

Instructional and Assessment Systems of Successful Schools¹

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe systems of educational assessment and supporting policies and actions that highly effective schools have created and implemented. Schools that have been identified as “in need of improvement” by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act, could use such methods at the school and classroom levels to achieve comparable success. NCLB sets stringent assessment requirements for states, districts, and schools, and couples these requirements with significant sanctions for failure to make “adequate yearly progress (AYP).” While the suggestions contained in this paper will be valuable for all schools, they will be especially useful for schools that have failed to make AYP and are facing sanctions.

The work that is described here is both theoretical and practical, and is based on experiences of schools that are highly effective, are “beating the odds,” or “dramatically improving” (CCSSO, 2002; ECS, 2001; Armstrong, 2001). That these principles and ideas are drawn from real settings means that they can be reproduced and implemented elsewhere. This should be reassuring to those who feel that if schools fail to make AYP, there is little that can be done. This belief need not be the case, as will be described in this paper.

Success

The school that is successful is one that has high levels of student achievement, with a well-trained and highly motivated faculty, with students who show their love of learning in their attentiveness and their accomplishments (which are more than test scores), and a supportive environment including parents and other members of the community. Sounds like a “perfect school,” doesn’t it? As the saying goes, none of us live anywhere near perfect. Must we, though, settle for a “reality” that disadvantaged students will not learn much in school and that they will fall further and further behind their suburban peers? Are successful schools beyond the reach of our urban or rural communities, where children born to poverty typically live?

Fortunately, the answer is “no.” There are successful schools that have defied the stereotype that ‘all schools serving x-type (fill in the blank) of students can never succeed.’ There are schools that serve minority students, poor students, rural students, English language learners, and students with disabilities that show high levels of student achievement and exhibit the

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other characteristics of successful schools mentioned above that indicate that these are not simply schools that know how to game the assessment system, but are truly high-performing schools.

If these schools exist, what can we learn from them? What role does student assessment play in these schools and what other conditions exist in these schools that supports student achievement that other educators could learn from and adopt? How can a lower-performing school transform itself into a higher performing one? Can these successful schools tell us what to do and how to go about doing it?

Whether We Think We Can or We Think We Can't, We're Probably Right!

The first necessary element of achieving success is the fundamental belief by the students, parents, teachers, and administrators that high levels of student achievement is not only essential, it is actually possible. This is more than a slogan such as "all children can learn," which often is modified by the conditions under which success could occur but won't because of factors beyond the control of anyone (for example, if the local community weren't so impoverished).

Successful schools know that success can and will occur if the adults do the right things. Since they know success is possible, the search goes on for what will work in their situation to bring about success. Setbacks do not deter the school. Without the fundamental belief in essentialness of our success, setbacks might become proof of the impossibility of our mission. Instead, they are small, temporary setbacks to be overcome on the road to success. Hence, the beliefs of the adults are critical.

Overview of the Elements of the System

Successful schools do several things to become successful, and student assessment is one of the key elements in this process. However, assessment by itself does not improve student learning any more than stepping on a bathroom scale daily causes one to lose weight. Effective schools use assessments within an overall system of improvement that is effective. The elements of a successful school structure include the following (CCSSO, 2003):

1. School Leadership
2. Curriculum/Instruction
3. Professional Development
4. Connecting Assessment to Instruction
5. Culture/Expectations/Climate/Communication
6. Budget and Resources
7. Parents and Community

Assessments can play a role that is both school-wide and classroom-specific. In the next section, the specific activities under each element that schools use to be successful are described.

1. School Leadership

These are several aspects to effective school leadership. The leadership of the school may fall on one person, or may be the shared responsibility of several administrators and even include the full staff of educators. What is essential is that the school's leadership has the vision for what the school's staff can accomplish and the dedication to see that the job is done successfully. This means that for a school to achieve academic success, the school's leadership must adopt high student achievement as a primary focus for themselves and the entire school.

For schools that serve students in poverty or with high percentages of minority students, vision is especially essential. Working in an environment of low achievement and low expectations, school leadership will have much to overcome. Effective leaders in this environment will be able to create a shared vision of success and focus on this as the school's primary mission while dealing with many other important factors.

