Early Childhood Champions:

Exceptional Administrators of School-based Programs for Young Children

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- *Creating Good Schools for Young Children: Right from the Start.* $12.00.
- *Caring Communities: Report of the National Commission on School Readiness.* $10.00.
- *Right from the Start: Report of the NASBE Task Force on Early Childhood Education.* $8.50.
- *Testing and Retention of Young Children* (NASBE Issue Brief). $5.00.

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Introduction

This report is the fourth in a series of publications by the National Association of State Boards of Education about creating high quality educational programs for young children. It differs from most studies of early childhood education in three ways. First, it focuses on *public school-based programs* for young learners starting in preschool and extending through the early elementary school grades. Second, it specifically analyzes *the important role of public school administrators* who are improving the way that young children are educated. Third, it discusses the *growing influence of early childhood principles on educational practices in elementary schools*.

We decided from the beginning to look exclusively at *school-based programs* for young learners. Many younger children are not in school-based programs, of course, but we decided to focus on the schools because of their obvious, long-standing responsibility for children, as well as their growing role in providing a range of early childhood services. Schools are increasingly establishing or linking with preschools and kindergartens, and they are also providing more before- and after-school care for children of all ages. In addition, the most influential guidelines for early childhood practice apply to children from birth to age eight, which means that they apply to the early elementary grades. Finally, we chose to look at school-based programs because the public in general, and parents in particular, have questioned the quality of school programs for young learners.

More specifically, this study was designed to look closely at the *role of administrators* in improving school programs for young children. Our idea was that the quality of leadership in a school or school system is an important reason — and sometimes the most important reason — why efforts to improve education practice succeed or fail. To gather information, researchers traveled to diverse areas in different parts of the country to study six different successful administrators. They talked to school district personnel, principals, teachers, parents, and children, with the singular goal of finding out how good administrators do their jobs. How do they go about making fundamental changes in the culture of schools and entire education systems to better support the learning of young children? Do they share common styles and strategies? What are the personal characteristics that make them effective leaders?

But there were surprises waiting at the case study sites. We had chosen these sites carefully and expected to find that good early childhood practices were being used in preschools and kindergartens at these schools. What we did not expect was that these practices were actually being used to transform entire elementary schools — and even elementary schools throughout a school system. *Innovative leaders were taking good early childhood principles, often blended with similar ideas coming from the general school reform movement, and using them to improve teaching and learning in entire institutions*.

Thus, the accomplishments of the administrators we had chosen to study were greater than we had assumed. And we had discovered an interesting new development — that early childhood principles of teaching and learning are finding their way up from preschools and kindergartens into elementary school grades — in some cases, all the way up to the sixth grade. Instead of just

seeing high-quality kindergartens, we observed entire schools that had changed their culture and practice.

This report features six stories about making significant improvements in schools, and a look at some of the people who make it happen. It is designed to offer administrators and others a chance to “see,” through words and description, other school systems that they would never have a chance to visit otherwise. These case studies offer administrators an opportunity to reflect on their own style of leadership. At best, we hope these stories can inspire, challenge, and entice other managers to invent their own approaches to helping children, families, and program staff members.

Chapter one of this report discusses the role of school administrators in creating good educational programs for young children and provides an introduction to our case study sites. It also contains a brief discussion of good educational practices for young children, as well as definitions of various technical terms used elsewhere in the report. Chapters two through seven contain the case studies themselves. Finally, Chapter eight reflects on the similarities and differences seen in the programs and administrators and concludes with some observations about supporting the future development of able administrators.

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) has been working to improve educational programs for young children for a number of years. In 1988, it published *Right From the Start*, which called for establishing early childhood units in public schools for children of ages four to eight and their parents, as well as developing new partnerships among schools, early childhood programs, and community agencies. *Caring Communities: Supporting Young Children and Families*, published in 1991, looked globally at what it would take to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn. And in 1995, NASBE published *Creating Good Schools for Young Children: Right from the Start*, which describes developmentally appropriate practices as found in the classrooms of eleven schools.

Chapter 1: The Role of School Administrators in Supporting Effective Programs for Young Learners

This chapter will:

- discuss the role of public school administrators in general,
- introduce our case study sites in particular,
- briefly describe effective practices for educating young children, and
- define some of the terms that are used in the case studies.

The Role of Administrators in Creating Effective Educational Programs for Young Learners

Because Americans are deeply concerned about the quality of public schools, this is an era of experimentation and innovation in education. Many strategies are being employed at every level of the education system that are intended to improve students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Schools are making significant changes in their methods of teaching and learning, changes that place difficult demands on everyone who is involved with the educational enterprise.

But no matter how much effort is expended, education reforms sometimes flourish in a school — and sometimes wither away and disappear. Many people want to find out why this happens. It is discouraging when administrator, teachers, students, and parents struggle to adapt to a new, innovative system of teaching and learning — only to see the innovation falter and eventually fail. And then the questions begin: Why did this happen? Was there enough teacher training or was it the right kind of training? Should the outside consultants have stayed at the school longer? People who really care about this issue engage in many discussions about which combination of strategies will actually succeed.

But there are other ways to look at the success or failure of school reform efforts. This particular study started with the idea that the *quality of leadership* may often explain why some school reform strategies work, while others are stalled. Administrators, whether they are school principals or district office staff, make crucial decisions about personnel, budgets, training, and materials that can support or hinder any changes. They are also important symbolic leaders who set a tone and climate for education reform through what they say and how they spend their time. Effective leaders can explain what good teaching and learning looks like, describe new goals that should be set for students, and determine how parents will be involved in a reform effort.

Less formally, administrators' interactions with and attitudes towards staff help determine whether people will follow their direction or try to sabotage the change. Their understanding of the children in their schools will help determine whether the approaches they choose are appropri-

The boxed quotes that appear here and in the final chapter come from focus groups that were held with early childhood district administrators and parents, as well as interviews with national experts in early childhood education. Participants in the focus groups were asked to discuss the role of administrators in creating effective programs for young children.

ate and will work. Administrators' knowledge of and feeling of kinship with the community will also influence the support they receive. In addition, their ability to communicate with and gain the support of their superiors and the school board will have an important impact on administrators' success in introducing education reforms.

Thus, we speculated, it could be that the role of the administrator in stimulating, supporting, and guiding change efforts is at least as important — if not more important — than the strategies adopted to make the change. In order to look more closely at this question, we decided to study a small number of school administrators who have successfully led efforts to substantially improve the way schools support the learning of young children.

This is a descriptive study, and as such, does not attempt to provide definitive answers about the relative importance of good leadership — as compared, for example, to other important factors that influence success or failure in making a change. This is also a study of *successful* change efforts; it does not examine instances in which education reforms were attempted and failed. Thus, these case studies are an introductory effort to understand the role of leaders in making significant improvements in schools. It is our hope that this analysis will also foster appreciation for the many ways in which good leaders make changes happen.

If one steps back to consider the subject in general, it is interesting to notice that Americans in general are ambivalent about their leaders. Our media is heavily dominated with accounts of heroic or flawed leaders, and we reward top business executives, sports coaches, and politicians with fame, fortune, and endless scrutiny and criticism. On the job, we are often overly dependent on our leaders — blaming them for not setting enough direction, envying their position, or using them as an excuse for our own lack of initiative or failure to get things done. Certain American values — of rugged individualism and of the belief in democratic processes for making decisions — can generate resentment, reluctance, or outright sabotage when leaders strike out in a new direction.

Educational leaders operate under their own peculiar set of constraints. While their greatest responsibility is for the achievement and success of students, principals and administrators have only a loose and indirect influence over what teachers actually do in classrooms. Further, all educators have only a limited influence on the energy and motivation of students, whose temperament, talents, interests, and lives outside of school may affect their achievement more than anything that happens in the classroom.

School administrators who are seeking to improve teaching and learning are also working with teachers who have typically experi-

The Fragility of Change

"We talk often about administrators failing to be instructional leaders, but we forget that sometimes they do try and don't get anywhere. Principals can have the best of intentions and back a good idea, but change is so fragile. Sometimes if the initial presentation isn't exactly right, teachers can totally dig in their heels. Or an initiative will grow, and it will provoke a backlash of jealousy from other staff — 'They're getting too much attention!' Or it can blow up around stupid things like which teacher is assigned to which classroom in the building!"

Harriet Egertson, Nebraska Department of Education

enced a variety of reform efforts in the past. New state or district policies and requirements, which may change every year, can require constant shifts in teaching practice and focus. The material and strategies learned at this year's teacher training workshops may be considered "old hat" three years from now. Therefore, it is not surprising when staff members are skeptical, if not cynical, when yet another innovation is announced from on high.

Finally, simply handling the day-to-day administration of school is a complicated business. People expect the schools' administration to work out bus schedules, to have a desk and textbooks ready for every child on the first day of school, to get information out and respond to questions promptly, as well as to deal with budgets, asbestos removal, fire drills, proper documentation of teacher evaluations, and timely paychecks.

While coordinating these activities is an enormous task, the case studies in this report demonstrate that school administrators can do all of this and more. Despite differences in jobs, levels of responsibility, and work styles, the leaders that we studied have all been successful agents in the transformation of schools.

The Case Study Sites and Their Selection

The six case study sites were selected to provide examples of outstanding public school administrators who successfully applied early childhood principles to transform primary grade classrooms. The cases included a mix of principals and central office administrators working in rural, urban, and suburban communities in different parts of the country.

To find the sites, researchers contacted state departments of education, foundations that support early childhood initiatives, and national experts and organizations. These contacts helped the researchers to draw up a preliminary list of possible case study sites. Then, the administrator at each site was contacted and asked about his or her interest in participating in this project. As a result of this process, six case study sites were finally selected.

The researchers then conducted site visits of from one to three days. During these site visits, the researchers interviewed the administrators featured in this publication at some length. They also visited schools and classrooms and talked with parents, teachers, and other staff. Written materials were gathered from each site for further analysis. When the case studies had been written, each was sent to the administrators involved so that they could be double-checked for accuracy.

The administrators and case study sites that were selected are:

- *Marilyn Butcher, Principal of the Travis Heights Elementary School in Austin, Texas.* Marilyn Butcher and her formidable staff of teachers have transformed their school from a place of poor morale, poor test scores, and student failure to a innovative, animated, high-quality environment for teaching and learning.
- *Bob Aldrich, Principal, H.O. Wheeler Elementary School, in Burlington, Vermont.* Bob Aldrich is the principal of the school that he attended as a child. In five years, he has successfully campaigned for a bond issue to renovate the dilapidated building, has opened it for the community to use, and has, in many ways, made H.O. Wheeler into the kind of school that he would have wanted to attend as a child.

- *Carol Olson, Director of the Title I Program, Spokane Public Schools.* Carol Olson has introduced a wide array of innovations in curriculum, teaching strategies, staff development, and parental involvement to Spokane's elementary schools. The result is an impressive and sophisticated transformation of classrooms and schools serving the district's most needy young students.
- *Jana Oxenford, Director of Elementary Education, Independent School District #279, Osseo Area Schools, in Maple Grove, Minnesota.* In 1991, Jana Oxenford was hired by a district with traditional educational approaches that varied little from school to school. Since then, she has introduced a rich array of ideas, a belief in diversity of practice, and support to teachers and principals as they design innovative strategies and offer a "menu" of learning options so that parents can choose the most appropriate classrooms for their children.
- *Karen McIntyre, Administrator, Pittsburgh Public Schools*. Karen McIntyre is a former child care center director who has become a powerful figure in the school system. Her major accomplishments have been to coordinate various programs that serve children of ages three to eight, to hold all of them to the same high standards for teaching and learning, to provide substantial assistance to help each to improve, and to give each school site the flexibility to develop its own strategies and programs.
- *Maurice Sykes, Deputy Superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools*. Maurice is a powerful, inspirational, and tireless advocate for D.C.'s children and their learning. Throughout his long career in this school system, he has worked prodigiously to bring good early childhood practices progressively into preschools, kindergartens, and elementary school classrooms.

Effective Educational Practices for Young Children

This report focuses on administrators who have used sound and widely accepted early childhood principles to improve elementary schools. But what are these good early childhood principles? Experts point to the importance of "developmentally appropriate" approaches that match and build upon the way that children actually learn and develop. For example, young children learn the best and the most when they actively explore their environment, using hands-on materials and building upon their natural curiosity and desire to make sense of the world around them. Thinking in young children is directly tied to their interactions with people and materials.

A second important aspect of developmentally appropriate practice is its recognition of children's individual differences. Although children as a group move through a series of predictable stages of growth and change, they develop at different speeds and in different ways, and their own interests and strengths start to become apparent. Developmentally appropriate practice looks closely at children's differences and finds specific ways to support their learning.

What follows is a brief discussion of some of the terms used in the case studies. Reading the definitions below will give the reader a sense of what good educational programs for younger children can look like.

In 1988, the National Association of State Boards of Education published *Right From the Start*, the report of its national task force on early childhood education. This report advocated early childhood programs that have:

- Developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction;
- Observational methods of assessment;
- Responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity;
- Active parent involvement and support;
- Strong professional development opportunities; and
- Collaboration with other programs and agencies to provide comprehensive services to children.

Supporting "child-initiated" learning. All of the case studies illustrate changes in teaching strategies and the classroom environment. Many of us grew up in traditional elementary school classrooms in which teachers chose what we would learn, when we would learn it, and how we would learn it. Learning itself was a fairly passive activity of listening to the teacher, completing worksheets, or studying while sitting quietly at one's desk.

By contrast, child-initiated classes recognize that children are active learners and expect them to move around, interact, work, and choose projects to accomplish alone and in groups. "Learning centers" are established within the classroom where children can work alone, in pairs, or in small groups. Within these learning centers, children are given a variety of activities and materials with which to experiment and develop their skills. There can be areas devoted to art, books, math and science, a computer, or blocks and other building equipment.

As children choose tasks by themselves and with others, they develop confidence and independence. In such classrooms, projects are often designed to teach a variety of skills and are deliberately tied to the world outside. Elementary students in one Pittsburgh school planned and planted a garden. A science project such as this can provide a focus for many kinds of learning, as children draw and write about their plans, talk about what they want to do, learn facts as they read books about gardening, and work with others as a team. These kinds of classrooms are designed to make learning both fun and meaningful, so that children will like to read and enjoy using math to solve practical problems.

Using a variety of strategies to teach reading. Some of the case study sites have adopted new ways to teach reading as a way to improve their overall programs for young children. Some schools refer to having taught only phonics before, whereas now they use a more eclectic approach that is designed to encourage young children to be skilled, active, and confident communicators — as they read, write, speak, and listen. The idea is that not everyone learns to read in the same way, so there should be a number of approaches to teaching it. Reading is learned by creating journals and class newspapers, by reading to others and by listening to older children or the teacher read, by making books, by writing out instructions for a project, by writing book reports and stories, and by using the library. Classrooms are rich with books — both books written by children and a wide selection of fictional and nonfictional material at different reading levels. In these approaches, there is less emphasis put on spelling and grammar at the beginning, so as not to dampen children's enthusiasm and drive to write and read and create. Spelling, letter recognition, and phonics are taught, as needed, to small groups through a variety of activities.

Creating multi-age groupings. A number of the schools described in the case studies have children of different ages grouped together for learning. Traditionally, of course, children of the same age are generally in the same classrooms together. Multi-age classrooms recognize that children do not all develop and learn at the same pace. Children who learn quickly have the flexibility to move ahead at their own pace and are not held back by artificial limitations.

For example, a child who is reading better than her peers can move on to books that would normally be considered as "too advanced" for her grade level. And children who are learning a skill more slowly have more time to master it without the stigma of being placed in a "slow" reading group or even having to stay in the same grade for two years.

Multi-age groupings also give less skilled children the chance to observe and imitate others and build confidence by initiating activities with children of different ages and at different levels. Children learn to be leaders and teachers and to share responsibility for helping and taking care of others. In this way, classrooms more closely resemble the way families and communities are organized, giving young children a chance to boost their real-world social skills. Highly regarded teaching and learning practices such as "cooperative learning," in which children work together on joint projects, and "peer tutoring," in which children teach one another, are often practiced in multi-age groupings.

Having the same teacher stay with the same students for more than one year. In multi-age groupings, one teacher stays with a class for more than one year, but even schools without multi-age groups sometimes allow elementary teachers to stay with their class for two years or more. This approach gives teachers more time and experience in helping each student. Having the same teacher for more than one year also provides continuity and stability for the student and makes the start of a new school year less stressful. In the Spokane case study, teachers commented on the benefits of a program that allowed them to work with a group of children for two consecutive years: "I really noticed how comfortable they were when they returned to school in the fall. We could 'start school' on day one and they had less anxiety when they left in June."

Creating "inclusive classrooms" instead of "pull-out" programs. A traditional way of helping children who are struggling at school is to "pull" them out of their regular classrooms for special instruction. But when they are pulled out, children miss part of their regular class work, which means that they fall further behind. "Pulled-out" students can also end up getting a less challenging education program and can eventually feel that they are inferior and less able to learn.

An alternative is "inclusive classrooms" that don't pull children out for special instruction. This approach recognizes that children learn in different ways and at different paces, and therefore strives to match each child's learning style with a supportive program in the regular classroom. High goals are set for every student, and programs are devised to assist all students to reach these goals. Specialists and teachers often work together to make sure that all students are receiving the help that they need.

Assessing students in different ways. All of the case study sites have changed the way they assess children. The traditional way to assess students is to give them tests that are graded, with the grades being reported home to the families on report cards. Students also take standardized tests to see whether they are achieving better than average, average, or below average in comparison with other children their age.

For young children in particular, standardized tests are of limited use and have been abandoned altogether in some districts for the early grades. Many young children have trouble understanding how to respond correctly to standardized tests. An alternate approach is "authentic assessment," which looks more closely at the development of each child in a number of ways as he or she is involved in real tasks. The purpose is to better understand children's progress and find new ways to help them learn.

A number of methods are used to arrive at an authentic assessment. Close observation is perhaps the most important tool. The teacher will observe as the child works alone or with others, and keeps notes and perhaps a journal of these observations, noting the child's learning style, interactions with others, strengths, weaknesses, and progress towards meeting the general goals of the class. Teachers also keep (or work with the child to create) portfolios for each child that contain, for example, drawings, stories, science project results, math problems, and contributions to the class newspaper. They may use checklists to note skills or concepts that the child is mastering, in order to understand and to track how far that child is progressing toward what would generally be expected from a child of that age. Teachers then use their observations and evaluations to design new ideas and strategies for working with that child, as well as to discuss the child's progress with the child and her family.

Children also participate in their own assessments. They keep portfolios of their work and are encouraged to reflect upon their progress and their feelings about learning. Their families participate too and are asked: What have they noticed about their child's progress? What skills and knowledge does the child exhibit in the home and community that should be brought to and built upon in the classroom? How can the home support the child's learning at school?

Parent Involvement. Families have a much bigger role in effective schools for young learners, as is shown in many of the case studies. There is a range of involvement, from parents working in classrooms to participating in committees that make important decisions about school staff, budget, and programs ("site-based decision making"). Parents in different sites are supervising children before they enter school, leading tours of exemplary schools and explaining innovative practices, or learning how to teach a new math program. They are also learning about different kinds of educational approaches used in classrooms so that they can choose which approach is right for their child.

Marilyn Butcher has been the Principal of Travis Heights Elementary School in Austin, Texas for seven years. Her school is located in a sprawling community of single family homes and public housing projects in which 65% of the children's families are of low economic status. The majority of families are Hispanic, and 20% of the children have only limited English skills. Marilyn's achievement has been to work with a formidable staff of teachers to turn the school around from a place of low morale and poor test scores into an innovative, animated, high-quality environment for teaching and learning. A large part of the success in this venture can be credited to Marilyn's sharp focus and clear ideas as an educational leader, her skills as a communicator, her ability to deal with dissent and strong personalities, and the fact that she never stops thinking like a teacher.

Chapter 2: School as a Place where Children can Test their Wings

Background

Travis Heights Elementary School is located in Austin, Texas, in the Austin Independent School District. Travis Heights is an aging school in an aging neighborhood, serving the very young — prekindergarten through 5th grade. Although Austinites refer to Travis Heights as an inner city school, it is not the sort of inner city environment non-Texans would envision. It is not a high-density, high-rise community, but rather a quiet, sprawling neighborhood of single family homes and four public housing projects. The neighborhood streets are narrow, but the sky is huge.

The traffic jam at Travis Heights' 7:45 opening is mostly a pedestrian one. There are no buses, since everyone walks. Some of the housing projects are just at the two mile district walking limit, so many parents with strollers full of younger siblings accompany their children into the school. The good news is, many of them stay. Parents are everywhere, at all times, at Travis Heights. Volunteering seems a weak word for what they do. They are an integral part of the school. It is difficult to tell who's a parent and who's a teacher in a classroom. The guide who takes visitors around, speaking articulately about the school and its goals, is probably a parent.

Travis Heights is located on 18 acres of land, but shares a stream, some land, and a running path with the local park authority. Indoor space is definitely at a premium. The teachers' lounge disappeared some time ago to make room for another classroom. The computer lab is small but adequate. The hallways are well used with groups of children doing Scrabble in Spanish, or listening to a story in two languages, or rehearsing for a classroom presentation.

Travis Heights serves 764 children, 57% of whom are Hispanic, 5% African American, and 39% "other." Sixty-five percent of the children are from families with low socio-economic status. Twenty percent of the children have acquired only limited English. Both English and Spanish are frequently heard, frequently written. The school newspaper is published both as "El Otro Lado"

and "The Other Side." Children are clearly expected to learn English, but their home language is used and respected. Even the piped hallway music represents the two cultures. One of Travis Heights' secret weapons may be the fifteen bilingual staff, all of whom can pick up a book in English and read it in Spanish, or vice versa. Many materials are in both languages, as is some of the computer software the children use.

How did this crowded school on a crowded property bring in parents, bilingual teachers, a computer lab, and a startling array of services? All of this and more is the product of a far-reaching education reform based on the best early childhood education practices. The story begins with one principal, a gifted leader, but eventually involves an entire community that redefined itself along with its caring and progressive elementary school.

Chronology

Travis Height's Principal, Marilyn Butcher, is the prime mover who has presided over a major school reform effort at this site for the past seven years. Eight years ago, Travis Heights was experiencing problems. Retention was a problem throughout the district, a serious dropout crisis existed in the nearby middle and high schools, and test scores were nothing to brag about. Many professional parents were moving out of the neighborhood toward more affluent, and presumably, more academically successful suburban schools.

In her new job as principal, Marilyn Butcher took a short while to talk to the staff and the community, to understand what was going on. Travis Heights had some committed and concerned teachers, but many problems. Space and money are two which continue today. But lack of focus and poor student achievement were glaring. Asked about the difference between then and now, a 15-year veteran teacher puts it this way: "Staff development was prescribed and fed to you. At the end of each summer, we'd get a 'chunk' of staff development, most of it not to the point and irrelevant. The curriculum was very textbook-driven, basals everywhere."

