Improving Chicago's Schools

Consortium on
Chicago School Research

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Report of the
Chicago Annenberg
Research Project

Working for School Improvement:

Reflections of Chicago Annenberg External Partners

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March 2004

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Acknowledgments

The Chicago Annenberg Research Project and this report on Annenberg external partners were made possible by the financial support of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. We are grateful to the Challenge's Executive Director, Ken Rolling, and members of his staff for their assistance. We thank the external partners who are the subjects of this report for the time they gave to this work. We also acknowledge the Chicago Public Schools for supporting our general data collection efforts.

We are grateful to John Easton, Executive Director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, for his assistance in preparing the final version of this report.

The findings and conclusions contained in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge or the Consortium on Chicago School Research and members of its Steering Committee.

I. Introduction

In 1995, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge launched a six-year, $150 million initiative to improve Chicago's public schools. It set out a broad vision for change, calling for the "enhancement of learning for all students through dramatically improved classroom practice and strengthened community relationships."[1] The Challenge was organized around a strategy that called for schools with common interests and needs to form networks to work together to improve. Each network was required to have an "external partner," an individual, group, or organization that would help promote local school improvement. Networks and external partners were supported by monetary grants and by a variety of professional services provided by the Challenge. This strategy followed a logic that schools that worked together and with an external partner would find greater support for local improvement and be more successful than if they worked alone.

Annenberg external partners were to perform a number of different functions. They were to serve as fiduciary agents of Annenberg grants to the networks. They were to bring human, material, and intellectual resources to support network development and local school improvement. They were to catalyze and sustain school improvement and help develop local leadership. External partners were also encouraged by the Challenge to bring or help raise additional financial resources for their schools and networks to support local improvement activity. Initially, the Challenge saw networks as the primary agents for local school improvement and external partners as resources for the networks. Over time, however, as networks struggled to develop and function effectively, the external partners became more and more central to the Challenge's strategy for promoting local school improvement.[2]

The Chicago Challenge made two types of grants to schools and external partners. Early in its operation, the Challenge distributed small amounts of money in one-year planning grants to help schools and partners develop their networks and their plans for school improvement. These networks of schools and partners, along with others that might not have received planning grants, could also apply for implementation grants. Implementation grants made available larger sums of money to carry out improvement plans. They usually supported several years of activity and could be renewed.

The Chicago Challenge awarded most of its implementation grants in two major waves. [3] Thirty-four networks received initial funding between 1995 and 1996; the rest first received funding 1997. The Challenge funded no new networks thereafter. Notably, three-quarters of networks and partners who had funding in 1997 received continuation grants until the end of the Challenge. Several networks and partners lost their support during the 1998-1999 school year, but from spring 1999 through 2001, the Challenge supported the same 45 networks and external partners.

In 2000, the Chicago Annenberg Research Project issued a report focused on the work of Annenberg external partners from the beginning of the Challenge through 1999.[4] That report described the nature of the work Annenberg partners were doing in schools, the strategies they used to work with teachers and school communities, their successes and failures, and the challenges they faced within and outside the schools. The overall impact of their work, as the Challenge's primary agents of school improvement, on schools and on student learning is documented in other reports of the Research Project.[5] While these other reports indicate that as a whole Annenberg's external partners were not particularly successful in promoting improvement across the large number of schools, it is nevertheless instructive to look to them to learn from their experiences and to hear them tell the lessons they learned from working with schools for extended periods of time. As a group of 45, across the six years of the Challenge, Annenberg partners accumulated some 210 years of experience working with schools to help them improve. The 19 partners

who formed the sample for this report accumulated nearly 100 years of experience. These partners have a lot to say.

This report presents the thoughts and observations, the collective wisdom, of Annenberg external partners about a wide range of topics. The report looks back on the work of the partners between 1995 and 2001, to what they said they learned about the challenges of working with schools, the keys to successful school improvement and the causes of failure, and the support they needed but did not always get to do their work well. This report also looks forward, presenting Annenberg partners' views about the future of external partners as agents of local school change.

The next section of the report begins by introducing Annenberg's external partners and their work. It then describes the various contexts in which the partners worked—the Chicago Annenberg Challenge as the organization that sponsored and supported them; the policies and practices associated with Chicago school reform; and the individual schools partners were to help improve. These descriptions of the Annenberg partners and the contexts of their work, drawn primarily from other reports of the research project, frame the voices of the partners in subsequent sections.

How This Report Was Prepared

This report was prepared with data collected from 19 Annenberg external partners.[1] These partners first received support from the Challenge during the 1996 and 1997 waves of grant making and continued to receive Annenberg support through the end of the Challenge in 2001. These partners were selected for study in spring 1997 and were chosen to be generally representative of the group of partners that received support from the Challenge at that time. These 19 partners represent 42 percent of Annenberg's 45 external partners receiving funding between 1999 and 2001. As Table 2 and Table 3 in the next section show, these 19 partners were also similar in organizational type and in experience working with schools to the larger group of partners supported by the Challenge.

The data for this report come primarily from interviews. Data also come from reports and other documents produced by the partners and submitted to the Chicago Challenge to describe their work and accomplishments. Additional data come from field notes of observations of Challenge and partner-sponsored activities and from correspondence from the Chicago Challenge staff to the partners.

Persons working as Annenberg external partners were sampled and then interviewed at three points during the life of the Challenge—1997, 1999, and 2001. This interview sample was developed in 1997 by first inviting to be interviewed the person named by the partner organization to be its primary Annenberg agent. The invitation provided that these persons could identify one or more colleagues to be interviewed with them or in their stead. This strategy produced a sample that grew in size each year. In 1997, 26 persons were interviewed and in 1999, 29 persons were interviewed. In 2001, 49 persons were interviewed. During that last round, as many as six persons associated with a single partner organization were interviewed. Observations of Challenge and partner-sponsored activities were conducted several times each year between 1997 and 2001. Also included were relevant data from observations of earlier Challenge-sponsored activities. Those observations were collected as part of the broader Chicago Annenberg Research Project.[2] A primary observer attended most Challenge-sponsored events, took notes, and collected all printed materials distributed at these events. Occasionally, another member of the research project would attend the events in place of the primary observer. At least once a year, documents pertaining to external partner and network activity were collected from the partners and from the Challenge offices. These documents included proposals for implementation grants, progress and financial reports required by the Challenge of all networks and partners, and various print materials provided the partners to their schools.

Each year, the persons interviewed were asked similar questions so that their responses could be compared across years. They were asked questions about (a) the partner organization's central purpose and mission; (b) its strategy for working with schools and how and why this strategy may have changed over the years; (c) the partner organization's capacity for working with schools (human, intellectual, financial, material, etc.); (d) the activities the partner organization engaged in with schools to promote improvement; (e) the conditions and resources that made "partnering" successful or unsuccessful; (f) the guidance and support received from the Chicago Challenge; (g) what the partner organization may have learned and might do differently in its future work with schools; and (h) the role that external partners might play in promoting school improvement in Chicago in the future. With the consent of the person(s) interviewed, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data from interviews, observations, and documents were read and coded by the report's authors according to emergent themes and patterns.[3] Presentations of initial findings were made to Annenberg external partners in December 2001 and April 2003. Their comments, suggestions and insights were used to guide our analysis. In the end, we organized this report around those themes and patterns that reflect the predominant perceptions of the partners in the study or of a specific group of partners (e.g., partners working with high schools, community-based partners, etc.).

It is important to note that this report presents the self-reports and reflections of the partners, what they said they did, what they saw, what they thought, and how they explained things. These self-reports and reflections are subject to the biases and self-interests of the partners and are not corroborated by independent data.

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[1] The identities of the partners in this sample are confidential.

[2] See Shipps et al. (1999b).

[3] Merriam (1998); Stake (1995); Yin (1989).

II. Meet the Partners

Annenberg's external partners were a large and diverse lot. They were of different organizational types. They varied in the experiences they had working with schools before Annenberg. These partners worked with different numbers of schools. And, they varied in what they sought to accomplish.

Partner Characteristics

Table 1 presents Annenberg's 45 external partners and the number of schools in their networks in 1999, the middle year of data collection. These partners represent a wide range of organizational types. As shown in Table 2, more than one-third of all Annenberg partners were based at universities. Twenty-three percent were from cultural institutions that included museums and arts organizations around the city. Another 28 percent of the partners were educational reform and service organizations. These organizations included local education advocacy organizations, national and local school reform projects, and teacher associations. Finally 14 percent of Annenberg's partners were community organizations such as neighborhood associations. Table 2 also shows the organizational types of the partners that were sampled for study. The sample has roughly similar proportions of organizational types as the whole group of Annenberg partners.

Most Annenberg external partners had some experience working with schools before the Challenge. However, as shown in Table 3, only about two-thirds of them had previously worked with schools in the type of long-term, collaborative improvement initiatives that Annenberg supported. One-third of Annenberg partners had no such experience working with schools. As shown in Table 3, the partners in the study sample were similar to all Annenberg partners in this regard.

Of the different types of partners that Annenberg supported, university-based partners were most likely to have had established working relationships with the schools in their networks before the Challenge. Moreover, most university-based partners that were interviewed expressed intentions to continue working with their schools after their Challenge grants expired and to look to other sources for grants to support their work. Community-based partners had also worked with schools before Annenberg, however, most had focused exclusively on promoting community and parent involvement. When they joined the Challenge, their work shifted to areas in which they had little experience or expertise, such as curricular and instructional improvement and improvement of student academic achievement. All but one of the education service organizations in the study sample had long-standing, ongoing relationships with the schools in their networks that predated the Challenge. Finally, the cultural institutions that became Annenberg partners typically had some experience working with schools or with groups of teachers before the Challenge, but as a group they had not had the experience of multiyear, collaborative school development work that the Challenge required. These organizations had the steepest learning curve of all the partners.

Foci of Partners' Work

Annenberg External Partners focused their work with schools on a number of different areas of improvement. About 55 percent organized their activities around curricular and instructional improvement. Sixteen percent aimed to improve student learning climate and social services for students and families. Another 13 percent were concerned primarily with parent and community support and development. The remaining 16 percent adopted more comprehensive foci, working to develop a number of areas

Table 1: Chicago Annenberg External Partners and the Numbers of Schools in Their Networks, 1999

Annenberg External Partners	N of Schools
Academic Development Institute	3
Association of Illinois Middle Level Schools	3
Beverly Area Planning Association	6
Chicago Children's Museum	3
Chicago Metropolitan History Education Center	4
Chicago State University	8[a]
Chicago Symphony Orchestra	3
Chicago Teachers Union—Quest Center	3
Coalition for Improved Education in South Shore	9
Coalition of Essential Schools Regional Center at Chicago	6
Columbia College—Science Institute	3
DePaul University School of Education	4
Designs for Change	5
Erickson Institute	3
Facing History and Ourselves	3
Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance	4
Governors State University	3
Great Books Foundation	4
Hug-A-Book	3
Illinois Future Problem Solving	5
Illinois Learning Partnership	3
Illinois Resource Center	3
Imagine Chicago	4
Kohl Children's Museum	3
Logan Square Neighborhood Association	5
Loyola University	4
National Louis University—Center for City Schools	4
National Louis University—Faculty	6
Near Northwest Neighborhood Association	5
Northeastern Illinois University—Chicago Teachers Center (Group A)	3
Northeastern Illinois University—Chicago Teachers Center (Group B)	3
Northeastern Illinois University—Chicago Teachers Center (Group C)	3
Northeastern Illinois University—Chicago Teachers Center (Group D)	3
Northeastern Illinois University—Chicago Teachers Center (Group E)	4
North Lawndale Learning Community	9
Participation Associates	3
People's Reinvestment Development Effort	3
Roosevelt University	5
Success for All Foundation	3
Suzuki-Orff School for Young Musicians	4
Teachers Task Force	3
University of Chicago—Center for School Improvement	8
University of Illinois at Chicago—Small Schools Workshop	15[b]
Whirlwind Performance Company	3
Youth Guidance	12

Source: Chicago Annenberg Challenge. *Notes:* This list contains External Partners of networks with implementation grants in 1999. [a] These eight schools are schools within four larger schools. [b] These 15 schools include some independent small schools as well as small schools within nine larger schools.

