Going to Scale with Smart Systems

Going to Scale with Smart Systems
Number 28, Summer 2010

Annenberg Institute for School Reform | *Voices in Urban Education*

Going to Scale with Smart Systems

VUE's Web site at <*www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE*> offers more information about *VUE*, including previous issues, audio and video clips, and ordering information.

Scale: The Missing Ingredient in School Reform

Warren Simmons

Warren Simmons is executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Since 1998, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform has been supporting the efforts of school districts, reform support organizations, adult and youth organizing groups, unions, and, more recently, state agencies and government to improve conditions and outcomes in urban schools. Early on, our work demonstrated the need to create smart districts by transforming conventional districts or creating alternatives that provide schools with needed support and timely intervention, the power and resources to make good decisions, and the information needed to strengthen accountability and engender improvement.

Urban districts that have incorporated these changes, such as Boston, Chattanooga–Hamilton County, Long Beach, and Aldine, to name a few, have raised student achievement and narrowed performance gaps in an increasing number of schools. Yet, each of these systems realizes that more needs to be done to help the vast majority of students meet the standards presented in the new Common Core. School district and community leaders in these cities also realize that future progress for children and youth depends on strengthening supports for learning and development in schools and aligning them with those provided by families and communities after the school day and year end.

To accomplish this, school districts must operate systematically within a larger network of organizations that we at the Annenberg Institute call a *smart education system* – a citywide platform that creates, aligns, and sustains services provided by schools, city agencies, community organizations, cultural institutions, and

businesses to promote high-quality student learning and development wherever it occurs. We posit that these systems would:

- maintain multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships to provide a broad range of services to young people and their families, depending on their needs;
- aim to achieve a broad set of positive outcomes for students and their families and communities – including but not limited to academic achievement – and gather evidence of progress;
- put students, families, and communities at the center of the work;
- share accountability across the system;
- have strategies for managing power differentials, for example by creating meaningful roles for all stakeholders and shifting partner relations away from the standard grassroots-grasstops tensions; and
- have a systematic approach for bringing the work to scale.

We have published *VUE* issues and articles that highlight some of these aspects of smart education systems, like the seminal efforts led by the Harlem's Children Zone, Manchester Bidwell Corporation, Community Schools, and Tower Hamlets in London. But none have focused on the last bullet in the list: bringing the work to scale. What does it look like

when the principles of a smart education system are understood and implemented across sectors and agencies throughout a community? We can't answer that question empirically, because no community, to our knowledge, has implemented such a system. But by looking across multiple communities, we can begin to glean lessons about the challenges that arise as big cities attempt to work more collaboratively, share accountability, and serve children and youth holistically.

Like many other individuals and organizations, we have also been keenly concerned about the redevelopment of New Orleans and its education system since the city was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2009, we brought our interests in smart education systems and New Orleans together by hosting our sixth Emerging Knowledge Forum there, convening New Orleans community leaders with leaders from other cities, universities, and school systems. The goal of the Forum was to make a contribution to the transformation of the education systems in New Orleans, as well as to learn from the efforts that have been undertaken there.

At the Annenberg Institute, one of our strengths and key roles is creating opportunities like the Forum where individuals from many different perspectives come together to learn from each other. We publish *VUE* in that same spirit. While this issue of *VUE* is written by Institute staff and consultants, we have also included, throughout the articles, the perspectives of many other colleagues who attended the Forum or other Institute convenings, or who have published articles in *VUE* in the past.

The articles in this issue focus on New Orleans and the three other sites that served as "critical friends" at the 2009 Emerging Knowledge Forum: Boston Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools, and the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice. By drawing on the discussions at the Forum and the data collection we conducted in all four sites, we

examine the challenges of achieving equity and scale in New Orleans, human capital development, cross-sector partnerships, community organizing strategies that combine collaboration and pressure, and data-informed decision-making.

- Alethea Frazier Raynor provides some background on New Orleans before and after Katrina and highlights some of the major concerns that emerged from stakeholder discussions at our Emerging Knowledge Forum.

- Joanne Thompson, Tracie Potochnik, and Ellen Foley describe the successes and challenges that Boston and New Orleans have experienced as they overhaul human capital development systems.

- Jacob Mishook and Alethea Frazier Raynor examine the critical role of data-informed, cross-sector partnerships and look at how partners are working together in Chicago and New Orleans.

- Margaret Balch-Gonzalez, Daniella Cook, and Elizabeth Richards discuss community organizing strategies that balance collaboration and pressure, drawing on the experiences of New York City and New Orleans.

- Ellen Foley describes the power – and the limits – of data in taking reform to scale.

The U.S. Department of Education and many funders are investing resources to strengthen and connect school- and community-based supports for learning and development. The articles in this issue of *VUE*, taken together, provide numerous lessons for communities facing the challenges and opportunities posed by the current policy and philanthropic environment as they move toward going to scale with smart education systems.

New Orleans: The Challenges of Equity and Scale

Alethea Frazier Raynor

As New Orleans continues to rebuild its public education system and city infrastructure five years after Hurricane Katrina, local and national education stakeholders reflect on what it takes to align school systems and out-of-school services to provide high-quality learning for all a city's students.

Over the past five years, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform has brought together practitioners, researchers, community leaders, and funders to consider the most pressing issues in urban education reform and to collectively build the knowledge and partnerships necessary to address them. The Institute has broadened and refined its ideas over time to reflect the view that schools and school systems alone cannot ensure that all students have the resources and supports they need, but that in partnership with community agencies and organizations, a comprehensive web of learning supports is possible. We call this type of partnership a "smart education system."

New Orleans is an ideal place to think about the development of a smart education system. Because New Orleans is rebuilding its entire city infrastructure, it makes sense to consider the school system in the context of economic development, housing, transportation, health care, and social services. How this city addresses the need to build and align a new portfolio of schools and new city infrastructures can shed important light on the challenges and opportunities faced by urban systems across the country.

To facilitate cross-sector reflections on these issues, the Institute held its sixth Emerging Knowledge Forum in New Orleans last year. The three-day meeting brought together New Orleans educators, parents, and community leaders to engage in discussions that surfaced diverse points of view and identified some of the challenges and opportunities for the city going forward. The perspectives and ideas that were voiced by local participants were augmented by the participation of other communities and national organizations. These included three sites – Boston, Chicago, and the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice – that are doing promising work in four key areas critical to rebuilding education in New Orleans and, we believe, central to the development of a smart education system: human capital development, cross-sector partnerships, community organizing and engagement, and the effective use of data.

Through small and large-group sessions, forum participants grappled with the challenges of building smart education systems and addressed a set of crosscutting issues faced by these

Alethea Frazier Raynor is a principal associate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and co–guest editor of this issue of Voices in Urban Education.

4

efforts. The Forum facilitated learning and critical reflection for participants from diverse backgrounds and perspectives and contributed to the groundwork laid by the Institute for a case study that was conducted from December 2008 through July 2009. Capturing a snapshot in time of the rebuilding of public education in New Orleans, we conducted forty interviews and eight focus groups with major local stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, principals, union leaders, reform-support leaders, community leaders, state education officials, and district personnel from the Recovery School District and Orleans Parish School Board. This article draws on part of that research, along with our documentation of the views of New Orleanians who participated in the Forum.[1]

There are many complexities in the New Orleans context – the decentralized governance structure, for instance – that are beyond the scope of this article to exhaustively document and analyze. Rather, the article aims to give voice to some of the perspectives that have been expressed to us through this process, especially those that are often missing in public discussions of education reform. We give special attention to one issue that was raised frequently in discussions and interviews: To what extent does the system of "choice" in New Orleans offer real options to students and their families? The answers to that question offered by participants we spoke with revealed some sharp disagreements among different stakeholder groups.

Public Education in New Orleans before and after Katrina

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, approximately 65,000 students were enrolled in the 115 schools that made up the Orleans Parish public school district, which ranked sixty-seventh out of the sixty-eight parishes in the state of Louisiana in terms of student achievement. The student population was predominately Black, with less than 5 percent of school-aged White children attending the public schools (Cowen Institute 2008). However, compared with their total enrollment in the district, White students benefited disproportionately from the high-performing educational options offered in selective-admissions schools.[2] Pre-Katrina, 75 percent of the students enrolled in the
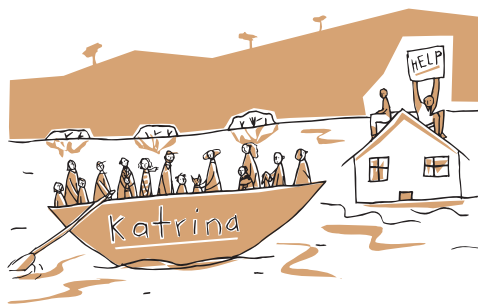
district were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, indicating a high concentration of high-poverty students. Overall, academic proficiency rates were low and internal dysfunction was high at the district and in many schools. Plagued by public criticism for its chronic fiscal mismanagement, low student achievement, and deteriorated stock of school facilities, the Orleans

---

1 The full findings from our work will be presented in a case study to be released in fall 2010.

2 For example, in Benjamin Franklin High School, White students were 56 percent of the total student enrollment in the school year prior to the storm (Louisiana Department of Education n.d.).

> Virtually everyone in New Orleans experienced some degree of loss and trauma, but not everyone with a vested interest and stake in the future of New Orleans public schools appeared to have the same chance to put their stamp on what became the blueprint for change.

Parish school district churned through eight superintendents between 1998 and 2005, which further undermined its capacity to make drastic and needed improvements.

In the eyes of some stakeholders, Hurricane Katrina presented New Orleans with an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and re-imagine what public education could look like. But we heard that for many other residents, the chance to write a new chapter in the history of public education was minimized by the extent to which Katrina's devastation impacted their personal lives and was further limited by the process in which the plans for transformation of public education were developed and concretized quickly.

Virtually everyone in New Orleans experienced some degree of loss and trauma, but not everyone with a vested interest and stake in the future of New Orleans public schools appeared to have the same chance to put their stamp on what became the blueprint for change. The absence of a strong

voice from residents who depend on public schools the most, but were unable to make a speedy return to their homes and neighborhoods, left some stakeholders feeling disenfranchised in the decision-making process. Hence, trust was further eroded in a climate where there was already heightened uncertainty.

A Drastic Overhaul of Governance

Following the storm, the Louisiana State Legislature moved quickly and approved Act 35, which permitted the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to take control of Orleans Parish schools deemed "failing schools" and operate them under the authority of the Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD). Pursuant to Act 35, BESE voted to take over more than 100 schools, some of which it reopened; others remain closed or were converted to charter schools. In the wake of the storm, 35 percent of school buildings were damaged. The Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB; also known as New Orleans Public Schools) was left with five schools and twelve charter schools under its control. BESE continued its control over two charter schools that operate in Orleans Parish.

With a complex structure emerging that included multiple systems of district-run and charter-run schools operating under one local jurisdiction, issues of coherence, governance, equity, and accountability have become key challenges and concerns. For many people we interviewed, it seemed unclear where ultimate authority rested for ensuring the success of every student in New Orleans across all systems,

networks, and school types. The roles of OPSB and the superintendent have been diminished in the new education environment, with one important exception – OPSB was and still is the only local entity in New Orleans with the authority to levy taxes for public education, and OPSB controls the total municipal budget for operating schools. Funding for all schools, RSD and charters included, flows through OPSB.

RSD and OPSB operate through central office departments that function much like any other district. Charter schools, of which New Orleans has a higher proportion than any other city in the country, operate as stand-alone schools or in small networks of schools. These schools are authorized by RSD, OPSB, or BESE and have their own governing board and autonomy over teaching and learning, the school budget, the provision of school services and resources, and – most important – staffing.

"A Decentralized System of School Choice"

Most of the people we interviewed commonly referred to the vision for public education in New Orleans as a "decentralized system of school choice" where parents have the option to apply to any open-enrollment school in the city. *Choice* as it is commonly understood in education reform is a strategy designed to open opportunities for parents to select a school for their child that matches the child's interests and needs. In New Orleans, charter schools have become the primary vehicle for exercising choice.

Many local community and parent leaders we spoke to challenged the assumption that the "decentralized system of choice" is actually designed to give *all* students fair options to attend a high-performing, quality school. When social, political, economic, and cultural capital have been the gatekeepers that allowed some students to attend good public schools and left others in poorly performing neighborhood schools, a critical question arises: Will families with the least amount of capital get access to the "best" schools that New Orleans has to offer? If so, who will keep both equity and excellence at the forefront so that there aren't just pockets of high-quality options, but quality choices for students and families at scale, in neighborhoods throughout the city?