Then, the teacher goes on to say, Marilyn came in, did an immediate assessment, spoke to all of the teachers, "Asked how we taught and what we taught. She had a definite vision, and she started sharing that vision." Marilyn's vision is now neatly contained in the school's mission statement, which emphasizes joy in learning and the belief that every child must reach her learning potential. Marilyn's vision is a commitment to high quality, child-centered curriculum, authentic assessment, and multi-age grouping. The vision establishes a non-coercive environment for children and staff.

> "I always had the idea that schools should give children the opportunity to explore. When you get to middle and high school there seems to be a narrowing of opportunities. They pick 'the best' when it comes to music, art, or sports. You should be allowed to try everything. School should be the place where children can test their wings. They can tuck away in their minds talents that they can pull out later in life. School should be an enriching kind of place. It's more than joy in learning, it's joy in life."

Marilyn took only a short while to listen and assess, because she is, above all, a woman of action. She seeks information, plans carefully, but then the maxim is "Ready, fire, aim!" She was not constrained by doubts and hesitations, because she is also an incredibly optimistic woman.

"Funny," she says, "how you first have an idea and then the opportunity is there." Energy and optimism — two qualities in a principal that are now embedded in an institution.

The first structural change at Travis Heights began with a solution to a rather run-of-the-mill logistical problem. The school needed to expand by one classroom, but there were not enough children at either grade level to justify a first or a second grade room. The obvious solution was a combined first and second grade classroom. But there were no multi-age classrooms or programs at Travis Heights. As in all bureaucracies, a change like this could have created a big resistance. Would a teacher want to teach a multi-age class? Would parents accept it? Marilyn held a staff meeting and opened up the idea. One teacher volunteered, another winked at her, and they were on their way.

In the first year, there was one pilot multi-age first and second grade class. In year two, there were some multi-age classes, and some not. This was, as Marilyn recalls, a "dangerous" year. Things could have gone forward, or not. Teachers had been asked to choose whether they would accept a multi-age class. A few teachers left, reluctant to put in the extra staff planning time. By year three, the entire school was multi-age. All of the remaining teachers chose to work the new way. And now, the chief dread among many is ever having to go back. One multi-age teacher says she would never again want teach preschoolers without the magnificent help and example of the kindergartners. She is convinced that the best teachers of routines to very young children are other young children.

Multi-age groupings were now well established, but the work was just beginning. As Marilyn is fond of saying, "Once you go to multi-age, everything else must change." And an accepted change rule at Travis Heights has been, "You can't change everything at once, but you must." The next wave of reform included the following key elements, the implementation and effects of which overlapped, making it difficult now for most staff to remember the order in which they were adopted.

The school adopted the instructional strategy called *cooperative learning*, which requires that children work on learning tasks in groups, sharing ideas and helping each other. The diverse skill levels present in a multi-age group means that each child can contribute, but in a different way. In addition to mastering content, children learn to listen, to negotiate, and to work with one another's strengths. At Travis Heights, successful students are team players.

The entire *assessment system* was overhauled. Travis Heights now has a very complex but satisfying assessment system that brings parents much closer to their children's work. The assessment answers the questions that parents wanted to ask:

- What should children know and be able to do at this age?
- How is my child progressing toward the achievement of these goals?
- How is my child progressing toward mastering academic standards set by the state?
- How does my child's academic progress compare with his or her peers on a national scale?

Assessment at Travis Heights is "no longer the test at the end of the chapter, but a continuous guide to instruction." The system alternates narrative reports with three-way conferences, (teacher, parent, child) where the child presents his work. Outcomes that are to be assessed (to be team

players, to be creative problem solvers, to explore and appreciate the fine arts, to be technologically literate, to make responsible choices, to be able to communicate effectively) are developed and revised annually by students, teachers, and parents.

These new outcomes for learning clearly require a different type of instruction from the traditional "skill and drill." Cooperative learning works well only with interesting and engaging learning tasks. Multi-age grouping suggests that content must be approached in different ways, by emphasizing the different ways in which children learn. A *hands-on curriculum that is integrated into themes* answers this problem.

It is particularly in the area of curriculum that staff feel early childhood education principles are useful. At Travis Heights, several of the early-childhood trained teachers working with younger children were asked to move to fourth and fifth grades. They took their "hands on" teaching style and their ability to plan curriculum around integrated themes with them. *Now the typical early childhood classroom environment is present, not only in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade, but right through the fifth and final grade at Travis Heights*.

And still, the work wasn't done. When the staff discovered that their attempts at using a *whole language approach to teach reading* were piecemeal, they requested training as a whole staff. And of course, all the team playing and critical thinking required of children led staff to rethink their practices regarding children's *behavior and discipline*. They chose Glasser's Quality School approach and found that his ideas about quality work and a supportive classroom environment enhanced their teaching. They also adopted a Quality School approach to discipline, which helps children to understand that they make choices and can control their own behavior. Counseling is provided, when needed, to help children reflect on, understand, and improve the choices they make.

When the federal program Goals 2000 came up, some professionals wilted under the pressure of its formal requirement that schools make sure that all young children are "ready to learn" by

The Quality School

The Quality School concepts that the Travis Heights Elementary School is using are the creation of psychologist William Glasser. Six elements characterize Quality Schools:

- There must a warm, supportive classroom environment.
- Students should be asked to do only useful work.
- Students are always asked to do the best they can.
- Students are asked to evaluate their own work and improve it.
- Quality work always feels good.
- Quality work is never destructive.

Glasser promotes the idea of partnerships between students and teachers in which they together take responsibility for setting goals and solving problems, rather than handing those responsibilities over to others. He also suggests that quality work is useful work and that students can see its value. High standards should be set by and for students, and students should have the time and receive adequate assistance to be able to meet high standards. The particular skills deemed most essential by Glasser are reading, writing, calculating and math, speaking, and problem solving.

providing any needed services — such as health or social services. Some worried about losing the distinction between academic and social services responsibilities. Not Marilyn Butcher. She went to work to become a pilot site for *repositioning health and human services within the school*. She brought in a nurse practitioner, therapists, and social workers.

Travis Heights was the first elementary school in the district to become involved in a *vertical team* with the neighborhood middle and high schools. The "vertical team" concept brings staff from all institutions together to discuss curriculum, ways to maintain parent involvement, and strategies for improving social services in the entire community. Travis Heights also became one of 33 mentor schools recognized by the Texas Education Agency to serve as a model for visitors from around the state. And there are other training initiatives, grants for services, and community outreach projects.

Some educators would say it's impossible. Some of these initiatives must create conflicts. Some of these approaches must clash. Somewhere, philosophies must not mesh. And aren't the teachers exhausted from all this training? Aren't they out of their classrooms too much? The answer to these questions is found in Marilyn's role. She has picked and chosen well. Her vision is so clear that she does not get staff involved in competing philosophies.

Marilyn and her staff pursue only those training opportunities and grants that will advance the principles and ideas they have carefully hammered out. This way, no one sees a new project as a "drain" or a "bother" or just "more paperwork." Everything advances the cause — a cause that staff, parents, and children have all signed on to pursue.

Together, the Travis Heights staff and community developed the following set of beliefs:

- Everyone is a learner everyday.
- Diversity is a positive attribute.
- All members of the student body and staff are equally responsible for the implementation and success of the educational process.
- Parents are partners in the educational process.
- The vertical team concept positively impacts the educational process of all students from prekindergarten to beyond 12th grade.
- Adopters [businesses that form partnerships with the school] are an integral part of the educational process and their contributions enrich the lives of our students.
- A child's ability should not be restricted by age or grade level.

Effects and Outcomes

The first evidence of success at Travis Heights is a walk through the doors. The atmosphere is different. The school is a friendly, welcoming place. It is hard to feel a stranger. Everyone is brought into the school's sphere of activity. There's always an interesting presentation going on: kindergartners explaining the uses and dimensions of various types of houses they've built; older children talking about the characters in Dickens and describing their previous evening's visit to a local travel agency where they viewed a slide show of Dicken's London; a heated discussion among an oceanography group deciding which facts about undersea creatures would be most interesting for a presentation to their classmates.

The ambiance is one thing the visitor notices, and then the fact that everybody's talking. This is a school of conversation, and children, teachers, and parents seem confident of what they are saying. Children talk animatedly and freely because they know things.

Another striking aspect of the school is that there are parents everywhere. In one classroom, a parent might be sitting on the floor teaching mathematics to a small group of children. Some parents help to write grant proposals for funding school projects. The vice principal has been working for weeks with parents to stage a Tamalata on Saturday. Three hundred dozen homemade tamales will be sold, and a mariachi band from the middle school will perform. It is impossible to find anyone who is not working on, or at least looking forward to, the Tamalata.

Still, the school doesn't particularly advertise or brag about this unusual level of parental involvement; it has become an integral part of the life of the school. Travis Heights has transcended the cliches, the time-worn nods to parent involvement. And one never hears about "helping with homework" or "reading to your child." Here, parents are already involved. They do not need lectures or admonishments, and no one implies that the teacher is the expert and the parent the recipient of knowledge.

The school educates the parents about any new innovations it is adopting. A kindergarten newsletter, for example, explains (without jargon) why the children are involved in projects and tells parents about early childhood expert Lillian Katz. The newsletter accomplishes what a classroom visit does, bringing parents right into the learning process. A mother's explanation about why her son was involved in a special reading program for a year reflects her understanding:

> "He read, but without expression. He had no inflection. He did not put the question mark in his voice when it was in the sentence. Now, he does. He no longer needs extra help. I'm so glad it was there when he needed it. He enjoys reading so much more."

Marilyn wants this school to be a place where learning is fun. She uses the phrase "joy in learning" a lot. But this is not the kind of fun that results in clowns or games or turning all math activities into quiz shows. The joy is internal, and the learning is serious.

It's hard to visit Travis Heights and not care about what happens there. It's also hard to visit and not wonder why all schools can't be more like this one.

Lessons and Implications

Who should be given credit for creating this remarkable school? If you ask Marilyn Butcher, she will give all of the credit to her teachers. If you ask the teachers, they give it all right back to her. In truth, the success of Travis Heights is probably an elusive combination of the right people at the right time all in the right place, all interacting in creative ways and marshaling more energy and ideas than anyone has a right to expect. The result is greater than the sum of its parts.

Can this success be replicated by pulling out the strongest teachers and sprinkling them throughout the district? The teachers themselves answer this question with a resounding "No." The interaction among them is what is important — so that the act of pulling out individual teachers would destroy the very thing worth duplicating.

Could the expertise and character of Marilyn Butcher be developed in others? Forgetting for a moment that Marilyn is an integral part of the group, and that her removal would be as damaging, or more, than anyone else's, what makes Marilyn Butcher the kind of principal she is? Interviews with staff reveal three key strategies:

1. ***Marilyn is tolerant of dissent, and she does not force.*** She never insists that staff go where they are not willing to go. Although she is a flywheel of ideas, spinning them out in a constant rush, teachers feel free to reject them. "Sometimes Marilyn will come with an idea, and we'll all kind of groan. But then, several weeks later, some of us will have been thinking, and we'll go to her and say, 'Okay, let's try.'"

All of the talking at Travis Heights includes some dissent and many arguments. This is not considered to be a problem, but rather a sign that thinking, committed professionals are at work. Teachers are secure in the knowledge that they can resist going where they do not want to go. Marilyn will either wait, or come up with a new way to bolster her case, or come up with another idea, or someone else will. Forward movement is the point, not whose movement it is.

Travis Heights harbors a startling number of highly individualistic teachers, some of them quite stubborn as they freely admit. Many of these teachers, on their own, in another environment, could be seen as troublemakers. But here the rebelliousness is useful, it signifies strength, it propels change, it makes change work faster. And, it makes ideas stronger.

Only a confident leader could accept such rebelliousness. When asked what she does when people disagree with her, Marilyn says, "I listen. I try to listen to what they say. I try to understand clearly. Divergent opinions help to keep your own opinions where they need to be. I try to determine a solution which is win-win. I try not to make it personal. Disagreement is not an affront to my person."

One of Butcher's earliest supervisors told her "Marilyn, you've got to row the boat so that when you get to the other side, everybody's still in it." She seems to have taken this lesson completely to heart, as teacher after teacher reports, "Marilyn never forces us." One teacher goes further to say, "I am her biggest fan, but also her greatest critic. When I don't agree with her, I say so."

One gets a feeling that Marilyn admires and respects critics equally as much as fans. She is herself stimulated by argument, enjoying the challenge of defending her ideas.

2. ***Marilyn provides focus.*** Although staff are not forced to follow her, the power of Marilyn's ideas is hard to resist. And the force of her energy field seems to bring others along. Staff joke among themselves about whether Marilyn sleeps. She is always alert, looking for an opportunity of any kind for Travis Heights. Marilyn is a prodigious networker and a tireless reader. She wastes no opportunity in talking to other principals, parents, community leaders, to clarify ideas, find funding, and get better information. But she does not, as staff points out, flail out in just any direction. As her energy expands to include more staff, the focus becomes sharper, more honed.

The sharpness of her focus actually allows staff to relax. They know that their work is useful, and that it matters. In the same way that they have agreed not to ask children to do useless work, they know they will never be asked to seek frivolous grants or take on a shallow curriculum objective. They can rely on Marilyn to have thought through the implications of any new effort. The focus is always there, and Marilyn's door is open to discuss, at any time, with anyone, where they are going.

Communication is Marilyn's strength. She relishes the opportunities to speak to groups, whether parents, children, the general public, or professionals around the state. Speaking engagements are difficult to work into her schedule, but she does them. It is as if sharing the focus and the success of Travis Heights is a personal priority, her way of paying back the education community for the joy her long career has given her.

Marilyn is happy to look for compromise, but not at the sacrifice of her staff's closely held beliefs. At a staff meeting where a new state-required standardized test is being discussed, Marilyn says, "This is heavy-handed stuff. We have to teach what our kids need to know. But does it mean we have to do it with work sheets?" The staff answers "No" and so are reassured. They will meet the new requirement, and the needs of the state of Texas will be served. But they will not change their teaching style.

3. ***Marilyn never stops thinking like a teacher.*** Although the teachers at Travis Heights clearly regard Marilyn as their leader, and appreciate the different role she plays, they never refer to her as "the office." She is one of them. When she went back to school after 17 years of teaching to gain her administrator's certification she was told, "After this class, you'll think like an administrator, not like a teacher." Marilyn says, "I never did. I still think like a teacher." And even though her role has evolved into that of a "resource gatherer" she is still an instructional leader as well. Her teachers build curriculum, but she is right there with them. She may be interested in grants, and networking, and speech making, but she also knows what goes on in classrooms.

Marilyn never forgets the struggles, or the joys, of teaching. Just as she picks up the occasional scrap of paper as she walks the halls, she picks up on teacher frustrations and needs. She is responsible for everything, and yet shares responsibility very easily. The result is a paradise for competent teachers. One 20-year veteran says very candidly, "There are skid marks outside my door where I originally fought many things — multi-age groupings, working in teams — but I came around. I have to tell you that this is my twentieth year, and it's the most fun I've ever had."

Wee Deliver is a school-wide project that is designed to encourage children to write. The school is divided up into continents, and mailboxes are hung up in the halls. Children take jobs as "shorters" or "deliverers" of mail, which consists of letters that children write to one another. When it comes time to swear in the new postal employees of Wee Deliver, it is Marilyn herself who leads the practice before the ceremony (telling the audience, "We're going to pretend you can't see us rehearse"). Then she leads the children in their oaths. She reminds them that last year when she got to the "I.... state your name..." part, many of the children repeated "state your name" instead of saying their own names. The children listen carefully, nod their heads, ask a number of questions.

When the ceremony begins, children introduce their guests, parents, and siblings, and then they promise to perform their duties to the best of their abilities, to make every effort to deliver the mail correctly and on time. When they get to the "state your name" part most repeat Marilyn's words instead of their names. They are rewarded with a big smile, the smile of a co-conspirator, not that of a forbidding principal. This ceremony is typical of the many that are held at Travis Heights, well-rehearsed, but not over-produced — spontaneous, celebrating the joy of learning, and allowing, even expecting, mistakes. Everybody laughs. The children head back to their classrooms, wearing real postal service shirts, many of which touch the ground as the children walk.

Bob Aldrich is Principal of H.O. Wheeler Elementary School, which is the school he attended as a child. Wheeler is located in Burlington, Vermont, in a metropolitan area and a college town where many people enjoy living. But the economic picture in the area is not so bright, as reflected by the fact that over 95% of Wheeler's students participate in the free lunch program. In five years, Bob has successfully campaigned for a bond issue to renovate the dilapidated school building, has supported a shared approach to school decision making, and has worked towards making Wheeler the kind of school that he would have wanted to attend. Bob is a self-effacing leader whose work is marked by his faith in the community and its children, his patience and persistence, and his commitment to an impressively democratic model of school reform.

Chapter 3: "There are Some Rooms that Still have Ghosts in Them"

Background

"We wish to welcome you to Munchkin Land." The crowd assembled to watch the H.O. Wheeler Elementary School production of The Wizard of Oz seems only too happy to enter. With the agile PTO president filming the event, over 100 children stage an elaborate well-rehearsed version of the familiar journey for courage, wisdom, a heart, and a home. There are a few anomalies: some of the munchkins, at first suspiciously tall, turn out to be dancing foster grandparents; the figure loosened up by the oil can is a tin girl; and Oz herself seems less apologetic than the original, and more confident.

H.O. Wheeler is a very old but newly renovated elementary school in Burlington, Vermont. With a population of 40,000, Burlington is the largest metropolitan area in Vermont. It is obviously a college town, with a closed-off pedestrian area downtown for University of Vermont students, dogs, and yoghurt and coffee shops. There's plenty to do but not a lot of congestion and traffic. Many Burlingtonians say they feel lucky to live there.

The economic picture, however, is not all that bright. Over 95% of the students at H.O. Wheeler participate in the free school lunch program. The community qualifies for and just received a three million dollar enterprise zone grant. A number of years ago, churches made Burlington a resettlement area for families from southeast Asia. Language still creates a significant barrier to education and work in the community.

The H.O. Wheeler of five years ago was a dark, dank, and aging building. Inside, by all accounts, children and staff were having a difficult time. Discipline, in spite of a dedicated staff, was a problem area. There were frequent fights in the hallways, there was no parental involvement, and learning was a distant goal.

Then, a home boy came back. Bob Aldrich, who had attended Wheeler as a child right after World War II, returned as the Principal. He wandered the halls and noticed that the building

hadn't ever changed. To save energy several areas of the school had been closed, and even the large front doors were boarded shut. It was exactly the same, maybe darker. This didn't seem right to Bob. He met with the mayor to ask if something could be done. The mayor suggested that if the school could be opened up to the community, he would support funding a renovation. After months of campaigning in person throughout the Burlington community, Bob saw a bond pass that funded a construction plan for Wheeler. Bob also hired new staff, made a concerted effort to recruit parental support, and assisted in the development of a school-wide discipline plan.

Today, from the front, Wheeler is still a fine example of early 1900's red brick, solid elementary school architecture. Around back the expanded school space has outside walls studded with large ceramic tiles, beautifully crafted by children. The building looks formal, but friendly. It looks like a place a community could believe in.

Inside, the school looks like a place the community calls home. Over 150 non-profit groups use the space at Wheeler. Bob Aldrich has expanded the definition of community school about as far as it can go. Virtually every community group meets here. Training on everything from GED preparation to lead safety takes place here. And every few months the Wizard of Wheeler hosts a community dance. Everybody comes: children, parents, teenagers. Bob says, "You should see it, it's wild."

Chronology

What transformed H.O. Wheeler? There is, of course, more than one answer. But some part of the Wheeler renaissance has to be Bob Aldrich, a self-effacing, behind the scenes force who likes to give credit to others. "My older brother always told me that if I didn't get my act together, I'd never get out of Wheeler." "Maybe," Bob chuckles, "he was right." "I was interested in only sports and girls when I went to school here." "Now, (after watching the school's Oz production) I think I might have been interested in other things as well." Still athletic-looking, and only a few years from retirement, Bob enjoys talking about the school, the community, and what he has learned. "Drama, theater, I think I might have gone for that as a kid."

To make sure that today's children have that choice, Bob helped to write a successful grant proposal to provide ongoing collaboration with the local Flynn Theater. As a result, every class attends three matinees each year. Artists in residence come into the school. Right now, a visitor is conducting multicultural workshops with children, responding differently to each class, talking with some, singing with others, answering tough questions with grace and aplomb. A group of children also receive foundation-funded ballet lessons, as aptly demonstrated in one act of Oz.

Arts are taken seriously at Wheeler. But arts are not the whole story. After the renovation, another major reform effort began. In response to a Chapter One requirement, the staff and community began an improvement plan which led them to choose Accelerated Schools as a new model for school governance.

Bob sums up the changes at Wheeler. "School is more interesting now. When I was a kid, we would sit there and watch the clock. We went home for lunch from 11:30 to 1:00, then we watched the clock till 3:00. It seems like only little girls who were well behaved liked school then. Now, more kids like it."

He also thinks about what it's like to be the principal of the school he attended as a child. "There are some rooms that still have ghosts in them," he says.

Effects and Outcomes

A walk around Wheeler readily suggests the lively intellectual and artistic atmosphere that has taken hold. Displays of student work contain interesting pieces of writing. Art projects include giant body posters and winsome paper mache heads portraying "Villains of Roald Dahl." Children are at work on the hallway floors, and a large selection of unit blocks dominates one wall of the library. In fact, a quick walk through the school at any given time might leave one searching for the students, who seem to be everywhere but in the classroom: in the halls, at a special event, investigating things outdoors, or working in the computer lab.

A large "Family Room" downstairs, cosponsored by the Visiting Nurses Association, hosts a preschool program, a toddler play group, sewing classes, nutrition classes, a drop-in program, a clothes closet, and a parent resource library.

Wheeler is designated a Community School, as a part of the neighborhood's grant as an Enterprise Community, and the description seems apt. The coordination of the 150 groups that use the facility requires an office and a busy full-time staff member. The presence of community residents of all ages, engaged in a variety of activities, is obvious.

Also apparent is the involvement of the students' families in the life of the school. When Bob first came to Wheeler as principal, the PTO had very few members, who spent much of their time arguing. Today there are twenty-five people, who while not always in agreement, are constructive in their contributions and positive about Wheeler's future.

Bob himself seems present throughout the school, and an observer might swear he had a clone, turning up down one hallway, in the next classroom, and again in a conference with a teacher. He spends a good part of his day in this fashion, simply asking others how things are going and, "How can I help?"

In Bob's view, an extremely important feature of their collaborative model (Accelerated Schools) is that it forces participation from people. His own role has changed dramatically. Whereas he used to be a one-man show, personally placing, scheduling, planning, and prodding, now this

Accelerated Schools

The Accelerated Schools model that H. O. Wheeler Elementary School is using was developed by Henry Levin at Stanford University as a way to promote academic excellence among disadvantaged students. Shared responsibility and decision making are big parts of this model. The model's first step is the creation of an "accelerated schools community" of parents, students, staff, and community members who take stock of a school's present situation, decide what needs to be changed and improved, and together develop a shared vision for the future. Committees or "cadres" are then formed to look into specific issues such as student achievement or school climate. These efforts build upon the three accelerated schools principles: unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths.

