

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge: The First Three Years

Improving **C**hicago's Schools



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A Report of the
Chicago Annenberg
Research Project

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Executive Summary

This report documents the origins and early history of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. It examines the development of the Challenge’s “theory of action” and assesses its place in the broader institutional contexts of Chicago and the Chicago Public School system. The report explores how those contexts have influenced the Challenge’s development and whether the Challenge, in turn, has begun to influence its environment. A key element of this report concerns the relationship of the Challenge’s theory of action for school change to other dominant theories of action held by the city’s civic, business, and governmental leaders.

Early History of the Challenge

In December 1993, Ambassador Walter Annenberg announced a gift of \$500 million from the Annenberg Foundation to America’s public schools. The money was offered as a “challenge” to schools to bolster existing reform efforts and encourage new ones. Responding to this opportunity, a 73-member Working Group of local community activists and representatives of national

school reform organizations drafted a proposal to bring some of the grant money to Chicago. In January 1995, the group was awarded nearly \$50 million, and the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was born.

The Challenge sought to build on the momentum of the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, which had radically decentralized governance of the Chicago Public Schools. Because they believed the model of school-site control was worthy of strengthening, the Working Group proposed that schools suggest their own innovations for improving. To structure such broad expectations, the group asked schools to focus on how they might alter the basic elements of time, size, and isolation. In addition, rather than applying as individual schools, they were required to form networks—clusters of at least three like-minded schools aided by an external partner—to enhance each school’s opportunities for collaboration and community support.

Within the first year, the Challenge began to develop an identity as a foundation. It sought independent foundation status and appointed Ken Rolling, an ex-

perienced foundation officer, as Executive Director. These decisions clarified the Challenge’s organizational identity. In taking on the identity of a foundation, the Challenge moved away from its roots as an *ad hoc*, voluntary group primarily engaged in community organizing.

Several key findings emerge from this historical account. The Chicago Annenberg Challenge has gone through a rapid process of organizational learning that reshaped its identity from a collaborative of community organizations, university researchers, and education reform groups into a formal foundation pursuing a strategic vision with an activist staff. External pressure from political and public school actors prompted some of this development. Internally, the Challenge staff, Board, and advisory group had developed a critique of its own practice. Ties between foundation executives and their community and university-based grantees influenced the ways that the Challenge responded to these external and internal pressures.

The Challenge as a foundation is both secure and supported; however, its influence has not yet fully developed. In the process of securing its identity, the Challenge

has seen its institutional resources broaden, even as its potential to evoke change in the school system has faced increasing impediments. As the Challenge's identity has developed, its strategies to influence school reform in the city have expanded.

The Challenge's strategic flexibility remains constrained by its early decisions and a rapidly changing institutional environment. Grant decisions made in 1995 have strongly influenced the Challenge's direction and obligated much of its available resources. At the same time, the Chicago Public Schools' shifting governance structure and the policy agenda of a new school system administration have changed expectations for reform in the city.

The Challenge in Its Institutional Context

To gain an understanding of the Challenge's role amid the wide range of Chicago school reform efforts of the past decade, a sample of city leaders were asked—in the summer and fall of 1997—how they viewed the Challenge and its prospects for success. Their answers revealed a substantial lack of knowledge about the Challenge. About half of the business and government leaders would not even speculate

on its goals or strategy; however, most interviewees had advice for the Challenge Board. About half of these leaders suggested broadening the focus to include influencing policy systemwide, and specifically to focus on policies to enhance teacher skills and competencies.

Civic and governmental leaders' responses also showed how the Challenge's "theory of action" is but one of several in the city. Compared with the Challenge's goals, the view of school change held by city's political leaders and school system officials is more business-oriented. Higher education leaders, particularly those from colleges and departments of education, typically focus on the primacy of teaching and learning in their view of school change. Community and other civic leaders fall into two groups: those who seek a broad community dialogue about ways to achieve economic and racial equity in the schools, and those whose focus is on enhancing parental and community control of the schools. The data indicate that the Challenge does not yet have a secure basis for legitimacy among many of these leaders. At the same time, the Challenge has among these leaders a wide variety of potential collaborators and sources of political support with which it shares at least some common ground. In this mix, the Challenge's theory-of-action can be seen as both

distinct and, given flexibility, potentially influential.

Implications

The study identifies several issues that confront the Challenge as it attempts to influence public schooling in Chicago. In order to be influential, the Challenge must distinguish its vision of school change in clear terms that permit it to have a meaningful identity in a crowded field of organizational change agents. Without such visibility, narrow influence based on "keeping the flame alive" may be the best that can be achieved.

At the same time, the Challenge must develop resource ties and cultural and political support from among the existing institutions in the city so that it develops its own locally rooted organizational legitimacy. In seeking such legitimacy, however, the Challenge risks compromising its theory of action to encompass ideas that are not in direct conflict, but that require stretching beyond current plans.

The development of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge into an activist foundation seeking to achieve policy influence while remaining faithful to its initial vision, should it succeed, may ultimately restrain its long-term reform legacy to one less deep and thorough than it might have hoped.

Acknowledgments

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Yiching Wu created the computerized database that enabled us to track the networks of schools and funding patterns. Sandra Storey at the Chicago Public Schools Department of Research, Assessment, and Analysis; Diane King Bilcer; David Kerbow; and Yeow Meng Thum pointed us to useful data. Holly Swyers completed the database and created many of the initial comparisons across networks that led to our observations about patterns of funding. Patricia Jones and Sandra Jennings patiently transcribed all of the interviews and helped keep us on schedule when the fieldwork became heavy. Kay Kersch Kirkpatrick and Rebecca Williams provided editorial support, shepherding this report from rough draft to finished product in a professional and careful manner that was both respectful and probing. Sandra Jennings completed desktop publishing on this document as she has for all Consortium publications in the past two years, doing so with the grace and care for which she is justly known.

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Introduction

In December 1993, President Clinton invited Ambassador Walter Annenberg to the White House Rose Garden to announce a gift of \$500 million from the Annenberg Foundation to America's public schools. The money would be offered as a "challenge" to schools across the country, to bolster school reform efforts already in place and to encourage new ones. As with most philanthropic efforts, the grant was meant as seed money to encourage participation from other interested entities; the Foundation counted on further matching support from the business and philanthropic communities.¹

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge received one of five grants awarded to support education reform in big city school systems and a network of rural schools between 1994 and 1995 by the Foundation. All were expected to help catalyze broad improvements in student learning, teacher leadership, and community commitment to reform. The Chicago Challenge, like the others, represents an acknowledgment that big city school systems require more resources and ingenuity than have been applied to them in the last twenty years, and that urban school contexts are too complex and idiosyncratic for prepackaged reform solutions.

In Chicago's case, these two factors were balanced by a third. The Annenberg Foundation was betting that the previous five years of school reform, beginning with a widely publicized decentralization of the system's governance structure initiated in 1988, had already fostered a community commitment to improve the city's schools.² An infusion of Annenberg funds could help sustain the commitment and build on existing structural changes to push the reform process beyond governance.

This report is an examination of the institutional contexts of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge since its inception in 1995. We address the relationship between the Chicago Challenge and

the city's history of engagement as well as exploring how a second governance restructuring signed into law in June 1995 (Illinois House Bill 206) has affected the Chicago Challenge. We discuss how the social and political environments of schooling in Chicago affect the expectations for Chicago Challenge schools, and how relationships with other institutions in the environment affect the ability of the Chicago Challenge to leverage change in the school system.

Organization and Conceptual Framework for This Report

This report has two distinct sections and a conclusion. "Organizational Identity" relates a narrative of the development of the Chicago Challenge. "Competing Theories of School Reform in Chicago" examines the Chicago Challenge theory of action in the context of the theories of action for school improvement held by the city's civic, business and political leaders. The separation allows us to highlight the organizational adaptation and learning of the Chicago Challenge in the first section, while we focus on the ideas behind its development in the second section.

In the first section, we explore the organizational identity of the Chicago Challenge. What kind of an organization is it? How does it fit into the spectrum of organizations engaged in Chicago school reform? From whom can it anticipate resources, information, and support? How does its strategy fit into changing rules and procedures from the central office?

In the second section, we examine the theory that guides decisions made by the Challenge in the context of an ongoing series of systemwide governance changes. What core values and beliefs about schooling guide its leaders? How do these compare with those of other civic leaders? What common themes, if any, unite them? How do the city's civic leaders view the Chicago Challenge? Does it have sufficient locally based legitimacy to expand its vision of school change beyond the "true believers"?

General Conclusions

We found the Chicago Challenge engaged in a rapid process of organizational learning: from a collaborative of community organizations to an activist foundation. That is, it became a foundation directly engaged in developing the projects it funds, in coaching and training its grantees, and in seeking new opportunities to influence change in the city's schools. In the process, its institutional resources have broadened even as its potential to influence school system change has faced new impediments. As the identity of the Chicago Challenge has changed, its strategies to influence school reform in the city have expanded. Yet its strategic flexibility remains constrained by past choices and a changing institutional environment. Grant decisions made in 1995 have strongly influenced the direction of the Chicago Challenge and consumed much of its available resources. At the same time, a shifting school governance structure has changed expectations for reform in the city.

In the midst of these challenges, we found opportunities. Chicago's turbulent environment, where the norms of good schooling are a source of public debate, and where the leading politicians, pundits, professors, corporate executives, and community activists routinely weigh in on what makes a good school, successful students, or a system in which they take pride, has fostered competition among school improvement strategies. We found the Chicago Challenge theory of action to be one of several. The city's political and district leaders typically expressed a view of school change in business-oriented terms. Education department leaders in the city's many colleges and universities typically focused on the primacy of teaching and learning in their view of school change. Community actors were split between those with a view of school change that stressed the importance of community activism and leadership, and those who agreed with some foundation and media workers that the inequitable distribution of resources in the system was its primary failing and most pressing need. The Chicago Chal-

lenge does not yet have a secure basis for legitimacy among many of these leaders. At the same time, it also has among them a wide variety of potential collaborators with which it shares at least some common ground. In this mix, the Chicago Challenge theory of action is both distinct and, given flexibility, potentially influential.

We studied the Chicago Challenge as an organization in a specific institutional context, and came to understand some of the dilemmas it faced in influencing public schooling. The organizational choices that have already been made partly reflect the perspectives of those most intimately involved with guiding the Chicago Challenge: its founders, staff, and philanthropic supporters. This report also shows how these perspectives are responses to the particular institutional context of Chicago Public Schools.

In our conclusion to this report, we organize the dilemmas that the Chicago Challenge faces as three overlapping influence requirements: identity, legitimacy, and legacy. In the future, we expect that its choices will continue to be a mix of goal-driven activities and prudent reaction to the specific context that the Chicago Challenge is attempting to change. Each of these choices will require organizational tradeoffs. The Chicago Challenge must distinguish its vision of school change in clear terms that permit it to have a meaningful identity in a crowded field of

Data Sources and Methodology

In characterizing the Chicago Challenge, we relied heavily on documents produced by the organization itself, including its own requests for proposals, meeting notes, records of granting activity, and correspondence. In addition, at least one researcher attended and kept notes on nearly all the formal meetings of the Chicago Challenge between June 1996 and January 1998. Finally, we used school level descriptive data in conjunction with Chicago Challenge grant records to track patterns of grantmaking and organizational learning.

Primary data for our examination of institutional contexts were 70 semi-structured interviews of organizational leaders from eight sectors in the Chicago Challenge's local institutional environment, conducted between June and October 1997. These included city and state political leaders, organized business, organized labor, foundations (including the Chicago Challenge Executive Director), community organizations, local media, institutions of higher education, and the CPS management.³ We supplemented and corroborated the information in these interviews with systematic searches of newspaper accounts and other documentary evidence. We also made use of the extensive secondary literature on the last ten years of reform in the CPS.

The study integrates multiple methods of analyzing these data sources. We qualitatively analyzed the content of the answers to some interview questions, while we tabulated and charted others. Interview data on significant influence patterns were graphed in a modified network analysis to determine the strength and direction of relations between institutional sectors. Historical methods were used to trace the development of the Chicago Challenge from documentary sources and first-hand accounts. Descriptive data on Chicago Challenge grantees were cross tabulated against descriptive school data and grouped by granting cycle to reveal patterns that would clarify some of the effects of this development. Where feasible, we make use of quotes from interviews and documents to ground our analysis (see Methodological Appendix for more detail).

would-be organizational change agents. It must locate resources and support from among the existing institutions in the city so that it develops its own locally rooted organizational legitimacy. Finally, it must consider how a lasting presence from which to influence schooling over the long term might evolve from its current direction.

Implications beyond Chicago

We believe that Chicago is a unique context from which to spur systemwide change in public schooling. Yet we are also aware that many of the relationships we found between the Chicago Challenge and the institutions in its social and political environments are likely to have counterparts in other cities. Several of the other urban sites of the

Annenberg Challenge also have evaluation teams engaged in some cross-site collaboration (e.g., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Detroit, Houston, and South Florida—Miami/Dade and Broward Counties). Each of these cities has a complex history of school reform initiatives and politics that preceded the introduction of an Annenberg Challenge effort and on which the local Challenge is implicitly or explicitly building. Similar studies of the institutional contexts of other urban Annenberg initiatives might become one basis for fruitful comparative study. We believe this could lead to broader understanding of the institutional factors that hinder and encourage large-scale, privately funded and locally driven reforms. Thus, we hope our study raises questions and encourages more study of institutional contexts for urban school change efforts.

Organizational Identity

How the Chicago Annenberg Challenge Was Formed

Shortly after Walter Annenberg launched his Challenge in 1993, three Chicago school activists—Anne Hallett, a local foundation executive turned national advocate of urban school improvement, William Ayers, a political organizer who became a local professor of education, and Warren Chapman, a state school reformer who is now a local foundation program officer—seized the opportunity. Ayers captured their enthusiasm:

When Annenberg announced that he was gonna give out half a billion dollars, I heard it on the radio at six in the morning. At seven in the morning, I had talked to Anne and Warren, and the three of us met for lunch that day. We began to plot a strategy. The strategy was to pull together the old Chicago school reform coalition, and to try to figure out what we could do at this juncture, [whether] we could get some of that money to Chicago, which we assumed we could.

Anne Hallett and Warren Chapman were no strangers to the initiative; each was already serving as a pro-bono informal advisor to the national Annenberg Challenge.⁴ Over the course of the following year, Hallett and Chapman met repeatedly with the other Annenberg Foundation advisors in Providence, Rhode Island, exchanging with them a series of working papers designed to ensure that Chicago would be one of the first urban initiative sites selected. Because of this early start, the three founders of the Chicago Challenge were able to influence the shape of the national initiative as well as the final draft of the Chicago proposal.

Back home, the three gathered a fluid and changing group of community organizations active in school reform to help them draft

the final proposal.⁵ More than half of the seventy-three member Working Group, as they called themselves, were activists from community groups and national school reform organizations. The organization that Anne Hallett founded and headed, The Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform, agreed to staff their efforts and donated its offices as the Working Group headquarters.

