creating a whole system of successful schools (or bringing reform “to scale”) is much more complex than a set of technical challenges. It requires depth and spread, sustainability and ownership – concepts that hinge on normative changes at all levels of the system, not just alterations in policy, techniques, and materials. However, in practice, efforts to change whole systems of schools are often reduced to the technical. How many community-wide planning processes or education summits have begun with lofty goals but resulted in, if anything, a small, “boutique” effort that has virtually no impact on the system as a whole?

Fortunately, there are several communities, a few of which are highlighted in this volume, that are taking on the challenges of scale. They have combined concrete strategies and technical fixes with efforts to engage allies, create demand, and change hearts and minds. Their work demonstrates the power of pursuing results, equity, and community to force fundamental changes in the structure, culture, and practice of school districts and schools.

These communities also highlight the capacities needed by districts and their partners in these efforts: brainpower to design steps carefully, political will to overcome the inevitable resist-



ance to change, and skills and constructive relationships to implement them effectively. Clearly, making results, equity, and community the overriding purposes for school districts has major implications for urban (indeed, all) district design and for the very definition of what a district is.

The danger is that the current policy environment emphasizes a narrowly defined view of results over all the other pieces of the equation. Superintendents, school committees, editorial boards, community leaders, and political representatives must resist the temptation to reduce school reform to standardized-test scores and accountability. Without an equal focus on equity – providing schools, students, and teachers the supports they need to succeed – and community, reform efforts will fail to result in the kinds of deep changes we envision – and desperately need.

Unlike most school districts today, smart districts would provide high-quality, equitable educational opportunities to all children in all schools. They would help children, educators, and schools achieve results by holding them to the same high expectations but also by offering different support strategies based on the unique needs of the children, educators, and schools. The sys-

tem would itself encompass a broad range of partners who would take joint responsibility for results. Furthermore, the structural and managerial arrangements by which these smart districts function would be driven by what it takes to achieve those results – not by history, convention, or convenience.

No district has yet put all these pieces together. Altering the structure, functions, and norms of a system that has its roots in a century-old vision is an enormous challenge. It might be tempting to pursue the “one best system,” as the administrative progressives did. But focusing on the three themes of results, equity, and community is the key to districtwide improvement; it allows each school district–community partnership to forge its own path and create supports, partnerships, and goals that are right for its context and its needs. And once those supports, partnerships, and goals are in place, we will see that the equation is commutative: not only do results, equity, and community add up to smart districts, but smart districts will lead to results, equity, and community.

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Working toward a Data-Driven, People-Centered District

Frank Till

Districts have the capability of tracking detailed data on individual students and schools. We need to use this capability to ensure that our district and all of our schools are succeeding for all of our students.

We have fully entered the electronic age, with multiple cell phones in most households connecting everyone to everyone else all the time; Internet-ready computers that connect adults and children to the world; and cable-ready television sets capable of pulling in over a hundred channels and satellite stations from every continent on earth. It is an entirely different world from the one in which many of our teachers and school administrators grew up.

Compare the current *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* television series to the old *Dragnet*. Both shows are about police and crime solving. But the similarities between the two programs stop there. *Dragnet's* Sergeant Friday employed his "Just the facts, ma'am" interrogation technique to wrap up cases and throw the bad guys in jail. These methods may have been effective for his time, but the modern criminals portrayed on *CSI* are more sophisticated and require more sophisticated techniques. So the *CSI* crime-solvers rely on the use of data and scientific evidence.

Today in education, just as in police work, we are under pressure to produce ever-greater results with tight budgets. Like the investigators in *CSI*, we can only do our jobs effectively if

we employ the electronic-age tools at our disposal, rather than relying on the methods that may have served the "Superintendent Fridays" well. We have the capability of tracking detailed data on individual students and schools. We need to use this capability to ensure that our district and all of our schools are succeeding for all of our students.

New Ways of Gathering and Using Data

Broward County Public Schools has begun to take advantage of the data-rich environment in which all of us live. Situated in South Florida, between Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties, Broward County encompasses one of the most culturally rich areas of the United States. Our students come from 159 countries and speak fifty-two native languages. According to a survey conducted two years ago, seven of every ten new students in our system are foreign-born.

With 278,000 students, Broward County Public Schools is the second-largest public school system in the state and the fifth largest in the country. Our annual budget is close to \$4 billion, but, like most school districts, we struggle to make ends meet. Every day, to make sure we use our funds wisely, our

Frank Till is superintendent of Broward County (Florida) Schools.

system employs data to monitor our student transportation bus fleet, manage a \$1.7-billion construction program, and track a multibillion-dollar investment portfolio. All of this monitoring, managing, and tracking require data to be available to us on a minute-by-minute basis. In the end, the students of Broward County benefit.

To help us collect and analyze data, we turned to the private sector, where data use is more routine than it is in education. Working with the IBM Corporation, we developed the nation's first education data warehouse, which includes a wealth of easily accessible information on student and school performance such as grades, test scores, attendance records, and special needs.

We use this data to improve everything we do and how we do it. For instance, data formed the basis for estab-

lishing long-term direction for the district through a strategic plan that outlined goals for every year through 2020.

Categories involve student academic progress and targets for every division and department, including the business side of the house. Major goals are posted in every office and on the district's Web site. My evaluation as superintendent is based on attaining our yearly strategic goals.

We also adopted a form of quality management known as the Sterling Process, which consists of four steps: plan, do, study, and act. The process starts with a gap analysis, which measures our current capacities against the strategies and objectives in the strategic plan. Based on that analysis, we develop a plan to close the gap and meet our objectives. We then implement the plan, evaluate it, and make adjustments based on what the evaluation reveals.

For example, we determined via an analysis of student-performance data that we had some learning issues at the ninth-grade level. According to standardized-test results, a large percentage of students were reading below grade level. Using data and the Sterling Process, we developed and implemented an intensive reading remediation program for these struggling students. At the end of the first year, we analyzed the data and discovered that the program had not had a significant impact. Therefore, we made adjustments to the program and implemented it again at the beginning of the school year. The program will be monitored on a yearly basis, and adjustments will be developed and implemented based on results.

Another example is the data-driven approach we have taken to recruiting new teachers. Common sense acknowledges that good teaching depends on high-quality teachers. We are challenged



to hire 3,500 teachers every year due to student growth, teacher retirements, and the requirements of the state class-size-reduction law. Traditionally, we conducted nationwide recruitment and held a local teacher-recruitment fair. However, these efforts still left us short of the required number of qualified teachers for the start of the school year.

We used the database to determine both the availability of teachers and the total costs associated with our recruitment efforts. Using this data, we developed a number of programs to meet the critical needs of the district in specific areas. The Broward Teacher Corps was developed. Part of the program involves a “grow your own” concept. Paraprofessionals were given tuition dollars to attend community colleges and earn an Associate of Arts degree. The program tracks these paraprofessionals to help them follow the path to becoming fully certified teachers. The use of data has been essential in both developing the program and monitoring the results.

Using District Resources Wisely

As we prepare our annual budget, making use of data to identify which programs produce value – and which don’t – forms an important part of using our funds wisely and efficiently. In the past, projects were measured by “feel good” assessments, in which many projects that had never produced results or, at best, hadn’t produced them for years were allocated new funding and even expanded.

To correct the situation, we developed a process for reviewing all projects. Using data, we assess every project for its ability to meet established objectives. Using the Sterling Process, we measure objectives against results. This process

of assessment puts the district in a position to reallocate scarce funding toward programs proven to be effective and away from programs that provide little or no value to the district and its students. We started by evaluating all existing programs this way; now we use the process for all new programs and 20 percent of continuing programs each year.

