



Improving Chicago's Schools



Consortium on
Chicago School
Research

A Report of the
Chicago Annenberg
Research Project

Executive Summary

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge was formed in 1995 as part of the national Annenberg Challenge, a project aimed at improving public schools across the United States. Since its beginnings, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge has pursued school reform through intermediary organizations—community- or university-based external partners—linked to networks of schools. This report presents the findings of a study of nine Chicago Annenberg External Partners, their accomplishments, strategies, and the difficulties they face. In addition, this report discusses the implications of these findings for the ongoing work of external partners and organizations that support them.

We found that the partners we studied are focusing on important aspects of school improvement and sparking positive changes. However, several obstacles work against them. Because partners' involvement in schools usually occupies only a minor part of schools' attention and activity, their capacity to influence the work of schools is necessarily limited. Moreover, partners' success varies substantially between schools, according to teachers' and administrators' willingness to work with them and implement their ideas. Given such constraints, the examples of progress and the difficulties we found suggest an approach to urban school improvement that places major emphasis not simply on adopting specific practices, programs, and strategies, but building on human resources both within schools and in assisting partner organizations over the long term.

School Improvement with External Partners

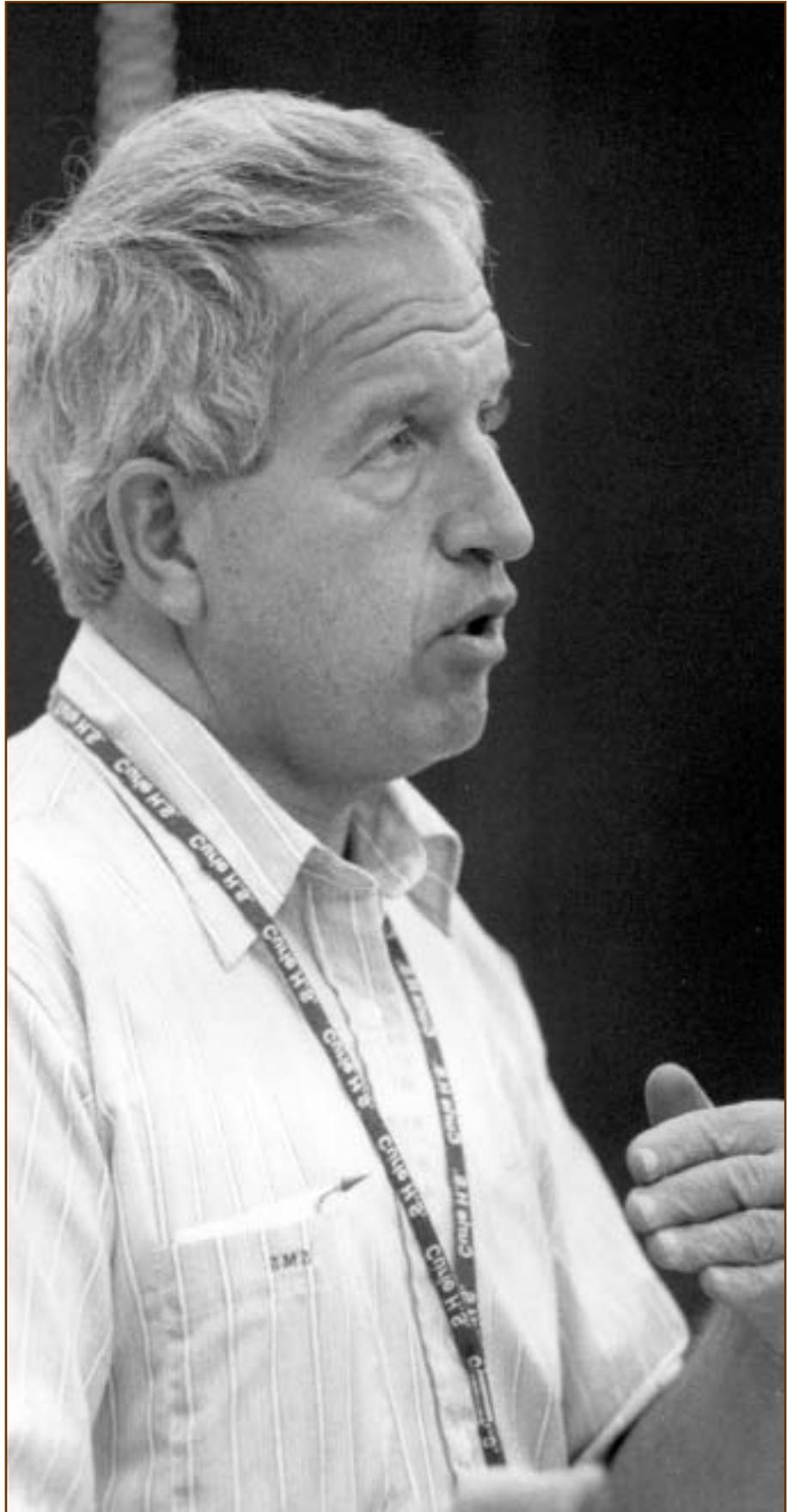
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Foreword

In 1993, Ambassador Walter Annenberg announced a \$500 million challenge grant to improve public education in the United States. Cities wishing to receive a portion of that grant were invited to submit proposals describing how the funds would be used to stimulate educational innovation and collaboration in their public school systems. A group of Chicago school reform activists and education stakeholders, including parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, and foundation officers, organized to write a proposal to include Chicago among the sites receiving a grant. They were successful. In January 1995, the Annenberg Foundation awarded a five-year grant of \$49.2 million to establish the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. An additional \$100 million in matching funds was pledged by local donors.

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge was organized to distribute and manage these monies among networks of schools and external partners throughout the city. Its mission is to improve student learning by supporting intensive efforts to reconnect schools to their communities, restructure education, and improve classroom teaching. The Chicago Challenge funds networks and external partners that seek to develop successful, community-based schools that address three critical education issues through whole-school change: school and teacher isolation, school size and personalism, and time for learning and improvement. More than half of Chicago's public schools will have participated in an Annenberg-supported improvement effort by the end of the grant period in 2001.

This report is part of a series of special topic reports developed by the Chicago Annenberg Research Project. This series focuses on key issues and problems of relevance to the Chicago Annenberg Challenge and to the improvement of Chicago public schools generally. It complements a series of technical reports that focus specifically on the work and accomplishments of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. Among

the topics examined to date in the special topics report series are the quality of intellectual work in Chicago elementary schools; social support, academic press, and their relationship to student achievement; and, in this report, the work of external partners.

Each report of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project is reviewed by an internal Lead Team that includes researchers from all areas of the project, as well as external researchers. Each report is also reviewed by the national Evaluation Advisory Committee. Consisting of nationally recognized scholars from across the country, this committee was constituted in consultation with local supporting organizations and the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. Finally, the Consortium on Chicago School

Research's Steering Committee reviews a number of the Research Project's reports.

The work of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project is intended to provide feedback and useful information to the Chicago Challenge and the schools and external partners who participate in its efforts to improve educational opportunities for Chicago's children and youth. This work is also intended to expand public discussion about the conditions of education in the Chicago Public Schools and the kinds of efforts needed to advance meaningful improvements. This effort to stimulate new avenues of discussion about urban school improvement is an important aspect of Ambassador Annenberg's challenge to engage the public more fully in school reform.

Acknowledgments

This report is the product of hard work, generous cooperation and insightful comments from many people associated with the Chicago Annenberg Research Project. The authors are deeply grateful for their assistance.

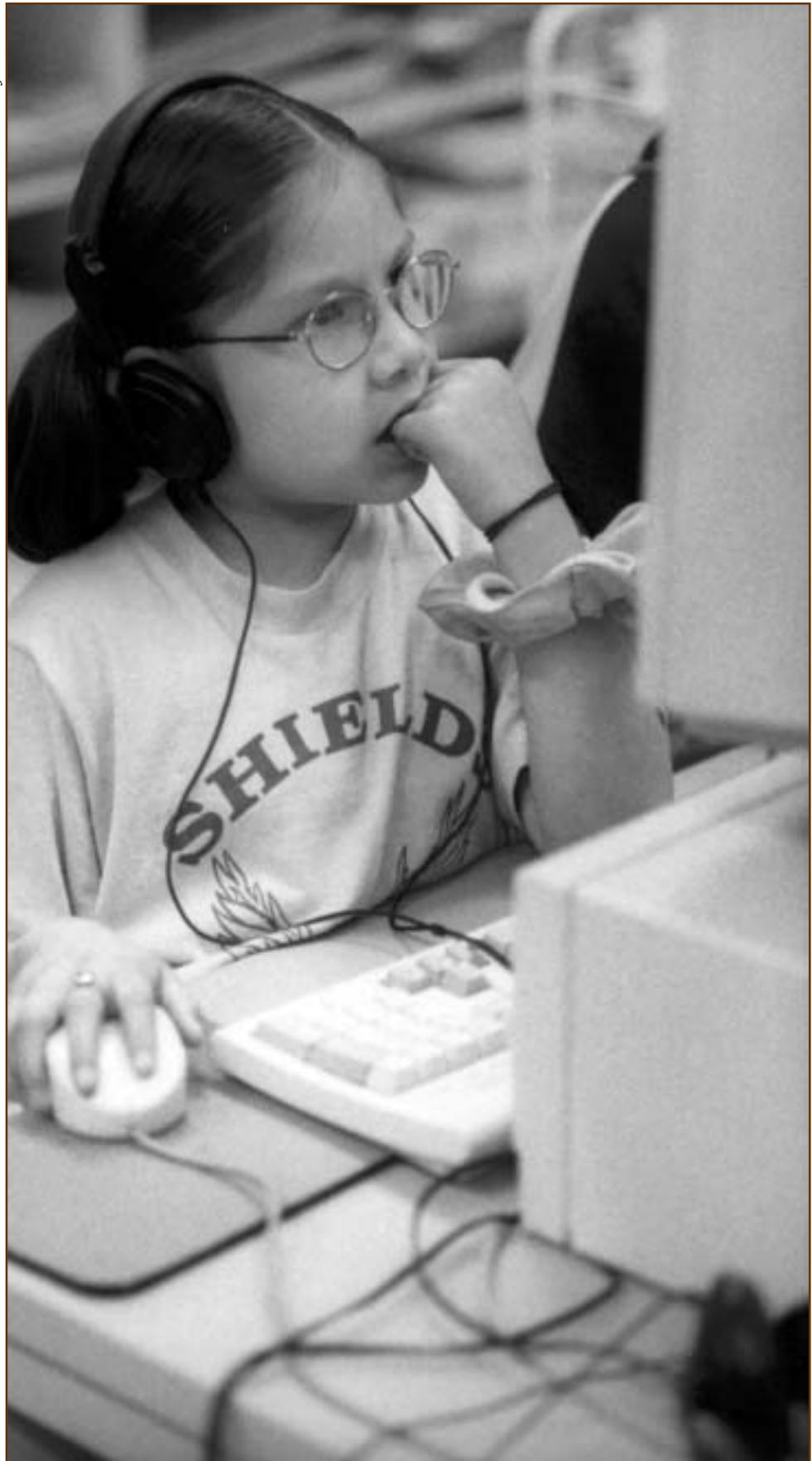
The Chicago Annenberg Challenge provided the primary funds for this study and for the development and distribution of the report.

More than 35 Chicago Annenberg Research Project researchers have worked since 1997 to collect and summarize data on partners and their efforts in the schools. Staff of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge provided access to the records of networks and the Chicago Challenge historical files. Ernestine Muhammad and Deborah Clark were helpful with data-gathering, and Pat Ford helped us set up meetings with the external partners. Ellie Kierson provided important information on the role of partners in early reform efforts in Chicago. We received helpful comments on the vignettes of four partners featured in the report from the partners themselves and from Rita Brusca-Vega, Tania Gutierrez, Jane Montes, Tamara Perry, Penny Sebring, BetsAnn Smith, Terry Stirling, and Kristin Williams.

Stacy Wenzel, Anthony Bryk, Mark Smylie, and other members of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project Lead Team gave important counsel during all phases of the report, from planning through publication.

Loretta Morris, Nicholas Leon, and Sabrina Billings helped to organize information on funding and school characteristics. Kay Kirkpatrick and Lara Cohen provided editorial assistance, and Sandra Jennings worked her desktop publishing magic to design the report.

Most important, the report depended on the cooperation of the staff in the schools and partner organizations, who gave much of their time to tell us about their work in school improvement. We hope the report will be seen as a positive return on their generous investment.



I. Introduction

Since 1996, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge has supported the work of intermediary organizations—university- or community-based external partners linked to networks of schools—to improve Chicago’s public schools. Intermediary organizations mobilize diverse resources to fashion programs and strategies aimed at the unique challenges and social contexts of individual schools. As of spring 1999, each of the 45 Annenberg-funded networks included from 3 to 12 schools (mostly elementary) with external partners focused on such goals as improving literacy instruction, training parents to aid in classrooms, and developing school leadership.¹

In this report we present findings of a study of external partners and their work during three years of the six-year Chicago Challenge. When the Chicago Challenge began its work, school networks were seen as the main agents for stimulating improvement in individual schools, but later, external partners became more central in the Chicago Challenge approach. This report focuses on the accomplishments, strategies, and difficulties of the partners, who are the leaders of each school network and the main agents of the Chicago Challenge for achieving network goals. While in some networks schools also join one another in common activities, these are stimulated and supported largely by the partners.

Following a description of the evolution of the Chicago Challenge, we describe accomplishments of partners in four networks that reflect different approaches to school improvement. Then, considering all partners in our sample, we present examples of additional accomplishments, a summary of partners’ key strategies, and, finally, a summary of difficulties they faced working with schools. We conclude with a discussion of implications of these findings for future activities of external partners and organizations that support them.

This report should be considered a mid-course assessment, subject to revision following additional research. Half of the networks we are studying have been working with schools for three years, the other half for only two. Some networks existed prior to the initiation of the Chicago Challenge, but many came into existence only with Chicago Challenge funding. Positive results often do not appear for at least five years after the initiation of significant

The Working Group saw an opportunity to strengthen school networks with the addition of intermediary organizations, which they referred to as external partners, by requiring that networks of schools also include an external partner.

school improvement efforts.² Nonetheless, we can describe the general scope of partners' efforts, show how these have been received by one or more schools in the network, and discuss the difficulties encountered by both partners and schools that have impeded their overall progress to date. We hope this portrait will provoke discussion among partners, networks, and supporting agencies about the strengths and weaknesses of the partner-network strategy for school improvement.

The Evolving Chicago Challenge Strategy

Partners' work with schools has been influenced in part through the Chicago Annenberg Challenge's criteria for funding, which evolved in the context of Chicago Challenge's own development.

The Chicago Challenge was founded in 1995, amidst a radical decentralization movement in the Chicago Public Schools.³ The 1988 Chicago School Reform Act—a state law that called for the formation of Local School Councils, with devolution of state anti-poverty funds from the Chicago Board of Education to the individual schools—was a watershed in school governance and organization in Chicago.⁴ This law substantially increased school autonomy from central management by the Board. The 1988 School Reform Act vested authority in the Local School Council to select a school's principal (who could in turn hire teachers), create an annual School Improvement Plan, and allocate an average of \$500,000 in discretionary Chapter 1 funds each year.

With the announcement of the \$500 million Annenberg Challenge in December 1993, a small group of school reformers quickly organized to take up the challenge and bring some of the money to Chicago. Known as the Annenberg Working Group, they drafted a plan to use the Annenberg money to promote school improvement in the new decentralized system.

The Working Group intended to continue the principles of the 1988 reform: community-based decision making and school-level autonomy, as well as a progressive vision for education that called for “parents and community members as authors of public education; the schools as important actors in community life; and the culture of community residents and parents as essential to the education of young people.”⁵ Their plan called for schools to form networks of three or more schools to work together and learn from one another's successes and challenges. The Working Group saw an opportunity to strengthen school networks with the addition of intermediary organizations, which they referred to as external partners, by requiring that networks of schools also include an external partner.⁶

The Annenberg Foundation invited proposals from cities around the country to form the Annenberg Challenge. Annenberg's vision was articulated through the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, based at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and strongly influenced by the Brown-based Coalition of Essential Schools, founded by TheodoreSizer in 1984.