The Accelerated Schools idea is a process for improving schools, not a program with specific ingredients, but it offers a number of tools for helping students to achieve at higher levels. Inclusive classrooms, authentic assessment, an Inquiry Process of learning, parents as partners, and outreach to the community are all part of the Accelerated Schools concept.

work is done through committees and at the initiation of others. A beneficial side effect of this shift is the disappearance of contract discussions related to teacher meetings. When the meetings began to be set by teachers, this issue was eliminated. The school has always had diverse opinions, but now people will give solutions a genuine try and not sabotage them.

Bob appears to focus on Wheeler to the exclusion of almost everything else. He finds both professional inspiration and fertile ground for work in its lively hallways and classroom. Rather than searching the outside universe for the latest trends and strategies, he takes a trip once a year for a conference, but is otherwise "very rooted here."

At Wheeler, if you check out the principles which guide policy and practice, you will see what very closely resembles a primer of early childhood education.

Wheeler circulates the following school vision:

> Our vision of a positive future for the H. O. Wheeler Community is a place where people are:
>
> - Developing a strong sense of self and achieving a personal best
> - Learning emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially
> - Providing a healthy, safe, nurturing, well-maintained, and attractive environment
> - Accepting, respecting, and valuing others as special
> - Building on strengths, delighting in differences, and recognizing what is common in all
> - Emphasizing and integrating academics, the arts, and technology
> - Thinking, communicating, and problem solving as life-long learners
> - Making choices and accepting responsibility
> - Reaching our full potential as members of society

Where did this obvious early childhood education influence come from? And how have early childhood practices begun to permeate the elementary grades at Wheeler? Granted, the principal, because of his personal history, tends to see the school from a child's point of view. He clearly wants children to feel safe, comfortable, and protected. He is as interested in the emotional climate of the school as he is the intellectual. But others in the school obviously understand early childhood theory. And theory into practice in early childhood is no accident. In this case, the Wizard found an ally, an early childhood specialist named Bonnie Clapp.

Bob welcomed Bonnie into Wheeler to facilitate progress on the Accelerated Schools model and to promote his focus on literacy. Bonnie is the trusted facilitator who moves the community along, together, helping people find their mutual goals and solve differences along the way. Bonnie attends marathon meetings and works with individuals between meetings, ("I saw you were uncomfortable with that. Tell me about it.") She helps bring cohesion, focus, and most importantly, the early childhood philosophy into the picture.

Although early childhood principles are key, Wheeler would not be the place it is today without the influence of the Accelerated Schools Project. Once the staff chose the Accelerated Schools Project model for their governance, reform really kicked in. The pace was not always brisk, since the chosen model calls for heavy democracy, lots of collaborators, and lots of input. But the hours everyone put in were focused on one or another of the three Accelerated Schools

goals, which, by the way, virtually every teacher can recite:

- Creating a unity of purpose among parents, teachers, support staff, students, administrator, the district, and the local community to work together toward a common set of goals that will best benefit all students;
- Empowering every individual member of the school community to participate in a shared decision making process and to take responsibility for his/her actions; and
- Identifying and building on strengths of the entire community.

The Accelerated Schools model abolishes the traditional pyramid structure (administrators on top, supported by teachers, then support staff, with students, parents, and families at the bottom.) The pyramid is replaced by a circle (students in the middle, surrounded by administration, parents and families, support staff, and teachers.) Even the diagram looks messier. And certainly the process is messy. But, as Bob and his teachers attest, the result is well worth it. "The old way," Bob muses, "You knew where every principal was, 2:45 to 3:45 same day of the week. Principals went up there [to the central office], got the message, and brought it back. The agenda was set the same way all over Burlington. Now, we're in this collaboration mode. We have four cadres, each with a different focus. They meet and talk, and they set the agenda. There's a cadre on climate, one on community, one on communications, and one on curriculum." Bonnie Clapp adds that, ironically, curriculum is the "last frontier, the last thing to come together." She realizes that some would argue that curriculum should have come first, but the urgency at Wheeler involved children's behavior, and the community felt that had to be dealt with first.

In the true spirit of collaboration, not all participants accept every aspect of the reform. Bob candidly admits that "Some of the teachers probably wish I would go away. [With all the community involvement], they think I've given away the store." Every issue is hashed out and researched. Bob discovered, for example, that half of the participants in the GED program are parents whose children are currently in school. He uses this information to convince staff that the community use serves the teachers' own purposes.

And since the commitment is to the group effort, staff labor honestly and diligently to make everything work. The discipline plan, for example, seems very complex, and not as child directed as some would like. But the number of suspensions has dropped from over 200 to seven. It may be that the discipline plan is more of a tool for teachers, rather than for children. It tells teachers what steps are next. It saves them the time, the emotion, the personal responsibility for deciding what is next. For whatever reason, whether it reassures teachers, or gives attention to children who need it, the discipline plan is considered a success. Although it is not, according to Bob, something he would take with him to another school, he respects and upholds the staff's decision.

Wheeler's solutions are Wheeler's, not necessarily transferrable to any school. But the process perhaps is.

Lessons and Implications

When studying Bob Aldrich's leadership style, several aspects stand out:

1. *Bob has faith in the children and adults of his community.* The fact that Bob's childhood was spent at Wheeler seems to be an important part of his approach and his effectiveness. Almost unnoticed, as others describe the community in terms of deficits (lack of education, lack of suffi-

cient language stimulation, lack of reading at home), Bob remains quiet. Then he says, "I have great faith in this community." Bob does not disparage, decry, or judge. Because of his history, he genuinely identifies with this community.

2. *Bob is patient, persistent, and has a high tolerance for dissent.* He says, "I encourage conflict. Nothing gets done without a little tension. Without conflict, things are staid, nothing takes place." Taking a more positive view, Bob adds, "The model we use is designed for input."

Some conflict seems essential to Bob's approach. So does persistence. Many of the processes at Wheeler are complex, tedious, requiring many months of group work to develop. Bob says very forthrightly, "You can't give up. You've just got to hang in there." The first couple of years of Accelerated Schools made some teachers long for a "benign dictator." "Sometimes," they said, "we just wanted the principal to make a decision." Today, the teachers describe themselves as "articulate, strong-willed people who wouldn't work anywhere else." But what would happen if the next principal were an autocrat? "We simply would not allow that to happen."

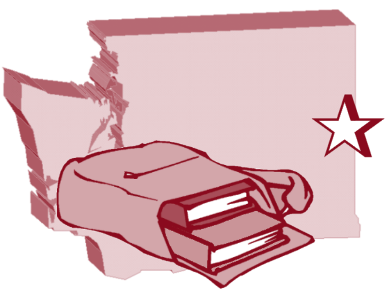
3. *Bob is not afraid to delegate decisions to others.* Bob is not an autocrat, and he goes one further by cheerfully delegating major aspects of the program to those who have more expertise. He knows how to find good people, invite them into the process, and step back and let them do their work. He does not remember all of the steps of Wheeler's complex discipline plan, but he trusts the staff and consultant who developed it, takes care to notice the results, and does his own part, hugging children, going to their homes, and telling the occasional child who has run afoul of the system, "You're a good kid."

By now, several years into the Accelerated Schools governance model, most decisions are in the hands of teachers. "Even placement of students," Bob says, "unless they don't agree, then they come to me." Scheduling is also done by the teachers. "There's much more agreement," when teachers decide. And, of course, there's no sabotage. Bob remembers that before the school-wide discipline plan was adopted, the principal took the blame for incidents and disruption. "Teachers would tell parents, 'The principal just lets things go.'" Now, the plan belongs to everyone, and so does the responsibility.

"Twenty years ago, I recognized that I didn't have the answers myself. But as far as this model [Accelerated Schools], I think a principal would have been called weak. Now, I'm confident in my own ability." Times have changed, and so has Bob. Luckily, an impressively democratic model for school governance was chosen by staff when the principal himself had become impressively democratic.

Bob gives decision making power to others, and also credit. "Most ideas are not created by myself. I listen and occasionally say, 'That makes sense.'" Bob's dubious model is the first superintendent he worked for, who smoked a pipe and "didn't listen the first two or three times you went to talk to him about something. Then, if you came back, he decided you must have something worth listening to."

Reflecting on his own leadership style, Bob says, "Some things I could do without. What I'd really like to be is a school counselor." Bob's meeting is disrupted by a huge, street-smelling dog. The dog is much more friendly than he is attractive, but Bob literally leaps to his feet to take responsibility for the animal. "This is what I enjoy, taking care of things."



Carol Olsen is Director of the Title I Program in Spokane, Washington. Spokane's schools are modern, well equipped, and orderly places that enroll a diverse population of students. The local economy is healthy, although many of the new jobs pay low wages and there is considerable mobility in the schools that serve less affluent neighborhoods. Carol began her work by redeploying the district's Title I funding in order to replace "pull out" programs that take children out of their regular classrooms for remedial instruction with in-class strategies of support. Since then, a myriad of reforms have been adopted in Spokane and have resulted in an impressive and sophisticated transformation of the classrooms and schools serving its neediest students. Carol's leadership style is marked by her ability to progress steadily on many fronts on a focused agenda. She also balances her strong leadership skills with her support for democratic methods that build ownership and create allies among other educators.

Chapter 4: Title I as an Engine for Comprehensive School Reform

Background

Carol Olsen, Director of the Title I Program in Spokane, Washington, works in a modest cubicle in the district's administrative building. However her influence on teaching and learning in the state's second largest school district is more substantial than her office perks might indicate. Carol is the only full-time administrator of a staff of roughly 150 and a $5.8 million budget per year, serving students in 15 of Spokane's 35 elementary schools.

Spokane schools are modern, well-equipped, and orderly places with a diverse population of students. The local economy is healthy, although the bulk of new jobs are in low wage categories and low income families have problems finding affordable housing. This causes considerable mobility in schools serving less affluent neighborhoods. At Bemiss Elementary school, 47% of the students were new to the building this year. Of the fourth graders at Regal Elementary school, only 16 of 75 had been in the same school in kindergarten.

The U.S. Department of Education's Title I program is a longtime federal effort that is intended to boost the achievement of the most disadvantaged students in every school district in the country. Prior to Carol's time, Spokane schools typically used Title I funds to establish "pull out" programs, in which specialists take children out of their regular classrooms for separate remedial instruction in subjects, such as math or reading, that they are having problems with. In these arrangements, however, students miss out on instruction from their regular teacher, and it is difficult to coordinate the work done by the Title I staff with the work of the regular teacher.

Carol Olsen's innovation in Spokane has been to use Title I resources more effectively and to the benefit of more students. She has replaced the "pull out" programs with other strategies to improve teaching and learning for all students in elementary school classrooms. The result is an

impressive and sophisticated transformation of classrooms and schools serving Spokane's most needy young students.

Spokane's school change efforts and Carol's leadership strategy have evolved over the past six years to touch on a variety of components of classroom practice and school organization:

- ***Teaching and learning***. Title I has been transformed from a "pull out" model to an "inclusion" model in which regular classroom teachers are assisted to carry out new approaches to curriculum and instruction for all children in the same classroom.
- ***Staff development***. Primary Grade Facilitators, paid for with Title I funds, provide intensive, individualized peer coaching and staff development for teachers in eleven elementary schools.
- ***Parent and community involvement.*** Title I funds are used to employ Parent Aides who work with children at school, as well as conduct workshops and home visits with other parents on how to support learning at home. Parents also participate in School Site Councils to help develop comprehensive improvement plans and make decisions on programs and resources.

These changes came about for a number of reasons. In particular, there was a sense among administrators and teachers that current practices weren't working well. Carol recalls:

> "I came into the Title I position wanting to make the program a locus for advocacy for students. But I found we had a staff of very well-trained people who were making minimal impact on regular classrooms. So we moved into an inclusion model and professional development strategies to work with principals and regular classroom teachers, and the approach has snowballed."

The principal of Bemiss Elementary School shares a similar perspective:

> "Three years ago our test scores were the lowest in the school district, we were retaining kindergarten students in a pre-first grade program, we were pulling out our special needs and Chapter I children from core subjects, we had aides who mostly watched the teachers teach, and we had homogeneous grouping, basal readers, and a total emphasis on teaching phonics. Teachers were angry about press coverage of low test scores, and parents were saying their kids were attending the 'dumb school.' So that created a momentum for change."

Teaching and Learning

School reform efforts in Spokane started with Carol's attempt to improve the Title I program so that children weren't pulled out from their regular classroom for remedial instruction. To make this happen, Carol provided support to regular teachers and Title I staff so that they could learn to work together in the same classroom as a team. Title I staff would then provide special assistance to students who needed it as part of the normal classroom activities. But as Title I staff moved into regular classrooms, they had a hard time working with students who needed help, because the teachers were directing all of the children's activities and discussions.

So Carol brought in consultants on *child-centered primary grade programs* (as opposed to teacher-directed instruction) and other *developmentally appropriate practices* for teaching young

children. These consultants trained several hundred teachers and principals. As a result of this training, Spokane began to change its educational practices and to question its practice of grouping and tracking students by age and ability. Schools began creating combined classrooms of kindergarten and first grade students and experimented with other *mixed age programs.*

At the same time, Spokane was re-examining its *strategies for teaching reading and writing* in the primary grades, as noted by another district administrator:

> "Beginning in about 1989 we changed our philosophical stance about reading. Prior to that our total emphasis in kindergarten through grade 3 was on phonics — children didn't even actually read until the second semester of 3rd grade. We shifted to a more comprehensive and eclectic approach which fosters phonics, meaning, and structure and provides individualized help to children, based on their progress as tracked in an ongoing mix of assessment strategies."

The district provided training and support for teachers in implementing three initiatives: Readers Workshop, Writers Workshop, and the First Steps program. Readers and Writers Workshop provide concrete teaching strategies in the processes of reading and writing. First Steps adds a comprehensive approach to assessing children's progress on a developmental continuum of literacy skills, along with a variety of "next step" strategies to support progress to subsequent stages of competence.

The fruits of these efforts are evident in classrooms, such as a combined kindergarten/first grade classroom at Regal School, full of shelves and tubs of story books and a wide range of different types of literacy activities. Posters remind students of the elements of "Story Grammar" (title, author, characters, setting, problem, solution, episodes) and boast of the class having read 183 books in the first three months of the school year.

The daily schedule includes time every morning when students choose from among interest centers such as art, listening, computer, painting, play dough, puzzles, construction, a rice table, math games, big blocks, and reading. They then move to writing in individual journals and reading. The teacher explains one key goal for her first graders is to be able to use a variety of strategies to respond to a book, such as making a story map, a book cover, a flip book, a pop-up book, and a triorama. For example, she prepares a group of first grade children for making posters by explaining the components of the activity and leading a discussion of the book's title, author, illustrator, characters, dedication, plot:

> "What do you see on movie posters or TV commercials for a movie? Do they pick the most boring part? The funniest part? The lousiest or worst part? So you'll pick something to draw so if the kindergartners see your poster, they'll say 'ooh teacher, where's that book?'."

The teacher also spends time each day listening to individual children read, recording stories they dictate and keeping track of their progress via an elaborate assessment system of anecdotal records, samples of children's work, and teacher comments. She analyzes this data to guide her next steps with each child and to prepare for discussions with parents.

Staff Development

As these changes in classroom practice were adopted, teachers were trained to assume their new roles. Based on several months of discussion with a group of elementary school principals, Carol created an intensive staff development strategy that relied on Early Childhood Facilitators. These Facilitators were chosen from among the existing teachers, and they were selected for their skills in working with children, their credibility with their colleagues, and their abilities to work effectively with other teachers. Their job was to work closely with their colleagues in kindergarten through grade three classrooms. Facilitators receive the same salary as regular classroom teachers (paid for with Title I funds), but spend their full time doing staff development in a single building.

Facilitators work predominantly as in-class coaches with eight to twelve individual teachers, although they also help facilitate grade-level planning sessions, informal lunch sessions, and workshops for groups of staff members. Their initial efforts centered on supporting implementation of reading and writing strategies, but they also provide intensive support to teachers on assessment strategies. They use a variety of approaches in their work, as reflected in the following comments from Facilitators in two elementary schools:

> "We start out usually with model teaching and, as teachers are ready, observing and coaching them as they work with students. It's very important for a teacher to be able to stand back and watch another teacher *and* watch their own students, since one key goal is to help teachers become better observers of children. Then we keep on giving them feedback and support until they kick us out!"

> "The keys are flexibility and persistence. Some people I spend one month with; some three months; and some can change a practice based on a single conversation. And sometimes we need to simply let them say they can't do something now and come back to the issue later."

Facilitators respond to requests for help and also work to introduce new concepts and skills. As they work, they provide support and encouragement to teachers, but they also challenge the teachers' practices:

> "We work really hard to not be seen as experts — our mind set is that every teacher is an expert. It always helps to integrate your work with the strengths of each teacher and honor what they do well. Yet often the initial view of teachers is 'this is my program and the kids need to be fixed.' Once they begin to own the idea that it's their practice that needs to change and not the children, then you're on your way! And as the practices change, the belief systems change along the way."

Teachers have become more cooperative and taken more initiative in this relationship over time:

> "In the first year, teachers would say come in and teach anything you want — they had essentially a 'you do it' orientation. Now they are more likely to say 'here's where I'm going, do you have any lessons which would be next steps?'"

Another advantage of this innovation is that it enriches career opportunities for teachers. Working as a Facilitator allows for professional growth without becoming a full-time administrator and giving up direct contact with children.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents are involved in Spokane schools in a variety of ways. Title I funds are used to employ Parent Aides as Educational Assistants who work with children around the school, as well as conduct workshops and home visits with other parents on how to support learning at home. Principals have seen positive outcomes from these positions:

> "Educational Assistants are particularly helpful in the crucial 20 minutes at the start of every day when my office normally used to have 8-10 chairs full of kids who had been in conflicts with peers. With parents outside in supervision, we've had very few kids with problems – parents just know how to work with them. And their children get all puffed up with pride when they see them working."

Schools have also worked with parents to explain changes in classroom practice:

> "We put together an evening program, beginning with a slide show to spotlight some of the things we were doing in classes and then we had parents meet in small groups to discuss what they liked and didn't like about the school; where they wanted their children and the school to be over the next two to five years. We then had parents visit classes for 30 minutes where teachers talked about the Writers and Readers Workshop programs, and we encouraged them to come back to observe for a full day."

Building on these efforts, several schools are now involved in a serious commitment to school-based planning and decision making. Site Councils of teachers, parents, neighborhood residents, and business people develop plans for new initiatives and set budget priorities for staffing, field trips, and parent activities. Councils organized focus groups and surveys to seek views and recommendations from staff, parents, and students, and sent staff and parents to workshops, conferences, and on visits to other schools, and then developed a detailed plan and budget for the coming year. Plans in one school included eliminating a staff position in order to add an additional Facilitator to work with intermediate grade teachers and changing the process for selecting students for a limited full-day kindergarten program.

Schools have also placed a new emphasis on community involvement and outreach. They have reached out to encourage community groups such as 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Park and Recreational Department, and other resources to provide after-school activities each day until 5:30 in the afternoon. A Buddy Program with local businesses and community residents includes 50 adults who come to school once a week to have lunch with an individual student.

Principals note that involving parents in decision making required adjustments in staff attitudes:

> "It has taken time for the staff to adjust to parents on the Site Council. Some seem uncomfortable with parents witnessing them working through an issue, being indecisive or not in agreement – and some feel that parents without college degrees aren't capable of being partners in decision making."

Effects and Outcomes

There are several dimensions to the success of school reform in Spokane. These include:

- the reform's survival and acceptance within the system,
- the fact that classroom practices have actually improved,
- teachers' perceptions of students' progress, and
- students' progress as measured by reading and math scores.

In regard to the first point, one awards positive credit simply to the survival of this strategy of school improvement. In many school districts reforms last only for a few years, sacrificed to turnover in top administrators or replacement by different and often even contradictory prescriptions. The story in Spokane is different: Teachers and principals have bought in to this agenda, rather than turning off or tuning out. For example, a principal commented on the acceptance of the Facilitator strategy:

> "Initially, teachers were nervous about having other adults in their classrooms. They were either fearful about exposing vulnerabilities or afraid of being accused of bragging if they were doing well. So our Facilitator was tested early on by teachers who saw her as 'invading' their classrooms, but the bottom line of model teaching is something they couldn't argue with. After a year she left for another assignment and we tried to support teachers working together as peers, but it was pathetic – people were just sliding back into their old habits. So when she returned, teachers realized what they had lost and began competing to receive a fair share of her time."

A second form of evidence is changes in classroom practices in curriculum, assessment, and grouping of students. As another administrator commented: "Ten years ago, Title I services were segregated from regular classrooms to the point that they used separate spelling lists and had separate Halloween parties. We are now serving all Title I students within regular classrooms, using writing and reading workshop methods and heterogeneous grouping. Students choose what they want to read even in first grade."

Another example of changing practice is the Facilitator strategy which replaces typical one-shot in-service workshops with "at the elbow" assistance for teachers in individual classrooms. By providing tailored support and regular scrutiny of classroom practice, teachers are helped to change their approaches and invent better ways of meeting the needs of their students.

A third form of evidence comes from teacher's perceptions of student progress:

> "I see much more growth in the kids. Children who've been involved in Readers and Writers Workshop from kindergarten are better able to express themselves, more independent learners and more interested in reading. I used to keep students busy with dittos. Now we have 40 minutes of silent reading each morning and they don't want to stop! And I can't believe how much writing my second graders do. Even in mathematics they are writing about how they think about and solve problems."

Other teachers comment on the benefits of multi-age programs which allow them to work with a group of children for two consecutive years: "I really noticed how comfortable they were when they returned to school in the fall. We could 'start school' on day one and they had less anxiety when they left in June."

Finally, Spokane reports encouraging progress on student outcomes. For example, four years ago, composite reading and math scores for fourth grade students at Bemiss Elementary on the California Test of Basic Skills were at 19%, while last year they averaged 52% and this year 48%. Bemiss was recognized as a National Distinguished School by the U.S. Department of Education.

Lessons and Implications

Spokane's improvement effort has expanded from an attempt to improve the Title I program to a transformation of classroom practice. It has introduced new ways for schools to organize themselves and group decision making processes that engage the community as well as the school staff.

Nearly all school districts receive Title I funding and could use these resources in a strategic, systemic school improvement effort such as Spokane's. However, moving in this direction depends on leaders adopting a vision and possessing the talent and dedication to manage a complex process of organizational and professional transformation. This case reveals a variety of models and lessons to emulate.

1. ***Carol promotes change by working steadily and on many fronts on a focused agenda.*** Carol Olsen illustrates the impact of a leader who has a core set of principles and a willingness to work hard and persistently on a number of fronts. Her priorities for improving classrooms and schools come from many sources, beginning with her own teaching experience:

> "My first job was in a small innovative middle school project where I taught reading to what were regarded as hard-core students. From those years, I start out with a strong belief that every child deserves a fair shake. Sometimes teachers will say 'kids need to earn my respect', but that's not how I see it. My other core priorities are fostering child choice and building community which were strategies I used in running my own classroom."