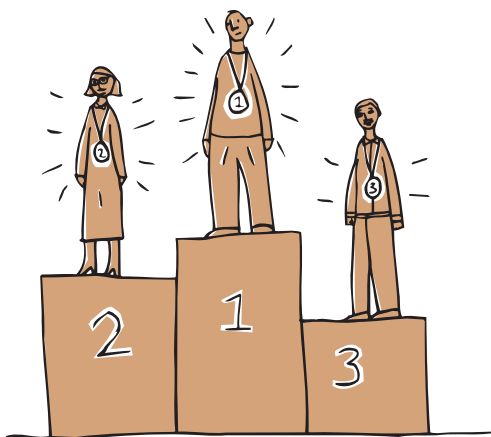
Of course, the major focus of a school district is student achievement, and Broward County’s interest in using data has extended to that area as well. We developed a unique system called Virtual Counselor, whereby parents can keep track of students’ academic progress and stay in touch with their

Making use of data to identify which programs produce value – and which don’t – forms an important part of using our funds wisely and efficiently.

school. Using individual pass codes, parents can monitor their children’s progress from home simply by dialing into the system, where they can track their child’s performance, community service hours, and test results. Parents can also access the system through computers that have been strategically placed in libraries throughout the system. During the 2003–2004 school year, the Virtual Counselor site recorded over 300,000 hits.

On the Road to Continuous Improvement

All of these initiatives – Virtual Counselor, the data warehouse, strategic plans, and the Sterling Process – have



As results began to surface, more and more principals came around to believing in the process and adopting the use of data into their individual school plans.

transformed the way we do business in Broward County. But I don't want to suggest that the transition to this new way of operating was a walk in the park. There is a natural resistance to evaluations in a state where it is illegal to hold closed-door school board meetings except for those involving contract negotiations and legal matters. Exposing yourself to public criticism based on data is uncomfortable. But where there's a will, there's a way.

The change was slow. But the state's accountability plan and the school board's commitment to continuous improvement forced the schools to improve their performance. The largest challenge was getting individual school leadership comfortable with using data to make decisions. Overworked and overloaded principals were often not enamored by the prospect of taking on the additional role of data manager.

Using data in a traditional school is a revolutionary idea. But the concept is beginning to take hold. The process began with the district's senior management team modeling the concept. Senior staff members visited schools and reviewed their data, mostly relating to student performance. Eventually, principals began to understand how the use of data could improve instruction and student performance. As results began to surface, more and more principals came around to believing in the process and adopting the use of data into their individual school plans.

I believe the breakthrough for principals came during the summer of 2003, when Kati Haycock of The Education Trust addressed our leadership seminar. At the end of her speech, the 1,500-member audience gave her a standing ovation. It was an epiphany for many in the audience. They got it! Using data *does* make a difference.

Armed with this new enthusiasm, the district's evaluation department routinely presented principals with data for use in tweaking their plans for student achievement. Individual school site plans are now based on data. School-based instructional staff now know that data determine success. The concept has been integrated into how we do business throughout the district.

Now the expectation is that every school and department will select a major area for reform. They are required to formally submit a Sterling project. This expectation helps reinforce the concepts of quality and continuous improvement.

The local business community has even become involved in the process by funding the Superintendent's Sterling Award. The award is presented to the "best in class" for each category, and the winner for each classification is entered into the state competition. This past year, Broward County Public Schools was selected as best in class for the state and two schools won statewide awards.

Today, we are busy trying to answer the question: What constitutes "best in class"? We currently measure our district against other school districts and even other types of organizations and businesses to benchmark against the best. Data is the essential ingredient in this process.

If *Dragnet's* Sergeant Friday were in Broward County today, he would likely alter his interrogation method from "Just the facts" to "Show me a wide range of detailed data and a sophisticated data analysis." His follow-up might be: "Show me the gap analysis."

Broward County Public Schools is committed to continuous improvement. This process can never be viewed as a once-and-done deal. Every year, we establish "stretch" goals and objectives and then engineer strategies for achiev-

ing them. We know we need to achieve better results for our students every year, and our goals and objectives reflect that reality. And we fully realize that it is only through the use of data that we will get there.

Creating Faculties That Support School Communities

Brad Jupp

Debates over who has the authority to assign teachers to schools miss the real problem: the inequitable distribution of teacher experience and quality. Districts and unions need to work together to ensure that well-qualified teachers teach in the schools that need them the most.

This fall, the School District of Philadelphia's governing board, the School Reform Commission (SRC) engaged in an old-fashioned dustup with its teachers union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) – in large part over using seniority as a factor in determining where a teacher is assigned. As is often the case in protracted collective bargaining disputes, the rhetoric became overblown. In a recent editorial (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 23, 2004), Ted Kirsch, the union president, saw a teacher assignment policy without seniority restrictions as a certain step to schoolhouse corruption. "In a pay-to-play city like Philadelphia," he speculated, "granting school principals unfettered power to choose teachers would open the doors to patronage, favoritism and racial, ethnic and religious discrimination in hiring, which were once rampant in public schools." Taking up the SRC's position, the editorial staff of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (September 24, 2004) shouted back, "Earth to PFT: . . . In the business world, bosses usually decide where employees work."

In the end, the two sides reached a compromise. But this was a weary debate, one in which both sides were

clearly missing – or, perhaps more accurately, avoiding – the point. While there are still urban districts that have strict seniority provisions in their labor agreements, many do not. And in those districts where seniority has given way to site-based hiring practices, the consequences have been neither pervasive cronyism nor businesslike efficiency in the principal's office.

Both sides are debating the wrong question. They are arguing about who should have the final say in making school staffing decisions: labor, through a system of simple, objective rules it controls, or management, through direct prerogative of the principal. Policy debates boil down to a single issue: Who has the power? But, as they discuss the teacher assignment policies, both parties should be answering a different question: How can we – labor and management together – develop policies and practices that ensure the best faculties for the communities that send their children to our schools?

I would like to enter this debate by answering the question the union and the SRC should be addressing. My answers are from a decidedly different vantage point. As a teacher leader in the Denver Classroom Teachers

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Association (DCTA), I speak not only from the perspective of a teachers union that has not had seniority provisions in its labor agreement for over a decade, but also from the perspective of a union whose members have recently ratified a landmark labor agreement that establishes a radically transformed teacher compensation system. One part of this system uses market incentives to help attract teachers to hard-to-serve schools and hard-to-staff assignments.

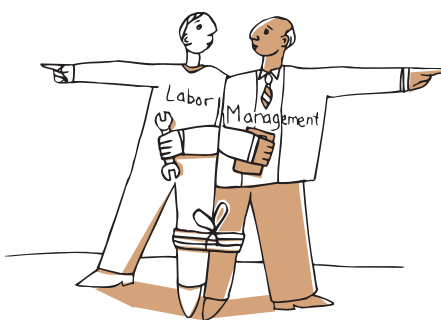
First, I will redefine the problem that needs to be solved by examining data from Denver Public Schools (DPS) about teacher turnover and distribution. I believe the data compellingly demonstrate that education leaders – urban school district administrators, union leaders, and community members – should disregard power-based solutions to the superficial problem of selecting candidates and pay closer attention to broader system problems that undermine our ability to provide schools with high-quality faculties.

In the second part of the article, I propose an agenda for reform that addresses the problems evident in the data and that can serve as an action guide for school districts to construct high-quality teaching faculties in all schools.

