FOLLOW THE LEADERS: HOW EFFECTIVE URBAN SCHOOL BOARDS ADVANCE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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The Center for Reform of School Systems - CRSS

- Trains governance teams for high student achievement
- Helps districts develop measures to drive improvement
- Conducts audits for instructional, operational, and technology effectiveness and efficiency
- Has worked with more than 100 of the largest urban districts in the US
- Has trained half of the Broad Prize for Urban Education winners.
First, the good news...

After more than a decade of fairly flat achievement and stagnant or growing gaps, student achievement is climbing.
4th-Grade Reading: Rising Performance, Gap Narrowing

9 Year Olds – NAEP Reading

Average Scale Score

- 150
- 200
- 250


African American
Latino
White

*Denotes previous assessment format

8th-Grade Math: Rising Performance, Gap Narrowing

13 Year Olds – NAEP Math

Average Scale Score


African American  Latino  White

* Denotes previous assessment format

Bottom Line:

We are making progress!

But the bad news…

At this rate, it will take decades to close the achievement gap—and that’s assuming the performance of white students remains unchanged.
African-American and Latino 17-year-olds do math at the same levels as White 13-year-olds.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress

Note: Long-Term Trends NAEP
African-American and Latino 17-year-olds read at the same levels as White 13-year-olds.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP 2004 Trends in Academic Progress

Note: Long-Term Trends NAEP

Slides from the Ed Trust
How do we stack up internationally?
Of 34 OECD countries, USA is 12th in Reading literacy.

2009 PISA

Slides from the Ed Trust

“Highlights from PISA 2009,” NCES, 2010
Of 34 OECD countries, USA is 17th in Science.

2009 PISA

Average scale score

Finland, Japan, Korea, Canada, Estonia, Australia, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Poland, Ireland, Belgium, Hungary, United States, OECD Average, Czech Republic, Norway, Denmark, France, Iceland, Sweden, Austria, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Italy, Spain, Luxembourg, Greece, Israel, Turkey, Chile, Mexico

“Highlights from PISA 2009,” NCES, 2010

Slides from the Ed Trust
Of 34 OECD countries, USA is 25\textsuperscript{th} in \textbf{Math}.

"Highlights from PISA 2009," NCES, 2010
What can we do?

An awful lot of Americans have decided that we can’t do much.
Do we believe that what we do makes a difference?

Then...do we act on that belief?
The Answer is YES!
How many of us take a baby aspirin every day based on the belief that it will prevent heart attacks?

This means that there is a 3.4% correlation between taking a baby aspirin/day and not having a heart attack.

Based on the data… millions take 1 baby aspirin/day!
We are motivated by what the research tells us about aspirin and heart attacks.

So, what does the research tell us about what works in improving student achievement?
The research literature tells us that…

The actions of the district and the school can have a powerful effect on INDIVIDUAL student achievement!
The Proof: A Meta-analysis by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

• Analyzed 27 studies
• 2,714 school districts
• Over 3.4 million student scores
• 4,434 ratings of superintendent leadership
What do we know about the effect of district-level leadership (BLOB) on student achievement?

The average correlation between district-level leadership (BLOB) behavior and achievement is 24%!!!
Findings from McREL’s Study on District-Level Leadership

1. District leadership matters.
2. There are six district leadership (BLOB) responsibilities with a statistically significant effect on student achievement.
What Works #1:
Collaborative Goal Setting = 24%

The superintendent involves the board members and principals in the process of setting goals.
What Works #2: Non-Negotiable Goals = 33%

Goals for student achievement and the instructional program are adopted and are based on relevant research.
What Works #3: Board Alignment & Support = 29%

Board support for district goals for achievement and instruction is maintained.
What Works #4: Use of Resources = 26%

Resources are dedicated and used for professional development of teachers and principals to achieve district goals.
What Works #5: Monitoring Goals = 27%

The superintendent monitors and evaluates the implementation of the district instructional program, the impact of instruction on achievement, and the impact of implementation on implementers.
What Works #6:
Defined Autonomy = 28%

The superintendent provides defined autonomy to principals to lead their schools, but expects alignment on district goals and use of resources for professional development.