These core principles provide a framework for Carol's leadership effort across curriculum areas and school settings.

Carol is also quick to credit people who have served as models of leadership for her, including her mother and sister, former supervisors, and current colleagues. "I've learned from observing a close colleague who has remarkable skills in building rapport with people rather than assuming an attitude of 'just give me the facts and let me get on with my job.'"

While she is gracious in acknowledging the talents and contributions of colleagues, Carol is determined and ambitious in working to support change. She has strong interpersonal skills and a willingness to extend herself to make tangible contributions within and beyond the Spokane schools. For example, she developed the Facilitator concept with a team of principals, plays a central role in the selection process, and serves as their personal coach and support system:

> "I do workshops and talk through issues with them. I work with them to reflect on what they have tried, assess where they are and where they want to be, and brainstorm alternative strategies. They share concerns about seeing children not doing as well as they'd like, feeling like they'd like to return to teaching themselves, and having problems with individual teachers. Often a few very negative encounters with teachers can cloud their entire week, so I remind them about the high proportion of teachers they're working with who are moving and encourage them to track teachers' growth on a continuum from the beginning of the year."

As another example, in the midst of her work with principals and teachers, Carol initiated a series of partnership efforts with the local Head Start program, leading to the development of a new Even Start family literacy program, and new efforts to prepare children and families to make a successful transition from their preschool program into kindergarten. The Head Start Director comments:

> "Any collaborative venture is only as good as the willingness of leaders to really make it work — beyond lip service or looking good on paper. Carol's way of seeing the big picture made a significant difference in our ability to work on transition issues. The school district didn't tell her to do this and other administrators wouldn't have seen it as important."

2. *Carol balances strong personal leadership with inclusive, democratic methods that build ownership and create allies.* Carol deftly combines a commitment to participatory decision making processes with a strong personal philosophy about what schools should look like. Principals give Carol high marks for her knowledge of program guidelines and as a source of guidance and feedback but they also see her as someone who allows them autonomy in developing specific initiatives for their buildings:

> "Carol's style is one of very close monitoring of processes and guidelines, but she doesn't tell you what to do. She attended our school-wide planning sessions and served as a guiding force who we bounced things off of in the process."

Support for Carol's early childhood initiative came from a number of sources. For example, Superintendent Gary Livingston had placed new emphasis on the issues of instruction, parent and community involvement, equity, and school-site management. These priorities created a favorable climate for the kinds of changes that Carol wanted to make.

Another source of support for Carol Olsen's initiatives was a district-level restructuring committee, "The Anchors," established three years ago by the school board, administration, and the teacher's union to remove barriers to school improvement efforts. The committee considers requests for waivers from school district policies and also deals with issues of conflict between reform plans and the union contract. For example, the group dealt with contract provisions around class size to clear the way for multi-age classrooms and with how School Site Council decisions impact the staff who were supported by Title I in the past.

The successes observed in Spokane also derive from principals who supported school site planning and lent their cooperation and energy to changing classrooms. School site management gives principals more autonomy and authority for staffing and budget issues. But it also requires

principals to share power and make decisions in concert with teachers, parents, and the community. Not only must they be willing to share power, but they also need to be skillful facilitators of groups who have not had previous experience in working together or in grappling with key choices in creating an overall design for a successful school.

This confluence of support suggests that leaders in school improvement efforts cultivate allies, create a coalition of other administrators for any campaign of reform, and be eager to share initiative and ownership. It also points up the need for leaders to strike a balance between asserting an agenda and priorities and devolving decision making to schools and teachers. This calibration and timing of pushing for change and supporting participants is echoed in the comments of one principal reflecting on working with teachers in his building:

> "I don't think we would have progressed as much as we had if we hadn't pushed teachers at times and kept them a bit off balance in tandem with the Facilitator's support role. It's a fine line to tread."

3. *Carol designs strategies that address both the depth of the effort and the breadth of its impact.* School improvement efforts contend with a core dilemma of breadth vs. depth in allocating resources. Successful implementation of changes in classrooms requires intensive investment in materials, training, supervision and support — and yet administrators strive to spread reforms throughout entire systems.

Carol Olsen and her colleagues have been forthright in a commitment to focus initial efforts with school-site management and Early Childhood Facilitators in a relatively small number of schools. The original plan was to have a Facilitator work with teachers in one school for six months, and then move on to another school. But the Facilitators stayed in their first schools longer than was planned. One principal reflects on this change in strategy:

> "We began with an assumption that a Facilitator could turn a school around in six months and then move along to the next building. However, after the first two months we saw that there was no way that six months was enough time — that would have been only upping the ante on the workshop model. What was simply phenomenal to me that other principals said, 'let's do it right' rather than insisting on their fair share."

Spokane is now considering how to implement Facilitator and school-site planning initiatives across the entire system. One plan is to use federal Goals 2000 funds to provide intensive training to several "Focus Teachers" in each school building in math, reading, and science.

Spokane's change effort is notable in that it focuses on the most needy students in the city. It brings the best ideas in teaching and learning to children who have the most to gain, and it creates model classrooms in the most challenging settings.

Jana Oxenford has been Director of Elementary Education for the Osseo area schools in Maple Grove, Minnesota since 1991. Osseo is a suburban area northwest of Minneapolis that was once lush farmland but is now drawing commuters who work in the Twin Cities. Into a district with very traditional and standardized educational approaches, Jana has introduced a rich array of ideas, a belief in diversity of practice, and support to educators as they design their own innovative programs that vary from classroom to classroom and from school to school. In accomplishing this, Jana has demonstrated her respect for the difficulties involved in changing educational practices, her rejection of "one size fits all" solutions, and her support for change that starts at the classroom level.

Chapter 5: Schools and Classrooms Should Look Different

Background

On a cold winter day, snow blows over the school yards in Independent School District #279 about 30 miles northwest of Minneapolis. The shouts and laughter of children are loud and friendly as they climb snow mounds and fall into the soft piles. They are bundled up, and no one is complaining about the weather; in fact, children and school staff take Minnesota winters in stride, knowing that most blizzards won't keep them home and the schools will stay open. In the Osseo elementary schools, learning is taken seriously and the pervasive belief is that all children can succeed. It will take more than a blizzard to keep children out of the classroom.

This suburban locale, once lush farming country, is changing. Light industries are attracting workers and commuters can catch an express bus to the Twin Cities. On one side of town, referred to as the West side, new housing developments are being built near elementary schools that are imposing modern, brick and glass structures. The 13 elementary schools in this area serve an affluent, homogeneous population. The East side, which lies closer to the metropolitan area, has older, smaller homes, apartment complexes, and rental units. The seven East side elementary schools are sturdy, one-level structures that increasingly serve transient, low income, minority, and "at risk" students. Families are moving into the area from large urban centers, as far away as Chicago, and with them come some of the problems associated with poverty, crime, and drugs. This Osseo school district covers a huge area — 67 square miles in eight municipalities; 12,000 students attend its elementary schools.

In 1991, when Jana Oxenford was hired as the Director of Elementary Education, she was given a "carte blanche" by the Superintendent. According to many accounts, the school district was conservative in its outlook and traditional in its practices. A veteran principal describes the situation: "In 20 buildings, there was no curriculum variation. The social studies head said, 'In

November, you should all be on this page...'" Decisions were made at the central office; there were few opportunities for local buildings to innovate. Jana made it clear from the beginning that change was coming to the Osseo area schools.

In the matter of only a few years, the changes are myriad in classrooms, grade levels, and schools. Ten of the 20 schools have multi-age classrooms, the most pervasive innovation. But the majority of changes defy easy summary; in fact, promoting diversity of practice is one of Jana's strongly held beliefs. For example, at one elementary school, there are many options for students:

- All-day kindergarten.
- A standard half-day kindergarten with a Cooperative Kindergarten Special Education site program.
- Multi-age team teaching for kindergarten through 2nd grade.
- Standard 1st and 2nd grade classrooms with team planning and team teaching part of the time.
- A reading/language arts and math immersion class for 2nd grade.
- Rotation or "looping" classes where one or more teachers remains with the same group of students for two years.

How did these changes come about?

Chronology

Jana's first commitment was to empower the principals and teachers. Early in her teaching career, she had worked under a principal who did not offer support and that experience taught her "how if felt not to be empowered." Furthermore, her graduate training in site-based management supported her conviction that educators were professionals who could make good decisions. Thus, one of her first steps in Osseo was to abolish "time specific," the district policy specifying that certain subjects would be taught at specific times of the day. One teacher insisted that Jana "put this change in writing" because she was "scared of getting in trouble" and could hardly believe that teachers were being given permission to plan their instructional day.

From the beginning, Jana created forums for educators to learn together, share ideas, and make informed decisions. At her monthly administrators' meeting — which she renamed Teaching/Learning groups — she distributed articles and books for discussion. Recent readings include Steven Covey's *7 Principles of Effective Leadership* and Howard Gardner's book on multiple intelligences. Under Jana's predecessor, the administrators' meetings had been "elitist," only for principals. She decided to open them up, to include the supervisors of the special curriculum areas (such as music and physical education) and other central office administrators. In this way, she made it clear that the administrators were a team and had to work together.

Jana also began a weekly bulletin for principals that included research articles on leadership, site based management, classroom instruction and other topics. She makes a point of underlining certain sections to draw attention to what is most important. Sometimes the principals reprint these articles (including the underlines) in the school bulletin for teachers to read. Once she put together a collection of summer reading materials for principals, not expecting anyone to read all of them, but "the message is that I value research and data and keeping current." Recently, as part of a technology grant, she supplied principals with laptops (even though some objected on the

grounds of their poor computer skills). She wants them to keep data on their schools to use in decision making and she believes that if the principals lead, there will be technology in the schools.

Reflecting on her work with principals, Jana says they are key to bringing about changes in schools. If they are not willing to try an innovation, it won't happen. Consequently, much of her effort has been with principals. Jana describes her role with them:

> "I believe I'm a facilitator and collaborator. I want to broaden their knowledge base so they can become motivators and innovators. Each person has wonderful characteristics and I try to tap into them. We can value everyone."

But Jana's style took some getting used to. As one principal says:

> "It's a major shift from the traditional hierarchy. Jana's definitely in charge, but she goes to the level of children and families. This was hard for me at first. The teachers in my building were used to a hierarchy and so was I."

All along, Jana has supported teachers in numerous ways and has been perceived as a strong teacher advocate. In response to teachers' interest in multi age groupings (MAGs), Jana created a district-wide study group. Fifty teachers came to the first MAG meeting; Jana met with them once a month and gave them relevant articles to read. She describes these sessions as honest talk about the "pros and cons." None of the teachers had ever seen MAGs, so she arranged for release time to visit MAGs in other districts.

At the end of that first year, teachers in an East side school were eager to implement MAGs. They received a planning grant from the district to pay for their time over the summer preparing materials; then they piloted a mix of kindergarten and first grade students. In 1995-96, the teachers were awarded another grant for over $6,000 in order to expand the multi-age model to kindergarten through grade two and to implement authentic assessment. The study group continues, and the pioneering MAG teachers share their experience with the others. MAGs are now being implemented in some intermediate grades and at several West side schools.

Incorporating MAGs into the Osseo area schools was a priority for Jana. She explains why:

> "MAGs for me are the key. For some reason, when a teacher teaches a grade level, she teaches grade level specific content/objectives. But when a teacher teaches a MAG, she teaches objectives/content a grade level below and above, appropriate to need. Teachers expand their thinking and philosophy of the needs of children."

MAGs have been the primary avenue for changing teaching practice in the Osseo area classrooms. However, in customary fashion, Jana has not forced them on any teachers, principals, or parents. Rather, interested educators have taken the initiative to implement them.

From the beginning, Jana wanted to be a "hands-on" administrator and know what was happening in classrooms. She explains, "I spend a lot of time in buildings. That's where the action is." She initiated "fireside chats" in each school; all teachers attend, even though it's voluntary, because "no one wants to miss anything." These dialogues between Jana and staff range from gripe sessions to discussions about the district's new report card. She also holds district-wide grade level meetings several times a year. When Jana visits a classroom, she gets involved. She sits

on the floor with kindergarten children during story time; she engages fourth graders in conversation about what they are doing. Clearly, she is at ease and enjoying herself as well as learning first-hand about the quality of children's education in Osseo.

Her first year in the district, Jana decided to work closely with the kindergarten teachers. Prior to becoming Director of Elementary Education in the Osseo area, she had been a teacher, principal, and school district administrator in Missouri. She was considered an "outsider" by many in Osseo. Although she had taught different grade levels in Missouri, she loved teaching kindergarten best and knew she could easily establish credibility with the kindergarten teachers in Osseo. Some teachers were interested in all day/expanded day kindergartens: Jana set up a study group and the next year, these innovations were tried in several kindergarten programs. Another study group developed a kindergarten assessment that focused on visual and auditory skills, language, and number sense. Jana worked with the teachers to make packets for parents of activities they could do at home with their children. Over the course of their weekly meetings, Jana observed that the "teachers saw I had an allegiance to them." She has continued to forge an alliance with teachers; she leads staff development sessions in the summer to prepare teachers to implement an innovation the next fall; she has an open-door policy and staff are welcome to talk with her at any time (and they do).

Under Jana's leadership, the Osseo district has begun to change its assessment system. Two years ago, she began to meet with a district-wide team to develop a new Progress Reporting System. The team identified learner outcomes for kindergarten through grade six. Continuums are used to show the progress a child is making toward achieving year end grade level standards. When Jana urged some of the preschool and kindergarten teachers to participate in the state's pilot project on portfolio and developmental checklists (based on the Work Sampling System developed by Stan Meisels in Ann Arbor, Michigan), this added momentum to the district's efforts to change its assessment and reporting procedures. Although Jana did not put assessment at the top of her agenda initially, it has become a recent focus for change.

Being an early childhood educator, Jana has always envisioned a seamless approach to early childhood and elementary education, a continuum of children's learning. An early decision she made was to bring the state-funded Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programs into the elementary education division. In other school districts, ECFE

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Psychologist and theorist Abraham Maslow argues that everyone seeks to satisfy a progression of lower to higher level needs. Once any level of needs is met, it becomes less important as a motivational force. From lower to higher, the needs are:

- Physical needs for food, shelter, clothing, and health
- Safety, security, stability, and freedom from fear
- Feelings of belonging and of being loved
- Confidence in oneself and respect for others
- Self-actualization, which is a sense of fulfillment and a reaching of one's potential.

Educators use this concept to understand what they need to provide for children, as well as a way to explain their approaches to parents and others.

is under the community education division. Jana included the ECFE Director in the administrators' meetings; as a result, the Director has gained visibility and credibility in the community and with the principals. Under Jana's initiative, many of the ECFE classrooms are placed in school buildings (both East and West side); ECFE staff are included in the buildings' faculty meetings; sometimes, an ECFE program and a kindergarten program plan joint activities. Jana has thrown her whole-hearted support behind the ECFE's expansion – more children are being served; more family literacy classes are being offered; the office was moved to a centralized location.

Not only has Jana created mechanisms to empower educators, she has provided a rationale for change. She argues that "equal treatment" for all students is actually "unequal treatment." When Jana arrived in the Osseo district, school staff were very concerned that many East side students were not learning to their potential and not succeeding in school. Yet, they were being taught the same way and receiving the same resources as the West side students. The demands of the East side schools were different and therefore, these schools needed a greater allocation of resources and targeted strategies. Jana puts it simply: "unequal is fair."

Related to this idea is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This hierarchy offers a way of conceptualizing children's needs, starting with the most basic physical needs for food, shelter, clothing and health, and progressing to the need for safety; belonging and love; self esteem; and at the top, self actualization. Although Jana was not solely responsible for introducing Maslow's hierarchy in Osseo, she has used it to provide a frame of reference and a common language throughout the district. That is, changes that are happening in the schools and in the classrooms are happening for a reason — because they address children's needs in a progressive fashion. When state legislators came to visit the East side schools recently, they were given a copy of Maslow's hierarchy and told how the various educational programs met children's needs at all levels.

Effects and Outcomes

Jana is an outspoken proponent of diverse educational practices. A recurring phrase in her conversations is "no one size fits all;" parents, children, and teachers need options. Her only caveat is that they be in the best interests of children. A principal affirmed: "If you're there for kids and support them, not just reinventing what's already been tried, Jana will support you. She has a 'can do' attitude." This attitude has made it possible for a vast and varied number of changes to take hold in the 20 elementary schools.

The fall '96 newsletter, put out by Jana, lists new programs in each school, including:

- A student volunteer program to help students feel more involved and connected with their school.
- A personal problem-solving approach that emphasizes taking alternative steps.
- An interpretative trail system which connects prairie, marsh, and woodland areas.
- A Language Cognition Specialist to work with kindergarten through first grade students and their teachers.

Some schools provide a breakfast program and a health services specialist to meet children's basic needs; a behavior intervention program (which has lowered suspensions dramatically) creates a safer learning environment in another school. The "7 SMARTS" program (derived from the theory of multiple intelligences) and school-wide enrichment programs support children's need

for self-actualization. Jana writes in the newsletter, "I applaud all these differences because it's those differences that are meeting the needs of the students, parents, and teachers in each individual building."

The variety across the district is mirrored in the variety within certain schools. Next door to one another, kindergarten teachers are teaching with very different schedules and classroom arrangements; yet, they still work together as a grade level. In keeping with Jana's philosophy, all these options are legitimate and parents are allowed to choose which classroom setting is most appropriate for their child. At this school, teachers were awarded six block grants, totaling $37,000 to implement classroom innovations during the 1995-96 school year.

The "immersion classroom" is an innovation Jana brought with her from Missouri. She views it as an alternative to retention. Students who are one or two years below grade level receive five hours of reading and one hour of math every day for one year in a self-contained classroom. Teachers volunteered for the immersion classrooms and over the summer were trained by Jana herself. She recalls how the teachers asked, "What do I have to give up in the immersion classroom?" Jana answered, "Everything!" The focus is on teaching the children different reading strategies, incorporating whole language, phonics, and multi-sensory approaches. As is typical in the Osseo schools, different schools are implementing the immersion strategy in somewhat different ways; at one, the immersion classes are at grades two and four; at another building, grades three and four.

Jana has not favored a single pedagogical approach, teaching method, or curriculum model. Across the district and even within one school, some teachers rely primarily on trade books, others on a literature-based series for reading instruction; at the same grade level, some use learning centers, others don't; some emphasize integrated curriculum, others don't. An East side principal praises Jana's approach:

> "I was so frustrated when the District regarded us as the same. Jana's greatest contribution is that we all don't have to be the same. It's OK if some have more site-based management... Now principals can take ownership of the curriculum. If we see needs, implementation is our business. We'll make adjustments and Jana will support us."

Jana's insistence that "no one size fits all" has become part of the culture of the Osseo schools. In 10 of the elementary schools, on both the East and West sides, there are MAGs. It is the most pervasive innovation in the Osseo district. MAG teachers describe the positive effects on the children:

> "Kindergartners who are struggling with writing can do better with models who are more advanced."

> "A big change was in behavior. Kids who had trouble in a self-contained classroom could take on a new role. Struggling first graders could be responsible with kindergartners and that did a lot for their self esteem."

> "I'm teaching higher expectations than in previous kindergartens I taught. They can do it. My expectations are geared to individual children."

> "With children who've been here since kindergarten, we know them well. They're at Maslow's hierarchy of belonging."

There is tremendous interest in MAGs throughout the district. At one East side school, the principal says that all the teachers in grades four, five, and six want to implement MAGs. But that would undermine one of Jana's tenets that "no one size fits all." Parents and students would be left with no other options (such as a self-contained classroom). So the principal is considering asking Jana about becoming a magnet school and offering all MAGs.

Jana' strong advocacy for change has made a difference in educators' thinking. Principals from the East side are excited and enthusiastic about their schools; what one called the "armpit school of the district" is now one of the leaders. Teachers used to ask to be transferred from the East side schools; in the last few years, the exodus has stopped and some West side staff have asked to work on the East side. There does not appear to be resentment that some schools are getting more funding or resources than others. A principal at one of the newest West side schools explains, "When the PTA here raises $4,800 from a book fair, but an East side school makes only $600, then something has to be done to help them." Administrators describe Jana as "fair," not one to play favorites. A West side principal affirms that resources have been made available to all Osseo schools and that all schools have benefitted from Jana's leadership:

> "Money brings people together. It had been divisive. But Jana encouraged teachers everywhere to write grants and they feel they have a license to do something different. The previous person in Jana's spot couldn't let people go. Now I have support to do what I want to do..."

Yet, there are others who think the East/West differences remain problematic. One administrator alludes to "unspoken tension" between the East and West sides, even though individuals may be collegial with one another. An East side principal recounts feeling out of place at the district-wide principals' meetings, because "they didn't have any comprehension of my school." Recently, the seven East side principals decided to have a breakfast meeting to discuss their particular concerns.

For the most part, the community has reacted positively to Jana's efforts to bring about change. Jana and building staff have meetings where parents can learn about options in the schools' programs; she is very clear that parents must be involved in decision making. Jana thinks the East side parents are able to take risks and try something new, because so many of them experienced school failure. They want something different for their children. Here, change has been more rapid and far-reaching than on the West side where parents are more invested in the status quo according to Jana and other administrators. Parents on the West side have sometimes questioned why more district monies were going to the East side schools. Jana has explained that some of the East side children's more basic needs had to be met, using Maslow's hierarchy as a way to show the importance of this. "Then they understood."

When a new Progress Reporting system replaced the standard report cards in 1995, the Superintendent said he received no complaints from parents. He gave Jana full credit, because she had involved teachers in designing it and had discussed the changes with parents at each school. There is no history of bitter community battles or hostile parent groups confronting the school

system. Rather, parent involvement in the schools is high and the community seems satisfied with the schools.

Finally — have the innovations paid off for the children? Each innovation has an evaluation built into it. The children in the expanded day kindergarten and in the MAGs will be compared to their classmates on criterion-referenced measures. Some initial test results are encouraging; kindergartners in a language intensive program have shown gains in reading readiness and number recognition; older students in the immersion classes have also shown improvement on standardized measures. Throughout the district, administrators are acutely aware of how the legislature and public hold schools accountable; educators have to show that programs are benefitting students. Over and over, principals say that they're "dedicated to data-driven decision making." An East side principal attests to how teachers' views have changed:

> "Now teachers value data. They used to say 'we feel...' when they made a pitch for an educational program, and it came across as whining. Now we use data. There are problems all over the world so we have to have supporting data to make our case for funding."

But, as in many school districts, teachers attest to positive program effects on children that aren't so easily measured. A MAG teacher notes, "We like the emotional growth we see. There have been big changes in behavior. Kids who had trouble in a self-contained classroom could take on a new role. Struggling first graders can be responsible with kindergartners, and that does a lot for their self esteem." She adds that if the academic test results are not high, they will do action research and make adjustments in the program.