Redefining the Problem

The debate about seniority provisions seeks solutions to the wrong problem. Data about teacher assignment and teacher distribution reveal problems of an entirely different order. It makes little difference whether the principal has the power to select teachers if there is a poor supply of teachers from which to select, or if constant turnover of staff forces schools into an endless process of selecting a significant portion of the faculty every year.

Urban school districts suffer runaway teacher turnover. This problem is



partly the result of our inability to retain teachers, but it is also because our teacher assignment policies, which create unregulated markets that allow teachers to move from one school to another every year, destabilize school faculties. The problem compounds itself, though, because teachers tend to move away from schools with high percentages of students who perform poorly and toward schools with high

The debate about seniority provisions seeks solutions to the wrong problem.

percentages of students who are successful. Consequently, schools with high percentages of underachieving students also have the least experienced, least educated, and least qualified faculties. Furthermore, these same schools have the highest rates of teacher turnover. This turnover is driven at least in part because so many teachers who enter these schools leave either the district or the profession, but it is made much worse because those teachers who do stay in the district move out of those schools into other, higher-performing schools.

Data about teacher assignment and distribution from DPS, developed by the district and DCTA, substantiate this sad state of affairs (DPS 2004). In

Faculty churn is the movement of teachers created as teachers shift around the district filling vacancies; as one teacher moves to fill an assignment opened due to retirement or resignation, he or she creates another vacant position.

the 2003–2004 school year, DPS served 72,489 students. The majority of students, 57 percent, were Hispanic, while 18.9 percent were black, 19.7 percent were white, 3.1 percent were of Asian descent, and 1.2 percent were American Indian. There were 4,343 teachers working in 136 schools and programs.

In recent years, DPS and DCTA have collected data about teacher assignment and distribution, in part to inform collective bargaining decisions. In 1999 and 2002, we organized the data in three ways: to look at rates of teacher resignation and retirement, to look at the volume of teacher reassignment in excess of resignation and retirement, and to look at the distribution of teachers by school. Each view adds a new layer to the problem we must work to solve.

DPS and DCTA analyzed data on teacher resignation and retirement in 1999, collecting data from two earlier years. We organized the total number of resignations and retirements by the

years of service the departing teachers had had in the school district. Figure 1, which summarizes that information, shows that the majority of resignations occur during the first three years of teaching, and the vast majority occur among teachers with less than six years' experience. This is not startlingly different from state or national data about teacher resignation and has not changed significantly in DPS during recent years, but it points to a basic problem. A great portion of teacher turnover is the result of teachers leaving the profession in the first five years of their careers.

The second layer of the problem is the runaway process of teacher reassignment. There are two seasonal periods when large-scale teacher movement occurs: in the fall, when adjustments in school staffs are made due to changes in enrollment, and in the spring, when schools are staffed for the upcoming school year. Figure 2 estimates the amount of turnover in the 2001–2002 school year due to transfer and reassignment. It tracks the total number of teaching positions filled by seasonal teacher transfer events. It does not take into account the positions that have to be filled because of resignation within the school year or because of the reassignment of teachers in the summer due to promotion into special assignments or administrative positions.

Years of teacher experience	Percent of resigning teachers
1	38%
1–3	51%
1–5	69%
6–25	31%

Figure 1: Teacher resignations by years of experience, 1996–97 and 1997–98

The total is astonishing – 36 percent of the teaching force filled vacancies in a single year. This total is shaped by several factors, including the opening of three new schools in September 2002, which inflated the totals. But it does not take into account positions filled due to teacher reassignment within schools or positions filled due to teachers who resign during the school year, whose positions are filled without postings. If the 492 resignations and retirements that occurred in the same period are subtracted – a somewhat uneven accounting – it means that 1,093 positions were filled for reasons other than teacher resignation or retirement.

This number represents what might be termed *faculty churn*. Faculty churn is nothing more than the movement of teachers in Denver created as teachers shift around the district filling vacancies; as one teacher moves to fill an assignment opened due to retirement or resignation, he or she creates another vacant position. Unchecked, this results in an endless process of self-redistribution that serves DPS no purpose. In 2002 in DPS, faculty churn was associated with 69 percent of the positions filled. It also led to the movement

of as much as 24 percent of the total teaching faculty in Denver.

In recent years, DPS and DCTA have taken small steps to brake this runaway process. “Cycle 1” has been eliminated, partly due to budget processes. We have experimented with a variety of ways to reduce the volume of movement in the late summer, such as holding large job fairs rather than conducting another cycle of postings. Furthermore, there have been fewer total resignations and retirements, ratcheting down the total number of vacant assignments.

Nevertheless, the problem remains largely the same. While retirement and resignation are commonly understood to be the main reasons for the teacher shortage, Denver’s schools spend far more of their time trying to replace teachers who leave their school but remain DPS teachers. The situation is nothing less than a self-inflicted teacher shortage that wastes resources and does nothing for our students.

The third layer of the problem is perhaps the most disheartening. When we analyze the data about where Denver teachers are assigned, we see that schools with the highest numbers of underachieving students are the

Teacher transfer/ assignment event	Total number of teaching positions filled
Fall reassignments due to changes in student enrollment	(estimate) 25
Spring transfer “Cycle 1”	18
Spring transfer “Cycle 2”	570
Spring transfer “Cycle 3”	722
Summer assignments following “Cycle 3”	(estimate) 250
Total teacher transfer and reassignment from September 2001 to September 2002	1585

Figure 2: Teacher transfers and assignments

Schools with the highest numbers of underachieving students are the same schools with the highest numbers of the least experienced, least educated, and least qualified teachers.

same schools with the highest numbers of the least experienced, least educated, and least qualified teachers. DPS collects three simple indicators that can be used to construct a picture of the unequal distribution of qualified and experienced teachers in its schools. The first is the percentage of teachers with more than ten years of experience. The second is the percentage of teachers with a master's degree or higher. The third is the percentage of teachers who are not fully licensed.¹

Figure 3 arrays academic achievement data from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reading test, given to students in grades 3 through 10. The test places students into four ability categories: advanced, proficient, partly proficient, and unsatisfactory. The figure organizes schools into four bands, based on the percentage of students who were categorized as proficient or advanced. As in previous cases, the lowest percentage of qualified

and experienced teachers and the highest percentage of teachers not fully licensed are in the schools with the most educationally disadvantaged students.

This figure in particular reveals how the students least likely to succeed on the state's standards test are taught by the least experienced and qualified faculties and the faculties with the most teachers who are not fully licensed. School by school, gaps in student achievement are reinforced by differences in the qualifications of teaching staffs. What is most noteworthy is how the poorest academic achievement is concentrated in only 21 out of 120 schools, a number that could be targeted quite manageably by better district policies.

Systemic Solutions

As these data reveal, Denver has a serious problem with the assignment of teachers, and the problem has nothing to do with who – principals or teachers – decides whether teachers are able to move from school to school. The problem is rampant teacher turnover and the maldistribution of teacher quality. And Denver is far from unique. What, then, should districts and unions do about it?

The first and most crucial step is to make the creation of a high-quality faculty in all schools the goal of all teacher transfer and assignment systems. To do so is to approach policy from a significantly different viewpoint. Transfer and assignment systems are highly individualized: they define the rights and responsibilities of individual teachers as they make decisions to move from one school to another. These policies turn the transfer and assignment process into a marketplace. Individual teachers compete for the scarce resource of desirable assignments; conversely, as they leave less desirable assignments, teachers create hard-to-staff vacancies that, when there

¹ Colorado has at least three different ways a teacher can enter the profession without being fully licensed. Teachers can hold a state-authorized emergency license; they can hold a state-authorized adjunct license; or they can participate in one of a variety of alternative entry programs in which teachers earn a license while they teach.