For most low-income and working class parents, choices about their child's schooling go hand-in-hand with a whole host of other decisions that must be made – decisions that involve transportation, after-school care, employment, housing, and other fundamental needs. And in New Orleans, those decisions are still compounded by the sudden collapse of the city's infrastructure and the rebuilding process that has taken place following Hurricane Katrina.
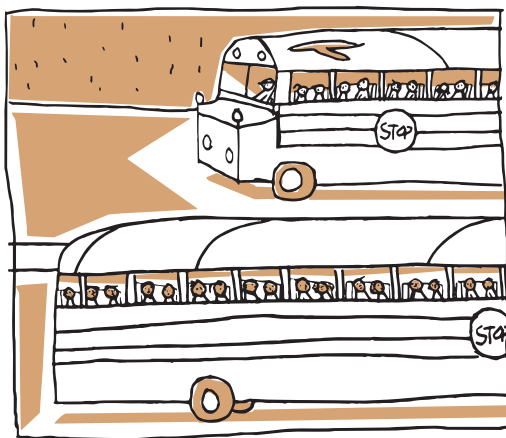
In our interviews with parents who have navigated through the decentralized system of choice, the majority of them expressed the view that real choice was an illusion, given the many difficulties they experienced in finding good choices and the multiple factors they considered before making good school choices. Consistent with the research done by Teske, Fitzpatrick, and O'Brien (2009) that cited transportation as a major barrier to school choice for low-income parents, we found that some parents in New Orleans were not able to take advantage of the full range of options that school choice created, but instead had chosen schools based on proximity to home or place of employment, even if another school farther away might have been a better match for their child. We also found that among parents for whom transportation was not a major issue, it was still frustrating for many of them to find a good fit and several had changed schools at least once during the school year.

Many stakeholders we interviewed that others consider "anti-charter" contend that they are not simply for or against charter schools. They argue that what they *are* opposed to is the whole-sale movement of the district toward every school becoming chartered as the answer to what wasn't working in Orleans Parish schools. Many believe that charter schools can be *one* strategy, but it should not be the *only* strategy to improve public schools.

The Challenges of Going to Scale in New Orleans

Post-Katrina New Orleans presented tremendous challenges to an educational system already in need of life support. Having a chance to fundamentally reinvent public education when every other major system of the city was also reinventing itself offered a window of

---

PERSPECTIVES:

The Challenges of Implementing a System of Decentralization and Choice

HOWARD FULLER
Professor of education and director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University, and co-founder of the Black Alliance for Educational Options

Choice strategies, if implemented properly, will empower families (particularly low-income and working-class families) to be able to choose the best possible learning environments for their children. That is its major advantage. It is the same advantage that people with money have in America when it comes to making sure their children get the best possible education.

Barriers to implementing choice are inequities in funding, over-regulation that stifles innovation and autonomy, under-regulation that allows poor schools to continue operating, and confusion about the various options that could be made available to parents and students.

In a decentralized context like New Orleans where you allow a variety of options, the advantage of such a system is that it moves us away from the notion of "one best system," and allows for the creation of independent schools, networks, and/or school management organizations that are not tied to bureaucracies that have failed so many of our children for decades. The challenge to such a system is maintaining quality and being willing and able to hold schools accountable for student achievement.

opportunity rarely seen in other communities undertaking large-scale education reform. But to ensure that the citywide transformation of New Orleans is not a missed opportunity, but rather a real chance to work and plan across sectors that include housing, health care, transportation, economic development, recreation, and education, new rules of engagement and different types of interaction are necessary.

The Need to Examine the Effectiveness of Accountability Mechanisms

In our interviews, many parents and community-based leaders reported that among their constituencies some schools in New Orleans have been labeled as "schools of last resort" and these schools are known to be low performing and of poor quality. In a fragmented system where schools are operated by multiple districts with different governance structures and levels of autonomy for district-run and chartered schools, accountability standards have to be evenly applied to ensure that school choice really does offer high-quality options for parents across systems and schools as they move throughout a system of choice.

Our research suggested that maintaining a market-driven approach to choice in which parents are expected to select the school they want and, if dissatisfied with the program, simply "vote with their feet" is easier said than done. Parents we interviewed expressed concern that in the charter school environment in New Orleans, it isn't always clear how to voice dissatisfaction beyond the principal and the governing board. Some of them were also reluctant to start the search for a new school.

> Maintaining a market-driven approach to choice in which parents are expected to select the school they want and, if dissatisfied with the program, simply "vote with their feet" is easier said than done.

The Impact of Class and Race

Issues of class and race figure prominently in the choice system in Orleans Parish schools. Between 2007 and 2008, the poverty rate in New Orleans climbed from 21 percent to 23 percent; children five years of age and under represent the largest group of poor residents in the city; and poor Black residents outnumber poor White residents five to one, even though they are 62 percent and 34 percent of the general population, respectively (City-Data.com, n.d.; Plyer & Liu 2009). As Howard Fuller and members of the Black Alliance for Educational Options have often said, "Choice is widespread unless you're poor" (Harding 2007, p. 1).

There are unintended consequences for low-income parents as they navigate the system of choice. The availability of public transportation in New Orleans was severely impacted by the hurricanes and the levee breach that left 80 percent of the city under water. Since the storm, with only 43 percent of the ridership returning and an ever-changing map of employment, housing, and commuter patterns,

Empowering Parents and Communities

Kenneth Campbell
President, Black Alliance for Educational Options; former director of charter schools, Louisiana

I don't believe it is possible to shift ownership of education reform without empowering parents and communities. Choice and decentralization shift accountability for outcomes to a more logical space – to the environments where our children are educated and to those who have the greatest stake in ensuring their learning is effective.

I don't believe there are disadvantages to increasing choice and decentralization. However, moving in this direction does create new challenges in terms of where and how resources are expended, the need to educate and invest in parents and communities so that they can become owners of the reform, and safeguards to ensure that all children have an opportunity for a quality education. Taking a limited approach to choice – where either few people can truly exercise choice, or where there is no mechanism for ensuring quality – is insufficient.

---

routes and services have shifted or been eliminated (Plyer & Liu 2009; Plyer & Campanella 2010). Low-income parents without a car who depend on public transportation are less able to choose a school across town, if there are no means by which they can easily get to and from the school for meetings and conferences – especially during a child's elementary years.

As accountability pressures in New Orleans intensify, access in the choice system is critical. If choice is creating new and innovative learning environments but they are inaccessible to students with the greatest needs, then choice further disadvantages these children by creating a system that cannot respond to their needs.

The Role of External Partners
The challenge to provide students and their families with a wide range of supports leaves external partners with an important role to play in helping districts and schools expand their options. The heightened demand for mental health, cultural enrichment, recreational, and other supports across New Orleans raises the bar for what schools will have to do to tap into a range of external supports that might be needed. The families that we interviewed regularly experienced a lack of available and aligned services offered by the schools their children attend and the communities in which they live. Helping parents to make important connections to the supports that their children need, both inside and outside of school, is what makes a smart education system a "nimble" one.

Keeping Sight of the Ultimate Goal: Equity and Excellence for All Students
Equity begins with having a diverse and representative group of stakeholders at the table who are making the decisions about how equity and excellence are defined and measured. Common data sets that can be collected across systems

and schools will begin to address whether there is access to high-quality schools for the children who need them the most and if the vision for education is sustainable through a decentralized system of choice.

Smart education systems cast their net wide, drawing in the voices of students, families, communities, and schools as primary sources of intelligence about the academic, social, and cultural competencies that young people need and the range of experiences that must be available for them to develop successfully in a local or global environment. As New Orleans prepares for Act 35 to expire, questions about governance, accountability, equity, and excellence are all at the center of discussions. How these questions are answered will bring new possibilities for the vision of public education and help to shape the future of New Orleans.

_____

References

City-Data.com. n.d. "New Orleans, Louisiana Poverty Rate Data – Information about Poor and Low-Income Residents," City-Data.com Web site, <www.city-data.com/poverty/poverty-New-Orleans-Louisiana.html>.

Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University. 2008. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans: 2008 Report.* New Orleans, LA: Tulane University, Cowen Institute. Available for download at <www.coweninstitute.com/our-work/applied-research/state-of-public-education-report-in-new-orleans>

Harding, H. 2007. *The Struggle to Achieve Authentic School Choice for Poor Families: An Interview with Howard Fuller* (audio interview and transcript), online at Annenberg Institute Web site, <www.annenberginstitute.org/Equity/choice.html>.

Louisiana Department of Education. n.d. "Planning, Analysis, and Information Resources. Students – Public School – Multiple Statistics, Student Data as of October 1, 2004, Zipped Excel: Multi-Stats – October 2004 – By Site – Elementary/Secondary," <www.louisianaschools.net/lde/pair/1489.html>.

Plyer, A., and R. Campanella. 2010. *Job Sprawl in Metro New Orleans: Based on 2008 Local Employment Dynamics Data from the U.S.*

Census. New Orleans, LA: Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. Available for download at <www.gnocdc.org/JobSprawl/index.html>

Plyer, A., and A. Liu. 2009. *The New Orleans Index: Tracking the Recovery of New Orleans and the Metro Area.* New Orleans, LA: Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. Available for download at <www.gnocdc.org/NewOrleansIndex/index.html>

Teske, P., J. Fitzpatrick, and T. O'Brien. 2009. *Drivers of Choice: Parents, Transportation, and School Choice.* Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center on Reinventing Public Education. Available for download at <www.crpe.org/cs/crpe/view/csr_pubs/288>

Beyond Human Resources: Human Capital Development for Scale and Sustainability

Joanne Thompson, Tracie Potochnik, and Ellen Foley

School districts are starting to respond to the need for high-quality teaching at scale by seeking outside partnerships and better data in order to build comprehensive human capital development systems.

Joanne Thompson and Tracie Potochnik are research associates in district redesign and leadership at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Ellen Foley is associate director of district redesign and leadership at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform; assistant clinical professor in the Master's in Urban Education Policy Program at Brown University; and co–guest editor of this issue of* Voices in Urban Education.

In their article "Human Capital Management: A New Approach for Districts" in the Summer 2008 issue of *Voices in Urban Education,* our colleagues David Sigler and Marla Ucelli-Kashyap presented a comprehensive vision of human capital management for school districts. They argued that school district leaders must reorganize to make human capital development central to their work. But they also noted that districts can't make this transition alone: "A district serious about managing human capital effectively must seek outside sources of expertise and build or augment key partnerships to help them fill in the gaps" (p. 11).

Last year, as part of our sixth Emerging Knowledge Forum – a cross-sector convening to share best thinking and practice on creating whole systems of successful schools – and subsequent data collection, we focused on how two sites, Boston and New Orleans, approached human capital development. Education leaders in these cities are acknowledging what is clear from research: teachers are the single most important school-level factor in improving students' learning. In both cities, key partner organizations have helped to prioritize the recruitment, acquisition, and, to some extent, the development of new educators.

These partnerships have involved partners in functions that have been traditionally the exclusive domain of district employees and have helped school systems develop their capacity, offer flexibility, and improve instruction. Other aspects of human capital development, however – evaluation and professional development, among other areas – remain, for the most part, in the traditional control of the school system. In this article, we describe the systems in more detail and discuss the implications for going to scale with a comprehensive approach to human capital development.

The Human Capital Context in New Orleans after Katrina

After Hurricane Katrina, the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) took control of more than 100 Orleans Parish schools deemed "failing schools" and operated them under the authority of a Recovery School District (RSD), which reopened some of these schools and left others closed or converted them

14   *Annenberg Institute for School Reform*

to charter schools. Currently, there are thirty-seven charter schools under the authority of RSD and thirty-three schools directly run by RSD. Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB; also known as New Orleans Public Schools) now operates four schools and has authority over twelve charter schools, while BESE has authority over two charter schools in New Orleans.

Over 4,000 teachers were laid off following the storm when schools were removed from the oversight of OPSB (BCG 2007) and the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) lost its power to collectively bargain after the storm. While schools or school systems can establish agreements with UTNO, there are no formal contracts between them at this time, and many long-time members of the union rank and file are working in independent charter schools and in both RSD and OPSB.

