A Broader and Bolder Approach to School Reform:
Closing the opportunity gap and transforming schools

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The challenge:

- Achieving Excellence and Equity
- Retaining support for public schools
- Addressing the needs of poor and disadvantaged children, recent immigrants, English learners
- Addressing the needs of chronically under-performing schools
- Unpredictable Financing - Doing more with less
- Public frustration is growing
The Reproduction Dilemma

- Rather than reducing poverty education is implicated in the reproduction of inequality across generations
  - Inequality in society reinforces inequitable outcomes – achievement gap
  - Significant disparities remain between “visible minorities” and white middle class students
- US education policies have failed to disrupt these patterns or break the cycle of poverty
### Narrow vs. Broad Approach

**Narrow**
- Use pressure to foster accountability
- Focus exclusively on achievement
- Use test scores to rank
- Adopt scripted teacher-proof curriculum
- Hold principals accountable
- Treat parents as consumers
- Punitive approach to discipline
- Encourage competition among schools

**Broad**
- Focus on learning conditions
- Use assessment to diagnose
- Develop teacher skills continuously
- Focus on “whole child” – health, nutrition, safety
- Hold all stakeholders accountable
- Treat parents as partners
- Use discipline to develop character
- Expand learning opportunities
- Promote cooperation between and among schools
Not everything that can be counted counts.
Not everything that counts can be counted.

William Bruce Cameron, 1963
The Biggest Obstacle: Normalization of Failure

- Tendency for staff to treat patterns of achievement as “normal”
  - **Complacency** - Staff has grown accustomed to the predictability of academic outcomes
  - **Rationalizations** - Teachers and administrators explain low achievement by blaming parents and students
  - **Beliefs** - Staff believes that culture and biology determine intelligence rather than access to resources and educational opportunity
What We Know

- Student achievement is affected by a variety of social, psychological and environmental factors
  - Services must be provided in a coordinated manner to counter effects of poverty and improve developmental and learning outcomes
  - Changing outcomes for youth requires a focus on the needs of the “whole child”
- By focusing on the conditions that foster powerful teaching and learning students become more motivated and invested as learners
Key Principles

Poverty is not a learning disability but ignoring poverty can be disabling.

Education can play a role in breaking the cycle of poverty if it promotes empowerment.

Education must also promote excellence by breaking stereotypes and cultivating mastery.

Schools must be organized to meet student needs – we must know and understand our students and community.
Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

Organizing Schools for Improvement, 2010 – Bryke, et.al.

1) A coherent instructional guidance system
2) Development of the professional capacity of faculty
3) Strong parent-community-school ties
4) A student-centered learning climate
5) Leadership that drives change
An excellence through equity agenda

- Systems to facilitate school improvement
  - Diagnostic assessment
  - Early intervention procedures
  - Personalized learning
  - Evaluation to insure quality control
  - On-site, ongoing professional development

- Cultural Changes:
  - Focus on relationships between teachers and students
  - Preventative rather than punitive discipline
  - Peer culture where it is “cool to be smart”
  - Adoption of rituals and norms that reinforce core values
Bronx Academy of Language and Technology
Students in control of learning at Hollenbeck Middle School, LA
PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012
Brockton scholarship winners
2015
What Superintendents Can Do

- Maintain the right priorities –
  - Support and recognize high quality teaching - focus on morale
  - Prioritize teaching and learning when setting budget priorities – cut away from classroom first
  - Publicize your district’s success
  - Provide incentives for teachers with track record of effectiveness to work in “high need” schools
  - Promote leaders who value and understand teaching
What else can we do:

- Ask the right questions:
  - Are current strategies working? Where is the evidence?
  - Why are we making progress in some places but not others?
- Know when to stay out of the way
  - Prevent educational issues from becoming politicized
- Build civic capacity to support public schools
  - Draw on community resources to support schools – churches, businesses, universities
Stay focused on the right questions:

- Instead of “How do we raise achievement?”
  - How do we promote healthy development and get students excited about learning?
- Instead of “How do we hold teachers accountable?”
  - How do we hold everyone accountable – Superintendents, administrators, teachers, students and parents?
- Instead of “How do we close the achievement gap?”
  - How do we close opportunity gaps and create schools where a child’s race and class are not predictors of outcomes?
We need a new vision to create schools that can counter the effects of inequality