Lessons and Implications

Jana is praised as a wonderful "mentor" by many educators in Osseo. The Superintendent reflects, "When we hired Jana, we were looking for someone with good ideas who could help others learn them." She has accomplished that by creating a rich learning environment for teachers and principals. She shares written material (no doubt, being an avid reader herself), she forms discussion groups, she arranges for visits to see new practices. She expects educators to stretch their minds and if necessary, shift their paradigms.

1. ***A key to Jana's success is her great respect for the process of change.*** Reflecting on her strategy for dealing with staff who don't want to try something new, she affirms, "I'll wait... they'll get there." When Jana observes an inappropriate teaching practice in an Osseo kindergarten, she winces. She'll handle it, she says, "By talking about it with the teacher and discussing how she can do things differently." Her response is non-threatening to teachers; she is their advocate not their critic. Because Jana is accepting, patient, and calm, educators in Osseo are eager to hear what she has to say. Jana will pave the way, but she won't force anyone to take a step.

For administrators in other districts, this approach may seem unusual, even ineffectual in the long run. But in the culture of Osseo, this approach works. A more head-on, authoritarian approach would backfire. Jana refers to the notion of "Minnesota nice," the gentle, polite, respectful way that locals act (and expect others to). Jana has been a good match for the Osseo culture. The Superintendent explains, "You can't fit our culture and be a controlling person. You have to be nurturing, cooperative like Jana."

2. ***Jana is an outspoken advocate of diverse educational practices.*** Schools and classrooms should look different, to address the particular needs of a community and a group of students. Jana rejects a cookie-cutter approach. Uniformity and conformity are not desired, but this does not mean that anything goes. Jana emphasizes accountability. First, educational decisions must be grounded in knowledge and research. Quick fixes and easy answers are not condoned. Then, innovations must be shown to work — and here, data must be gathered — or else something needs to change. Jana requires that educators act in a responsible way and in her view, they are ultimately accountable to the children. Jana's colleagues say that her motives are above reproach — the bottom line is what's going to help the children learn and be successful.

Although Jana herself has not been directly responsible for obtaining extra funding for the schools, she is very clear about using monies to provide teachers with tangible support for implementation. She has used funds to purchase classroom materials or hire substitutes so teachers can attend a conference. Among the teachers and principals, Jana is perceived as someone who provides the financial resources to back them up. There is no hint of money ill-spent or wasted on educational programs that won't work or that aren't supported by teachers and principals.

3. ***Jana supports grass-roots change, from the bottom up, beginning at the classroom level.*** Jana describes her approach to change this way: "You get info from outside the district but develop resources from within." As an administrator, she has relied little on outside consultants to leverage change. Rather, Jana's strategy has been to make written information available and send staff to conferences, then expect them to be as well-informed and knowledgeable as the "experts." They are the ones who make the decisions and decide what will work in their schools. As a result, the Osseo educators feel they are competent and capable; they are treated with respect and given authority.

4. ***Jana's style of leadership is subtle.*** As she herself admits, she is delighted when others — from the Superintendent to principals to classroom teachers — get the credit for changes she initiated. When the teachers and parents at one school wanted a multi-age classroom, and the principal didn't, Jana showed her research articles. According to Jana, soon the principal's mentality changed and she claimed ownership of the MAG innovation.

Jana is a modest person who radiates quiet confidence. One administrator described her as "canny — someone who really knows how to grease the skids" and a MAG teacher offered this praise: "She was always there, behind the scenes, getting things done we have no control over, like providing us with extra staffing for the classroom." Jana is a problem-solver; when a teacher or principal suggests that something can't be done because of the "system," Jana gently inquires, "What about the system is holding you back? We can change the system..." And then she asks, "How can I help you?" And she really means it!

Karen McIntyre is a former childcare director who was hired by the Pittsburgh school system in 1986 to start two school-based preschool programs. Since then, she has become a powerful figure as an administrator of a wide range of programs in the district. Karen's major accomplishments have been to coordinate various programs that serve children of ages three to eight, to hold all of them to the same high standards of teaching and learning, to provide substantial assistance for each to improve, and to give each site the flexibility to develop its own strategies and programs. In doing all of this, she has worked with a clear focus and direction, has been inclusive in bringing many kinds of educators into the process, has made it a point to identify barriers and ways around them, and has built a learning community for professionals as well as children.

Chapter 6: Early Childhood Leads the Way

Pittsburgh has been described as a great big small town. Despite a population of 2.3 million, it maintains a close-knit — if not provincial — feel across its many neighborhoods of different ethnic groups. But the city has established its place on the cultural and educational maps, boasting fine museums and arts institutions, as well as excellent universities and landmark teacher training efforts. Bolstered by a strong foundation community including the likes of Heinz, Mellon, and Toyota, Pittsburgh has the resources to make things happen. It is a do-it-yourself town, inventing its own unique solutions rather than simply adopting the models of others, and this strategy is strongly in evidence in its approach to education. The home of such early childhood luminaries as Mr. Rogers and Dr. Spock, Pittsburgh coaxes and preaches its concern for the very young right across the airwaves and pages of its public school system.

This is a story of the leadership of Karen McIntyre and her staff, who started ten years ago to help a small number of prekindergarten programs in Pittsburgh to improve. Eventually, this effort would grow into a broad initiative to restructure elementary schools across the city. It would also influence educational reform at all grade levels in the school system.

The story begins when former school Superintendent Dick Wallace and Deputy (now Superintendent) Louise Brennen found themselves wondering about the emotional climate at the elementary schools that they visited. The children didn't look happy and didn't appear to be enjoying school. Sensing that something wasn't right, the system officials convened a broad-based group to examine the subject of early childhood education. The group's conclusion was that the district should reach out to children at an earlier age and help prepare them for schooling. The system could do this by establishing preschool classrooms.

Chronology

Phase One: Providing A Firm Foundation in Prekindergarten Classes. Enter Karen McIntyre, an early childhood advocate from a local college and the administrator of one of the first private preschool programs in the area to achieve accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Karen approached the school system to express her concern about the system getting involved in preschool education when so much remained to be improved about the existing programs for children in kindergarten through grade three. So the school system hired her.

Karen came on board in June of 1986 with no teachers, equipment, or enrolled children and was given the task of opening two public school preschool programs in September. She recalls that Superintendent Wallace challenged her to create the best possible program, but left it up to her to set specific priorities. She hired two outstanding teachers, one for each school, and parents waited in long lines the night before registration seeking to enroll their children in both programs.

From the beginning, Karen knew that she wanted to focus on four main elements of a good early childhood program:

- An appropriate curriculum and engaging instructional practice
- An authentic assessment of children's progress
- Staff development
- Public support and parent involvement

Karen assembled a small team of colleagues to provide leadership and to work with schools on different issues. Carol Barone-Martin was brought in to focus on parent involvement, and she sponsored an array of options for parental engagement with schools — including coffee groups and workshops on parenting issues, open classrooms where parents could observe and volunteer, and surveys to assess parental views and interests. Offering this diversity of options was effective in engaging parental interest and participation in school programs.

Donna Bickel, from the University of Pittsburgh, provided leadership on evaluation and assessment strategies. Her job was to show that early childhood programs were making a difference. Initially, the administration called for using achievement tests to assess whether funds spent on preschool programs resulted in better achievement for children.

Karen's next challenge was to help the Board of Education to understand that they *already* operated preschool programs — in existing school-based child care and Head Start classrooms. These two pre-existing programs needed to be linked in terms of philosophy, practice, and evaluation with the newer programs she was establishing.

In October, 1988, Karen was assigned responsibility for all three sets of preschool programs. She stressed the need for these programs to have the same high standards in terms of teacher qualifications, curriculum, and the environment. She monitored these aspects with an eye to NAEYC standards. Says Karen, "It was very helpful to have the NAEYC standards because they were supported by research. It showed that the new programs were not "off the wall." Our major goal was consistency and continuity between and among the preschool programs and up and into the primary grades."

Another priority was to create a stronger connection between preschool programs and their host schools. A Head Start leader recalls that, at the time, early childhood programs were "step-children" — they were considered more as "outside entities who rented space" than as professionals with the same mission as elementary school teachers. She credits Karen with creating a more inclusive, respectful climate that made her staff feel like equal partners in the district's early childhood efforts.

Through this early phase of program development, Karen took care to acknowledge and involve the broader early childhood community in Pittsburgh. An early childhood leader at the University of Pittsburgh commented:

> "Karen has credibility with both the schools and the larger child care and early education community. She had a healthy respect for the queasiness of other early childhood people towards the school system and her intuitive strategy was always to draw in community programs rather than to usurp their territory. I recall a series of workshops she organized for primary grade, child care, and Head Start teachers to bring people together. Teachers received credits towards an incentive of choosing free teaching materials from a Board of Education warehouse. Teachers were so flustered about all the things being available in one place that they kept walking around and couldn't decide what to choose!"

Phase Two: Extending Developmentally Appropriate Practice into Primary Grades. In the first phase of her work, Karen focused primarily on improving preschool programs for four-year-olds. Then she began to expand her work by introducing developmentally appropriate practices into the school system's primary grades. This effort began in the early 1990's, when another broad-based "let's re-examine where we are" early childhood committee was convened by the school system. This group produced an *Early Childhood Resource Guide* that provided an approach to curriculum based on NAEYC standards. The Board of Education also formally adopted a philosophy of principles and practice for early childhood programs serving three- to eight-year-olds as recommended by NAEYC.

Karen recalls presenting NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice Guidelines to a meeting of the Superintendent's cabinet of top administrators. The publication contrasts exemplary and inappropriate classroom practices. Superintendent Wallace commented that "I'll be happy if we get to the staples," meaning that they'd be lucky to get halfway down the road towards establishing exemplary practices — and possibly expressing his initial skepticism about the link between early childhood principles and higher achievement for students.

The Board's action in support of early childhood practice was critically important and provided the justification for all that was to follow. Even now, staff members wonder whether the Board realized the implications of such a move. The school system was still very locked into discrete content standards. At the central office, each content area had a Division Director who developed a sequenced curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12. Many principals wanted child development classrooms to prepare children for school, but they didn't see any need to change the nature of their primary grade programs. Under these conditions, kindergarten and primary grade teachers felt they had to "sneak around" in order to do good early childhood practice, but they began to see Karen as a leader they could rally around for support. At the same time,

other Division Directors expressed interest in learning more about and supporting appropriate early childhood experiences.

A continuing challenge was to accurately represent good early childhood practice in the face of critics who felt that its emphasis on children's play was frivolous. Karen brought in a world-renowned educator and researcher, Sara Smilansky, to help communicate the value and types of children's play. She also explained the role of teachers in assessing and helping children to learn from their play and work.

Karen and the early childhood staff provided support to teachers in a variety of ways. Pittsburgh has a history of investing in staff development and has found many ways to use peer teachers as resources. Instructional Team Teacher Leaders in every school observe and help other teachers as peer coaches. In collaboration with the Office of Staff Development, Demonstration Teachers were designated as part of the primary grade reform initiative to co-teach and model teach in select buildings. Partner Teachers were then named as an additional strategy for changing teaching practices in the primary grades. Partner Teachers work full time as master and mentor teachers, helping with self-assessment, co-teaching, classroom observation, and a variety of other methods. They also work as substitutes so that regular teachers can attend other training sessions. Regular meetings were held between Partner Teachers and principals to create a supportive climate for classroom change.

Demonstration Teachers created video tapes that principals used to improve their skills in observing and assessing classroom practices. Building administrators also re-examined the district's teacher evaluation framework, which was built around a teaching model that was inconsistent with developmentally appropriate

Work/Sampling: An Assessment Technique

Work/Sampling is a system, developed at the University of Michigan by Sam Meisels and his colleagues, Judy Jablon and others, for teachers to use in assessing children in preschool through grade five. The system relies on teachers' observations of their students in actual classroom situations, as well as collections of children's work.

The Work/Sampling System has three parts:

- **Developmental Guidelines and Checklists** provide a way for teachers to record their observations about each student's progress. The checklists are based on developmentally appropriate expectations for children at each age or grade level.
- **Portfolios** are collected and designed by the teacher and the student. They are collections of children's work that illustrate students' efforts, progress, and achievements.
- **Summary Reports** are completed by the teacher three times a year to report students' progress to families and to the school.

The Work/Sampling System looks for progress in the areas of Personal and Social Development, Language and Literacy, Mathematical Thinking, Scientific Thinking, Social Studies, the Arts, and Physical Development. Students' skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments are reviewed in each of these areas.

practice. Gradually, principals came to understand that consistency and continuity in educational practice from preschool up into the primary grades is crucial and that all of these programs needed to become more developmentally appropriate.

Meanwhile, work was continuing to support parent involvement and education. Working with Head Start and other community programs, Karen, working with Phil Parr in the Office of Strategic Planning and Development, helped to stimulate the development of a set of family support centers in the school system and several family literacy initiatives with support from federal Even Start and Toyota Foundation funding.

Phase Three: Restructuring Entire Schools. The third phase of Karen McIntyre's work is the most ambitious and complex. With the endorsement of Superintendent Louise Brennen and the assistance of Phil Parr's office, she focused on restructuring entire schools by introducing a new set of more intensive and sophisticated efforts to improve curriculum, teaching, and assessment. Karen orchestrated the introduction of new model programs from outside sources, a new emphasis on school-site planning and decision making, and new investments aimed at strengthening schools' capacities to continue to improve.

Karen selected two major program models as the cornerstones for this phase of work. One model was the Work/Sampling System of assessment. The issue of assessment had been raised by a district-wide task force, including national experts, that recommended sweeping changes in assessment practices, including minimized reliance on standardized achievement testing for grades kindergarten through three. A committee, including content area curriculum directors, recommended a pilot program using the Work/Sampling System. A Board action gave these schools the right to suspend standardized tests and retention in grades one through three. Previously, there had been high levels of retention in the primary grades, since retention was the automatic consequence of failing reading and math. Work/Sampling was seen as a way of improving assessment and thus was set up as a pilot project in seven schools for three years. Educators hoped that this improved assessment would remove one of the barriers for teachers in providing better programs for children. Karen insists that an important part of bringing about change is to identify the barriers and find a way around them. Her consistent mantra is "We can change it."

The second discrete initiative was Vision 21, a project of the Bank Street College in New York City that helps kindergarten and primary grade teachers re-examine classroom environments, curricula, and teaching strategies. Vision 21 applies principles of child development and developmentally appropriate practice through a strong emphasis on curriculum content. The centerpiece of the initiative is to approach the teaching of social studies, science, and other subjects and skills through long-term thematic projects that emphasize investigative learning. Themes such as the post office, restaurants, bakeries, cities, and arctic and rain forest environments involve math, reading, and cooperative learning. As one principal comments, Vision 21 was an ideal next step for improving classroom practice in Pittsburgh:

> "What's new and different with Vision 21 is the emphasis on content. Up until now, we couldn't take on curriculum content without stepping on other toes in the central office. The Vision 21 effort turned the light bulb on for many teachers because it is so concrete."

Vision 21 began as a pilot in two schools and expanded to six sites in the next year. As often happens in Pittsburgh, this initiative built on past efforts in staff development and supporting more developmentally appropriate practices. The partnership with Bank Street took staff development to a more intensive level by bringing Judith Gold, a senior faculty member from Bank Street, to Pittsburgh every other week for an entire year. She met with each individual teacher for observation, demonstration teaching, or coaching sessions. As one principal commented:

> "As with other initiatives, administrative buy-in at the top has been crucial, as has been a commitment of resources to provide persistent support and reinforcement. Every other week teachers have the Bank Street people in their classes and 'in their face' with the same message. Judith confers with each teacher and spends time in each classroom. She has really gained respect through demonstration teaching, where teachers can watch her work with their own class."

One finds rich evidence of Vision 21 in classrooms — taking the form of large construction projects, such as a full-sized igloo built from newspapers on a wooden frame or a huge paper mache model of rivers and buildings. There are large scale drawings, maps of neighborhoods and river systems, and charts of webbed relationships such as food chains. Students begin many projects by creating lists of what they know and want to find out about a theme. Thematic projects often build on prior work, such as a sequence that began with a unit on Pittsburgh and its rivers and led to a unit about five other cities, exploring the overarching question of what it takes for a city to survive. Many teachers create a photo album about each project to record the process and products.

Karen also provided support for building administrators. As the process evolved, school principals who were responsible for evaluating teachers were now being asked to assume new roles as peer coaches and colleagues. Principals went to Ann Arbor for training on Work/Sampling and also visited Bank Street to learn more about Vision 21.

While Vision 21 required an intensive use of outside consultants, Karen also created a strategy to build schools' internal capacity to continue to improve. Donna Bickel and Carol Barone-Martin work as co-facilitators with the Vision 21 and Work/Sampling lead consultants, and other local teachers provide supplementary support:

> "We work as partners with Judith Gold and Sally Rifugiato on Vision 21 and Judy Jablon on Work/Sampling. They trained us and we confer with them regularly. We worked together to train principals, Instructional Teacher Leaders, and the central staff who are monitoring the initiative."

As more elementary schools were brought into the early childhood effort, it became clear that the schools were at different stages in the reform process and needed different staff development approaches. To cope with these differences, seven schools formed site-based collaborative teams, consisting of the principal, the early childhood support team, the primary instructional leader, and anyone else who seemed appropriate. Three schools were restructured by teams of teachers and administrators writing plans in a competitive process. This structure became the prototype for site-based decision making initiatives in individual schools. One of the themes to emerge from this process is that there are many ways to create successful programs and many models to choose from, each with its own level of risk, but that parents and the community must be part of the change process.

During this period, the system went through a leadership transition as Superintendent Wallace retired and Louise Brennen was selected as his successor. Next, a sweeping school system reorganization gave Karen new duties. She was to head up the School Support division, one of seven new district offices. All former Division Directors now reported to her. Her division, School Support, had more than 300 employees and contained all of the functions believed to support school decision making, including early childhood education, multicultural education, staff development, research and evaluation, vocational education, special education, all curriculum content areas, and all federal programs. From this new vantage point and reflecting on her experiences with improving early childhood programs, Karen is positioned to guide improvement efforts across the entire range and scope of the Pittsburgh public schools.

Planning for the future involves a process of facing up to core challenges that have been identified in earlier efforts and creating new methods and strategies. The district is expanding site-based planning and decision making, along with re-examining the roles of the central office and external models and trainers. Fifteen schools are developing Comprehensive Educational Improvement Plans and considering the adoption of Vision 21 and Work/Sampling among other models to guide their effort.

Within this initiative, observers note that new demands are being placed on both building administrators and central office staff:

> "We keep repeating to principals that 'you are responsible and accountable for your school' and to call us if they need help. But principals can recall times when they have had their wrists slapped for taking risks, so they are often cautious in testing new ideas. There have been serious consequences — some people have been transferred and others have been publicly humiliated. Many times we have said we want them to take the initiative, but they have had to decipher what we were after and willing to support. So some have adopted a wait-and-see attitude, while others have hit the mark perfectly and ended up with all the perks."

Karen is seeking to strike a new balance in redefining the leadership role of the central office:

> "We're shifting the central office away from a program development orientation to serving as resource people. I'm shifting away from dreaming up programs and looking for which principal I can persuade or nudge to try them out. We're taking the different elements of our strategic plan and reviewing the types of assistance schools are asking us for."

Yet, as one principal wryly noted:

> "Site-based decision making is easy to say, but hard to do. It's hard to define new roles and it's hard for some central office staff to give up traditional control. You'll be going along and someone will say 'Stop!'"

At the same time, Karen is seeking to develop and use the capacity of peer principals and teachers rather than outside models and trainers:

> "We're trying to get away from external programs and focus more on our internal capacity. We're trying to discover from pilot sites the essential factors and most

> important stages in a process of making a model work. We're asking principals and teachers to reflect on those issues and use them in teams to talk with different stakeholder groups on what a model is, how long it takes, key obstacles, and what you can or can't compromise on. Ultimately we hope to have lead schools in different areas which we can pair up with others."

The Office of Strategic Planning and Development has worked with Karen to tap local foundations for funding to support staff development and the expansion of innovations from pilot sites to the overall district. In addition to local entities, the district has recently sought resources from national foundations such as The Pew Charitable Trust and the New American Schools Corporation to support its overall vision and strategic plan, with a special emphasis on building an overall infrastructure for human resource development.

Many people believe that the early childhood system has pushed improvement in the rest of the school district. "Best practices" in other levels of the system, including middle and secondary school portfolios and school-to-work initiatives in high school, are being derived in large part from what has been done in early childhood. Meanwhile, Karen and her staff continue carefully and confidently to accept public accountability, define new standards, improve teaching approaches, and discover genuine ways to evaluate students and their performance that will offer lessons about schools' efforts as well as children's work.

Effects and Outcomes in Two Schools

Zinnias, tomato blossoms, and marigolds wave at visitors as they enter the grounds of Fulton Elementary School. Blooming in an field that had been paved with asphalt, these flowers symbolize the rebirth of a school. The staff has introduced many innovations to renew the school's commitment to real learning and revitalize its connections with the surrounding community. Initiatives in place at Fulton include Vision 21, Work/Sampling, multi-age, non-graded groupings of students, and full inclusion of all students in the regular classroom. Principal Paula Howard explains that all of these initiatives were begun simultaneously — an amazing effort about which she has two thoughts: "Don't ever do it that way" and "If you weren't going to do it that way, how would you ever choose which thing to begin with?"

Restructuring at Fulton began in 1988, after a period of problems at the school, including a procession of seven different principals in the previous 14 years. Acting Principal Paul Howard was directed to close the school in October and engage in a process of re-planning the school's program, reconstituting its staff, and establishing new ties with parents and the community. In January, the building was re-opened as the Fulton Academy for Geography and Life Sciences. Seventeen of 20 teachers were new to the building, and Paula was appointed as Principal.

Parents were heavily involved in decision making at Fulton. Parents drove through a plan to open an additional building to relieve the school's overcrowding. When the school wanted to be part of the Work/Sampling assessment program, Paula recalls, "Parents went to the Board and demanded it saying, 'We don't have faith in looking for achievement from the standpoint of standardized tests.'" Principal Howard describes the PTO as fully integrated into the educational process. "When there's a problem, I tell the parents to come up with a solution." A group of parents accompanied the teachers to listen and read about the ungraded approach to teaching

children. Parents of children with special needs are pulled into the reform process by the school's emphasis on inclusion. Student assignments, which require them to study local issues and pull in material from their homes and neighborhoods, make the curriculum more accessible to parents.

A walk through Fulton yields plenty of evidence that something different is going on. Children are reading everywhere — in hallways, while walking, nestled in nooks and crannies, and even in classrooms. Signs, stories, pictures, and graphs document their studies of rivers, restaurants, and schools. In one classroom, children use workbenches instead of desks. They are anxious to tell visitors how they designed and constructed these benches themselves. In the process they considered various materials, measured and tried out ideas, acquired and learned to use tools, and eventually produced the functional masterpieces of which they are now so proud. The plentiful garden in front of the school was planted by the children and produces flowers, herbs, and vegetables that the children distribute to neighbors.