	Percent teachers with more than 10 years' experience	Percent teachers with a master's degree or higher	Percent teachers not fully licensed	Number of schools
Schools where 25% or fewer students are proficient on the CSAP reading test	37%	33%	15%	21
Schools where 26% to 50% of the students are proficient on the CSAP reading test	44%	41%	11%	57
Schools where 51% to 75% of the students are proficient on the CSAP reading test	53%	50%	6%	31
Schools where 76% of the students or more are proficient on the CSAP reading test	54%	49%	3%	11
All schools in district	46%	42%	10%	120

Figure 3: Distribution of qualified and experienced teachers in DPS schools, organized by student-performance level on the CSAP Reading Test

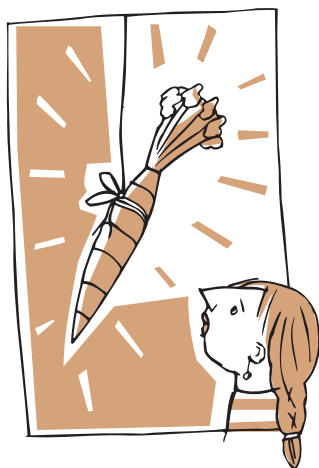
is a shortage of interested applicants, are filled by less-experienced, -educated, and -qualified teachers.

This marketplace becomes highly problematic when we consider research on the impact teachers have on the learning lives of their students. William Sanders has demonstrated in papers widely discussed by education policy-makers and opinion leaders that the negative effect of three or more years of teachers who get poor results from their students is almost irreversible. William Sanders and June Rivers (1996) show, further, that once students have fallen behind under circumstances like these, the work of a single outstanding teacher cannot bridge these powerful achievement gaps. In a school district with teacher turnover and distribution patterns like those in DPS, transfer and assignment policies reinforce the problem. Teachers in this marketplace move away from schools where students are underachieving, and the experienced, educated, and qualified workforce moves toward schools where students are already achieving.

If they are to turn around the effects of this perverse marketplace, school districts and teachers unions must collaborate to regulate the economy of teacher transfer and assignment. Moreover, if they take what Sanders demonstrates into consideration, they must do more than entice a few individuals to work in a less desirable place, or create simple restrictions that limit individual movement. Rather, they must work together to develop well-regulated marketplaces where the intended outcome is a high-quality faculty in every school.

There is no single policy action that will create this kind of well-regulated market for teacher assignments. Rather, leaders are going to have to negotiate multiple elements from an agenda of possible reforms, which are outlined in this section. Many of these actions are common sense, but many are nevertheless controversial. Most are not yet in place in DPS.

The suggested actions on this reform agenda are not sequential and they are not prioritized. They form, instead, a path of recommendations



Districts and unions should build a system of incentives that value retention as much as or more than attraction.

that leads from the area where the policy debate usually takes place – teacher transfer and assignment policies – through various school and district administrative systems and, finally, to the place where the debate should take place – in the potentially productive relationships between high-quality faculties and the school communities they serve.

Reform teacher transfer and assignment policies.

Districts and unions must eliminate the seniority provisions. This step, in itself, is not enough to solve the problem – the deplorable statistics about DPS are the result of a system without seniority restrictions. Nevertheless, creating site-based hiring committees that include principals and teachers with the authority to select staff is a necessary, if insufficient, first step in changing this system.

We also need to constrain excessive teacher movement by creating multiyear assignments. While this type of restriction is critical for teachers in

their probationary periods, similar restrictions could be created at any point in the teaching career. Multiyear assignments would serve many purposes, not the least of which is cutting back administratively initiated transfers.

Districts and unions should also build a system of incentives that value retention as much as or more than attraction. Signing bonuses may serve the purpose of attracting a teacher, but incentives that increase over time reward commitment and, if well designed, success with students. Polling of DPS teachers conducted by DPS and DCTA indicates that teachers are more likely to find packages that include strong leadership, smaller class size, adequate materials, and appropriate staff development more attractive than simple cash incentives. Furthermore, as we have designed our Professional Compensation System for Teachers, we have made incentives “stackable.” In other words, teachers who serve in eligible schools and who also serve in eligible assignments, like special education, receive multiple incentives. Of course, all incentives should be bonuses, not salary; teachers who choose to leave the eligible assignment no longer receive the incentive.

Ultimately, we should develop the capacity to offer these incentive packages to teachers with demonstrated track records of success with students. An incentive system designed by the Hamilton County Public Schools (Chatanooga) and the Hamilton County Education Association, the local teachers union, sets a strong positive example about how to design incentives that are linked to measurable student growth to encourage teachers to work in hard-to-serve schools. Developing such a system requires a deep source of student growth data, however, that can be linked confidently to the records of individual teachers.

Develop rigorous teacher induction programs.

Early evidence by the New Teacher Center suggests that programs that establish close bonds between new teachers and a well-trained, released-time mentor have a positive impact on both teacher retention rates and student performance (Strong & Gless 2004). But such programs can only work if they connect newly hired teachers with high-performing mentors, not just on-the-job buddies.

Set new expectations for principals.

Principals' performance should be evaluated, in part, based on measurable outcomes for the recruitment, retention, and development of teachers. In DPS there are schools that routinely turn over 25 percent to 40 percent of their faculty every year. Leaders at these revolving-door schools should be held to account; they should receive assistance to improve.

At the same time, we should resist the temptation to offer incentives to teachers to stay at these revolving-door schools. Recurring, exceptionally high turnover rates are almost certainly the sign of poor school leadership. Paying teachers incentives to stay with bad managers, especially if there is not any intended course of action to improve the quality of leadership at the school, is perverse.

The school-improvement planning process, which in Denver is based almost entirely on student-achievement outcomes, should address business practices, like human resource development, as well. Developing a stable staff serves as a means of improving student outcomes.

Situate school faculties in school communities.

Enduring partnerships between school districts and community development and neighborhood advocacy organiza-





tions can help close achievement gaps. The relationships among schools and other organizations need to be strong and grounded in practical expectations that closing these achievement gaps starts by building strong school faculties. Every effort should be made in these partnerships to attract and retain high-quality teachers and to develop systems that support this end.

These partnerships should be grounded in shared resources and work. Teachers and principals should do more than volunteer after their workdays to assist community organizers and representatives from development agencies. Only by sharing workspace, job assignments, and leadership roles in each other's organizations will codevelopment activities truly thrive.

Expand data systems for human resources and align human resources with budget systems.

Districts and unions need to develop data systems that make analysis of teacher transfer, assignment, and performance easier. The data analyzed in this paper was hand-developed by correlating Board of Education reports made by different school district departments. There is initial controversy about collecting data on individual teachers, especially linking individual teachers to student-performance data. But contract provisions can be negotiated that hold individuals free from consequences until the district and union become confident in the data systems being used.

Districts also need to disentangle staffing cycles from budget cycles. The most common bureaucratic excuse districts use for maintaining a late hiring cycle is budgetary: the district cannot hire new teachers until it knows staffing ratios and school enrollments, key variables in determining expenditures and

If reform is to endure, it must accomplish what it sets out to do. Districts need to commit to third-party program evaluation for all high-stakes reform.

revenues. While these are legitimate business reasons, they often mean that smaller suburban school districts, whose budgets are easier to manage, get the jump on the hiring market, draining the supply of new teachers before large urban districts can enter. School districts and unions should at least permit separate, early staffing cycles for hard-to-serve schools.