The Chicago Working Group stressed many of the ideas espoused by the Coalition: whole school change, teacher autonomy and community, and personalized learning experiences for students. While several competing proposals emerged in Chicago, the Working Group's ideas fit most closely the overall vision of the Annenberg Foundation. In January 1995, the \$49.2 million Annenberg Challenge contract in Chicago was awarded to the Working Group.⁷

The idea of using external partners to aid in school improvement did not originate with the Working Group. A strong precedent for external partners had been developing for several years. The newly available budgeting authority under the 1988 School Reform Act had already allowed many community groups and university-based organizations to work directly with schools as paid consultants or service providers. New foundation funds suddenly became available to support Local School Council training efforts, research endeavors, and curricular projects in schools.⁸ Beginning in 1990, the MacArthur Foundation and a few organizations in the city made grants to several groups—the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago, the Chicago Teachers Union QUEST Center, the Small Schools

Workshop at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and others—to work with schools to provide outside expertise for improvement efforts.

By 1993, policy conversations about Chicago school reform began to stress the idea that some schools were not able to improve on their own, that while decentralization had been helpful to some schools, it was not enough to help all schools improve student achievement. The Chicago Public Schools' central office made new efforts to improve operations, most notably a “re-engineering” conducted in 1994 and 1995 by CSC Index, a business consulting firm. This work revealed a need for some sort of centralized policy that would help poorly performing schools move toward greater student achievement.⁹

A new Chicago Public Schools superintendent, Argie Johnson, arrived from New York in the summer of 1993. In 1994, she proposed a three-tiered plan that would rank schools in three groups based on student achievement, measured by standardized test scores and other indicators of progress. As one CPS document claimed, “The three-tiered process offers support for all, recognition for many, and intervention for some.”¹⁰ Assistance from the newly re-engineered central office, subdistrict offices, and

“assistance groups (universities, reform groups, community organizations, etc.)” would be available to all schools upon request.¹¹ A sub-group of schools would be recognized for significant progress or exemplary practices, and these schools would be able to chart their own course of improvement because they had already proven their success under the decentralization reform. They would be expected to serve as models for other schools. The remaining schools would be subject to a process that



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might identify some of them for intervention. Part of the intervention plan for an individual school might include the use of outside experts in charting a plan for improvement.

While this three-tiered plan was never implemented under Johnson's tenure, a process called "Pathways to Achievement" emerged as a main strategy for reform, supported by the central office and independent reformers as well.¹² This process was to be used by schools

. . . the Chicago Challenge merged two competing ideas: schools need autonomy to help themselves and each other improve, and outside expertise, voluntarily selected by the schools, to improve teaching and learning.

for their school improvement planning. It was linked to a new school review process developed by the State of Illinois called the Illinois Public School Accreditation Process. Pathways to Achievement was organized around the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning: school leadership, professional community, parent and community involvement, student-centered learning climate, and quality instruction. These Supports were derived from a synthesis of research across the country on school improvement. They represent a consensus of a diverse group of experienced educators within the CPS.¹³ By the time the Working Group wrote its initial proposal to the Annenberg Foundation in fall 1994, many schools were already working with outside consultants, soon to be known as external partners, to help them develop and implement improvement plans around the Five Essential Supports.

The original contract between the Chicago Annenberg Challenge and the Annenberg Founda-

tion outlined a plan based on the formation of networks of three or more schools with one external partner. The founders envisioned a range of possibilities for the partners' work and hoped that the networks' proposals would push toward:

- Alliances with curriculum and pedagogical reform organizations;
- New and expanded roles for teachers;
- Leadership development for Local School Councils, parents, principals, and communities;
- Unique opportunities for teachers to develop intellectually; and
- Reduced ratios of young people to teaching adults.¹⁴

In the Chicago Challenge's original Request for Proposals, issued in June 1995, networks were envisioned as groups of schools, with one school acting as the leader to the less-developed schools: "Schools that are making progress may join with others on a similar path or may reach out to schools which will benefit from support and leadership in undertaking education revitalization."¹⁵ In keeping with the spirit of decentralization in the 1988 School Reform Act, the Chicago Challenge intended for schools to initiate partnerships with each other and to find an external partner who would be able to enhance their efforts. Although the Request for Proposals also said "an external partner may initiate a partnership as well,"¹⁶ in this initial vision, the partners were not clearly identified as leaders of the networks.

Partners were defined as "community organizations, cultural institutions, independent schools or organizations working to educate out-of-school youth, reform groups, or other organizations who will work with schools in ways that improve the quality of education for Chicago's youth and are mutually agreed to and beneficial."¹⁷ The partners were to "provide community support, external resources, and a broader responsibility for education renaissance at the schools; combat the isolation of schools from the larger community; continue the development of a cadre of school

reform support organizations; and develop leadership among Local School Council members, parents, community members, teachers.”¹⁸ In this way, the Chicago Challenge merged two competing ideas that existed among school reformers: schools need autonomy to help themselves and each other improve, and outside expertise, voluntarily selected by the schools, to improve teaching and learning.¹⁹

Initially, the Chicago Challenge asked schools and partners to address three persistent obstacles to learning in schools: insufficient or excessively rigid use of time for learning of both students and teachers, the large size of schools and instructional groups, and the isolation of teachers from one another and of schools from students’ parents and communities. The Chicago Challenge also asked partners to help focus school change efforts: “The Challenge is not looking for networks with multiple, superficial partners, but for a deeply committed relationship between one network and one partner.”²⁰ The partners’ previous experience working with schools was one criterion by which a network proposal would be evaluated, although inexperienced partners would

also be considered. A list contained in the Request for Proposals identified the following possible partner functions:

- Helping schools develop curriculum, instruction, and assessment techniques;
- Providing and structuring professional development opportunities;
- Providing and facilitating leadership development opportunities for Local School Councils, parents, and community members;
- Brokering other outside resources;
- Providing coalition/networking support;
- Organizing community involvement; and
- Advocating on behalf of the schools.²¹

Initial budget requirements limited external partners to only 10 percent of any total grant that was made to a network. Later, the Chicago Challenge recognized the need for more vigorous leadership



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by external partners and altered this funding formula to allow for larger percentages of funding to go to the partners.

Concurrent with the first Request for Proposals, a new Chicago School Reform Act was signed into law in May 1995.²² The new act called for a reformed school board with five members appointed directly by the mayor. A new management team, headed by a Chief Executive Officer and with the full support of the mayor, began its efforts to improve the schools with bold policy mandates focused on strict accountability and emphasizing scores on standardized tests. This new school governance system would compete

All partners shared the goal of improving schools, but they differed considerably in their specific objectives and strategies.

with the Annenberg vision in both symbolic and concrete ways. The return to centralized authority conflicted with the democratic localism of 1988; the “one-size-fits-all” accountability scheme competed with the Chicago Challenge’s school-by-school theory of improvement; and the emphasis on standardized test scores clashed with the Chicago Challenge’s ideas about personalized student learning.²³

The Director of the Chicago Challenge was hired in summer 1995, just after the school reform landscape had been radically altered by the new law and just after the original Request for Proposals was issued. The Director oversaw the first round of grant making, but substantially altered subsequent Requests for Proposals for greater clarity and focus. Chicago Challenge program staff also held a series of conferences to clarify how partners might address the three problems of time, size, and isolation.

Partly in response to the difficulty networks were having in focusing on time, size, and isolation, and partly in response to outside criticism that these foci were too narrow, further changes were made to the funding criteria for networks. In the form of a letter to networks and partners in summer 1997, the Chicago Challenge communicated expectations that emphasized student achievement, professional development for teachers, whole-school change, developing a whole-school mission, and sustaining reform.²⁴

Despite such changes and clarifications made during the first three years of the granting period, the overall vision of the Chicago Challenge has consistently promoted school improvement as a process that happens school by school and from the ground up. It is also important to recognize that while its language has differed, the vision and goals of the Chicago Challenge have remained consistent with the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning used by CPS to guide local school improvement planning.

Analysis Framework and Methodology

We assessed partners’ accomplishments on two general criteria. First, we examined the extent to which partners seemed to be accomplishing goals they set for themselves for improvement within schools.²⁵ All partners shared the goal of improving schools, but they differed considerably in their specific objectives and strategies. Second, we examined the extent to which partner and network activities tended to strengthen the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning: school leadership, professional community, parent and community involvement, student-centered learning climate, and quality instruction. Figure 1 provides more specific indicators for each Support. As noted earlier, these Supports come from a synthesis of research on school improvement, and they represent a consensus among a diverse group of experienced educators within the Chicago Public Schools community. They are also consistent with the goals and expectations of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge.

Five Essential Supports for Student Learning

Figure 1

<p>School Leadership</p>	<p>School leadership is broadly based and involves principal, teachers, other staff, parents, and the Local School Council. The principal and other administrators seek input from faculty and other stakeholders, such as parents and students, in strategic school decision making. Teachers work with colleagues and administrators in regularly scheduled meetings to formulate plans for school improvement. The administration buffers teachers from interruptions to their teaching. The principal communicates effectively with the school community. The principal takes ultimate responsibility for fair enforcement of school policies and implementation of school visions and programs. School management is efficient. School leadership focuses on improvement of instruction. School leadership recruits and retains effective staff and further promotes their professional development.</p>
<p>Professional Community</p>	<p>There is consensus on clear learning goals for the school. Teachers and other staff share information, collaborate with one another, and take collective responsibility for achieving the goals. Professional norms place a high value on reflective inquiry guided by logic, evidence, and up-to-date research and expertise. A high degree of trust among staff makes it safe to disagree and to learn from intellectual conflict.</p>
<p>Parent and Community Involvement</p>	<p>Parents support student learning in their homes. The school actively reaches out to parents to discuss their children's progress and to invite parent participation in school activities. Parents feel welcome in the school, find it helpful to talk with teachers, participate in school activities, and contribute in ways significant to school goals. The school enlists the support of community organizations to enhance student learning.</p>
<p>Student-Centered Learning Climate</p>	<p>Within classrooms and all other space in school, students and staff support and treat one another with respect. Activities are conducted in an orderly fashion. Disruptions are handled firmly and fairly. Students and staff feel physically and psychologically safe, and included in the life of the school. Students have some choice in content of and processes for their own learning. Above all, academic expectations are high for students.</p>
<p>Quality Instruction</p>	<p>Curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aimed toward student mastery of challenging content. Teaching and assessment respond to students' diverse needs and attempt to connect learning to students' lives beyond school. Students and teachers have access to high quality materials for learning. Curriculum and instructional time are organized to provide increased depth of understanding as students proceed through the grades.</p>

The Nine Chicago Annenberg Challenge Partners Included in This Study

<p>Nine Partners</p>	<p>Partner names are pseudonyms, chosen to protect the rights of human subjects.</p> <p>Community Development Group Network (CDG) Developing Strong Students Network (DSS) Growth and Learning Network (GLN) Innovative Instruction Network (IIN) Learning for Everyone Network (LEN) Literacy for Life Network (LLN) Network for Student Support (NSS) School Development Organization Network (SDO) Teaching and Learning Network (TLN)</p>
<p>Partner Organizational Types</p>	<p>University-based (5) Community-based (2) Community advocacy (1) Cultural institution (1)</p>
<p>Partners' Main Activities</p>	<p>Networks sponsor one or more of these activities:</p> <p>Network meetings to share information, develop skills, or plan for improvement (all) Provide new instructional materials (4) School-based literacy coordinators (3) School leadership teams (3) Demonstration teachers assisting teachers in network schools (2) School social services teams (2) Community professionals (artists) assisting teachers (2) Demonstration school (2) Student advisory groups in schools (2) Parent classroom assistants (1) Schools as community centers (1) Partnerships with cultural institutions (1)</p>

Findings in this report are based on evidence from 18 schools, two in each of nine networks, and from information from each network's external partner. These networks are among those first funded by the Chicago Challenge in 1996 and 1997. They are among the 45 networks receiving funds through spring 1999.

The Chicago Annenberg Research Project selected for study 11 networks to represent diverse partner strategies and network demographics across the city.

For this report, however, sufficient data were available on the activities of only nine partners. The kinds of organizations represented by the nine partners, their goals, and their main activities are summarized in Figure 2. We use pseudonyms in this figure and throughout the report to honor the promise of anonymity made to those from whom we collected data.

For each network selected, we identified one school that appeared to show high potential to benefit from the partner's approach to school improvement and

one school in which potential benefits were more uncertain. In selecting schools on these criteria, we consulted with partners and research colleagues familiar with the schools, and we examined school profiles developed from prior survey data collected by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. This sampling of schools within networks does not allow us to draw conclusions about a partner's overall effectiveness in helping all of its schools, nor conclusions about the relative effectiveness of Annenberg-funded initiatives in contrast to other school improvement efforts. We can, however, identify examples of partner or network success in individual schools, key strategies partners use to achieve these accomplishments, and difficulties partners encounter in assisting schools to improve.

At each school we interviewed key administrators, such as the principal, the Chicago Challenge program coordinator, teachers, the union representative, and a parent representative. We observed classes in grades three, six, and eight, as well as meetings or other activities (such as professional development) that reflected main improvement objectives of the partner

and the schools. We interviewed representatives of the external partner organizations and read the partners' reports to the Chicago Challenge. We reviewed the schools' results on standardized tests required by the Chicago Public Schools and the state. For each school, this information was compiled into school case studies, one for our first year studying a school, one for our third year, and two interim updates. These cases became our primary sources for analyses. More detailed information on research methods is given in the Appendix.

Our report begins with vignettes of four partners that describe different goals, strategies, and evidence of progress and include a commentary on the partners' attention to the Five Essential Supports. We then present additional examples of accomplishments that specifically address the Five Essential Supports. Next we describe promising strategies across partners that contribute to their accomplishments. We then identify major difficulties that appear to stand in the way of further progress on the Five Essential Supports. We conclude with a discussion of implications.



II. Four Partners: Goals, Strategies, Accomplishments

Brief vignettes summarize the work of four external partners. These vignettes were written to represent diversity in approaches to school improvement and to illustrate the clearest examples of progress available to date. Each vignette describes the background of the external partner, the main goals and characteristics of the network, the main strategies and activities sponsored by the partner, and evidence of progress. The vignette then comments on how the partner has addressed one or more of the Five Essential Supports. The purpose is not to offer a comprehensive account of the networks' activities, but only to highlight salient work relevant to the partners' goals for school improvement. To identify instances of progress, we included only accomplishments that were well documented through interviews and observations. In selecting material for these vignettes and for other examples of school and partner activity, it was not possible to include descriptions of all partners' programs or to describe the full range of activities of those partners that are included. We regret that it may have been necessary to omit achievements and strategies that the partners consider significant. Schools, partners, and individuals are identified by pseudonyms.

Vignette 1: Teaching and Learning Network

Partner Background, Network Goals and Characteristics

The Teaching and Learning Network (TLN) was formed by a university-based school improvement organization about three years prior to receiving funding from the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. TLN grew out of the Illinois Writing Project, a project that has assisted teachers

in up to 20 Chicago schools per year to advance the teaching of writing, reading, and integrating writing in all teaching disciplines. Drawing on the expertise of Illinois Writing Project leaders, TLN staff developed a program of technical assistance to improve teaching in the areas of literacy and writing.

TLN promotes student-centered learning that emphasizes literacy instruction in which students engage in conversation and diverse forms of writing, connecting their experiences to literature. Students work independently and collaboratively in small groups, choosing topics that interest them and completing projects on the topics. Interdisciplinary thematic curriculum is emphasized for upper grades and high school, and in high school, student participation in community internships is a key activity.

Vignette 1: Teaching and Learning Network (TLN)

Number of schools:

5 elementary, plus 1 high school (data not available for the high school)

Student enrollment:

500-1,400; most have between 500 and 700

Percent low-income students:

86-98%

Percent limited English proficiency students:

0-43%

Racial/ethnic make-up:

2 schools predominantly African-American

2 schools predominantly minority (over 85% mixed minority)

1 school racially mixed (15-30% white)

ITBS scores:

Reading: 21-47% of students at or above national norms

Mathematics: 29-53% of students at or above national norms

Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Accountability, Department of Research, Assessment, and Quality Reviews

Activities

TLN has promoted student-centered learning through three main strategies: providing sustained, on-site assistance to individual teachers in each school; building community support for the practices; and holding network-wide meetings that promote further development for teachers, administrators, and parents.

On-site assistance to teachers. TLN staff insist that “staff development needs to occur in actual classrooms during regular instruction,”²⁶ and that “school change is labor intensive and basically happens one teacher at a time.”²⁷ The goal is to build a critical mass of teachers in each school who follow the principles of student-centered learning. TLN’s key strategy has been to supply each of the six elementary schools with a demonstration teacher who works at each school during an average of nine two-week residencies over the academic year. During the residency the demonstration teachers, all of whom are experienced teachers in the Chicago Public Schools, work in the classrooms of teachers selected in consultation with the school staff. After classroom observation, demonstration, and co-teaching, demonstration teachers confer with the teachers. Having the demonstration teacher in the classroom reduces the student-to-teacher ratio and offers a more personalized learning environment in which each teacher has more opportunity to respond to individual student needs. Demonstration teachers have assisted teachers in the use of literacy circles, more systematic attention to vocabulary, identification of higher quality children’s literature, and other strategies. Demonstration teachers have assisted in the implementation of the workshop, a major instructional strategy promoted by TLN. The partner described a workshop: “Students choose their own topics and books for reading, collaborate with classmates, create polished products [finished books or essays], keep records, and self-evaluate their work. Teachers demonstrate their own reading and writing processes, confer with students one-to-one, and offer timely mini-lessons as students work.”²⁸ More recently, demonstration teachers have also worked to cultivate teacher leadership in the school.