Forging a Proposal

The Working Group's goals were ambitious. They aimed to educate the Annenberg Foundation about progress that had been made in implementing a 1988 school governance law, and to clarify how they could build on that progress. The 1988 law had radically decentralized governance in the Chicago schools, authorizing 550 elected Local School Councils (LSCs) made up of six parents, two community members and two teachers, one to govern each of the system's schools.⁶ LSCs were given the authority to hire and fire the school principal, and approve a mandated School Improvement Plan. LSCs also approved school budgets that included vastly enlarged discretionary sums in most schools.⁷ By the time the Working Group was deliberating in 1994, three biennial elections had been held for LSC members, and about 38 percent of the LSCs had replaced the principal in the schools they now governed.⁸ One study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research had already concluded that about one-third of the system's elementary schools showed signs of developing into collaboratively run institutions with increased focus on improving students' opportunities to learn.⁹

Yet, systemwide implementation of the reform had been mixed. Each cycle of Local School Council elections drew decreasing numbers of candidates and voters, and progress in student achievement was hard to document. As had been the case for a decade before 1988, each new year saw local newspapers filled with stories of budgetary shortfalls and impending labor action, di-

verting attention from school-based improvement efforts.¹⁰ The Working Group hoped that a Chicago Annenberg Challenge might revive public interest in LSCs and refocus attention on the ideals of the 1988 reform. As they prepared their proposal in consultation with the Annenberg Foundation, they also formulated the goal of encouraging Chicago's schools to go beyond governance by examining how they might alter the taken for granted structures of schooling. The three founding members of the Working Group agreed with the other Annenberg Foundation advisors that without substantive "restructuring," little change was likely to be sustainable.

After considering a great number of ideas, the Working Group based its proposal to the Annenberg Foundation on the premise that furthering Chicago reform meant allowing teachers, parents, and communities to rethink, and hopefully restructure, public schooling. Instead of specifying programs that schools should adopt, the proposal assumed that school personnel, with the help of parents and community members, should collectively examine some assumptions about how they used resources and organized their work, given their students' needs, teachers' talents, and neighborhoods' resources. To structure such broad expectations, the Working Group proposed that grantees focus on how they might alter the basic elements of time, size, and isolation.

As befitted a strategy that relied on grassroots initiative, the concepts of time, size, and isolation were open to interpretation. The Working Group as a whole had varying reflections about these concepts. Yet they had specific meaning to the founding members, who had the task of negotiating such terms with the Annenberg Foundation. To them, time structured the school environment in such a way as to limit everything else that might be done. A school willing to reorganize the school day, for instance, had demonstrated its willingness to take responsibility for educating its students, while schools that took the daily routine for granted had

not. The concept of size emphasized the importance of creating smaller, more personalized environments for students and creating small units of work within schools. Isolation referred to the isolation of educators and schools from the communities they serve, and from one another. It came from an assumption that educators could not, and should not, reform by themselves; they needed the external challenge and creative thinking of parents and community organizations.

The three founders also had a vision of school reform that was philosophically grounded in community organizing, grassroots action, and participatory democracy. They hoped to encourage teachers and communities in the schools to come up with their own solutions to problems. As

one of the founders put it, we hope to “drive them to do the next thing,” to go beyond the governance change instituted in 1988, to create an “imagined space” that allows school communities to think creatively about next steps. In his mind, time, size, and isolation were “reflections of wanting to change the structure of schools as we know them.”

The means to this vision was the formation of like-minded clusters of schools aided by an external partner. It was thought that schools working together—a cluster had to include at least three schools to be eligible for an implementation grant—would provide better support for change than an individual school acting alone. Early documents reveal three reasons for the importance of including an external partner: 1) to provide community resources to schools, 2) to continue to develop the existing pool of external organizations assisting schools with some form of intervention, and 3) to develop leadership among adults at the school (parents, teachers, LSC members, community members).

This “network” structure was already in place at many schools and was also linked to the 1988 reform. The 1988 law had devolved the state’s share of Chapter 1 (anti-poverty) funding to schools, bypassing the central office. Among the most popular uses of these discretionary funds, which had grown to an average of \$500,000 for every elementary school and \$800,000 for each high school, were supplemental programs provided by local reform groups and national reform coalitions.¹¹ These existing groups became models for the external partners called for in

Chicago’s proposal to the Annenberg Foundation. Money was to be awarded in small one-year planning grants or open-ended implementation grants, to be applied for through a “rich invitational process” in-

volving a wide variety of stakeholders.

Networks served another major goal—to keep the Annenberg money out of the hands of the Chicago Public Schools central office. Initially, the Annenberg Foundation facilitated this goal by stipulating that funds may not go to the system’s existing central administration. Even so, during the months of the Working Group’s negotiations with the Annenberg Foundation, the CPS central office, city hall, and the teachers’ union had each submitted its own competing proposal.

For its part, the Working Group reflected the view of many schools and community organizations: the central office had functioned as a hindrance to decentralized control. Since 1988, central office administrators had developed the reputation for resisting LSCs, supporting neither the LSC election process, nor the information and training needs of LSC members once they were seated. To the proposal’s authors, LSCs represented the structural embodiment of the spirit of the 1988 reform that they intended to encourage. Moreover, decades of unbalanced budgets, accom-

[The founders wanted] to change the structure of schools as we know them.

panied by ambitious union contracts had left the school system with a legacy of fiscal ineptness.¹² Despite their reservations, the Working Group also assumed that the existing central office administration was going to be around for the foreseeable future, and planned their strategy of intervention accordingly. As the Working Group's proposal gained support from the Annenberg Foundation, its authors sought support from the central office, city hall, and the union.

Support from the local philanthropic community proved crucial to the Working Group's ability to prevail.

Local foundation leaders helped the Working Group negotiate these agreements over the winter of 1994-95. The presidents of the three foundations most actively associated with the 1988 school reform, Patricia Graham of The Spencer Foundation, Adele Simmons of The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and Deborah Leff of The Joyce Foundation, all stepped in to provide support for the Working Group's proposals. They used their offices and access to help smooth negotiations with the union, city hall, and the central office, urging broadly collaborative efforts across these competing stakeholders. One foundation president described winning the grant for Chicago: "It sort of came together when Vartan Gregorian (Brown University President, and advisor to the Annenberg Foundation) came out here for a day ... that we basically set up for him, including a very successful visit with the mayor and a very successful visit with the union." The three foun-

dation executives further encouraged the Working Group by agreeing in advance to provide "matching" funds for its proposal, although they would not agree beforehand to match funds for any of the competing proposals. In these ways, support from the local philanthropic community proved crucial to the Working Group's ability to prevail.

The philanthropic community also stepped in to help with the administration of the grant and by offering their existing grants as matching funds.¹³ Chicago's foundations had long been supporting community efforts to improve the schools, and the implementation of the 1988 law had drawn even more local foundation resources to these initiatives.¹⁴ Because of this legacy, the Annenberg Foundation had agreed at the outset that the Chicago Challenge could "draw upon existing commitments as a source of matching support."¹⁵ It was understood that the public side of the match would come from public dollars committed to the implementation of the 1988 law, including some portion of each participating school's discretionary Chapter 1 dollars.

On January 20, 1995, a host of Chicago dignitaries were present at Washington Irving School when Ambassador Annenberg's daughter awarded a poster-sized \$49.2 million check to Chicago. The Chicago City Council approved a resolution honoring the group that brought the grant to Chicago. The Chicago Annenberg Challenge was born.

Governing the Chicago Challenge

The assembly that brought the grant to Chicago was unique, and they created an organization for the Chicago Challenge that was also novel. They envisioned several groups that would be the functional parts of one organization with broad community representation. A Board of Directors, composed of foundation and business executives, was responsible for fiscal operations, developing a procedure for securing matching funds and mak-

ing grants, and hiring an executive director. Initially, the fiscal agent was to be a collaborative of small foundations in the city, The Donor's Forum. But within the first year, the Annenberg Foundation and the Chicago Challenge Board agreed to seek independent foundation status for the Chicago Challenge that would enable it to maintain its own fiscal accounts.¹⁶

More unusual was the body that came to be known as the Chicago School Reform Collaborative, made up of members of the original Working Group and others. Collaborative members were chosen in a ballot cast by all Working Group members who had attended at least two or more of the proposal drafting sessions. A 10-member Nominating Committee of the Working Group constructed the ballot. The final 23-member Collaborative reflected the composition of the earlier assembly; nearly half were community group leaders. Unsurprisingly, all but one of the Nominating Committee members who had drafted the ballot were elected to the Collaborative. Two of the founding members served as its co-chairs.

The Collaborative had an important, if ambiguous, role in the Chicago Challenge.¹⁷ The proposal to the Annenberg Foundation had argued that the Collaborative would be the "heart of the operational work" which included writing the Request for Proposals (RFPs) and developing the application process, as well as selecting participating schools and overseeing program evaluation. In addition, the Collaborative was to publicize the Chicago Challenge, develop the "metropolitan strategy" that had been requested by Annenberg Foundation staff, broker waivers and resources, and provide services to networks of schools.¹⁸ But this wide-ranging role quickly proved problematic. As one of the proposal authors recalled: "The Collaborative wanted to maintain this conversation among the advocates, but they didn't want to make the decisions about grants, and that was inappropriate, because they would be seeking

grants themselves. But what they wanted to do was continue this conversation around policy issues."

During the first few months after the award, the Collaborative took on most of the tasks envisioned for it in the proposal and set a course for the Chicago Challenge. Collaborative members drafted the initial RFPs, held informational sessions for potential grantees, and aided the Chicago Challenge Board in selecting an Executive Director. And in the first year, the grantee selection process was heavily influenced by their priorities. The Collaborative produced 17 volunteer readers who screened and rated initial letters of intent, although they did not formally select grantees. Consultants—a few of whom had served on the original Working Group—were also hired to review grant proposals using a standard checklist against which to rate them. After the first round of grantmaking, the newly hired Executive Director, Ken Rolling, was expected to redesign the grantmaking process and make initial recommendations to the Chicago Challenge Board.

Partly in response to a lack of specificity about Chicago Challenge staffing in the original proposal, but also because of concerns raised by the Annenberg Foundation and others about the high volume of potential grantees, the Board began to search for an appropriate organizational identity. Their choice for executive director signaled their decision. Selecting Ken Rolling, an experienced foundation officer, as executive director crystallized an organizational identity as a foundation, even before that legal status had been secured. It also initiated a process by which the Collaborative became less central to the grant making activities of the Chicago Challenge. The Collaborative gradually moved from "the heart" of the operation to an important advisory group. No longer would the Chicago Challenge be an ad hoc, voluntary group with its primary roots in community organizing.

It might have been otherwise. The position announcement for executive director had listed broad requirements—knowledge of schools and learning, ability to work with diverse community groups, and fund-raising and/or grantmaking experience—and it attracted a broad pool of candidates. Among the finalists were an aide in the Mayor’s office and a former CPS principal active in the Brown University-based (and Annenberg affiliated) Coalition of Essential Schools. Both had been members of the original Working Group and had attended many of the proposal drafting sessions. The former principal had been helpful in transferring a vision of teacher collaboration from Providence to Chicago. Yet the final choice for the executive director was a foundation officer who had previously directed community organizing and human rights organizations, but had not attended Working Group meetings or been otherwise engaged in public schooling. Ken Rolling was hired in mid-1995, barely in time to oversee the initial selection of grantees. His influence would be stronger after he had time to react to the first group of applicants.

The First Wave of Grantmaking, 1995

The first year’s grantees reflected the broadly worded RFPs written by the Collaborative. After being given the opportunity to attend one or more informational meetings conducted by the Collaborative, interested groups were asked to submit a letter of intent to the Collaborative. From the 177 letters of intent received, the Collaborative unanimously identified 76, and the Board added another 13 that would receive an invitation to submit a full proposal. This first group of encouraged applicants included 48 requesting a one-year planning grant, and 41 who were requesting a one or more year implementation grant. Of the 89 interested groups, 77 submitted a full proposal by late 1995, and 35 were selected as initial grantees. They were the largest group of grantees to be se-

lected in any funding cycle and what were to become the core networks of the Chicago Challenge.

A diverse lot, the initial 35 grantees are most readily identified by the commonalities among their partnering organizations. External partners were intended to be the catalyst for providing motivation and intellectual resources to schools, and their role has been documented as crucial to the way programs were constructed in network schools.¹⁹ Higher education or community-based partners submitted 85 percent of the funded proposals, and all but one of the first-year implementation grants had such partners.

Institutions of higher education were by far the most successful applicants. Forty-nine percent of their requests were funded, accounting for 46 percent of the grants received and 57 percent of the dollars allocated in 1995. Higher education institutions received, on average, \$96,000 each, only somewhat smaller dollar amounts than the average \$100,000 grant received by community service/activist groups or neighborhood-based community groups. Although these two community sectors received only 20 percent of the total grants awarded in 1995, they, like networks with higher education partners, received a disproportionate amount of the dollars awarded (26 percent). In contrast, a third category of community partners, cultural institutions in Chicago, received 20 percent of the grants awarded in 1995 but only 10 percent of the dollars allocated, half of it in the form of small (\$25,000) planning grants.

At the other end of the spectrum, networks with external partners from the business, labor, foundation, and government sectors (including CPS and federally funded organizations) together received only 14 percent of the grants and 7 percent of the dollars awarded in 1995. Sixty-six percent of the proposals from networks with external partners in these sectors were rejected.

This pattern of first-year grant making by the Chicago Challenge is accounted for by the fact that funded networks with community service-

activist groups, neighborhood associations, and institutions of higher education as partners had previous experience working together under the 1988 reform law. The funding proposal had argued for no more than 10 “active, highly visible sites of experimentation and learning,” but 13 applicants were given implementation grants in this first funding cycle, most to extend the work of existing school-based partnerships. As befitted the initial intentions of Collaborative members, these were given out to support schools and external partners that had already begun to collaborate on ways to improve education under the decentralized governance system established in the 1988 law.

The initial grantees were to become the core networks being funded two years later: 10 of the 13 networks receiving implementation grants in 1995 were awarded multi-year continuation grants in 1997. These 10 core grantees accounted for 42 percent of the total Chicago Annenberg Challenge dollars allocated by 1997. In addition, another 14 networks received implementation grants in 1996 or 1997 after having been awarded planning grants in 1995, including seven with community group partners and seven more with higher education partners. Thus, by 1997, 60 percent of the implementation grants were awarded to networks that had first received Chicago Annenberg Challenge funding in 1995, and 65 percent of the total funding went to these initial grantees. A process heavily reliant on the ideas and interests of Collaborative members had designated these core grantees and kept them at the center of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge funding process.

It was clear by the end of 1995 that the grantmaking process would be changed. Ken Rolling had already determined that the criteria for grantmaking needed clarifying. Some Collaborative members led organizations that had won grants in the first round, limiting the participation they were to have in future granting cycles. The Annenberg Foundation in St. Davids, Penn-

sylvania was concerned that the Chicago Challenge had rapidly committed its funds, but still had no staff to manage the paperwork and oversee the next funding cycle.

By mid-year it was also clear that the institutional context and the governance of the public schools had changed radically. As a result, the Chicago Challenge would be facing new, unforeseen problems that increasingly required drawing

Even as the Annenberg check was being signed, legislative committees were meeting in Springfield to draft a new school reform law for Chicago.

upon the resources of its recently hired professional director and his growing staff.

Second Wave, 1996

Even as the Annenberg check was being signed, legislative committees were meeting in Springfield to draft a new school reform law for Chicago. While the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was seeking an executive director, the state legislature amended the 1988 legislation with a second reform package (Illinois House Bill 206) that focused on the system’s central management and on increasing the accountability of schools. LSCs were preserved, but the 1995 legislation dismantled the central office and school board, replacing them with corporate-style management team and a five-member Reform Board of Trustees, all to be appointed directly by the mayor. The law gave the new management team substantial authority to hold schools accountable for their performance,

including the ability to identify failing schools and intervene with increasing sanctions.