The Human Capital Context in Boston

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) enrolls 56,340 students in 135 schools and employs nearly 5,365 professional educators (teachers and administrators; BPS 2010b). Efforts to revamp human resources began under Superintendent Tom Payzant, and continued under the Carol Johnson administration's "Acceleration Agenda" (Towery, Salim & Homm 2009). In 2004, BPS targeted the schedule for teacher hiring, guidelines for teacher quality and recruiting for diversity, and key content areas (Archibald 2008), which led to changes in the teacher contract negotiated with the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) in 2006-2007.[1]

BPS has a centralized recruitment effort, but a decentralized hiring process. The human resources department recruits candidates, targeting minority candidates and high-need content areas. It identifies a pool of teachers from the applicants; then a school site council, led by the principal and including teachers and parents,[2] decides on the specific skill set needed for that particular school. The site council does the interviewing and hiring. Other agreements with the BTU have helped move up the hiring timeline so outside candidates can be considered as early as February of the school year preceding their employment. In the case of high-need areas, BPS can actually guarantee a promising candidate a contract prior to the formal hiring process, an option that has been in place since 2005. The contract between BTU and BPS will be renegotiated in 2010, and prominent voices are calling for additional changes related to teacher hiring and evaluation (Vaznis 2010).

Acquisition of High-Quality Educators

Acquiring high-quality educators involves recruitment, selection, hiring, and induction. In some school systems, these functions are typically led by the human resources office, and selection and hiring are rules that are governed by the collective bargaining contract. In both New Orleans and Boston, new organizations are taking on some of these traditional functions.

2 The *requirement* that parents be involved in the selection of new teachers has been eliminated, though some schools still voluntarily involve parents in the selection process.

1 Improvements in the technical supports for human resources (e.g., updated technology) and in customer service orientation of the human resources department were also part of this effort, though we do not focus on those in this article.

New Orleans: A Focus on Recruitment

In the years since Katrina, New Orleans has, through a concentrated effort on recruitment, moved from considerable teacher shortages to a thriving supply of teachers coming from traditional and alternative routes. The quantity of teacher candidates throughout all New Orleans systems – RSD, OPSB, and charters – is more than adequate for the city's staffing needs. National alternative route programs such as Teach for America and Teach NOLA (an initiative of the New Teacher Project) have taken a leading role in recruitment in New Orleans and have attracted national talent to the city, particularly to traditional and charter schools within RSD.

The programs supplying teachers have internally developed parameters for identifying candidates who will be successful in the classroom and, in some instances, in supporting teachers and monitoring their performance and improvement once they are placed in a school. Site-based selection of teachers is present across all systems, resulting in considerable competition across schools for the most talented teachers.
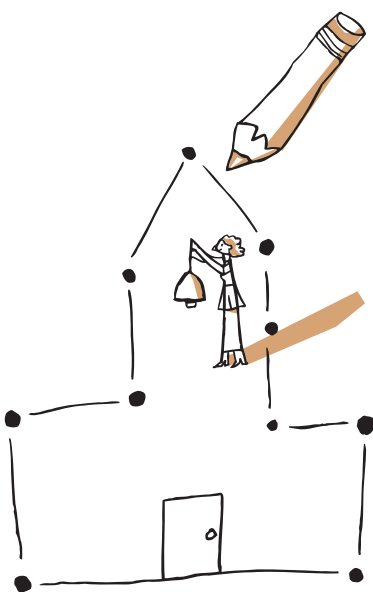
Concurrently, RSD is providing training to principals in how to adequately identify, select, and retain teachers who are a good fit for their building.

Boston: An Inside-Outside Strategy to Address Supply and Demand Mismatches

Teach for America has also partnered with Boston, with twenty candidates placed in the 2009-2010 school year. But a key piece of BPS's human capital focus has been the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR). BTR's mission is to recruit, prepare, and sustain excellent teachers in and for Boston's public schools. BTR prepared over 300 BPS teachers between 2003 and 2010.

BTR was started in 2003 as a response to heavy teacher turnover and a shortage of specialists and educators of color. As a district leader told us,

> There are lots of universities here and we have strong partnerships with some of them . . . [but] there is a very large supply and demand mismatch. We don't need who they are training.

BTR is housed at the local education fund, the Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), though the director and staff work closely with BPS human resources, teaching and learning, and professional development staff.

BPE and BPS leadership deliberately designed BTR as a "one foot in, one foot out" model (Childress, Marietta & Suchman 2008). As one respondent said, "[We] didn't want to put it in the district because [we] didn't think it would have a chance to grow, take risks, try things out." Another told us,

> It is hard to be innovative if you are fully inside the district. BPE has worked in the past by piloting something, then handing it over to BPS. This is really a BPS program managed within BPE.

The thirteen-month program is modeled on a medical residency program, combining practical training with rigorous coursework. During their preparation year, residents receive an $11,400 stipend to help defray living expenses. Tuition is $10,000, but that is immediately offset by a $10,000 loan. If the candidate successfully completes the residency and teaches in BPS for three years, the loan is completely forgiven.

Each resident is matched with an active mentor teacher; they work side by side in the classroom four days per week for a full school year. Residents participate in a specialized curriculum tailored to BPS's guidelines on the dimensions of effective teaching on Fridays, after school, and in summer sessions before and after the school year. Residents graduate from the program with a Massachusetts Initial Teacher License in their primary content area and a master's degree in education awarded by the University of Massachusetts–Boston. They also work toward dual licensure in special education.

Overall, we found that BTR has successfully recruited and retained teachers in the unmet areas of special education, English language learning, math, and science. In its first five cohorts, over half of all BTR residents have been people of color and over half of middle and high school residents teach in the areas of math and science. In 2008, BTR had trained over 60 percent of the school system's new math and science teachers (BTR n.d.).

Many respondents suggested that BTR did a good job of preparing teachers to be part of BPS. Residents reported that they felt ready to be teachers in BPS; as one told us,

> "BTR uses people who have been in the classroom as instructors; they're not just talking about theory. We can glean from their wisdom and knowledge strategies to use in the classroom and practical skills."

We have been here almost nine months and we are ready. By June, we'll be even more ready. I feel prepared. I feel capable and qualified.

The principals we spoke to said they appreciated the expertise of teachers coming from BTR. Residents also cited a number of advantages of BTR, including being specifically prepared to teach in BPS and being taught by active teachers and faculty who were involved in writing the BPS curriculum. As one resident put it,

> BTR uses people who have been in the classroom as instructors; they're not just talking about theory. We can glean from their wisdom and knowledge strategies to use in the classroom and practical skills.

Teacher Development

Teacher development involves initial placement, mentoring and support, evaluation, and professional development and is tied to ideas about what makes an effective teacher. In New Orleans, each of the alternative-route teacher suppliers has internally defined methods of identifying people who have the characteristics of being an effective teacher.

BPS has adopted a set of "dimensions of effective teaching," including areas such as equity and high expectations, professionalism, and content knowledge. Our informants told us that these dimensions were developed in part from BTR's efforts to identify the competencies they wanted to develop in residents. The induction seminars for new teachers are organized around the dimensions of effective teaching. Also, in a negotiated agreement with the Boston Teachers Union, teacher evaluation in BPS is linked to the dimensions of effective teaching.

New Orleans: Uneven Quality of Professional Development

Given the influx of new talent into New Orleans, charter management organizations, reform support organizations, and alternative route programs are beginning to play an increased role in developing and retaining high-quality teachers and administrators. A growing number of professional development supports, including coaching, content

support, and leadership development, are provided by alternative-route providers working in partnership with the various school systems. Alternative-route programs also have evaluative systems, which include ongoing data collection and feedback, to determine if their teachers and administrators are on track to meet their goals. This is not tied to formal evaluation from a school or district.

OPSB, which has the benefits of being smaller in scale, composed of schools that have a history of being relatively successful, and staffed with a greater number of veteran teachers and administrators, was described as having a more comprehensive system of supports, with site-based, data-driven professional development that is linked to observation, evaluation, and support. Some schools in Orleans Parish are participating in the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP), a national initiative that provides a comprehensive process of ongoing teacher evaluation that is focused on increasing excellence in teaching. Locally, TAP is led by the Louisiana Department of Education. Participating schools must voluntarily commit to a more rigorous process of improvement. The program places teacher leaders in schools across all systems in Orleans Parish that provide school-based, job-embedded professional development for teachers through a coaching, feedback, and evaluation model. TAP was widely seen by teachers as a promising initiative, and its presence in New Orleans is growing.

Professional development in RSD was described as being repetitive and not designed to address teacher needs and varying levels of experience. Some teachers we spoke with did commend the United Teachers of New Orleans
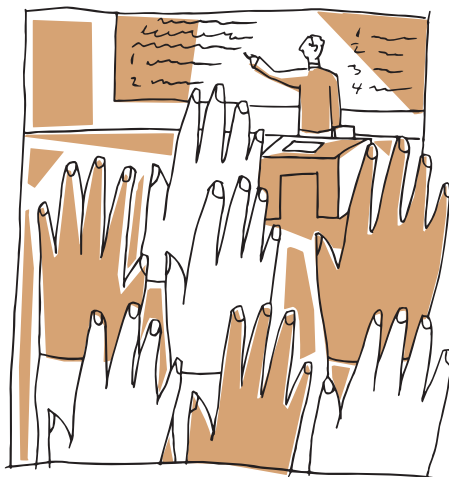
for providing meaningful professional development that met their needs. But in general, when teachers and principals noted instances of effective professional development, it was developed and implemented internally in the schools, based on teacher needs, or with the assistance of partner organizations.

Among charter schools, there is a greater variety in the content and types of teacher supports because development opportunities are provided at the discretion of each school. In addition to traditional after-school and summer workshop opportunities, much school-based professional development tended to provide either formal or informal opportunities for teachers (usually of the same grade level) to meet during the school day to discuss practice issues and share lessons.

Many respondents felt that, with the possible exception of some charter and OPSB schools, teachers and leaders overall are not getting the level of support they need either from administrators or the system at large. There is a challenge *across* systems in providing professional development that is responsive to teacher needs. New teachers were of particular concern in a system and environment that even veterans acknowledge as being consistently challenging.

Boston: The Challenge of Linking Professional Development to School and Educator Improvement
One of BPS's "Seven Essentials for Whole School Improvement" is to "Invest in professional development to improve instruction." The district is addressing this essential in several ways. For new teachers, the state of Massachusetts requires an induction program to move from initial licensure to professional licensure. BPS had nominally fulfilled this requirement for several years, but in 2005-2006 the district began implementing a much more intensive support system.[3] Centrally, the BPS human resources department and the Office of Teaching and Learning each have dedicated three staff members to be part of a new teacher support team – a central point of contact to help new teachers navigate BPS from the time they are hired through their first year in the system. All new teachers take part in an initial three-day induction program and are offered the opportunity to take part in new teacher seminars throughout their first year of teaching.

Every teacher new to BPS has a mentor; teachers with no teaching experience get the most intensive support. They are assigned to "new teacher developers" – teachers who are completely released from teaching duties and who are paid 5 percent more to mentor new teachers. Each new teacher developer has about fourteen new teacher mentees. Other new teachers receive support from veteran teachers in their schools. Centrally, there is particular focus on schools that hire a large proportion of new teachers.

Evidence suggests that the new teacher developers and other new teacher supports have been successful in increasing retention of new teachers. In fact, BTR graduates are being retained at an 87 percent rate over the first three years (BTR n.d.).

With the exception of this new teacher development program, professional development in BPS is highly

---

3 Archibald (2008) reported that in 2003, the Boston Teachers Union filed a lawsuit against BPS to get the district to implement this law.

> "The culture here is that the teacher evaluation process is heavily geared toward evaluating out poor performers, because it is difficult to get a teacher out once they are tenured. The evaluation is not really used for teachers [who are] performing well."

decentralized and primarily school-based.[4] In BPS's 2010 Acceleration Agenda, Superintendent Johnson pledged to work with the Boston Teachers Union to revamp professional development (BPS 2010a). Centrally, BPS is working to better track teachers' involvement in professional development and to use the dimensions of effective teaching and school improvement plans to design professional development offerings. Currently, however, according to a BPS leader, there is "a menu of things out there that are, to some extent, aligned with broader district goals but don't necessarily meet all people's needs."

In terms of evaluation, there are still only two ways a teacher can be evaluated: satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A district leader told us that evaluation is not really about helping teachers improve.

> The culture here is that the teacher evaluation process is heavily geared toward evaluating out poor performers, because it is difficult to get a teacher out once they are tenured. The evaluation is not really used for teachers [who are] performing well.

As the contract is renegotiated in 2010, teacher evaluation tied to student outcomes will certainly be an issue.

Issues for Developing Human Capital

Boston and New Orleans have reaped many advantages by involving external partners in their efforts to attract, acquire, and develop new teachers. New Orleans, a storm-ravaged city, has attracted a steady stream of young, energetic teacher candidates. BPS has succeeded in developing teacher candidates with certifications in high-need areas such as English language learning, science, and special education. However, concerns about equity, mentoring, and sustainability remain.