Building support for student-centered learning.

Parents and other community members unfamiliar with the teaching practices promoted by TLN may be skeptical of their effectiveness and, therefore, oppose them in favor of more traditional approaches. TLN has addressed this problem by trying to build community support in three ways: teaching students to make videos of their experiences that can document their learning to the larger community, giving parents direct experience with the practices through workshops in which parents themselves participate in similar learning activities, and working in a high school that provides a continuation of this approach to teaching for graduates of the network's elementary schools. The high school offers professional development to teachers in the upper elementary grades.

TLN enlisted producers/instructors from a video production organization to work with one class in each of three schools to make a documentary of interesting student projects. In one school, fifth-grade students undertook a recycling project. In another, fifth-grade students developed a project on the rainforest. The documentary involved instructing students in various aspects of video production, extensive filming, and editing related to students' projects. In the selected classes, the activity occupied about two hours a week for ten weeks. The videos were shared with other classes in the school, with parents in the workshops, and with wider audiences at TLN meetings.²⁹

Workshops at network schools offer parents opportunities to participate in literacy activities similar



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to those that students experience, such as discussing reading in literature circles, writing in journals, and making books. The workshops also provide opportunities to talk with other parents and teachers about topics that parents choose to explore, for example, safety of the children getting to and from school.³⁰ Each workshop lasts about six hours and is offered every six weeks. Modeled after the student workshop, they are led by parents who have

“I didn’t feel so alone anymore. Having somebody [the demonstration teacher] come every two weeks was much more beneficial than me going out for an hour or so a month at a time.”

participated in a prior workshop and may involve viewing student videos.³¹

Concerned that students from the TLN’s elementary schools be able to continue in a student-centered learning environment in high school, TLN worked with the Chicago Public Schools to establish a relationship with a high school. Faulkner High School offers a college preparatory curriculum, at least three two-week interdisciplinary units per year in each grade, flexible block scheduling, a daily advisory session, half-day weekly internships with community organizations, and a peer mediation program. These program features, combined with its small size of about 500 students and carefully selected staff, continue and expand upon practices initiated in the elementary schools. To help prepare students for the high school, teachers from the upper elementary grades visit Faulkner High School during two-day visitations. In these visits, elementary teachers observe classroom instruction and confer with each other on how to introduce aspects of the high

school program, such as thematic curriculum, into the upper elementary grades.³²

Network meetings. TLN sends teachers, principals, and parents to week-long summer retreats at an out-of-state professional development facility and holds network meetings for participating schools about four times a year.³³ The summer retreat and meetings offer opportunities to share experiences between schools, discuss issues within school teams, and listen to invited speakers.

Evidence of Progress

At Gabriel Garcia Marquez Elementary School, the school’s vision statement and School Improvement Plan reflect the principles of the Teaching and Learning Network, and the principal expresses solid support for the project. For example, the school’s 1999 vision statement says, “The administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, and community of the Gabriel Garcia Marquez Elementary School have created a school that is child-centered, stresses learning that is experimental, authentic, holistic, and is balanced with opportunities for reflection. Garcia Marquez School allows students to take an active part in their education. All learning activities are collaborative, democratic . . . ” The School Improvement Plan calls attention to major aspects of TLN, such as anchoring the curriculum in reading, writing, fine arts, computer technology, and library services, as well as emphasizing alternative assessment, literature-based textbooks, trade books, classroom libraries, and literature circles.

A demonstration teacher, who has worked with about 20 Garcia Marquez teachers over several years, recently reported that all classrooms have improved their libraries, and many teachers have started programs for students to check out books. She explained, “These classroom libraries support the reading workshops and literature circles that are now a staple of classroom practice. The students are reading more in class and at home. . . . All of the teachers are having their children write and publish their work into books using the school’s binding machine.”³⁴ Here are some comments from teachers about the help provided by this demonstration teacher:

Teacher 1: “She actually is showing us how to do literature circles and how to make them more effective. [Students] should be able to choose from several titles. Each has a role and job to do to get them to discuss what they’ve been reading that day. One is responsible for vocabulary, one for discussion, one for picking up something interesting, one for making a connection.”³⁵

Teacher 2: “I think she helped me the most by modeling. By watching her teach, I learned to do other things.”³⁶ This teacher explained how the demonstration teacher used a situation in a children’s story involving a choice about whether to steal as a springboard for getting students to write. As a result, most students wrote almost a page. “Then she took it one step further and told them they were responsible for two papers. They had to edit and make a final version. This is what I am trying to work toward. I also watched how she managed the classroom or handled disruptive behavior. She didn’t tell me what to do, but made suggestions that helped out tremendously. I didn’t feel so alone anymore. Having somebody come every two weeks was much more beneficial than me going out for an hour or so a month at a time.”³⁷

The parent workshops, along with several other forms of parent involvement, have flourished at Garcia Marquez. According to one report, “Parents are well prepared and serious about their writing, yet the sessions are full of warmth, humor, and wonderful food. The parent leader, an alumna of the summer retreat, received a computer from the school to write letters, agendas, and to document activities in the parent project.”³⁸ In 1997-98, for example, there were four workshops involving 42 parents and facilitated by parents, and two meetings of alumni from former workshops. At least 16 parents planned to attend the summer retreat.³⁹

In addition, TLN recently has worked more explicitly on another Essential Support—school leadership. TLN has addressed this Support through such strategies as identifying and working with teacher leaders and holding self-study reviews for each school to assist in strategic planning.

Commentary on Vignette 1

The main priority in the Teaching and Learning Network is instructional improvement grounded in a philosophy of active student learning. The primary strategy has been to supply each school with a demonstration teacher to work intensively and over sustained periods of time at the school. In addition to helping teachers enact effective learning activities as defined by the partner, the network has supported and extended them by sponsoring the production of student videos and workshops in which parents learn according to similar methods. The external partner also established a relationship with Faulkner High School that embodies the student-centered philosophy for older students and was designed to serve graduates of the network elementary schools. The high school teachers offer professional development at their school to assist teachers in the upper elementary grades. The partner has focused primarily on the Essential Support of instruction, with significant effort also devoted to parent involvement. Recognizing its special expertise, the partner explained, “We are not experts in governance reform, so our efforts are based in classrooms with teachers.”⁴⁰

Vignette 2: Community Development Group

Partner Background, Network Goals, and Characteristics

The Community Development Group (CDG) is an organization that has worked in its neighborhood since 1963. The primary goal of the organization is to “strengthen families and create a healthy community.”⁴¹ Its most direct and visible involvement with schools in the neighborhood initially centered on the issue of overcrowding: They helped organize residents to lobby for school remodeling and construction. With CDG’s help, the neighborhood added two new schools and substantial additions to four others.

In 1993, CDG called a neighborhood summit with 35 area organizations and institutions. The result was

a comprehensive list of goals for the neighborhood. Among the goals for both the organization and the neighborhood were three educational goals. The comprehensive list of goals called for residents to maintain community control of the schools, to develop a community center in each school, and to create a parent classroom assistant program to involve parents in schools in a substantive and productive way.

In their efforts to develop the neighborhood and its families, CDG viewed the schools as an important institutional partner for reaching both parents and students. As a partner staff member describes, “What we were wrestling with was how do we involve parents in our schools in a way that’s not demeaning to parents, that teaches parents some leadership skills, and that helps their children as a result of the way we’re treating parents, instead of waiting until there’s a problem. And what we wanted to do was figure out a way to get parents in the schools in a healthy

way. So that’s where we started.”⁴² CDG used these general goals and a strong community-organizing tradition as a basis for their Annenberg grant application. Since they had little expertise or experience in school development, they built their network and their programs based on the issues they were best equipped to address—the development of community resources and, in this case, special services for parents.

Activities

CDG works within the schools to strengthen families through four interconnected efforts within their Annenberg grant:

The Parent Classroom Assistants Program (PCA). This program recruits and trains parents from the school population and places them in classrooms to work with students, as directed by the teachers.

Teacher Collaborators. This initiative connects teachers from across the network around issues of pedagogy in regular meetings.

Character Counts. This program strives for parent participation in their children’s education at home, in school, and in the neighborhood’s churches. It promotes monthly themes such as responsibility, honesty, and patriotism.

Education for Everyone. This initiative offers services such as after-school care and tutoring, GED and job readiness programs, and family recreation in the school buildings after regular school hours.

In this network, the partner has often acted as a broker to help other community organizations implement these ideas and programs, offering assistance and applying for grants, conducting surveys and focus groups, and helping one school spread its successes to others in the network. The partner convened meetings of principals and parish pastors around the Character Counts program, and they hired the instructors who work in the Education for Everyone centers. They also hired outside trainers to conduct workshops with the parents for the Parent Classroom Assistants program. A teacher explained, “What we are doing now is that every other Friday we are planning some kind of workshop for [the parents], . . . Next Friday we are doing ‘Homework without Headaches.’ So that is good for the kids. We had a math workshop; we had

Vignette 2: Community Development Group (CDG)

Number of schools:

4 elementary, plus 1 middle school opened in 1998 (data not available for the middle school)

Enrollment:

1,000-1,300

Percent low-income students:

91-98%

Percent limited English proficiency students:

27-49%

Racial/ethnic make-up:

all 4 predominantly Latino

ITBS scores:

Reading: 23-31% of students at or above national norms

Mathematics: 27-36% of students at or above national norms

Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Accountability, Department of Research, Assessment, and Quality Reviews



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a stress management workshop—things that will help them here in school and also at home with their kids. And they have been enjoying it a lot. They want more workshops. . . . We asked them in the initial training what kind of workshops they would like, and we go from there.”⁴³

Evidence of Progress

Since our data collection was limited primarily to activities carried out during the regular school day, we did not assess the progress of the Education for Everyone initiative. The Parent Classroom Assistants program has been the most successful and visible of the three other programs planned by the CDG. Its goal was to help parents become effective partners with teachers in the classroom and, in turn, help them as parents to promote their children’s learning.

In the 1998-99 school year, 55 teachers from the five schools participated in the Parent Classroom Assistants program, eight more than in the previous year. There were others who wanted to participate, but because parents are generally limited to one semester as Parent Classroom Assistants, the program was un-

able to supply enough parents with training to meet the teachers’ interest. An average of nearly 175 parents worked in the five schools every day, either as Parent Classroom Assistants or in a variety of other official capacities, many of which are outgrowths of the Parent Classroom Assistant experience.⁴⁴

A teacher commented, “I measure the success of the program by how dedicated the parents are. You will always see some that are there for the money, and you know that they are going to be gone once they are done. But most of them are involved in some other program. They finish their hours in the morning, and they are still working in the school in the afternoon, which is great. They get attached to the kids.”⁴⁵

Another positive outcome of the program seems to be significantly reducing conflict between parents and teachers.⁴⁶ According to one observer, “[I]t’s amazing. . . . They [parents] get so informed about what’s going on in a school, what is expected of the student, all the different obstacles that teachers have. And it’s amazing that not only are they helping in the individual rooms, but they’re also cooperating more because they understand the reasons for different

policies.”⁴⁷ The Parent Classroom Assistants program has built strong bonds between teachers and parents, who, because of their work in individual classrooms, are now more knowledgeable about their children’s schoolwork and the performance standards across the school. In addition, the presence of extra adults who are also parents seems to have had an effect beyond the classroom in creating a warmer relationship be-

. . . many of the Parent Classroom Assistants alumni who remain in the neighborhood are now deeply involved in the schools and are pursuing their own educations . . .

tween parents and the administration, and in garnering parent support for school development through the Local School Council and the School Improvement Plan processes.

The partner’s efforts have improved classroom learning climates in the two schools we studied. The addition of an extra adult in the classroom in most cases allowed teachers more time to work with individual students or parents to conduct one-on-one tutoring. Teachers and others spoke of improvements in the classroom climate where Parent Classroom Assistants have served. This teacher described an unusually talented parent who served in her classroom: “I jumped on the bandwagon [to get a parent in my room] because if they were offering help, I am taking it. She is fabulous; she is amazing, intelligent, caring. I don’t consider her my aide, I consider her my co-worker, my peer. . . . I don’t have her grade papers because that would be a waste of her time. She participates in the class discussions and adds to what I am saying. We are team teaching. It’s amazing.”⁴⁸

Many teachers reported improvements in classroom behavior, attentiveness, and their own ability to create a personalized learning environment for their students.⁴⁹ A former Parent Classroom Assistant who later was hired as a coordinator in the school echoed these teacher reports: “I know that when I was a Parent Classroom Assistant, some of these kids were so behind in reading, that when they caught up, they felt so much better. They would feel like they weren’t smart, and we would say, ‘You are smart.’ Most of these kids don’t get that attention at home.”⁵⁰

In some cases the program has energized teachers as well. One observed, “Teachers who have the parent volunteers in their room . . . have also changed, let’s say from . . . what I perceived to be non-involved to . . . wanting to be involved outside school and making a contribution. So I see it as very positive.”⁵¹

Ironically, this program, which strives to build capacity in the community by strengthening families, in a small way may be a victim of its own success. As parents feel empowered by their participation in the Parent Classroom Assistants program, they are able to seek employment and move on to a better neighborhood. As a school staff member notes, “That has happened to an awful lot of people, I would say a third of the people that have gone through the program . . . but you have to say those kids are better off: they’re probably in a better neighborhood—maybe not so many crime problems and gang problems and violence. So you’re happy for them in some ways, but you also want them to come and give back, and a lot of them are not doing that.”⁵² At the same time, many of the Parent Classroom Assistants alumni who remain in the neighborhood are now deeply involved in the schools and are pursuing their own educations through the Education for Everyone centers and other means.

Commentary on Vignette 2

This partner focused most clearly on the Essential Support of parent and community involvement. The partner also made efforts to provide teachers and school staff with incentives to meet together and share ideas,

to focus on curriculum and instruction and other aspects of school development. However, the Community Development Group did not attempt to provide a full program of professional development, as the partner's expertise and mission did not extend to these areas.

CDG's concerted effort to gather resources and link the family to the school is a reflection of the organization's many years of work in community development. The CDG Parent Classroom Assistants program is widely admired, and through CDG's participation in Annenberg-sponsored workshops, the idea has been considered by other partners. One teacher noted, "I think that's exciting. I think we are beginning to help other people change their paradigm regarding parental involvement, community involvement in the school. We have a model that can be successful. We have a model that excites people and makes them think, 'Perhaps this is a possibility for us, too.'"⁵³

Vignette 3: Network for Student Support

Partner Background, Network Goals and Characteristics

The Network for Student Support (NSS) is based in a university resource center that offers courses and workshops for teachers, has a library and resource center for teachers to use, has conference facilities where it sponsors education gatherings, and houses a coaching and mentoring staff. The center also serves about 40 Chicago public schools on probation and is the external consultant to approximately 15 Chicago public schools that have CPS grants to promote inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. The resource center also has a number of federal and state grants and many ties to local educational, cultural, and business organizations. The center's staff tries to coordinate grants and use existing networks and relationships to support its other initiatives whenever it seems appropriate. For instance,

the resource center used a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for curriculum development as a resource for curriculum planning within the Network for Student Support. Because of these overlapping relationships and a long history of providing professional development, the resource center has access to national and local experts, educational technology, and federal and state grants. The resource center's staff tries to use this access to link teachers and schools to the materials, people, and information they need.

The impetus for NSS came from some of the resource center's prior work with schools. They were interested in boosting achievement and ending the disaffection children have toward school in early adolescence, an age when achievement typically lags in Chicago schools. A partner staff member states, "With young adolescents especially, there needs to be a different atmosphere. It's the stage where kids start disengaging from school and start getting turned off, so there needs to be some change in the way things are done to pull them back in again, to wake them up to the excitement of learning, and to really try to do this before they're lost to the high schools."⁵⁴



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Activities

NSS's goals are grounded in research from the Carnegie Task Force on Young Adolescents, which stresses the importance of both academic and social/emotional growth in preparation for later schooling and life.

NSS helps network schools develop long-term (five-year) plans for the development of programs for their young adolescent students. Goals for the network schools include:

- Creating a restructured school day to allow for common planning time for NSS teachers;
- Developing advisory groups for young adolescent students to offer more personalized and trustful learning environments;

- Involving parents and community members in planning efforts, workshops, and social events in order to create a cohesive, supportive environment for these students both in and out of school;
- Developing a service-learning curriculum for their young adolescent students.