As important, it gave the new management team unprecedented fiscal flexibility by consolidating funding sources and budget streams. Obstacles to outsourcing and privatization were removed. The district was allowed to dismiss employees within 14 days if privatization or outsourcing made their positions redundant. The law also permitted the redirection of all increases in state Chapter 1 funds to the district, effectively freezing the LSCs' share at 1994 levels. This fiscal flexibility was matched with increased management authority over the personnel who work in schools. Strikes by teachers were prohibited for 18 months, and 13 previously bargained educational issues—like class size and teacher assignments—were removed from the school code. Individual schools were authorized to waive collective bargaining agreements if more than half of the faculty agreed.

Within days of passage, in June 1995, Mayor Daley named his outgoing chief of staff, Gery Chico, president of the new Reform Board of Trustees and appointed business people or city hall administrators to the other four trustee positions. Daley appointed his budget director, Paul Vallas, to the position of Chief Executive Officer. Three of the other four positions on the management team—the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Purchasing Officer, and Chief Operating Officer—went to other high-level city officials. Among these positions, only one, the Chief Education Officer, was filled with a professional educator, a former principal turned educational consultant.²⁰

Initially, the Collaborative and Challenge staff had mixed reactions to the new school governance structure. In some ways, the suspicion that the Collaborative had about the CPS central office was exacerbated. For many Collaborative members, the new law challenged the very basis of LSC authority by setting up an accountability system

that refocused principals and teachers on central office mandates and reporting.

The 1988 empowerment of LSCs and the devolution of resources to schools had captured the passions of Collaborative members.²¹ Indeed, many Collaborative members had helped draft those provisions of the 1988 law. In 1995, they did not have much influence on the substance of the law, and few had attended the Springfield meetings held to draft its contents. Some were surprised it had passed.

Yet, the new law did give the central administration the tools to remedy fiscal problems that had hamstrung the district. CEO Paul Vallas proved an adept fiscal administrator, balancing the budget within his first few months in office. He quickly signed a four-year contract with the teachers union, thereby vastly diminishing the possibility that labor action might delay school openings and hinder innovation. Vallas publicly exposed inefficiencies and initiated, with full-blown media coverage, an assortment of school-based programs targeted to problems like truancy and school violence; but at least in the first year, he seemed willing to leave instruction to the schools.

For his part, the mayor welcomed his new authority, backing each new initiative from the central office with boisterous approval. As Vice President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1996, Mayor Daley used his bully pulpit to promote the school system's efficiency and fiscal achievements nationally. Within the year, he had become the nation's unofficial "education mayor" and was encouraging other mayors to take over the schools in their cities.

Now that he was politically accountable for the system, Mayor Daley chafed at \$50 million in Annenberg funding going to schools in a manner he could not control. As one mayoral aide put it:

I know there was a great deal of concern because (city hall) people viewed it as just a big

pot of money that was being essentially run by (other) people who did not have accountability for the system. And the Mayor said, “I have accountability for the system. I’m the one whose . . . career is going to be made or broken with this commitment, and I want to have access to that money.”

The process of formalizing the Chicago Challenge as a foundation was encouraged by these changes in system governance. As a second cycle of grants was being reviewed in early 1996, Executive Director Rolling hoped to clarify the goals and expectations of the Chicago Challenge in order to adapt its core vision in this changed context. Members of the Collaborative, the Board, and the Chicago Challenge staff

were voicing their own concerns. Rolling reported that in general they “have not been highly impressed with the creativity and inventiveness” of the implementation proposals funded in the first round.²² Voiced to the Annenberg Foundation in Pennsylvania, these concerns elicited encouragement to increase the staff, tighten the grantmaking process, and find ways to nurture potential grantees.

Rolling was also discovering that schools and external partners not already in a functioning partnership seemed to be having particular difficulty applying the three conceptual anchors of time, size, and isolation to their common interests. Their proposals lacked coherence and seldom focused on “systemic” change.

Although he did not speak for the entire Chicago Challenge Board, one member, a business association leader instrumental in passage of the

1995 law, began what was to be a sustained critique of the networks funded in 1995:

The project proposals, by and large, were awful. Which is what you could have expected. You were getting people that didn’t know anything about developing programs, and beyond that, how to implement it. I’d read program proposals—and I spent forty years reading program, project proposals—and you couldn’t tell the difference between one asking for ten thousand

and the one who was asking for three hundred thousand. There were all levels of generality and a lack of specificity. . . .I’ve talked to Ken about it at length. You’ve got this whole [1995] reform business we’re talking about, and then you’ve got time,

size, and isolation. It was a parallel universe.

Each of these factors—a skeptical and ambitious school administration, prodding from the Annenberg Foundation, staff qualms and confused applicants, and at least one uneasy Board member, encouraged the Chicago Challenge staff and Board to think more strategically about how it used its resources.

In response, Rolling clarified the goals of the Chicago Challenge and created a more professionally driven approval process. He eliminated the open-ended information meetings once held by the Collaborative and no longer required a letter of intent to screen applicants. Instead, he encouraged applicants who wanted information to write or phone the Chicago Challenge offices at any time. Letters would receive written comments from “at least two” Collaborative members, but

[New networks] seemed to be having particular difficulty applying the conceptual anchors of time, size, and isolation to their common interests.

phone calls were clearly a more immediate feedback option. He recommended the development of workshops to explain the funding criteria and encouraged the Board of Directors to slow down the grantmaking process, perhaps by requiring more planning from applicants before an implementation request was funded. He hired consultants to help him identify grantees from among applicants, but also developed his own recommendations to the board for each applicant. Two meetings for existing networks were organized to discover their non-monetary needs. As these internal grant monitoring and review processes became more formalized, new Chicago Challenge staff were hired. Their titles and functional responsibilities reflected those found in any foundation.

Taken together, these changes allowed the Chicago Challenge strategy to focus on the applicants that might meet guidelines. As anticipated, the number of applicants in each of the two grant cycles of 1996 was less than half those applying in 1995. Because many applications in the second half of 1996 came from networks already funded in 1995 and seeking additional funding, the proportion approved was higher. Both applications and approved grants continued to come primarily from networks with higher education and community-based partners. Tightening the funding process narrowed the applicant pool and solidified the Chicago Challenge's focus on those grantees to whom it had already made commitments.

Third Wave, 1997

Before the last grant cycle of 1996 was complete, the institutional context had once again shifted. By the spring of 1996, the new CPS administration began to focus on the academic performance of students and schools. Until then, the CEO and his management team had directed their attention to stabilizing and re-legitimizing the central office.

Capitalizing on the significant good will he had earned through tight fiscal management and ex-

cellent public relations, CEO Vallas invoked portions of the 1995 law giving him the authority to put schools on academic probation if he felt they were unwilling or unable to “remediate their deficiencies.”²³ He chose to trigger academic probation in those schools where 15 percent or fewer of the students scored at national norms on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). Beyond this, schools were warned that a more drastic sanction awaited those whose scores did not improve or whose probation managers recommended it. Re-

[CPS] measures put the schools on notice that their organizational survival depended on meeting minimum standardized test score targets.

constitution would require that all school staff re-apply for their jobs. The central office, not LSCs, would make decisions about who could stay on.

Underscoring the test-based direction of the new regime's academic accountability initiatives, in the summer of 1996, eighth-grade students were told that the ITBS test in reading that they had been taking for years would now have high stakes. Those scoring below a grade equivalent score of 6.8 would be required to go to remedial summer school, after which a re-testing would determine if they might graduate to the next grade or be retained in elementary school. About a quarter of the class failed the test. In succeeding years the policy was also applied to third, sixth and ninth graders, and the ITBS math test also had to be passed at a predetermined grade equivalent score.²⁴

The combined effects of these new measures put the schools on notice that their organizational survival depended on meeting minimum standardized test score targets. Forty-three Annenberg network schools were on the initial list of 109 schools put on probation, and all saw students being retained. During that year, about 30 percent of the principals in Chicago Challenge schools identified conflicts between their networks' priorities and the priorities of the central office.²⁵ As Chicago Challenge schools began to focus on survival, and the basis for judging school success narrowed, the Chicago Challenge Board, staff, and Collaborative began to rethink whether their earlier strategy was appropriate for the new conditions.

Near ubiquitous praise for the system's new management team and for their new school and student accountability measures brought the institutional context nearly full circle. Once seen as supporting the primary vision of decentralized school reform in the city, the Chicago Challenge, with its emphasis on school-by-school innovation and pedagogical risk-taking, now found itself opposed to the basic direction of the system that leaned toward uniform (if low) performance expectations and centrally imposed sanctions.

Champions of the new regime included business, government, and CPS leaders. In their interviews with us, about half of these leaders knew little or nothing about the Chicago Challenge. Of those who could respond to our queries, half identified the Chicago Challenge with a flawed attempt at systemwide improvement, stubbornly withholding its marginal resources from CPS initiatives.²⁶ In the summer of 1997 Mayor Daley wrote of the Chicago Challenge: "The best strategy for Annenberg, or any other foundation, is to support the CPS education plan articulated by Gery Chico, President of the School Reform Board of Trustees, and Paul Vallas, CPS Chief Executive Officer."²⁷ The local media had developed a symbiotic relationship with the new CEO and his

team; nearly all the education coverage presented central office perspectives.²⁸ By this time, too, President Clinton was praising the accountability measures being used in the Chicago schools and vowing to conduct a national study so that other cities might emulate their example.²⁹ In the face of a "system on the move," the vision of school reform that had spawned the Chicago Challenge was no longer leading.³⁰

The Chicago Challenge responded to the more constrained environment by becoming more activist in its grantmaking. First, Rolling and the Board strengthened their emphasis on school-by-school opportunities to improve classroom practice by determining that Chicago Challenge staff would identify successful implementation networks from the first two funding cycles and offer them multi-year grants to the year 2000. The already large number of schools (200) and networks (50) being served also influenced the change. These numbers were far more than had been originally anticipated; it was difficult to imagine how the small Chicago Challenge staff could effectively support an increase.

This new process eliminated the half-yearly granting cycles that had characterized the first two years of grantmaking. Essentially, the cycle of RFPs, network proposal review, followed by one-to two-year grants came to an end, and the Chicago Challenge anticipated no longer accepting or funding additional networks after June 1998. At the beginning of the 1997 grant year, the executive director estimated about half of the existing planning grants "will not make it." But it proved more difficult to eliminate networks than he expressed. In the end, a full three-quarters of the networks funded in 1997 had previously received a grant from the Chicago Challenge and were offered some form of continuation grant.

The new grantees funded in 1997 went through a grantmaking process quite different from that experienced by applicants initially funded in 1995 or 1996. They were carefully coached in

How City Leaders View the Chicago Challenge

To help us understand the prospects and impediments that face the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, we talked with a wide range of city leaders from June to October, 1997. We wanted to know what Chicago's civic and governmental leaders had heard about the Challenge, its goals and strategies to improve the public schools. We asked about their expectations for the Chicago Challenge and what advice they would give the Chicago Challenge Board. Their answers varied, but followed noticeable patterns.

Importantly, they revealed a substantial lack of information about the Chicago Challenge. Business, government, and some central office leaders knew the least about the Chicago Challenge—about half of each group would not even speculate on its goals or strategy. About one-third of the labor and media leaders had the same lack of information or gave us an inaccurate account of the Chicago Challenge. When pressed, many could identify one or more key elements of the strategy, for instance, that the Chicago Challenge required schools to have partners before funding them; but the typical leader was not able to put these elements into any sort of coherent change strategy, and told us so.

Their lack of knowledge about the Chicago Challenge did not deter the city's civic and governmental leaders from making judgments about what it might accomplish. They had developed these opinions based on their vague recollections of the process by which the Challenge was brought to Chicago, its founding members, their own grant application experience, or an experience that had been related to them. About half of the business and one-quarter of the government and central office leaders we interviewed had already determined that the Chicago Challenge would not meet its goals. In their eyes, the Chicago Challenge was pursuing an incomplete strategy, or at least one they assumed to be incomplete based on their sketchy understanding. On the other hand, two-thirds of the media and one-third of the labor leaders we interviewed assumed that the Chicago Challenge would succeed, at least in part, despite how little they knew.

Nearly everyone we interviewed had advice for the Chicago Challenge Board. Over half of them advised the board to broaden the focus of their grantmaking to include funding systemwide efforts aimed at changing policy. Of these, one-half suggested focusing on the professional development of teachers and/or the systemwide training of parents for their roles *as parents*. The rest suggested more dissemination of information about the Chicago Challenge or refocusing on a few well-chosen groups of schools.

Many of those who responded to our query about what would provide “satisfying evidence of success” from the Chicago Challenge's efforts pointed to measures that were not tightly linked to Chicago Challenge goals. About half identified improved test scores and other measures of success of individual student achievement. For the most part, it was business, media, and labor leaders who gave this response; but half of the leaders of community organizations with whom we spoke agreed. Immediate expectations for higher student outcomes like standardized test score improvements seem to be at odds with the Chicago Challenge's strategy of seeking structural changes like alterations in the way time is used in schools, reducing school isolation from communities, and making learning environments more intimate.

the development of weak portions of their programs; encouraged to add elements that creatively addressed the core concepts of time, size, and isolation; and invited to a series of training sessions that explained the Challenge staff's vision of successful strategies for school restructuring. In addition to Chicago Challenge staff, partner organizations from a few successful networks were facilitator/trainers at these sessions, further focusing the Chicago Challenge and its resources on particular types of instructional change and community involvement. This extensive coaching process rapidly led to a strand of workshops designed to assist already-funded networks in sharing their implementation problems. Another objective of these new program development sessions was to bolster their commitment to local innovation in the face of strong district sanctions.

This two-year development of the grantmaking process reflected organizational learning on the part of the Challenge staff, the Collaborative, and the Board. An initial grantmaking process that was open to nearly all applicants, but that expected grant seekers to have clear and innovative ideas about how they would pursue the goal of restructuring, confronted the reality of school people and community partners who had only begun to think about what they might do. Most networks proposed limited projects rather than fundamental change. Few seemed likely to have the kind of deep impact anticipated by the Challenge, and fewer still were clear about how they would tackle the many impediments to implementation that routinely face organizations hoping to reinvent themselves. Founding member Bill Ayers reflected on the problem that encouraged this strategic change: "Even though people get the power decentralized, if there is no educational imagination—if the imagined space is narrow—then you end up with people proposing to do the same old thing with a little better intention, and that changes nothing."

At least some of the initial grantees and subsequent applicants appeared to have a weak under-

standing of, or commitment to, the Challenge strategy of restructuring, and needed a push. As one board member who is also a foundation executive reflected:

The question is, How do you help schools or networks that receive these funds become committed to these ideas which they have pledged to say they were already committed to? My experience as a grantmaker (and also as a grantee) is that people often say things that they do not mean in their heart of hearts, but mean "sort of" in order to get money.

The Challenge became more activist partly in response to the lack of imagination among the proposals received and funded, and partly as a result of concerns voiced by grantees who seemed to be unclear about the implicit values and expectations built into the tripartite "time, size, and isolation" levers for restructuring. In the late summer of 1997, Executive Director Rolling clarified what he saw as the Chicago Challenge's response to the problem:

We realized [that] just because you build it they will not come. . . . [W]e had to add a strong program resource piece and that's what we've been engaged in since the first of this year. We [now] say, "Not only do we want to lure you into these relationships with the money and this Working Group, but we also need to lead you or expose you to a set of resources." . . . We needed to inject ideas . . . with the spirit that . . . we're still respecting your choice. . . . We're being more nudging and more pro-active . . . because all the resources that we're pushing toward the networks are examples of things we expect people to be dealing with. . . . We felt like we couldn't do that if we hadn't adjusted our original strategy.