Create policies that endure and improve.

Rigorous, challenging reform of school systems takes time and patience, and there is sometimes a tendency for the direction to drift with the winds of change. Commitment to making enduring change is best held in place by policies intended to stay put. In urban school districts, collective bargaining agreements and the commitment of external partners serve to anchor reforms. The agreement for Denver's Pay for Performance Pilot lasted longer than the term of any elected official from either the Board or the union, and the agreement that creates the Professional Compensation System for Teachers holds this tough, but controversial reform in place for nine years.

At the same time, the most important component of any long-term commitment to change is a commitment to measuring its effects. This assures both transparency and accountability. If reform is to endure, it must accomplish what it sets out to do. Districts need to commit to independently funded, third-party program evaluation for all

high-stakes reform. And future system improvement will be driven by data from the program evaluation. Ongoing evaluation should generate data used to make systems get better over time, not simply offer a thumbs-up or thumbs-down judgment on the program.

The Need for a New Perspective

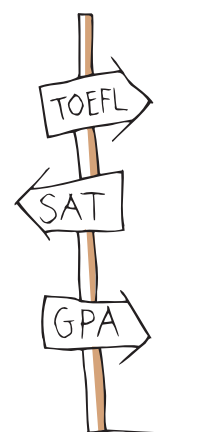
This fall my colleagues in Philadelphia have concluded their debate about seniority-based teacher assignments and site-based hiring. Fortunately, they settled their differences quickly and without rancor. My hope is that now they can move to the more important negotiations: ones where they look more deeply into their systems and begin to develop school faculties that meet the needs of their entire community.

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Putting the “Public” Back in Public Education: A Community Covenant

Kay S. James

In Durham, North Carolina, hundreds of community, civic, and education leaders have signed a “covenant” pledging support for public education. This document has galvanized community support for schools and refocused the district’s efforts to close the achievement gap.

In March 2003, hundreds of civic, community, and education leaders in Durham, North Carolina, signed a one-page statement that pledged their support for public education in the city. The statement, known as Durham’s Covenant for Education,¹ read in part:

We citizens of Durham, North Carolina, do hereby agree to work for the improvement of public education and closing the achievement gap by committing our time, energy, and resources; working in partnership with one another and the public schools; and coordinating and sharing our resources to the benefit of all students in Durham’s public schools.

We make this commitment to our community’s children and call upon all citizens to commit their time, energy, and resources to ensure the highest achievement of all children in Durham’s public schools. We pledge to make a quality education for every child a top community priority.

The event was a significant milestone in Durham’s history. But the Covenant was a springboard, not an

end point. Rather than allowing civic leaders to sit back and bask in the good feeling of having endorsed education, the Durham community has challenged them to commit resources and staff time to data-driven planning and to the creation of services that can promote student success. With the Covenant putting the signers on record in favor of a high priority for education-related programs, there is a mandate for agencies to attack and solve the problems that face students and their families.

The Durham community now has an expectation, a structure, and a vehicle for making changes in policy and practices in education. And we now have a record of success, as well as public responsibility. Together, the Durham community is moving forward on behalf of all children in the Durham Public Schools.

Following Up on the Covenant

The Covenant has transformed all of the segments of the Durham community who were party to the document – including the Durham Public Education Network (DPEN), which organized the effort. Prior to the community engagement initiative, which generated the covenant, DPEN had focused its ener-

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¹ A PDF file of the Covenant can be downloaded from the Durham Convention and Visitors Bureau Web site at <http://www.imakenews.com/durhamcvb/e_article000132570.cfm>.

gies on relatively small projects in support of schools and classrooms. Now, the organization is devoted to engaging all segments of the Durham community in educational improvement in more systemic ways.

Following the signing of the Covenant, DPEN formed the Covenant for Education Task Force, with more than forty members drawn from non-profits, business, education, government, and parents, to connect community resources to the schools. The school board and county commissioners are represented on the task force. Its activities have included:

- coordinating and focusing community resources through monthly meetings to build relationships across agencies, organizations, and the business community;
- mapping the available assets in the community that can be used to assist students and their families;
- examining school needs through a process of school-level needs assessment and review of existing data.

The processes of needs assessment and asset mapping have been formal and detailed, in the belief that a solid base of data will inform problem solving. The school-by-school needs assessment provided the community and the task force with in-depth information about

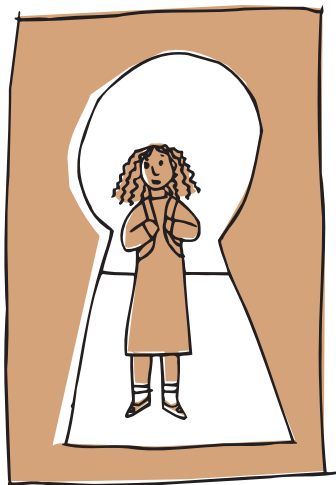
the schools' needs and challenges, including addressing the needs of students and families, parental involvement, volunteerism, and resources. The task force has presented the findings to the board of education, community agencies, and the broader community. The principals used these findings in their management retreat, and schools are now citing the data in their fund-raising.

Action followed swiftly in response to the needs assessment. But the full implementation of solutions requires time for working through all the barriers. For example, one issue that emerged in the spring of 2004 was the lack of public transportation serving five schools. Low-income parents have difficulty reaching these schools, and this problem impedes home-school connections and services for students and families. The city council passed a resolution agreeing to address this problem by expanding bus service, but found that the state legislature would have to approve an increase in city taxes to support the expansion. The legislature approved the increase, and the city and schools developed a plan that included the use of vans. Then a new legislative hurdle emerged: state law prohibits transporting students in vans. School and community officials are working to solve that problem.

This experience illustrates the complexity of the issues surrounding support for students and families. It also shows the persistence of the task force and DPEN in finding solutions and forging greater alignment and linkage of very large agencies to sit down and plan collaboratively for more efficient delivery of services to children and families.

DPEN also launched and supported a comprehensive process of asset mapping that pulls together data on Durham's many small, sometimes





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overlapping service programs. One purpose was better informing parents, professionals, and community members about existing services; a partnership with the Triangle United Way 2-1-1 program is a major vehicle for dissemination of the information gathered. Another purpose was to point the way to increasing the impact of all the services by pooling resources where possible.

For example, research showed that the achievement gap could potentially be narrowed through effective programs of early childhood education, after-school services, tutoring, and summer services. In response, DPEN set out to map the availability of all of those services, particularly in high-poverty areas of the community. The process, launched at a nonprofit collaboration workshop, sought the cooperation of hundreds of service providers. With DPEN funding, a consultant gathered data on services and participants and delivered a report, mapping their location and accessibility to students; the community; board of education members; school, city, and county officials; after-school service providers; the DPEN Board of Directors; and the Covenant Task Force.

Focusing on the Achievement Gap

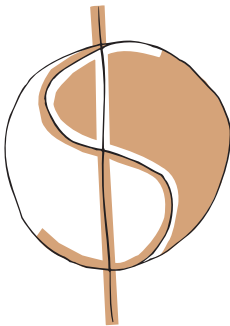
The process of community engagement has helped Durham Public Schools (DPS) focus its mission on closing the achievement gap, a key concern of the Covenant signatories. Although the DPS system has always embraced a goal of raising achievement, the school system now specifically incorporates the issue of the achievement gap into its vision. DPS aims to raise *all* children's achievement and believes that closing the achievement gap is essential:

Our Vision for Durham Public Schools is centered on all students achieving

at or above grade level, making continuous progress and reaching their highest potential. In order to realize this vision, we have to close gaps between African-American and Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts.²

The school system officially established a Closing the Achievement Gap task force and appointed an individual to the position of coordinator. The task force used a 2002 DPEN document, the Community Action Plan, as one of the key guides for its work.