NSS's goals for the network as a whole include:

- Cross-school meetings to discuss strategies for developing curriculum, advisory groups, and parent/community events;
- Parent and student meetings and events across the network, including student exchanges;
- Teacher course-taking through the university where the partner is based, for an additional endorsement for the Illinois teaching license.

Vignette 3: Network for Student Support (NSS)

Number of schools:

4 elementary; 1 school added and 1 dropped since the initial grant in 1995

Enrollment:

400-1300 in the 4 schools in the network during the 1998-99 school year

Percent low-income students:

51-96%

Percent limited English proficiency students:

3-95%

Racial/ethnic make-up:

1 school predominantly African-American, 2 schools predominantly Latino, 1 school racially mixed (15-30% white)

ITBS scores:

Reading: 32-60% of students at or above national norms

Mathematics: 38-64% of students at or above national norms

Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Accountability, Department of Research, Assessment, and Quality Reviews

NSS gathers teachers and administrators for network meetings on Saturday mornings every other month. Meetings might include a discussion, a workshop, or a guest speaker. In addition, principals meet every quarter with the school-based NSS coordinators. Each school is also assigned a coordinator from NSS, who has contact with them at least once a week to work on the school's specific goals. The schools hold network-wide Community Saturdays twice a year, where students, parents, and teachers from all four schools meet together for workshops and recreational activities.

NSS helps individual schools meet their goals by offering schools coaching in areas where their programs for young adolescents seem to need the most development. According to a partner staff member, "This is not a staff development program where we're defining what would be good for them and offering it in every way, shape, or form. They're working with the teachers and defining these things. . . . It was difficult at first because we had such a non-traditional approach, and they expected us to come in and say, okay, this is what we're going to do; it was difficult for them to say what they wanted. . . . I don't think teachers are used to doing that, defining what sort of staff development they want and in what way and



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how it should be carried out. I think that's part of our role—just to make suggestions and offer models.”⁵⁵ NSS staff members have an average of one contact per week with each individual school, either face to face or over the phone. They give notice about upcoming conferences and encourage teachers to participate in state and national professional associations.

NSS helps teachers develop as a team by helping the team arrange for common planning times and define how they want to work together. As teachers are able to gather for common planning times, the partner expects them to move into the areas of curriculum and instruction as a natural evolution of the time they spend planning for other kinds of programs, such as advisories. Advisories are a key strategy for personalizing learning and building relationships with students. They are generally configured as small groups of students who meet regularly with an adult to discuss social, academic, and other issues. In the 1998-1999 school year, the NSS team at John Steinbeck

Elementary School experimented with thematic units as a way of personalizing the learning experience for students, a complement to the advisory philosophy.

Evidence of Progress

NSS brings new resources into the schools, and school representatives say they find this very helpful. One principal expressed this as a clear advantage of working with such a well-connected university-affiliated partner. A school staff member explained, “Because first of all, it's the level of intelligence. . . . I like to work with teams or organizations that are academically, intellectually able to help me, not someone that I'm always having to teach . . . a [university] would have the resources to do that. . . . They have the staff; they have the research teams; they have all of those resources and the experiences; they have all of the materials—the technology, the contracts, the linkages.”⁵⁶

NSS has seen positive results in its efforts to build professional community among the teachers. In the network's schools, nearly 100 percent of teachers who work with young adolescent students actively participate in network activities. There are formal and informal opportunities for teachers to learn together, both in their schools and in the NSS network.

The strongest evidence for professional community is in the school, shown in the frequent team meetings. Teachers meet regularly, and often on their own time, to plan activities, share new teaching ideas, and plan curriculum. The team at John Steinbeck School meets weekly, before school, to discuss programming and network information. Teams from other schools meet after school, well beyond the end of the regular workday.

The NSS teaching team motivated other teachers in the school to join in collaborative activity. Teachers who worked at Steinbeck school but were not part of the NSS were initially envious of some of the special benefits NSS teachers accrued via membership in the network. But, as one teacher commented, after

several years, "many of the ideas of NSS have been adopted; the whole school is adopting them, such as team meetings. They have team meetings at the other grade levels, and that's fine because you need that articulation regardless of grade level."⁵⁷

Network-wide activities are prominent among the schools. NSS teacher leaders attend the network meetings described above, and many teachers have taken the courses offered by the university where NSS is based. Some have attended state or national professional conferences. Teachers expressed their appreciation for the monthly meetings. One said, "To me that's been the greatest part, the opportunity to share with other professionals in a forum, people from different buildings. Before that point, we had pretty much been limited to sharing among ourselves in the building. It helps to have ideas from other buildings in terms of what practices have been successful."⁵⁸ Another teacher said, "I know as a teacher I love the camaraderie . . . and the feedback, positive and negative . . . and I've grown from that."⁵⁹



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NSS recognizes how important it is for the teams to grow and develop and wants them to be able to continue without as much outside coaching when the Annenberg grant comes to an end. In the third year of the grant, the partner had the schools write their own section of the network proposal to the Annenberg Challenge for funding renewal. The partner also plans to reduce the amount of guidance it offers to the network's schools for conference registration and professional association memberships. The partner wants to see the teachers take responsibility for their own professional development in these areas.

The NSS has also worked to improve curriculum. Some NSS school teams worked together to develop thematic units around a single topic, such as "conflict," that could be covered in all subject areas. Since 1999, some NSS teachers from throughout the network have used the Annenberg-sponsored report *The Quality of Intellectual Work in Chicago Schools* to stimulate discussion and work together to create higher quality assignments for their students.⁶⁰

The schools have also seen some progress with parent and community programs. Steinbeck School invited parents into the planning process during the first year of NSS with two family events. One teacher stated, "There were lots of food, balloons, and signs, and the parents felt very comfortable. They were relaxed, and they just opened up and talked about their ideal school and what their goals were for their children."⁶¹ Individual schools sponsor Family Nights. One of the schools in the network used its Annenberg grant to expand their Family Night to a weekly program.

Community Saturdays are network-wide events held twice a year at the schools on a rotating basis. All of the schools in the network participate every time a Community Saturday event is held. The parent coordinator for the network reports that attendance has grown from 50 to 150 parents, students, and teachers over the three years the Community Saturdays have been held. Parents and teachers work together on issues of concern for young adolescents, and the students have academic and recreational opportunities. A partner staff member says, "The Community Saturdays have been our main connection to the parents. . . . It has

connected parents with their schools and the network schools. The events have gotten rave reviews from parents. . . . They've gotten a lot out of (these workshops) and they keep coming back. A lot of workshops are on helping the parents understand adolescents and on the work the students are doing and need to be doing in schools."⁶²

Commentary on Vignette 3

The goals of the Network for Student Support were best articulated and best executed in the area of teacher professional community. To accomplish this, the partner promoted teacher team meetings and network meetings, and sponsored courses that would lead to special endorsement for the Illinois teaching certificate that were open to and attended by teachers from throughout the network. The partner has also assisted teachers in working together to plan and implement outreach programs for families, to create more intimate learning climates for students through the use of advisories, to develop thematic units, and to create more intellectually challenging assignments. By focusing on a group of teachers working with students in a specific age group, the network has also been able to nurture the leadership skills of these teachers as they work to establish special programs within the larger school.

Vignette 4: School Development Organization

Partner Background, Network Goals, and Characteristics

The School Development Organization (SDO) is a university-based school assistance organization. Founded in 1988 and funded primarily with private foundation grants, SDO has worked to improve between three and seven schools since its efforts began. Its main objectives are to improve literacy instruction; to cultivate school leadership; to enhance coor-

dination among school staff, parents, and social services; and to foster strategic planning for whole school improvement. In 1998, SDO founded a new small school, which is intended to serve as an exemplary school for its community and a professional development site for the network.

Activities

According to an SDO staff member, “The general strategy is to focus on human resources development. This contrasts with offering material for a formal program that you’re trying to get people to implement. And so we’ve tended to invest the most time and energy in a broad sense of leadership development.”⁶³

Vignette 4: School Development Organization (SDO)

Number of schools:

7 elementary, plus one small school founded by the partner in 1998 (data not available for the small school)

Student enrollment:

450-1,550; 4 have enrollments between 450 and 750

Percent low-income students:

75-98%

Percent limited English proficiency students:

0 (in 4 schools)-50%

Racial/ethnic make-up:

4 schools predominantly African-American, 2 schools predominantly minority (over 85% mixed minority), 1 school predominantly Latino

ITBS scores:

Reading: 16-45% of students at or above national norms

Mathematics: 24-59% of students at or above national norms

Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Accountability, Department of Research, Assessment, and Quality Reviews

The more specific objectives have been pursued through the following strategies:

Improving literacy instruction. Literacy coordinators at the primary and intermediate/upper levels of each school are trained through a two-year program. Coordinator training includes formal instruction by SDO specialists and two half-day meetings per month with other coordinators in the network.

Training focuses on the use of a literacy framework for primary grades developed over several years by university-based researchers and practitioners. The framework emphasizes a balanced approach: specific skills practice and literature-based activities responsive to student interests. This approach aims to cultivate student interpretation and complex thinking about reading, writing, and speaking. The framework offers suggestions for high quality literature and, for the primary grades, it includes a Developmental Assessment System that diagnoses each student on specific literacy proficiencies three times a year.⁶⁴ In recent years, SDO has devoted increasing effort to helping literacy coordinators develop specific instructional materials to implement the framework, especially at the intermediate/upper levels where the framework is somewhat less specified.

Literacy coordinators are to train their school colleagues through at least one semester of weekly, two-hour, after-school workshops for which teachers can receive CPS lane credit or a stipend. After the teachers have taken the workshops, coordinators are expected to continue to offer training through class visitation, individual mentoring, and staff meetings.

Leadership development. SDO tries to nurture leadership in the schools through training both faculty and principals. Faculty training includes the work with literacy coordinators as just described. In addition, SDO has helped each school to form a leadership team of key administrators and a representative group of staff. Through consultation with individual SDO staff, school team retreats, and network meetings of leadership team representatives, SDO offers training for the teams in collaborative decision making and strategic planning. SDO views the leadership team as the main vehicle for engaging the faculty in discussion and setting policy for the school, particu-



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larly with reference to the School Improvement Plan and implementation of the SDO initiatives.

SDO has focused on principal leadership through monthly, half-day meetings of principals in the network and assigning an SDO coach to work on an individual basis with each principal. Recently, SDO expanded its leadership training activities by forming networks for assistant principals, librarians, technology coordinators, and new teachers, and sponsoring periodic meetings for these groups.

Social service coordination. SDO helped each school form a Social Service Team, which consists chiefly of specialists who serve students with special needs, such as the special education teacher, counselor, psychologist, social worker, and nurse. The team can also include other faculty such as the principal, the literacy coordinator, or attendance officer. These teams meet regularly to inventory and coordinate delivery of social services to specific students and their families and to help strengthen parent involvement

in the school. A staff person from SDO meets with the teams to help formulate their goals and strategies. Special emphasis has been given to designing a process, called SERVE, for identifying students who require special help from within or outside the school, and in consultation with the teacher and parent, devising a plan of action to address an individual student's needs in a timely fashion.

Strategic planning. As SDO staff work with each of these initiatives, they encourage school staff to ground decisions in data, to construct short-term objectives leading to longer-term goals, to assess progress along the way, and to make reasonable revisions in the plans. SDO has provided new data for the schools to fortify this process, namely, results of periodic surveys of the staff, information from the Developmental Assessment System for literacy, analysis of trends in performance on standardized tests, and a yearly self-study conducted by the school that identifies high priority areas for the School Improvement Plan. At

the primary level, using observation data from the literacy coordinators, SDO has found a link between the extent to which the literacy framework is implemented and student reading levels in specific classrooms. Each school sends its leadership team to participate with SDO staff in a yearly School Analysis exercise. Each school first conducts a self-study on the degree of implementation of the initiatives in literacy, leadership, and social service coordination. Data illustrating strengths and weaknesses are then discussed in a half-day meeting among representatives of the school and SDO staff. Together they reflect on this analysis, then meet again in a week or so to develop an action plan for the coming year. The action plan is designed to influence the school's School Improvement Plan.

Evidence of Progress

The external partner perceives significant professional growth in the literacy coordinators and growth in teaching effectiveness as indicated by a high degree of implementation of the literacy framework in two schools where SDO has been involved the longest. Newer teachers have been particularly receptive to using the literacy framework.⁶⁵ In one of those schools, Toni Morrison Elementary, an estimated 75 percent of the teachers have implemented the framework.⁶⁶ According to the Morrison School Analysis, most primary teachers incorporated key strategies of the framework, such as reading aloud, shared reading, and using the Developmental Assessment System to plan instruction and refer students for special services. In the intermediate and upper grades, the School Analysis found that nearly all staff had been trained in the use of the frameworks, that there was widespread use of literature circles, journals, read-alouds, independent writing, and small group collaboration, with decreasing use of basal readers.

Elements of the framework were seen in almost all of the classes observed by Chicago Annenberg Research Project researchers. One of the Morrison literacy coordinators has been trying to devote more classroom emphasis to higher order thinking, "not just the easy recall kind of drill." As a result of classroom visitations, she said, "Some teachers are very strong in using it, and some are at an awareness level. . . . It's caused people to come and ask, 'What should I do to make my lessons look like that?'"⁶⁷ A Morrison primary literacy coordinator said the framework has been very valuable, especially the Developmental Assessments, which provide specific data on what aspects of reading the teachers need to address with each student. She said, "Teachers are a lot more comfortable with the framework at this point." She also said that reserving a significant block of time (two and a half to three hours per day) just for literacy in primary grades has been a big help.⁶⁸ At least five teachers (of the nine most recently interviewed) said their teaching had changed in the last two years to incorporate the literacy framework and more higher order thinking assignments. One said, "I have tried more to follow the literacy framework." Another teacher said that since introduction of the literacy framework, "There is a lot more group participation. . . . I had not done much with journals before, and now I use journals in both social studies and language arts."⁶⁹

Morrison staff said that use of the Developmental Assessment System has enhanced the power of the literacy framework by giving more precise and more frequent indicators of students' reading progress. Teachers said the SDO training was very good, that the Developmental Assessment System was a good and efficient measure of reading readiness and development, and that it allowed the teacher to build on what the student learned in the previous grade. Teach-

"There is a lot more group participation. . . . I had not done much with journals before, and now I use journals in both social studies and language arts."