Another critical aspect of leadership for school success is instructional leadership. A school administrator, a curriculum specialist, a lead teacher, or another educator may provide this type of leadership. The key is that not only is the school staff focused on the goal of achieving success, there are leaders that help show them the ways to accomplish this goal. For example, is a particular mathematics or reading program more effective with certain types of students than others? Which programs best help students from high poverty homes? This can help the staff actually achieve its shared vision for success for all students.

High quality school leaders also know what is happening in each classroom in the school. Lesson plans are drawn up in advance, plans are followed, assessments provide information on student learning that the school leader(s) are aware of, and plans to revamp instruction when learning falls short of target are developed. This awareness occurs through frequent classroom visits, and the review of materials provided by teachers.

The final part of good leadership is the reinforcement of quality work on the part of teachers and students. The key is that the work that is praised is substantial and high quality, so that the praise reinforces the effort and dedication that it took to produce. Reinforcement provided for little or no effort may have the negative effect of encouraging little or no effort in the future.

2. Curriculum/Instruction

The alignment of units and lessons to standards at every grade level is the essential curriculum and instructional design element in effective schools. In an effective school, everyone knows what is to be taught to students at every grade level and in each subject area. This means that the school has a written curriculum that provides overall guidance to the teachers, and that this curriculum is further translated into instructional units and lessons that build on one another through the school year, and from one grade level to the next. The curriculum is highly articulated across grade levels within the school.

This implies that if there is more than one teacher teaching at the same elementary school grade, or more than one teacher teaching the same subject at the secondary level, they have planned the year's instructional program together, and periodically (e.g., once or twice monthly) meet to determine what changes if any are needed in the original plans. This is horizontal articulation.

In addition, it is essential that at the elementary level, teachers of adjacent grades meet periodically to make sure that the instruction at the lower level will be meshing with instruction planned for the upper level by the end of the school year. This can include an end-of-the-school year meeting to determine which instructional needs still remain, or which areas of instruction may need reinforcement. The same sort of cross-grade articulation should occur at the secondary level, when course sequences rely on materials being taught and learned at an earlier grade level. This is vertical articulation.

All students are provided grade-level instruction. There is a temptation to "water down" instruction for students not on grade level. This may mean, however, that the student does not catch up – in fact, may fall further and further behind. One way to strive to provide grade-level instruction is to provide this student with additional time for learning – after school, at home, on Saturdays, and during the summer. Each of these has been used to provide more time-on-task for students who are struggling to learn.

Using effective strategies and materials is another hallmark of effective schools. This sounds simple, but it may not be, since the goal is universal achievement of the important knowledge and skills by all students. If the school is using materials or instructional strategies that help only some of the students achieve mastery, the school may need to locate or develop more suitable materials and plan instructional strategies that are more effective. One source for these materials and strategies is other schools serving similar student populations. What is such as school using to achieve success? How are they using the materials? What did teachers have to do to learn how to use the materials effectively?

Next, systematic and continuous monitoring of teaching occurs in all classrooms. The instruction provided in successful schools is continually monitored by not only observation of the teachers by the school leadership,

but also through periodic achievement measures. A variety of such measures, some formal and some less formal, can be employed, as will be described later. The frequency may vary from one school to another, from one grade to another, but the essential thing is to monitor student achievement frequently. The achievement of students is known to the instructional staff and school leaders, and the results are carefully analyzed so that teachers can provide the added instruction students need to grasp new concepts, so that subsequent instruction can occur successfully.

Finally, some effective schools use teacher mentoring not only to induct new teachers, providing them opportunities to observe and learn from more experienced teachers, but also to learn from them newer instructional techniques and materials that the novice teachers learned during teacher preparation. This "two-way street" serves to use both the novice and veteran teachers as resources for one another. A by-product of this approach is lower turnover among both novice and veteran staff members.

3. Professional Development

It is essential that teacher knowledge and pedagogy remain current. This means that educators need to have the opportunity of periodically studying and learning more about the subject area(s) that they teach by engaging in professional development activities that serve this purpose. There are various courses for study that the educators in the school might wish to pursue, but the top priority should be given to activities that address areas of student need. Programs that focus on academic subject areas and serve to prepare teachers to improve their skills should be approved first. These are often school-wide efforts.