Another significant change in policy is that the school system increasingly takes the view that removing non-academic barriers to achievement is part of its job. The Covenant Task Force affirmed the aim of educating the whole child in schools that are child centered and family focused. A few years ago, the school system's attention was officially focused narrowly on academic matters. The task force recognized, however, that principals were spending time coordinating with agencies that could address students' health and housing needs. Because addressing those needs is now seen as a prerequisite to high achievement, the school-based integration of services is increasingly seen as part of the schools' work to link county agencies to provide the services.



² Quote is from the DPS Web site at <<http://www.dpsnc.net>>, under the Closing the Achievement Gap tab.

The school system now says that all parts of the community have responsibilities in educating children, including the faith community, business, parents, and others.

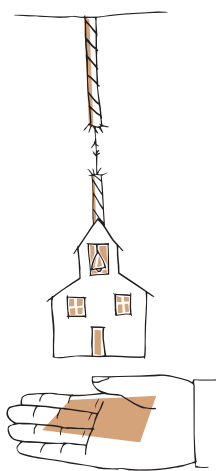
Opening Schools to Public Engagement and Responsibility

The schools are changing their stance toward the community in some visible ways, showing more openness to the public's exercise of its responsibility. The school system now says that all parts of the community have responsibilities in educating children, including the faith community, business, parents, and others. Its annual report gives credit to outside partners, including DPEN, for their contributions. Similarly, the school board chair has pointed to community contributions and DPEN's leadership role as factors in narrowing the achievement gap.

At a DPEN education summit, members of the public made the point that schools have not been inviting, approachable places. Since that time, a small but symbolic step has been taken in response: school office personnel have undergone training in customer service to improve their skills in welcoming parents and community members who call or come to the building. One parent program, which had repeatedly invited a school system representative to its meetings for some years, had its invitation accepted recently.

To build a good working relationship with DPS, community organizations have tried to demonstrate that they are not taking a punitive or adversarial

“They thought the problem was about ‘those kids.’ We are helping them to understand that situations or life in the community play a role and that the work will make Durham a better community.”



approach. For the school-by-school needs assessment, a focus group of principals helped review and revise the survey that would be used. This helped reassure central office staff and principals that the intention was to strengthen services, not to point a finger of blame at the schools.

DPEN and other civic organizations have played a role in supporting adequate funding for the public schools. When state budget cuts were proposed in spring 2004, DPEN distributed talking points that could be used to thank legislators for their past support and to explain the importance of school funding. Although cuts did ensue, they were less than had been proposed. Also, the county commission passed a tax increase to help make up the shortfall in funding. While DPEN does not claim sole credit for this action, its talking points were widely circulated and used

on the local level as well as in communicating with state legislators.

Stronger, More Positive Civic Engagement

The Covenant process has also had profound effects on groups outside the school system and their relationship with it. Increasingly, diverse groups recognize that they have a stake in the educational success of Durham’s young people. DPEN has sought to engage a broader band of stakeholders in identifying problems, planning, setting priorities, and implementing solutions. To do so, we have had to reach out to sometimes-antagonistic groups, and to build trust through a reasoned, fact-based approach. A community observer commented on the success of this stance: “People are coming to the table to talk without being confrontational. DPEN has created a baseline of civility.”

To take one example of engaging diverse groups, DPEN partnered with the Carolina Hurricanes hockey team and with the Oxford Manor After-School Achievement Center to provide resources for students living in the Oxford Manor public housing community. Emerging out of this engagement was the establishment of a Parental Resource Center at the Student Achievement School in Oxford Manor, with hockey players mentoring students in the summer.

The faith community has also been key to this work. In June 2004, DPEN

and North Carolina Central University co-hosted a conference, Working Together to Close the Achievement Gap: Communities of Faith Making a Difference. The conference was designed to build relationships, build capacity, and share tools and practical approaches to serving students and their families. Two groups – African American Clergy Closing the Achievement Gap and Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods (Durham CAN) – continue to communicate with DPEN about our shared goals.

Annually, an education summit draws together community leaders and grassroots participants in wide-ranging workshops and discussions. This event has symbolic significance; for example, the April 2004 summit was co-chaired by the mayor, the chair of the county commission, and the chair of the school board, demonstrating their determination to work in concert. Leaders engaged in a panel discussion and question-and-answer session on the subject of collaboration among the city, county, and schools. The summit also focused on community action, with intensive discussion of nonacademic needs, volunteerism, and public responsibility.

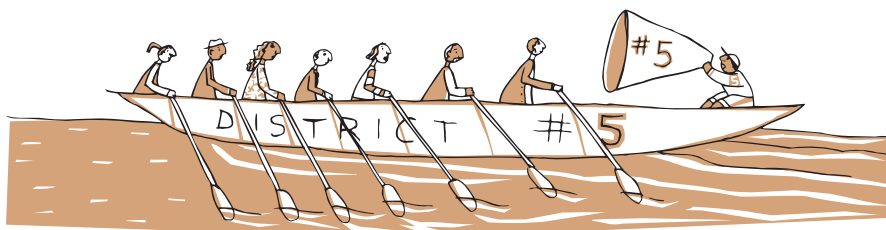
As a result of the engagement activities, the goals and assumptions that business leaders bring to their

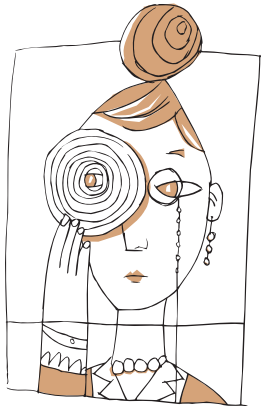
engagement with schools and related services appear to be changing. One business leader who has worked actively with DPEN described the change: “They thought the problem was about ‘those kids.’ We are helping them to understand that situations or life in the community play a role and that the work will make Durham a better community. Doing a better job educating our children and moving them through the system more efficiently will contribute to reductions in crime, tax burdens, and poverty. . . . I think they are starting to get it. We are in process and on the journey.”

Lessons Learned

No one should have the impression that this work has been easy. Building collaborative relationships is time-consuming, political, sticky work. The results are fragile, requiring constant attention and nurturing. Disputes arise over policy and over the proper awarding of credit for accomplishments. Because collaborative relationships can be volatile, having the flexibility to seize or create opportunities is essential – as is steadfastness in pursuit of children’s best interests.

One way we have maintained focus is by using public forums to recognize good behavior, encourage behavioral





change, and condemn destructive positions when needed. This has taken some courage; we have gotten resistance from those we might have considered our allies. But we understand that progress may threaten their power, leading them to distract from the main focus by promoting single issues.

To move community engagement to community action, it is critical to engage both the power brokers at the top and the grass roots and the masses. Even with that approach, though, community engagement is not linear. It is possible to get caught off guard when slow movement is followed by high velocity in action.