These organizational and procedural changes also demonstrate increasing awareness by Chicago Challenge staff of the distance that had developed between them and the supporters of the mayor and the new CPS regime. For example, the city's powerful business groups were among the most vocal in their support of the mayor, and simultaneously, the most critical of the Chicago Challenge. After community-based groups and institutions of higher education, which taken together represented more than three-quarters of all the proposals submitted to the Chicago Challenge from 1995 through 1997, business groups had submitted the next largest number, about seven percent of the total.³¹ Yet before 1997, their rate of acceptance (1 percent) was far below that of networks with community groups (particularly cultural institutions, like museums) and higher education institutions as partners (44 percent each).

Business leaders we interviewed claimed the Annenberg dollars could be better spent on one of the school system's priorities like additional early childhood education programs, remediation of kids in summer school programs, technology, helping dropouts, training principals, or as a reward for schools that improve their ITBS test results.

While our business informants were unhappy with the direction they saw the Chicago Challenge taking, they knew little of substance about it. Except one business representative who sat on the Board, none of those we interviewed was even willing to venture a guess about the Chicago Challenge's goals. But over half felt the Chicago Challenge would not succeed in meeting its goals, whatever they were, because they were not "consistent with what is going on in the Chicago Public School system." To several of them, the "holy trinity" of time, size, and isolation seemed to dominate proposal acceptance criteria, and, as one put it, this was "abstract to the point of irrelevancy." Another simply misconstrued what the emphasis on time meant to the Chicago Challenge, asking rhetorically, "If it's a shitty day, why

would we want to lengthen it? ... If they only get forty minutes with this teacher, I want them to be the best forty minutes they can get. And, if they got that, *then* let's make it fifty." Aware of the skepticism, and the fact that it was being echoed in some parts of city hall, CPS, and beyond, the Chicago Challenge staff identified and coached two business partner networks that they were willing to fund in 1997. One received an ini-

The media pitted the decentralized reform of 1988 against the new central agenda of the mayor.

tial planning grant; the other received an implementation grant.

Support for reform was needed across a broad range of community sectors, and encouraging a wider range of potential external partners to become a part of the process could facilitate this. Before 1997, the Chicago Challenge staff, Collaborative, and Board had clarified their values by rejecting weak proposals from several partners that it might have been politic to accept. This kind of principled stand could engender hard feelings, and it also did little to increase understanding of the goals of the Chicago Challenge.

In 1996-97, nearly all education stories were crowded out by a CPS media blitz about high stakes testing, mandatory summer school, school reconstruction, and other accountability mandates. The media pitted the decentralized reform of 1988 against the new central agenda of the mayor, implying—frequently claiming—the former had failed. In response, the Chicago Challenge joined with other foundations in the city to

address what they perceived to be an “inaccurate media picture of Chicago school reform largely driven by the Chicago Public Schools central office.”³² Collective frustration led to a public education initiative to publicize the “promising and good practices” of schools and shape the future agenda of school reform. Rolling acknowledged that Chicago Challenge success would be measured as much by how the media covered any improvement in Challenge schools, as it would be by their substantive impact:

So that the parents say, “Oh, that’s what a good school is! I recognize it and I’m glad my kids are there.” Legislators say, “Stop dumping on these schools!” Business people say, “Yeah, I want to get people [employees] out of this system or at least [from] this set of [Annenberg] schools, who I don’t have to train when they walk in the door. They know how to read and write. They can answer phones and they have basic skills. In fact, they can even think.”

In another demonstration of their new activist approach to philanthropy, Rolling and the Chicago Challenge staff helped craft the campaign that was to include a targeted publicity effort, special issues of the monthly education newsmagazine *Catalyst*, and a citywide conference in fall 1998. The Chicago Challenge Board committed funds along with several other foundations in the city.

In further recognition that new conditions required a new strategic approach, the Chicago Challenge expanded its staff to nine. Each staff member was given a foundation title and responsibilities. Collectively, they were expected to help raise and monitor matching funds, coach and advise new grantees, review grant proposals, maintain grant records and reports, provide collaborative and training opportunities to existing grantees, and develop a public communication plan for the Chicago Challenge. Some were also to assist the ex-

ecutive director in devising new programs for using an anticipated \$8 million in uncommitted funds.

For the executive director, working with the new school governance regime underscored that the Chicago Challenge was “not the elephant in town.” This meant constantly revisiting and emphasizing the core values of the Chicago Challenge while responding to new circumstances. By 1997, the Chicago Challenge was considering broadening the network grantmaking strategy to consider spending its remaining funds on “two or three major issues in the system.” Several of these programming suggestions were efforts to partner directly with the Chicago Public Schools, either by co-sponsoring principal or teacher development programs or by identifying new network foci that would fit with the CPS accountability measures (e.g., high school restructuring and reconstitution).³³ In a related effort, Rolling encouraged the Board to support developing a Public Education Fund in Chicago that would draw upon a wide range of business and foundation sources for ongoing education support to the schools.

At the same time, the Challenge renewed its earlier commitment to reconnect schools with their communities. They developed a grant category that had been conceived by the Collaborative in 1995. The Leadership Development Grant was specifically designed to assist in organizing and training parents, community residents, and LSC members to work better with schools in their efforts to improve education. Several versions of an RFP for this purpose had been circulating within the Chicago Challenge since then. But only one grant—for LSC election support—had been funded in 1996 from this category. By the end of 1997, three had been awarded grants in that category from among seven applicants, giving Chicago Challenge staff the opportunity to help develop a curriculum for leadership development training.

The Annenberg Foundation also requested that the Chicago Challenge Board be expanded to at

least eleven members in order to include more business and other top-level representatives from the city, extend the fund-raising possibilities, and “give increased credibility” to the Chicago Challenge’s work.³⁴ They encouraged most of the other substantive changes in the 1997 strategy, including greater public visibility for the Chicago Challenge’s goals and its interim success stories, a larger, more specialized staff, more opportunities for funded networks to collaborate, and greater cooperation with the CPS.

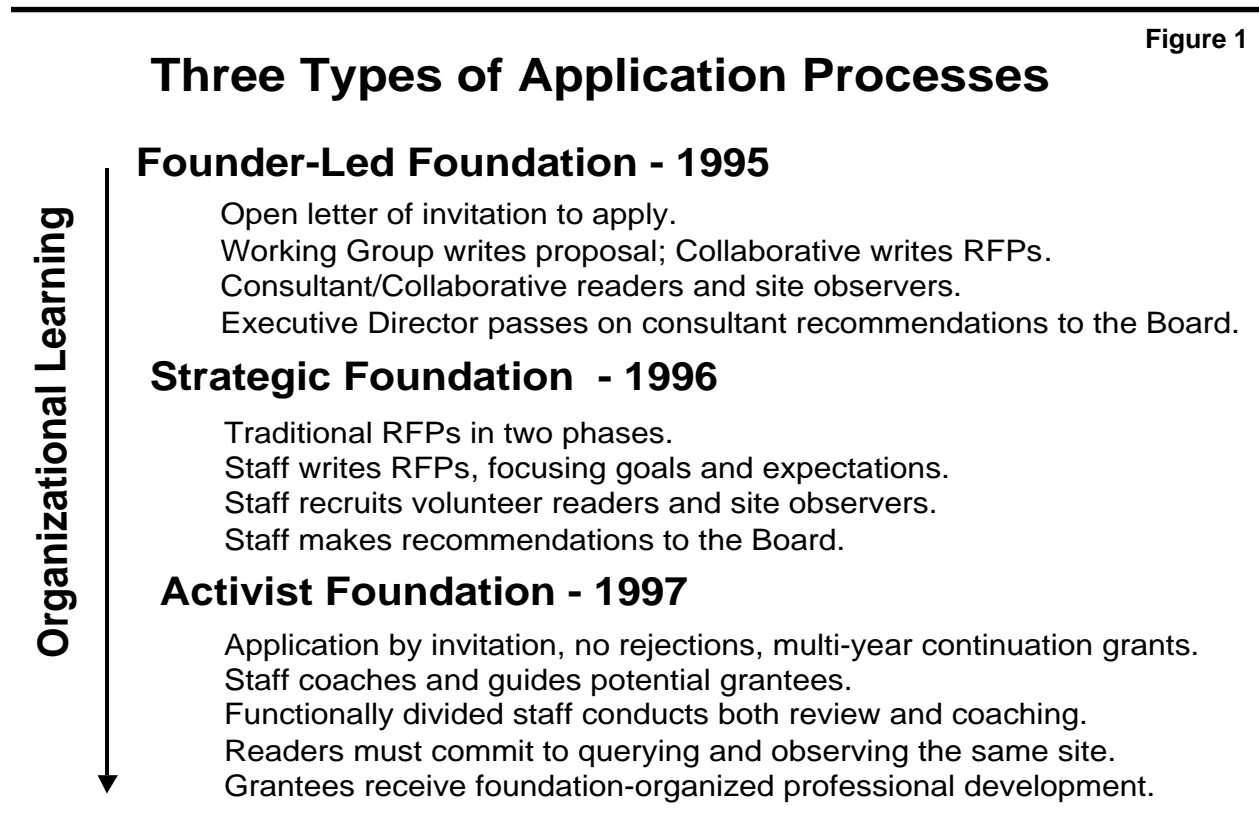
Organizational Learning

The Chicago Challenge had its roots in the vision of the community activists who were a crucial part of the 1988 school reform coalition. Its initial strategy rested on a definition of the schooling problem that was quite similar to that which had guided activists in 1988. The proposal to fund the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was written by three individuals long associated with grassroots

organizing for community development in Chicago, while negotiations with the Annenberg Foundation were facilitated by a group of local foundation leaders who had already invested significant resources in reforming the city’s public schools.

The first grantees were an extremely diverse group, each proposing to pursue some worthy idea in partnership with at least three schools.³⁵ There is little that conceptually unites them except that the large majority had institutions of higher education or community organizations as partners.

Collaborative members, local faculty and others served as an informal review team, and the Chicago Challenge operated without a staff for the recently hired executive director. A review of the “evaluation sheets” used to rank the 1995 proposals revealed no consistent pattern between consultants’ numerical ratings of a proposal’s promise and the proposal’s acceptance. It is likely that grants were awarded in this period in a manner similar to that Ellen Condliffe Lagemann found



at the Carnegie Corporation in the 1930s: “on hunch, coincidence, opportunity, friendship, and a wish to help.”³⁶ However, this founder-led philanthropy was short-lived.

The Chicago Challenge rapidly adapted to its institutional environment. Figure 1 outlines how this adaptation changed its internal organizational structure and the way that it has interacted with potential grantees. When the governance structure of the school system changed dramatically, the Chicago Challenge refocused in an attempt to sustain its basic principles in the face of new obstacles. In response to the new test-based accountability system for students and schools, a concentration of power at the central office under non-educators, new CPS leadership unsympathetic to educational processes as well as to its own experiences in working with the earliest grantees, the Chicago Challenge refocused its strategies. Lagemann again clarified the meaning of the change when she described a shift in the post-war Carnegie Corporation: “If it had once been sufficient to justify a grant on its merits, now it became necessary, in addition, to demonstrate how that grant must fit within one of the Corporation’s articulated and agreed-upon plans for reaching long-range goals.”³⁷ As central office mandates continued to undermine or mitigate Chicago Challenge goals and divert the attention of people in schools, the Chicago Challenge has become increasingly “activist.”

Some Consequences

As a foundation—rather than a collaborative of community organizations or an arm of the school system, for instance—the Chicago Challenge has broadened its base of institutional resources and helped to insure its own survival. At the same time, it has attenuated its potential for influencing how the school system evolves.

By identifying itself as a foundation, the Chicago Challenge has eased some of the resource gathering burdens it would otherwise face. It can

relatively easily identify the required matching funds from the city’s other foundations because it shares their common accounting and record keeping procedures, and also because many of the city’s leading foundation executives share common understandings about the leveraging role they play in education policy formation.³⁸ The foundation sector also confers stability, collegiality, and social acceptance upon its member organizations. As a group, they have well-developed ways to diffuse potential conflicts between them and other sectors. For instance, foundations can gain the symbolic acceptance of local civic leaders by seating them on foundation boards and commissions. The Chicago Challenge has pursued this strategy as a matter of course.

The legally sanctioned and pre-determined operating rules and procedures of foundations also limited the Chicago Challenge’s vulnerability to being labeled a self-interested funding mechanism for its founding community activists. The number of community service and school reform groups receiving grants increased during each funding cycle, but after 1995 they were chosen using a formal review process that largely eliminated the direct influence of the Collaborative.³⁹

By developing into an activist foundation, the Chicago Challenge also targeted its influence opportunities through its granting authority. It can (and has) provided grant support to the school system, the local principals’ association, and other key schooling groups in addition to community activists and universities to support their work with particular schools. Although few in number, business groups, labor, government agencies, and even other foundations have all served as external partners for Chicago Challenge network grants. The example of two new grants to business groups described above clarifies how grants to networks with these non-traditional partners have been recently expanded.

In the summer of 1997, the Chicago Challenge broadened its granting categories. It now promotes

Leadership Development Grants with a community-organizing focus. These grants have been few in number thus far, but may expand the focus of the Challenge's potential influence on a wider range of institutional actors. The collaborative grants being considered with CPS may generate quicker understanding of the Chicago Challenge's goals among a broader cross section of people in the city than grants focused on a few schools, and bolster its current public informing efforts.

There are some well-known limitations to strategic grantmaking as a way to influence policy. The Chicago Challenge has inherited many of them. As is often the case in the startup phase of a new foundation strategy, the original grantees frame what can be accomplished in succeeding years. The network strategy initially driving its grantmaking process gave the external partners selected in 1995 strong influence over the types of innovation that the Chicago Challenge would be embracing. Most of the Challenge's resources were quickly committed to them in long-term grants, and they, in turn, provided the Challenge with its primary image of what was needed to push restructuring. Their very diversity makes it hard for the Chicago Challenge to encompass these grantees within a coherent vision of improvement that can be readily understood. Whatever new focus the staff wish to give the Chicago Challenge, they are limited by resource commitments to existing networks. Nor is it only grantees that frame future possibilities. Rejecting a proposal can create new friction between the Chicago Challenge and other powerful groups in the city.