In both cities, for example, there were concerns that the initial placement of recruited teachers/teacher residents was not equitable. In New Orleans, some participants indicated that charter schools have an edge in attracting teachers, for a variety of reasons: compensation packages that are more suitable to people who know they will not be career educators, opportunities for professional growth and advancement, and organizational culture. As one administrator in a charter network said,

> [As a charter] you can court people and try harder. Plus, you have a better reputation – you get the cream of the crop. Other schools have whoever's left. As a city, that's concerning.

---

4 The contract with the Boston Teachers Union allows for four days of professional development (when students are not present) and eighteen hours of after-school professional development.

The issue is not as pronounced in Boston, where much smaller proportions of new teachers are placed. However, some evidence suggests that teacher residents, when placed, aren't necessarily going to the hardest-to-staff schools in the district. Childress, Marietta, and Suchman (2008) reported that residents end up in schools with historically higher achievement levels than the average Boston public school.

Mentoring is also a concern in both systems. Boston teacher residents are matched with a mentor teacher, and when mentor quality is not high or a mentor does not "buy into" BTR's philosophy, our respondents told us it negatively impacts the resident's experience. BPS is committed to providing school-based mentoring and professional development through the new teacher developers but has struggled to link that with centralized, measurable indicators of good teaching. With the large influx of new teachers in New Orleans, there is a shortage of high-quality educators available to mentor new teachers.

At times, our respondents also questioned the sustainability of these efforts. In New Orleans, high rates of turnover exist in many schools, and many new recruits are not generally considered to be career teachers. One leader said,

> Easily the biggest weakness surrounds issues of sustainability. We've got pretty good news on performance so far, but I take a longer term view of that. … A lot has happened in Louisiana since Katrina, and lots of out-of-town folks and new talent and attitude have provided for great synergy and enthusiasm, but I don't know if we have the depth to sustain

this for the long term. I look at the long hours people are working. I worry that the talent is thin and the turnover will persist.

Several participants spoke about the need to build local capacity by finding and nurturing local talent. Some partnerships with local universities exist or are being developed in various parts of the system. Conversely, some leaders particularly valued the energy, drive, and abilities of novice teachers coming through alternative routes and felt that given a willingness to accept a certain amount of ongoing attrition, this model of recruitment could be sustained on a broad scale.

BTR, which has become a national model for teacher recruitment and development and is being adopted by other cities, also faces issues of sustainability. Several interviewees cautioned that the success of the program is threatened by the budget challenges of the district. When positions are lost to budget cuts, there are fewer spots for new teachers and early career teachers are typically the first to lose their jobs. Additionally, intensive support programs like the new teacher developers and
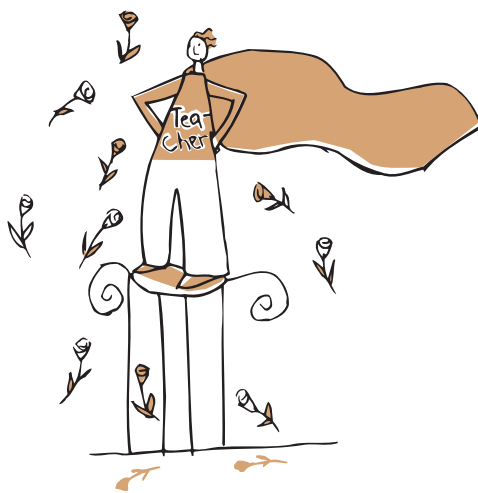
professional development opportunities are often curtailed under such circumstances. However, both programs have continued through recent budget challenges.

Beyond Human Resources; A Comprehensive Human Capital Management System

Sigler and Ucelli-Kashyap presented this scenario in their 2008 article in *Voices in Urban Education*:

> Consider a situation present in many mid- to large-sized urban districts today. A district has an excellent recruitment and marketing campaign in human resources, paired with a high level of customer service for applicants and new hires. At the same time, this district's office of professional development has inconsistent and poor-quality mentoring and a lack of quality professional development options for teachers. The result for our imaginary school system, just as it is for most school systems with similar circumstances, is predictable: high turnover. Today's high-quality new hires quickly become tomorrow's attrition statistics. (p. 8)

This quote underscores the main lesson from our research in New Orleans and Boston. While it is important to build effective recruitment, acquisition, and new teacher development, it is not enough. In a comprehensive human capital management system, a broader set of key functions – Sigler and Ucelli define them as Acquisition; Development, Deployment, and Advancement; and Accountability and Exit – must be tied together. This cannot be done through traditional human resource offices alone.

Leaders in our two sites recognized this and brought in partners to strengthen some of these functions. But they also acknowledged that there is a strong need to develop a comprehensive human capital system with the tools and data to look at teacher quality in a more sophisticated way. This human capital system, involving school district leaders, partners – including teacher unions – and educators themselves, must be linked to student outcomes and to a continuum of supports and tied to evaluation. Getting to scale in developing human capital will require much greater coordination among these key functions, continuing collaboration with key partners and the wherewithal to maintain the focus on improving teacher quality.

References

Archibald, S. 2008. *Boston.* Madison, WI: Strategic Management of Human Capital, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, School of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Boston Consulting Group. 2007. *The State of Public Education in New Orleans.* Boston, MA: BCG.

Boston Public Schools. 2010a. *Acceleration Agenda, 2009–2014: A Five-Year Strategic Direction to Transform the Boston Public Schools.* Boston, MA: BPS.

Boston Public Schools. 2010b. *Boston Public Schools at a Glance 2009–2010.* BPS Facts, no. 17 (February). Boston, MA: BPS Communications Office. PDF at: <www.bostonpublicschools.org/files/BPS%20at%20a%20Glance%2010-0225.pdf>

Boston Teacher Residency. n.d. "The BTR Impact," Boston Teacher Residency Web site, <www.bostonteacherresidency.org/btr-impact/>.

Childress, S., G. Marietta, and S. Suchman. 2008. *Boston Teacher Residency: Developing a Strategy for Longterm Impact.* Publication no. N9-309-043 (rev. September 17). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School. PDF at: <www.all4ed.org/files/081309BTR_HBS_CaseStudy.pdf>

Sigler, D., and M. Ucelli-Kashyap. 2008. "Human Capital Management: A New Approach for Districts," *Voices in Urban Education* 20 (Summer).

Towery, I. D., K. Salim, and V. Homm. 2009. *Hiring (and Keeping) Urban Teachers: A Coordinated Approach to New Teacher Support.* A Report of the Boston Plan for Excellence and the Boston Public Schools. Boston, MA: Boston Plan for Excellence.

Vaznis, J. 2010. "Tensions Grow as Boston Prepares for Teacher Contract Talks, *Boston Globe* (May 18). Available online at <www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2010/05/18/tensions_grow_as_boston_prepares_for_teacher_contract_talks>

The Critical Role of Data-Informed, Cross-Sector Partnerships in Smart Systems

Jacob Mishook and
Alethea Frazier Raynor

A broad, cross-sector web of partnerships between a school district and outside partners, aligned and informed by excellent data systems, is an essential ingredient for building sustainable reform at scale.

Jacob Mishook is a senior research associate in district redesign and leadership at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Alethea Frazier Raynor is a principal associate at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and co–guest editor of this issue of Voices in Urban Education.

If educators alone are responsible for ensuring that our children and youth develop into knowledgeable, caring, and productive adults, we will not succeed. To reach this goal, partnerships that involve city and state agencies, government, nonprofits, for-profits, and citizen's groups are essential.

Schools-only approaches to improving outcomes for children have not closed long-standing achievement gaps (A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education 2008). Improving instruction during the school day and within classrooms is critically necessary for reforming schools and districts; however, systemic inequities will only be addressed by providing a range of additional services through coordination with external agencies and partners. Ultimately, the goal of such a web of cross-sector partnerships is "a comprehensive, seamless approach to learning that values the distinct experiences that families, schools, afterschool programs, and communities provide for children" (Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force 2007, foreword).

Partnerships are not new to education. But more and more, external partners are playing a central role in areas that have traditionally been the exclusive domain of school districts.

Collaborative partnerships are able to tap unused or underutilized capacity within school systems and in communities to improve outcomes for students. External partners can play multiple roles inside and outside the system, depending on expertise and need. In examining a critical area of what the Annenberg Institute for School Reform calls *smart education systems* – a broad, cross-sector web of learning and youth development opportunities and supports – we see how external partnerships can help expand the capacity of both *school systems* and *communities* to improve student outcomes. Cross-sector partnerships include the voices of a wide range of leaders and advocates who share authority and accountability for the planning, decision making, implementation, and critique of their work so that no opportunity is missed to give *all* children in the community an excellent education.

High-quality, cross-sector partnerships, let alone a web of partnerships across an entire school district or city, are still rare. However, drawing on research into high-quality partnerships,

Cross-sector partnerships require communication and trust – and they take time.

the Mott Foundation's New Day for Learning initiative has outlined the key components of such high-quality, cross-sector partnerships (Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force 2007).

In this article, we examine how building capacity through partnerships is playing out in one traditional urban district – Chicago – and in one more decentralized and evolving system, New Orleans. Using a case study approach, we conducted interviews with over fifty people in Chicago and New Orleans to better understand how they are developing cross-sector partnerships to support education. We conclude with a set of implications for building and sustaining high-quality partnerships that include partners external to the school district under such different sets of circumstances.

New Orleans: Partnerships to Support Rebuilding an Education System – and a City

Cross-sector partnerships require communication and trust – and they take time. All of these are ingredients that most individuals and groups in New Orleans admit are in short supply. As the vision for education in New

Orleans evolves and the demand increases for high-quality, equitable learning environments for *all* children, the contributions made by cross-sector partners will become more necessity than luxury and may well be the new "life support" for public education in New Orleans.

Parents and families we interviewed regularly experience the fragmentation of services resulting, in part, from the limited amount of resources available to reach residents across the city. Post-Katrina schools are attempting to compensate for the distance between home and school by placing some services on-site that might normally be found in neighborhoods.

The Orleans Parish Education Network (OPEN) and Educate Now are two examples of partnerships that have emerged post-Katrina with different entry points, strategies, and approaches to creating partnerships across sectors in New Orleans. OPEN was established for the purpose of creating a community-driven process for education reform. This partnership was intentionally designed to be a provisional structure and is using a participatory process to engage people across the ideological divides in the city to support a set of common education goals related to the current reform. Educate Now seeks to ensure that the education reforms that have already begun in New Orleans are sustainable and effective. A goal of the organization is to provide the public with current, comprehensive information about the evolving system of decentralized schools in New Orleans, which includes public charter schools and schools operated by the Recovery

School District (RSD) and the Orleans Parish School Board (OPS).[1]

When examples of collaboration with city departments in Orleans Parish were mentioned by the stakeholder groups we interviewed, they described partnerships that were temporary and ad hoc in nature. There were no formal or informal partnerships identified with the mayor's office since the Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) Committee was convened immediately following the storm. A cross-sector planning committee that included housing, transportation, health, parks and recreation, and other municipal departments collaborated with OPSB and RSD to craft the Master Plan for School Facilities; this process was often cited by participants as the most visible example of a cross-sector partnership.

In Orleans Parish, the education subcommittee of the City Council is the only group within municipal government that was frequently mentioned as an ongoing partner in education. The subcommittee oversees the funding the city provides to OPSB. Public education funding in Orleans Parish is drawn from a portion of the sales tax but not from property taxes. State and federal dollars are the primary funding source for public education in New Orleans and, as a result, the mayor and City Council have limited fiscal control. As a group, the education subcommittee acts as a watchdog and raises questions on behalf of the community. But they have also had their own internal battles about the priority that should be given to education in

the devastated versus non-devastated areas of the city. Thus, the subcommittee's power and influence seemed tied more to constituency than to a shared platform and agenda to support systemic change.

Partnerships with other city agencies were viewed as crucial by all stakeholder groups that we interviewed, as these institutions provide the parks, playgrounds, pools, libraries, arts institutions, and community centers that children and families sorely need, especially in the most devastated areas of the city. Young people we interviewed also expressed their frustration that there weren't enough constructive activities for them outside of school and in their communities to meet their diverse interests and needs.

The full range of services and activities that were available for youth pre-Katrina were severely diminished when many nonprofits were unable to reopen and service providers did not return after the storm. When we interviewed education leaders and community stakeholders, it was noted by several of them that as many as 50 percent of the nonprofits that existed pre-Katrina did not reopen after the storm. The dramatic reduction in external service providers is a critical loss for public schools that depend on nonprofits and community-based organizations to provide essential programs and social services for young people during school, after school, and in the summer months.