These efforts may be seminars, on-going programs that address students' instructional needs, or may be graduate school programs. The key is that they assist teachers to better understand the students that they are teaching and how the content area(s) they teach can be taught in a manner that more students grasp the material taught more readily. Such programs may be offered locally, or may be part of nationally-available, externally-supported programs.

Another priority for professional development programs is activities that are needed by individual teachers. While some professional development programs may be keyed to all educators in a school, or all that are teaching a particular subject area, it is good not to forget that individual educators may have particular needs that also must be addressed. School leaders will need to work on an individual case-by-case basis to address these needs.

A final priority for professional development is the continuous review of student achievement and assessment results by the school staff. This is a useful activity to identify school-wide and individual student instructional needs. This effort can serve to identify instructional areas that need to be

altered or improved, which in turn may identify areas in which educators as a whole or part may need assistance in meeting the identified needs.

4. Connecting Assessment to Instruction

As mentioned above, a key activity of successful schools is that they have developed grade-level expectations tied to state, district, and school goals and standards. In addition, they assess students periodically, giving educators, specialists, parents, and students an ongoing record of student achievement. They act on this data to improve both individual student learning opportunities and to review and improve the overall instructional program. In addition, they seek other measures of student and school performance so that their definition of success is not confined to a single test score or other measure. Finally, they report achievement results to students, parents and others interested in the performance of students. Each of these ideas is expanded upon below.

Define Measures of Success Effective schools can define success in several ways, but one of the most important is student achievement. Almost every state has created statewide academic content standards, student assessment programs, and academic performance standards that define individual student and school-level success. Schools will want to use these for sure. However, schools may want to use other achievement measures (e.g., a writing assessment) or even other outcome measures for students, such as average grade point average. Other outcomes measures for schools could include the percent of students taking AP classes or tests, going on to college (two- or four-year), number of school violence incidents, and so forth.

Measures such as the above can become ways that schools monitor their performance in order to determine their effectiveness. While some of the measures schools will use are “givens,” schools will want to supplement these with measures of their own choosing.

Develop Grade-Level Expectations Highly effective schools have a plan for success for students. This plan is a detailed set of grade-level expectations for each content area and grade level. Although states and school districts commonly have identified key academic content standards for schools to address, these are often not detailed enough for teachers to build an articulated instructional program that addresses the academic content standards in a coordinated and consistent manner.

Schools that are effective will use the academic content standards as a basis for the development of grade-level expectations (GLEs). The GLEs are formed by examining each content standard and determining the precursor skills that lead up to accomplishment of the content standard. Then, these precursor skills are laid out in a logical manner across grade levels. Commercially available instructional materials can often be useful in this process, but school faculties know that such materials may have “holes” in

them, areas in which they need to provide additional instruction due to missing or incomplete materials. The key is to make certain that the GLEs will lead to achievement of the academic content standards, not simply follow the structure of the instructional materials. This is a professional judgment of the instructional staff (perhaps with external assistance).

Develop an Instructional Plan to Address These Expectations The GLEs become the outline of the skills to be addressed in the instructional plan. Teachers need to add the manner in which these GLEs will be addressed to fill out the plan. This will include when during the school year the GLEs will be addressed, what materials will be used (or need to be found or created), how much time will be spent on each GLE, and what measures of student achievement will be used (both during the learning process and in a summative manner after instruction is completed).

The depth of this instructional plan will vary, depending in part on the skills of the teachers and their experience teaching. The key is that this plan is public (known by the instructional leaders and teachers in the school), that it is followed (teachers work from this plan, not their own preferences for what they teach), and that student assessments are based on this plan (to determine what students learned and what they need more help to learn). Of course, as assessment information is collected, this instructional plan can be modified and improved, since teachers may find that needed skills have not been included or the sequence of instruction on the skills may need to be changed.