Table 2: Types of Organizations Represented Among Annenberg External Partners

	Percentage of All Partners (N = 45)	Percentage of Study Sample (N = 19)
University-Based Organizations	35%	42%
Cultural Institutions	23%	21%
Educational Reform and Service Organizations	28%	21%
Community-Based Organizations	14%	16%

Table 3: Percentages of Annenberg External Partners with Experience Working with Schools on Long-Term Improvement Projects

	Percentage of All Partners (N = 45)	Percentage of Study Sample (N = 19)
With Experience on long-term projects	30 (67%)	13 (68%)
Without Experience on long-term projects	15 (33%)	6 (32%)

Table 4: Primary Foci of Annenberg External Partners' Work with Schools

Foci of Work	Percentage of Partners
Curriculum and Instruction	55%
Student Learning Climate and Social Services	16%
Parent and Community Support and Development	13%
Comprehensive	16%

concurrently, including curriculum and instruction, teacher professional community, school leadership, student learning climate, and parent and community support.

Annenberg's partners pursued a number of different strategies to promote improvement in these areas.[6] Many introduced new programs of professional development for teachers, principals, and other school leaders. These programs created opportunities for participants to share experiences and engage in joint problem solving. They engaged teachers in technical training in literacy instruction, the use of technology in the classroom, integration of arts into the curriculum, health/science education, and other curricular innovations. They also provided training in strategic school improvement planning processes. The partners helped develop new staff support for instructional improvement. Using their Challenge grants, a number of partners were able to hire demonstration teachers, literacy coordinators, and resident artists. Some new support staff members were brought in from outside schools through the partners' organizations, but some were hired from among the teachers in the partners' schools, creating new opportunities for teacher leadership.

Some partners also used Annenberg funds to develop and distribute new instructional materials to schools. These materials included children's literature, new systems of student assessment, and plans for teaching specific types of lessons. Other partners helped schools to create new organizational structures to support school improvement activity. Some helped develop small schools or schools-within-schools. Others helped schools restructure their days to bank time

for regular teacher professional development. Still others helped schools develop new committee structures to promote collaborative planning and decision making within schools and among schools in partners' networks.

During the course of the Challenge, most Annenberg partners altered or refined their initial strategies to increase their effectiveness with schools; to respond to the Challenge's evolving agenda for school improvement, particularly its growing emphasis on instruction and student achievement; and to deal with the Chicago Public Schools' policy initiatives, especially those concerning high-stakes accountability. Such changes in partners' strategies are discussed in the last section of this report that focuses on the partners' own learning and the development of their capacity to serve as resources for school improvement in the future.

III. The Contexts of Partners' Work

Understanding Chicago Annenberg external partners and what they have to say about promoting local school improvement requires some understanding of the various contexts in which they worked. Annenberg partners worked within the strategic orientation and organization of the Chicago Challenge. They worked within the broader context of systemwide school reform policy. They also worked within the specific contexts of individual schools. This section of the report examines each of these contexts, but first it provides a bit of history of the emergence of external partners in Chicago. That the idea of external partners had been established prior to the Chicago Challenge created a precedent for the Challenge to look to partners as agents of school improvement.

The Precedent for Partners

In turning to external partners to support local school improvement, the Chicago Challenge built upon a precedent that had been developing in the Chicago Public Schools since the mid- to late-1980s.[7] The 1988 decentralization reform required that every school in the Chicago Public School system develop and implement an annual school improvement plan. The reform also granted new budgeting authority to local schools that allowed them to hire individuals from community groups, universities, and other organizations as consultants or service providers to support local improvement efforts. At the same time, a number of Chicago-based philanthropic foundations began to provide grants to a wide range of external organizations to work with schools on local improvement efforts. These foundations, among them the MacArthur Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Chicago Community Trust, provided funds to external organizations to support a wide range of activity, including training programs for Local School Council members, curriculum development projects, establishment of small schools, teacher professional development, and research on the progress of school reform in the city.

Concurrently, the Chicago Public Schools began to turn to external organizations as a resource for its own school improvement initiatives. In 1994, Superintendent Argie Johnson proposed a plan that would categorize schools in three groups based on student achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests and other indicators of academic progress. Known as the "three-tier plan," it proposed to offer "support for all [schools], recognition for many, and intervention for some." Under this plan, the system would provide to schools, upon request, assistance from a newly "re-engineered" central office, district offices, and a wide range of "assistance groups." These groups included universities, education reform groups, and community organizations.

While the three-tier plan was never implemented under Johnson's administration, it provided additional precedent for turning to external organizations to support local school development. By the time the founders of the Chicago Challenge wrote the initial proposal to bring an Annenberg grant to the city, many CPS schools had already begun to work with outside organizations to help them develop and implement annual school improvement plans mandated by the 1988 reform. Moreover, after the 1995 reform, the system continued to look to external organizations as resources for local school improvement, assigning them to work with schools on academic probation.

The idea of external partners was not anomalous to Chicago. Throughout the country, educational reform networks were growing in number and in importance. Such networks connected schools not only to each other but also to outside organizations.[8] Several other local Annenberg Challenges across the country were organized around strategies involving school partnerships with outside organizations. Indeed, in describing the organizing principles of the national

Annenberg Challenge, a group that coordinated, monitored, and supported the work of local Challenges, the Annenberg Institute wrote:

> The Challenge encourages whole-school reform through partnerships in which individual schools often group themselves into clusters, families, or networks; schools also link with 'external partners' such as a university, cultural institution, community group, local business, or reform organization.[9]

Building upon such precedent, the Chicago Challenge incorporated external partners into its strategy for promoting local school improvement. We now turn to a description of the Challenge as a context in which the partners operated.

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge sought to promote local school development through networks of schools and their external partners. It followed a logic that schools that worked together with an external partner would find more direction and support for development than if they acted alone. Since its establishment in 1995, the Challenge operated much like a foundation.[10] It distributed its resources through planning and implementation grants to networks and external partners and provided some professional assistance to grant recipients. The Challenge did not articulate specific goals for individual school improvement to schools or to the external partners. Instead, it called for teachers, parents, and communities to rethink and restructure the basic elements of schooling, with external partners serving as guides and resources in the process. Rather than specify programs that schools should adopt, the Challenge believed that educators, parents, and community members should identify their own ways to solve local problems and address local needs.

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge followed the principles of the national Annenberg Challenge, a group associated with the Annenberg Institute that coordinated, monitored, and supported the work of local Challenges. These principles were described in 1998 by the Institute as follows:

> An abiding tenet of the Annenberg Challenge since its inception—one that distinguishes it from other major school reform initiatives—is its embrace of pluralism. Believing that there is no magic bullet, no single panacea, for fixing what ails our nation's most troubled schools, the Challenge has eschewed privileging one reform strategy over another. Rather, like all pluralist efforts, the Challenge accommodates an array of theories, in this case about how change occurs in schools and in the systems of which they are a part. And like all pluralist efforts, its constituent elements are characterized by both similarities and differences.[11]

While the Chicago Challenge did not have specific goals for school improvement nor did it specify programs or processes for schools and partners to follow, it did set particular directions for local school improvement activity. Initially, the Chicago Challenge focused on three basic problems of school organization that were seen as obstacles to improvement: (a) the lack of time for effective teaching, student learning, and teacher professional development; (b) the large size of school enrollment and instructional groups that hindered the development of personalized, supportive adult-student relationships; and (c) schools' isolation from parents and communities which reduced their responsiveness to local needs and their accountability to their most immediate constituents. The problem of isolation was extended to include teachers' isolation from one another, which could limit opportunities for teacher learning and development, innovation, and professional accountability. In making its first grants, the Challenge required school networks and their partners to address one or more of these organizational problems. Thereafter, the Challenge encouraged schools and external partners to focus more specifically on teaching and learning, teacher professional development, and whole-school change, not just change among groups

of teachers within schools. Within these general areas of emphasis, partners had broad latitude to work with schools on specific local issues in ways that the schools and partners saw fit. Indeed, as described in the previous section of this report, Annenberg partners and their schools focused on a wide range of school improvement activity and employed widely varying strategies to achieve their goals.

The Challenge provided two general types of support to its partners to work with schools. The first type of support was money distributed through planning and implementation grants. The second type was various forms of professional support. As described below, both types of support were relatively modest.

In its first few years of operation, the Challenge distributed small amounts of money in one-year planning grants to schools and external partners to help them develop their networks and their plans for school improvement. These schools and partners, as well as others that might not have applied for nor received planning grants, could then apply for implementation grants, which made available larger sums of money to carry out their plans for school improvement. Implementation grants usually supported several years of activity and could be renewed.[12] Grant money could be used in any number of different ways and the partners were designated fiduciary agents of these funds.

The total amount of money provided to schools and external partners through implementation grants grew considerably between 1995 and 1999.[13] This increase coincided with the growing number of schools and external partners funded during this period. At its peak in 1999, the Challenge distributed $9.6 million to support local school improvement activities. Between 1999 and 2000, total funding was reduced by almost 40 percent, to $5.9 million. By 2001, total funding was reduced to about $526,000, one-tenth of the funding provided in 2000.

The amount of money that individual partners and schools received was relatively modest. Between 1996 and 1999, this amount of money increased, even as the number of partners and schools that the Challenge supported increased. In 1999, at the peak of funding, partners received, on average, about $160,000 to work with an average of four to five schools. While the partners spent these resources in many different ways, in practical terms, the money that year was about enough to provide salaries, benefits, and support to two professional staff members to work across the partner's schools. After 1999, the average amount of money partners received declined substantially with the total amounts that the Challenge distributed. Initial budget requirements set by the Chicago Challenge stipulated that partners could use up to 10 percent of their grants to support their own expenses. The remainder had to go directly to the schools or be used by the partners in direct service of the schools. Later, the Challenge recognized that to be more effective, the partners themselves required more resources, and it altered this requirement to allow for larger percentages of grant monies to be kept by the partners.