The need for such services – especially in the area of mental health – has become even more acute as the post-traumatic stress of Katrina continues to impact the lives of children and families years later. Many young people

1 For more details about the governance of the New Orleans public school system after Katrina, see "New Orleans: The Challenges of Equity and Scale," by Alethea Frazier Raynor, in this issue of VUE.

experienced firsthand the death of family members and the loss of their homes, neighborhoods, and possessions. And regardless of where they lived in the city, all children experienced some degree of disruption in their daily routine.

In a study conducted by Louisiana State University of post-traumatic stress disorder in New Orleans since Katrina, 38 percent of the 1,181 participants were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or showed symptoms, which is ten times higher than the national average and a clear sign that people are still in distress (DeWulf et al., 2007). Many individuals and groups we interviewed responded with their concern about the mental health issues that young people are dealing with as a result of what they saw and experienced. Teachers were the most keenly aware of their students' mental health needs, which they say remain unmet; they were frustrated by the limited resources available for educators to respond.

Leadership from both school districts in New Orleans – OPSB and RSD – noted that the infrastructure of external supports that previously existed

---

PERSPECTIVES: Partnerships with Local Agencies to Provide Wraparound Services

BROTHER MICHAEL REIS
CEO, Tides Family Services

Partnerships between school systems and local agencies that provide community-based wraparound programming are an essential element to bring together local schools and estranged families.

The key factors in making "inside/outside" partnerships work are a clear mission, committed staff, and outcome-driven data. It only works if you do what you say you'll do and allow outcome data to drive the program. Obviously, your staff will have to be very willing to accept change and open to trying new models. They are the heart and soul of creating positive change. This only occurs if they truly believe in the mission. Their commitment is to each and every youngster and family. "No Reject No Eject." If we care enough, we'll figure something out. The dominant force is strength-based family therapy. The assessment begins with a simple question, "What's working for you?" This is a radical change in approaching these families, empowering parents. Helping is built upon respect and caring.

A second major issue is the inclusion of "wraparound support" from within the community to help support the families. Many of the poorer families suffer from several basic needs that are not being met. The new best practice models work hard on developing networks to support in the community who can be available to meet the various levels of Maslow's needs.

In Rhode Island, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) implemented a program for at-risk families called Family Care Community Partners (FCCP). They combined all of their prevention monies and now have four FCCPs to cover the State. The FCCPs are based on the High Fidelity Wraparound model. The four lead agencies were responsible to organize within each of the four regions a network of support services ranging from kinship to school systems. Each family that becomes involved is assigned a worker who helps the family to access needed services.

After the first year of operation, the results are encouraging. Systems that provide positive working partnerships that allow parents to be effectively involved and have a real voice will have a much better chance of educating at-risk youth.

is now "small and limited" in scope and agreed that agencies have been "slow to rebound" from the storm. School-based leaders have had to work independently to cultivate their own cross-sector supports and opportunities for students. Some schools and school networks are now able to offer services such as on-site health centers, psychological counseling, social workers, cultural and arts activities, family outreach programs, and Saturday schools. But there were clearly disparities across schools and neighborhoods in the external supports that were available to students. Added to the challenge of a diminished nonprofit infrastructure is the limited role that faith-based organizations can now play in support of young people outside of school. They, too, are still struggling to rebuild and have been unable to fill in the gap by providing the same range of services that have traditionally been offered to the community.

Communication channels were also seen as a barrier to cross-sector collaboration among the stakeholders we interviewed. School Connect, operated by HandsOn New Orleans, is one central repository or database of information where many of the existing resources have been collected or "mapped" across the city; schools are given an opportunity to identify their needs and find a match. This information seems essential not only for schools and districts that are trying to locate available resources, but also for some of the small or fledgling nonprofits that might be looking to ramp up or extend their capacity by collaborating with other nonprofits that have a similar program or mission.

Building partnerships *within* the education sector that can collaborate around a shared vision for change
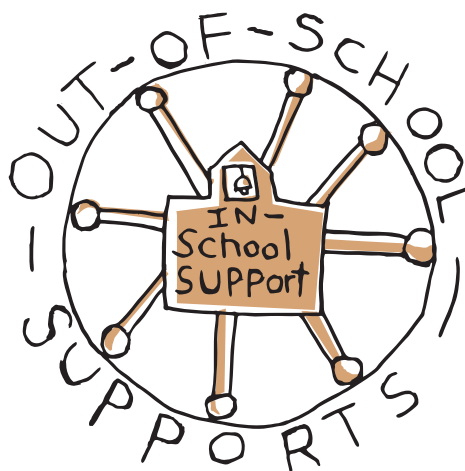
is important. However, reaching out beyond education to establish partnerships *across* sectors can only enhance the chances that planning for the core systems that many students and families rely on will happen concurrently, rather than serially, and in ways that can improve a child's overall quality of life.

Chicago: A Cross-Sector Partnership to Support Out-of-School-Time Opportunities and Supports

Both the Chicago Public Schools' Community Schools Initiative (CSI) and the citywide Out-of-School Time Project represent vigorous (and intertwined) efforts to harness the energy and resources of these sectors to serve students and families. CSI, overseen by Chicago Public Schools (CPS), links nonprofit organizations in the arts, youth development, community, and social service sectors with public schools in CPS. The Out-of-School Time Project coordinates citywide

agencies and nonprofit organizations (including the leadership of CSI) around afterschool programming for youth. These are joint initiatives with the school district's Office of Extended Learning Opportunities. A clear picture of the multi-layered system that provides out-of-school opportunities for youth in Chicago is critical to understanding the overarching citywide cross-sector partnerships.

The initial impetus for the Chicago Out-of-School Time Project was a five-year grant from the Wallace Foundation, but it operates with substantial investment from its lead partner organizations – CPS, the Chicago Public

"We prioritized the most fundamental and high value to each organization – that was data."

Libraries, the Chicago Parks District, Chicago's Department of Children and Youth Services, and After-School Matters. The chief executives of the five lead organizations also serve on the board, along with CEOs and leaders of other key agencies, including the Chicago Housing Authority, the Police Department, the Polk Bros. Foundation, and Metropolis 2020, which represents civic and commercial interests in the city. As the initial Wallace Foundation funding comes to an end, there is movement to formalize the partnership to ensure sustainability.

Leadership for Five Major Areas of Partnership Work

Just below the board level is the Leadership Group, with appointed members from the five lead organizations, which serves as the operational heart of the Out-of-School Time Project. One of our interviewees described the Leadership Group as a

> strong, cohesive group, passionate about what they do. … We all have the ear of our commissioners and a strong belief that we can do this. … That's important to have – a group with "like-mind." No grandstanding.

Another Leadership Group member talked about the group's decision-making ability:

> [The Leadership Group is] a relatively high-level group. Not the chief executive level, but one step below. We have decision-making authority and are familiar with the resources in our own organizations. When we sit down to coordinate, we really get things done. It's really helpful to have those relationships right under the chief executive level. A lot of things happened that wouldn't have happened without this group – our executives [only] meet every six months.

This group focuses on the five major areas of work of the partnership, described by a member of the Leadership Group:

- *Information.* Who are the children enrolled in afterschool? What are the afterschool programs? What are the experiences of kids in those programs?
- *Innovation:* There is a high priority set on identifying the best practices for afterschool programs, especially for teens, as there's a general lack of teen programming that's organized.

- *Communications.* The focus is both building support for afterschool programs and making the system more accessible and more appealing for youth.
- *Quality.* Being able to define, measure, and improve program quality at both the individual program level and at the system level. There is a need to talk about program quality in a common way, but without jeopardizing Chicago's strength in its diversity of programming.
- *Sustainability.* This includes institutionalizing tools and resources for the other four focus areas and developing continued funding in a time of significant public agency cutbacks.

The Key Role of Data and Indicators
Another Leadership Group member described the Out-of-School Time Project's recent, significant focus on collecting and sharing data across the lead agencies:

> We began work on all five [major] areas [of work], but we prioritized the most fundamental and high value to each organization – that was data. The primary motive for focusing on data was program participant tracking. [We began] building standardization into the data [by] implicitly coordinating and building commonality. We left the option to join the [data] system up to each partner. After School Matters already had their own data system, but they eventually came to our system. Others came to our system [as well]. … That area of work has continued to be the most concrete. We have a data system called Cityspan. The fact that partners had confidence in pulling together what was needed to support them furthered substantive partnership.

The data system – Cityspan – is designed to "sit on top of" the legacy data systems of the five lead organizations, but with the ability to pull data from any one of those systems and create simple and usable reports. The goal for the next year is to create a "data dashboard" across all five data systems.

However, in developing this data system, there were serious privacy concerns raised by the Chicago Public Libraries, and they were very reluctant to participate. After lengthy discussions within the Leadership Group, however, the Libraries created what one respondent called an "externally focused" program, which involved an "opt-in" system of data gathering that allowed all organizations to move forward with data collection while still respecting privacy concerns.

This focus on data is a major reason why Chicago Public Schools was attracted to the partnership initially. According to one CPS respondent,

> The initial common reason to be at the table [was having] at least one thing in common – the need to collect data. [It is] a strategic way to inform our work. That galvanized this partnership, each of us figuring out how to interact and do that. We're at a collective place where we have the data.
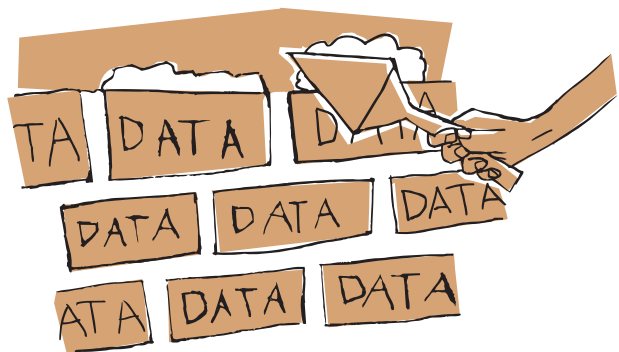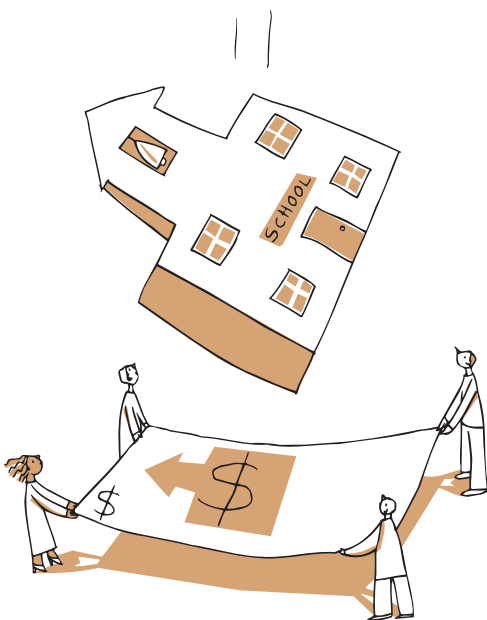
She credited the Out-of-School Time Project as "opening up [the Community Schools Initiative] to using data management." The Office of Extended Learning Opportunities (OELO) is considering going beyond CSI and OELO and pulling in other CPS departments to begin using the Cityspan data system, including the office that handles sports for the district.

Along with the development of this Cityspan data system, the leadership group realized early in the work of the project that indicators of quality would not be effective if imposed at the outset, rather than built from the ground up. One leadership group member noted,

> I believe strongly that if we went out of the gates saying that we'd decided these are eighteen indicators of program quality, that would have been a divisive tactic. It would have emphasized where we don't have commonalities. We came together to talk about how to use Cityspan, and then said, "Here's the best we understand about quality for improving programs." The five partners immediately agreed to create a framework to define quality, how to measure it, and how to improve it.

Strengths and Challenges

This anecdote exemplifies the transparent communication that exists in a bureaucratized set of organizations. How this work is done effectively across complex institutions can be explained partly by the authority given to the leadership group by the heads of the partnering organization and the strong norms within the Leadership Group. The Leadership Group meets about every six to eight weeks and has two rules: "Rule #1 – *you* attend, not somebody else; Rule #2 – if at least two leadership group members cannot make the meeting, the meeting doesn't

happen." This mutual accountability at the Leadership Group level has developed to the point that the group is now crafting a formal, legal agreement to institutionalize the partnership, which will necessarily take a different form from the Wallace-funded Out-of-School Time Project.