Grade-Level and Content-Area Teachers are All "On the Same Page" The instructional plan is both horizontally and vertically articulated to make sure that all teachers of the same grade and subject area as well as those that are teaching at higher or lower grades, are addressing the plan in a comparable manner. All teachers work on the overall school instructional plan together. It is essential that, for example, the three third grade teachers follow a similar plan as they address the GLEs, and that they know that the second grade teachers have taught the precursor skills so that their third grade instruction can build on the second grade instruction (and that the students will be ready for the instruction that they will receive in fourth grade).

To keep teachers working "on the same page," effective schools schedule time for teachers throughout the school year to discuss how they are implementing the plan, what is working and what is not, and how the plan needs to be "tweaked" in order to help all students accomplish the skills being taught. In order to be effective, these meetings need to be frequent enough (e.g., two or more times per month) and focused on how teachers addressing the same elements of the plan with different students are doing in implementing the instructional plans.

In addition, it is essential that teachers meet at least occasionally in cross-grade groups. For example, once a month, the third grade teachers as a

group need to meet with the second grade teachers, and once a month with the fourth grade teachers. It may be necessary for teachers to meet cross-building as well, to make sure for example that the elementary and middle school instructional programs are articulated. If middle school assessment results can be disaggregated by elementary feeder school, then the cross-school discussions can be focused on the skills taught in the feeder school that students have not achieved (or at least not retained).

Articulation of the instructional program both horizontally and vertically is not commonly found in schools and therefore is another key to academic success for students.

Use Assessments to Measure GLE Achievement Schools certainly have no lack of assessments or tests that they are required to administer. However, many of these external exams are not especially useful to schools as they measure the accomplishment of the GLEs. Such assessments are generally not specific enough to be helpful, and the data come back to the school too late to be useful in guiding instruction (ECS, 2001). Hence, effective schools need to collect their own information they will use for instructional improvement activities and to determine student achievement based on this information.

A wide variety of assessment tools are available for schools. Attachment A provides a list of the types of assessment measures that schools could choose to use to measure student accomplishment of the GLEs. There are a variety of ways that effective schools choose to measure student achievement periodically. Some of these ways include the following:

Schoolwide Assessments

- Quarterly or semi-annual paper-and-pencil tests of the GLEs
- On-line tests given as students complete units of instruction
- Computer-adaptive tests
- Informal or formal unit tests given at the end of instructional units
- Item banks used to construct schoolwide tests
- Commercially available tests or item banks

Classroom Assessments

- Teacher-developed unit tests
- Student projects or presentations
- Classroom-based performance assessments
- Individually-administered performance assessments
- Structured observation of student performance
- Portfolios of student work to showcase student learning
- Item banks used to construct classroom tests

By assessing students frequently, on smaller portions of the annual instructional plan, schools hope to catch student instructional needs while the skills are still being addressed and before students fall too far behind.

The manner in which these periodic assessments are assembled is also something that can vary. Some schools may use survey instruments that cover materials outside of the range of time for which the assessment is given. For example, in a quarterly assessment system, such survey instruments may contain materials from the previous quarter (to measure the retention of the skills previously mastered or the effectiveness of remediation for students who did not do well the previous quarter) and from the upcoming quarter (to indicate skills the students may have already mastered). Others may prefer that quarterly tests focus more on the period of instruction and assess student knowledge and skills in a more in-depth manner.

Other schools use assessments that are classroom-based, with each teacher collecting achievement information that they feel is valuable. Teachers may use formal assessments and/or informal assessment methods such as observation of students or collections of their classroom work. In some classrooms, students may lead the assessment process, assembling portfolios of their achievements for presentation at the end of the semester or the school year.

The key, however, is that these assessments are frequent, are closely-aligned to the school's GLEs, and provide feedback that teachers can use to help individual students and review and improve the instructional program in the future. Tests, alone, will not improve student learning. To be helpful, they must measure what teachers were trying to teach, provide feedback soon after instruction, provide the feedback in a useful and useable manner, with recipients who understand the reports and are provided the opportunity to review the data and make decisions based on it. Without such conditions present, even the most elegant assessment system will do little to improve what students know and can do.