While these funds were allocated differently among schools, it is useful to examine levels of average per-school funding to gain another sense of the level of Annenberg resources the partners and the schools had to work with. An average amount of funding per school was calculated on the basis of the total amount of implementation grant moneys disbursed and the total number of schools supported by the Challenge in a given year. These figures do not separate out how much money of a grant was used by the external partner itself. Still, as total Annenberg funding increased between 1996 and 1999, average funding per school rose from about $15,000 to almost $47,000. As total funding fell and the total number of schools and partners supported by the Challenge remained constant, average per-school funding dropped considerably, from about $47,000 in 1999, to $29,000 in 2000, to about $2,600 in 2001. Even at its peak in 1999, the average per-school funding from Challenge grants comprised only a small percentage of a typical school's budget. The average per-school funding level of $47,000 represented about 1.2 percent of the annual operating budgets of elementary schools studied in this research project.[14] This percentage does not take into account other grants that schools might have obtained, in which case the Annenberg portion would be even smaller.

In addition to funding, the Chicago Challenge provided its schools and external partners different forms of professional support. In 1997, the Challenge sponsored workshops to help schools and partners develop stronger plans for school improvement and stronger proposals for Challenge funding. Some schools and partners received direct coaching on the development of their programs and proposals. That year, the Challenge also held workshops for schools and partners on the themes of time, size, and isolation. Challenge staff provided workshops to promote its vision of successful school improvement. These workshops tapped a few successful Annenberg partners to serve as trainers and facilitators. Also that year, in an effort to promote communication and learning among schools and partners, the Challenge printed the first of several directories listing its implementation grant networks and their member schools and partners. These directories also contained descriptions of the primary foci of network and partner activity.

These initial forms of professional support were followed by another strand of workshops designed to provide opportunities for schools and partners to share ideas and engage in joint problem solving. These workshops were also designed to bolster commitment to local improvement efforts. Additionally, the Challenge sponsored presentations by outside speakers, some of whom were national figures in school reform. Finally, the Challenge organized fairs for schools and partners to display their work and celebrate their accomplishments. These forms of support are discussed further in Part V of this report.

The chief responsibility for providing these and other support activities fell primarily to one member of the Challenge staff, a program director, who was hired to develop programs, obtain resources, and provide professional support to schools and partners. A grants manager and the Challenge's executive director joined the program director in this effort. Both the program director and the grants manager had some, but not extensive, experience in school improvement. The executive director was hired from the local foundation community. His primary experience had been in grant making and community development. Perhaps because of economies of scale, in the later years of the initiative, the Challenge staff worked more closely with external partners rather than working more directly with individual schools.

In addition to providing professional support, the Challenge established a reporting and accountability system that required partners to submit detailed written budget and activity reports twice each year, documenting and explaining their expenditures, their activities, and their accomplishments. As discussed later in this report, most Annenberg partners found these requirements to be onerous and thought that they detracted from their work with schools.[15]

Chicago Public School Reform

Annenberg partners also worked in the broader context of school reform in the city.[16] The Chicago Challenge was established with a grant from the Annenberg Foundation in January 1995. It was aligned with the principles of democratic localism and grassroots action inherent in Chicago's 1988 decentralization reform (Illinois PA85-1418 School Reform Act). The Challenge sought to extend what is considered Phase I of Chicago school reform, from governance to other areas of school improvement, notably teaching and learning. The Chicago Challenge was designed on the assumption that the central administration at the time would be in place for the foreseeable future and that decentralization and local school governance would be the foundation for school improvement for some time to come.

Six months after the Challenge was established, everything changed. The Illinois legislature passed the 1995 amendment to the 1988 reform bill (Illinois HB206), which ushered in Phase II of reform. This amendment restructured the central administration through the creation of a corporate-style management team that included a Chief Executive Officer to replace the superintendent, and a five-member Reform Board of Trustees appointed by the Mayor. It established greater accountability within the system by clarifying and extending the authority of the CEO to intervene in nonimproving schools.

Shortly after the Chicago Challenge began awarding its first network grants, the new central administration introduced two major initiatives that brought centralized, high-stakes accountability into the system. It placed schools with less than 15 percent of

students scoring at or above national norms on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) on academic probation and assigned each a probation manager to direct school improvement efforts. Schools on probation that failed to improve their test scores over a period of time could be reconstituted. The administration also developed a new policy to end social promotion. Students in third, sixth, and eighth grade were required to meet specified cutoff scores on the ITBS in order to advance to the next grade level. If they failed to meet these benchmarks, they had to attend summer school, and if they failed again at the end of the summer, they were retained.

A year later, the administration developed new systemwide goals and standards for student learning. It began to create lesson plans keyed to these standards across grade levels and curriculum-specific examinations for high school graduation. It also began a major capital improvement initiative to build new schools, repair and renovate existing facilities, and alleviate overcrowding in many schools. It established the Lighthouse program to provide after-school academic, recreational, and social learning opportunities for students. It also began to place more emphasis on early childhood education.

Against this backdrop of centralized initiatives and test-driven accountability, the Challenge made grants to support local school development activity. As noted earlier, it first emphasized the organizational issues of time, size, and isolation. Later, it intensified its focus on teaching, learning, and whole school change. In particular, the Challenge began to promote intellectually challenging instruction and teacher professional development. It encouraged teachers to analyze their students' classroom work to stimulate instructional improvement.

There were several areas where the school system's initiatives and the Challenge's efforts to promote school development were consistent and mutually supportive. For example, at some Annenberg schools, the system's capital development efforts were instrumental in developing learning climates that were more conducive to teaching and learning.[17] On the other hand, the Challenge and its external partners promoted school improvement activities that sometimes collided with and competed against specific system policies, creating tensions and dilemmas for principals and teachers at the school and classroom levels. Nowhere were the tensions and dilemmas between the Challenge and the system more sharply pronounced than in the interaction between high-stakes standardized testing and efforts to improve instruction. Other reports of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project have indicated that in some Annenberg schools, high-stakes testing, coupled with the system's probation and student retention policies, played a crucial, even positive role in creating a press for accountability and a perceived need for change.[18] At the same time, in some schools, high-stakes testing pushed teachers and principals to focus on the quickest means of administrative compliance—test preparation—and abandon, or push aside at least for a while, partners' efforts to achieve more ambitious, long-term instructional improvement. Often this meant giving Annenberg-sponsored efforts low priority.

It was in these evolving reform contexts of pushes and pulls, of compatibilities and contradictions, that Annenberg external partners worked with schools to help improve them.

The Schools with Which Partners Worked

As a group, Annenberg external partners worked with a large number of schools across the Chicago Public School system. The number of schools in Annenberg implementation networks rose from 138 in 1996 to 211 in 1998. From 1999 to 2001, that number remained steady at 206. In all, the Chicago Challenge, through its external partners, extended support to nearly 40 percent of schools in the system.

Structural and Demographic Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the typical Annenberg external partner worked with four or five schools. A few partners worked with as many as 16 schools. Most of the schools with which Annenberg partners worked were elementary schools. Indeed, about 90 percent of all the schools that the Chicago Challenge supported were elementary schools. As shown in Table 5, almost

Table 5: Percentages of Annenberg External Partners Working with Different Combinations of Elementary and High Schools

	Percentage of All Partners (N = 45)	Percentage of Study Sample (N = 19)
Working only with High Schools	2%	0%
Working with Elementary Schools and One High School	35%	37%
Working only with Elementary Schools	63%	63%

two-thirds of Annenberg's external partners worked exclusively with elementary schools. A little more than one-third worked with elementary schools and one high school. Only 2 percent worked exclusively with high schools. While the majority of partners worked only with elementary schools, almost 40 percent of Annenberg partners faced the task of working with more organizationally complex and challenging high schools. Table 5 also shows that the sample of partners that were studied was similar in this regard to all partners that Annenberg supported.

The schools with which Annenberg partners worked were very similar as a group to schools throughout the system as a whole. Table 6 shows the characteristics of elementary schools supported by the Challenge during the 1998-1999 school year. Recall that schools that received support from the Challenge that year continued to receive support through 2001. Overall, substantial proportions of students in Annenberg schools scored below national norms on both reading and math portions of the ITBS. More than one-third of students who graduated from their schools dropped out before graduating from high school. Much like other Chicago elementary schools, Annenberg elementary schools served primarily African-American and Latino students. Eighty-five percent of these students came from low-income families. Almost one-fifth of the students in Annenberg schools were enrolled in bilingual education.

School Capacity

Another important aspect of the schools with which Annenberg partners worked was their capacity to engage effectively in Annenberg's approach to reform. Thomas Timar and David Kirp have argued that the success of school reform initiatives depends in significant ways on the capacity of schools to engage in and implement those initiatives effectively.[19] In their words, schools need the "institutional competence" to fulfill effectively the demands of reform. By institutional competence, Timar and Kirp refer to the aspirations, commitments, and norms of a school that direct its work and its efforts to improve. They also refer to the knowledge and skills of teachers and administrators to respond to the reform, to implement it, and to achieve its objectives. They argue that reforms are more likely to succeed if they are consistent with the aspirations, commitments, and norms of the school, and if those in the school who must implement the reforms possess the requisite knowledge and skills to do so. Others have made the same general argument.[20] For instance, Gene Hall and Shirley Hord, among others, have pointed out the importance of a school's state of "readiness" and its initial commitments to an innovation to the long-term implementation and effectiveness of that innovation.[21]

A primary organizing theme of the Chicago Challenge was the empowerment and self-determinism of local actors, members of school communities working in networks with their external partners, to improve their own schools. Closely related to this theme of local initiative and self-determinism was the theme of capacity building. The Challenge called on the schools and external partners it supported to build organizational capacity by addressing the issues of time, size, and isolation. It challenged schools and partners to build capacity for instructional improvement through teacher professional development. At the same time that it challenged its schools and external partners to build capacity, the Challenge made certain assumptions that schools and partners already possessed some requisite capacity to engage in the sort

Table 6: Characteristics of Chicago Annenberg Elementary Schools and Elementary Schools Citywide, 1998-1999

	Annenberg Schools	Schools Citywide
Average student enrollment	696	706
Percent low-income students	85%	85%
Percent English-language learner	18%	18%
Racial/ethnic composition		
• Percent African-American	53%	54%
• Percent Latino	33%	34%
• Percent White	10%	9%
• Percent Asian/Pacific Islander	3%	4%
• Percent Native American	< 1%	< 1%
1993 Eighth grade students who:		
• Graduated from a CPS high school	40%	40%
• Dropped out	35%	36%
• Left CPS	25%	24%
Students in grades three through eight scoring at or above national norms on the ITBS		
• Reading	36%	35%
• Math	43%	42%

Note. Percentage of low-income students is percentage of student eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program.

of decentralized, self-determined, collaborative work of local capacity development that it promoted.

A case can be made that in order for schools to successfully engage in the Challenge's "style" of reform, that is, for schools to "do Annenberg" well, they had to possess some base of human, social, and material resources that would support collaborative development work within schools, among schools, and with external partners. This base of resources might well consist of inclusive collaborative leadership, strong working relationships among teachers, and strong relationships between the school and parents. Schools would also have to have some base of commitments to the Challenge and to the approach to reform that it promoted. Indicators of such commitments might well include the alignment of Annenberg's goals with the school's own goals for improvement, the centrality the school would give to the Annenberg initiative among other initiatives it might be pursuing, and the commitments of people and time to make the effort work.