Another strength of the Out-of-School Time Project is its developing role as an advocate for increased funding for afterschool programs. There is a coordinated advocacy campaign to identify a stable funding stream at the state level for afterschool. The leadership of the Out-of-School Time Project, in partnership with other organizations, is working on drafting legislation for Summer 2010 and galvanizing public support for that legislation.

One of the significant challenges for the Out-of-School Time Project is around how the programs of the participating institutions will interact. For example, up to now, the work around program improvement has been primarily internal. One Leadership Group member asked,

> How is the Park District working on program quality? Libraries? We haven't been able to move to connecting the work in a [Community School Initiative participating] school to the nearby park or library. We're not there yet. We're trying to get there.

A shooting tragedy in Chicago in which a teenager was brutally killed in 2009 led the city of Chicago to increase funding for programs to decrease youth violence in the city. Afterschool programs for teens will be a major piece of that response, but a leadership group member wondered: "What do we do as a partnership? We have a citywide system. What do we do?"

The leadership group realized early in the work of the project that indicators of quality would not be effective if imposed at the outset, rather than built from the ground up.

Taking Partnerships to Scale

Partners are playing ever more significant roles in school districts, as described in our studies of New Orleans and Chicago, as well as in Boston, described in the article "Beyond Human Resources: Human Capital Development for Scale and Sustainability," by Joanne Thompson, Tracie Potochnik, and Ellen Foley, in this issue of *VUE*. They play critical roles in making connections possible between all the resources a city can bring to support child and youth development. But as we have also seen from the examples above, partnerships are far from simple.

Because the New Orleans system of education is fragmented, individual schools and the various school systems are often individually accessing external partners to support local reform. This could create a dynamic where there is a competitive market for services, instead of a collaborative environment that fosters partnerships.

In Chicago, longstanding external partners have developed working collaborative relationships with a single school system. Chicago's cross-sector partnerships through the Out-of-School

MEREDITH I. HONIG
Professor, College of Education, and senior fellow, Center for Educational Leadership, University of Washington–Seattle

[Our study "'External' Organizations and the Politics of Urban Educational Leadership"] is one in a growing line of research that challenges scholars of educational leadership to expand the traditional scope of our own field from examining mainly school-level leadership to truly focusing on educational leadership – the pursuit of influence over educational improvement from a variety of organizational and institutional positions both inside and outside formal school systems. The practice of educational leadership seems to be moving in this direction. What will it take for more scholars of educational leadership to break from our own longstanding institutional patterns and more regularly expand our conceptions of what counts as educational leadership?

Time Project and Community School Initiative operate in the context of a mostly intact public school system that educates the vast majority of young people in the city. These examples demonstrate important aspects of a smart education system through the efficacy of their collaborative work and the central role that data play in creating shared ownership and commitment to partnership.

Partnerships between schools, districts, civic and community organizations, elected officials, and other stakeholders are needed to support young people's learning and development of a broad range of outcomes, both inside and outside of school – especially in historically under-served communities. There is much to learn from both cities as they continue to develop the supports that can bring quality teaching and learning to scale.

References

A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education. 2008. *A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education.* Main BBA Statement. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Available online at <www.boldapproach. org/statement.html>

DeWulf, A., L. Mills, R. Levitan, M. Macht, N. Afonso, J. Avegno, and T. Mills. 2007. "Prevalence of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Following Hurricane Katrina," Abstract #337, *2007 SAEM Annual Meeting Abstracts,* Annual Meeting of the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine, May 16–19, Chicago.

Time, Learning, And Afterschool Task Force. 2007. *A New Day for Learning: A Report from the Time, Learning, And Afterschool Task Force.* Flint, MI: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Available for download at <www.edutopia.org/new-day-for-learning>

Community Organizing for Reform at Scale: Balancing Demand and Support

Margaret Balch-Gonzalez,
Daniella A. Cook, and Elizabeth Richards

A community organizing strategy that combines collaboration with the district and other institutional partners with pressure when necessary to move reforms forward can be a powerful driver of school improvement at scale.

Margaret Balch-Gonzalez is staff editor and a research analyst at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Daniella A. Cook is an assistant professor at the University of Tulsa School of Education who has done extensive research in New Orleans. Elizabeth Richards is artistic director of Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, an urban charter school in Providence, Rhode Island, and a graduate of the Master's in Urban Education Policy program at Brown University.

If reform efforts are to be sustainable at scale, schools must be deeply and authentically connected to the communities they serve. Parents, students, and community organizations play a fundamental role in building and maintaining this connection. Therefore, engaging students and their families and communities must be at the center of what the Annenberg Institute calls *smart education systems* – high-performing districts coupled with community partners in a web of learning supports and opportunities to educate all students to high standards. And that engagement must be meaningful – not just an exchange of ideas with communities, but also the opportunity for communities to actively participate in making decisions about what happens in schools.

Most urban education systems struggle with defining who constitutes the community; they also struggle with how to include communities – both grassroots and elites – at the decision-making table. Inevitably, allowing the range of community voices to be heard entails rethinking power relationships and dynamics; this is the challenge of engagement in post-Katrina New Orleans as the school system and city

infrastructure are rebuilt. Some urban communities have addressed this challenge by using what we call a *demand-support* strategy. In New York City, for example, a coalition of community organizing groups has emerged as a powerful and valued reform partner with the school district, the teachers union, and city officials by balancing support for their institutional partners with pressure for change when necessary.

Last year, the Annenberg Institute spoke with parents and other stakeholders in New Orleans about community engagement to improve schools, as part of our Emerging Knowledge Forum. This convening brought together educators, researchers, community leaders, school administrators, and others from across the country to share best thinking and practice on creating smart education systems. We also conducted interviews and focus groups with a variety of stakeholders prior to the forum in four featured sites – New Orleans, New York City and the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, Boston, and Chicago – in preparation for a more in-depth case study.[1] This article draws on discussions at the

---

1 The full case study report is scheduled for release in fall 2010.

forum and data from the New Orleans and New York City research. Parents and community leaders – who are often left out of discussions on reforms – had much to say about their role in rebuilding public education.

New Orleans: The Desire for Meaningful Participation

In our work, we have found that parents, youth, and community members can become a compelling force for positive change when they build the capacity to join together around common ground, identify and articulate systemic problems, use their deep knowledge of the community to design sustainable solutions and assist with their implementation, and collectively hold a school system accountable for the education of their children. [2]

A fragmented system like New Orleans presents many barriers to this kind of parent and community involvement. Parents are often seen as individual consumers who have no collective common interest beyond the choice of schools for their own children and no role as decision makers. Problems are often seen as occurring at the school level rather than as systemic weaknesses, and the lines of authority and accountability are often unclear. In this environment, parents struggle to be heard.

Parents as Community Advocates Versus Parents as Individual Consumers

In New Orleans, we conducted forty interviews and eight focus groups, two of them with just parents. Many parents felt that they were discouraged from pursuing general advocacy for children in school, rather than limiting their interest to their own children's school performance. These parents shared that their attempts at being a "participatory parent" were negative experiences in both traditional and charter schools.[3] In one instance, parents of a child who was considered "well behaved" were still concerned about what they described as a "punitive" discipline policy at a charter school – they felt that the policy as practiced was "counterproductive to the school's mission." But the administration was unreceptive, the parents reported:

---

2 See, for example, our series of case studies – Organized Communities, Stronger Schools – based on a six-year research study funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. This research found that community organizing for educational improvement had significant positive impacts on a range of student, school, and district outcomes. The case studies, tools, and more information are available at < www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>. See also the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) Web site at <www.nyccej.org/about> for a description of some of the improvements CEJ's organizing has brought about.

---

3 After Katrina, the Louisiana legislature authorized the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to create the Recovery School District, which would take control of more than 100 Orleans Parish schools deemed "failing." See Alethea Frazier Raynor's article "New Orleans: The Challenges of Equity and Scale" in this issue of *VUE*.

"When you try to talk to them about that and suggest some other ways, they're not open to that."

In this way, some school leaders pushed parents towards an individual rather than communal understanding of involvement and engagement. One parent shared her experience at a recent meeting with a school administration.

> I said, "I'm advocating, representing kids who don't have anybody speaking for them." In so many words I was told, "You're a different kind of parent." I suggested that we have a parent liaison or advisory committee of parents. They said it was a good idea, but "we don't think parents should be a part of decision making."

The collapse of viable community-based organizations, coupled with the dissolution of neighborhood schools (and new transportation challenges), left a vacuum in support for parents interested in broader advocacy for all children – not just their own. The ability to push back against the notion of parents as consumers has been limited by the lack of an organizing infrastructure.

This sentiment that parents should not be involved in decision making was echoed by a charter school principal:

> Parents have less of an opportunity. I think it's important for parents to have an avenue to influence decision making and give feedback, but I don't know if they should be directly involved. I feel like the parents are the consumers that give feedback. Our management team is held accountable to meet their desires and needs. One of the things that is empowering parents right now is the freedom of choice they have to choose among public schools in New Orleans. I think it's more productive for parents to leverage that power and communicate their feelings but not have them on a charter board or anything.

Generally, principals and civic and political leaders articulate the role of parents as exercising power because they can opt to move their children when they are not satisfied, since parents can choose their child's school. As captured by the charter school principal above, the view is that parents should give feedback but not be directly involved. Thus, from this perspective, parents were seen as *consumers* of the educational goods and services that schools offer them through a system of school choice, but they were never characterized as collaborators or *producers* in the reform who participate in the decision-making process about what the educational system should look like.

Unclear Authority and Lack of Recourse

Several parents raised questions about who, ultimately, has authority over the schools, especially charter schools. One community leader explained:

> Each school is required to have a parent complaint process. . . . [But], are our boards as open and transparent as they need to be? Do parents know when board meetings are? Is there a complaint process? Are they published?

Parents are often seen as individual consumers who have no collective common interest beyond the choice of schools for their own children and no role as decision makers.

Parent and community organizations that derive their power independently of their neighborhood schools and the district have the ability to put pressure on their partners to move forward if change gets bogged down.

One way parents could be involved in decision making is to serve on charter school boards. A charter school leader shared that "We have some parents on our board, but I don't know if that is in our bylaws or just the way it occurred."

Often, parents turned to OPSB with questions, needs, and frustrations regardless of whether they were in a school governed by the OPSB, RSD, or charter. According to one district leader, this was because OPSB was considered the only local authority that everyone was aware of, since it existed before the storm. The respondent went on to state,

> Education is now to the point where people don't have a point of contact for all these other services. It's difficult for people to know, who do I get in contact with for what, and how do I contact them?

Finally, parents and community leaders expressed that state-level and, to some degree, system-level leaders were isolated from the everyday challenges (inaccessibility of charter school boards) and realities (such as transportation) facing parents who wanted to be involved. Specifically, parents

expressed frustration at the inaccessibility and disregard in which charter boards held parents. When asked about access to decision making, one parent leader stated,

> I went to board meetings. I saw a bunch of men with no relationship to the school saying all the kids had ADHD. There was no opportunity for me to speak – I was not even introduced. The charter board did not have any attachment or relationship to our community and the children that they're there to serve.

So, although there is an expressed interest in supporting parents' access to information about charters, including parents having access to charter boards, in practice, this interest has not necessarily trickled down to the school level. Responses from a range of sources in New Orleans conveyed that charter school boards "vary in quality"; yet, mechanisms that seriously address the variability of charter board quality or the inaccessibility of charter school boards were not known.

NYC Coalition for Educational Justice: Balancing Demand and Support

When parent and community organizations bring assets to the table as they approach traditional power-holding institutions like school districts, teachers unions, and city and state agencies to advocate for school improvement, they often gain respect, appreciation, and collaboration. In the Annenberg Institute's work around the country, we have seen more and more communities that gather credible data, design innovative solutions that would not have occurred to more traditional

reformers, build alliances, and secure resources independently. Districts, unions, and elected officials have credited such community organizing efforts with helping to achieve major educational improvements.[4]

At the same time, parent and community organizations that derive their power independently of their neighborhood schools and the district – unlike traditional parent organizations like the PTA – have the ability to put pressure on their partners to move forward if change gets bogged down. The sources of the potential power of these organizations are that they mobilize the people with the highest stakes in the quality of their neighborhood schools and who possess the deepest knowledge of their communities' assets and challenges. When they speak with an organized, unified voice, decision-makers are more likely to listen.