The Chicago Challenge also has all the problems of foundations that seek reliable information about what its grantees are doing, how much progress they are making, and how much assistance they need. Procedural paperwork, mandatory meetings, and reporting requirements can overwhelm a grantee's view of the Chicago Challenge contribution. As has been reported by a sample of external partners in funded implemen-

tation networks, the Chicago Challenge has been generally perceived as helpful, even though most raised the expected concerns about administrative matters, including reporting guidelines, proposal deadlines, and the like.⁴⁰

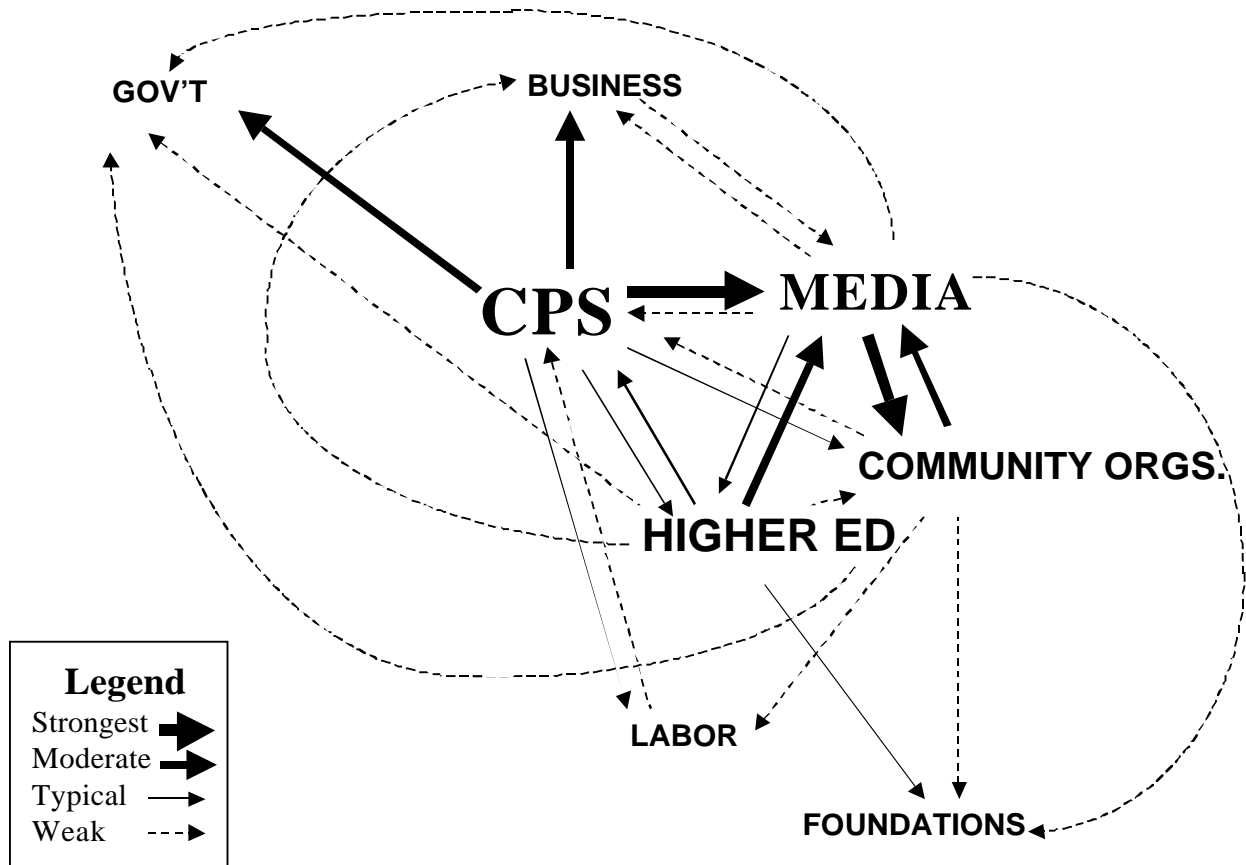
It is also common for grantees to alter their programmatic descriptions to fit the perceived priorities of the foundation in formal correspondence, without changing practice. Grantees have strategic reasons to present the most positive case when reporting on their own progress. In addition, the results of external evaluations are quite frequently completed too late to be of much assistance in adjusting foundation strategy. Any of these circumstances impose limitations on the Challenge's ability to influence policy through the work of its grantees.

In one attempt to sort out the direction and strength of influence patterns among the leaders of the seven sectors we interviewed in the city, we asked where each of our informants found his or her most reliable information about the Chicago Public Schools. We discovered that foundations are well outside the current influence networks. No other group was further removed. While foundation executives themselves most frequently cited their grantees as sources of reliable information, virtually none of the other civics leaders we interviewed identified a foundation, or anyone in a foundation, as a reliable source of information.

As Figure 2 shows, the strongest patterns of trustworthy information are one-way relationships from the central administration of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). That is, except for foundation executives, leaders in every sector on Figure 2 identified the current school management team or their immediate subordinates as the most reliable sources of information they have about the schools. The single strongest relationship is the media's overwhelming reliance on CPS management for information.⁴¹ The media's role in diffusing this information—especially to community organizations—is illustrated by community lead-

Figure 2

Sources of Reliable Information about the Chicago Public Schools



ers' equally strong dependence on media for reliable information.

Two dynamics illustrated here are of significance to the Chicago Challenge. First, only foundations (including the Chicago Challenge) and general government organizations (e.g., legislature, city hall) lie completely outside the reliable information networks for schooling. Ironically, while the Chicago Challenge and city hall may feel pitted against one another for influence over the schools, other city leaders see neither as an especially reliable source of information.

Second, the primary grantees of the Chicago Challenge—community organizations and institutions of higher education—are themselves moderately or typically strong sources of reliable information. In heavily supporting higher education and community groups as external partners, the Chicago Challenge has encouraged voices other than that of the current school regime in the ongoing dialogue about school reform. At the same time, its own voice—presumably a potentially synthesizing and unifying force that could magnify the impact of a single network—remains largely unheeded.

What Is a Theory of Action?

Theory of Action is a term used to describe a leader's values and assumptions about how change works, and what is needed to make it happen. Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schon used this concept extensively in their writing about the change process and how that vision may contrast with the ways actions are perceived by others.¹ Theories of action need not be thorough or logically consistent in the way one expects of a theory capable of being scientifically tested to be. Instead, theories of action are based on the combination of personal experience, acquired knowledge, and instinct that a leader brings to a problem in need of a solution.

Although we did not expect any single city leader to have a complete theory of action about school improvement, a few did. Their answers were especially helpful in providing us with the metaphors that we used to name and distinguish the five theories described here. But we used information from all those we interviewed to construct our final theories of action. We categorized the answers each of the leaders gave to a common series of questions about the most pressing problems in the Chicago Public Schools today, what was needed to address them, which resources were crucial to successful improvement, and what impediments stood in the way. Then we independently placed each leader in one or more of the emerging categories. As individuals, many of the 70 leaders fit in two categories, a few in three. In this sense, the theories of action sketched here are composite accounts.

In describing these theories, we use the words of our informants as much as possible. To honor commitments of anonymity, however, we do so with unattributed quotations.

¹Argyris and Schon (1974). For a more recent use of theories of action, see Hatch (1998).

Competing Theories and Common Ground

Conflict and controversy about the best way to improve public schooling in Chicago are inevitable: this city faces the same dilemmas that confound many other school reform efforts. As Thomas Hatch observed about the ATLAS project: there are tensions between seeking systemwide support and the development of lead schools and programs, between attending to the immediate needs of children and addressing the broader community's expectations, and between respecting the choices and preferences of individual schools and encouraging more schools to take risks that might overcome impediments.⁴²

As described in the introduction, the Chicago Public Schools had been undergoing systemwide reform for at least five years before the Chicago Challenge was initiated. Beyond that, the system had been the target of downsizing and other efficiency measures for at least ten years. A wide range of stakeholder groups in the city participated in one way or another in those changes, and since 1995 they have engaged the political energies of Chicago's powerful mayor.

This ongoing reform effort encouraged us to ask how these city leaders viewed change in the public schools. We suspected that media coverage and their own personal engagement had spurred them to form their own notions about what it would take to "fix" Chicago's schools. We wanted to know what kinds of expectations the city's community, political, media, labor, business, and civic leaders hold for the public schools, and how their theories of action differ from what the Chicago Challenge is proposing. For instance, how does the top leadership in the CPS see the need for change? What about leaders in the city's many colleges and universities that train CPS teachers? What are the media's expectations? We offer some answers to those questions from the participants themselves who were interviewed between June 1997 and October 1997.

Theories of Action

This section reports on the ways that the Chicago Challenge fits into the larger pattern of school reform in the city. Here we reconstruct the theories of action that city leaders gave us in response to our questions about how the Chicago Public Schools ought to be improved. Their answers help us explore the hopes that different groups in the city have for schools and the ways different leaders define the school system's most pressing problems. They also give us insight into the mechanisms and resources that city leaders feel are needed to achieve their goals. In answering questions about such things, Chicago's leaders told us what they valued as first principles and starting points for change, what they saw as evidence of successful school change in general, where they focus their attention, and what kinds of effort would be needed to effect change.

Below we describe the four theories of action that we discovered among governmental and civic leaders' answers to our direct questions, as well as our distillation of the Chicago Challenge theory of action as we captured it in interviews with the Chicago Challenge Board, staff, and founding members, in the proposal the Annenberg Foundation approved, and in subsequent Chicago Challenge documents. We present the contrast to highlight the importance of the choices made by the Chicago Challenge as it had developed its strategy and grantmaking criteria. Were we to examine the Chicago Challenge theory in isolation from those held by other city leaders, we would underestimate the difficulty of engaging in a substantial school change effort where many governmental and civic leaders hold quite different views about the nature of the problems faced and how they

should be solved. Moreover, the complexities of leveraging change through the efforts of a foundation are better understood when they can be put in the context of other contrasting and competing visions of change in the city.

In addition, we hope that Chicagoans will be encouraged by the range in the theories of action presented here. Chicago school reform is frequently portrayed as polarizing the city into two camps: those who support the 1988 law and its efforts to decentralize school governance, and those who support the 1995 law that re-centralized many aspects of school governance. In this bipolar frame-

work, the Chicago Challenge is put in the same camp with the 1988 reformers, limiting dialogue between it, the current central administration, and other Chicago citizens. The opportunities for broad public dialogue among those generally interested in school reform is also constrained by this bipolar perspective. The fact that we found five distinct theories of action

(including the Chicago Challenge theory of action) is testimony to the rich and complex dialogue that could engage the city. It also suggests that more local resources would be available to improve Chicago's schools if the currently limited set of reform goals were expanded.

We did find a theory of action that corresponded to the vision most often ascribed to the 1988 reformers. We call this theory of action Democratic Revitalization. It is espoused primarily by members of community-based organizations. We also found a theory that corresponds to the vision of those who support the current central administration and its recentralization. We call that the Management Turnaround, espoused primarily by business and government leaders.

The fact that we found five distinct theories of action (including the Chicago Challenge theory of action) is testimony to the rich and complex dialogue that could engage the city.

Figure 3

Differences among the Theories of Action in Chicago

| | Chicago Challenge | Democratic Revitalization | Management Turnaround | Recentring the Pendulum | Redis-tributing Resources |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| Problem definition | 1988 Reform did not go far enough. | Centralized bureaucracy controlling the system. | Poor leadership and lack of accountability. | Insufficient attention to classroom instruction and teachers. | Economic and racial inequality. |
| Action plan | Build on past gains. Focus on structural change. Encourage innovation with incentive funds. | Strengthen LSCs and site-based management. Revitalize community engagement. | Focus on outcomes. Hold everyone accountable for some uniform standard. | Revalue teachers and teaching. Develop teachers. Link curriculum, teaching, and assessment. | Generate dialogue about underlying causes of inequality. Metropolitan/state/federal and local responses. |
| Key resources | "Vanguard" schools. External partners. LSCs. Community engagement. | LSCs. Grassroots organizations. Chicago Challenge. University researchers. | Decisive leadership. Political and business support. Quiescent unions. Market incentives to improve. | System's exemplary educators. Universities willing to retrain. Technology push. | Civic values about common schooling. Public spirited media. Political bully pulpits. Federal and state government entities. |
| Impediments | New CPS leadership. Narrow prescriptions for change. Managing complex interaction among many groups. | Current governance structure. Short-term political solutions. Parent/community passivity. | Revolt of parents and teachers against accountability sanctions. Impatience. Lack of will to improve that slows momentum. | Fascination with top-down accountability. Old fashioned unionism. Parent and community distrust of educators. | Resistance from the currently privileged. Implicit search for two-tier society. Dialogue may challenge notions of common school. |

In addition to these and the Chicago Challenge theory of action (The Next Leap Forward), we also found two others, neither of which is well represented in the current dialogue about schooling in the city. Redistributing Resources is what we

named the theory of action that highlights the unequal distribution of educational resources in the city, both historically and in the current moment. This theory is espoused primarily by foundation, media, and some community leaders;

several university faculty; and at least one businessman. Recentering the Pendulum is the name we have given to a theory of action that seeks to turn attention to the classroom and the quality of instruction in the public schools. That theory of action is primarily espoused by the leaders of the city's many education schools and departments in higher education institutions. But they are joined by a mixed group of media, foundation, school district, and labor leaders.

We suspect that in hindsight, many of those with whom we spoke would approve of the elements of more than one theory. Similarly, we expect that readers will find several attractive, as we do. Taken together, these theories invite reflection on the difficulty (we are tempted to say the impossibility) of the Chicago Challenge remaining faithful to its original formulation. There are simply too many alternatives to which its grantees could be drawn.⁴³

Figure 3 reduces these five theories of action to a few core distinctions. In doing so, it ignores the many overlapping ideas that occur between theories. But it is the differences of emphases and how they affect expectations for school reform that can help to explain the dilemmas the Chicago Challenge faces and the organizational adaptation necessary for its own legitimacy. The evolution documented in Part I of this report is evidence that the Chicago Challenge has had to adapt to its institutional environment. We saw that the Chicago Challenge Board, staff, and Collaborative members have all struggled with different conceptions of school change. To some extent, they have been influenced by the other theories reported here; at other times, they have resisted making changes in the belief that fidelity to their original purposes will eventually prove fruitful.

The differences between a system of centralized mayoral governance and parent-led school-

by-school decision making through elected Local School Councils was clear to everyone with whom we spoke. Most of our informants saw at least potential conflict between accountability based on achieving standardized test score targets and process accountability in which schools are asked to take responsibility for defining and achieving their own goals. Mandatory programs created a set of practices and materials that could conflict with the efforts of reflective practitioners seeking to identify and solve their own problems. These and many other differences were attributed to the two successive governing regimes put in place by the 1988 and 1995 laws. Yet few were clear on how these differences grew out of different theories about the underlying problem in Chicago's schools and the way any problem definition prioritizes some resources and improvement strategies over others.

We expect that few would have anticipated that the other leaders of the city embodied so many different views of school change. Instead of two opposite perspectives representing the two coalitions that launched the successive reform laws, there are a range of concerns being raised that are not fully recognized in the city's ongoing dialogue about school reform. At the end of this section, we have more to say about how the unexpectedly large number of theories of school improvement among the city's leaders can be used to expand that dialogue.

Before presenting each of the other theories, we review the Chicago Challenge theory of action. We present it in distilled and static form, although we are aware that it has been continuously evolving. Our initial evidence for the Chicago Challenge theory came from documents—its accepted proposal to the Annenberg Foundation; correspondence among the central foundation staff in St Davids, Pennsylvania and Chicago; and the succession of Requests for Proposals to po-

tential grantees. Then we asked the authors of the proposal and the executive director to add what they found missing from our description. We were motivated by this two-step process to construct a richer, more nuanced account.

The Chicago Challenge Theory of Action: The Next Leap Forward

The Chicago Challenge builds on the 1988 law as the legislative embodiment of a “school reform movement” that has already seen some success, and created the conditions for much more. One legacy from the 1988 law is a “vanguard” of schools and their external partners. They are the movement’s critical mass from which it will recruit new schools, extending the principles of community-based school reform throughout the system, and leveraging policy support from the region and the state. Although the movement is currently “less energetic,” the Chicago Challenge hopes to further development by encouraging school communities to “think boldly” about how they might “change the structure of schools as we know them.”

Chicago Challenge leaders believe the 1988 reform law radically changed the fundamental policy context in which the city’s schools operate, “unleashing enormous civic energy.” Dramatic improvements, once blocked by a resistant “monopoly power of the central bureaucracy,” are now possible. The resulting “cohort of principals closely aligned with the needs, dreams, hopes of school communities” and new funds earmarked for poor children combine with great optimism to create new possibilities for change. Encouraged and mentored by external partners, a group of schools in the city have already made great strides towards “real reform.” Their partners, national and local school intervention programs, have gained a foothold in the city as a result of the new authority and resources given schools. LSCs are the democratic governance mechanism enabling many of these changes. They tap “a variety of people at

the school” and “a lot of community resources and energy” not previously available to schools, helping them to become “more entrepreneurial.”