For DPEN, working inclusively to build public responsibility has been slow, sometimes frustrating work. People inside and outside the organization have sometimes felt that setting up a service-delivery program could provide more immediate satisfaction and tangible short-term results. But as public responsibility has deepened and broadened in Durham, the pace of policy change has begun to accelerate, and participants are beginning to see the more far-reaching results that come from aligning the efforts of key agencies and organizations. DPEN has always had a commitment to commu-

nity engagement, but our board is now even more convinced that it is essential in all of our work. The vision of a community holding its leaders accountable for serving children has come closer to realization in Durham.

The Covenant for Education Task Force will continue to focus on the priority areas identified by the needs assessment and work with public agencies to implement the ideas that are developed. The Task Force will focus on engaging the community in improving teaching quality by retaining new teachers through mentoring and community partnerships. Community engagement is now the thread that is drawn throughout all the work of the Durham Public Education Network. As one community member put it, “this initiative has helped our community to put the ‘public’ back into education.” And that is what we will continue to do.

A Community-Led Reform: Improving Schools in the South Bronx

Ocynthia Williams

In a low-income section of New York City, parents and community activists have organized a grassroots effort to improve teaching in local schools and succeeded in persuading school officials to implement their plan.

In the South Bronx section of New York City, parents have proven without a doubt that the oft-quoted adage “It takes a village to raise a child” is not just a cliché, but a genuine prescription for real school reform. Engaging the entire school community to make changes in how children are raised and taught in school has been a tireless effort of the three-year-old Community Collaborative to Improve District Nine Schools, or CC9.

CC9 is an extraordinary parent-led community group, made up of six community-based organizations and a university, whose primary goal is to improve the quality of education for children in the South Bronx, where Community District 9, one of thirty-two community districts in New York City, is located. Each of the six organizations that make up CC9 – ACORN, Citizens Advice Bureau, Highbridge Community Life Center, Mid Bronx Council, New Settlement Apartments, and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition – brings with it more than twenty years of experience in rebuilding its part of the South Bronx. CC9’s university partner, New York University’s (NYU) Institute for

Education and Social Policy, provides technical and coordinating support.

Because of their ability to reach thousands of residents, and because of their relationship with local political leaders, all of the organizations have the political clout needed for CC9 to make systemwide as well as local improvements in education. What makes CC9 powerful and effective is that we are a parent-led group, meaning that all campaigns are developed and driven by parents and community residents. With the aid of the six organizers hired for the community-based organizations, we have been able to move our campaigns forward at a steady pace.

Building the Movement

After thirty years of having to deal with as many as twenty-five different superintendents, corrupt school board members, and an unstable teaching force, CC9 decided that it was time for real change and that it was going to be a new day in District 9. The district had been at the bottom of the totem pole in academics, parent involvement, and resource distribution for far too long. The children were being treated unfairly. We were not going to accept that kind

Ocynthia Williams is a parent leader at the Community Collaborative to Improve District Nine Schools in the South Bronx.

of inequity any more and were no longer going to sit back and allow the system to fail our children.

CC9 realized that, for effective and sustainable change to happen in our schools, we would have to take the lead in making the changes and confront the system head on. So we convened numerous meetings, held retreats, and came up with a plan we believed represented some of the answers to the question of how to create real change. Our vision for school change, the Platform for Educational Improvement, was ambitious, creative, and innovative.

The three-point proposal supported teachers and principals, and it was designed to build true parent-school and community partnerships and improve academics. The first point called for a highly skilled and well-trained teaching force. Although we believe District 9 has many excellent teachers, we need more. And we believe they must be recruited and retained in the South Bronx. The second point calls for effec-

tive principals to lead the school-change process. School-improvement research puts the role of the principal at the center of successful schools, and we believe that principals need the time and skills to function as instructional leaders in their schools. The third point calls for real family and community partnerships. CC9 feels that the distance between schools and the community must be reduced and that parents and teachers must work together in collaboration to benefit the children.

Taking Advantage of the New York City School System Reorganization

In the middle of our campaign to build support for the Platform for Educational Improvement, the mayor and chancellor announced their Children First reform agenda. It constituted the most significant reorganization of the school system since decentralization was initiated thirty-five years ago. They reorganized the thirty-two school districts into ten regions. Each region then created networks of ten to twelve schools. All of the schools we were involved with fell into Region 1.

To prevent the reorganization from fragmenting our power and adversely affecting the work that we started, CC9 rallied the Region 1 superintendent and the chancellor and convinced them both to make the ten schools that we were working with into our own network of schools, called the CC9 Network. We're the only network in the city that was grouped together based on the work and relationships a community-based organization has created with the schools.

Engaging the School Community

We knew that building relationships with people and organizations with the power to bring about change would be



the key to our success. So CC9 reached out to the community, the Region 1 top management, school district representatives, the teachers union, administrators, the department of education top management, and our local political leaders. We also reached out to other school reform organizations, like New Visions for Public Schools, Lehman College, and NYU's School of Education, all of whom had important resources that could benefit the schools. We felt that to make any kind of change happen we would have to facilitate buy-in from all of the players. We knew that we didn't have all of the answers to how change would happen, so we wanted to share our vision with those folks and to ask for their help in developing an implementation strategy for the platform.

We also knew that we had to demonstrate our power to ensure real collaboration and mutual accountability. We held a rally in October 2002 attended by over 300 parents, community residents, all of our local political leaders, top-level representatives from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the Department of Education, New Visions, Lehman College, NYU's School of Education, and the local news media. The platform was very well received. A pledge of commitment to the platform was signed by Michele Cahill, Chancellor Klein's senior counselor for education policy; Irma Zardoya, superintendent of Region 1; Michelle Bodden, vice president of the UFT; Elliot Weitz from Lehman College; Arthur Foresta from New Visions for Public Schools; all of our local political leaders; and CC9 leaders. All of the parties agreed to participate in a planning committee to implement the platform.

Immediately following the success of the rally, CC9 scheduled our first implementation and strategy meeting.



CC9 is the only network in the city that was grouped together based on the work and relationships a community-based organization has created with the schools.

The pledge-signers were not the only folks to attend the meeting; close to sixty people showed up, including principals, teachers, parents, and community members. As with all of our meetings, parents facilitated the entire agenda. The evening ended with total buy-in from the committee. In fact, the meeting was so successful that three subcommittees were formed and each group decided to take a section of the platform and come up with a strategy to best implement their portion. We met throughout the entire winter and spring, working diligently on developing the strategies. By the end of April, we had completed the implementation strategies and were ready to present them to the community at large.

CC9 proposed that each school employ a “lead teacher”: a highly skilled classroom-based teacher who would use his or her classrooms as a laboratory for other teachers and also support other teachers by providing targeted professional development.

The Lead Teacher Campaign

One of the most important strategies that came out of the meetings was based on our first point, which called for a highly skilled and well-trained teaching force. The lower-performing schools in the South Bronx all have something in common: a younger teaching staff with only one or two years’ teaching experience. CC9 had to come up with a strategy to address retaining our teachers in the schools. We called this strategy the Lead Teacher Campaign.

The strategy was based on the idea that strengthening the capacity of the teaching force in our schools and addressing the maldistribution of teachers required a new type of position. CC9 proposed that each school employ a “lead teacher”: a highly skilled classroom-based teacher who would use his or her classrooms as a laboratory for other teachers and also support other teachers by providing targeted professional development.

The proposal called for the lead teacher to serve half-time in the classroom and half-time providing coaching, leadership support, and professional development to other teachers. The reasoning behind the balancing of the roles is to ensure that the lead teachers have the time to maintain significant classroom responsibilities, yet have adequate time beyond their classroom responsibilities to coach and support the professional growth of the other

teachers. The CC9 proposal called for a citywide posting to attract the best candidates, a salary adjustment to reflect the differentiated responsibilities of the position and to attract highly skilled teachers from other parts of New York City, and a budget of \$2.2 million for the full implementation of the proposal.