Paula tells a story about a group that was visiting the school. One participant was particularly impressed with the fact that every classroom has building blocks. It turned out that he was an architect and the principal designer of the airport, and the children were beside themselves when they found this out. They insisted that he stay and talk with them. It seems that they were designing a city, and they felt that they could really use his help.

> "Two years ago we had children sitting in individual desks, and teachers were used to passing conflict situations on to my office. Now I tell kids, teachers, and parents, 'you are responsible.' Teacher talk has changed. They used to point to their grade book and say 'so-and-so is failing.' Now they can talk about children as individuals."

This move to improve assessment at Fulton and at other schools in the district has taught Pittsburgh many lessons. One is that teachers need more staff development in both curriculum and assessment to make substantive change. Work/Sampling takes time to implement, but after four years, the district has discovered that students' portfolios are richer. It is clear that children have gained confidence in setting their own goals for learning, in their reflective capacity, and in expressing their ideas and opinions in writing. However, getting all teachers and children producing high-quality evidence of learning remains a challenge.

Paula credits Karen McIntyre with supporting her personal development as a leader and manager. Karen has been a key source of ideas and materials about the many approaches to school reform as Paula, her staff, and the community have wrestled with difficult questions surrounding retention, student achievement, meeting family needs, and other issues.

Fort Pitt Elementary is a second school that was restructured. It has used some of the same reform strategies as Fulton, but it also evolved based on the style and strengths of its building administrator. Fort Pitt is located in a neighborhood with high levels of poverty, and Louise Brennen appointed Gail Griffin, an administrator with a background in early childhood education, as its principal. The faculty was reconstituted by requiring staff members to reapply for their positions, and a cadre of new staff members was brought in. Gail began her work by emphasizing early childhood principles, focusing on the strengths of the African-American learner, and stressing the value of keeping children with the same teacher for several years.

One strong element in the Fort Pitt program today is a comprehensive set of early childhood services, including a full-day child care program, Head Start, prekindergarten, and special education classes. Services are thereby offered to nearly every child who will enter kindergarten. Children enjoy a smooth transition as they move from prekindergarten to primary grade classrooms in the same familiar facility. Teachers in the early childhood classrooms are full participants in Fort Pitt programs and community initiatives. Another early and ongoing practice at Fort Pitt is home visits. Each August, teachers visit every entering student in their home to begin the process of building relationships with children and their families.

Gail Griffin has also created a host of community partnerships, and as a result, more than 500 volunteers contribute to the Fort Pitt program. In return, the school serves the community through events such as a health fair and through sharing its building with community groups and programs. Recently, the community came together with professionals to build an outdoor play area for the children.

Teachers have become firm supporters of keeping children for several years:

> "I can't imagine working any other way. It takes me more than a year to really know some students, and I find some children who were terrors in kindergarten became my strongest leaders. Academically, you're not so caught up in making hasty judgments about a child's capabilities. Your rapport with parents gets stronger and stronger over the years. Many of our children come from homes without much stability, and I find that it takes many children six or seven months to bond with each other and with me. No wonder we never get anywhere in traditional graded classrooms! Children love to reminisce about experiences in prior years almost as they do with their own families."

Fort Pitt has also used Vision 21 and Work/Sampling, which are credited as valuable resources in improving classroom practice and staff morale and professionalism. Gail had begun an initiative on thematic units, but she found that teachers were struggling with many practical issues about how to frame and design units and activities. They wondered how long they should continue work on a given theme and how best to incorporate students questions and experiences in classroom routines. Accordingly, the intensive and personalized staff development from the Vision 21 team was timely and invaluable. As one teacher commented:

> "Regular visits from the Vision 21 team are very helpful, because unless you're video-taping yourself, you're never sure how well things are working. I'd think I was finished with a project, but Vision 21 staff would have many suggestions about how to extend a theme or create other ways to explore questions. They also hook us up with teachers in other schools, so that staff who are working on a common project can share ideas, materials, and resource people."

Similarly, adopting the Work/Sampling system has been an arduous but ultimately rewarding venture at Fort Pitt. Staff report that parents are responding well to the new forms of reporting on students' progress, particularly as they are able to see specific evidence of children's progress from one reporting period to the next.

Fulton and Fort Pitt are just two of many successful elementary schools in Pittsburgh, each with a unique focus and its own set of programs. Pittsburgh gives each school a wide range of discretion over precisely how it will meet its goals for early childhood within the context of its community. Individual schools may adopt some or all of the early childhood initiatives, which provides a highly variable picture in terms of focus, programs, and practice.

Lessons and Implications

Karen McIntyre has obviously done a number of things right in order to stimulate and nurture the growth of sound early childhood practice in Pittsburgh. She has provided a consistent focus on a concrete vision of engaging, student-centered, age-appropriate teaching and learning for young children from prekindergarten through elementary grades and beyond. She has retained a firm commitment to authentic assessment, professional development, and parent and community involvement. Like other leaders in this report, she has the ability to articulate a specific vision while allowing ownership to grow in teachers, principals, and parents through site-based decision making. Her sense of strategy allows initiatives to build on one other and create a strong sense of positive momentum and growing community of support for improving schools and classrooms.

Dubbed informally as the "Czar of Early Childhood," she is lauded by early childhood leaders for her ability to pull everyone in and not be territorial. And within the school system, teachers and principals such as Paula Howard cite her as a personal inspiration:

> "Karen has been pivotal as an advocate and a teacher. Years ago on an early childhood committee, she started me thinking about what developmentally appropriate practice really was. She plants seeds and gives tremendous support."

From this brief account of a rich history of change efforts, three more specific elements of Karen's leadership style seem to stand out.

1. ***Karen is an effective leader within a constellation of other leaders.*** Early childhood leadership is a many splendored thing in Pittsburgh. A local leader in the child care community comments on the unusual confluence of support for young children at the top echelons of the school system:

> "Ten years ago we had a very unusual Board of Education President, Jake Milliones, with an astounding depth of knowledge and passion for early childhood. He didn't see it narrowly as a job for schools. He supported on-site child care in businesses, and he had an instinct for the importance of play and active learning before he knew about developmentally appropriate practice. It wasn't unusual for him or the Superintendent to invite early childhood leaders to their offices. How often does that happen in most systems? So you had a group of high caliber people who were in tune with each other philosophically and were fun to work with. And that creates a positive aura, even with a huge school system, and allows an agenda to move."

Foundation and private sector leaders have also contributed to Pittsburgh's outstanding achievements in the area of early childhood. The Heinz Foundation spearheaded a number of efforts to enhance program quality and access to child care and prekindergarten services, including a mentoring

program for directors. Another impressive, still-unfolding endeavor was brought to fruition by a major community effort. The Early Childhood Initiative, a partnership of local foundations, the United Way of Allegheny County, and businesses has raised nearly $60 million over five years to double the amount of quality early childhood services for low income families through neighborhood-based planning efforts.

These successful and well-publicized efforts created a hospitable context for Karen's agenda of school-based early childhood improvements. In this context, Karen has made a difference by working skillfully and effectively with leaders above and below her in the school system hierarchy. She dovetailed her agenda within a progressive district's overall efforts to improve instruction and outcomes across the entire age- and grade-span of public education. She built support at the Board of Education level and made a convincing case to principals and teachers of the virtues of improving instruction according to the tenets of early childhood education. She was adept as a middle-level manager in responding to cues from superiors but taking full advantage of her own discretionary powers. She explains:

> "If you're not given an agenda, then you need to seize the opportunity to set direction. Dick and Louise were saying 'go for it,' while at an operational level, in some ways, they didn't know what 'go for it' meant. Their instinct was to pay attention to things other than achievement and they gave us the discretion to figure out the details while they watched how the movement evolved."

2. ***Karen provides leadership in making the most of both external and internal resources.*** Karen is adept and strategic in selecting and using outside experts and programs, yet she adapts these to local schools and people. Early on, she employed nationally known early childhood experts such as Larry Schweinhart, Anne Mitchell, Sara Smilansky, and Lilian Katz in various roles with the school board, principals, and teachers. Later, she brought in Work/Sampling and Vision 21. Pittsburgh has a sustained relationship with outside experts, and these experts work with the local facilitators who will help other schools to adopt innovations. As one observer noted:

> "People from the outside bring cachet through their reputations. But outside contributions have an impact because Karen has a coherent vision for improving instruction and a big picture perspective on strategy. She has the discernment to seek out people who understand classrooms and child development and who can work effectively in schools at various stages of development."

3. ***Karen works to build a learning community for professionals as well as for children.*** Pittsburgh has focused on training teachers to change their classroom environments, routines, and instructional practices. Outside experts guide teachers as they replace their old practices with new strategies. An important part of this process is creating a good learning environment for adults. One teacher at Fort Pitt Elementary put it like this:

> "This is my 30th year of teaching, and restructuring has really made me change. I had some fears going in about whether students would get everything they need. But their natural curiosity helps them reach for answers and they are becoming more responsible for their own learning. We're also understanding that teachers must do for ourselves what we expect of students, so we're being more responsible for our own learning and for seeking out resources."

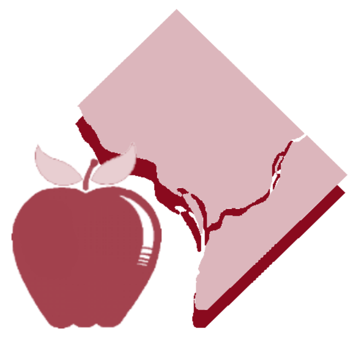
Paula Howard shared a similar perspective of her work with Vision 21:

> "Judith Gold has held me accountable to really looking at my own leadership. They tell you to reflect on everybody else — children and teachers — but if you don't do self-reflection, there's no change and you're not going to be successful in moving the agenda."

Donna Bickel shared another example of this process from a series of monthly Study Group meetings of teachers and principals involved with Vision 21 and Work/Sampling:

> "We discuss readings, exchange experiences, look at videos of classroom vignettes, and discuss what students are learning and how to improve instruction. One of the best things that can happen is when Judy Jablon says she doesn't understand what's going on in a video clip, or when she and I disagree on an issue. This helps teachers understand that it is OK to admit that they don't have all the answers, and that it's also OK to argue with a colleague. We are seeing real intellectual engagement by the teachers."

Clearly, Karen's stances and actions have contributed to a learning community in which early childhood is seen as state-of-the art educational practice, leading the way for improvement at other grade levels. In Pittsburgh, administrators and community leaders have come to view the early childhood program as a leader in blazing an educational trail for the future and playing a progressive role in the fundamental life of the community.



Maurice Sykes is Deputy Superintendent of the Center for Systemic Educational Change in the District of Columbia Public Schools. Maurice's accomplishments during his 16 years with the D.C. schools are myriad and impressive, as he has worked to bring good early childhood practices progressively into preschools, kindergartens, and elementary school classrooms from the first to the sixth grade. Maurice is a thoughtful, experienced, and inspirational leader who whose vision is informed by an abiding concern for all children's well being.

Chapter 7: Doing the Right Thing for Kids

Background

Maurice Sykes loves books, art, and toys. The multi-colored sign that hangs to the right of his office door reads "I play for a living." This greeting suggests to visitors that the space that they are about to enter, albeit a school district office, is anything but traditional and bureaucratic.

The bookshelves hold volumes about early childhood development, educational leadership and change theory, black history and culture, children's literature, and just about every national educational report and study since *A Nation at Risk*. The paintings, the objects d'art from around the world, and the replica jukebox that hangs on the wall behind his desk represent an eclectic mix of funk and elegance that is engaging and aesthetically pleasing. Visitors are struck by the purposeful design of the office and its strong focus on the sights and sounds of children.

Many of the items in Maurice's office are gifts that teachers and staff have presented to him at the District's Annual Early Years Institute. One year, it was an educational toy composed of colored beads on a frame with the inscription "For Your Vision and Guidance Towards Doing the Right Thing for Children." Another year, it was an electric train, each car representing one of the DCPS programs with an engine labeled "The Center for Systemic Educational Change." With the engineer's cap on his head and his train whistle tooting away, Maurice joked with the Institute audience, "Get on board or get off the track — you'll get run over."

One year, he was given an exquisite kaleidoscope that bore inscription "Visionary Leader." Maurice often hands out kaleidoscopes at meetings and uses its image on all the Center's publications. The kaleidoscope represents his vision of the ever-changing world that the students will face as adults in the 21st century, and the promise of a future that is bright and beautiful.

In Maurice's 15 years with DCPS, he has been a genius at finding ways to represent his ideas. He uses songs, symbols, and slogans to communicate his vision of change. At a staff meeting, he'll start the group singing, "I'm very glad you came today," and everyone will feel happy to be there. At an elementary principals' gathering, he'll pass out buttons with the DCPS logo of children and

balloons (designed by Maurice) and administrators will wear them proudly. Over and over, he'll describe D.C. educators' job as "Doing the Right Thing for Children" and soon it becomes their rallying cry. Maurice knows that change is hard but he's found many ways to engage professionals, parents, and the community in school reform efforts.

In 1981, Maurice was hired as the Assistant for Communications in DCPS. He brought with him a wealth of experience in the public and private sectors — as a teacher in an ungraded primary class in the District, a day care director in the Boston area, a teacher trainer in East coast cities, and a policy analyst for the federal government. In his communications position, Maurice worked hard to involve the private sector with the schools, build parent involvement, and improve public confidence in the schools.

In general, the early childhood scene was quiet. The DCPS budget allotted a meager $25,000 per year for the early childhood programs (defined as prekindergarten and kindergarten). A veteran in DCPS notes, "There was no leadership in early childhood." In 1989, the D.C. Committee on Public Education (COPE) issued a report calling for radical reform throughout the school system, including expanding and upgrading the quality and quantity of early childhood programs. The COPE report led the school system to significantly shift its priorities and reorganize personnel. As part of the reorganization, Maurice was appointed Director of Early Childhood programs in 1989.

Chronology

Maurice embraced the COPE report and its findings. In order to create a climate for change, he set out to refocus the early childhood agenda on two levels:

- Defining early childhood education as a developmental span from ages three to eight.
- Elevating professional dialogue to a discussion about what research has established about how children learn best.

Citing research and theory to back him up, Maurice advocated hands-on, inquiry-based learning experiences for young children; they needed to be taught in "developmentally appropriate" ways that provided for their wide range of interests and abilities. He described D.C. classrooms where children weren't learning — not because they couldn't — but because of inappropriate learning experiences or what he called "death by dittos." Many prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms were focusing too much on academics and not enough on social/emotional development. Primary classes in the public schools tended to be teacher directed, not child centered. The school district's curriculum emphasized isolated skills. Textbooks, basal readers, and workbooks were the norm, with the children's desks lined up in rows. Retention in the early grades was high. Maurice called for a drastic change in many of the city's schools.

One of his first moves was to introduce a resolution to the Board of Education declaring school year 1989 as "The Year of the Young Child." An official kick-off ceremony was held where large, colored buttons and posters were distributed and resolutions from the city government and Board of Education were read. As Maurice says, "I used my public relations skills to push the COPE report as hard as possible." It was clear that he was moving the public school early childhood programs into the forefront of the school system — a system of 111 elementary schools, with approximately 34,000 children enrolled in prekindergarten through grade three.

Maurice began to gather people around him who could help bring change to early childhood. Some of the old-timers were suspicious, wondering what he was up to. But many regarded him as a "breath of fresh air." A veteran of DCPS describes Maurice's strategy:

> "He was finding out people's strengths and expectations. He told people to carve out the niche they wanted. It was up to you to say 'this is what I do best, these are my ideas.' Maurice was wide open."

An early childhood specialist who was working in the private sector at the time, remembers an early conversation with Maurice:

> "He said he needed more than just teacher trainers because he was trying to make schools new and different. He talked about a vision, starting with a few schools, and then moving into every school with new materials and instructional strategies. I had felt guilty about not working in DCPS because many of my family had. I thought this was a way to give back to the school system. I didn't commit right away, but six months later I was on Maurice's staff."

There was a sense of excitement and energy in Maurice's early childhood office that attracted like-minded educators. They sensed that better times in DCPS were coming.

Key Elements for Transforming Educational Practice in Washington, D.C

Maurice Sykes used the following strategies to improve teaching and learning practices for children:

- Holding a *Early Childhood Institute* for teachers and aides each year
- Establishing *Early Childhood Demonstration Centers* in the public schools
- Employing *Collegial Consulting Teachers* as coaches and mentors for other teachers
- Convening a *Principal's Seminar* on education reform
- Training teachers to establish *Responsive Classrooms* as a structure for teaching and learning
- Developing the *Continuous Progress Report*, which replaces the old report card, letter grades, and retention
- Establishing the *Early Childhood Teacher Collaborative* of teacher-led study groups on education reform

Early on, Maurice convened an intra-agency, early childhood group that brought together special education, bilingual, Chapter I, and early childhood educators, as well as curriculum and instructional personnel. Every other month, this group observed classrooms in the morning, and in the afternoon they discussed what they had seen that they considered developmentally appropriate. This process of seeking common ground continued for a year until there was some consistency of knowledge, understanding, and purpose in the early childhood community.

By then it was time to share the vision with classroom staff. In January, 1990, the first all-day, city-wide *Early Childhood Institute* was offered to Head Start, prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade teachers and teacher aides. They could chose from among 57 concurrent workshops that stressed experiential, hands-on learning. According to Maurice, the Institute was successful with the Head Start, prekindergarten, and kindergarten teachers, but less so with the first grade teachers:

> "For them, something was missing. Where were the skills? No wonder children come to us unprepared — all that playing! How can we prepare children for our system's standardized testing program, fooling around with all this mess? Some might find this level of discourse disempowering, but in my opinion it was just the level of tension and disequilibrium needed to begin to move teachers to the next level."

The second year of the Institute, 1991, teachers up through kindergarten could still select from among the workshops, but all first grade teachers were placed in an "Institute within an Institute" that focused on teaching skills within the context of a developmentally appropriate classroom. The first grade teachers indicated on their evaluations they were "beginning to see some possibilities" in this approach, "not much, but some." The next year, 1992, the second grade teachers joined the first grade teachers in an "Institute within the Institute" where the emphasis again was on teaching skills with a developmental approach. In 1994, the third grade teachers were invited to the Institute within the Institute, but the first grade teachers were free to select workshops. (This same year, the Institute was expanded to include a small group of grade four through grade six teachers and renamed the Early Learning Years Institute). In this progressive, sequential fashion, teachers at different grade levels were introduced to a common base of knowledge and learned ideas and strategies for changing their classroom practice. The Institute was one way Maurice affirmed the importance of system-wide professional dialogue.

Early on, Maurice made a budgetary commitment to improving classroom environments. He made it a priority to hire an aide for each prekindergarten classroom. He also knew that many D.C. teachers lacked the materials necessary to implement a developmentally appropriate program. He instructed his staff to survey the early childhood teachers and ascertain what they had and what they needed. When the survey came back, there was consternation among some veterans in the early childhood office — the teachers' requests totaled $1.3 million! But Maurice submitted the request for school year 1991 to the School Board and it was accepted. The monies were to be used to upgrade all early childhood classrooms with furniture, equipment, and materials — including puppet theaters, magnifying glasses, clay, unit blocks, and a rug for group time. The prekindergartens and kindergartens were upgraded first. The teachers attended an all-day workshop and viewed a model classroom to learn how to use the new materials. In successive years, some first grades were also upgraded. A veteran teacher noted that this was the first time in 35 years that she had received new materials and equipment for her kindergarten. Under Maurice, teachers were being treated like professionals in a way they had never been before.

In order to provide teachers and administrators with opportunities to observe current practices and develop the skills and strategies to take back to their own schools, Maurice established seven *early childhood demonstration centers* in the public schools. They are scattered throughout the city, representing the economic and cultural diversity of the nation's capital. Maurice did not want to make these "model schools" with hand-picked teachers culled from throughout the system. Rather, they are considered "schools in progress" where the existing staff and principals are interested in exploring the change process and are willing to engage in continuous staff development. Maurice's message is that good practices can happen in any school, anywhere in the city. At each center, teachers apply to be cadre teachers; they are selected on the basis of their exemplary teaching and their willingness to help other teachers learn. Their classrooms are open to visitors one day a week. In return, they receive a small stipend.

For many years, DCPS had a core of instructional support personnel, including mentor teachers for new staff and curriculum specialists. In early 1992, Maurice transformed some of these positions and re-named them *collegial consulting teachers.* Using a non-evaluative collegial approach, the consulting team supports classroom teachers by demonstrating instructional strategies, coaching, conducting workshops, and arranging visits to demonstration centers. There are 20 consulting teachers, each one assigned to four or five elementary schools. Maurice made a deliberate decision to designate them "classroom staff," rather than central office staff which would make them more vulnerable to budget cuts. This is one way Maurice has worked around the realities of an urban school system strapped for finances.

From the beginning, Maurice has invited school leaders into the change process. In the summer of 1990, he invited all elementary principals to an institute in which they were introduced to the sights and sounds of developmentally appropriate practices. Simulated classroom experiences were offered, and principals engaged in art activities, sand play, storytelling, and hands-on math and science. Firsthand, they experienced the rich learning that comes through active exploration of materials and social interaction. Since 1991, Maurice has held *Principals' Seminars* with invited speakers on educational reform and instructional practices.

When the collegial consulting team was being established, Maurice thought about how to introduce these personnel into the schools, making sure they knew their "stuff." One of the team leaders describes the process:

> "Maurice and the collegial team put together a presentation. We had a set script that explained how we operated and why. Maurice said we had to refer to the research base to explain what we were doing. We had to be able to say, "At this stage of development, children need..." The school system never had that before. Maurice had us rehearse the presentation and it was videotaped so we could improve. We always made our presentation first to the principals, then to the school staff."

All along, Maurice's vision of change has targeted classroom practice. Teachers' practices have to change if outcomes are to be improved for all children. But how could this

The Northeast Foundation for Children and The Responsive Classroom

The Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to establish elementary school environments "where children feel safe and cared for and where knowledge of the ways children learn and develop inform teaching practices." The foundation has a laboratory/demonstration school, Consulting Teachers who work with other teachers and schools, and a publishing house.

The Responsive Classroom (a concept developed by NEFC) describes a way of managing classrooms that is meant to promote both academic and social learning. Practices used in Responsive Classrooms include Morning Meeting, Classroom Organization, Rules and Logical Consequences, Choice Time, Guided Discovery, and Assessment and Reporting to Parents. The aim is to nurture inquisitive, competent, and industrious students, as well as to promote pro-social behavior and reduce problem behaviors.

happen across a huge urban school system? In 1991, Maurice contacted the Northeast Foundation for Children (NEFC) to provide technical assistance to the schools and support the change efforts. He was impressed with their approach to teaching young children:

> "My intuition guides me in picking people. When I first heard an audio tape of Chip Wood (Director of NEFC) talking about children and schools, he spoke to my soul — he really understands kids and schools. I want people who have something to offer and who are committed and willing to engage in a long-term partnership. They can't come in with preconceived notions of urban schools and children; they must respect your collective work."