The theme of the Chicago Challenge is broad—“the enhancement of learning for all students through dramatically improved classroom practice and strengthened community relationships.” Its founders envision a broad agenda of change: “developing and empowering” teachers, restructuring schools into “intimate learning communi-

The Chicago Challenge hopes to further development by encouraging school communities to “think boldly.”

ties” with tighter school-community relationships, and “systemic change.”⁴⁴ In practice, the founders expected the Chicago Challenge to spur creative responses in schools to three “leverage points”: the “inflexible press of time” and “the huge numbers of students [that schools] are responsible for” and the “isolation of schools from communities.” As the Chicago Challenge developed, isolation came to refer to the “isolation among teachers and administrators” as well.

Although the 1988 reform movement made strides in many elementary schools, it has not yet focused sufficiently on supporting teachers as decision-makers and creative problem solvers. The current “factory-like” nature and size of schools functions to alienate students and make them and teachers more anonymous. Instead of being responsive to central dictates, teachers need to be encouraged to collaborate and be given the time to be more reflective about their practice. Yet, educators in schools “can not and should not make

Distinct Theories of Action in the City

Each of the four theories we summarize is distinct because it addresses common issues quite differently. Each invokes quite different views of the recent history of Chicago school reform to explain why some concerns are more salient. The theories call upon diverse reservoirs of metaphor and analogy to explain the connection between problems and their ameliorating actions, and they highlight different actors and resources that will be needed to make improvements. Because of this, they help us to understand the complexity of the institutional renewal being undertaken in Chicago and the many potential conflicts and misunderstandings about the Chicago Challenge that can result.

changes alone.” They need the inspiration and resources of parents and community members. As importantly, these groups together need to step beyond governance to “imagine a different structure to the school” that will permit “ordinary people to do a good job by kids.”

The Chicago Challenge theory rests on three kinds of action plans:

1. to deepen the change already happening in vanguard schools and sustain their partners, giving them “a little extra push and help.”
2. to extend these changes to schools as yet untouched by the same kinds of improvement by getting them to “come for the money” and then “hook” them.
3. to leverage the school-based change into systemic changes in policy in the district, region, and state.

Key among the assets necessary for implementing these plans are the existing external partners fostered by 1988 movement. Vanguard schools demonstrate that progress is possible, and LSCs are also important means of insuring school commitment, both financial and personal. Ironically, strong central leadership of the public schools is

an asset because “it creates a context of more urgency for change.” Beyond these leaders, a widening array of groups including local foundations, media, community groups, and those teachers who have learned to work collaboratively can help sustain the movement’s momentum. They can do this if they say, “We are going to stick with this path.”

One impediment to success in recruiting new schools and leveraging central policy change is also the CPS leadership who painted champions of the 1988 law as “go slow, defend the status quo” types. For people in schools, the impediment is thinking that “time is seen as finite and already decided; size is seen as imposed.”

Democratic Revitalization

This definition of the problem is similar to that which guided the initial framers of the 1988 decentralization law. A long-term breakdown in relationships between schools and the communities they serve is at the heart of the problem. Community leaders who espouse this theory believe that the public schools are being governed by a system that is “too bureaucratic.” The system and many individual schools are “too large,” and it is vastly “too impersonal.”

They believe that the coalition of community activists who backed school governance in 1988

were essentially correct. The 1988 decentralization that created Local School Councils revitalized community links with schools and spurred some schools to rethink the ways that they taught their students, bringing improvements in areas such as more collaborative principal leadership styles and higher test scores. More widespread and deeper success was inhibited because impatience and political backlash re-centralized and re-bureaucratized the system to the long-term detriment of children, schools and communities. Since 1995, schools have been forced to respond to the authority of “bureaucrats” in the central office, who wield immediate punishments for both schools and individual students when they do not meet externally set goals.

Community leaders and others who adhere to this theory voice several overlapping conceptions about how to shore up the connections between schools and communities in the face of this recent setback. They believe that if more “opportunities to increase public participation” can be found, then the system would once again “move faster.” Thus, the “community organizing effort” that initiated the 1988 reform needs revitalization. Especially in formerly abandoned communities now undergoing economic reinvestment, community leaders see schools as key resources that need more involvement if those communities are to be “fixed.” Community leaders also believe that the statutory powers given to Local School Councils in 1988 need to be strengthened, possibly to include the “local hiring and firing” of teachers, and stimulating “more local innovation.” A critique of the current management structure of the system is also required, with the intention of holding its top managers accountable for their many centralized initiatives. While the 1995 reform undermined progress, it need not do so indefinitely, since local control and site-based management is “long-term fundamental system change.”

According to this theory of action, LSCs are an important resource in rebuilding community in-

volvement, as are the strong attachments residents have to their neighborhoods in Chicago, and the large number of community organizations in the city. They maintain personal relationships in communities that might otherwise become fragmented again. The exemplary programs that were created in the period between 1989 and 1995 and the funding provided by the Chicago Challenge are resources that can be used to maintain school-based change efforts and the necessary personal

Community leaders believe that the statutory powers given to Local School Councils in 1988 need to be strengthened . . .

relationships. Eventually they will permit re-seeding the movement when times are better. Sympathetic researchers in universities can be helpful by conducting “critical evaluations” of CPS initiatives, and can help to educate parents and other LSC members about best practices in schools.

For the most part, the community leaders who voiced this view see impediments coming from the new 1995 governance structure and the redirection of energy to “short-term” political solutions. But they also worry that parents will become passive in the face of a “good news” media campaign from the central office.

Management Turnaround

Those who espouse this theory liken education to big business in a free market economy. “Why have corporate profits been good? They’ve been good because of productivity. Productivity took pain, it took paring down, it took responsibility,

it took accountability.” Inconsistent and indecisive leadership have characterized Chicago’s schools. They have had poor focus on the fundamentals, especially ignoring “accountability issues,” with great resulting waste and lassitude. New leadership has gained the ability to act in an “executive capacity” and this is a “vast improvement.”

For this group of leaders, the Chicago Public Schools were a formerly “inefficient command system” that, like the states of the former Soviet bloc, must now undergo shock therapy

. . . decisive, even “aggressive” leadership with strong, flexible powers and loyal subordinates “two or three deep” are needed to push the school system into productivity.

to become competitive and achieve productivity. In the past, education professionals were unable to focus on the bottom line as they fussed over process. Top administrators had divided loyalties. They adhered to educational norms that hampered a clear-eyed examination of problems, as well as wanting to please board members, the union, and other powerful groups. Principals lack “the guts to do the things that we have to do” when a handful of “school customers” (parents and community members) are in charge of hiring and firing them. Teachers had as their “number one problem” the “lack of will to educate.” As a result, schools became unattractive to highly qualified principals and teachers. Those who do work in the system often have “low capacity.”

Proponents believe that decisive, even “aggressive”

leadership with strong, flexible powers and loyal subordinates “two or three deep” are needed to push the school system into productivity. They emphasize “universal” management attributes over the procedures “the education establishment” is trained to expect. Necessarily, educators do not make good top leadership candidates. This leadership must set priorities and hold “laggard” teachers responsible for meeting clearly defined targets. Wherever possible, outsourcing should be used to obtain the best services available on the market and to spur improvements through competition. Bottom-line accounting clarifies measures of success.

Standardized curriculum and sanctions for poor performance will facilitate improvements by “holding it over the heads of the staff in the event that they don’t do their job.” Universal retraining should then be offered on pain of job loss. “Tenure (for teachers) must go.” Likewise, “if you hold children and parents and faculty accountable for not performing, everybody will get focused, and there will be a positive response.”

New teachers should be recruited from outside the system for their skills and be given special incentives to gain their loyalty and energy. All students should be held accountable for clear numerical targets, and those who meet them permitted to enter upgraded programs, while poor performers are given remedial assistance. If students continue to perform poorly, they should be given an alternative program geared to their abilities, which emphasizes scripted lesson plans for a narrowed curriculum, preparing them for occupational training. The process will be hard: dislocation and “short-term pain” are to be expected. But constancy and firm leadership will ultimately produce a shakeout in which the best schools thrive and the worst disappear.

Key assets are the current leaders of the school system, city hall, legislative leaders, and local corporate executives. Mayor Daley’s support is crucial. The Chicago Teachers Union and the

Chicago Principals and Administrators Association are also potential allies, if they acknowledge that their own best interests are served by straightforward labor management relationships, for which they can earn a good, secure livelihood. Market competition permits satisfying the needs of special classes of students through magnet and charter schools while providing opportunities for privatization and the business support it implies. At the same time, parents are expected to be pleased by more efficient school services, and the media happy about immediate access.

These business and government leaders worry about the potential for union resistance. For executives especially, unions have to be “watched like a hawk” because they are typically “agents against change.” They also intend to see that the current statewide leadership “stays in power” so that newly elected officials don’t “mess it up.” Mayor Daley could have a “change of heart” under pressure to soften accountability when parents and teachers begin to complain of the “pain” of student retention, school reconstitution, and the like. Either would slow the “recovery” and lead to the loss of business support. Activist groups in Chicago may be willing to lobby to stop all additional funding and current management progress in order to save LSCs. For some, the worry is the lethargy and “friction: the desire to move, wearing against the lack of will to change,” more than any interest group that might derail progress.

Recentring the Pendulum

For those who espouse this theory, “classroom instruction” is at the center of school improvement, but it has been lost in the dialogue and legislation around “competing governance processes.” Instruction is the rightful and primary preoccupation of educators who need to be re-authorized as decision makers in this realm.

Although their concerns are basic, these leaders highlight the uniqueness of recent Chicago history in framing their theory of action. For them a

left swing to community control in 1988 was followed by a right swing to business management in 1995. But neither addressed the fundamental issues of teaching and learning at the core of school improvement. In their view, the 1988 reform law was attempting to wrest power from an entrenched bureaucracy, with the goals of institutionalizing public accountability through parent governance, devolving resources from the central office to

Instruction is the rightful and primary preoccupation of educators who need to be re-authorized as decision makers in this realm.

schools and spurring school-by-school improvements. But this reform had flaws, including a lack of common performance standards and measures of accountability. It continued to be plagued by resource problems. Moreover, it worked best in those schools that least needed the help. School-by-school change proved too idiosyncratic, and many schools lacked the ideas, teacher experience, outside assistance, and financial resources to take advantage of increased flexibility.

The 1995 reform law was a reaction to these flaws, enabling tighter central control over resources and standards. It substituted business managers for educators as system leaders and gave them increased financial and resource flexibility. Resource control seems to have been rationalized and stabilized the system as a result. The new regime also provided a wake-up call to poorly performing schools by using the new CEO’s authority to enforce consequences for poor performance.

But in the view of the people who espouse this

theory of action, the 1995 reform is also flawed. It is deficient in educational vision, substituting short-term numerical performance targets for coherence between what is expected from students, what teachers know, and what is assessed. This has created a new system that is too inflexible. Like the 1988 reform, the 1995 reform improved some aspects, but left out others. Now Chicago needs to rebalance the centralization/decentralization “pendulum swings” of the past ten years.

Educator improvement is “the next frontier.” But if educators are not involved in attempts to improve, teaching and learning will be problematic. Neither business managers nor community and parent leaders understand the “culture of the institution.” Parent roles need to be refocused on “parenting” to assist student learning rather than governance, while managers need to be focused on the “business” aspects. Educators must now become engaged in improving teaching and learning, especially in schools that have a history of poor performance. This is a system “confused about how to teach.” CEO Vallas must either set up a kitchen cabinet or upgrade the “excellent educators” in the system, giving them the authority to “lead the system.” This means that the top leadership of the system needs to “give the teaching profession the respect it deserves” and “revalue” their professional contributions. System leadership should identify the top classroom teachers in the system and help them to “duplicate” themselves in order to develop the “capacity to support teachers at the building level.” In so doing, “They need to walk the walk, and talk the talk.” This will be difficult because, “This administration doesn’t think much of educators.”

The key is “massive re-training,” or “investment” in teachers, or “professional development.” For some it is also a better system of “screening,” “pre-certification,” professional requirements, and career opportunities than now exists. Educational researchers might also devise “a new assessment

system” that is based on standards but also linked to what teachers are teaching and what the curriculum requires.

The system’s exemplary but underused educators are key assets to improving teaching and learning in the system. Those who would recenter the pendulum on teaching and learning believe the CTU has been relegated to a backstage role but may become an important advocate in support of this recentering. University faculty can lend their expertise, while the foundations might support these efforts. It is believed that most parents want to help their children learn and are less interested in governing schools, so that they may also be enlisted. “Dormant PTAs” could be revitalized as a result. Mayor Daley and CEO Vallas might also be useful if their concern for “bottom-line accountability” can be linked to improved teaching. Some believe that technology is “pushing towards” a re-examination of the value of good teaching and could encourage for the effort.

Adherents worry that the mayor, CEO Vallas, and their supporting business organizations do not want the newly established accountability mechanisms diluted, and their mistrust of educators may make them unwilling to listen. The CTU may prefer labor-management negotiations and job security to a stronger professional role. For their part, parents may not yet trust teachers enough to give them a strong role in improving schools.

Redistributing Resources

Those who espouse this theory of action describe Chicago’s school reform in terms of enduring and universal dilemmas of inequity. For this mixed group, education is “ethical work.”

Although much of the local debate about school reform has been polarized, adherents believe that discussions about equity and fairness are largely missing and badly needed. Inequities in the distribution of economic resources and wealth, often by race, are the most pressing problems in

education, as they have been for decades. Local governance in Chicago exacerbated these inequities by resting on racial and economic segregation. The 1988 reform ignored this fact when it devolved powers to neighborhood schools.

For them, Chicago is also one case of a larger problem. Corporate control of the “global markets” and mobile international capital have strengthened these trends by “de-centering” cities, creating a “hyper-concentration, geographic isolation, social isolation of the minority poor in the central city” as wealthier inhabitants move to the suburbs. This creates a “caste society” in terms of the ability of local governments to compete with one another for taxes, jobs, and the wealthy.

As local institutions, schools are caught in this squeeze. This affects urban neighborhood schools in particular since they continue to be the homes for most of the nation’s immigrants, poor children, and people of color. The goal is to create school systems where “race, class and ethnicity” are less predictive of academic achievement. But what it takes to create such systems is not yet known. At the same time, those employed in urban, resource-poor schools have “no competition” for their unattractive jobs, hence no market pressure to improve their practice.

These leaders seek to reawaken the idealist expectation that public schools can be one means to level the economic playing field and provide all Americans with opportunities to thrive. They believe that “equality of opportunity” can best guide education policy to improve. To do this, most stress dialogue: across political jurisdictions, in naturally linked regions, among foundation leaders and federal agency heads as well as “the grassroots base” absolutely necessary for effectiveness. The dialogue is intended to reawaken the natural fairness in Americans. This group is leery of claiming that urban schools should be the primary lever used to overcome “social and economic segregation.” But they do argue for a “coherent vision that is broadly shared” and a “common

vocabulary.” At least, this will change the “rhetoric” of school reform that can encourage change in practice.