Review of the Assessment Results and Determine Implications of Results

Educators in effective schools not only give assessments keyed to the GLEs being addressed in their instructional plan, they are also given time to address the results of these assessments so that they can understand the implications of the results for their instructional plans, both short-term and long-term. The horizontal and vertical articulation teams (the within-grade and cross-grade/cross-school teams) are an ideal vehicle for the review of the assessment results gathered periodically.

The within-grade teams should look at the achievement of each skill and by each student. There are relatively simple ways in which these teams can examine the assessment results (Roeber & Mastie, 1998). For example, the within-grade team can address these sorts of questions: was the level of

achievement on each skill high? If not, was it higher in one classroom than the others? If so, why? On which skills is achievement low enough that large-group re-instruction makes sense? Are there precursor skills that students did not achieve that lead to the skill on which they did poorly? Which students need individual assistance to achieve the skills assessed? How can this individual instruction be provided?

The cross-grade/cross-school team should address questions such as: does the achievement of students in the lower grade raise any concerns about whether they will be ready for more advanced instruction in the upper grade? If so, how can the teachers in the lower grade provide additional instruction that will serve to bolster the achievements of students so that they do well the following year? Do the assessment results suggest the need for any changes to the instructional plan?

The key at this stage is that educators take the time to look at the results and to plan how to address the instructional needs that the assessment information will highlight. Without such examinations and planning, much of the previous effort will be for naught.

Report Results to Students, Parents and Administrators Another aspect of the use of assessment results that supports the achievement of students is to report the assessment results back to students, as well as to parents, teachers, and administrators (Roebler & Mastie, 1998). Students are often quite eager to learn how they did, whether their achievement is "on-target" or they need additional help in learning, and if so, what the teacher will do to help them learn. Once the teacher has met with the within-grade team and they have answered the questions in the previous section, it is time to report the results and what will be done to address the instructional needs of individual students and groups of students. Even at a young age, students want to know how well they did.

Teachers might, for example, give students a copy of their assessment results individually and discuss overall results. Then, teachers could follow up with individual students who need additional instruction on particular topics as they opportunity for such individual work becomes available. The teacher might be able to address these needs in flexible small groups, by using the more advanced students as tutors for the students needing help, or the use of other strategies.

Parents should be interested in what their child has learned, and can be effective allies in motivating the students to learn if they are informed of the assessment results and plans to address any skills that were not achieved. This reporting will be more effective when it is presented in plain, non-jargon, action-orientated language. Telling the parent that the student achieved a score of 37 on an 85-point scale or a score below average is not as useful as saying that the student was not able to add two numbers with carrying, and that the teacher plans to work with the student on this skill in

the coming month (and that the parent might work to reinforce the skill with their child at home).

School administrators or instructional leaders should also receive reports of results. In effective schools, these individuals pore over the results to determine if 1) the school's instructional program is working (and if not, making sure that the within-grade team addresses the needs adequately), 2) there are teachers whose students are doing poorly and who may need mentoring or individual professional development, and 3) there are levels of classroom or student achievement that are note-worthy and should be publicly recognized. Such recognition might take the form of certificates of achievement, public recognition at school assemblies, a recognition night with students, parents, and teachers, and so forth. The key is the engagement of the instructional leaders in student achievement.

Provide the Professional Development Educators Need on Assessment

Educators rarely receive pre-service instruction on the assessments that they will use in their classrooms and schools to monitor student achievement. Whether they use informal assessment methods such as observation or portfolios, or more formal assessment methods such as multiple-choice or constructed-response exercises, educators rarely have the opportunity of learning how to develop such achievement measures. Even worse, because they are not given the opportunity of learning about such assessment tools, they do not learn until they are on the job how such assessments can provide constructive feedback to them about student achievement and the nature of the instruction that students were provided.

This means that most of the ways in which effective schools plan for instruction, deliver it, and assess whether such plans have been successful will need to be learned while on the job. This further means that instructional leaders will need to include in their planning how to provide teachers with the types of experiences they will need to develop a carefully-planned instructional program, articulated horizontally and vertically, with student achievement being measured through a series of aligned assessment either selected or created by the teachers. These experiences will need to be a substantial part of the initial school-wide professional development provided to teachers, with periodic reinforcements as needed throughout the school year.