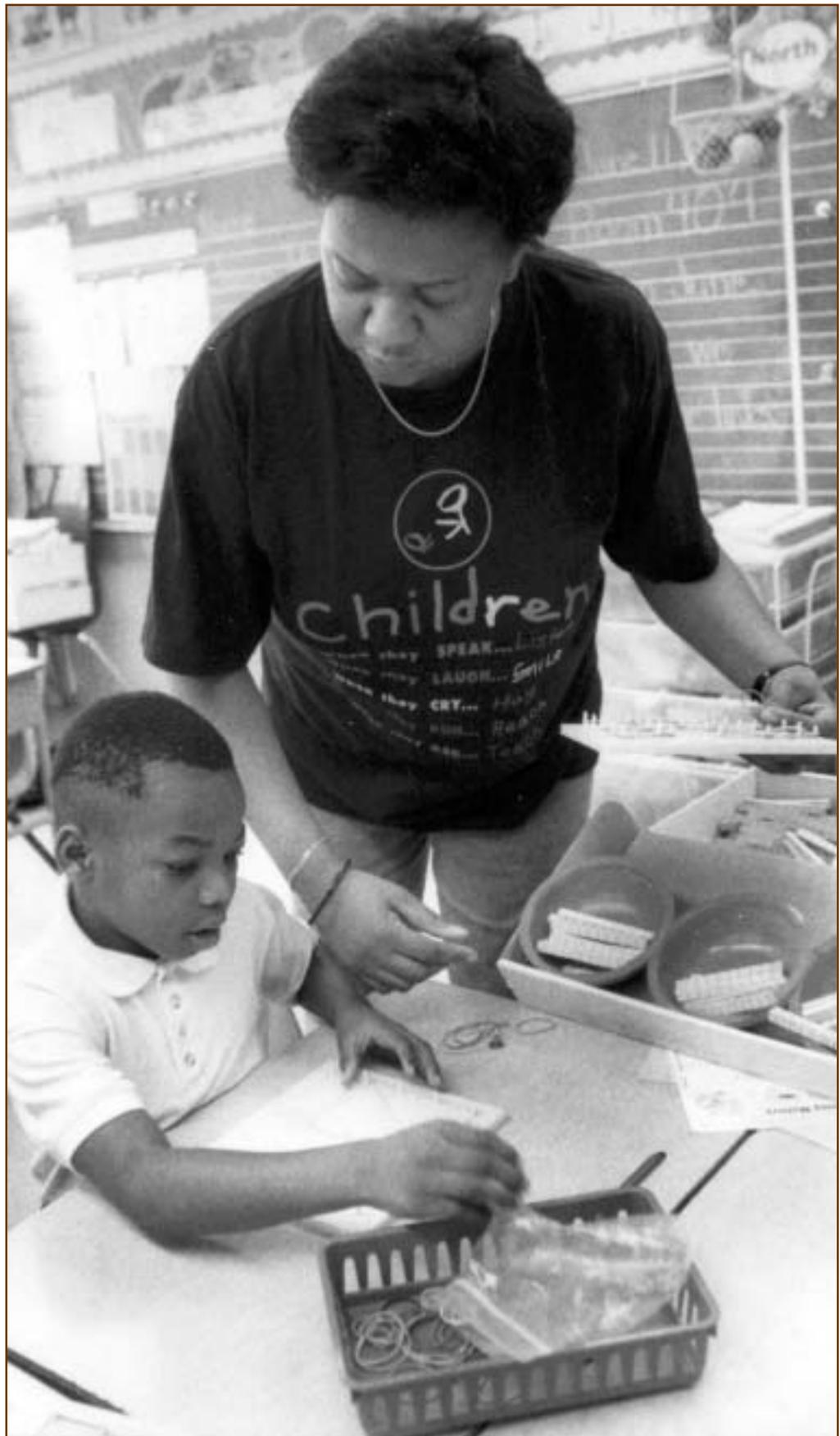
ers said that Developmental Assessment information influenced their teaching. Some said it pointed out student difficulties in comprehension even when students could read the words. Another said, “I pulled what Step 6 is addressing, and broke it down. It helped to focus on the sounds, and reviewing the elements of the story and the main characters.”⁷⁰

One indicator of success in leadership development is the functioning of leadership teams formed through SDO influence. At Morrison, the team now meets twice a month from 7:30 to 9:00 A.M., and teachers are paid for their time beyond regular school hours. Beginning in fall 1998, instead of having the principal direct the meetings, the team elected its own facilitator and recorder. The facilitator runs the meetings. Teachers can suggest agenda items to the facilitator, and the agenda is prepared by the facilitator, recorder, and principal. Minutes of the meetings are now distributed to the full faculty and the Local School Council. The team played a significant role in developing the School Improvement Plan for 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. For example, to prepare for the School Analysis in February 1998, the team reviewed the successes, challenges, and plans of action of the previous year and revised the material based on information over the past year. After the first School Analysis meeting, the team decided to consult with the staff in each of its schools-within-a-school. Each school-within-a-school compiled data on attendance, achievement, and student behavior. There was agreement across schools that special education services required significant attention, and the principal provided eight different budget options for addressing the need. Based on feedback from the schools, the Leadership Team developed a set of priorities. As one teacher described the process, “We would put up charts, analyze all the data, find where our needs were. Then [the assistant principal] would come in with the budget part and we would have to make choices. It was always a group thing and not necessarily the

principal leading it.”⁷¹ Another teacher said, “We really brought up problems that needed to be solved from all members of each academy . . . everybody listened. . . . I think we’re very democratic, and I feel the leader is very fair.”⁷² SDO noted recently that leadership teams have begun to expand their concerns from improving communication and planning for the School Improvement Plan to other issues, such as how to increase time for professional development and how to improve teaching and learning.⁷³

Commentary on Vignette 4

SDO activities focus clearly on the Essential Support of quality instruction, as illustrated by their efforts to develop primary and intermediate/upper literacy frameworks, provide instructional materials for literacy and a special assessment system, and train literacy coordinators to train their colleagues. In addition, SDO concentrates on nurturing school leadership—leadership both to implement the program and guide the school in setting strategic priorities, forging a coherent set of improvement activities and building good communication and trust among the staff. The main strategies for leadership development include literacy coordinator training, coaching principals, and building leadership teams. Other leadership development strategies are monthly principal network meetings and the self-study, analysis, and action planning that occur as part of the School Analysis. SDO supports building professional community, but less directly, perhaps, than school leadership and quality instruction. For example, by emphasizing the literacy framework and strategic planning, SDO tries to influence schools to clarify key learning goals for the whole staff. Training for literacy coordinators, principals, and leadership teams encourages collaboration, inclusive participation of the full staff, and timely, honest communication—all critical to strong professional community.



III. Accomplishments across Nine Partners

We now describe accomplishments of all nine external partners we studied, according to each of the Five Essential Supports (see Figure 1, page 11). Summarizing the accomplishments of the partners by each Essential Support gives us the opportunity to see the range of accomplishments across our sample. Some of these accomplishments have been described in the vignettes; others appear here for the first time.

School Leadership

Leadership issues were explicitly addressed by several of the partners. Some emphasized the role of the principal or literacy coordinator, and another concentrated on developing leaders within the Local School Council. As described in the School Development Organization vignette, in addition to mentoring principals and convening monthly meetings with them, the partner helped establish leadership teams of teachers and administrators at each school and coached the teams in the process of school planning and program implementation.

The Learning for Everyone Network (LEN) also convened principals for monthly meetings, where principals had an opportunity to learn from and support each other while developing their leadership skills. One principal explained how this helped develop a professional community among the principals: “I used to see LEN principals at regional principal meetings. But now LEN has brought us together and made us cohesive as a group. It has helped us develop respect for each other. . . . I was talking to a principal the other day about how good it is that we can sit down and discuss things, and many times disagree with each other, but never be disagreeable. Even though we used to have a monthly regional meeting, we had 90 principals sitting in that room. So you never really got a chance to know each other, talk to each other, really discuss things. Now we feel very comfortable if a



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problem comes up. . . . It is that kind of thing where [principals] feel comfortable calling each other, helping each other, and supporting each other.”⁷⁴

The Literacy for Life Network (LLN) worked to identify school leaders in addition to the principal, establish action committees to monitor school goals, and train Local School Council members. One of LLN’s principals described the importance of being trained in shared decision making: “And that’s how the partner really got us going on shared decision making. . . . Nobody knew really how we were going to go about doing that. We hadn’t had the experience of doing this before, and that process has to be learned. Someone has to learn to facilitate, and people that have never facilitated a meeting became facilitators and reporters and took the various roles that you would in meetings. That took a long time.”⁷⁵

Professional Community

Partners addressed teacher professional community within schools by emphasizing collaborative work toward shared goals. Many partners helped schools restructure their schedules to allow teachers to meet during the school day, and to arrange for up to two and a half hours of time for professional development every couple of weeks.

At William Faulkner High School, one of the Teaching and Learning Network schools, teachers all take part in hiring decisions for new teachers, which helps to reinforce a strong, shared philosophy among all teachers. The School Development Organization literacy coordinators at each school, after learning from the partner how to implement the literacy frameworks and the Developmental Assessment System,

then meet with their colleagues at the schools to help them implement the program.

The Network for Student Support teachers work in teams within their schools, and they also meet as a network of schools for professional development and planning meetings. As one teacher enthusiastically proclaimed, “Another opportunity that Annenberg has facilitated is the bringing together of our core group, the team that works with young adolescents. We had never had that type of collaboration in the building before, where you’ve got teams across grade levels meeting and articulating and making decisions. So that has been a very positive outcome of Annenberg.”⁷⁶

Teachers in the Growth and Learning Network (GLN) worked together to try to break down barriers between different academic subjects. As one teacher reported, “The teachers who are working in the GLN project are meeting and planning cross-disciplinary activities and trying to find common ground between their teaching disciplines and the disciplines of other, departmental people. For example, the art people are working with the history people to find out if historical events or historical documentation can be presented in a more demonstrative way using art, graphics, etc. Science and math people are interacting to find the common areas of instruction in their disciplines, and there’s a natural union . . . of the math and science disciplines.”⁷⁷

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent and community relations were addressed explicitly by a few partners: others have tried to establish parent workshops or parent tutoring programs, but the only comprehensive parent involvement programs in our sample were described in the vignettes. The Community Development Group’s Parent Classroom Assistants program brought parents into classrooms, where they were able to assist teachers on a daily basis in ways that allowed the teacher to increase individual attention to all students. The Teaching and Learning Network worked with parents to build support for the reading and writing techniques used in the network’s schools. And the Network for Student

Support sponsored network-wide Community Saturdays as well as parent meetings at individual schools.

Student-Centered Learning Climate

Learning climate was rarely addressed explicitly and systematically by the partners we studied, but it received indirect emphasis through activities of some. The Community Development Group’s addition of parents to classrooms, as described in the vignette, made it possible for some students to get more personal attention, and for some classrooms to have more adults available to interact with the children. One teacher explained that she valued “having the extra

“It is that kind of thing where [principals] feel comfortable calling each other, helping each other, and supporting each other.”

person, the positive attention, just having somebody else there to work with the students; a lot of the students behave better, and the kids, a lot of time, will try to focus.”⁷⁸

The Teaching and Learning Network’s project-oriented curriculum, the small size of its high school, and its use of student advisory groups helped to create a student-centered learning climate. One of the Network for Student Support’s main goals was to support development of advisory groups to offer more personalized and trustful learning environments. Advisories met daily for 15 minutes in groups consisting of a teacher and 20 or fewer students in one network school; a pilot advisory project in another school was also considered successful, and there were plans for full implementation in 1999-2000.

Quality Instruction

Most of the partners emphasized instructional activities, most often in literacy. The accomplishments mentioned here are consistent with research on effective practices for literacy development. The vignettes described accomplishments of the School Development Organization and the Teaching and Learning Network in this area, namely, the use of literacy coordinators and the Developmental Assessment System by the School Development Organization, and the use of demonstration teachers in the Teaching and Learning Network. The School Development Organization's literacy framework provided high-quality literature and assessment materials, and the School Development Organization found that greater implementation of the framework was associated with gains in student achievement. The Teaching and Learning Network's workshops and

demonstration teachers responded to students' diverse needs and attempted to connect learning to students' lives beyond school.

The Literacy for Life Network also used literacy facilitators to help teachers establish good reading practices, such as literature circles, journal writing, and a young author's contest, reinforced by Links to Literacy, a program that encourages students to read many books and to celebrate literacy throughout the school. Practices such as these teach basic skills, encourage higher order thinking, and help students connect reading and writing to their lives beyond school. According to one school literacy facilitator, "At the beginning of the year, Marlene [the Literacy for Life Network consultant] came. One of the teachers was teaching too much in Spanish; it should be half and half. So she came and we worked, three of us—Marlene, the teacher, and I—and taught him the language experience approach.



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She did one [lesson] with the kids, then I did one with the kids, then he did one with the kids on three consecutive days. So now he knows about the approach . . . and the kids are using the words that they know, which makes a lot more sense instead of just the regimented vocabulary.”⁷⁹

The Innovative Instruction Network approached the teaching of reading through student participation in the arts. Artists and teachers worked together to create reading lessons that emphasized specific literary elements, which students learned about and expressed through dance, music, drama, and visual art. As one of our project researchers explained, “Ms. Johnson begins the class with a drama exercise called sculpting (a volunteer is ‘sculpted’—pushed and positioned to represent a character in a literary text). Then the students enact a talk show in which they interview characters from the novel, *The Giver*, which they are currently reading. The purpose of this activity is to dissect the feelings and motivations of the characters. From there she introduced point of view. After a short discussion, Craig (the artist) illustrated the concept by asking students to pretend they were a character in *Jack and the Beanstalk* and tell the story from that character’s point of view. Then he asked the students to tell *The Giver* from a minor character’s point of view. Finally, he suggested Ms. Johnson give them a writing assignment in which each student chooses another character and tells the story from that point of view.”⁸⁰

In the Network for Student Support, one school piloted a thematic unit that emphasized a single theme across all of the subject areas, and teachers partici-

pated in professional development activities to learn how to create assignments that demanded high quality intellectual work from students.

Summary of Accomplishments

Partners and schools have achieved some clear accomplishments on each of the Essential Supports. Among the Supports, quality instruction and

Among the Supports, quality instruction and teacher professional community seemed to receive the most direct attention across the nine networks we studied.

teacher professional community seemed to receive the most direct attention across the nine networks we studied. As discussed in the conclusion, most partners tended to address only one or two of the Five Essential Supports vigorously. Some partners tried to address more, but were not able to fashion a comprehensive, well-specified program that addressed all Five Essential Supports in a coordinated way.



IV. Promising Strategies

Partners have used numerous and diverse strategies to produce such accomplishments. The dozens of activities undertaken by partners and schools can be represented as four promising strategies: offering professional development, creating new roles to assist instruction, providing materials to assist instruction, and establishing new school organizational structures.

We consider the strategies and activities highlighted here promising because they, in combination with other complementary activities and resources, have been successful in enhancing one or more of the Essential Supports in at least one school. In designating them as “promising,” we do not intend to suggest that they always lead to significant school improvement. To the contrary, prior research and experience indicates that the effectiveness of any strategy depends largely on the extent of support for the strategy in the particular context. For example, providing high-quality literature for children to read may enhance reading instruction in a school where teachers are skilled in the use of such materials. But in a school where teachers have little experience teaching reading except through basal readers or where the principal communicates weak expectations for literature-based instruction, the availability of outstanding children’s literature may not enhance the quality of instruction. In addition to higher quality literature, teachers in the latter school may need extensive professional development on how to incorporate such literature productively into their lessons.

Intelligent action by an external partner consists not only of choosing promising strategies at the beginning of an intervention but, as the program evolves, identifying problems, then changing the strategies to improve the intervention. A change might entail building more support for an unsuccessful strategy or replacing it with a strategy for which more support is available. This section concludes with examples of how some partners have changed their strategies, based on feedback from the field and/or from the Chicago Challenge.

Professional Development

Almost everyone agrees that professional development is a key to school improvement and that it must be strengthened. Yet knowing only that a school or a partner has invested heavily in professional development is not instructive, because professional development can be enacted in many different ways for different purposes. Professional development usually occurs in different kinds of meetings, for example, meetings of two people (mentoring and coaching), meetings of groups of staff within schools or groups in the community (workshops, courses, planning sessions), or meetings with network groups (representatives from network schools who discuss approaches to school discipline in their schools or who plan network activities for the coming year). These meetings may include different activities and be used for different purposes, all touted as professional development. Partners have sponsored and led meetings that involve at least four types of professional development:

- Orientation to program or practice (e.g., introductions that explain to new teachers or to parents the goals, activities, practices, and expectations of a new program);
- Sharing experiences (e.g., a group of teachers discussing what they learned after visiting a few schools or principals comparing the use of literacy consultants in a network meeting);
- Technical training from specialists, including colleagues (e.g., workshops on the use of “running records” to diagnose student errors in reading or a school coordinator coaching a teacher on how to conduct guided reading);
- Planning for individual or collective action (e.g., teachers in a primary reading team deciding what literature to study at each grade level or a mentor helping a principal to construct a coherent School Improvement Plan).



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The four types of professional development can overlap, for example, when an external consultant offers technical knowledge to members of a grade group team that is planning how to teach a unit (e.g., technical training and planning for action). But any given professional development activity usually represents a dominant thrust that fits into one category. Most partners supported professional development of each type. Orientation is necessary to all improvement efforts, and some orientations can generate spirited commitment from staff that seems critical to the program's future success. Yet in this study, when school staff were asked to describe significant professional development, they almost never mentioned orientation activities. In contrast, we did find positive reactions to the last three forms of professional development, and we il-

lustrate these below. The examples are taken from all four partners featured in the vignettes, as well as the other five partners in the sample.

Sharing Experiences

To break down isolation, to promote common goals and professional community, and to disseminate practitioner wisdom, partners sponsored a wide range of opportunities for staff to share professional experiences. Common activities included network-wide meetings of teachers, principals, and school program coordinators (e.g., literacy coordinators or parent coordinators), visits to innovative schools, within-school observations of teaching, and school staff meetings, often organized in grade-level teams.