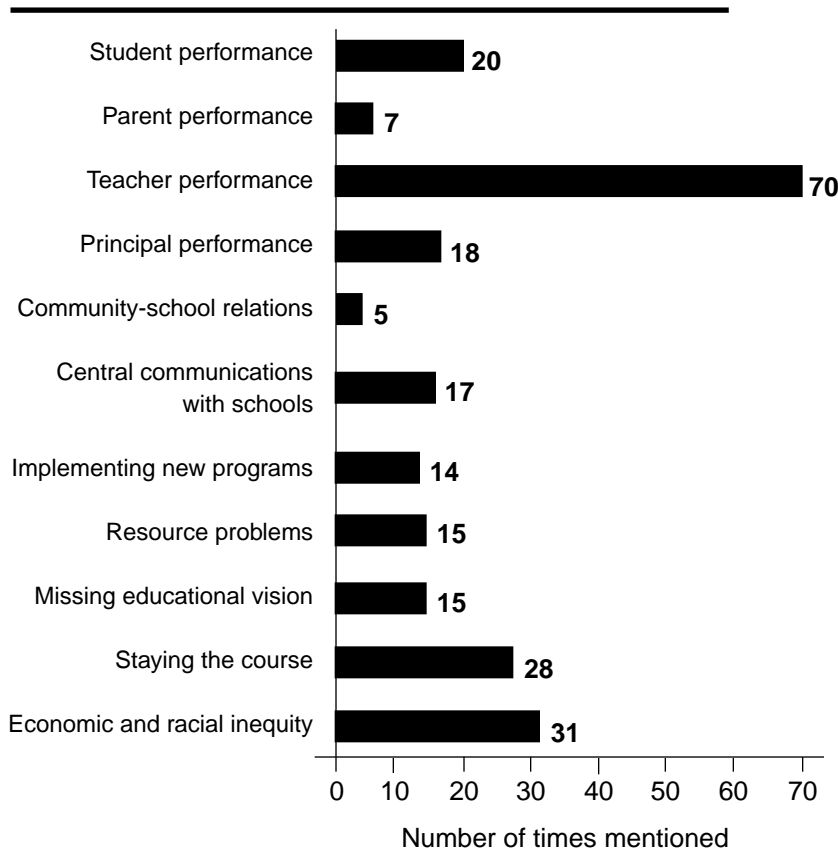
Some emphasize creating an ethical role for professional educators, so that their expertise, whether as “classroom based researchers” or “teachers” is applied collaboratively on behalf of underserved students. This group is divided about the role of demonstration projects and grassroots constituencies. Some seek demonstrations of new ways to teach poor and minority urban students. Others argue that demonstration programs are too limiting; they provide politicians with small victories but do not lead to widespread change.

*The dialogue is intended
to reawaken the natural
fairness in Americans.*

They stress the need to engage bigger governmental units—regional, state, or federal—to examine funding inequities in education in light of constitutional guarantees and a society built on individual competition. They also look to non-governmental groups including foundations and university researchers to develop ideas about the new equity problem underlying the new economy. Some specifically seek a state or regional takeover of specific school governance functions, like applying a common test or curriculum throughout a region that includes both wealthy and poor citizens, while providing each with the same resources. Locally, some hope that the “current administration” will articulate “the needed vision,” and if they do, that community leaders will lend their support.

Adherents worry that the majority of citizens and their elected representatives accept inequities, especially if they are relatively advantaged.

Figure 4
Pressing Concerns for Chicago's Schools



Others worry that some businesses may seek a two-tier society to provide workers for service sector jobs as well as management ones. And they acknowledge that any dialogue that proposes substantive changes in schooling will challenge the common notion of a “real school.”

Common Ground

The Chicago Challenge has pursued a theory of action that is quite different in many ways from those that guide many of the city’s institutional leaders. These differences pose significant dilemmas for the Chicago Challenge. While altering its theory could mean abandoning possibilities that no other group might pursue, steadfastness also poses the danger of becoming isolated and, therefore, more easily dismissed. The legitimacy of the Chicago Challenge as a reform organization lies in its ability to voice agreement and explore common ground with others. It is possible to remain faithful to the initial vision and sustain the core set of grantees supported by the Chicago Challenge. It is more difficult to expand beyond the core of committed “true believers” to

influence other schools unless the Chicago Challenge theory of action can encompass some of what motivates others. Policy influence is even less likely without some adaptation to the different theories of action in its institutional environment.

Although these theories highlight different conceptions and values, each is silent in areas where another is articulate. For instance, only the Redistributing Resources theory places Chicago reform in the larger context of American racial inequality and economic disparities. The Recentering the Pendulum theory focuses on rebuilding teachers’ knowledge and skills as professionals. The Democratic Revitalization theory highlights community participation and commitment as no other does, while the Management Turn-around theory focuses on the responsibilities of central office leadership. The Chicago Challenge theory of action also stresses some elements and takes others for granted. It is strong on flexible decision making at individual schools while it also emphasizes the structural components of schools as organizations more than any other does. As this listing is intended to demonstrate, a more comprehensive theory might be created by deliberately melding parts of each.

Yet it is politically naïve and impractical to assume doing so would be easy. Even when there is mutual trust and a great deal of time for working out differences, the problems of this kind of interaction are enormous. It may make more sense to look for common ground among concerns that none of the theories has adequately addressed, but about which there is a common will to do something. One area of common ground across these disparate theories is a shared interest in teachers and their professional development. When asked to identify the three most pressing concerns in the Chicago Public Schools today, individuals who otherwise espoused different theories of action identified teachers and their professional development as one.

Figure 4 dramatically demonstrates that no other pressing concern was mentioned more than teachers and their need for training (professional development). A large group of leaders interviewed from many sectors of the city believe that current improvements in the system will require this kind of teacher focus to be sustained, irrespective of whether the improvements were driven by the new regime, the vision that emboldens the Chicago Challenge, a concern for equity, or increased parent empowerment. This common concern provides a topical focus that may help to bridge the differences that underlie the theories above.

The different conceptions of the common “teacher” problem are not difficult to document. For instance, adherents of the Management Turnaround theory believe much of the current teacher force is lacking in the will to improve or is simply

incompetent. The Chicago Challenge theory hopes to restructure teachers’ work lives, while those who espouse the Redistributing Resources theory acknowledge that teachers are a crucial resource. Adherents to the Democratic Revitalization theory believe teachers need more community support.

Those who espouse Recentring the Pendulum envision teachers’ knowledge as the key to unleashing the potential for improved instruction. But these differences have not yet been publicly explored in the city. Nor are there current plans to be defended

by any group. Their sharp edges are likely to be softened in the tumble of query and retort.

Uncommon bedfellows once came together to discuss and debate the future of Chicago school governance in 1987. At that time, the participants shared little but outrage at the intransigent school bureaucracy and its poor ability to support the schools. They held quite different theories of action then; they did not agree on many issues, and the school reform law they created in 1988 was, in part, a series of temporary political compromises. But they did create a space between them for common action and to negotiate the values on which they might agree. That space permitted the development of two of the nation’s most radical school reform laws and eventually led to a much more stable, and respected, school leadership. It may be that a shared concern about teaching and the current quality of instruction in the Chicago Public Schools can become the conversational glue that once again enlivens a more public debate about the future of education in the city.

One area of common ground across these disparate theories is a shared interest in teachers and their professional development.

Reflections

Identity

The organizational identity of the Chicago Challenge developed in two short years from a loose collaborative of community organizations, university researchers, and reform groups into a formal foundation pursuing a strategic vision with an activist staff. External pressure from political and public school leaders drove some of the change, although Chicago Challenge staff, the Board, and the Collaborative had also developed a critique of their own practice. In response to both external pressure and internal adaptation, the Chicago Challenge learned to shape its role within a changing and unanticipated context. Ties between foundation executives and their community and university-based grantees influenced the ways that the Chicago Challenge responded to these internal and external pressures. Yet it still faces dilemmas of identity. The Chicago Challenge as a foundation is both secure and supported. But it may not be particularly influential.

Responding to an increasingly complex and competitive environment, the Chicago Challenge has altered its organizational structure and grantmaking from founder-led to strategic and then activist philanthropy. This progression helps ensure its organizational survival and simultaneously creates dilemmas of influence. If it had become a collaborative of community organizations as some might have expected, it may have had greater direct influence on what the local media viewed as an acceptable and appropriate school reform activity, but it also may have had difficulty distinguishing itself from the earlier reform movement of 1988. On the other hand, if it had become an arm of the central administration, its information influence would have been virtually assured, but its integrity as a different voice may have been compromised. As a foundation, the Chicago Challenge has adapted to its environmental constraints by

becoming both more procedural and more strategic. Each removes it from direct influence on information flows and heightens the importance of selecting the most competent grantees, the most needed interventions or research, and the “next logical step” toward reaching its own goals.⁴⁵ This, in turn, narrows the group to whom the foundation speaks and, thus, diminishes its indirect influence opportunities in a city where louder voices are routinely heard.

Greater attention to how the media cover Chicago Challenge schools and how they conceive of its activities seems warranted. Now that the Chicago Challenge has nearly finished the business of selecting grantees, it can turn to the more neglected goal of its original three: influencing the policy environment to support the spread of innovations that the Chicago Challenge has seeded. For this to begin, the Chicago Challenge must have a voice that is more clearly heard throughout the city.

Foundation influence over information that might spur change in schooling is attenuated. We saw that it works almost exclusively through grantees, particularly community organizations and university faculty. Given the difficulty in obtaining clear information about what grantees are doing, strategic foundations interested in influencing the dialogue about the possibilities of school improvement are caught in an influence dilemma. Foundations, including the Chicago Challenge, must trust the information they are given by grantees, even though it may be more rosy than real, while their grantees, in turn, enjoy greater impact on what others believe about improvement in the schools.

This highlights the importance of retaining strong ties with the Collaborative, itself a group of leaders from community organizations. Collaborative meeting attendance has begun to drop off as members refocus on the work of their respective organizations in the absence of a decisive role in the Chicago Challenge. One of the ten-

sions in the Chicago Challenge since its inception has been balancing the direct action perspective of community activists with the more deliberate and reflective approach of a foundation. It may prove useful to revitalize the Collaborative by reconsidering its role, especially as the need to influence broad public opinion in the city grows.

To the extent that the goals of the Chicago Challenge are filtered through a stable number of nurtured grantees, the group of people who are exposed to the public opportunities its philanthropy offers is limited. The fact that the partnering grantees are themselves working in nearly 40 percent of the schools in the system extends the influence potential, but stretches the technical assistance and programming support the Chicago Challenge can offer any one of them. To the extent that the Chicago Challenge explores new ways to leverage its funding for citywide influence in the manner of an activist foundation, it may lose touch with the needs and concerns of individual schools or limit the options available to its leading networks and their partners. None of these dilemmas is solvable and none is unique to the Chicago Challenge as a foundation. They all encourage the ongoing self-reflection about strategy and programming activism that has marked the evolution of the Chicago Challenge since it was formed.

Legitimacy

The security and support the Chicago Challenge garners from its environment is based in its identity as a foundation. But its institutional legitimacy must be as an external agent of change for the school system. Agency requires that the Chicago Challenge align its values about school change with at least some of those in its institutional environment. This means softening the edges of its theory of action to encompass those ideas and action plans that are not oppositional, but that may require stretching beyond the current Chicago Challenge action plans.

What is it about the concerns of those who espouse the resource redistribution theory of action, for instance, that might help the Chicago Challenge expand beyond its current set of networks to consider broader targets of influence? Can the Chicago Challenge theory of action be expanded to encompass the revaluing of teachers' work without becoming prescriptive to its existing grantees? How might the Chicago Challenge engage a management task that is under-resourced but highly valued by business executives and the CPS management team? These are the kinds of boundary spanning questions that will unsettle the security of the Chicago Challenge, but that simultaneously have the potential to enhance its legitimacy across the city. The work will be substantial, but no more so than the goals of the Chicago Challenge.

Legacy

The legacy the Chicago Challenge can leave is bound up with its status as a foundation and its legitimacy as a change agent. Without greater visibility, narrow influence based on "keeping the flame alive" may be the best that can be achieved. Yet, without risking its theoretical integrity, it can hardly hope to gain legitimacy as a change agent in the context of Chicago, where radical, systemwide reforms come twice a decade. Thus the ironies of identity and legitimacy dilemmas combine. The development of the Chicago Challenge into an activist foundation seeking to achieve policy influence while remaining faithful to its initial theory of action, should it succeed, may ultimately restrain its long-term reform legacy to one less deep and thorough than it might have hoped.

Methodological Appendix

Research for this report was designed and conducted as an institutional analysis in which organizations were the basic unit of analysis. The institutional fields were divided into seven sectors: business, labor, foundation, higher education, community organization, government, and media. The business sector included business associations and several large corporations. The labor sector included the labor organizations and professional associations within the CPS. The foundation sector included the Chicago Annenberg Challenge as well as the city's other foundations engaged in school reform. The community sector included religious, non-profit professional, community-based, and neighborhood associations that had been active in Chicago's school reform environment. The government sector included the Chicago Public Schools, the mayor's office, the governor's office, the city council, the state legislature, the Illinois State Board of Education, and one national research organization. Media included print, radio, and television media organizations regularly reporting on education in the city and nationally. Based on differences discovered in con-

ducting network analyses of information links between the sectors, the CPS was separated from the rest of government sector for some analyses.

Grant History

The Chicago Challenge determined the granting cycles we used. When a new Request for Proposals was issued, we recorded it as a new granting cycle. The grant history for the Challenge was created by coding each network grant application as either rejected or accepted in a given granting cycle, by a variety of characteristics of its partner (e.g., sector, type, experience) and by the demographic characteristics (e.g., size, racial configuration of students, proportion Limited English Proficiency, low income, student mobility, etc.) of the schools within the network. Cross tabulations and correlations were constructed to determine how organizational learning might have been reflected in who was applying and who received grants.

Interviews

Seventy interviews were conducted between June 1997 and October 1997, one and one-half years into the Chicago Challenge

grantmaking. Informants were organizational leaders in one of the seven sectors in the Challenge's institutional environment. They were all chosen because they held leadership positions in key organizations that make up a particular sector. Each was nominated and checked against three criteria: (a) Did this person represent an organization of some size, importance, and longevity in the relevant sector? (b) Did this person's title and authority permit him or her to speak for the organization? (c) Was this person knowledgeable about school reform issues in Chicago?

Nominations were garnered from a broad range of sources, including Directors and Steering Committee members of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, and community members from each of the sectors. In addition, informants were asked to nominate additional individuals at the conclusion of their interviews. In this manner, an initial set of 50 nominations grew to a sample of 81, from which 70 were conducted. Ultimately 11 sector leaders declined or proved unavailable to interview.

No attempt was made to interview candidates based on their reputed relationship with the

Chicago Challenge. Even so, we ultimately learned that sector leaders identified by the criteria above included nearly all of those who played key roles in organizing the Challenge and developing its funding proposal: four Annenberg Board members, 11 of 20 Collaborative members, 12 grant recipients, 11 rejected grant applicants, and two semifinalists for the position of Challenge Director. Twenty-seven of the 70 informants claimed in interviews to have either worked to influence Ambassador Walter Annenberg to make a grant to Chicago, persuaded Mayor Daley or the Chicago Public Schools to sign on to the original proposal, attended the first set of meetings to design the proposal, or been involved in helping to select the first round of Annenberg network grants.

Figure 5 describes the interviews by sector in terms of the individuals' willingness to speak for attribution. Figures 6 and 7 describe their race/ethnicity and sex.

Virtually all of the interviews were conducted in face-to-face sessions and tape recorded. Four were conducted over the telephone and recorded. All informants were asked to sign a consent form in which they either requested anonymity or declared themselves willing to be identified by name if given prior notice. Sev-

enty-one percent chose to be on the record. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, but several extended two hours or more. All were transcribed and transferred to computer files to expedite searches for key themes and words.

Each interview followed a standard protocol. It included open-ended questions about the 10-year history and 5-year prognosis for Chicago school reform, the school system's current challenges, informants' views about how school change happens, and the best sources of information about Chicago school issues. Figure 8 identifies the questions that were used in this analysis by their intended substantive foci.

