How Change Can Be Accelerated For Students

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We know of many efforts, which have been underway or are being planned, which meet the challenge of systemic reform for better education. Yet, increasingly we are asked, through the hundreds of questions posed on our website or by those in attendance at conferences and meetings, how *change can be accelerated* so that fewer students will be left behind.!There is reason for hope. !Research and evaluation of achievement trends suggest that many people are gaining traction in their work, and that by working together and sharing our successes, we can accelerate our progress.

Many of us are involved in preparing or implementing strategies for community engagement, which may facilitate movement toward systemic reform. !To that end we thought that the initial planning by Michael Froning, the Dean of the University of Alabama at Birmingham might be of interest (see attachment for leadership events). !Dr. Froning has developed a process for helping to change a district; the district of Birmingham which has one of the lowest performing school systems in the country. Under his leadership, the University has already secured significant funds from stakeholders for a University–based urban center (becomes the hub and control center) and for the development of a strategic change process. !

The work underway in Indianapolis, through the leadership of Pat Pritchett, also provides an outstanding example of systemic reform. Superintendent Pritchett's initiatives have helped build community confidence so that stakeholders are willing to reinvest in the school district and its children. The district received $250,000 from the Carnegie Corporation, $16.4 million from the Eli Lily Endowment, $2.2 million from the federal government and grants from local corporations and foundations. !Dr. Pritchett has also paved the way for accelerated change by committing significant funds for sustained community advocacy and professional development. Further, he has precipitated connectivity among key stakeholder groups, such as local universities, state and local unions, corporations, the Chamber of Commerce, faith-based leaders, and community and educational agencies.

The efforts of leaders in Seattle, Newark, Beacon, Minneapolis, Dallas, Houston, Watertown, San Francisco, San Diego, NYC and El Paso (to name a few), have put into place structures and interventions that have or will lead to sustained change.

It is through the efforts of local, state and national leaders that we are witnessing pathways for change on behalf of all students -- especially for those students whose needs go under served. Our work over the past five years has suggested that the following elements are critical for district change. !Some of

what follows is informed by the national research of CGCS, extant research, literature, and applications in the field:

Systemic change factors:
1. Sustain central and community leadership.
2. Identify processes that facilitate use of an outside group to work with district personnel with focus on improving learning and teaching.
3. Develop a singular focus on student achievement, tangible goals and standards.
4. Develop community engagement that builds trust and opportunities for dialogue, decision-making, feedback, reflection, action and evaluation.
5. Implement an audit or assessment that uncovers obstacles to change, district needs and strengths.
6. Use strategies for deepening community and school system capacity, e.g., establish university connections; create expert and peer coaching activities which facilitate both classroom and structural support.
7. Build community awareness in an irrefutable belief that all students are capable of graduating and attending a college or university, if they so choose.
8. Implement a common core curriculum or course of study for!all schools. This should also allow for opportunities for enrichment and adaptability in meeting the diverse needs of the student body, and in understanding the!dynamics of language, culture, belief systems and learning in the classroom.
9. !Facilitate school and home strategies for those students who are primarily dependent on the school for accelerated learning.
10. Evaluate and implement strategies that address the administrative and organizational arrangements that serve to accelerate the change process. (see, for example, effective school research correlates)
11. Build capacity for institutionalization by working with outside leadership groups who can guide, facilitate, evaluate and devise processes for coordination, vertical integration, synthesis and application of the change processes. (The goal here is toward enhancing the collaborative process – developing the teams whose goal is to sustain change.)
12. Partner with advocacy groups and develop strategic alliances that can!serve community purposes.

The above is only a barebones administrative framework, if you will, of the sort of activity that we hope will serve to reinforce your purposes. It is only meant to continue the dialogue we have initiated via electronic platforms. !We strive to avoid individual and organizational isolation in planning for change -- these efforts may only result in marginalized results and can lead to community cynicism and indifference. Change is complex, but it is possible through flexible, reflective and dynamic leadership. !The long-term answer to the challenges we face on behalf of student learning may reside in a rediscovery of our own insights, gleaned through our engagements as practitioners, and through collaboration with others in their pursuit of accelerating systemic educational reform and closing the achievement gap.

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