At the end of May 2003, another rally was held, attended by over 450 people, where CC9 shared our complete implementation strategies to the community. Following in the footsteps of the last rally, we presented the community with another pledge and asked the same folks who signed our earlier pledge to sign a pledge of commitment to support the Lead Teacher Campaign. We asked them to work with us to push the program to grantmakers, garner support from our elected officials, and present the proposal to the chancellor to ask for his support in implementing the program for school year 2004–2005. Our working together really paid off, because, once again, all of the folks signed the pledge of commitment. We were making history.

CC9 formally launched the Lead Teacher Campaign in January 2004 at a reception for CC9 hosted by the UFT. The principals from each of the ten schools, along with parents and teachers, attended the reception. The Director of Community Engagement, Leanne Shimabukuro, represented Michele Cahill from the chancellor’s

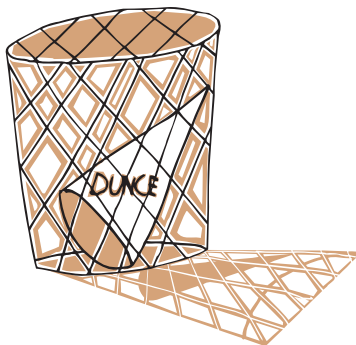
office, and the keynote speaker of the evening was the UFT president, Randi Weingarten. It was an amazing evening, but only the beginning of an eight-month journey into making the lead teacher program become a reality.

Over the course of the next eight months, we spent countless hours meeting with grantmaking foundations shopping our proposal. The Booth Ferris Foundation agreed to fund our program, providing a two-year, \$400,000 grant.

Meeting the Chancellor

With some financial backing and the support of elected officials intact, the next step was to gather the support of the community. For one month, from March to April, organizers and parent leaders set out to mobilize grassroots support by having parents and community residents sign a petition of support for the program. The organizers and parents knocked on doors, held house meetings, and met in schoolyards and subway stations to collect the signatures. Remarkably, 10,000 signatures were collected – important leverage when presenting our proposal to the chancellor.

Armed with the 10,000 signatures, along with letters of support from our elected officials and the secured funding from the Booth Ferris Foundation, CC9 met with the chancellor on April 2, 2004. We presented the proposal and asked for his support for the program and an allocation of public dollars for the implementation. With parent leaders and organizers from CC9, UFT members, Michele Cahill, and the chancellor in attendance, the meeting went off without a hitch. Much to all of our surprise, the chancellor expressed his general support for the program and committed to funding it for at least one school year. He only had a couple of suggestions for the program. He



asked that we try not to deplete the best teachers from the schools that we are currently working with and to look for teachers citywide for the position, and that we meet with the new deputy chancellor for instruction, Carmen Farina, to work out the program's design.

CC9 was stunned at how quickly the chancellor embraced our proposal – stunned because, historically in our communities, chancellors have almost never met with parent groups, let alone

The organizers and parents knocked on doors, held house meetings, and met in schoolyards and subway stations and, remarkably, collected 10,000 signatures.

awarded them money for programs that they've developed. It was even more shocking that he agreed that a salary adjustment should be paid to reflect the differentiated responsibilities of the teachers. That meant the chancellor was willing to negotiate with the union about a teacher's salary.

CC9 left that meeting ecstatic. After months and months of planning and preparing, our ideas were becoming a reality. If successful, we would

actually create a new position for teachers in New York City and change the policy on how some teachers would be paid, based on their skills and the quality of their teaching.

The next four weeks would prove to be crucial for CC9. We met with Deputy Chancellor Farina on April 30. She informed us that the chancellor had agreed to allocate \$1.6 million (above and beyond the normal school allocation) to implement the lead teacher program. As suggested by the chancellor, we discussed the design of the program, and came to an agreement. The final step was the negotiation for the salary differential; Carmen informed us that a date had been set.

Up to this point of our journey, things had been moving well. However, it was difficult to find a convenient time for both the UFT and the Department of Education to meet for negotiations. Because it was so late in the school year, CC9 felt that any lapses of time in the process would threaten the program's ability to be implemented in September. After back-and-forth conversations with both the UFT and Department of Education representatives, a time was set.

In an unprecedented move, the UFT president invited members of CC9 to attend *and to participate in* the negotiation session around the language of the contract. Although the experience was exciting, we left the meeting without an agreement. That meant more waiting, and the last thing that CC9 wanted to do was wait. We were about to lose all hope.

Doing the one thing we knew how to do best, we pushed both parties as hard as we could to see how important the program was for the children in our schools and urged them to come to an agreement. We literally sent daily e-mails to the lawyers for both parties,



CC9 organized a trip to the Department of Education headquarters and delivered a large roll of red tape and scissors to key staff – a symbolic action urging them to cut through the red tape.

the deputy chancellor, and the UFT. We constantly relayed the message that if they didn't come to an agreement soon, it would be too late to post the position, meaning that we would not be able to hire the teachers and thus not implement the program in September. In a last attempt to get the parties to understand our message, CC9 organized a trip to the Tweed Building (the Department of Education headquarters) and delivered a large roll of red tape and scissors to key Department of Education staff – a symbolic action urging them to cut through the red tape.

All the pushing paid off, and on June 14, 2004, the final meeting between CC9, the UFT, and the Department of Education took place. The meeting was to inform us that the Department of Education and UFT had resolved their issues and had come to an agreement on the terms of the contract language. We were now free to advertise the position, at least locally. There was one more step on the part of the UFT to complete the process: presenting the contract to its executive board for approval at an emergency session. And, in another historic event, CC9 was invited to attend the meeting. The meeting ended with almost a unanimous vote in favor of the contract. We were cleared to move forward.

Hiring the Lead Teachers

Although it seemed that most of our work was over, it had just begun, because the next step was the actual advertising for the position and inter-

viewing the best candidates. CC9 placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* and posted the position on the Department of Education Web site, as well as in universities across the region.

Fortunately, the contract helped us in our work. The agreement called for a two-step process. First, a committee made up of four representatives of the superintendent, two from the UFT, and two CC9 parent leaders would select a pool of the best-qualified candidates for the ten schools to consider. The second step was for each school to form a committee composed of the principal, administration representatives, staff representatives, and parents to hire the lead teacher. The selections were to be made by consensus, and the principal had veto power. While the selection process was somewhat rushed due to the short timeline, overall it worked



quite well. All of the teachers were interviewed by the first and second committees and thirty-six teachers were hired. All this happened between June 14 and August 27.

Consolidating a Historic Achievement

The final stage of CC9's quest to establish the lead teacher program involved developing, along with the Department of Education and the UFT, a training program for the lead teachers. The training took place the week of August 30. To ensure the involvement of CC9 throughout the entire process, we facilitated the first day of training. On the last two days of training, the lead teachers got a visit from Randi Weingarten, the UFT president, who expressed her support and confidence in the teachers and conveyed her belief that the program will be successful. The next day, Chancellor Joel Klein expressed his support and commitment for the program, his confidence in the teachers, and his belief that this program is going to work. Amazingly, they both acknowledged the historic nature of the program.

In keeping with CC9's mission, we will continue to build power and work in collaboration with organizations to ensure that the children in the South Bronx receive the best quality education possible. We strongly believe, in the words of the freedom fighter Frederick Douglass, that "without struggle, there can be no progress."



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