Analysis of interviews proceeded in several stages. Initially, answers were sorted by questions and by respondent sector, then by response type and emergent themes. Frequencies and percentages of responses that were tabulated by sector within classifications were then calculated to determine the prevalence of particular responses. Specific quotes were identified as illustrative of common responses and themes. As a crosscheck on themes, key word searches were conducted throughout all interviews using indexing software.

Analysis of Reliable Information Sources

Tabulations of reliable information responses were also used to construct a weighted reliable information matrix (Figure 9). Simply asking people to whom they talk is a notoriously unreliable source of information.⁴⁶ Instead, we asked more open-ended questions that did not depend on frequency of contact as much as on the informant's judgment about the value of the advice given. (See questions in Figure 8). About 60 percent of the responses we received were named individuals; the remainder were organizational names, titles, publications, or media outlets, and a few status categories (e.g., "probation managers," "corporate leaders," "university researchers," "legislators"). All responses were coded to put them into one of the initial seven sectors plus CPS, creating an eight by eight matrix. As a response category, "CPS" refers to named individuals or organizations, and department heads who are either members of the mayoral-appointed CPS management team (CEO, CPO, CEdO, CFO, COO, and Board members) or to those who report to one of these individuals directly or indirectly and worked in the central office headquarters at the time of the interviews.

Each of our informants was permitted to answer our query with as many names or references as he or she chose to give us. The number of responses from a single individual ranged from no sources of reliable information (4 individuals) to 24. Since our research design involved grouping these responses into sector categories with unequal numbers of informants (ranging from twelve higher education informants to four non-CPS-affiliated government informants), we weighted the initial tabulations. The weighting formula we used was to multiply the proportion of respondents who mentioned the sector category as a source of reliable information by the mean response value. The mean response value is the average number of times a single informant identified a reliable source from the same sector category.

Figure 9 displays the values resulting from these weighted tabulations. Reading across the first row of numbers, the matrix tells us that the 11 informants we interviewed in the business sector told us they relied most on information they received from the Chicago Public Schools (value=1.6), and least on information they received from foundations (value=0). Since we were interested in the relationships between sectors (not within them) we set each value in the Matrix

Figure 5

Institutional Interviews by Sector

| SECTOR | Interviews Conducted | | | Declined | Total Sought |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | On the record | Off the record | Total conducted | | |
| Business | 9 (11.0%) | 2 (2.5%) | 11 (13.5%) | 1 (1.2%) | 12 (14.8%) |
| Community | 10 (12.3%) | 1 (1.2%) | 11 (13.5%) | 2 (2.5%) | 13 (16.0%) |
| Foundation | 5 (5.0%) | 2 (2.5%) | 7 (8.6%) | 0 | 7 (8.6%) |
| Government (includes 7 CPS) | 11 (13.5%) | 5 (5.0%) | 16 (19.7%) | 2 (2.5%) | 18 (22.1%) |
| Higher Education | 12 (14.8%) | 0 | 12 (14.8%) | 0 | 12 (14.8%) |
| Labor | 6 (7.4%) | 1 (1.2%) | 7 (8.6%) | 3 (3.7%) | 10 (12.3%) |
| Media | 5 (6.1%) | 1 (1.2%) | 6 (7.4%) | 3 (3.7%) | 9 (11.0%) |
| TOTAL | 58 (71%) | 12 (15%) | 70 (86%) | 11 (13.5%) | 81 (100%) |

Figure 6

Institutional Interviews by Race/Ethnicity

| RACE | Interviews Conducted | | | Declined | Total Sought |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | On the record | Off the record | Total conducted | | |
| Asian | 1 (1.2%) | 0 | 1 (1.2%) | 0 | 1 (1.2%) |
| Black | 13 (16.0%) | 3 (3.7%) | 16 (19.7%) | 3 (3.7%) | 19 (23.4%) |
| Latino | 3 (3.7%) | 1 (1.2%) | 4 (5.0%) | 1 (1.2%) | 5 (6.1%) |
| White | 41 (50.4%) | 8 (9.8%) | 49 (60.3%) | 7 (8.6%) | 56 (68.9%) |
| TOTAL | 58 (71%) | 12 (15%) | 70 (86%) | 11 (13.5%) | 81 (100%) |

Figure 7

Institutional Interviews by Sex

| SEX | Interviews Conducted | | | Declined | Total Sought |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | On the record | Off the record | Total conducted | | |
| Female | 29 (35.7%) | 7 (8.6%) | 36 (44.3%) | 4 (5.0%) | 40 (49.3%) |
| Male | 29 (35.7%) | 5 (6.1%) | 34 (41.8%) | 7 (8.6%) | 41 (50.4%) |
| TOTAL | 58 (71%) | 12 (15%) | 70 (86%) | 11 (13.5%) | 81 (100%) |

Figure 8

Questions from Institutional Leader Interviews

| Focus | Questions |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| CPS reform history | <p>How would you characterize the Chicago Public Schools today?</p> <p>What is your opinion about the school system's progress in the last eight years?</p> <p>What events or information have influenced your opinion about CPS?</p> <p>Chicago has been through a succession of reforms in the past eight years. What changes do you think have been most helpful? Why?</p> |
| Reliable information sources | <p>How do you get your most reliable information about what is going on in the Chicago Public Schools?</p> <p>Whom do you regularly confer with about public school matters?</p> <p>When was the last time you had such a conversation?</p> |
| Theory of action | <p>Which three concerns would you identify as the most pressing in Chicago today?</p> <p>In light of these problems, what do you think it will take to substantially improve the Chicago Public Schools over the next five years?</p> <p>In your mind, which organization or individuals hold the necessary resources to make changes like these happen?</p> <p>Who or what organizations could stop or block improvements of this kind?</p> <p>What are your expectations for the Chicago Public Schools over the next five years? What still needs to be done?</p> <p>When new policy is created for schools, who should be empowered?</p> |
| Chicago Annenberg Challenge | <p>How does the Collaborative make decisions?</p> <p>What can you tell me about its formation?</p> <p>In your mind, what was the problem that the Annenberg Challenge was designed to address?</p> <p>What do you understand to be the goals of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge?</p> <p>What is the strategy designed to meet those goals?</p> <p>Do you think the Annenberg strategy will meet its goals?</p> <p>How will you know if the strategy has worked?</p> <p>What evidence of strategy has worked?</p> <p>Given your assessment, what do you think is the best use of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge resources in the future?</p> <p>Does your organization provide resources to or in any other way support or influence the Chicago Annenberg Challenge? What kinds of activities, resources, or influence?</p> |

Figure 9

Weighted Reliable Information Matrix

| SECTOR | Number | Business | Community | Foundation | CPS | Government | Higher Ed | Labor | Media |
|------------|--------|----------|-----------|------------|-----|------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Business | 11 | | 0.4 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 0.6 | 0.1 | 0.9 |
| Community | 11 | 0.2 | | 0.1 | 1.3 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 2.5 |
| Foundation | 7 | 0.0 | 0.9 | | 0.4 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 0.7 |
| CPS | 7 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.0 | | 0.3 | 1.3 | 0.9 | 0.6 |
| Government | 4 | 0.2 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 2.0 | | 0.6 | 0.0 | 1.0 |
| Higher Ed | 12 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 1.4 | 0.3 | | 0.2 | 1.2 |
| Labor | 7 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | | 0.3 |
| Media | 6 | 0.5 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 2.2 | 0.0 | 2.0 | 0.2 | |

A to zero when it reflected a within-sector influence reference (i.e., the right diagonal row of blank cells).

To turn these numerical values into categories so that we could display their relationships in Figure 2 (page 23), we divided each of the cell values in Matrix A by .5 to create five categories—negligible, weak, typical, moderate, or strong influence. We assigned progressively thicker lines to each of the four highest categories in our network relationship diagram to represent the strength of influence, and arrowheads to display the direction. We did not attempt to display negligible relationships.

An additional 45 responses—vague references to unnamed “teachers,” “parents,” or “people in schools”—are not included in the analysis represented by Matrix A. When we included them as a response category (SCH) in our preliminary analyses, they did not change the results because all of the strength values in this category were negligible or weak. Because we had interviewed no one whose primary affiliation would have been to this sector category, we did not include it in our analyses.⁴⁷

Endnotes

¹The Brown University News Bureau, Press Release: “Half Billion Dollar Challenge to the Nation,” distributed December 17, 1993.

²This is the period of five years of implementation of the Chicago School Reform Act (P.A. 851418) about which dozens of articles and several full-length books have been written. See for example Hess (1991), O’Connell (1991), Kyle and Kantowitz (1992), Katz (1992), Moore (1992), Mirel (1993), and Shipps (1997).

³For some analyses of these interviews (e.g., analyses of grant partners) the CPS management was subsumed into the category of government with state and local politicians.

⁴Schon and McDonald (1997).

⁵The group also included some teachers, principals, and parents along with faculty from three universities, business association staff, representatives of the mayor’s and governor’s offices, the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center, and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

⁶One elected student also sat on each high school LSC. Principals, once selected, were automatically members of LSCs.

⁷The 1988 Reform Act had mandated that every school prepare a School Improvement Plan, and that the Local School Council approve the plan. It was to guide local improvements in the school and clarify the purposes for which the school’s discretionary Chapter One funding was to be used.

⁸Only one year later, district records were to show that 78 percent of the schools had changed principals at least once. In the seven years between 1987 and 1995, 37 percent of the schools in the system had three or more principals, and 19 schools had five or more principals.

⁹Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, and Sebring (1993).

¹⁰Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie (Forthcoming).

¹¹See the descriptions of LSC discretionary spending in Hess (1996) and Rosenkranz (1994).

¹²In 1995, a projected budget shortfall of nearly \$350 million threatened to swallow up any new money.

¹³When the Annenberg Foundation granted funds to Chicago on a two-for-one matching basis, the nature of those matching funds had already been negotiated.

¹⁴See McKersie (1996) for detail about local foundation support in the early implementation of the 1988 reform.

¹⁵Vartan Gregorian, Letter to Barack Obama, Chair of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge Board. Brown University, May 28, 1996.

¹⁶The Consortium on Chicago School Research was mentioned in the proposal as a partner willing to take on the task of documenting the Chicago Challenge. The Consortium received a sole-source evaluation grant for the project, and the first two authors are currently working for the Consortium.

¹⁷The final, accepted proposal to the Annenberg Foundation lists the wide range of Collaborative responsibilities detailed here. However a letter dated before the proposal from two of the founders, Anne Hallett and Bill Ayers, simply says, “The Collaborative will be the operational policy and planning group.”

¹⁸Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995), p. 8.

¹⁹See Kathleen Hall (Forthcoming).

²⁰Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie (Forthcoming).

²¹The 1988 law had seated a new, larger school board and provided for sub-district boards. In addition, it reinforced the existing fiscal oversight authority of a small business-initiated School Finance Authority (SFA). The 1988 law had given the SFA oversight of the implementation of the law itself, including subpoena power. See Shipps (1997).

²²Ken Rolling, memo to the Board of Directors, April 25, 1996.

²³Chicago Public Schools Board of Education, Law Department (1995), p. 16.

²⁴For a more detailed discussion of these academic accountability policies and their roots in the 1995 law, see Shipps, Kahne and Smylie (Forthcoming).

²⁵Smylie et al. (1998).

²⁶Sixty four percent of our 11 business informants, 5 of our non-CPS government informants and two of the seven CPS officials we interviewed could not tell us what the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was attempting to do. Of those who were willing to venture an idea about its goals or strategy, 75 percent of the businessmen, 30 percent of the non-CPS governmental officials and 14 percent of the CPS officials identified the Challenge with the grassroots activists who had helped to launch the 1988 reform. In their eyes, this effort was not and could not be successful unless it was linked with the central administration's efforts to improve student test scores.

²⁷Personal communication to Dorothy Shipps, August 13, 1997.

²⁸Wong and Jain (1997).

²⁹Fornek (1997).

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Preliminary tallies show that foundations had been the partnering institutions in 2 percent of the proposals submitted, government (including CPS) in 4 percent of the proposals, and labor groups in 3 percent of the submitted proposals. These organizational sectors had about the same rate of acceptance as their rates of submission. Higher education institutions submitted about 40 percent of the proposals, and community groups about 44 percent of the proposals.

³²Ken Rolling, "Recommendation for support of public education and agenda writing effort," (memo to the Board of Directors, March 24, 1997).

³³Another was to pursue the "metropolitan strategy" mentioned in the Collaborative's proposal to the Annenberg Foundation, but that had not been addressed. Others were various versions of extending additional funds on existing networks.

³⁴Ken Rolling, "Update and Agenda for April 2, 1997 Board Meeting" (memo to the Board of Directors, March 24, 1997).

³⁵Planning grants could be awarded to as few as two schools and an external partner, but a minimum of three schools was required for an implementation grant.

³⁶Lagemann (1992), p. 7.

³⁷Ibid., p. 148.

³⁸McKersie (1996).

³⁹Grants to community service and activist groups increased from three of twelve in 1995 to three of seven in the first round of 1996 funding. The second round of funding in 1996 drew five of seven, and in 1997 eight community service or activist partners obtained grants as network partners. For this analysis the category of community service or activist organizations was created to exclude geographically based neighborhood organizations and cultural institutions like museums and art galleries.

⁴⁰Smylie et al. (1998).

⁴¹Our analysis confirms and strengthens Kenneth Wong's findings that media and the CPS have a mutually supportive relationship. See Wong and Jain (1997).

⁴²Hatch (1998).

⁴³This suggests more work on integrating the theories of action that individual networks espouse with the theories of action found in the institutional environment of the Challenge. We thank Tom Corcoran for bringing this to our attention, and we are pursuing the connections.

⁴⁴Hallett, Chapman, and Ayers (n.d.).

⁴⁵John Gardner, quoted in Lagemann (1992), p. 148.

⁴⁶See for instance, Knoke and Kuklinski (1982), pp. 29-30.

⁴⁷For more information about how people in schools get reliable information, see Smylie et al. (1998).

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Consortium on Chicago School Research

Mission

The Consortium on Chicago School Research is an independent federation of Chicago area organizations that conducts research on ways to improve Chicago's public schools and assess the progress of school improvement and reform. Formed in 1990, it is a multi-partisan organization that includes faculty from area universities, leadership from the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Teachers Union, education advocacy groups, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, as well as other key civic and professional leaders.

The Consortium does not argue a particular policy position. Rather, it believes that good policy is most likely to result from a genuine competition of ideas informed by the best evidence that can be obtained.

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Improving Chicago's Schools

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The Chicago Annenberg Research Project is a five-year program of the Consortium on Chicago School Research to document and analyze the activities and accomplishments of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. The project focuses on four related areas of inquiry.

1. **Outcomes for students.** Change in academic achievement, including basic skills and higher levels of learning. Also change in social attitudes, conduct, and engagement among students in Annenberg schools.
2. **School development.** Improvement in key organizational conditions of Annenberg schools that affect student learning. These conditions include school leadership, parent and community partnerships, student-centered learning climate, professional development and community, and quality instruction, as well as the Challenge's organizational themes of time, size, and isolation.
3. **Networks.** How networks, their external partners, and other change mechanisms promote the development of Annenberg schools.
4. **Larger contexts needed to support school development.** How the Challenge develops as an organization to support networks and school development. How the broader institutional contexts of Chicago affect the development and accomplishments of the Challenge.

The project's research design includes longitudinal surveys and case studies, multiple levels of analysis, and comparison groups. Data are collected from several sources including surveys of teachers, principals, and students; observations of schools and classrooms; classroom tasks and student work products; interviews; documents of Challenge activities; and administrative records from the Chicago Public Schools.