In the Chicago Annenberg Research Project's final technical report, these indicators of school capacity to "do Annenberg" are examined in substantial detail.[22] A few of these indicators are presented below. Overall, these indicators show that Annenberg partners worked with schools that as a group varied widely in their capacities to support the demands of the Challenge. Coupled with potentially strong internal sources of disruption and persistence, such wide variation in capacities no doubt complicated the work of Annenberg's external partners.

In citywide surveys administered by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, principals of

Annenberg schools were asked whether their schools had enough of their own resources—staff, time, and other resources—to make participation in Annenberg activities "pay off." In both 1997 and 2001, principals were mixed in their assessments of the adequacy of the resources their own schools possessed to make Annenberg participation "pay off." In 1997, 45 percent of Annenberg principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that their schools had enough resources for participation in Annenberg to make such a difference. In 2001, roughly the same percentage of principals considered their own schools' resources inadequate.

Data from the 1997 Consortium citywide teacher survey provide some indication of the strength of key human and social resources among Annenberg schools early in the Challenge that might be used to support school development. As shown in Table 7, substantial proportions of Annenberg schools scored in the weakest categories of measures of these resources.[23] That year, 17 percent of Annenberg schools reported minimal and limited orientation to innovation. In these schools, relatively few teachers were reported to try new ideas and take risks to improve their practice. There was substantial disagreement that teachers were continually learning, were encouraged to grow, and had a "can do" attitude. No teachers or only some of the teachers in these schools were reported to try new ideas and take risks to improve their practice. Substantial percentages of Annenberg schools also reported weaknesses in various aspects of school leadership. Twenty-four percent of Annenberg schools reported minimal principal support for change. In addition, 18 percent of Annenberg schools reported weaknesses in principal instructional leadership. In 24 percent of Annenberg schools, teachers reported that their principals promoted parent and community involvement but they disagreed that their principals worked to create a sense of community in their schools or were committed to shared decision making. Finally, 36 percent of Annenberg schools reported weaknesses in joint problem solving. While teachers reported general openness of expression in their schools, they indicated that problems and conflicts were often ignored or avoided.

Substantial percentages of Annenberg schools also reported weaknesses in different aspects of teacher professional community in 1997. One-quarter of Annenberg schools reported limited levels of peer cooperation and collaboration. A similar percentage of schools reported that teachers engaged only occasionally in reflective dialogue about their teaching. About one-third of Annenberg schools reported weak focus on student learning and a very limited sense of teacher collective responsibility for student learning and school improvement. Substantial percentages of schools also reported weaknesses in relational trust.

Table 7: Percentages of Annenberg Schools and the Weakest Categories in which They Scored on Measures of Human and Social Resources to Support School Development, 1997

Measures	Categories	Percent of Schools
Orientation toward Innovation	Minimal and limited	17%
Principal Support for Change	Minimal	24%
Principal Instructional Leadership	Mixed	18%
Inclusive Leadership	Mixed	24%
Joint Problem Solving	Weak	36%
Peer Collaboration	Limited	25%
Reflective Dialogue	Occasional	24%
Focus on Student Learning	No focus and not very focused	31%
Collective Responsibility	Very limited and limited	33%
Teacher-Principal Trust	Minimal	21%
Teacher-Teacher Trust	None and minimal	54%
Teacher-Parent Trust	Minimal	42%
Parent Involvement	Minimal and limited	39%

Twenty-one percent of Annenberg schools reported minimal levels of trust between teachers and principals. More than half of the schools reported no trust or minimal trust among their teachers. Forty-two percent reported minimal levels of trust between teachers and parents. Finally, 39 percent of Annenberg schools reported minimal and limited levels of parent involvement.

It is important to note that some of these human and social resources grew stronger in Annenberg schools between 1997 and 1999, including inclusive leadership, principal instructional leadership, focus on student learning, and teacher-parent trust.[24] In addition, teacher participation in professional development activity and the quality of the professional development activity they experienced improved among Annenberg schools during this time. In almost all cases, however, these improvements were lost after 1999.

There is another side to the issue of school capacity. In addition to the various resources that schools may have to support improvement, schools also have sources of internal disruption and persistence that can complicate and compromise partners' work. There is some evidence, for instance, that Annenberg schools as a whole experienced substantial turnover among their faculties, and such turnover may have made it very difficult to make and sustain much school development. On the Consortium principal survey, principals of Annenberg schools reported that, on average, they hired 25.2 new teachers to their schools between 1995 and 2001, which is, on average, 3.6 teachers per year. Between 1999 and 2001, they reported hiring an average of 9.7 new teachers or an average of 3.2 teachers per year. According to the Chicago Public Schools, the average size of an elementary school faculty is 26.3 teachers. While number of new teachers hired is not necessarily the best indicator of turnover in a school (it doesn't take into account the numbers of teachers who leave a school), it does give us some indication of the change or "churn" in personnel that is taking place within the school. Taking the number as a rough indicator, on average, the number of new teachers hired by Annenberg schools between 1995 and 2001 represented between 12 and 14 percent of their entire faculties each year. Data from CPS personnel records indicate that these principal reports underestimate the numbers of teachers who came to their schools each year. For example, these records indicate that on average, for the 1997-1998 school year (the latest data available for this report), 15.7 percent of teachers in Annenberg schools were new to their schools that year. This percentage is the same as the percentage of teachers in non-Annenberg schools who were new to their schools.

In addition to changes in teaching staffs, the loss of key leaders can threaten school improvement efforts. Between 1996 and 1999, there were a number of documented instances from the research project's field research schools where the loss of curriculum coordinators—hired and trained by Annenberg partners and paid for by Challenge grants to work with teachers—all but terminated the progress achieved through the schools' main improvement efforts.[25] In other field research schools, improvement efforts stalled when the principals who initiated them retired or left for other schools.

Data from Consortium teacher surveys and from field research provide evidence that some Annenberg schools had cultures that were much more conducive to change than other Annenberg schools. Recall that in 1997, almost one-fifth of Annenberg schools had minimal or limited orientations toward innovation (see Table 7). Another indicator of whether a school culture may be conducive to change is the expectations that teachers hold for their students' learning and for their futures. It may be very difficult to engage schools and teachers in improvement activity if teachers hold relatively low expectations for their students. That is, if teachers do not think that their students can learn or be successful, they may also believe that efforts to change schools may be for naught.

Two items on the 1997 teacher survey give some indication of the range of expectations that teachers in Annenberg schools held for their students. These items asked teachers the percentages of their students who they believed would graduate from high school and the percentages of their students who they believed would go on to attend a two- or four-year college. Table 8 shows the distributions of responses from

Table 8: Expectations of Teachers in Annenberg Schools for Their Students' Educational Futures, 1997

	Percentage of Annenberg Teachers
Percentage of the students I teach who I expect will graduate from high school:	
• 1 to 25 percent.	4%
• 26 to 50 percent.	13%
• 51 to 75 percent.	35%
• 76 to 100 percent.	48%
Percentage of the students I teach who I expect will attend a two or four-year college:	
• 1 to 25 percent.	23%
• 26 to 50 percent.	27%
• 51 to 75 percent.	29%
• 76 to 100 percent.	21%

Annenberg teachers to these two items in 1997, early in the Challenge. As this table shows, teachers in Annenberg schools held a range of expectations for the students they taught. Some of these expectations are quite low, perhaps contributing to school cultures that were not particularly conducive to improvement.

Our field research revealed that Annenberg external partners sometimes encountered school cultures that confounded their efforts to promote school development. Partners sometimes butted up against a culture among teachers of privacy and autonomy that made difficult efforts to promote joint problem solving and collaborative professional development.[26] Several Annenberg partners that were interviewed observed that some teachers with whom they worked believed that since previous reform initiatives seemed never to be sustained—that they came and went with changes in school administrators—it was not prudent for them to invest serious effort in new reform initiatives. Similarly, partners reported that in a number of cases, principals with whom they worked were either unwilling or incapable of infusing partner-sponsored activities into their schools. As in the case of some teachers with whom the partners worked, some principals appeared to partners to be "victims" of an administrative culture that worked against the partners' goals for school development.[27]

Another source of problems was program overload and fragmentation from the many improvement initiatives that Annenberg schools had adopted. This issue is discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections of this report. Here, it is important to note that even the earliest interviews with Annenberg partners revealed that partners' work with schools often competed with other initiatives for teachers and administrators' time and attention. In these cases, Annenberg partners who tried to promote whole-school improvement found that they had limited influence. In later interviews, more than half of the partners reported that their schools were involved in so many programs besides Annenberg that "it was often difficult to get the schools to pay serious attention to [their] programs."[28]

The scope of this problem in Annenberg schools is suggested by data from the Consortium principal surveys. Both 1997 and 1999 surveys asked principals to report the extent to which they saw the Annenberg Challenge as just one of many programs they had at

Table 9: Percentages of Principals of Annenberg Schools Who Agreed with the Statement, "The Annenberg Challenge is just one of many programs we have at this school," 1997 and 1999

	1997	1999
Strongly Agree	20%	15%
Agree	57%	65%
Disagree	21%	18%
Strongly Disagree	1%	3%

their schools and the degree to which their teachers devoted time to Annenberg activities as opposed to other projects at their schools. Principals' responses to these items are shown in Tables 9 and 10. In 1997, 77 percent of Annenberg principals agreed or strongly agreed that the Annenberg Challenge was just one of many programs they had at their schools. In 1999, 80 percent of Annenberg principals agreed or strongly agreed. In 1997, more than half of Annenberg principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that of all external projects in their schools, most teacher time was devoted to Annenberg activities. In 1999, a similar proportion of Annenberg principals made the same assessment. Taken together, these pieces of evidence strongly suggest that Annenberg partners faced competition for time, attention, and effort from other improvement initiatives in a substantial number of the schools with which they worked. This competition may have made quite difficult efforts to engage schools in Annenberg activity in a way that would lead to significant, lasting improvement.

Ironically, both Annenberg principals and external partners noted throughout the course of this study that, although the Challenge identified it as a crucial problem to address, lack of time was a persistent impediment to efforts to promote school improvement. As discussed earlier, substantial proportions of Annenberg principals reported on both 1997 and 2001 surveys that their schools lacked the staff, time, and other resources to make participation in network activity really "pay off" for their schools. An earlier report of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project noted that half of the principals interviewed identified lack of time as a specific impediment to their schools' participation in network activities during their first year of funding.[29] Each of these principals pointed to lack of time to attend network meetings themselves or to send members of their staffs. The problem of time was also identified in initial interviews of Annenberg partners. A substantial number of partners observed that 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.[30]

Table 10: Percentages of Principals of Annenberg Schools Who Agree with the Statement, "Of all external projects, most teacher time is devoted to Annenberg activities," 1997 and 1999

	1997	1999
Strongly Agree	12%	13%
Agree	35%	37%
Disagree	50%	48%
Strongly Disagree	3%	3%

IV. Lessons on Promoting School Improvement with External Partners

Within these complicated, competing, and not altogether supportive contexts of the Chicago Challenge, school reform and the Chicago Public Schools central office, and the schools themselves, Annenberg partners went about the business of promoting local school improvement. As indicated earlier in this report, their efforts were not widely successful.[31] At the same time, the partners observed and experienced a great deal during the years they spent working with schools. From their observations and their experiences—successful and unsuccessful—the partners that we interviewed offered a number of lessons they learned about how to promote school improvement. In this section and those that follow, we turn directly to the partners. In three sets of interviews across five years, they told us about their experiences working with schools, those things that supported and constrained their efforts, and the value they thought they brought to the schools with which they worked.