Sharing Experiences: Some Examples

- Two principals in the Teaching and Learning Network praised the network meetings. One said, "We always try to participate, because that's where we get our ideas."⁸¹ A high school principal said that, as a result of the meetings, "We get to really meet people in the [elementary] schools and find out more about what's going on."⁸²
- Lead teachers in the Community Development Group initiative meet to discuss their work in the different schools. One said they get useful suggestions from teachers about how to work more successfully with the parent tutors: "The lead teachers come together and have these conversations. . . . They talk to each other all the time when they go to each others' schools. . . . They're asking each other questions and trying to make this work."⁸³
- One goal of the Network for Student Support was to reinforce teamwork through network meetings between and within schools. A teacher at one school said, "Annenberg helped us by providing time and money for us to go to professional days, to in-services and conferences, and those have been very useful. We come back and share with our team, and we use many of those ideas that we learn at conferences. We split up and go to something different, and we've shared as a staff and that helped."⁸⁴
- A principal in the Developing Strong Students Network said the national conference was very helpful in thinking about bilingual programs in school with mostly Hispanic students elsewhere in the United States that seemed more similar to hers than other Chicago schools: "They had a lot of workshops for principals, and we were able to talk about the problems. . . . Some of their ideas were so fantastic that I said, 'I am going to try it at my school.'" She said the principals were eager to share ideas in the future.⁸⁵

Technical Training

In contrast to sharing experiences, technical training from external authorities and colleagues attempts to offer well-defined knowledge and skills, based on prior research, development, and training. The vignettes that highlight technical training include quotations about the positive effects of the School Development Organization's training of literacy coordinators, of the coordinators, in turn, training their colleagues, and of the Teaching and Learning Network demonstration teachers training teachers in the schools. Four other networks also offered technical training in lit-

eracy: the Literacy for Life Network, the Developing Strong Students Network, the Learning for Everyone Network, and the Innovative Instruction Network. The latter taught teachers to make literacy instruction more powerful by integrating artistic experiences into the curriculum. Other examples of partners providing technical training include the School Development Organization training of principals and leadership teams, and the Community Development Group training Parent Classroom Assistants.

Technical Training: Some Examples

- In one school in the School Development Organization network, a teacher of upper elementary grades spoke highly of the training she received from the school literacy coordinator: "The training was very useful. I use a lot from the reading and writing we've worked on in our meetings. Often it's research-based. The meetings are also very motivational." She said she learned important strategies for teaching writing, such as having the students work in clusters, with each cluster summarizing a chapter of a book for the class, and graphic organizing, or mapping on paper what you want to learn as you read a chapter. She said in the training, "We do a lot of writing together. I'll tell the other teachers about writing styles they're using that they sometimes don't even realize they're using."⁸⁶
- In the Learning for Everyone Network's literacy program, teachers attend workshops, and literacy coordinators work at the school one week a month to help the teachers implement the strategies. One teacher said the coordinator taught her important skills: "She gives hands-on tips and works with the children with writing and gives all kinds of ideas. For example, she showed me the Bear Books, and guided us through the making of a classroom book. She also teaches the children how to edit. It has been helpful to both the students and me as a teacher. It gives me another trick in the book and another avenue to use in teaching. She models how to do it. And with the current professional development sessions, I always have a good idea when I come back. For example, yesterday I used the writing patterns idea where the students learn to develop a pattern in their writing."⁸⁷
- Schools in the Developing Strong Students Network rely on technical training organized through the national office of the organization. In addition to offering initial training for teachers at the local school site, the Developing Strong Students Network sends trainers about twice a year to monitor program implementation and to offer feedback to teachers in each school. One principal praised this kind of training: "Sometimes it's a lot easier to hear it from another source, knowing that these people might work in Dallas, California, or Miami, and they are dealing with the same kinds of problems. Their staff is very good, the program is very thorough, and they are constantly trying to improve it. I wish they were based in Chicago."⁸⁸

Planning for Action

A key step in school improvement is to enhance staff competence in planning, from individual or team lesson planning to constructing school improvement plans. Some partners helped schools use a strategic planning process to generate a clear set of long-term and short-term goals, a coherent program of activities to reach them, and a way of gathering and analyzing data to aid in monitoring progress and modifying actions. Such assistance can entail teaching group process skills to facilitate collaborative decision making and offering technical

assistance in collecting, displaying, and analyzing data on student outcomes. The School Development Organization vignette, for example, described how the partner tried to promote strategic planning by offering leadership training, by providing data on implementation of literacy strategies and student outcomes, and by conducting annual school analysis sessions to serve as a basis for development of the school improvement plan. The Network for Student Support also helped schools with their school improvement plans. The Literacy for Life Network created action committees within schools,

Planning for Action: Some Examples

- In one year's school analysis session, the School Development Organization-guided self-study at one school determined that 95 percent of intermediate and upper-grade teachers had been exposed to the literacy framework, but implementation was quite uneven. Through the School Analysis Process, the faculty decided to intensify professional development on the framework, create demonstration classrooms, and clarify that the school literacy coordinators were mentors, not supervisors. Staff members at this school made several positive comments about School Development Organization assistance in developing their School Improvement Plan: "They provided leadership for the team . . . all the training and guiding us to do what's sort of a skeleton . . . and then we fill in the [missing parts]";⁸⁹ "We learn so much from their leadership in showing us how they conduct a meeting and keeping us on track";⁹⁰ "They're so non-judgmental . . . giving us not solutions, but training in how to arrive at what our needs are and the various options we have."⁹¹ At another school, the principal said the School Development Organization was helpful in showing the school how to focus their limited Annenberg funds. A staff member there said the School Development Organization has helped to keep the school on track, "not necessarily by telling us what to do, but by guiding us to think about and present our problems to each other in a roundtable situation, and then helping us as an objective mediator to solve our own problems."⁹²
- The Literacy for Life Network organized regular grade-level meetings as key sites for teacher planning. The local literacy facilitator, a former teacher at the school, helped to facilitate these meetings, and staff eventually learned to use test results to help them in coordinating curriculum. The principal described one of these meetings: "Teachers looked at some of the results of the tests, and the second-grade teachers said, 'I thought you taught that in first grade.' And the first-grade teachers said, 'No, we didn't teach that. We don't teach that.' The second-grade teachers said, 'Well, we would have taught that if we had known you didn't teach it.' So they found out from communicating with one another what needed to be taught. Both grades felt they should have taught the material to prepare students for the test."⁹³ The literacy facilitator said the analysis of test results helped staff focus on what had to be done to help the students.

helped Local School Councils to plan, supported literacy facilitators to collect and share data on teachers' use of key literacy strategies, and tried to provide schools with more user-friendly information on test results.

New Roles to Assist Instruction

As indicated in the vignettes and examples of technical assistance, partners helped establish new positions in the schools, usually to improve instruction in literacy. The vignettes described the School Development Organization's work with primary and intermediate/upper literacy coordinators who had permanent positions in the schools and the demonstration teachers sponsored by the Teaching and Learning Network who worked in the schools during several two-week residencies. Other networks also supported special literacy positions. The Literacy for Life Network trained school-based literacy facilitators who work with the partner's literacy specialists at their school one day a month and meet with the specialists and facilitators from other schools twice a month. In the Learning for Everyone Network, a reading/writ-

ing specialist visited the schools one day a week. In the Innovative Instruction Network, practicing artists worked with teachers in each school during six cycles over the year; each cycle included one lesson-planning meeting with the artist, followed by two collaborations with the artist in the classroom. The vignette on the Community Development Group showed how parents with training could assist classroom teachers.

New Materials to Assist Instruction

Some partners helped schools improve instruction by providing curriculum frameworks, lesson plans, lists of high-quality children's literature, or assessment schemes for teachers. When partners provided such resources, they also included various forms of professional development on how to use them. The most comprehensive examples of partners developing materials for teachers involved literacy instruction. As indicated in the vignette, the School Development Organization provided each of these types of materials.

Creating New Roles to Assist Instruction: Some Examples

- In addition to working with individual teachers, the literacy facilitator at one school in the Literacy for Life Network stocked the teacher's resource library with her own books, helped teachers apply for grants, organized a pep rally for the Links to Literacy program, and supported a rich literacy program in other ways as well. She said, "Reading should be fun. I try to volunteer and sign up for all the programs where kids get incentives for reading . . . Great America tickets, free pizza, whatever it takes. Get them reading, because if you can read, you can do anything."⁹⁴
- At one school in the Innovative Instruction Network, many teachers said they gained valuable knowledge working with the artists: "At first I did not understand some of the terms that they use in drama. But, just like the kids, I had to grow and learn them. Last year I don't think I would have felt comfortable leading an exercise, but now I have learned a couple of exercises and tried them. The students will perform and when the artist comes in, he will tell me if I have done something wrong and then we do it correctly. This year I feel a lot more comfortable with the drama."⁹⁵

Introducing New Materials to Assist Instruction: Some Examples

- The School Development Organization provided primary teachers with a new approach to assessing each student's reading proficiency three times during the academic year. Information from the Developmental Assessment System guided teachers in how to group students according to progress on specific reading skills and to individualize instruction according to the student's level. The literacy coordinator at one school explained that baskets of books were organized according to Developmental Assessment System levels so that teachers could assign reading that was not too easy or too difficult, and that teachers re-assigned students to different reading groups according to their Developmental Assessment System level. One year the staff discovered through the Developmental Assessment System data that at least half of the kindergarten students were not ready for first grade, so the next year they gave more intensive instruction to the kindergarteners who were behind. One year they found that second-grade students varied from very low to very high Developmental Assessment System scores, and so they provided special services to students who needed the most help.⁹⁶
- The Developing Strong Students network used a comprehensive literacy curriculum published by a national organization. The curriculum includes daily lesson plans and instructional materials for kindergarten to fifth grade. The national organization also provides introductory training for teachers, periodic implementation checks by trainers from the national organization, yearly national conferences for schools using the program, and revised versions of the materials and lesson plans. The national organization specifies that each school have a literacy facilitator to assist teachers in implementing the program and offers training and continuous assistance to the facilitator.
- The Literacy for Life Network, which promotes a balanced approach to reading instruction, published a guide. Organized into separate sections dealing with learning activities in and out of school, school community leadership, and adult learning through collaboration, the guide presents the framework for the partner's work in literacy and includes descriptions of promising practices. It was used as a basis for discussion in meetings of literacy facilitators from the schools. In at least one school, the literacy facilitator shared it with teachers in grade-level meetings, and it led at least three teachers to change some of their practices.⁹⁷
- In the Innovative Instruction Network, the external partner worked with the practicing artists to create lesson plans that use art forms to teach specific concepts—for example, the main idea in stories. The lessons are aligned with the district and state learning goals and with the Illinois Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) and Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) tasks. In the sessions we observed, the teacher, artist, and an Innovative Instruction Network staff person discussed the lessons. Artists described and demonstrated arts activities; teachers brought proposals and problems to the session; artists and Innovative Instruction Network staffers helped adapt activities to specific curricula; and teachers left with structured lesson plans to carry out in their classrooms. Piloted in summer 1998, the lessons were later given to teachers during their planning meetings with the artists and adapted to the needs of specific classes.

New Organizational Structures

Authorities in school improvement have recommended for many years that students need a more personalized learning experience, and that teachers need more time to reflect on their practice, to question and make decisions about possible alternative reforms, and to work collaboratively with colleagues both within and beyond the school. To support these points, the Chicago Challenge asked partners to address the persistent organizational barriers of large instructional groups that stand in the way of personalized learning: insufficient and excessively rigid use of teachers' and students' time, isolation among teachers within schools and between schools, and isolation of parents from teachers. Partners have assisted schools in addressing some of these issues.

Summary of Promising Strategies

Promising strategies include professional development intended to boost practitioner effectiveness through four different kinds of activity: orientation to program and practice, sharing of professional experiences,

technical training, and planning for action. Orientation to programs and practice and sharing of experiences can be necessary and useful to school improvement. But since technical training and planning for action are more likely to involve in-depth, systematic, and sustained study of a problem, we suspect that, in general, these two forms of professional development may have greater positive impact than orientation and sharing.⁹⁹

In addition to professional development and often coordinated with it, partners used three other promising strategies. They established new instructional roles, such as literacy coordinators and coaches. They provided new instructional materials, such as classroom libraries, lesson plans, and assessment instruments. And they supported new organizational structures, such as planning committees and schedule changes, to allow more time for planning and professional development.

As indicated in the introduction to this section, the effectiveness of any given strategy will depend upon factors in the local school context. To have maximum positive impact, the most promising strategies for an external partner may need to vary according to context and the school's current level of development. Since the context for school reform in Chicago has

Creating New Organizational Structures: Some Examples

- In a few cases, partners tried to help schools to reduce class size and offer more personalized learning by adding parent tutors or demonstration teachers to the classroom. The Network for Strong Students put high priority on establishing an advisory program in which students meet in small groups (limited to 20 or fewer) with one staff member for 15 minutes, three or more times per week, to discuss student concerns.
- Some partners helped schools arrange for common time for grade level meetings during the school day and for about two and a half hours for staff planning and professional development during normal working hours about every two weeks.⁹⁸
- Some partners supported new committee structures that increase teacher collaboration and decision making—for example, by forming school leadership teams, or primary and intermediate teaching teams.
- Two partners established schools to serve as demonstration sites for exemplary practices: the School Development Organization organized a small elementary school, and the Teaching and Learning Network established a relationship with a small high school.

changed considerably since the late 1980s, and since most partners have had fewer than 10 years experience in facilitating schoolwide improvement, we assume that partners as well as schools have much to learn about the process of school improvement. One would hope that partners themselves engage in a systematic process of self-assessment that leads to modifications of strategies in response to the degree of success and the difficulties they encounter.

Change in Partners' Strategies

This study did not examine the extent to which partners self-consciously re-examined their strategies and theories of intervention. We intend to study this more carefully in the future. We noticed, however, that some partners did change strategies. Sometimes the changes were stimulated by feedback from teachers and administrators in their networks, sometimes by feedback from the Chicago Challenge (who reviewed partners' activities at least twice a year), and sometimes by mandates or policies of the Chicago Public Schools.

- Prior to the Annenberg work, some partners had not focused primarily on instruction, but on matters such as school governance, parent involvement, or community development. Because of the Chicago Challenge's emphasis on student learning, some of these partners—for example, the Literacy for Life Network and the Community Development Group—began to direct their work more specifically to improvement of instruction.
- In response to teacher and administrator feedback, some partners decided to put more effort into creating specific materials to help teachers. For example, the Developmental Assessment System materials from the School Development Organization, the guide from the Literacy for Life Network, and the lesson plans from the Innovative Instruction Network mentioned above were all developed after the partner had begun work with the network.

- In response to Chicago's emphasis on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, some partners such as the School Development Organization, the Teaching and Learning Network, the Literacy for Life Network, the Innovative Instruction Network, and the Developing Strong Students Network modified their work to deal more directly with these issues.

Other changes made by specific partners include the following: The School Development Organization decided to put more emphasis on coaching individual teachers by the school literacy coordinator and to start a small school. The Literacy for Life Network decided to expand their program to the middle grades and to place more emphasis on the development of school leadership and assisting schools with analysis of test results. The Teaching and Learning Network began to initiate meetings twice a year for leaders in each school and partner staff to enhance coordination between the school and partner, and to set goals and plans for achieving them.¹⁰⁰



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V. Problems

Partners faced a number of problems in achieving their objectives and in enhancing the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning. Partners described problems in two main areas: limited fiscal and human resources in both the schools and the partner organizations, and countervailing forces in the broader educational system that posed conflicts with the partners' goals and strategies. We also considered the quality of partner interventions.

Limited Resources

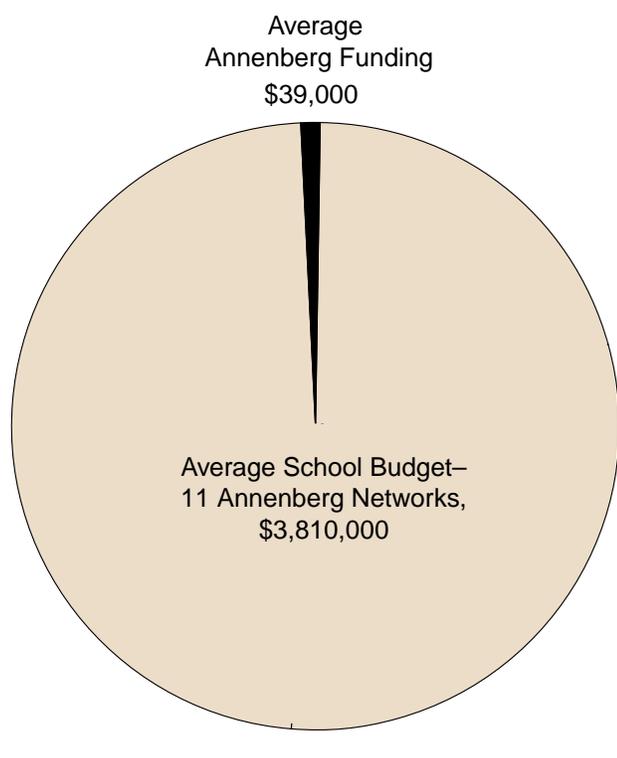
Helping teachers, administrators, and parents improve their professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions posed a major challenge to external partners. As partners tried to change long established beliefs or practices in the schools, some teachers and administrators appeared to need far more assistance than was provided through the partner, the school, or other agencies. The root problem here is limited human capital, both in the schools and the partner organizations; namely, there were not enough people with sufficient expertise and sufficient commitment to improve practice substantially and to develop the technical materials that substantial improvement requires. Closely related to this problem is insufficient investment of money and time to enhance human capital. Since the amount of available fiscal resources has such profound impact on the supply and the quality of human resources, we discuss fiscal resources first.