Applications of Technology – Making Assessment Easier The manner in which students are assessed, while not directly related to the experiences of success of the schools, can have an impact on whether other schools are willing to engage in the efforts for improvement that led successful schools to become effective. The assessment technology that has become available to schools, while not causing schools to improve by itself, has certainly opened new ways of collecting and analyzing student achievement, thereby increasing the range of information available to educators, increasing the

uses of this information, and making it easier and less time-consuming for them to gather and examine the information.

For example, the quarterly tests that some schools have used (and which some schools hand-score in order to receive "immediate" feedback), could be administered using a scannable form and a small desktop scanner located in the school or the district, thereby saving teachers from hand-scoring the tests. If the tests were administered via online testing systems, feedback might be immediate. However, schools may not have sufficient numbers of computers with Internet access to permit online testing of large groups of students.

If online testing is feasible, however, the nature of the quarterly tests could be changed. For example, if students did poorly on the first quarter's exam and the teacher re-taught the missed skills, the second quarter's exam could re-test the skills missed by each student as part of the second quarter exam for each student. Computer adaptive testing would allow additional focus on the instructional level of the student without wasting testing time on skills already accomplished or skills beyond the reach of the student.

There are tools that teachers can use within their classrooms to assist them in daily instruction. For example, several vendors market programs that teachers can use to gather information on student learning as it is occurring in the classroom using Palm technology. This technology permits teachers to collect observational data as it is occurring and either upload this information into a database at the end of the lesson, or using wireless technology, as it is occurring. This can permit the collection of "informal" assessment information in a more formal manner.

Electronic portfolios are another tool that teachers – and students – can use to document student learning. Student involvement in their own learning and assessment is a relatively new phenomenon, and the electronic portfolio, where students can "store" scans of student work, audio clips or video clips, provide a means for students to engage in documenting and commenting on their performance. For students at younger grade levels, the teacher can assist students in collecting and storing achievement information. From this is emerging a whole new area of assessment – the student-led assessment (Stiggins, 2002).

Finally, there are data analysis programs that have been developed to assist local educators to "slice and dice" their assessment data. It is essential for educators not only to look at overall achievement, and the accomplishments of individual students, but also to disaggregate the information by teacher, by race, by poverty status, and for students with disabilities and who are learning English. Teachers may also want to look at the performance of students who participating in particular instructional programs, or by length of time in the school. These software packages make it easier for teachers to

look at the data that is collected (via formal or informal means) in multiple ways.

All of this technology makes the monitoring of student learning far easier. It does not cause them to learn. This means that acquiring the technology itself will not by itself improve student learning, any more than more frequent testing will cause students to learn. In the hands of educators who have done the other things mentioned in this paper, however, the technology will assist them to be even more effective with less effort.

5. Culture/Expectations/Climate/Communication

As mentioned at the outset of the paper, the expectations of educators, parents, and students are the key to high performance of students in highly effective schools. The schools that demonstrate high levels of student achievement are those who do not allow factors such as race or poverty to have an overwhelming effect on student performance. While these factors do affect the learning process (for example, some students may come to school with far less early literacy experiences in the home than other student), they become obstacles to be overcome, not insurmountable barriers to learning. Hence, the climate that is establishing within the school is an essential ingredient for successful schools.

Highly successful schools that serve student populations with high percentages of poor and/or minority students are those with school leaders and faculty that hold high expectations for student achievement, and who put these high expectations into practice in their day-to-day activities. An attitude of “no excuses” is prevalent in these schools – no matter how poorly students do today, the educators feel that all students can and will achieve at high levels and they work to see that students do achieve at the level expected. They feel that high levels of student success are possible with additional work on their part.

As mentioned above, school faculties in highly successful schools work collaboratively, with horizontal and vertical articulation of the school’s instructional program. Such collaboration not only helps to assure that all students are taught the essential GLEs, it also helps to bolster the expectations of the faculty for high achievement and encourages each team member to work to see that students achieve at high levels. The team also provides a resource for teachers who do not see such high achievement initially, spurring each other on to strive for higher levels of accomplishment.