In this section we present four areas of "lessons learned" about promoting school improvement using external partners as agents of change. These areas focus on the importance of school leadership, communication and relational trust, issues of coherence and coordination, and the need for adequate and sustained levels of resources to support improvement. As we mentioned earlier, these areas reflect the predominant views of the partners. For instance, every partner we interviewed spoke about the importance of strong and supportive school leadership, be it in the context of active or uncooperative principal support or about the role of teacher leadership or shared leadership in improvement activity. Likewise, nine-in-ten partners we interviewed spoke about the importance of communication and relational trust.

The Importance of School Leadership

All of the partners spoke at length about the need for strong, supportive leadership in order for their school improvement initiatives to succeed. This leadership was frequently embodied by the principal, but teacher leaders and shared leadership were also seen by partners as important for successful school improvement.

Principal Leadership

Partners consistently named the principal as the "make-or-break" factor in creating a strong partnership between a school and its external partner. One partner told us, "The principals in these schools have the power to create a culture of learning and collegial support or to utterly undermine it." Another said, "At the school level we have come to see the principal as the key player in this restructuring effort and we have learned that without the participation, without the leadership of the principal, any thought of restructuring schools was nearly impossible." The positive support of the principal was always a boon for the work of the partners, but even a neutral principal was preferable to one who was uncooperative. Observed another partner:

> Some principals get it more than others, some principals sign on no matter what, some principals question this or don't question that, some principals don't really get it. . . . But, no matter how powerful and how wonderful, and how much leadership is exhibited [by teachers], the principal is still a principal and can throw a wrench into anything at anytime.

On the positive side, most partners spoke of principals who were instrumental in helping them promote their agendas for school improvement. These principals actively monitored instructional quality in their schools and worked to ensure that their schools' programs were consistent with the approach to school improvement promoted by the Annenberg partner. One partner described the type of principal most supportive of its work this way:

> The principal is very important, someone who actually understands and doesn't just take on whatever comes his or her way. . . . For example, Principal X actually has read the books, and actually knows what [our instructional improvement method] means, and actually can go into a classroom and be able to see that kids are doing what he thinks is right.

This type of principal support can be cultivated over time, as another partner explained:

> In two of our schools we have really succeeded in making the principals much more partners with us in what we do. We have frequent meetings with them, we poured out a plan with them and the project does not operate as some kind of graft onto the system. We insist that the principals be at the governing committee meetings. I probably never write a memo from us alone [but always include] the principal. We didn't have that kind of cooperation in the previous years. It was more like we were in there doing a project type of thing, and that is the very thing that we were trying to transcend.

Partners found they depended on strong school leadership to develop wide support for the school improvement ideas they promoted. They looked particularly to principals to promote teacher involvement in partners' activities and to hold teachers accountable for following through in their classrooms. One partner concluded from his experience working with schools that:

> There has to be a critical core [of people] at the school that wants to partner, that wants to change and that values an external partner. There has to be a principal that has to do something about the people who aren't motivated to be involved.

Extending Leadership to Teachers

Partners also discussed the importance of other sources of leadership in the school to support and help sustain school improvement, particularly strong teacher leadership. All but two of the partners we interviewed described specific efforts they made to include teachers in decision-making and to develop teacher leadership. One partner told us:

> We always work with the schools' leadership, meaning principals, but we started with the teachers. We were teachers first, and then as the ground swell of teacher involvement began to grow we were able to start working more directly with the school leadership. The principals, the local school council, we always went in right from the beginning to the local school council and presented material, but I don't think we ever went to the local school council until we had already connected with the teachers, so we didn't speak for ourselves on this. We went in with teachers speaking.

Several partners observed that it was important to develop a critical mass of teacher leaders in a building to be able to initiate and sustain school improvement activity. Developing a single teacher leader was often not enough. One partner recalled:

> We had in our design originally one teacher leader who would be a liaison to the project with Annenberg. I think that was dead on smart, but I don't think we did it enough. One teacher leader in a school probably isn't enough; we think that principals need to have teams of people who they can work with and depend on, and it almost has to have a little leadership training or-

ganization going on in the school where they are finding and rewarding teachers and possibly even others to take on the leadership role.

The partners understood well that teacher leadership would provide little "added value" to school improvement if their principals did not have confidence and trust in their ability. They knew that they had to have principal understanding and support for broadening the base of leadership in their schools. And many of the partners sought to develop that support through collaborative decision-making processes concerning their work with the schools. One partner described it this way:

> Our mission was to transform teaching and learning, and to build a strong teacher leadership base. That was our mission. But, we also knew that we couldn't do this without the building principal. So we knew that we'd have to get them involved. And we did that in this network. As a matter of fact, there were no planning sessions where teachers and the administrators did not sit down together to make all the plans for how we were going to implement some process. There was a collegial kind of environment we created for both schools and external partnership. We were equally involved in learning from each other.

Several partners used meetings of principals and teachers across their networks to build leadership capacity at the school level. Another partner described such activity this way:

> We have regular principal collaborations, sharing of ideas to foster school leadership, and to encourage that, develop it. We have regular cross network events with teachers, and lead teachers are coming together regularly, and they really are central in their school. So they really are able to share together, able to come out and go back to their school and share ideas, and you now build off of them.

Several partners observed that such efforts to extend and strengthen leadership across teacher and administrator roles had the potential to "snowball" or spread beyond an initial group to a broader number of teachers.

> As people get good at leadership, they learn for themselves, and they [can give up some power]. Nudging them to go ahead and give that empowerment to somebody else. "You had practice on this. Can you think of something else that you would like to do?" You know, that gentle nudging. "You learned this, you're a go-getter. How about we think of a new role for you?"

Such spread held out prospects for building deeper, wider bases of leadership to support school improvement.

Communication and Trust

If they were not aware at the beginning, the partners said they quickly learned that each school with which they worked was a unique organization with its own strengths and weaknesses. Coming from outside the school, partners found that they had to learn to become a part of the school community if they were to be successful. And in order to become part of the school community, the partners reported that they often had to overcome formidable barriers to communicating with schools. They also had to build trusting working relationships not only between them and their schools but also among teachers, principals, and parents with whom they worked. They learned that it was often quite difficult to develop trust without effective means of communication.

Communicating with Schools

To the partners, one of the most frustrating aspects of working with their schools was the difficulty in communicating directly with school personnel. Communications systems that partners took for granted in their own settings—individual access to phones, voicemail, and e-mail—were either unavailable or

inoperable in many Annenberg schools. The partners found that the schools with which they worked relied primarily on centralized telephones and fax machines for communicating with the outside world. They told us that elementary schools typically had only one fax machine for the entire school, and the phone and fax machine were both located in the main office, far from most teachers' classrooms. All of the partners wrestled with one type of communication problem with schools or another.

Partners who needed to reach individual teachers directly could rarely do so. They had to rely on their schools' internal communications systems. Simple tasks, such as relaying telephone messages, could not be relied upon, as this partner observed:

> The quickest thing is putting a note in [a teacher's] mailbox, but calling and leaving a message, that's just not [effective]. That's the last resort.

Another partner said,

> If I had to change the schedule [of a meeting] around or to check on something, getting a hold of somebody in the schools was just incredibly difficult, and you could by no means count on a phone message being delivered.

Even in the few schools where they were more available to teachers, phones were not always the best means for communications. As one partner recalled:

> We have one school where each classroom has its own phone. And I am always fearful that I shouldn't be calling now they're in the middle of teaching. They don't have voicemail, they just have that phone there.

Most partners wished they were able to use e-mail and Internet for communicating with the schools. But at the time of our interviews with partners in 2001, few schools were wired. Even those schools that were wired had not prepared their staffs to use the technology routinely. One partner said, "I never use the e-mail if I want them to know something, because I know it doesn't get checked." Internet access and use was very uneven from school to school. Recalled another partner:

> That has been a frustration all along. It's been a frustration with the Board because one of our schools was promised it would be wired and that never happened. Now they have all been wired [from the street] to the door but that doesn't mean anything now, because it's not [wired] inside.

Some partners described principals as being at the heart of the problem with using technology. One partner recalled:

> In our network the principals are way behind the times in using the Internet. They say dumb things like "you are never going to catch me on that." Now it's as ridiculous as saying "I am never going to pick up a book" or "you won't see me reading a book."

Another partner related this story about how difficult it was to introduce electronic communication to the schools:

> One year we bought laptops for all of the principals and [our network's] literacy coordinators. And we had our staff here to train them. And among the people who were being trained were everyone from those who needed to be told "Here's the button you punch to turn it on," to those who already had some experience with a PC. We threatened. One time we said we weren't going to send any more faxes, that they would have to get [computer] literate. We paid for e-mail for our network. And we said we weren't going to communicate with them any other way. And there are still some principals, to this day, who just can't be communicated with unless you fax them.

Occasionally a school, especially one with a determined principal, overcame these problems. One partner recalled:

> One of our former schools was internally wired, that principal just went ahead and did that. [He was] very technologically savvy, but the rest of the schools have been really slow.

The partners who worked in schools where Internet access was available found it an extremely useful tool for communication. One of these partners recounted:

> At one school they have e-mail, and they also have an internal e-mail system so you can send a message to one person, and then ask them to send it out through the internal network. So there's a huge advantage there. They use it as a means of communication. The principal sends out broadcast messages and they know the teacher leader also sends out broadcast messages to everybody. They have a wealth of means of communications, and habits of communicating with each other.

Given the problems they experienced, the partners we interviewed found that they had to be creative in order to communicate with schools. Half of the partners with whom we spoke said that they bypassed their schools' formal communications channels. Some partners used paper flyers in teacher mailboxes as their primary means of communication. Several others also developed newsletters. One partner told us: "We do a Round Robin newsletter that starts at one school and keeps adding." Another partner recounted:

> We sent out weekly bulletins. I wrote them and I faxed it, usually Monday morning or late Friday afternoon, so it got there Monday morning. And the principals had agreed that what they would do is get it photocopied and put in teacher's mailboxes.

Another partner said:

> Every week on Monday all my coordinators and my principals receive a weekly update that I do, just kind of a "Here's what's going on, here's what's coming up" little newsletter. Those are posted wherever the teachers are, the teachers room or sometimes at the swipe machine [timeclock] at the front desk.

Another partner recounted, "They don't read e-mail. Telephone, fax, mail, and showing up in person are the best ways. We are in constant contact with them."

And still another told us:

> We fax a lot, we send out a lot of fliers, a lot of information, but we really don't use the Internet with the schools very effectively. It's difficult to do because they are not all set up to be able to communicate that way. They really need more resources to be able to do that.

Most of the partners who tried to make use of the Internet had to rely on teachers who use e-mail at home. Others simply relied on calling teachers on the phone after school hours. One partner said: "There are a lot of late night calls at home." Many partners had lists of teachers' home phone numbers, and partners also freely distributed their own home phone numbers to teachers and principals.