*** Site-based management is negatively correlated in districts without goals for instruction and achievement.
Yet, instead of doing what works...we hear many people say:

- The children are poor.
- They come to school without breakfast.
- Their parents don’t care.
- There aren’t enough books.
- There aren’t enough parents.

No Excuses
But...

If they are right, why are low-income students and students of color performing so much higher in some schools?
Low-income* students do better in some districts. NAEP Math 8th Grade – 2011

There is a 31-point gap between Detroit and Houston.

*Based on eligibility in the National School Lunch Program.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011, Trial Urban District Reading Assessment
Low-income* students do better in some districts.

**NAEP Reading 8th Grade – 2011**

There is a 26-point gap between the District of Columbia and Hillsborough County.

*Based on eligibility in the National School Lunch Program.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011, Trial Urban District Reading Assessment
All over the country, there are high-performing schools and school districts...

○ Broad Prize Winners 2002-2013
They concentrate on what they can do…

not what they can’t.
They don’t leave anything about teaching and learning to chance.

- Most teachers are left to figure out on their own what to teach at what level of rigor.
- They’re supposed to teach standards but…
- A sample language arts standard for grades 9-12 reveals a problem.
Sample Language Arts Standard: Grade 9
“The student will develop and apply expansive knowledge of words and word meanings to communicate.”

Sample Language Arts Standard: Grade 10
“The student will develop and apply expansive knowledge of words and word meanings to communicate.”

Sample Language Arts Standard: Grade 11
“The student will develop and apply expansive knowledge of words and word meanings to communicate.”

Sample Language Arts Standard: Grade 12
“The student will develop and apply expansive knowledge of words and word meanings to communicate.”
Instead, high performers…

- Have clear and specific goals for what students should learn in every grade, including the order in which they should learn it.
- Provide teachers with common curriculum and assignments.
- Have a regular vehicle to assure common marking standards.
- Assess students every 4-8 weeks to measure progress.
- Act immediately on the results of those assessments.
They set high goals.

African-American and Latino students are not making gains at the advanced level at the same rate as white students.

**NAEP – Grade 8 Math**

Source: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES
Provide a rigorous high school curriculum to **ALL** students.

The single biggest predictor of post-high school success is the QUALITY and INTENSITY of the high school curriculum.
They know that principals are hugely important, but NOT the only leaders in the school.

• Teachers regularly observe other teachers.
• Teachers have time to plan and work collaboratively.
• New teachers get generous and careful support.
• Teachers take on many leadership tasks at the school.
They know how much good teachers matter and ACT on it.

Cumulative Teacher Effects On Students’ Math Scores in Dallas (Grades 3-5)

At every level of education, what we do matters!

But how do we manage all this in an era of declining resources???
We must stop doing many of the things we have always done to create time and funds for this effective work.
The Strategic Abandonment Tool at www.CRSS.org

- Common sense rethinking
- Rate programs according to 8 criteria
  – Example - Has a clear metric for measurement
  – Example - Program supports teaching and learning
- Rubric: Found, Questionable, or Unacceptable
- Add up the points and eliminate low-point programs.

Source: Dr. H.T. Sanchez, superintendent, Tulsa Unified School District
Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of district operations.

- Operations includes: transportation, HR, technology, facilities maintenance, food service, construction, security, finance...

- Collaboratively within each department develop goals and metrics:
  - To support the core mission of teaching and learning – focus on the teacher and student
  - For key functions
  - Track metrics over time
  - Track metrics in comparison to similar districts
  - Post metrics publicly and review regularly
Operations Division: Develop measures that support teaching and learning!

• Guiding Principle #1: Create seamless business practices that maximize schools’ capacity to focus on instruction.

• Each department develops goals and metrics to make this a reality.
Food Service Goal: Ensure that hunger is not a distraction to learning. Metric: Ave. # of meals served/day
HR Goal: Support learning - have a teacher in every classroom on Day 1. Metric: Teacher fill rate by HR manager

Hiring as of August 18, 2003

- Vacancies
- Hires
Maintenance Goal: Eliminate facility distractions to learning. Metric: Staffing vs. work orders

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In Summary…

• Be assured that what we do matters.
• Focus on teaching and learning.
• We know what works because some districts are achieving results every day with the most challenged students.
• So… do what works.
• Strategically abandon work that robs you of time and funds.
• Measure, compare, and publicize performance for schools, departments, and districts.
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