The New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), a citywide parent- and community-led coalition formed in 2006, was one of the sites discussed by the wide range of national and local stakeholders who participated in our 2009 Emerging Knowledge Forum in New Orleans. We gathered data on CEJ prior to the forum in New York City in twenty-one interviews with CEJ members, their partners, district and city officials, and funders, as well as a focus group in English and one in Spanish with parent leaders. We also attended a CEJ meeting and a CEJ event and reviewed relevant documents. From this discussion and research, a picture emerged of the successes and challenges of a demand-support strategy.

Building Community Power to Participate in Policy Development: A Citywide Coalition

CEJ grew out of the work of three neighborhood-based collaboratives: the Community Collaborative to Improve Bronx Schools (formerly Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools), the Brooklyn Education Collaborative, and the Brooklyn-Queens 4 Education Collaborative. These collaboratives each include public school parents, union-led groups, community residents, and community organizations with long track records of strengthening their communities through organizing, social services, and housing development. CEJ has risen quickly to be the preeminent parent organization working for better public schools in the city's low-income and working-class neighborhoods.

The neighborhood collaboratives came together to form CEJ with the vision of a citywide parent organization with roots in low-performing districts and sufficient capacity to propose and participate in the development of systemwide education policy. By forming a larger-scale coalition, the neighborhood collaboratives were able to address both local and citywide issues. In a session on CEJ at the Emerging Knowledge Forum, a CEJ member-organization leader explained the importance of creating CEJ:

> [My organization] started at the local level. When mayoral [power] was centralized, it became clear that we needed to work at a central level. We were one small organization and could win on one small issue … but not deeper issues. … CEJ began to look at issues across the city.

---

4 See our case study series *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools: The Impact of Community and Youth Organizing on Public School Reform* at <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>.

Working with Allies

CEJ's allies recognize and admire the organization's collaborative approach and advance preparation. One of CEJ's strengths, said one City Council staff member, is that they always arrive at meetings with a bargaining chip or an important piece of data:

> The administration, once they feel like you bring nothing to the table – always complaining, no solutions – it's hard to get their attention. But if they feel like you have something to offer, are being transparent, sincere, genuine – that's a much better way to engage.

Just as important as their political skill and bargaining ability is the on-the-ground knowledge of CEJ and its member organizations, which is invaluable to those making governance and policy decisions. In our 2009 Emerging Knowledge Forum, an urban superintendent expressed the wish that there were a presence like CEJ in his city so that he would "know what the priorities of the community are." He went on to say that in "a large, diverse urban school system," like the districts in his city, New York City, and others, "so many people try to

PERSPECTIVES: Parent Organizing and Accountable Collaboration

CAROL BOYD
Parent leader, NYC Coalition for Educational Justice

In 2004, parents in the South Bronx celebrated a historic victory when after an intensive campaign to improve teacher quality in their low-performing schools, the Lead Teacher Program (LTP) was launched. The LTP was unique in that the model provided for authentic collaboration, in both the planning and implementation processes, among all of the key stakeholders (parents, community organizations, the teacher union, and the Department of Education).

A report prepared by an outside evaluator, the Academy for Educational Development, highlighted the effect of the LTP collaboration in improving teacher quality and student achievement; the LTP model was used for two successive school terms and the number of participating schools was increased. Creditability, sustainability, and scalability: we had achieved the ultimate recipe for success (or so we thought). But in year three, when the Department of Education decided to take the successful LTP citywide, they killed the collaborative process that was fundamental in yielding such positive outcomes and excluded the parent groups that had created the program in the first place. However, we as parents refused to be [excluded].

After much reflection, we came to the realization that parents needed to build citywide power in order to compel the Department of Education to work with us as equal partners. It was this thinking that led to the formation of the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), a citywide coalition of nine community groups working together to organize parents to improve low-performing schools. CEJ is based on the premise of *accountable collaboration*, meaning that partners feel most accountable to each other when there is a recognition of each other's power. If parents don't have this power, many school districts will treat parents as fair-weather friends that they can invite to dinner when they want and kick out when their interests differ. CEJ continues to build a parent organization with the power to compel accountable collaboration towards smart education systems citywide, statewide, and across the country.

_____

For more information about CEJ, see <www.nyccej.org>.

For more about the Lead Teacher campaign, see Williams 2004.

get your attention that it's overwhelming." He cited one of CEJ's strengths as their knowledge that "the district doesn't have the capacity to handle hundreds of separate requests." A New York City Council staff member said:

> Elected officials are trying to do the right thing, but they get confused by different voices. It's hard to see the real path to education reform. You can't always bring everyone together, but the more you can have a singular, clear voice – CEJ can be a major part of that effort, which they have been – it would be beneficial to someone like my boss. … It's important in city government and politics to have something that speaks to people in the community and their concerns.

This knowledge of the community is also helpful when administrators and policy-makers need to effectively communicate with community members. In the lead-up to the a campaign for a comprehensive middle grades improvement plan, for instance, CEJ members worked closely with school staff and vetted the final report to make sure the report "wasn't too academic, but was meaningful on the ground," in the words of one interviewee.

CEJ's on-the-ground knowledge and community connections also translate into an on-the-ground presence, a valuable political resource to their allies. One CEJ member-organization leader said, "The [CEJ member] groups are a turnout machine – when there are passionate leaders, everyone steps up." Another valuable characteristic of CEJ activists is that as private citizens, they have a freedom to speak openly that the New York City Department

of Education and City Council staff do not. A City Council staff member said:

> [CEJ] does things that we can't do. We can't be seen as organizing parents. … But if they say "We're going to organize a rally" on an issue that we believe in, we're, like, "Woo-hoo! Go ahead!"

Parent Leadership and Capacity Building

CEJ's approach differs from other groups in several aspects. Two of the most important are its democratic, parent-led governance structure and its data-and-support partnership with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. The combination of grassroots parent leadership and "grasstops" university research means that, in the words of an education foundation staff member, CEJ possesses both "user-friendly data" and parents who can "use the data for themselves, interpreting it and using it to build a case."

Having a strong constituency of citizens armed with solid data has proved invaluable to CEJ. One education reform advocate who has worked with CEJ put it this way:

Sometimes the intellectual community thinks that you can't use data, that parents of poor kids aren't going to be able to see through data. I learned that they can certainly figure it out and use it to their advantage. ... [It] makes them very strong – gives them the opportunity to say "I don't just *think* [schools] are bad, I can actually *prove* it to you."

CEJ's internal governance structure reflects its focus on empowered parents, selecting two or three parents from each community-based organization and union in its membership to sit on the steering committee, alongside two executive directors. The steering committee leads and directs CEJ's campaigns from monthly meetings and makes all of CEJ's decisions. There are no permanent officers; CEJ is led by a rotating group of parents. The meetings are run according to basic principles of adult learning and are places of sharp strategic analysis, focused and realistic discussion, and a high level of mutual respect. Several interviewees mentioned that attendance at steering committee meetings has always been high, and the numbers of participants is growing.
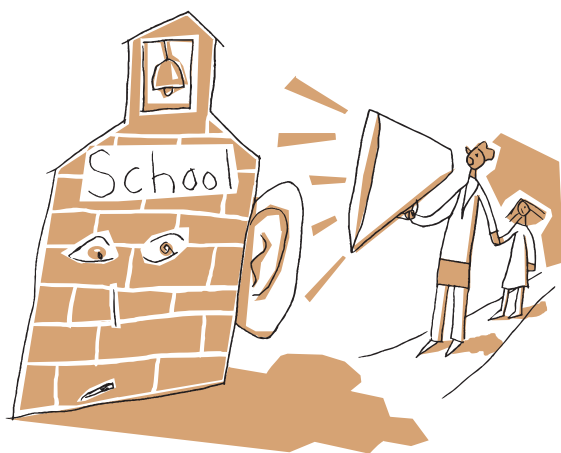
Two CEJ parent leaders described the meetings:

Parents learn a tremendous amount about educational policy, about the politics of education, and power analysis, and they also have a space where people really get to know each other, build relationships of trust and make real decisions. CEJ ... moves at a pace that is ambitious and, at the same time, is very respectful of people's growth and development.

Parent leadership is key – having parents facilitate meetings, making it possible for them to participate by providing childcare, food, and translation. It's different from the PTA-type leadership, which has a culture of "being true to the school" and not challenging the school.

This method of democratic leadership has proved effective. As one Annenberg Institute staff member who works with CEJ put it,

The people who are most affected by the inequitable outcomes in the school system have the capacity and the will to change that system.

When Support Doesn't Work, Pressure

At times, collaboration and support are not enough. Although CEJ works hard to keep interactions friendly and respectful so that partners are challenged but not alienated, CEJ members do not shy away from confronting decision-makers and putting them in uncomfortable situations if they feel they are not being heard. CEJ has conducted rallies and protests on the steps of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) and City Hall, circulated petitions, released reports, called press conferences, and carried out other public actions over such issues as poor-quality middle schools, budget cuts, and school closings.

ADOLFO ABREU, 17
Youth leader
Sistas & Brothas United/Urban
Youth Collaborative

Developing smart education systems requires that all of the players who are involved or affected by the system are given the opportunity to make decisions. Students and parents are both affected by the policies that the Department of Education makes, but they have no say in what at the end of the day is affecting them. Youth organizations are the ones that give the youth a voice on the issues that are directly affecting them concerning their education.

The way the youth organizations give a voice to the young people is by building relationships with them and training them on the issues that are affecting them. The young people are the ones that are experiencing policies that at times are jeopardizing their future choices. They are the experts because they experience the flaws within the education system. Youth organizations give the youth the power to reform their lives. By building their base, the youth organizations are able to reform their lives by mobilizing people into action and applying pressure to their targets who have the decision-making power.

By applying pressure to the elected [officials], they then notice that the organization is powerful and has credibility in the community. Once there, a relationship can be formed with the elected [officials] in which the youth organization can apply pressure to the [official] to pass pieces of legislation. Reform can truly begin to be implemented once the elected [official] is pushed into convincing his/her colleagues into changing policies for the better.

Youth organizing can develop a smart education system with two things: extensive outreach to parents and engaging the youth in conversations about the education system. Currently in the system, the parents are not reached out to enough due to there being a lack of communication between them and the school. The majority of people that live in New York City do not speak English, or they do not have English as their primary language. A lot of documents are out there that do not have translation for parents who do not speak English, resulting in the parents not being informed on what is going on with their child's education.

Youth organizations can be the gateway into putting pressure on the Department of Education so that they could provide translation for the parents. They can also hold information sessions in which they explain to the parents what their child needs to do in order to excel in school and the role they play in their child's education. With this, the parents are engaged in a dialogue where they are informed on what they can do to make sure that their child is having a good educational experience.

Students can also be engaged in dialogues where they are trained in certain skills and practices that they can use to succeed in their education experience. Once the school community is engaged in dialogues that are geared towards success, neighboring schools can then have the opportunity to learn from one another. The entire school district can then be positively impacted if all schools implement this grassroots change that is centered on the parents and the students. Once there, we can then develop smart education systems that have the people who are affected in the center being able to make decisions.

Demonstrating large numbers of mobilized community members and attracting media attention are powerful tools in CEJ's community organizing strategy.

Mostly, this type of pressure is respected and is often highly effective when combined with a commitment to collaboration whenever possible. Many of CEJ's partners with whom we spoke described CEJ parent activists – partly in admiration, partly in annoyance – as "relentless." One NYCDOE staff member said, "I've referred to them [CEJ] as the thorn in my side, but it's been a good thorn," while another said, "Early meetings were not lovefests… [but we] push each other and come to a common vision."

Community Organizing as an Asset to School Reform

A demand–support strategy, by its very nature, makes for a sometimes-bumpy ride. Although the Emerging Knowledge Forum research team found overwhelming praise for CEJ's approach among its institutional allies, some questioned what they perceived as CEJ's adversarial nature, or felt that the group gave up too quickly on efforts to cultivate relationships within the NYCDOE and city government when initial efforts were unsuccessful. One NYCDOE staff member said, "One of challenges…with community organizations is to draw a clear line between where it's collaboration and where you get to set policy." Some of the parent and community leaders and their allies, on the other hand, felt that in negotiating with partners, CEJ sometimes ended up ceding more than it should have. One union activist said, "Once you get on stage with them [the NYCDOE at public events], it becomes difficult to fight the next battle with them."

But amid the acknowledgment of challenges, a clear message came through in our conversations with parents and other stakeholders in our Emerging Knowledge Forum research: an organized, independent community that balances collaboration and pressure and acts as an equal partner with the district and other institutions can be a powerful force for school improvement at scale.