Finally, some principals found that the best way to communicate with schools was the most direct—having a physical presence in the school. One partner told us:

> We are big on making that stop in the school to say hello to certain teachers, to say hello to certain people. That's where you get a real slice of the school and you get to really talk to the principal or to someone in two seconds to see how they are reacting on certain days. We are in the schools a lot.

Going to the school allowed for more personal encounters. Another partner recounted, "I have found that the human connection that you make [when] the teachers/staff and parents see you in the school physically is really effective." Making an effort to be in the school makes other means of communication more effective, as another partner reflected:

> Part of the challenge is not just getting the information to them but really connecting with them so they'll pay attention to information, so it means more to them, so they feel a personal contact there. So, "Oh, gee, maybe I'll come to that," because you had this conversation about it or they heard about it in a meeting when they actually put together the date. I find that hard and very important. We're pretty good at doing flyers now and getting that out, but the follow up, that's time intensive but very important.

A number of the partners we interviewed appointed and trained people within schools who could act as liaisons. Literacy specialists, parent coordinators, and outside consultants all spent a lot of time in schools and could relay messages from the partners. One partner who adopted this strategy told us:

> The way we are organized, we have facilitators responsible for a few schools and they are on site there. They are regularly in the building a number of days each week.

Another partner told us:

> I really, really rely on the coordinators to get the information out to the teachers, and then to get the teacher's feedback or anything. I really rely on the coordinators to give me that information.

These and other partners found that persistence was often essential in communicating. For example, one recalled:

> [W]hen we were recruiting for [our summer institute], the consultants went teacher to teacher, door to door, you know, and 20 times brought them the form.

The creation of coordinator positions was, according to some partners, a triumph of trust in some schools. Several partners told us that principals, who once wanted to control the flow of information, had learned to let go as the partner came to be seen as a trusted, long-term ally. One partner described the long road to efficient communications in its network:

> We have a person in each school called the coordinator that is actually a disseminator of information. There is a structure to this, because they get paid a stipend for this, to make sure that principals know where to be when they are supposed to be, and committee members know where to be when the meetings happen, and special events and that kind of stuff. It wasn't until about two years ago that the principals actually went for that idea, and they went for it because they realized the amount of stuff that they were getting, and they started to finally realize how much work it was to get information to the schools, and so two years ago they allowed us to finally go to the system of having a point person, and that has just helped so tremendously. I think the principals finally got to the point where it's a release of control. They had to feel a comfort level with us and our ability before they would allow this type of a process to happen in the schools. So I think it says a lot that the organization was able to grow to the point where they would allow a coordinator from the school to be responsible underneath them.

A Foundation of Trust

As suggested by the passage above, trust was seen by the partners we interviewed as an essential ingredient in working effectively with schools. Partners consistently pointed to the importance of trust as a foundation for risk-taking and change on the part of teachers and principals. Some partners anticipated the need to develop trust from the beginning of their work with schools. Others acknowledged that they had underestimated the importance of trust but had come to realize that they had to work consciously and diligently to develop it even in later years of their work.

One partner explained that in order to accomplish much of anything with the schools, "There had to be trust, trust in [the] external partner. [The schools had to think that] it wasn't just somebody else coming in to do something to you." Another partner said: "The

[thing that] is the most important is that the principals trust you, and they trust that the programming that you are doing is going to be in their school's best interest."

Another said:

> We say we work for the best interest of the children, and we are doing this so that you can do your job. I think that people have to learn that we really mean that, I don't think they trust that in the beginning, because that's not how schools operate. [Teachers are used to a] "you are here to observe me and give me a bad rating and get me fired" kind of suspicion.

Partners emphasized repeatedly in interviews that building trust takes time and patience. Some observed that only in the later years of their relationships with schools had teachers become trusting enough to really commit to the work that they were to do together. One partner remarked, "It took really the whole year and a half to build enough trust in the network that anyone wanted to be together." Another partner recalled that early efforts to work with schools had gone slowly in large part because of an absence of trust:

> A lot of that had to do with the trust process, getting to know the [external partner organization], getting to know us as individuals, and trusting that we weren't going to do anything horrible. It also had to do with the principals trusting their faculty [who worked with us] to make sound choices and decisions.

The partners reported that they used a variety of strategies to cultivate trust among school personnel. While building trust was not always the primary objective of these strategies, the partners considered it a powerful by-product. Several partners told us of network-wide retreats they organized with their schools. They described these retreats as opportunities for joint planning, professional learning and development, and also time for partners, teachers, and administrators to get to know each other better outside the context of school, to work together, and to build relational trust. Even those partners who were not cognizant of the importance of trust-building early in the Challenge came to see the value of retreats as mechanisms for developing stronger working relationships with their schools and promoting collaboration among school personnel.

Some partners told us of role-specific, cross-school networks they created to strengthen trust relationships among different school personnel. Such networks were formed for librarians and media specialists, social-service providers, and principals. One partner explained how meetings of these networks helped to build professional connections and relational trust:

> We built trusting relationships among the people, so that when they see each other in a different context, they know each other. The librarian at one of the schools said, "Oh now when I go to the district librarian meeting we all hang out and talk to each other and share ideas and have coffee." I think especially for people who don't have any real professional network, they may have professional development conferences that they go to, but there isn't a network kind of within the school that supports their own professional development. I think they found each other to be resources, they sort of feel like they built a community.

Other partners described how they sought to develop trust through teacher and parent book clubs or brief sabbaticals that gave teachers an opportunity to observe, collaborate with, and learn from other teachers. In any case, whether successful at building trust or not, partners identified it as a crucial element for working effectively with schools.

Coherence and Coordination

In addition to leadership and communication and trust, the partners we interviewed had a great deal to say about the importance of coherence and coordination of school improvement activity. The partners recognized the importance of coherence in instructional programs for teaching and student learning. [32]

They also recognized the importance of coherence among different improvement initiatives in which a school might be engaged. Most pointed to the advantages of working with schools with clear and coherent programs of improvement. According to the partners, coherence in school improvement activity created a singularity of focus and sense of purpose. It reduced competition for school resources as well as staff time and attention. And, it increased a school's chances for success.

In its research on school reform in Chicago, the Consortium on Chicago School Research used the phrase, "Christmas tree school," to refer to those schools that boast a large number and wide variety of programs and partners that may conflict with each other and that may pull teachers and administrators' time and energy in different directions.[33] These programs and partners might be attractive "ornaments" that bring attention to the school, but they provide little benefit because they fail to support common goals for school improvement and improvement in student learning. The opposite of the fragmented, Christmas tree school is one where the school and its partners are united behind one coherent vision and strategy for school improvement.

Sixteen of the 19 partners we interviewed worked with schools that worked with other partners, including a few with probation partners assigned by the CPS central office. In some of these schools, external partners had agendas that were complementary and compatible to those of the Annenberg partners. In other schools, those agendas were not. In the latter schools, the Annenberg partners we studied identified lack of coherence and coordination among multiple partners as a serious impediment to school improvement. One partner who worked in one of these schools exclaimed in an interview: "It's a Christmas tree school, and it's crazy. [It's] crazy trying to make it work there."

The partners we interviewed found that schools placed on academic probation by CPS central office were particularly susceptible to becoming Christmas trees. While probation managers created the possibility of conflicting improvement agendas, another partner described how some Annenberg partners might themselves have contributed to the Christmas tree phenomenon in Chicago. He recalled:

> What happened at the very beginning was that external partners were just looking for bodies, that's how I'll put it, to put together a network. A lot of consulting types of firms that popped up that, I don't know, didn't seem very well established. I mean a lot of our schools got calls, "Hi, I'm putting together this network. You want to tie in?" [For a school to be in a network put together in that way,] it would have been a Christmas tree. It wouldn't have made a lot of difference.

Several partners spoke about why it was so difficult to work with schools that lacked coherence. Describing the situation in a school on academic probation, one partner told us:

> The probation partner for a while was "X." It was like [the school was] getting double messages. It was exactly the opposite of what we were talking about, so it made [work there] really, really difficult, very difficult.

Annenberg partners said that they sometimes had to compete with other school partners for teachers' time and attention. One partner said, "You could sit down and find out that there's so many people [from other external partners] trying to vie for the same few teachers who were really interested in doing something."

When working with a Christmas tree school, some of the partners we interviewed tried to avoid conflict with other programs and partners. These partners tried simply to work in different and noncompeting areas. And sometimes that worked out well for the Annenberg partners. For example, one told us:

> One of our schools had a partner in math and science, and we are addressing literacy and art, so we were just kind of running along on two tracks. Also because the school is very consistent, working with both us and this other partner really wasn't a problem.

Another provided the following examples:

> One school had a partnership with [a math] program there. It was a very hands-on student-centered approach to math. It just supported whatever we did. Another school brought in two years ago an out-of-state university partner to help with reading. He had somehow come to some CPS meeting and connected with a principal there and I suggested we sit down at the table together. We sat down and I said, "What are you doing? How can the Annenberg support what you are doing?" Once I heard his conceptual framework, it was not at odds with what the network philosophy was all about so it was not a problem.

However, most partners said that they were more proactive to try to bring some coherence to the schools in which they worked. Fourteen of the 19 partners told us that they attempted to meet with other partners regularly, to work to coordinate programs in some constructive way. One partner explained that the way in which he approached the problem of coordination was to help the school and its multiple partners focus on those things that were the most fundamental to the school and its improvement:

> I think one clear success factor has been to focus on goals that are central to the mission of both the school and of the system to be something other than another Christmas tree program. So, if what the schools must accomplish is improving reading, give them a way to do that, that also [helps them address other issues like student] engagement in education. It becomes an effective [way to work with schools and other partners] because you are on a partnering mission not a partner that is kind of distracting you from the mission. You are not using the schools to accomplish your goals in a way that distracts them from theirs or vice versa. You are doing something that is central to your mission and central to their mission. It's real collaboration.

Another partner described how complicated and difficult this important task could be:

> We were very intentional about forming a relationship with the other external partners and [our school planning team] worked with the principal to make sure that all the different partners were represented in that group. If they had somebody focusing on curriculum and instruction or whatever it was, any kind of serious partner, then they were integrated into that [committee] so that it was not everybody doing separate work. The goal of that team was to integrate and coordinate things so that it aligned with the school improvement plan, and everyone was kind of moving in the same direction, but really wanted to encourage schools and make sure the actual people were sitting around the table, so that as these discussions rolled out, that they're involved. Over the more recent years with probation, we had to step up integrating what we do, and having real dialogues about that because we had to share staff development time and all that kind of stuff. There was a lot of back and forth negotiation that goes on, but I think we consulted with each other a lot on how to best approach something in the school.

As suggested by our earlier discussion of leadership, the partners we interviewed considered the principal to be a critical factor in their efforts to promote coordination and coherence. One of the partners explained it this way:

> The partnership can't just be one of 50. There has to be some kind of coherent strategy for school change. If you have 50 other partners they all have got to say, "This is how we connect to this coherent strategy for school change. We can add this or we understand what it is the school is trying to do, and here is where we fit in." And there has got to be some leadership there that says if you don't fit in you are out, you can't just be a conglomeration of programs and pulling and tugging in various ways.