Fiscal Resources

Enhancing professional competence and commitment of teachers and administrators in hundreds of schools requires substantial fiscal resources. Unfortunately, the funding available through the Chicago Challenge (or at least the way it was allocated) offered, at

Figure 3

Chicago Annenberg Challenge Funding



best, marginal assistance to any partner or school. Annenberg funds to individual schools averaged about \$39,000 per year out of an average school budget of about \$3,810,000 (see Figure 3). This amounts to about 1 percent of the school budget.¹⁰¹ Since schools were preoccupied with many other concerns beyond their Annenberg project, the Annenberg effort tended to receive a relatively small portion of the schools' human and fiscal investment. Annenberg funds available to external partners averaged about \$160,000 to serve an average of six schools per network (in addition to the average \$39,000 available to individual schools).¹⁰² Similarly, since most external partners' organizations had missions that extended beyond their Annenberg projects, and since their Annenberg funds tended to occupy a relatively small portion of their total budgets, the partners' investment in Annenberg projects was limited. Taking into account salary, fringe benefits, and overhead, \$160,000 is barely enough for a partner to hire two or three full-time profes-

sional staff members to stimulate comprehensive improvement across the Five Essential Supports in six schools. This is a very modest external resource to accomplish such a challenging set of objectives.¹⁰³

Human Resources

The fundamental problem is how to upgrade the professional competence of existing school staff and how to increase the supply of competent partner staff as well. Helping parents offer more effective educational support to their children is also important, but since teachers and administrators have the most direct influence on students' academic performance, we concentrate here on professional staff and discuss human resource limitations of school teachers, principals, and partners.

Teachers. Enhancing the professional competence of teachers could be accomplished by delivering technical assistance on a wider and deeper scale than currently offered by the partners, for example, by modeling for teachers effective approaches to teaching reading and including continuous coaching on site to help improve practice. While partners offered such services to some teachers, they said they did not have sufficient staff to offer intensive help to most of the teachers in their network.

The human resource challenge in the schools involves more than showing teachers effective practices and coaching them to employ the practices successfully. In many instances, practitioners overtly resisted what the partners had to offer. In some cases, teachers refused to attend meetings where professional development was offered and refused to implement programs that the partners sponsored. Of course, resistance to partners' initiatives could be justifiable, for example, if practitioners argued that the proposed innovations were poorly conceived or contradicted prior research. But the instances of resistance we observed involved no such justifications. Instead, resistance seemed to be based on strongly held beliefs and norms. In short, upgrading the technical competence of the teaching staff also requires challenging deeply held norms in the school culture as well.

The partners had insufficient staff to train all the teachers in their network schools, but they hoped that schools themselves would develop the capacity to do this, through school coordinators trained by the partners and/or through the leadership of the school principal. But in the face of the challenges just described, partner expectations that local schools would effectively educate their peers were frustrated. School coordinators often could not find enough time to work with colleagues, and in many cases this could be traced to a more fundamental problem of inadequate principal leadership.

Principals. Principals have the power to facilitate or block school improvement because of their authority over budget, hiring, school programs, professional development, the enforcement of school routines and regulations, and the school's involvement with parents and external organizations. Schools had a choice in whether to work with a Chicago Challenge external partner, and in most cases the principal was the gatekeeper who made the decision and who specified conditions under which any external partner worked with the school. In some cases, partners depended on

principals to articulate a clear vision for school improvement and to implement a coherent program of progress toward the vision. More specifically, partners depended on principals to schedule time for more effective professional development, to attend partner and network meetings, to gather data, to use discretionary funds for partner and network activities, and, most importantly, to engage the school's teachers in the partner-sponsored program. Partners encountered principals who both advanced and frustrated the partners' efforts.

To be sure, principals and teachers alike face substantial pressures from the larger system that can interfere with effective teaching and administration. Our purpose here is not to blame teachers or principals, but to give examples of difficulties that partners encountered in implementing Chicago Challenge activities.

Partners. As already indicated, partners did not have enough staff to enhance human resources in the schools at the scale apparently required. This problem is unlikely to be solved merely through additional funding to hire more trainers and

Limited Human Resources—Teachers

- In some schools, many teachers often prefer to insulate themselves from observation by colleagues, from formal colleague assistance or feedback, and from participation in activities that involve collective responsibility to colleagues. These attitudes may reflect an assumption that teachers, once certified, should be treated as autonomous professionals, free to teach as they wish and to engage in whatever professional development they choose without obligations to advance their effectiveness through work with school colleagues.
- Because teachers are rewarded mainly for following rules and mandates from above, it is often safer to comply with existing regulations and routines than to work with the external partner to craft unique solutions to problems in one's specific school.
- Teachers believe that since reform initiatives seem never to be sustained—they come and go with changes in school administration—it is not prudent to invest serious effort in them.
- Teachers' believe that students' lives outside of school impose so many handicaps upon their learning (poor health, fear, lack of resources, and little support for learning in the home) that many students are incapable of high-level academic learning.

coaches. Enhancing the progress for partners' efforts entails finding additional fiscal resources to support school improvement, reallocating existing fiscal resources toward more focused and sustained improvement efforts, upgrading the technical competence of teachers and administrators (which simultaneously calls for improving the professional culture of teachers and administrators), and, finally, developing a larger core of competent providers of professional development to support the partners' efforts.

- An apparent shortage of skilled professional development specialists in Chicago (and nationwide as well) requires that new people first be recruited and trained to assist in the partners' work, again raising the issue of commitment of fiscal resources over the long term.¹⁰⁴
- In a few instances, partners hired teachers from the network schools to work as professional development providers for the partner, but this ex-

acerbated a shortage of leadership in the very schools the partners tried to serve. When competent principals, teacher leaders, and parent tutors and leaders left their schools for more rewarding opportunities, this posed further human resource problems for their schools.

Countervailing System Forces

The educational system beyond individual schools presented serious difficulties to some partners and schools working on school improvement. First, the Chicago Public Schools introduced a policy in 1996 to make student grade promotion decisions on the basis of scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Second, schools were encouraged by CPS to partner with outside organizations, causing, in some cases, a fragmentation of their improvement planning.¹⁰⁵ Third, these numerous programs often required teacher participation, further taking away precious teacher time during the school day for training or planning. And,

Limited Human Resources—Principals

- To build more effective leadership, a few partners tried to engage principals in professional development through network meetings, retreats, and mentoring. Partners used these occasions to teach them strategic planning, skills in conducting meetings, and more effective ways of building collaboration and commitment to school improvement within the staff. In a number of cases, however, principals were either incapable of infusing partner-sponsored activities into their schools or unwilling to do so. As in the case of teachers, some principals seemed to be victims of an administrative professional culture that worked against partners' goals.
- Significant school innovation is likely to be controversial because it usually requires change in adult behavior. But one part of the administrative culture encourages principals to avoid controversy and maintain stability. Since most schools include teachers with diverse skills and diverse beliefs about effective educational practice, principals can avoid overt controversy by trying to please everyone, instead of taking a stand in favor of a particular approach to curriculum and instruction for the whole school.
- Scarcity of fiscal resources encourages principals to seek outside funding and assistance from as many sources as possible. The ability to garner for one's school additional resources and new programs that address diverse needs becomes valued as the mark of an "innovative" administrator. Yet the effort to take advantage of a host of partnerships and grants promotes fragmented and incoherent school programs that often preclude a focused, strategic approach to school improvement.

Countervailing System Forces

- The Chicago Public Schools' emphasis on student scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, including the score-based policies on student retention and school probation, posed obstacles to school improvement activities of at least seven of the partners (the Community Development Group, the Network for Student Support, the Innovative Instruction Network, the School Development Organization, the Literacy for Life Network, the Teaching and Learning Network, and the Developing Strong Students Network). Partners and school staff described two problems generated by the pressure to score well on tests. Teachers were so preoccupied with teaching directly to the test, and so many school activities were oriented in this direction, that they had little opportunity to engage in professional development on other issues, such as selecting meaningful children's literature or developing a positive learning climate in the school. Moreover, the goals of both partners and school staff sometimes extended beyond proficiency in basic skills to higher order thinking, complex problem solving, and project-based learning. Since the standardized tests failed to assess these intellectual processes, the extreme pressure to succeed on tests diminished the importance of these educational goals, and thereby undermined partners' and schools' efforts. In two of the networks, we found schools that were on academic probation. In these cases, the probation manager's focus on teaching to the tests conflicted with the Annenberg partner's effort to enrich teaching.
- According to at least five partners, schools were involved in so many programs besides the Annenberg initiative that it was often difficult to get the schools to pay serious attention to the partner's program. Additional programs included the after-school Lighthouse program, school partnerships with other external groups, short-term professional development in the different subject areas, and programs to serve students with special needs.
- The structure of the normal school day, combined with the plethora of programs requiring teacher participation, restricted the time available for teachers and administrators to focus on the partners' programs.
- Finally, with little advance notice, the Chicago Public Schools central office often issued directives for principal or teacher meetings that forced cancellation of partners' activities that had been scheduled prior to the announcement of these directives.

fourth, CPS meetings always had priority over partner meetings. Some examples of these forces are detailed on page 53.

The Quality of Partner Interventions

A third possible obstacle to partners' success might be problems in the quality of partners' work with schools. For example, if an intervention were selected based on erroneous assumptions about school improvement, the activities offered would likely be ineffective, even if schools actively participated. Or if partners were incapable of building productive relations with school staff, even well-designed interventions would likely fail.

We were not able to observe partners' activities directly enough to make independent judgments about

the technical adequacy of partners' activities with the schools. Instead we had to rely primarily upon reports of principals, teachers, and the partners themselves. Partner reports to the Chicago Challenge varied in the extent to which they offered objective, research-based analyses of their work. Occasionally school staff expressed dissatisfaction with some aspect of the partner's intervention, for example, an ineffective literacy coordinator or an unproductive meeting. But we encountered no examples in which several school participants seriously criticized the quality of the partner's interventions, and our direct observations of meetings found no instances of inept or inappropriate professional behavior. The school participants we interviewed often praised the assistance that the partners offered.



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Notes



VI. Conclusions

This report was written primarily for staff of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, the external partners and schools that have received Chicago Challenge funds, and others interested in the approach to school improvement used by the Chicago Challenge and other Annenberg Challenge projects in the United States. It does not specifically address what institutions beyond the Chicago Challenge, such as universities, schools of education, the CPS central office, or the state of Illinois, should do to improve urban schools, but the conclusions may have implications for these agencies. As a mid-course report of a six-year research project, the following five conclusions are, therefore, subject to revision following further data collection and analysis.

1. The Annenberg external partners we studied engaged schools in activities that addressed important aspects of school development and showed promise of making important contributions. Examples of activities associated with each of the Five Essential Supports include:

- **School Leadership.** Leadership training for teacher leaders and administrators sponsored by the School Development Organization, the Literacy for Life Network, and the Learning for Everyone Network.
- **Professional Community.** Collaborative staff meetings sponsored by the Student Development Organization, the Teaching and Learning Network, the Literacy for Life Network, Innovative Instruction Network, the Network for Student Support, and the Learning for Everyone Network.
- **Parent and Community Involvement.** The Community Development Group's Parent Classroom Assistants program, the Teaching and Learning Network's parent workshops, the Network for Student Support's Community Saturdays.

- **Student-Centered Learning Climate.** The Community Development Group's Parent Classroom Assistants program, the Teaching and Learning Network's structure for a small high school, the Network for Student Support's student advisory.
- **Quality Instruction.** Literacy programs of the School Development Organization, the Innovative Instruction Network, the Literacy for Life Network, the Teaching and Learning Network, the Learning for Everyone Network, and the Developing Strong Students Network.

Despite these notable successes, there remained several significant challenges to the work of the partners and their networks.

2. The Chicago Challenge strategy has limited influence on the work of schools and partners because, in general, partners' involvement in schools usually

occupies only a minor part of the schools' attention and activity. The regulations and programs of the larger educational system, including a variety of external partnerships not connected with the Chicago Challenge, comprise the dominant agenda of school staffs. This agenda often competes with Chicago Challenge activity for staff attention. The overall system budget for schools allocates many times the resources to its activities than the fiscal resources supplied to schools through Chicago Challenge. Limited funds from the Chicago Challenge to the external partners further limit the extent of partners' involvement and impact in individual schools, and the partners themselves have broader organizational missions that may limit their attention to the Chicago Challenge initiative. While several partners began working with schools prior to the Chicago Challenge project and most likely will continue to do so after the Chicago Challenge ends, these limitations suggest it would be



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surprising to find that the network/partner strategy resulted in fundamental school improvement across a large number of schools. And if impressive improvement were found, it would be difficult to attribute this primarily to assistance from the Chicago Challenge.

3. The extent of success in achieving partners' goals varied substantially between schools within their own networks. Countervailing forces in the larger system posed serious difficulties in all schools studied (especially those on probation). But apart from these difficulties, the degree of partner success within a school seemed to depend largely upon that school's base of human resources, especially the commitment of the school principal to the partner program. Partners made more progress in schools with greater staff commitment and lower resistance to the partner's efforts.

4. Research shows that schools are complex organizations in which the quality of student learning depends on several interacting factors represented by the Five Essential Supports.¹⁰⁶ For example, teachers might aim toward ambitious curriculum standards and use the highest quality instructional materials, but if the school's learning climate is disorderly, punitive, or disrespectful of students' cultural and personal backgrounds, students are unlikely to benefit. Or, some teachers might show enthusiasm for collaboration to improve teaching, but if most teachers in the school are uninterested and unwilling, and if the principal fails to lead in ways that strengthen professional community, high quality instruction will remain restricted to a small portion of the students.

The ideal role for an external partner might be to help a school assess its needs with regard to all of the Essential Supports and then to help the school develop a long-range plan that addresses areas of weakness according to a list of coordinated priorities. Generally, however, partners gave substantial attention to no more than two of the Essential Supports.¹⁰⁷ This is probably due to partners' limited expertise (e.g., universities may be less able to generate local parent involvement than community organizations, and community organizations may be less able to assist with curriculum and instruction than universities) and partners' limited fiscal resources. It may also be due to partners' limited conception of school im-

provement. Given the problem of limited resources discussed above, it is probably unreasonable to expect each partner to offer assistance with all Five Essential Supports.

To the extent that a school may need assistance with all Five Essential Supports, the school might conceivably rely on assistance from different external partners for different supports. Schools did, in fact, take advantage of assistance from a wide variety of exter-

. . . the degree of partner success within a school seemed to depend largely upon that school's base of human resources, especially the commitment of the school principal to the partner program.

nal organizations, but generally these diverse efforts were not coordinated into a program for the school that addressed all five Supports in a coherent way. Instead, help from different sources tended to exacerbate overall program fragmentation and incoherence. Program incoherence limited school development, because in most situations it prevented staff from investing the degree of focused, sustained energy and attention that any given high quality intervention requires. In contrast, coordination of assistance with the Five Essential Supports would permit more efficient concentration on a focused agenda for development.

The lack of program coherence is due in part to principals' difficulty in channeling available help from many sources into a focused, sustained program. But the incoherence problem is also due to weaknesses in the broader system of assistance that makes it difficult for principals to focus their school development efforts. We indicated earlier that administrative culture encourages principals to seek help from many exter-



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nal sources. Yet we found no powerful incentives or accountability structures that led universities, foundations, and other improvement organizations to coordinate their efforts in each school toward a comprehensive design that addressed the needs of all Five Essential Supports in each school context over a sustained period of time. A shorthand expression for the approach to school improvement that seemed to be missing is comprehensive, coordinated, and custom school design. Instead of promoting this kind of individualized school planning, the larger system allows external assistance organizations to act autonomously to deliver limited programs. Conceivably, if the Chicago Challenge investment were allocated to more comprehensive interventions in a smaller number of schools, at least some schools would experience substantial improvement. For example, if the Chicago Challenge were to support only half the number of networks and restrict each network to three schools, the investment per partner and school could support far more comprehensive reform activity.

5. To the extent that partners' efforts have been helpful, it is important to insure that accomplishments are sustained beyond the period of Chicago Challenge funding. Several partners indicated that termination of Chicago Challenge funding would also terminate important initiatives in the schools. This suggests a critical need for Chicago Challenge partners to help schools build capacity to continue and to refine Chicago Challenge achievements through self-monitoring, implementation, evaluation, and revision, and by finding additional resources to help.

The examples of progress and the difficulties we found suggest an approach to urban school improvement that places major emphasis not simply on schools adopting specific practices, programs, and strategies, but on building human resources both within the schools and the assisting partner organizations over the long term. To build capacity in schools, this approach recognizes the need for comprehensive interventions that coordinate assistance according to unique school contexts. The approach would frame

interventions based on assessment of individual school needs on all Five Essential Supports, and most likely would give special attention to developing school leadership. The approach would commit enough resources to individual schools over a long enough period of time to make a difference. To build capacity in partner organizations, the approach would create incentives for partners to pool resources and to coordinate efforts so as to maximize coherence in school programs and to maximize effectiveness in addressing all Five Essential Supports in a coordinated way. Finally, the approach would help partners increase the supply of competent partner staff and help them learn from their work with schools by emphasizing professional development for partner organizations as well as for schools.

This report documents positive school development activity, stimulated by Chicago Challenge external partners. It would be unfortunate, as the Annenberg Challenge concludes its work in Chicago, if this momentum were lost. Over the long term, deep and meaningful improvements in student learning will occur only with continuing efforts to develop teachers' knowledge and skills, as well as their capacity to work more productively together. Chicago Challenge partners and networks have catalyzed important work in this direction, but in order to bring more widespread benefits across the school system, the capacity of partners must be enhanced. We hope that public and private agencies will find ways to build this capacity.

Notes

Appendix

Research Methods

The Chicago Annenberg Research Project combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to achieve a longitudinal, comprehensive view of the role of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge in schools between 1996 and 2001. The Research Project conducts research to inform the Chicago Challenge, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the public community at large. The Research Project's work is intended to describe:

- Each school's capacity or state of development at different points in time;
- The impact of deliberate efforts to improve the school, with special emphasis on the role of Chicago Challenge external partners and school networks;
- The effects of the larger context of the community and education system on the school; and
- Outcomes for students.

This report concentrates on the second point, as we examine activities of external partners to foster school improvement. Our findings in this report rest on qualitative inquiry we conducted between 1996 and 1999.

Field Research

Selection of Fieldwork Sites

In 1996 and 1997, more than 40 networks of schools in partnerships with external organizations applied and were awarded multi-year implementation grants by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. Eleven of these networks were invited and agreed to participate in the Research Project. They were selected to represent the various categories of network partners in the overall group: university partners, reform groups, and community organizations. Networks

were also chosen to assure inclusion of high schools and middle schools.

From each of the 11 networks participating in the research, two schools were selected as field research sites: one school that appeared to show high potential to benefit from the partner's approach to school improvement, and one school in which potential benefits were more uncertain. In selecting schools on these criteria, we consulted with Annenberg external partners and research colleagues familiar with schools, and we examined school profiles developed from prior Consortium survey data. By June 1999, 18 elementary/middle schools and 5 high schools had participated in the Research Project's field research for more than two or three years.

We do not intend findings based on field research to be generalized across all Annenberg partners and schools. However, the following information indicates that the networks and schools in which we conducted field research are not unusual cases. In terms of demographic characteristics, schools in the networks we studied are located in neighborhoods across Chicago and serve primarily students from low-income families. Of the schools studied, 45 percent enrolled predominantly African-American students (defined as over 85 percent African-American), 20 percent enrolled predominantly minority students (defined as over 85 percent mixed minority groups and less than 15 percent white), and 20 percent enrolled a racially mixed group of students (defined as from 15 to 30 percent white). Fifteen percent of the schools are predominantly Latino (over 85 percent Latino). In terms of scores on the 1999 Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, on average, 29 percent of students in the field research schools scored at or above national norms in reading, and 36 percent scored at this level in math. Individually, however, students' scores in these schools ranged from 16.7 percent to 60 percent at or above national norms in reading, and from 16.2 percent to 78 percent at or above national norms in math. The

systemwide average for 1999 was 35.9 percent at or above national norms in reading and 44 percent at or above national norms in math. While the average enrollment in the field research schools represented in this study is approximately 837 students, actual student enrollment ranges from 261 to 1,558 students.

Those interested in other schools in the system can consider the extent to which lessons learned here may apply to other schools and networks. By combining survey data with field-based research, future research will offer more generalizable findings.

Collection of Fieldwork Data

Field research in schools and networks took place in the 1996-97, 1997-98, and 1998-99 school years. The baseline round of data collection for a given school or network was either in 1996-97 or in 1997-98, depending on when it was awarded its implementation grant from the Challenge. Field research on individual schools, on networks and partners, and on the efforts of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge will continue through 2000-01. Collected data include interviews with teachers, school administrators, Local School Council members, the staff of partner organizations and the Chicago Challenge; observations of school classes and meetings conducted by schools and partners; documentary sources, such as School Improvement Plans and reports to the Chicago Challenge; and results of school surveys and student testing.

The sources of evidence for this report are transcribed interviews, including 22 interviews with staff members of nine Annenberg external partners, 29 separate interviews of principals and other administrators at 18 of the 23 schools, and 30 interviews of in-school Annenberg coordinators at 18 of the 23 schools. Also used were proposals and progress reports filed by 11 partners with the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, and case reports of the schools written by Research Project researchers that also reflect teacher interviews and observations of classes and meetings.¹⁰⁸

Participants were interviewed and observed with the promise of anonymity in all reports of findings.

Dozens of researchers from more than eight local universities conducted the Research Project's field research. A team of one lead researcher and one research assistant was assigned to document the development of each school participating in the research. Eleven of the 17 lead researchers were faculty members at local universities. Fourteen of the 17 research assistants were graduate students at local universities. Most of the field researchers were hired as consultants on the project. Both lead researchers and research assistants collected data at the schools. The research assistant had the most continuous contact with the school (up to ten hours per week during periods of data collection) and the lead researcher was responsible for writing the case reports. In many cases, lead researcher/research assistant teams also had advisor/student relationships at their university.

Field research in the schools occurred during the academic year. Data collection in Year Three (the 1998-1999 school year) reflects the typical timeline, with interview and observation data collected primarily from October 1998 to March 1999. Researchers wrote case reports of the school at two points in time (about two years apart) and vignettes that described important events for school development between the case reports. Partners' reports to the Chicago Challenge on network activities have been updated annually since 1996. The authors of this report were involved in each phase of the field research including interviewing external partners, teachers, and principals; observing classes and meetings; and writing case reports.

Analysis of Fieldwork Data

In this and other Research Project reports, school improvement is framed in terms of the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning (See Figure 1, page 11 of the report). The Five Essential Supports delineate key aspects of school development that are strongly related to student achievement.

Report authors read interviews, case studies, and documentary evidence pertinent to each partner's work with its school network and with the two schools in each network that we studied. The authors coded these data to correspond with important analytic themes such as the Five Essential Supports, key strategies used, and difficulties faced. Field researchers who worked with specific networks reviewed the authors'

drafts of the four external partner vignettes included in the beginning of the report. External partners also reviewed these vignettes and commented on the authors' accuracy of information and appropriate masking of their identity. A broad group of field researchers and other advisors provided feedback on early drafts of the full report (see also Foreword, page 2).



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Endnotes

- ¹ Smylie, Bilcer, Kochanek, Sconzert, Shipps, and Swyers (1998) describe the main features of the diverse networks and principals' initial perceptions of their contributions.
- ² Reformers have estimated that it takes five to ten years to substantially improve a school with students from educationally disadvantaged families, staffed by teachers with outdated professional competence or expectations, and managed by administrators with inadequate leadership skills (Fullan, 2000).
- ³ For more information about the history of the Chicago Challenge in the context of Chicago School Reform, see Shipps and Sconzert (1999).
- ⁴ The 1988 School Reform Act (PA 85-1418) and subsequent reform activities have been documented by many others, including Hess (1991), O'Connell (1991), Katz (1992), Moore (1992), Mirel (1993), and Shipps (1997).
- ⁵ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1994) p. 2.
- ⁶ The Working Group thought that external partners could perform two functions: serve as the fiduciary agent of the network and a source of support for school improvement.
- ⁷ Shipps and Sconzert (1999).
- ⁸ McKersie (1996).
- ⁹ Interview with Anthony Bryk (December 20, 1999).
- ¹⁰ Chicago Public Schools (1994), p. 1.
- ¹¹ Chicago Public Schools (1994), p. 15.
- ¹² Chicago Public Schools (1995).
- ¹³ The framework of supports has evolved through analysis within the Chicago Annenberg Research Project. It draws largely on conceptualizations advanced in Bryk, Lee, and Smith (1990), Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, and Sebring (1993), and Newmann and Wehlage (1995). It has been informed by consultation in Chicago with local researchers, principals, teachers, Local School Council members, advocacy group representatives, and staff from the central office. This collaboration led to a Chicago Public Schools document, *Children First: Self-Analysis Guide* (1995), which is the framework for annual school improvement planning in Chicago. Earlier versions of the framework used in this report have served as the basis for individual school reports by the Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- ¹⁴ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1994) pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁵ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 3.
- ¹⁶ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 3.
- ¹⁷ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 1.
- ¹⁸ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 12.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Anthony Bryk (December 20, 1999).
- ²⁰ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 12.
- ²¹ Chicago Annenberg Challenge (1995) p. 12.
- ²² PA 85-15.
- ²³ Shipps and Sconzert (1999).
- ²⁴ Rolling (July 25, 1997).
- ²⁵ Some partners also tried to build strong connections among schools and among certain positions therein, such as principals and literacy coordinators. As explained in the introduction, our research design did not assess partner efficacy in promoting such networks.
- ²⁶ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1995).
- ²⁷ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1998).
- ²⁸ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1996).
- ²⁹ Teaching and Learning Network, documents (1996 and 1998).
- ³⁰ Teaching and Learning Network Staff Member B interview (June 1997).
- ³¹ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1996).
- ³² Teaching and Learning Network, document (1999).
- ³³ Teaching and Learning Network, Staff Member B interview (October 1999).
- ³⁴ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1999).
- ³⁵ Gabriel Garcia Marquez School, Teacher A interview (November 1997).
- ³⁶ Gabriel Garcia Marquez School, Teacher C interview (June 1997).
- ³⁷ Gabriel Garcia Marquez School, Teacher C interview (June 1997).
- ³⁸ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1997).
- ³⁹ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1998).
- ⁴⁰ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1998).
- ⁴¹ Community Development Group, document (1996).
- ⁴² Community Development Group, Staff Member A interview (February 1997).

- ⁴³ Pearl S. Buck School, Teacher A interview (May 1999).
- ⁴⁴ Community Development Group, document (1999).
- ⁴⁵ Pearl S. Buck School, Teacher A interview (May 1999).
- ⁴⁶ Community Development Group, document (1997).
- ⁴⁷ Saul Bellow School, Teacher A interview (December 1998).
- ⁴⁸ Saul Bellow School, Teacher B interview (March 1997).
- ⁴⁹ Community Development Group, document (1997).
- ⁵⁰ Pearl S. Buck School, Teacher B interview (May 1999).
- ⁵¹ Saul Bellow School, Teacher C interview (February 1997).
- ⁵² Pearl S. Buck School, Staff Member A interview (April 1999).
- ⁵³ Pearl S. Buck School, Teacher C interview (March 1997).
- ⁵⁴ Network for Student Support, Partner Staff Member A interview (June 1997).
- ⁵⁵ Network for Student Support, Partner Staff Member A interview (June 1997).
- ⁵⁶ John Steinbeck School, Staff Member A interview (July 1997).
- ⁵⁷ John Steinbeck School, Teacher A interview (April 1999).
- ⁵⁸ John Steinbeck School, Teacher A interview (April 1999).
- ⁵⁹ John Steinbeck School, Teacher B interview (May 1997).
- ⁶⁰ Newmann, Lopez, and Bryk (1998).
- ⁶¹ John Steinbeck School, Teacher A interview (June 1997).
- ⁶² Network for Student Support, Partner Staff Member A interview (May 1999).
- ⁶³ School Development Organization, Staff Member A interview (June 1999).
- ⁶⁴ School Development Organization, document (n.d.); School Development Organization, summary of intermediate/upper framework (August 1996).
- ⁶⁵ School Development Organization, Staff Member A interview (June 1999).
- ⁶⁶ School Development Organization, Staff Members B and C interviews (May 1999).
- ⁶⁷ Toni Morrison School, Teacher A interview (March 1999).
- ⁶⁸ Toni Morrison School, Teacher B interview (May 1999).
- ⁶⁹ Toni Morrison School, Teacher C interview (February 1999).
- ⁷⁰ Toni Morrison School, Teacher D interview (May 1998).
- ⁷¹ Toni Morrison School, Teacher E interview (June 1998).
- ⁷² Toni Morrison School, Teacher F interview (June 1998).
- ⁷³ School Development Organization, document (1999).
- ⁷⁴ Eugene O'Neill Elementary School, Staff Member A interview (January 1999).
- ⁷⁵ Nelly Sachs School, Staff Member A interview (May 1997).
- ⁷⁶ John Steinbeck School, Teacher A interview (March 1999).
- ⁷⁷ Octavio Paz School, Staff Member A interview (June 1997).
- ⁷⁸ Community Development Group, Staff Member B interview (January 1999).
- ⁷⁹ Nelly Sachs School, Teacher A interview (May 1997).
- ⁸⁰ Samuel Beckett School, Researcher A observation (June 1999).
- ⁸¹ Gabriel Garcia Marquez School, Staff Member A interview (December 1998).
- ⁸² William Faulkner High School, Staff Member B interview (June 1997).
- ⁸³ Community Development Group, Partner Staff Member A interview (February 1997).
- ⁸⁴ Jean Paul Sartre School, Teacher A interview (March 1999).
- ⁸⁵ Winston Churchill School, Staff Member A interview (April 1999).
- ⁸⁶ Nadine Gordimer School, Teacher A interview (January 1997).
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- ⁸⁸ Winston Churchill School, Staff Member A interview (January 1999).
- ⁸⁹ Toni Morrison School, Staff Member A interview (April 1997).
- ⁹⁰ Toni Morrison School, Teacher F interview (June 1998).
- ⁹¹ Toni Morrison School, Teacher E interview (May 1997).
- ⁹² Nadine Gordimer School, Teacher B interview (January 1997).
- ⁹³ Nelly Sachs School, Staff Member A interview (May 1997).
- ⁹⁴ Nelly Sachs School, Teacher A interview (January 1999).
- ⁹⁵ Samuel Beckett School, Teacher A interview (December 1998).
- ⁹⁶ Toni Morrison School, Teacher B interview (May 1999).
- ⁹⁷ Literacy for Life Network, document (1998).

⁹⁸ This is commonly known as the “restructured day.” Schools add about 10 minutes of instructional time each day for 14 days which allows them to “bank” about 140 minutes of teacher time, dismiss students early on the 14th day, and use the banked time for staff development.

⁹⁹ Available information does not allow us to compare the extent of partner and network investment in each of the four types of professional development.

¹⁰⁰ Teaching and Learning Network, document (1998).

¹⁰¹ The average total school budget referred to here does not include other grant money that a school may possess. It also does not include CPS probation support or other CPS supplemental support. Including such monies in the total school budget figure would reduce further the size of the Annenberg portion.

¹⁰² The financial information cited here applies only to the 11 networks that participated in our fieldwork.

¹⁰³ One might argue that a significant reallocation of both school and partner budgets could lead to more substantial school improvement, but this study did not delve into details of school finance.

¹⁰⁴ We are not aware of published studies of supply and demand for skilled professional development specialists, but authors’ discussions with partner staff, school personnel, and authorities on school improvement indicate a significant deficiency in the supply of this kind of expertise.

¹⁰⁵ Smylie, Bilcer, Kochanek, Sconzert, Shipps, and Swyers (1998).

¹⁰⁶ See Endnote 13.

¹⁰⁷ Two partners, the School Development Organization and the Literacy for Life Network, based their work on a conceptual framework consistent with the Five Essential

Supports, but their Annenberg activities did not specifically address all of them.

¹⁰⁸ For the overall Chicago Annenberg Research Project, a lead researcher and a research assistant collected the following data at each of the selected 18 elementary schools:

- Classroom observations of two language arts teachers and two math teachers in each of grades three, six, and eight.
- Classroom observations of two or three additional teachers involved with Annenberg initiatives.
- Interviews with each observed teacher, principal, Annenberg external partner, Annenberg coordinator on site at the school, Local School Council chair, Local School Council teacher representative, designated teacher leader, and Union teacher representative.
- Observation of meetings and events at school involving school improvement activities.
- Collection of teacher-assigned tasks and student work.

Similar data were collected in each of the five high schools in the study, with the exception that three language arts and three math teachers in each of grades nine and ten were observed in class and interviewed.

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This report reflects the interpretations of the authors. Although the Consortium's Steering Committee provided technical advice, no formal endorsement by these individuals, their organizations, or the full Consortium should be assumed.

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Improving Chicago's Schools

Sponsored by
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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.