And so began a collaboration between NEFC and early childhood in DCPS that was to last for the next four years and that laid the groundwork for classroom change.

One of Maurice's core beliefs is that the schools must provide a social curriculum along with an academic curriculum. NEFC appealed to Maurice because it had developed strategies for creating a classroom community and teaching social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. NEFC refers to its classroom support structure as *The Responsive Classroom* which includes choice time, morning meeting, and rules and logical consequences. Maurice was looking for nuts and bolts, based in child development theory, to change classroom practice and he found it in NEFC. But not all DCPS staff were initially enthusiastic about NEFC; some objected to the preponderance of white trainers — what did they know about teaching urban, predominantly African American children? An experienced teacher looks back:

> "My first impression was what's new? But the beauty of it was the format, organization, and good practice. I already had circle time and a time when children moved around. So the Responsive Classroom validated what I did and it was familiar."

This reaction — initial suspicion, followed by acceptance — was typical of many teachers in DCPS. Maurice held firm and even though some staff questioned his choice, he supported NEFC's work because he knew it represented good, solid early childhood practice and that the trainers would be sensitive collaborators.

NEFC ended up wearing many hats in its work with DCPS. Starting in the summer of 1991 and continuing in the next school year, its trainers focused on the demonstration centers and training the cadre teachers in the Responsive Classroom approaches. The cadre teachers were given release time for training. During the summer of 1992, the NEFC trainers and the cadre teachers co-taught in-service courses in the Responsive Classroom to primary teachers throughout the system. NEFC also provided extensive training to the collegial consulting teachers, who, in turn, supported implementation of the Responsive Classroom with prekindergarten through grade three teachers throughout the school system. Every chance he has, Maurice reinforces the Responsive Classroom; he opens his staff sessions with a morning meeting that includes greetings and sharing. When he visits a classroom, he'll talk about room display and design and ask the teacher, "Didn't you learn in the Responsive Classroom not to have junk up on the walls?" If the teacher doesn't understand, Maurice explains that young children need to have displays at their eye level and that the children's own work, not commercial or teacher-made materials, should be prominent to validate their learning.

As teachers began to change their instructional practices, Maurice took on the next challenge — assessment. D.C. teachers had been teaching to a discrete set of skills at each grade level and measuring students' progress in terms of their mastery of these skills — the antithesis of authentic assessment. In 1992, Maurice brought together some of his staff, classroom teachers, and principals to develop a new report card for prekindergarten through grade three. Referred to as the *Continuous Progress Report*, it did away with letter grades and retention. In addition, Maurice hired Dr. Sam Meisels and his consulting group to train teachers in the Work/Sampling System, an assessment approach involving portfolios and developmental checklists. The new assessment and reporting system was piloted in the demonstration centers and is now being used in 52 elementary schools. Maurice hopes that all elementary schools will eventually use the Continuous Progress Report.

Under Maurice's leadership, the *Early Childhood Teacher Collaborative* was established. It consists of about 20 teacher-led study groups, including hands-on mathematics, integrated curriculum, multi-age grouping, and whole language instruction. Several study groups have led to school initiatives in which the staff have decision making authority in areas of budget, curriculum, and staffing. Within a large urban system, Maurice has encouraged teachers to take the initiative and to try different practices to support children's learning. The collaborative also plans and implements the Early Learning Years Institute, sponsors a newsletter, and plans a ceremony each year to welcome new teachers.

Across the system, Maurice has also launched numerous, smaller initiatives in early childhood. They include the Daisy Project, an early intervention program; Montessori classes in the public schools; and bilingual prekindergarten programs. In-service courses on emerging literacy and child development are offered year round. Teachers enrolled in the literacy courses are given trade books for their class libraries and provided with in-class support from the course instructor. All together, 38 initiatives have been launched in early childhood.

Maurice served under one superintendent, Franklin Smith, until 1995. But soon after he was hired as Early Childhood Director in 1989, Maurice was riffed as part of a system-wide reduction of temporary employees. There was a public outcry. Maurice was perceived as a strong and effective leader by professionals and parents, and he was reinstated. Superintendent Smith then supported Maurice's reform efforts, and Maurice was promoted to successively higher positions in the school system. Maurice described his relationship with the former superintendent in this way: "We have a grass roots strategy; it's not mandated from the superintendent, and I don't ask for his permission." A colleague in DCPS observed that initially, Franklin Smith was watchful of Maurice and somewhat competitive, but Maurice proved himself and could be counted on for success. Consequently, Superintendent Smith granted Maurice a high degree of autonomy.

Effects and Outcomes

By the fall of 1994, over 3,000 elementary teachers had received training in the Responsive Classroom and were using strategies in their classrooms. The most wide-spread implementation is Morning Meeting, a time set aside when children can greet each other at the beginning of the day, discuss the day's schedule, and participate in lively language arts experiences. A consulting teacher recalls asking a group of children as they were walking in the hallway, "How was your Morning

Meeting?" She was astonished, "They all knew what it was and had something positive to say. That showed me how much classroom life is changing for many DCPS students."

Change is evident in the room environments and curriculum of many classrooms. Children work together at tables or clusters of desks; a small group of third graders discuss different ways to solve a math problem. Learning centers promote self-directed inquiry; in a science center, second graders study their pet hamster and keep track of what he eats; in a first grade, the students have set up a Message Center and their favorite time of the day is when they write to one another. A veteran kindergarten teacher reflects:

> "Developmentally appropriate practice has changed what we do. There's more hands on, less seat work. We didn't start working with centers until Maurice. Teachers needed help with that. Part of my own problem is multi-tasks, so having a management structure really helps. We're used to teaching skills, so change is hard because you can't direct the way you used to. But you know it's good for children; they're happier and more involved."

A consulting teacher shares these stories:

> "A first grade teacher went from a barren room to a lovely classroom, just by visiting and seeing other classrooms during the in-service course on whole language. Another teacher in the course was very phonics based and didn't want to change his reading program. I told him to keep the reading as is, but I suggested his children do more writing. He set up a writers' workshop and he loves it. As he becomes a more confident teacher, he'll see how children learn and will loosen up."

A principal of a demonstration center credits Maurice with revolutionizing the restructuring of her school:

> "We had desks in rows, spelling books in grade one, and too much homework. Maurice made it possible for us to write a planning grant and get money to hire subs. That allowed the primary staff to meet for three hours every week. The hardest part was trying to get a diverse group of adults to function as a cohesive team and be willing to improve. The Responsive Classroom materials began a dialogue for that to happen. Maurice also required that we do a self-assessment based on NAEYC criteria. We found out that we had nothing in the curriculum on physical development and appropriate practices. This gave us more of a dialogue. Two of the veteran teachers lead the way and embraced the changes. I thought they would be most resistant. But they got a new lease on teaching and renewed energy to do better."

A principal attests that parents in her school are pleased with the continuous progress assessment:

> "I saw a parent crying in the hall after her teacher conference. I thought her feelings had been hurt. Her first grader had just been transferred to our school from another D.C. school where graded report cards were still being used. She told me, 'I just can't talk about this.' Then I got really worried. Finally, she blurted out,

> 'This is the first time I've been to a conference where a teacher told me what my child *could* do. And then the teacher told me what my child needs to work on.'"

Some schools have changed more than others, often reflecting the leadership (or lack of) of the building principals. Maurice has never had responsibility for hiring and firing personnel and does not mandate what principals do in their buildings. This means that a resistant principal can hinder classroom change or even undermine it.

Findings from a study of different prekindergarten and kindergarten models in the D.C. public schools indicate that the changes put in place by Maurice are having a positive effect on children. Four- and five-year-olds enrolled in developmentally appropriate classrooms mastered more basic skills. They continued to excel in the primary grades in comparison to their peers in more traditional classrooms. Maurice provided support for a follow-up study of these children as they made the transition into fourth grade. Again, the children who had been enrolled in a developmentally appropriate prekindergarten or kindergarten made the transition more smoothly and made more academic progress than their peers. The findings did not support retention alone as the best way to remediate deficits in learning. Taken together, the results supported Maurice's change efforts and helped pave the way for continuous progress.

Maurice's success in early childhood led to his being appointed Director of the Early Learning Years (prekindergarten through grade six) in 1994. Since then, the Responsive Classroom approach has been taught to a small number of fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers, who in turn, are expected to model and disseminate back in their buildings. The collegial consulting team now includes more specialists at the intermediate level. Later, Maurice was appointed Deputy Superintendent and created the Center for Systemic Educational Change, which serves as a catalyst for effecting system-wide restructuring and reform efforts at the elementary and secondary levels. The NEFC is working with the middle schools and some senior high schools. Under Maurice's leadership, the Center has targeted literacy goals for all DCPS students.

The many contradictory pushes and pulls in a school system as large and bureaucratic as DCPS have presented obstacles. Principals are still held accountable for students' standardized test scores, and their reappointment is based on their performance, including students' achievement. On the other hand, the Center urges authentic, developmentally appropriate, performance-based assessments. A principal of a demonstration center describes the dilemma:

> "Principals have three-year contracts. Administrators who are not confident or who are new aren't willing to take risks. Principals come to the institutes, have a good time and say they will try something. But they're not doing it back in their building. I see things continuing like this until everyone is on the same page. But I'm not even sure we're in the same book."

Principals use a teacher evaluation form required by DCPS and approved by the teachers' union that does not emphasize developmentally appropriate practice or the Responsive Classroom strategies. Consequently, there is no built-in incentive (tied to promotion or salary) that moves teachers toward change. Some D.C. principals and teachers have taken the initiative to include appropriate items in their evaluations, but this is not widespread. Divisions of personnel and student assessment in DCPS operate independently from the Center; one administrator summed up the situation this way: "There are lots of initiatives that the Center pushes about what schools

should do and look like, but the operational side of DCPS has policies, practices, money, and resources." One of the outside consultants who has worked with Maurice agrees:

> "The problem with Maurice's position is that he has no power. Just the power of persuasion. As Deputy Superintendent, he has control over ideas and enough money to foster new ideas. He can influence principals by cajoling and sometimes withholding resources. But his hands are so tied — it's difficult to watch. If he had the power, he'd can people right and left because he believes in children. He doesn't want to lose a generation."

A consultant from NEFC reflects on the change process at the early childhood level:

> "The biggest issue is knowing if change will last. Thirty trainers are continuing our work. I'm utterly confident about one-third of the trainers; they've helped us train around the country. Another one-third do an adequate job; they're glad to model, but it takes two of them to teach an in-service course on the Responsive Classroom. Another one-third still need a lot of support to improve."

Throughout the system, there's a level of awareness about the Responsive Classroom and developmentally appropriate practice that did not previously exist. But it's well known that some schools have made real jumps, others are inching along, and some are resistant. Veterans of DCPS note that there is an air of excitement in the school system since Maurice arrived. When DCPS staff attend education conferences, they're able to say, "We're already doing that in D.C." The pride, commitment, and vigor of DCPS staff are palpable.

How does Maurice size up the progress made in DCPS? Foremost is the change in educators' views of children:

> "They viewed children as receptacles, and information was broadcast by teachers. We've changed these ideas. Now they see children as resourceful, capable, worthy of engaging in rigorous inquiry. There's a critical mass of educators that know and understand about good educational practice."

Taking a broader perspective, he reflects:

> "People are talking about taking reforms to scale, but they have no idea how much effort it takes to turn one school around. Compared to other urban districts, we've made phenomenal changes, and we've only been at it since '89."

His positive outlook, even in the face of media and Congressional attacks on the school system, blends with a practical sense of how hard change is and how long it takes.

As Maurice's leadership role has expanded, his impact has been felt more widely at all levels of the school system. But a number of early childhood colleagues regret that he's less accessible to them. A principal misses the new ideas and stimulating conversations she used to have with Maurice. Another administrator thinks the quality of the demonstration centers has diminished because Maurice is less involved with them. A cadre teacher misses the professional training provided by the NEFC consultants in her school and confesses to not valuing the in-house trainers as much. The tension between wanting "things the way they were" when Maurice was Director of Early Childhood and accommodating his expanded role in the system is acute for some of Maurice's staunchest supporters.

Maurice's approach has been to introduce many initiatives — as one principal described it, "he creates a smorgasbord." But a few colleagues think some initiatives stalled because teachers were asked to do too much, and they didn't understand what they were doing. The most frequently cited examples are continuous progress and portfolio assessment, attributed primarily to the lack of support from the DCPS testing/assessment office and its emphasis on standardized measures. Some principals and teachers think that emphasizing Responsive Classroom management was detrimental to the content of the curriculum. They say they are struggling with what should be taught at each grade level. The Center is now developing curriculum frameworks for the upper grades, but not yet for prekindergarten through grade two.

Lessons and Implications

How has Maurice brought about change in a system reputed to be bureaucratic, entrenched, and where many children weren't learning? A combination of carefully chosen strategies and his personal style have been effective.

1. *Maurice is a thoughtful and experienced leader.* Maurice has thought long and hard about being a leader. He has read books and talked with experts. He described himself as a "coach and cheerleader." Especially during difficult times for the D.C. public schools, he must keep people focused on the work that remains. Setting time aside to celebrate victories, even small ones, is always important. His staff knows they can count on Maurice to see opportunities amidst the most daunting challenges.

Maurice thinks he has a somewhat unusual perspective for an early childhood leader:

> "I'm not a career bureaucrat. My experiences outside of the public sector have shaped my views of management, and I've seen how things are done in other arenas. My counterparts across the country get stuck when they think they have to have everything in place. I may not know all the steps, but I know where I want to go. It's having a vision that leads change."

Maurice's business acumen has, no doubt, contributed to the success of his efforts. He admits that "change can't be done on the cheap." It costs money to buy equipment, hire staff, and set up demonstration centers. According to Maurice, being able to articulate and defend his vision has made it possible for him to get funding within the school system, as well as from outside sources. Maurice appreciates the power that money has:

> "Having money makes you interesting to others. The first year, I asked manufacturers of early childhood materials to give us a line of credit. Most educators don't even know that is possible. By the second year, when I had gotten a lot of funding, the company said yes."

Maurice is a leader who takes stands, attracts resources, and commands attention from the community at large.

2. *Maurice has an informed vision that promotes many possibilities for change.* Maurice's vision of change is to alter the entire educational system, not to tinker with one piece of it. He wants to change people's minds — he talks about "shifting paradigms." He explains his rationale for the diversity and breadth of the initiatives:

> "We launched a whole host of things at once on the theory that you need to create controlled chaos when a system has been stagnant. There was a lot of turmoil; we bombarded people with experiences — but there was an underlying coherence."

Different people will be "hooked" by different strategies. Some teachers will be excited about new approaches in language arts; others will be attracted to integrated curriculum and they will start to make changes there. But where is the coherence Maurice refers to? He explains:

> "It's something very simple, called 'Doing the Right Thing for Children.' Is it right for children to learn in a safe, stimulating environment? Do they need to have content knowledge? This has been our guiding principle: Is it right for children?"

Maurice also recognizes that adults learn in different ways and has therefore created multiple learning opportunities for staff. For some, taking an in-service course is critical; for others, visiting a demonstration center is key. By providing options for school staff, Maurice is modeling that children need options in their learning experiences as well.

3. *Maurice has built expertise within the school system*. Another critical element in Maurice's approach is "building capacity" within DCPS. It is never intended that outside consultants stay for long. Their primary job is to train trainers within the D.C. system who will then carry on. NEFC has trained cadre teachers in the demonstration centers, who then teach district-wide in-service courses. Maurice tells the consulting teachers to target their efforts on the "high implementers" in the schools, those who want to change and can, in turn, promote change in their buildings. A consulting teacher explains, "You identify the high implementers and work with them first, even though the principal may want you to work with someone who's just getting by in the classroom."

Maurice encourages his staff to "think strategically" and to work with teachers who are receptive. He takes a practical approach:

> "My notions of change are intuitive. It's like thinking through what you need to plan to have a good party. People need an opportunity to deal with past baggage of disappointments, being put down or isolated. They need to vent their feelings and talk about their experiences. Then you go first to affirm the core of people with good will who believe these practices are right even if they might not be using them. Then you try to move the fence straddlers. Then you isolate those who won't change so that they are the odd people out."

4. *Maurice values on-going learning*. Over and over, Maurice is described by colleagues as a "great teacher and mentor." He is well read, knowledgeable, and up to date on theory and research. This gives him credibility as a leader. At staff meetings, he passes out interesting articles, culling from the worlds of business, organizational management, sociology, and education, and includes time for staff to read and discuss them. He has sent staff to annual NAEYC conferences and also hosted a conference with educators from Reggio Emilia. Maurice urges educators to be reflective and makes time for that with his staff. A coordinator of a demonstration center recalls the Friday staff meetings with Maurice:

> "We would talk about what was happening and develop strategies. We could cry if we had to. When we saw the spark at a school, it would be celebration time.

> Sometimes we would discuss a theoretical point — like should we teach handwriting in grade three or grade five? He'd reach behind his desk, grab an article about this and we'd discuss it. It was like sitting at the foot of the master."

Another early childhood colleague adds:

> "Maurice empowers through knowledge. It's a wonderful way to be empowered in a school system because the power of knowledge is what you try to convey to children."

5. ***Maurice believes in children***. Maurice's credibility is also grounded in his deep connection with children. He likes to talk about the children he's taught and the lessons he's learned from them. He denounces any notion of a "deficit model," believes that children come to school with vast knowledge, and affirms that schools — not children — have to change. There is no doubt that his vision is informed by an abiding concern for all children's well being. When he gets impatient with the slow pace of reform, he explains, "We don't have time. These are children's lives being wasted." One of the NEFC consultants recounts how Maurice would visit the demonstration classrooms and talk with children:

> "He'd ask them, 'What are you doing?' in a genuine, inquiring way. He was so interested in their learning and evaluating how well they were understanding the structures the teacher was establishing."

Maurice has instituted the Children's Forum, an annual city-wide gathering of student representatives from each elementary school. The top administrators in DCPS, including Maurice, invite the students to share their ideas and concerns in panel discussions. Maurice listens, asks questions, laughs, and worries as the children speak about what's good and bad in their schools. Sometimes he uses their comments to shape future reform efforts. Recently, Maurice has asked the Center staff to tutor children in reading once a week. This work keeps them close to children and classroom teachers as well as addressing the literacy needs in the schools. It is clear that the bottom line for Maurice is "doing what's right for children."

6. ***Maurice inspires loyalty, hard work, and engagement***. Maurice is a prodigious worker. His staff joke that when he goes on vacation (which is rare) he comes back with so much work for them to do! He seems to explode with physical energy; his stamina is boundless; his charisma, inspiring. In front of audiences, he sings and dances and they join in, even if they're not used to expressing themselves in these ways. As a colleague says, "He exudes energy; the kind of energy you need to have with children."

Maurice creates a climate in which people want to work hard and stretch to do their best. A consulting teacher talks about her commitment, inspired by Maurice's example:

> "He can get people to work themselves to death. You do six million things and feel guilty because there are three more to do. Not because he puts guilt on you, but because the work is so important. This work becomes your everything, your avocation and vocation."

Maurice has made good staff decisions, hiring people who share his vision. He has attracted nationally known early childhood leaders to work with DCPS and train the in-house trainers. At times, he's been criticized for bringing in too many "outsiders" and "whites," but he says:

> "I want the best people. This system is very parochial and cliquish. People need to hear outsiders with a point of view even if all they can do is react by challenging it. I'm willing to be the bad guy with staff (about hiring decisions)."

Because Maurice's reform efforts have been guided by the latest thinking and best practices in the field, DCPS staff feel knowledgeable and capable. They know that they are in the forefront of what's happening in early childhood. That is a big boost to morale and no doubt, fuels their commitment.

Maurice puts the work first and does not tolerate big egos. He refers to "our work," "our team," making it clear that everyone has a part. He never asks anyone to do what he wouldn't do. No task is beneath him, whether it's xeroxing an article or painting a classroom before school starts. Center staff say they feel like "a family." The caring, responsible environment Maurice advocates in the classroom, he generates in his office among his colleagues. He's modeling the model, one of his basic tenets for bringing about change.

7. *Maurice models — and advocates — flexibility and adaptability*. One of Maurice's assets is being able to move in many different worlds. He's comfortable with classroom teachers, children, foundation heads, and Congressional leaders who oversee the District's budget. A long-time DCPS educator puts it this way, "Maurice is politically astute. He can move in any circle, talking with the corporate big shots or hanging on the street with the boys." This flexibility means that he can appeal to many different interests, including funders or philanthropists who have monies to support his ideas. Maurice's ability to communicate his vision has also propelled him into the national early childhood scene. He speaks at conferences, writes articles, and is well-regarded as an articulate spokesperson for school reform. When it is time to make or implement policy, Maurice brings power to the table.

Like any good early childhood professional, Maurice values the *process* of inquiry and self discovery. A colleague speaks for many when she says, "If you get an idea, you're never shot down. He tells you — 'run with it.'" Maurice inspires others to take risks, and sometimes insists on it. At the beginning of a training session for high school teachers, Maurice had each one sing a favorite karaokee; another group of trainees had to learn to tap dance. Maurice was in the audience, applauding their efforts. Maurice's strategy was deliberate — he had faith in their ability to learn and allowed them to step outside of themselves. Throughout his career in DCPS, Maurice has struck a balance between creating disequilibrium and creating a risk free environment. He doesn't mandate change, but he dangles it out there in the form of information, training opportunities, and institutes. People can take as much as they're ready for.

As an early childhood leader, Maurice has made it clear that it's time to do what's right for children. This message has gotten through to the schools and the community. Change is happening, and D.C.'s children are benefitting.

Chapter 8: Final Observations and Conclusions

The administrators described in the preceding case studies occupy a range of positions, from principals of schools to district-level administrators. By virtue of their various positions, and of the diverse ways in which their districts are structured, they obviously have differing levels of power and authority. What they have in common is the ability to be a successful agent in transforming educational practice in schools.

This chapter will examine the personal qualities that these successful administrators share, as well as common strategies that they used to reform schools. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a number of observations about supporting the development of administrators of good programs for young learners.

Personal Qualities and Strategies that Characterize Effective Administrators

Leadership is idiosyncratic, and as such, all administrators develop their own styles and approaches for dealing with their jobs, the people around them, and their communities. All of the case study administrators have learned how to work successfully in a particular *context* — whether this context is defined as a superintendent's priorities or as the culture of their area of the country. They adapt their styles and strategies to the communities where they work. Jana Oxenford of Osseo refers to her style as "Minnesota nice" — the gentle, polite, respectful way that people treat one another in her section of the country. Jana has obviously been a good match for the Osseo culture. Yet one can also see that she had to work to be accepted within her school system. An outsider, she knew she needed to gain credibility and started by establishing a rapport with the kindergarten teachers, since she herself had been a kindergarten teacher.

At Travis Heights in Austin, there exists an obvious synergy among the principal and staff. Principal Marilyn Butcher is a strong leader, but the school's achievements are the product of everyone's work. Her teachers are strikingly confident and intelligent. Marilyn and her teachers argue, debate, and revise their strategies in a dialogue that strikes an outsider as both very professional and very stimulating. Butcher's personal style exudes the idea that strong leaders can have powerful employees. In the end, it is the mutual energy of the staff team that is the school's most important asset, and it is an asset that is particular to Travis Heights Elementary School in Austin, Texas.

Carol Olson and Karen McIntyre work in cosmopolitan districts where research experts and national model programs and foundations come to visit the schools and offer their services. Working with funders and experts, assessing various proposals, negotiating and overseeing large projects, and coordinating and evaluating this work requires its own set of skills.

Maurice Sykes has deep roots in his own community of Washington, D.C. and echoes charismatic African American politicians and preachers in his persuasive, even inspirational personal style of working and leading. And the fact that Bob Aldrich became principal of the school that he attended as a child has given him a special feeling for the Burlington community in which he operates.

As these leaders have their own working styles that fit with their environments, each also has a very definite and particular personality. These are the kinds of people about whom others could (and do) tell stories and anecdotes. They are leaders who bring their whole selves to their work — a quality that makes them very human and appealing to others. It is clear that these leaders have common qualities — such as vision and focus and energy, pragmatism and patience, and a real love of schools, children, and families — that help them to sustain the support of others and maintain the momentum for improvements in their schools.

As one reads about what these leaders say and think, what they have done, and what others say about them, the following characteristics stand out:

1. *Effective Administrators Work from Strongly Held Beliefs about Children, Families, and Schools*

They bring vision and focus to their work. The case study administrators work from a strongly held core of convictions about what schools and classrooms should be like for children, families, staff members, and the community. They *know* what they want to accomplish in schools, and this provides a focus for employees who are plunged into the midst of change. These leaders' visions seem to come from their experiences as teachers, as well as their personal values, but their ideas are also shaped and defended by research evidence.

Thus, each of these leaders is immediately and precisely vocal about what they stand for. One does not have to probe, prod, and guess to find out what they think about things. They may investigate all kinds of ideas, but then they select, and then they advance, a point of view.

These leaders also express an overall generosity of spirit towards other people and towards the positive potential of schooling. Rather than criticizing what exists, they focus on what they see as greater possibilities: Classrooms can be more lively and interesting and engaging places for students and teachers, and teachers can do more than stand in front of the classroom and teach basic skills. These attitudes are coupled with an ambition and a desire for excellence rather than for personal power or prestige. These leaders are less willing to "settle for less" than their colleagues, and more willing to make the extra effort, take the additional risk, give the credit to others, and put themselves on the line for a more expansive goal.

Leadership and Vision

"Maurice Sykes in an example of an inspirational leader. He does a lot of cheerleading about teachers, but also around children. He helps others see the competence in young children. Teachers watch kids brighten up and respond — even some children with terrible stresses in their lives — and the teachers see that these children can be capable and motivated. He tells lots of meaningful stories which people can connect with and which expand their conception of what's possible for children and teachers. He sets up models of good teaching, so teachers can see peers using these methods with the same kids they are teaching."

Sue Bredekamp, National Association for the Education of Young Children

They believe all children can learn. It is hard to imagine creating a good learning environment for children if one doesn't believe they can learn. All of these leaders talked about the

> **Administrators as Communicators**
>
> "Maurice Sykes and Karen McIntyre are extremely unique from anyone I've seen in other parts of the country. Baseline, they are really, really smart. They can both talk amazingly well and they are very charismatic and passionate in presentations. It's hard to dispute people who are such good talkers, and lots of people connect with them. It's an aspect of intelligence to be able to connect to diverse audiences of teachers, board members, administrators, and children. They understand the children in their communities in such depth that even when half of an audience is bristling about their messages, they are persuasive."
>
> *Judy Jablon, The Work Sampling Project*

positive aspects of their communities and were very impressed with the strengths of their children. Carol Olson says, "I start out with a strong belief that every child deserves a fair shake. Sometimes in conversation teachers will say, 'Kids need to earn my respect,' but that's not how I see it." These leaders put much more stress on what schools could do to improve, as opposed to what parents should do to bring them better kids.

Each leader still has a heart and mind in the classroom. They are surprisingly tied to the children. They have recent, fresh classroom stories. One of the reasons, perhaps, that they don't stereotype is that they continue to have real everyday experiences with the children, families, and teachers they serve. "One of the first things you notice in a good school is whether a principal greets children by their name," said one educator, "Or if they even know the teachers' names."

They respect families. A genuine respect for families was expressed in many different ways, most notably by inviting them into the schools as tutors, organizers, and equal partners in the education process. Jana Oxenford believes that parents can make informed decisions about what educational approach is best for their children. Bob Aldrich does not join in criticisms of the community parents for "deficits" such as their lack of education or not reading to their children at home. "I have great faith in this community," he says.

2. *Effective Administrators Skillfully Engage the Participation and Support of Others*

They lead by persuasion, not force. The case study administrators bring vision, energy, and focus to their work, and they hold positions of authority. But they use persuasion — and not force — to marshal the energy and support of others. For example, Maurice Sykes' position of Deputy Superintendent lacks the authority to hire, fire, or evaluate teachers, but he uses positive incentives, such as funding or training, to help lever change. He also uses his remarkable ability to communicate and connect with others, conveying his vision and ideas in a way that inspires others to change their practices. Similarly, Marilyn Butcher does not force her teachers to adopt new strategies, but over time her philosophy and values about children and schooling have persuaded her teachers to follow her lead.

This general philosophy that favors persuasive tactics is coupled with a healthy respect for the difficulty involved in changing education practice. This respect can take many forms, as when Jana Oxenford is described observing an inappropriate teaching practice. She'll handle it, she says, "By talking about it with the teacher and discussing how she can do things differently." Her response is non-threatening; she is accepting, patient, and calm.

As these leaders do not force others to follow their lead, they are also tolerant of dissent. Some in particular seem to have a special fondness for teachers who argue, ask hard questions, and force issues. They seem to use the teacher dissent, community unrest, and even budget fights to clarify and refine their own ideas and fortify themselves for future debate. No one talks about dreading presentations to boards and sitting through long meetings in which new directions are debated and discussed. It is possible they are so strong in this area because learning itself requires periods of doubt, questioning, testing, and forming new ideas.

They are skilled at managing democratic processes, but they balance this with knowing when and how to take control. These leaders exhibit superb judgment in dealing with colleagues, superiors, teachers, and parents. They know when to assert their authority, and when they should compromise. They are also confident about making key strategic decisions, such as hiring outside consultants to train teachers or deploying funds to support their agenda. At the same time, they are comfortable in delegating decisions to others, while continuing to lend a guiding hand as the process moves along.

This sensitivity to the balance between making certain key decisions to provide direction, while at the same time leaving other important issues and processes in the hands of others, is found in a number of ways in the case studies. For example, Carol Olsen set specific directions in curriculum, teaching strategies, and staff development as a way to improve the educational practices in her district's schools. But she also supported the establishment of school-based councils of teachers, parents, neighborhood residents, and business people to develop plans for new school initiatives and to set budget priorities. Elementary school principals in Spokane give Carol high marks for her knowledge, guidance, and assistance, but they also view her as someone who allows them autonomy in developing specific programs for their buildings: "Carol's style is one of very close monitoring of processes and guidelines, but she doesn't tell you what to do."

Structure and Direction in Managing Change

"Change is an evolutionary process in which more structure and direction is needed in some stages than in others. You can err by being too concerned about being unobtrusive and developing ownership from participants. For example, in the early stages, people need to feed their imaginations, to broaden the range of possibilities. But they can't imagine a wider range of possibilities without some new models and ideas."

Stacie Goffin, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

Bob Aldrich decided to make the renovation of H.O. Wheeler School his first priority as its new principal, but he also supported a collaborative model in which teachers, other staff, students, and families make decisions about the school's programs. In Pittsburgh, Karen McIntyre adopted Vision 21 and Working/Sampling as methods to reform schooling for young children, but she also gave schools considerable latitude in what they would do and how they would do it. And Jana Oxenford came to Osseo with many ideas about how schools could improve, but she has supported a process in which teachers study and design innovations.

Many of the changes described in the case studies originated from committees of parents, teachers, and school staff. Group decision making is a lengthy and often frustrating process of working through individual concerns and molding a common consensus. Yet, the administrators

Spreading Ideas

"Leaders must know the content and stay close to practice by being out in schools. They work to create quality in one sector and then build towards making it universal. You don't move to become universal all at once, but you need to have the goal in your consciousness and have a plan to spread the ideas. Leaders make early childhood something that makes the superintendent look good — little kids are a winning issue politically and in the media."

Anne Mitchell, Early Childhood Policy Research, Inc.

in this study seem to not only accept these difficulties, but see them as essential to making the schools what they should become.

3. *Effective Administrators Are Skilled in Managing Change*

They are pragmatic and carefully consider the size and scope of the effort, building from success to success. Successful change is not a static event, but a process of making progress over time, of steadfastly finding a way to overcome the inevitable roadblocks and of taking "one step back for two ever steps forward." The majority of these leaders exhibit an instinct for building from strength to strength — that is, they start improving educational practice by working with a few enthusiastic and able people and places, which improves the chances for success. Creating successful models then helps other more hesitant or skeptical people to see the value of new ideas.

All of the case studies involved a minimum of one school as the reform site. No one was doing a classroom-by-classroom approach. In half of the examples, the reform site was the entire school system. This would seem to emphasize the fact that significant change requires support from peers, supervisors, and all the school services from counseling to transportation to the cafeteria. The energy and the momentum to create important changes in educational practice require a certain size of effort.

On the other hand, the district administrators demonstrated a sensitivity to the balance between the desire to work intensively and selectively with a few sites, and the need to spread ideas and good practices across many schools and classrooms. These administrators tend, to a greater or lesser extent, to work selectively and intensively rather than thinning out resources or endorsing a superficial level of change.

Several of the administrators started the change process by solving concrete, practical problems. For example, Bob Aldrich needed to raise money to renovate a dilapidated school building, and Marilyn Butcher didn't have enough space for new first and second grade classrooms. Carol Olson wanted to make bet-

It Doesn't Matter Where You Start

"Nothing is as systematic as we make it out to be. Leaders need to capture the opportunity, see the places where there is readiness to move, and go with it. It doesn't matter where you start. For example, one female superintendent was able to create a comprehensive, collaborative structure for family services by giving the leadership away. She let the mayor and business leaders assume the leadership in order to make it go. She was willing to not be the star."

Harriet Egertson, Nebraska Department of Education

ter use of the district's Title I funding. Successful solutions to these discrete problems tended to open the gates to a flood of other improvements and changes. For some leaders, such as Jana Oxenford, a commitment to taking on so many changes reflects a strongly held belief in diversity of practice. For others, such as Karen McIntyre, Carol Olson, Maurice Sykes, or Marilyn Butcher, it is a sense that many improvements must be undertaken at once, no matter how difficult that might be.

These case studies suggest that education reform can start in many ways. Perhaps, if you have a clear vision, it doesn't matter where you start. The starting point may often be the most pressing practical problem or a mandate from one's boss. An initial success helps the administrator to gain credibility, making the next change easier to make.

4. *Effective Administrators Are Personal Models for Others*

They are life-long learners. The case study administrators are personal models of lifelong learning, which is a quality that good educational programs aim to nurture in young learners. Intelligence about people and ideas is honed by a strong ability to learn from experience as well as from books. Their work seems guided by instinctive strategic judgments about how to handle people, situations, and timing.

Many of these leaders are omnivorous readers. Most are comfortable in seeking out the best of national expert opinion and eager to explore new resources. One pictures Jana Oxenford studying the literature on reform and circulating research syntheses for principals, engaging in "fireside" chats at schools, and facilitating teachers' study groups on various educational reform topics.

Maurice Sykes is a leader who energizes discussions wherever he goes. He is adamant in his commitment to the well being of children, but he's also always looking for new ideas and challenges. He engages people in his world of ideas everywhere he goes, encouraging people to think and to figure things out on their own. One educator reported, "You know when people are excited by the issues by listening to what teachers talk about in the their lounges. Are they fussing about their weight or are they talking about what they are doing in their classes?" Another said, "These are not discussions about parking spaces and bologna for lunch."

They have energy and a sense of urgency. There is a sense of urgency in many of these leaders. They have a clear sense that time is wasting and children are growing older. They each expressed, in different ways, that you can't do everything at once, but you must. They realized that instruction, assessments, the cultural environment, and the provision of comprehensive services, for example, all had to be improved at once. Otherwise, the effort would fail.

There is more energy, more drive, and more sheer ambition among this group than one might expect to find in administrators and bureaucrats. They even walk quickly. Sweeping everyone along, leaving no stone unturned, these folks are moving ahead. Consequently, people in their education communities thrive on a sense of progress. For these leaders, the worst thing is a rut, no activity, and an acceptance of the status quo.

They have a "roll up your sleeves" approach. Each of these leaders adopts a "soup to nuts" style of supervision and administration. They like to conduct trainings themselves, they sit in classrooms, they even pick up trash as they walk down the halls. Each aspect of the educational experience in interesting to them, from the way budgets are developed or buildings are con-

structed or classes are scheduled or teachers are hired or computer software is selected. It is impressive how deeply involved they are in so many varied aspects of their programs. They are roll-up-the-sleeves kinds of people, and not "report to me in my office."

Observations about Supporting the Future Development of Able Administrators

Our site visits, writing, and thinking about the leaders featured in this report led us to reflect upon many aspects of education administration. In analyzing our data, it became obvious that there were general commonalities among the administrators. But it was also clear that these leaders' styles and strategies are also specific to each individual and to the sites where they work.

Program Elements That Were Used to Transform Educational Practice

Looking across these six case studies, there are a number of key and common strategies — but also significant differences in — approaches to changing classroom practices and school structure. The most common strategies were:

- ***Merging Good Early Childhood Practice with Other Similar Principles of Education Reform***

All of the case study administrators were moving good early childhood principles of teaching and learning from preschool and kindergarten to the early elementary grades. And the majority of the administrators were using these ideas to transform entire elementary schools. This kind of school improvement is an interesting new development that draws upon similarities between general education reform and good early childhood practices. For example, experts in both of these fields call for a more active and stimulating environment for students, more attention to the development and progress of individual students, and richer assessments to ascertain what students really know and can do.

- ***Staff Development***

Change came about at each site through staff development, although varied approaches were used. The D.C., Pittsburgh, and Spokane schools have heavily invested in outside experts to train teachers based on a particular philosophy of schooling. At the same time, they are working to build their own capacity to replicate the training they have received, so that they can keep up the momentum after the outside experts have left. These districts also are united in their choice of long-term," at-the-elbow" levels of assistance for individual teachers, rather than sending all of the teachers to a single workshop as a way of changing their teaching strategies.

By contrast, Jana Oxenford is very interested in outside theories and innovative ideas, but she hasn't adopted a district-wide teacher training program based on a single

model for improvement. Rather, she lends her support to effective innovations that groups of her district's own teachers have studied and then designed. Marilyn Butcher also draws on outside ideas, but crafts her school's strategies in concert with her teachers.

- ***Meaningful Family and Community Involvement.***

Within these case studies are examples of substantive and active participation on the part of the whole community in the daily life of the school. Spokane, Austin, and Burlington, in particular, favor school-based councils of parents and staff who make important decisions about the schools' direction and programs. Some of the schools in Pittsburgh have also adopted this innovation. There was constant talk about processes, meetings, discussions, and voting in places where these changes occurred. One gets the sense that all of these strategies were labor intensive, heavy in human intellectual and emotional investment. Everyone was very conscious to avoid top-down decisions, leaving some teachers to say that some top down decisions would be welcome!

- ***Authentic Assessment***

A common tool for reforming early childhood practice in the case studies was the adoption of more authentic assessments for young children. This was an important tool for improvement in most of the sites. Three sites (D.C., Pittsburgh, and Osseo) used one particular method, known as Work/Sampling. As more developmentally appropriate, child-initiated educational programs were created, standardized tests, grading, and other ways of charting young children's progress seemed less and less useful for either program evaluation or reporting to parents. Marilyn Butcher says, "You can't teach cooperatively and grade competitively." As educational innovations are adopted, the results of richer assessments also provide a way to explain to parents how their children are faring and what they are gaining as a result of their participation.

- ***The Use of Outside Models***

Some case study sites used outside models for changing their educational practice, employing consultants or contracting for training. Pittsburgh used Bank Street's Vision 21 program for improving science and social studies in kindergarten through grade three. Burlington took on the Accelerated Schools concept, with its emphasis on shared decision making. And the D.C. public schools adopted principles of a Responsive Classroom, a classroom management idea created by the Northeast Foundation for Children.

- ***Formal Support of an Early Childhood Philosophy for Teaching and Learning***

Washington, D.C.'s effort to improve early childhood programs was initiated by a report of the D.C. Committee on Public Education in 1989. In Pittsburgh, the reform effort was bolstered by the Board of Education's adoption of a philosophy of early childhood principles and practice for ages three to eight. This action was an endorsement of developmentally appropriate teaching and learning practices by a high-level group with real authority, and it was critically important in guiding and justifying the changes that Karen McIntyre made in the school system's practices.

Program Elements That Were Used to Transform Educational Practice

	Spokane	Pittsburgh	Austin	Bu
Early Childhood Principles				
Staff Development				
Community Involvement				
Authentic Assessment				
Outside Models				
Formal Adoption of Principles				

In light of this, what conclusions can be drawn from this study that might help support the development of other good administrators of educational programs for young children? What strategies might make sense? In thinking this issue through, the first set of thoughts that arise regard the sizeable challenges to providing better support for education leaders.

One challenge is the administrators themselves, who can be a tough audience for those who design training and support efforts. One expert who works with a variety of school systems put it this way:

> "The whole culture of administrators is framed in a way that works against admitting vulnerability or not knowing what to do or not understanding. They think they should have the answers and be in charge. So you need to be very subtle and skillful in working to get beneath the surface to address their discomfort and jeopardy during a change."

A second issue arises from the nature of present training programs. Busy administrators are often reluctant to attend more training because of their past experience with limited, one-shot programs that they haven't perceived as benefitting their work. As an expert explains:

> "Administrators are required to take X number of hours of training annually, but there is no follow up, no mentoring, and no opportunity to network with peers in similar situations. As a result, administrators have seen it all and consider themselves experts, so they tend to sit back and critique training."

In addition, "information overload" is a problem for busy administrators who have more than enough on their plate already. Mastering the growing and changing body of knowledge regarding sound educational practice in a range of fields is a challenge for both education personnel and those who are charged with creating training programs. One person had this to say about designing administrator preparation programs:

> "The problem when you approach administrative preparation programs is that the curriculum is already overloaded, and they are overwhelmed with interest groups urging other additional areas of content. So mandating a six-hour class in child development must compete with requiring three hours in multiculturalism or disabilities, and the participants simply resent it."

In our discussions with the case study administrators, they were thoughtful and honest in describing the sources and development of their own ideas and strategies for school improvement. A dominant theme in those conversations was the importance of learning from experience and from the example of other leaders and colleagues — rather than citing the influence of preparation programs or higher education courses or classes.

Thus, our observations about improving the support provided to administrators center around on-the-job training and support. For example, *site visits* to schools with exemplary programs was seen as a particularly valuable way to gain information. During site visits, administrators should have the chance to observe and talk with children as well as adults. As one person explained:

> "I believe that vision is literal. Administrators need to see developmentally appropriate practice in action. People don't have a sense of the possibilities unless they have opportunities to observe. For whatever reason, people don't trust the notion of children as active learners. When they see what children are capable of doing, and the richness in curriculum that is possible, they are invariably taken aback. They're so surprised. It's also important that people aren't just watching, but that they can talk with the children about what they are learning and hear directly about the multiple ways that they see things."

Administrators also need on-going relationships with people — *peers and mentors* — who can provide practical assistance, answering questions and helping to solve problems. "Administrators respond to one-on-one consultation about thinking and strategy. It keeps them interested and strengthens their commitment. They enjoy setting aside time from other demands," observed one expert.

Some administrators like to have the opportunity *to read about and discuss education reform*, and they should have access to materials and forums for doing this. A state official from

The Role of Outsiders in Helping Administrators to Manage Change

"Administrators need long-term consultant relationships throughout the roller-coaster process of change. I've been through it enough that I can predict the stages perfectly. People love it and hate it so intensely — it's very personal. I'll go to a school for months where no one will talk to me in the teacher's lounge or no one will eat with me. People get really P.O.'d at you, so an administrator needs to be strong-willed, thick-skinned, and Polyannaish at the same time — believing that it will get better eventually — which it does. And they have to be able to let people leave. That's when administrators often crack, because they want to be liked, and they work in one school or district for years. The consultant's job is to take some of that pressure off the principal, and to talk through the process on a confidential, off-the-record basis."

Terry Rosegrant, Arlington County, Virginia, Public Schools

Nebraska described one approach: "Iowa and Nebraska have developed a study team process to support local innovation — we call it cooperative learning for grownups. Groups commit to reading from a set of materials and meeting for discussions over a period of time. It's like the old book club approach. For $30 we can send them a huge array of materials. It's a low cost but powerful staff development tool in sparsely populated regions in which it's too expensive to design large training events."

Finally, development programs for administrators need to address the problem of information overload. Rather than adding more material to administrative preparation programs, improvements can be made in on-the-job assistance that stress common themes among different strands of education reform. The leaders featured in the case studies have successful merged similar concepts from early childhood theory and general education reform to transform elementary schools. Other leaders also need a chance to see how things "fit together." Focusing on commonalities among reforms can help reduce the isolation of good early childhood practice, as well as help administrators who are pressed to be experts in too many subject areas.

One focus group participant said that her organization's approach to training administrators is "to focus less on content knowledge, and more on conceptual thinking, vision, and skills in working with groups of people. We don't need every school administrator to be a content expert, but they all do need to know more about working with families and communities. Our general approach is convening mixed groups of people several times a year over several years. The problem with one-shot conferences is that people never get outside of their traditional roles — the superintendents stay in their shirts and ties and talk to each other. You need to get people comfortable with each other and sustain a conversation over time, which is very expensive."

Conclusion

It is our hope that the stories and discussions in this book may serve as food for thought and encouragement for those who are engaged in the most important task of improving schooling for young children. Our case studies suggest that administrators are powerful determinants of success in reforming educational practice. By virtue of their strategies and personal examples,

effective administrators set out a vision, make connections with people, and find practical answers to concrete problems.

From the experience of this project, we urge that successes in the education world continue to be studied and analyzed and publicized. For one reason, stories in the popular media would sometimes lead one to believe that nothing good is happening in schools. This is not only untrue, but it ignores the very hard work of local leaders who are struggling, against formidable odds, to make fundamental changes in the culture and strategies of schooling for children.

When administrators are successful in improving educational practice, the result is very personal and relevant for the children who are involved. Schools are more than institutions to be managed — they are important partners in helping children grow up and develop. Good educational programs for young learners provide a place and space for learning, a powerful community of support, and the foundation for children's future growth as lifelong learners, workers, and citizens.