Some partners worked directly with their schools' principals to help them develop the capacity to bring coherence to their schools' improvement activities. One partner told us:

> Our network has tried to work with, or help principals make strategic decisions, but leaving the ultimate decision up to them, and saying well you don't have to get rid of these [many nonrelated] partners, but you might want to think about this when you start pulling this stuff in. We tried to dissuade them from the Christmas tree effect, you know. Sometimes they listen and sometimes they don't.

The Need for Resources

A final factor that the partners identified as being important for school improvement was the presence of adequate resources over a sustained period of time. The partners we interviewed identified three types of resources as being particularly important to their efforts to promote school improvement. These resources were time, money, and people. Each is discussed below.

Sufficient Time

The partners we interviewed spoke about the importance of time in two ways. The first was the time available to work with school personnel, particularly teachers. Many partners found that the shortness of the school system's teacher workday, coupled with the substantial amount of responsibility teachers have, posed serious constraints on their ability to find time to work with teachers.[34] Some partners confronted what one called a "time clock" culture that made it difficult to gain teacher participation in improvement activities past the end of the regular school day. Others pointed to the aversion they encountered from some teachers to "overtime" work. Partners recalled that efforts to "release" teachers from classroom duties to participate in improvement activities proved complicated, as our later discussions of partners' comments about substitute teachers and CPS administrative procedures attest.

In addition to the challenges of finding adequate time to work with school personnel during and beyond the regular the school day, the partners we interviewed thought about the importance of time in a second way. They spoke at length about how long it takes to achieve change in schools and how important it was to be able to work with schools over an extended period of time. All of the partners with whom we spoke stressed that they needed multiple years of sustained work in any one school to get results. One partner told us:

> We used to say when we began ten years ago, "It's going to take us six years." Although we were kind of on target, it's going to take us six years to really get started, because of all of the political things that you have to take on. And they are all important things. They are all critical victories that we have had along that span of time.

The partners with long-term experience working in schools had perhaps the greatest insight concerning the amount of time successful partnering work for school improvement required. One of these partners recounted the long route his work has taken:

> It took 10 years to get some teachers on board and Annenberg was only around six. I felt like the six-year mark with [our organization], we were heading real solid, and you needed to keep going. At six years we didn't have the strong leadership that we have now, and we didn't have the total buy-in that we have now from the teachers, and we didn't have the depth of understanding about curriculum that we have now. At six years we were beginning to get that pretty solid base, but we needed to fill in more people. We needed to pull in more teacher leaders, and we needed to be really dealing with the curriculum and the assessment. You couldn't deal with the assessment in the first six years. If you are creating curriculum you are not assessing it the first couple of years. You are just trying to create it and maybe you will stumble into some forms of

> assessment that work, but chances are you will not. It just took a while to get there. If I was going to start Annenberg over again, I think the external partners were a good idea and we should have had ten years and not five. I think for the schools you need a solid ten years to really feel comfortable.

Another partner pointed to the need for a long time frame in order to address the interlocking elements of a more comprehensive school reform plan:

> We talked about culture change. I think the thing that we learned is that you can't focus on a plan and expect the entire culture to change. It's like all the food groups. It's principals, teachers, parents, and kids, and if you don't try to hit all of those you are maybe successful in changing one of the elements, but you can't get [culture] change in five years.

Sustained Financial Support

Partners credited the Challenge with providing long-term financial support that created opportunities for sustained work with schools. Such lengthy funding was uncommon for many of the partners. And while they believed that their Annenberg grants gave them resources essential to their work with schools, some found that the relatively small size of those grants did not provide them levels of resources to support their work adequately. Some partners were able to supplement their Annenberg grants with other resources. For other partners, their Annenberg grants were the primary financial resources with which they had to work.

Of significant concern to many partners was their ability to sustain funding post-Annenberg. Most partners did not see easy ways to replace their Annenberg grants in order to continue their work over the long term. When we conducted our 2001 interviews, many of the partners with whom we spoke were working with their schools to secure continuation funding but with varying success. One partner was working with his schools to help them decide how to carry on parts of their Annenberg work, even though they had not secured ongoing outside funding. Some partners were working directly with principals and LSCs to find ways to reallocate their schools' discretionary funds to continue to support Annenberg work. Reported one partner:

> We are exploring now. There aren't a lot of sources of funding out there to continue things that somebody else has started. Our focus has been on strengthening those principals and local school councils, and those cadres of teachers that we have. It's going to be very difficult to maintain. Our emphasis right from day one has been to try and work with the LSC and the principal because they are the policy makers, and they are the ones who can state this is what [we] need to do and this is what we're putting in the funds for.

Another partner described some modest success finding funds to continue Annenberg work within its network schools' budgets:

> Well, the schools are actually funding a continuation of the network. We had proposed this last spring to the principals, and they all had talked to their staffs and all of them very much wanted to continue some kind of interaction. And so they are paying for it, and what we're doing is we are going out to the schools now what amounts to about one day a month.

Other partners told us of the difficulties they were experiencing trying to replace Annenberg grants with grants from other outside sources. They found it difficult to piece together many small grants into a sufficient pool of resources. One of these partners told us:

> For us through small grants to recreate the budget that we had with Annenberg is going to be hard. We have about 15 grant requests out and I have heard on two of them, so we now have $35,000.00 out of a budget. We had three schools. We need $300,000.00. So we will see

what happens there. There is an outside chance that the Annenberg [Foundation] in Pennsylvania is going to pick up some of the networks. They asked us to write one page descriptions on what we have accomplished in our networks. If that were to come through, we would be back on the track, and we might be fine. Anyway, it's a little bit up for grabs.

Several other partners talked about how difficult it was to secure grants from other funders to continue a pre-existing program or network. The partners perceived that most local funding sources are reticent to fund long-term activity. They saw further that most sources preferred to fund something they had a hand in creating, something of priority to them. One of these partners observed:

> Then on the foundation level, it's just kind of hard so far. We've gotten some private foundation funding, but you know they don't really want to fund this kind of long-term program. You know they would want to find something new.

The Chicago Challenge did offer a grant-writing workshop to partners, but many of the partners we interviewed wished that the Challenge would have done more to prepare them to find post-Annenberg funding. During our 2001 interviews, one partner observed:

> I think if Annenberg had set themselves up from the very beginning to train us on how to [find other sources of funds] we'd be so much farther. So now people are kind of in crisis mode. You know there are some folks who are just now starting to think about "Uh oh [our grant expiration is] 30 days away. What are we going to do?"

Human Resources

In addition to time and financial support, the interviewed partners were well aware of the importance of human resources to their work in schools. They spoke in interviews of the importance of stability in staff and leadership in introducing and sustaining school improvement initiatives. They also spoke about the importance of school-level leadership, trust, teacher professional community, and teacher commitment to and participation in partners' activities. The schools with which the partners worked varied considerably with regard to the strength of these human resources (see Tables 7, 9, and 10).[35]

The partners spoke of two other human resource issues that they considered important to promoting school improvement. The first, related to creating time to work with teachers, concerned substitute teachers. The second issue concerned hiring coordinators or other project staff to work in schools.

A major challenge to external partners was the shortage of substitute teachers to cover classrooms so that regular teachers could participate in professional development and other activities the partners sponsored. Almost one-third of the partners we interviewed were emphatic about this issue. Even though there was money to pay for substitutes—partners had allocated Annenberg funds to pay for them—the CPS system that supplied substitutes was unreliable. One partner complained, "There weren't bodies. Subs wouldn't show up." Another partner described the problems he experienced with substitutes this way:

> The whole substitute thing, there is so much that our teachers wanted to do, but we couldn't get subs to cover them. It's horrendous. We would have to cancel some things at the last minute or only half the people showed up because they couldn't get subs in.

Sometimes school principals had little choice but to insist that their teachers not attend partners' school-improvement activities because substitute teachers were not there to work with students in their absence.

Some partners said they became so frustrated with the system of supplying substitute teachers that they considered alternative strategies. One partner remembered what worked successfully for an earlier reform strategy in Chicago.

> Project CANAL, for example, when they were here, had a cadre or pool of subs that they then sent up. They were regular, [the] same subs that were trained. And Annenberg didn't do that. You know, that would have been a good thing to do.

One of the partners told us that he attempted to build his own pool of substitute teachers but was not successful because he could not overcome high turnover within that group.

The partners we interviewed also discussed the challenges involved in hiring personnel to help them run programs in schools. Partners said they demanded that their employees be dedicated, confident, and flexible in working with teachers and principals. Most said that they required teaching experience of some kind, or at the very least experience in schools on another level, such as school counselor or parent volunteer. Ten of the partners we interviewed tried to hire staff with prior experience in Chicago. The partners told us that consequently, most people who worked full-time for them came from the schools or had been closely related to schools in their work. In one partner organization, "Everybody, everybody was a teacher. There was not one person that hadn't been in a classroom or that didn't keep a teacher certification." But the partners found that hiring people from schools posed its own difficulties. Recalled one partner: "There is a tension [in] taking people out of schools. You don't want to take people out of the schools that are leading important work in the schools."

The partners we interviewed indicated that there had been a substantial amount of movement of personnel from schools to partner organizations and back again to schools. Many of the consultants and coordinators that partners employed were "teachers-on-loan." This was a personnel category in CPS that allowed teachers to work outside their schools but keep their seniority, pay scale, and benefits through the school system. However, CPS policy permitted teachers to hold this state for only two years. This contributed, partners told us, to a "revolving door" of personnel and destabilized relationships they worked hard to develop with schools. One partner recalled how he and his organization tried to work around the problem and maintain the staff needed for his work with schools:

> The Board has been horrible. Every year they have told us they are taking them back. [One of our staff members] is just a genius at working the board. If it weren't for him we wouldn't have teacher consultants. He has found ways of covering them, having them appointed to different schools. We said at least let us have them for the duration of the Annenberg project. And they have a two year limit. We kept them but it's been very creative. We've had to put them on rolls of schools. Keeping our consultants has been one of the most difficult things every single year. It has been: go to the Board, figure out a lie, work with someone who you find will let you add him or her to a school's budget.

V. What Partners Need to Do Their Work Well

Annenberg external partners served as a source of support for local school development. Likewise, the partners themselves often needed support and an environment conducive to working effectively with schools. In this section of the report, we present partners' observations about the forms of support they felt they needed to work effectively with schools. Certainly, the partners we interviewed considered the presence of resources discussed in the last section of the report to be sources of support in their work with schools. Here, however, we focus on three other supports they spoke of—professional support from external sources, in this case, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge; opportunities for networking with schools and other external partners; and support from the CPS central office.

Professional Support

The external partners we interviewed readily acknowledged the importance of their own learning and development to their ability to serve schools well. And they pointed to the importance of external sources that could support them. For these partners, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was their primary, common source of professional support. Indeed, the Challenge sponsored a number of events for schools and partners during its six years of operation. As shown in Table 11, these events included a wide variety of workshops, retreats, and presentations. Programs designed specifically for external partners included discussions of the CPS probation process and its implications for Annenberg schools, discussions with CPS central office personnel on budgetary issues, workshops on the grant renewal process for networks requesting additional funding, using data for school improvement decisions, interpreting Consortium survey results, and network-to-network exchanges. The Challenge also provided more direct, one-on-one support for most partners.