Reference

Williams, Ocynthia. 2004. "A Community-Led Reform: Improving Schools in the South Bronx," Voices in Urban Education no. 5 (Fall). Available for download at < www.annenberginstitute.org/ VUE/archives>

Going to Scale: The Power and Limits of Data

Ellen Foley

School improvement at scale depends on good data systems not only to inform decision making, but also to help build relationships and enhance equity.

Ellen Foley is associate director of district redesign and leadership at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, assistant clinical professor in the Master's in Urban Education Policy Program at Brown University, and co–guest editor of this issue of Voices in Urban Education.

When we set out to develop our 2009 Emerging Knowledge Forum and to conduct related research in the featured sites (New Orleans, New York City/NYC Coalition for Educational Justice, Boston, and Chicago), data-informed decision making was just one of the themes that we pursued. Now, after studying and learning from these four sites, we have come to the conclusion that data is one of the most critical supports for going to scale.

Data to inform decision making and support accountability have been emphasized in research and best practice models for most of the last decade, and we certainly saw evidence of that trend in our sites. But we also found data serving in some unexpected ways: building relationships, lowering tensions, increasing credibility, addressing equity issues, and building the capacity of less-powerful stakeholders to participate meaningfully in school reform. As we took stock of the lessons about going to scale from this work, we found that most had something to do with the availability and accessibility of data, as well as the capacity to use data. In this concluding chapter, we describe in more detail the role of data for going to scale and bring in some voices from outside the Annenberg Institute to help underscore that point. We conclude with reflections about the challenges of going to scale.

What Is "Going to Scale"?

We draw on Coburn's (2003) dimensions of scale and our own vision of a *smart education system* – one that joins a school district and a range of community partners to create a whole system of successful schools – to imagine what achieving scale would look like in a smart system.

Coburn's first dimension of scale is *depth*. In a smart education system, this would involve profound changes in instructional practice, including the expansion of in-school and out-of-school opportunities, resources, and time for learning. These changes, in practice, would put students, families, and communities at the center of the work and be sustained over time – *sustainability* is the second dimension of scale – through the commitment of resources and the achievement of a broad set of positive outcomes.

The third dimension of scale, *spread*, is perhaps the most meaningful to us at the Annenberg Institute, as it pertains most directly to equity. Spread

in a smart education system would mean that the expanded opportunities and new approaches to practice would be available to *all* children within a community, not just some students, as is typically the case now. This would require the development of substantial cross-sector partnerships.

Reaching these goals would require a *shift in reform ownership* – the fourth dimension of scale. In a smart education system, this would mean that all the stakeholders involved – school districts, unions, city agencies, community-based organizations, social service and civic organizations, business, parents, and students – would take an active role in the education system. Managing power differentials among stakeholders is a critical consideration for building this shift in reform ownership.

How Does Using Data Help Achieve Scale?

One theme of our work in these four cities was the power of data. Using data can touch on all four of Coburn's dimensions of scale.

- *Using data provides depth.*
  Data-informed decision making in education has focused on the ways in which school- and district-based staff can use data to improve instruction; such efforts were certainly being adopted in the three school systems we studied (Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans). In

addition to what we report in this issue of *VUE*, we heard of cases in every city where using data helped teachers, principals, and other educators change instructional practice, look at students holistically, and assess their own and their students' effectiveness.[1]

- *Using data promotes sustainability*.
  In all four sites, informants called for data that goes beyond test scores: they asked for data on other outcomes, and on student, school, community, and program characteristics and program implementation. Standardizing and institutionalizing data tools helps maintain consistency, coordination, and effectiveness of improvement efforts across a system. Also, measuring and publicizing both problems and successes builds public will to support reform, which is essential to sustainability.

- *Using data supports spread.*
  A major lesson from our research in Chicago is how data has brought partners of key agencies together and has galvanized their collaboration. As reported in the article "The Critical Role of Data-Informed, Cross-Sector Partnerships in Smart Systems" by Jacob Mishook and Alethea Frazier Raynor in this issue of *VUE*, leaders of key city agencies came together because of the common need to track children and youth and to understand them better. The Cityspan data system was the technology that provided an avenue for collaboration.[2]

---

1 These findings will be available in our full case study report, forthcoming in fall of 2010.

2 See <www.cityspan.com> for more information.

Collecting the "right data" is crucial. As education systems recognize the importance of data for informed decision making, more and more data are being produced; however, sometimes less is more. Many systems collect and report on anything and everything that can be quantified. In this case, decision-makers (educators) become "data drunk" and are left dazed with binders and binders of meaningless numbers. Therefore, the first consideration for collecting the right data is that the data be meaningful … meaningful to their mission – educating all students at high levels. Selecting data that are meaningful requires systems to identify their target audience and determine how these data are expected to be used.

• *Using data shifts reform owner-ship.* The story of the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), as described in the article "Community Organizing for Reform at Scale: Balancing Demand and Support" by Margaret Balch-Gonzalez, Daniella Cook, and Elizabeth Richards in this issue of *VUE*, dramatically high-lights the impact of wider access to data that address the specific concerns of parents: CEJ's power-ful combination of "grassroots parent leadership and 'grasstops' university research" has helped to make the voices of parents heard in the New York City Department of Education. Strong, credible data interpreted and presented in a compelling way have provided CEJ a legitimacy that opens doors and equalizes previously imbalanced power relationships.

Why Don't More Reform Efforts Realize the Potential of Data?

If, as we posit above, data and data-informed decision making have so much potential for catalyzing smart education systems at scale, why haven't they developed? Schools and school districts are awash with data and, to some extent, so are the other city agencies, community groups, and organizations that we expect to be involved in smart education systems. Data are ubiquitous, and calls for data-informed decision making are frequent and growing. The problem is, as our research suggests, that schools and districts are still struggling with the fundamental issues of data-informed decision making: the accessibility of and the capacity for using data.

For example, data warehousing technology that links previously sepa-rate, self-contained datasets is preva-lent in other organizations, but many school systems are only just beginning to figure out how to connect their data across departments. Efforts like Chicago's to link data across multiple city agencies are even rarer. Debra

Vaughan, director of data and research at the Public Education Foundation in Chattanooga, elaborated on this point:

> The ability to effectively use data for change requires a profound understanding of the data and their inherent meaning for improving student outcomes. Using data as a tool for improvement is not currently the norm across districts and at every level of the system. Creating such a culture takes time and ongoing professional development. It also requires flexibility, a commodity that is often hard to come by in large bureaucratic systems.
>
> Going to scale also involves multiple players and stakeholders with varied incentives for change. With numerous entities, there is an increased difficulty to achieve unity and more opportunity for complications when making decisions (about need, support, and resources). Going to scale requires that every person be committed to the concept and its implementation in their work.

In all of our Emerging Knowledge Forum sites, there was widespread agreement that there is an abundance of data collected. However, when asked how data is used for decision making,

nearly all of our respondents from all four cities were in agreement that there was still a long way to go to improve data use at all levels. We did find many examples of individual schools and teachers using student performance data as a central strategy for supporting instruction, but this was far from systematic. The capacity – the skills, time, and technology – of district or school staffs to make good use of data available and to ask the right questions was a major concern in all of our sites.

We spoke to Cynthia Coburn, associate professor of policy, organization, measurement, and evaluation at the University of California–Berkeley Graduate School of Education. She elaborated on this point:

> To date, most efforts to develop systems to support data use in school districts have focused on technical infrastructure, such as data warehouses, reporting functions, etc. Less attention has been paid to the human infrastructure to support data use. Yet, data in and of itself doesn't tell you anything. Data needs to be interpreted. This interpretation happens in social interaction among and between people in the district and the community. The next frontier for school districts is to develop better systems that enable people to come together and collectively grapple with the meaning of data and implications for solutions.

What Other Factors Inhibit Going to Scale?

In "Going to Scale: The Challenge of Replicating Social Programs," Jeffrey Bradach (2003) laments that "proven solutions to social problems do not spread" (p. 25). His explanation for this phenomenon is primarily economic – an irrational unwillingness to invest in

programs that have data to demonstrate their success. In the previous sections of this article, we have emphasized another hypothesis for the frustrating tendency of education improvements to remain no more than pockets of success: the challenges of data accessibility, use, and interpretation.

Several former *VUE* authors and Emerging Knowledge Forum participants had further ideas about the challenges of going to scale.

Kenneth Campbell, president of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, former director of charter schools in Louisiana, and an Emerging Knowledge Forum participant, told us:

> I believe the primary obstacle in going to scale is fear of the shift in reform ownership in its truest sense. I believe that ultimately, parents and communities should be the true owners of reform. The education establishment blocks any attempt to shift ownership of the education process, and we have not invested in the training, education, and support that is essential for our parents and communities to become true and effective owners.
>
> I also believe that educators have abdicated their responsibilities in helping to drive the reform process, allowing outside entities to claim the mantle of reform. Instead of [becoming] co-owners of the reform process, educators have allowed themselves to be cast as "anti-reformers." In order to bring the pieces to scale, educators must become more active owners (drivers) of the reform process.

Cynthia Coburn suggested that the tendency for education systems to implement one-size-fits-all solutions was part of the challenge of going to scale in large school systems.

> Part of the challenge of scale in large school systems is the fact that schools and communities have different needs. One school may need one

thing to enable the development of deep enactment of a particular instructional approach; another school might need something else. Schools vary by their prior histories of reform, the human capital in the school (what teachers know and are able to do in relation to the reform effort), their social capital (the nature of social relations in schools), and even their physical capital (material resources).

> Few school districts have developed ways of assessing the needs of schools along these dimensions and figuring out different strategies that meet schools' differing needs. Those districts that do differentiate support for schools tend to do so based on achievement levels. Yet schools with the same low achievement might have different strengths on which to build or need different supports. It is the capacity for implementation that matters in taking something for scale, and districts must find ways of assessing that capacity and providing supports that are targeted to specific needs.

Both Howard Fuller of Marquette University, a leading advocate of school choice, and Debra Vaughan of the Public Education Fund in Chattanooga emphasized the importance of a shared belief that all children can learn. As Vaughan summarized:

> Creating an education community unified around the concept of educating *all* students is key. This is most difficult in communities served by individual schools and/or multiple district structures; it is, however, especially for these communities, imperative that educators embrace a collective mission: that each and every student in the community will demonstrate high academic achievement and be prepared for success after

high school. Only through a common vision will the smart education system concept be capable of going to scale.

Brother Michael Reis, CEO of Tides Family Services in Rhode Island, which serves youths involved with the juvenile justice system and their families, emphasized the lack of genuine community engagement and the interconnections between academic success and other outcomes:

> The main obstacle [to bringing smart education system components to scale], in my opinion, is the lack of family involvement. The school personnel see academic success as a single silo. … These young throwaways were very high risk to re-create the next generation of single-parent moms and young men graduating from the juvenile justice to the criminal justice system. If you never graduated from high school, how would you be able to help your son or daughter graduate? If you were never parented as a teenager, how would you be able to parent your son or daughter? The key to avoiding this cycle is to support these youth to maintain connection with the family and with the school. Society pays a terrible price when we fail. The community becomes a much safer place when we succeed.

Scaling Up: Emerging Lessons

There are many challenges to building smart education systems at scale, as our own research and the voices of our colleagues have described – the lack of resources, capacity, human capital, and high expectations, among other problems – the list goes on and on. However, there is an upside. As the Annenberg Institute works to build smart education systems in the sites we work with, we are keeping the following encouraging ideas in mind.

First, we know that data are powerful. They can build relationships, defuse difficult situations, increase the user's credibility, address equity issues, and develop the capacity of less-powerful stakeholders. Our regular practice at the Annenberg Institute is to help stakeholders understand, interpret, and present data so they can work collaboratively toward solutions. The work on the Emerging Knowledge Forum over the last eighteen months has reinforced how important such efforts are.

Second, we've learned that collaboration is expected. Whether we were talking about human capital development, cross-sector partnerships, data-informed decision making, or community engagement, our informants expected that educators would work together, both within and across organizations. Our experience has shown us that collaboration is not easy – it is peppered with technical issues, political pitfalls, and cultural challenges – but the likelihood that it will occur increases immeasurably when educators see it as part of their regular work, rather than "extra" work or an expendable luxury.

And lastly, we remind ourselves that trying to get to scale is a good challenge to have. It means that a problem has been solved by someone, somewhere, at some time. It's a privilege to work on creating the depth, sustainability, spread, and shift in reform ownership that are required to take those good solutions to scale.

References

Bradach, J. 2003. "Going to Scale: The Challenge of Replicating Social Programs," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Spring). Available online at <www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/going_to_scale>

Coburn, C. E. 2003. "Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change," *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 6:3–12.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY