

## Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago Supplemental Information

### About the Book

*Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, a new book by current and former researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) at the University of Chicago, provides a detailed analysis of why students in 100 public elementary schools in Chicago were able to improve substantially in reading and math over a seven-year period, while students in another 100 schools were not. Drawing on massive longitudinal evidence, the study yields a comprehensive set of school practices and school and community conditions that promote improvement, noting that the absence of these spells stagnation.

These five essential supports are: school leadership, professional capacity, parent-community ties, student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance. In contrast to many current reform efforts that seek to spur progress through one or two of these elements, this book shows that substantial school improvement requires building the social organization within schools and orchestrating initiatives across multiple domains.

Moving beyond the schoolhouse, the authors analyze community context to discover the ways internal practices of improving schools are inexorably entwined with the social resources of local neighborhoods. They raise troublesome questions about our society's capacity to improve schooling in its most neglected communities. For schools in these communities, the task of improvement is much more formidable than most have acknowledged to date.

### Data Sources for the Study of the Essential Supports

**Surveys of students and teachers:** To measure the essential supports in each elementary school, the authors drew on CCSR teacher and student surveys. They relied especially on teacher and student surveys from the winter-spring of 1994, and supplemented these surveys with information from the 1991 (teacher) and 1992 (principal) surveys as well as with survey data from 1997 through 2005. The surveys collected detailed information about teachers' professional work, including instructional practices, their opportunities for continued learning, and the development of professional collaboration and community. These surveys also explored teachers' perceptions of the school environment, their participation in school governance, and the involvement of parents and community members in school life. The student surveys inquired about students' experiences in school, their motivation and engagement with learning, their educational and work aspirations, their perceptions of the school environment, and their relationships with teachers. Students were also asked to furnish their views about classroom instruction. Depending on the year, between 265 and 400 elementary schools participated in the surveys.

**Outcome data:** The outcome measures in this study were based on annual individual student test scores in reading and mathematics on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) from 1990 to 1996. The authors calculated the amount students learned each year and whether these learning gains increased over time. **Note that replication analyses were carried out using the ITBS from 1997 to 2005.**

**School administrative records:** The authors obtained administrative records from the CPS Comprehensive Student Information System. These records contained basic registration information about students, such as birth date, race, gender, home address, school attended within CPS, and grade level.

**In-depth case studies of two schools:** These cases detail the stories of two schools that were located about one mile apart from one another. One eventually improved student outcomes substantially, but the other did not.

**Other data:** The authors also drew on the U.S. Census, public aid data, Chicago public housing data, and crime statistics from the Chicago Police Department. They were also able to take advantage of two other research endeavors occurring in Chicago during the 1990s. First, through the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), they gained access to unique information about the 363 micro-neighborhoods that comprise the city of Chicago, based on interviews, surveys, and videotapes collected by PHDCN. This information provided real depth for the analysis of the social resources in Chicago's different school communities. Second, through a collaboration with the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, the authors gained access to an extensive longitudinal database on the public social services provided to all children and families in the city of Chicago.

## About the Authors

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