The school faculties in highly effective schools openly communicate their high expectations to students, along with their belief that all students can achieve at the high levels that the teachers have set. By urging students to do better, by repeatedly expressing confidence that all students can do more and can do it better, teachers are communicating their belief that the students can do the work before them (even when they do poorly initially) and that with

greater effort, students will learn the material being taught. It is not enough for the educators to hold the belief that all students can learn at high levels – this belief needs to be acted upon and communicated to students on a daily basis.

High achieving schools praise student accomplishment wisely. These schools celebrate genuine student achievement publicly, using school assemblies, certificates of achievement, or other means. They publicly display the best work of students, and publicly express pride to the students in what they have achieved. The key to the effective use of praise is that the level of student achievement is genuinely high and that the praise of students is public. If the level of performance of students that receives praise is low, students will come to see that little effort is all that is necessary in order to get good grades. Without public praise, some students may not know how well they have done.

Finally, schools with high performance teams are given the opportunities for collaboration and communication, so that all team members not only know what is happening, they participate in the management of the instructional process within the school. Typically, this means open communication from the instructional leader downwards and from teachers upwards to the instructional leaders. The high achievement of students becomes the common mission that all team members strives to accomplish, and the open communication among team members focuses on the areas of achievement and the areas of instructional need (and what team members plan on doing to address these needs).

6. Budget and Resources

There are several ways in which the resources necessary for a school to be effective are used. These include targeting funding to the instructional and assessment activities needed for students to achieve at high levels, to provide funding for the collaboration needed for effective instructional planning (which may involve released time, after school work or work during vacations), to fund the needed professional development, both school-wide and individually, and to focus discretionary monies on the instructional areas targeted for improvement for purchasing instructional materials or other improvement services.

This implies that the school instructional team has some discretion over how the funds that are made available to the school are used, can re-direct some of them to accomplish what the school team feels is necessary, and may have some monies that can be directed to places such as professional development or materials purchase that the team feels is necessary to address student instructional needs. This does not necessarily mean the infusion of large amounts of additional dollars into a school, although the school that is effective can probably use these added dollars wisely.

However, money itself will not turn an ineffective school into one where the faculty believes that they can be effective.

Funding for a less-than-effective school can be used in the following ways that will encourage the school to become more effective. The faculty can use funding to

- visit other similar schools that are highly effective and interview the school faculty and leaders about what led them to become effective;
- attend conferences that draw educators from effective schools so as to learn what instructional techniques and materials effective schools used to become more effective;
- purchase materials that the school can use to improve their instructional program;
- use funds to establish within-grade and cross-grade collaboration teams to plan an articulated instructional program;
- select or develop the assessments that will be used to periodically assess student learning;
- engage professional developers to assist the school to more effectively use or learn to use the instructional materials at hand;
- participate in national, regional, or state networks for schools serving urban students;
- review the achievement results of students and collaboratively plan how to address student achievement needs.

Therefore, while money itself will not cause a school to become effective, some funding is necessary for the school to engage in the activities described throughout this paper that successful schools have used to improve their performance.

7. Parents and Community

The involvement of parents is well-known to impact student achievement. Yet, this is a challenging area for schools to address, especially in urban schools that serve students in poverty. It may be difficult to obtain high levels of parent involvement, but schools that are successful do not allow these difficulties to prevent them from doing so.

Schools that are effective mobilize the community to support student achievement. For example, employers may release employees to tutor students, provide funding for schools, or employment opportunities for high school students during the summer. Civic or social organizations may provide recreational programs for the school. Public agencies, such as social services or mental health programs, can provide needed support to children and their families. Religious organizations may provide support for the school's instructional program or the involvement of parents in the school's activities. These and other types of support do take time and effort to cultivate, which can be an effort that the school's leaders spend time on. There may be

several organizations that can come to share their time and expertise working with students and parents.

Parents themselves can become involved in the school and its programs in several ways. Schools can

- provide information to parents about what students are learning in school and how parents can reinforce this learning at home;
- inform parents about disciplinary problems that arise in school, so that parents can reinforce the school at home;
- invite the parents to participate in events and activities that celebrate the high achievement of students, such as an awards night or school assembly;
- invite parents to learn more about how they can help their child at home;
- involve parents as tutors in their child's classroom.

The schools that are successful are ones that mobilize the resources in the community to assist the school to be effective, and that involve parents in the work and the success of the school.

Summary

With recent Federal legislation, the stakes for such high performance of all students has been raised, making the lessons of successful schools even more important. As mentioned at the outset of this paper, there are several factors under the control of school leaders and faculty that can help the school become highly effective. While these elements are not always easy things to change, they do serve to show that success in many other schools is possible.

By organizing the school in particular ways, by learning how to become more effective, and most importantly, believing that success is possible, other less effective schools can emulate the success of the schools who perform at high levels, or that have dramatically improved. High beliefs, followed by sustained action, can lead to improvements in performance of many schools.

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Attachment A Types of Assessment Measures

Some formats for assessment are listed and defined below:

On-Demand Assessments

- Selected-response (multiple-choice; matching; true-false) exercises: In these types of exercises, students select one or more answers from a list of suggested responses. These exercises have the advantage of not taking much time to complete, which may make them well suited for assessments of a broad set of content. However, because students select a response, it is more difficult to assess student thinking with such items.

- Short constructed-response: In these types of exercises, students write in an answer to a question. The response is typically a phrase, a sentence, or a quick drawing or sketch. Response time is generally limited to ten minutes or less. Less guessing is involved than in selected-response exercises, but these exercises do not tap much student thinking, either.

- Extended constructed-response: These exercises require students to compose a response that may be several pages in length, and require fifteen minutes or more for a complete response. They require much thought on the part of the student. Still, this is only first-draft student work, so it may not represent what students could do given additional time and encouragement in which to compose a final draft.

- Individually-administered interview: In these exercises, an assessment administrator administers the exercise individually to students. This format permits the interviewer to ask each student questions about the topic being assessed, which may be needed in order to judge the performance of the student on other parts of the exercise. Has the advantage of tapping important skills often desired of students, although this is quite expensive both to administer and to score.

- Individually-administered performance events: These are exercises that are completed by individual students within a class period, and involve some type of performance on the part of the student. This may be because the exercise requires special equipment (as in a science experiment), requires an individual student to perform (such as playing a musical instrument), or because we may wish to observe the process that a student used to respond to the question (such as in a mathematics problem-solving activity).

- Group-administered performance events: These are exercises that groups of students respond to. These may be existing groups (e.g., a band or orchestra) or groups made up just for assessment purposes (a group of six students assessed for teamwork skills). The students

typically perform in some fashion and the group interaction and/or performance is scored as a whole (and, perhaps, individually).

Extended-Time Assessments

- Individual performance tasks: These exercises are ones on which students may work for several days, weeks, or months to produce an individual student response. This could be, for example, a science experiment (e.g., design and plan a garden and make observations about it over time) or other performance that students will need time to complete.
- Group performance tasks: These exercises are ones on which groups of students may work for several days, weeks, or months to produce either a group and/or individual student responses. This could be, for example, a health education task (e.g., design a school lunch menu for a month that is nutritious, affordable and that would appeal to students) or other performance that students will need time to complete.
- Portfolio assessment: There are several reasons why portfolios of student work may be kept. First, it can serve to document the changes that students are making in a work (e.g., different iterations of an essay). Second, they can use the portfolio to assemble a collection of their best or most polished pieces (e.g., a collection of musical performances). Third, and perhaps most importantly, students can use their portfolio to document their ability to achieve important outcomes, such as those contained in state or national content standards. In this case, the portfolio provides the evidence that the student needs to demonstrate his or her competence on the standards, with the demonstration being provided by a persuasive piece that the student provides to the scorer.
- Observations: Other important types of information that teachers can collect over time come from structured and unstructured observations of students. Structured observations, for example, might be made in a pre-arranged classroom set-up in which students are given several choices of free-time activities and observed as to which ones they engage in and for how long. Unstructured observations are the events that occur within the day-to-day classroom that teachers may wish to record for the future. For example, if a student is having difficulty in mathematics, the teacher may observe that the student is not listening during instruction and therefore not picking up the knowledge needed to take tests.
- Anecdotal records: There are other sources of information about students, such as notes from other educational professionals, parents, and others. These records may also provide useful information about individual students.