For the most part, the external partners we interviewed appreciated the Challenge's efforts to support them. Many were positive but others were more equivocal about the value of this support. Seven partners, including all three community-neighborhood partners, had only positive things to say about what they learned at Challenge partner events. One told us:

> I have never gone to an Annenberg-sponsored activity, event, workshop that wasn't so worth my time. I've gone to a lot of workshops sponsored by a lot of different organizations over the years and I can tell you none of them compare with the Annenberg Project. They're always, regardless of subject, excellent. The reason is they give you practical information. And it's what you can really use and really need. I felt like it wasn't one of those where you get tons of theory, but nothing useful. Like going to the fundraising workshop, I got a folder that said, "here's what they're looking for in the introduction, here's what they want to hear in this." Okay, well if I write a grant I'll take that folder out, you know, something that I can actually sit and use. They're not lofty idea kind of workshops.

Some partners pointed to workshops on media relations, data-driven decision-making and research findings, and various inspirational guest speakers as particularly helpful. Another partner said:

> I really appreciated the events that they planned over the years. The events that they have given have always been very well thought out. There are two or three events a year that are very helpful, very instructive, very pleasant, very elegant. They don't stand on anything. They meet in a really nice place, and we have really nice food and they think about who the presenters are and the quality of it. They put a lot of effort into that and it has paid off. I definitely have benefited from that enormously.

Table 11: A Sample of Events Sponsored by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge

Date	Event	Speaker/ Topic
October 1996	*CPS Probation Policies* at CAC offices	Meeting of external partners to discuss implications of probation policies for Annenberg schools
Spring 1997 (multiple sessions)	*Time, Size and Isolation* at Chicago Teachers Center	Workshops for networks on core Annenberg principles
June 1997	*CPS High School Redesign Policies* at CAC offices	Meeting of high school principals and external partners to discuss high school policy
October 1997	*Fall Celebration* for networks and external partners at University of Chicago Downtown Gleacher Center	Gloria Ladsen-Billings of the University of Wisconsin on teaching urban children
February-May 1998	*Network Roundtables* at CAC Offices	Networks with similar interests meet to share ideas and expertise
May 1999	*Planting Roots: Cultivating Change* at Field Museum of Natural History	Network presentations of accomplishments, plus luncheon speaker Jeannie Oakes of UCLA on de-tracking
November 1999 and March 2000	*Sustaining Reform* at CAC offices	Meetings of external partner organizations on securing funding after Annenberg
December 1999, April 2000, July 2000	*Using and Sharing Data for School Improvement* at various venues	Series of retreats for external partner organizations on making data-driven decisions
January 2001	*Authentic Intellectual Work* at Summit Executive Center	Workshops for external partners and principals on creating expectations for high-quality student work

Eight other partners were more critical about Challenge-sponsored events. These partners wanted to have more opportunities for partner-to-partner exchange and more follow-up to workshop experiences. Said one partner:

> This is not to cast aspersions on anyone because we [partners] do the same damn thing. These events were not interactive. They were kind of touted as things that would be, and you got everybody in a room and somebody made a presentation; that seemed to be the typical kind of format. I think in some cases it was just fine, but it is also a chance to swap some stories among the partners, but it didn't seem like a lot of that went on.

Many partners thought that the manner in which the Challenge scheduled its events compromised their effectiveness. They felt that the Challenge was not sensitive to the school calendar or the difficulties with scheduling events for network schools on short notice. One partner remarked:

> We found that it was continually frustrating that things like deadlines or meetings or whatever would drop down on us with little notice and our lives were so complicated, to say nothing of the teachers' or the principals' lives. That was often really difficult to manage, that I think was the one downside.

Several partners who wanted to include teachers and principals in various events were stymied by scheduling: "[The Challenge] frequently scheduled things at a time when people from the schools couldn't go, and/or they would give you last minute notice and you couldn't turn on a dime."

Partners also pointed to the importance of their relationships with their Challenge "program officers," those members of the Challenge staff who were responsible for working directly with them and their networks. They considered these relationships as crucial sources of support. In general, the partners we interviewed portrayed the support they received from their program officers as helpful. As one partner reported:

> I really like working with the staff. Our program officer was very good initially about coming out to our schools and getting a feel for what the program was like. We had to negotiate a lot of things about the budget or about the program over the years and she has been very helpful and supportive. She engaged us in the External Partners Advisory Group from the beginning, so we were able to play a role there so I think it has been quite positive. We always had access to [the Challenge's Executive Director] if we wanted to talk to him.

At the same time, many of the partners were frustrated by the lack of time program officers had for on-site school visits. As we noted in the final technical report of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project and earlier in this report, the Challenge was staffed by a small number of people who had responsibility for working with large numbers of partners and schools.[36] It was difficult for staff to find time to work much with partners individually in their schools and this was a problem that the partners understood. Still, they wanted more from the program officers.

While the partners were grateful for the support they received through Challenge events and from Challenge staff, they saw much of the administrative and reporting requirements imposed by the Challenge as burdensome. Several complained that these requirements constrained their work. A nearly universal complaint from the partners was about the mandatory semiannual progress reports. One of the partners said, "Twice a year was too much. We understand why they did it but once a year would have been fine." Another partner also found the reporting to be a great deal of work, but with an up-side:

> I found it not busy work. I found that the reflecting that I had to do was pretty important, so I haven't felt it excessive. It's burdensome, but it's not excessive. There is a meaningful purpose.

Many partners expressed disappointment that they did not receive more feedback than they did on their reports. Partners wanted the feedback to assist in their own development and to help them work more effectively with schools. One partner told us: "People need to feel that what they are being asked to do is valued and evaluated and reviewed. I think a bit more periodic feedback would have helped us." Feedback was important not only to the partners and their organizations but to the schools. This partner summed up the feeling of many other partners:

> We never received any comment on reports. It's nice to be funded and refunded at a higher level, but we have never had feedback that we can take to the schools and say, you see they think you should do more of this or less of that or whatever. The Challenge was so far in the background that it seemed to the school partners that all these grants were simply coming from the external partners.

For some partners, the hands-off monitoring style of the program officers carried some benefits. The absence of close supervision provided a level of autonomy that some partners thought was itself a source of support and impetus for partners' learning and development. This partner explained:

> When we started working with the Annenberg Project, unlike other grants that I've done that are very rigid, very "this is what you do, this is

> what you don't do," the Annenberg Challenge was kind of out there, almost "figure it out, figure out how to do this." Sometimes we scratched our heads and tried to figure out how are we supposed to do this, and meet what Annenberg wants us to do? I wish they would give us more guidance and more leadership. In a sense it was very empowering. You might not have seen it then, but I really, really see it now. It was very empowering.

One final area of support is worth noting. As we discussed earlier in this report, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge was organized around a broad set of principles of collaborative local school development. It specified neither goals for school improvement nor programs or processes for schools and partners to follow. Many, but not all, of the partners we interviewed thought that guidance on school improvement goals and processes was an important source of support and one that was missing for the most part in working with the Challenge. These partners wished that they had had more direction from Annenberg. According to this partner:

> [The Challenge might have] suggested some models for operating. People were pretty much left tabula rasa. A lot of good things came out of it, but I think if you had these research-based 'what works' models..., so that everybody is not reinventing the wheel.

Another partner said:

> I think they would have been well advised to start with a series of seminars on the process of school change, during which they presented or they had skilled teachers present the best state of the art thinking on the process of school development. I mean there is so much out there in terms of research. I would say [it would have helped] if they had given a series of very reflective seminars on the process of school change and got at it from many angles, to get people thoroughly grounded in what's available and not only to come to lectures or something, but to be involved in a series of reflective discussions about it.

Networking

The partners we interviewed considered opportunities to network with schools and with other partners to be important sources of support and development. Although the original intent of creating networks was for schools to learn from each other, several partners explained how working with a variety of schools assisted in their own development. Different schools posed different issues to the partners and challenged them in different ways. To some partners, working with a network of schools, some which might be succeeding and others which might not, provided a source of motivation. Reasoned one partner:

> I think that it's good [to work in a network] because as external partners when something's not working in one school, yet there's celebration in another school, it gives you enough motivation to come back. When things are going poorly, if I were to have to go through some of the crap I went through, and only see it from one school's perspective I would probably have given up a long time ago. Because dark is really dark. So I think that something good is happening here, and it motivates you to keep on trying where it's not good it's more motivating.

The partners we interviewed also saw networking with other partners as an important source of support and development. As mentioned earlier, the partners generally placed high value on opportunities to interact with other partners. They believed that sharing ideas and experiences and engaging in joint problem solving would help them develop the capacity to work more effectively with their schools. They felt that they could be more effective by pooling their collective wisdom about school development.

The partners we interviewed generally wanted greater opportunities for networking with other partners than they experienced with the Challenge. They desired better communication among partners, especially

those with similar network foci. A simple way to have promoted this, suggested one partner, would have been sharing reported findings and accomplishments.

> It would have been fun and interesting for everyone to have received a booklet of sections of peoples' reports, the good sections. Again, something down and dirty, to cut out two pages of our report on teacher collaboration and there are three pages of somebody else's or a half of a paragraph. A sense of what other people were doing, and how they stack up with other people. It would not have been expensive or complicated to do.

A Supportive Central Office

A third source of support that Annenberg partners considered vital to their work with schools was the CPS central office. They understood well that the central office could be a crucial source of support for local school development by streamlining administrative procedures and by developing programs and policies that were consistent with, even enabling of, local improvement efforts. While a school system's central office could serve as a source of support, it could also be an obstacle. For most of the partners we interviewed, the CPS central office was seen as an impediment to their work to promote local school improvement.

Nearly every partner we interviewed had negative things to say about the CPS central office and how it complicated and failed to support their work. Their complaints focused on a number of different policies and procedures ranging from the uncertain and unsteady nature of decision-making to what they considered an overemphasis on standardized testing. We identified such policies and procedures as "countervailing system forces" in our 2000 report on external partners.[37] Our last interviews with the partners in 2001 revealed that these matters remained of serious concern through the end of the Challenge.

Partners spoke at length about the challenges of processing financial transactions through the central office. One partner brought to the interview a two-inch thick folder of paperwork she had collected from one simple transaction. Another partner told us: "There are bureaucratic problems, for just something as simple as loading the money. All money that we use to pay for an extended day or parent mentors, or career service, or office staff extended hours has to go through the Board, and that has never gone well." Another partner said: "To change anything, the lines were so ridiculous, the requirements, that it wouldn't get done for months and we would lose out."

One very common complaint, voiced here by one partner, was the changing nature of central office directives to the schools:

> If [they] could get their act together. There are so many last minute mandates that come down, or we will plan something and then all of a sudden testing time has changed. The whole process of getting approved to visit. Sometimes some schools seem to be right on top of it and other schools miss their window of opportunity because they couldn't get permission from the district to do a field trip in time or something like that. If they want to implement something, do it and give it time to work and do it right and don't keep changing every two or three years.

Some partners complained about the disruption to their programs or plans by the central office. One partner provided this particular example:

> There is always the constant kind of pressure or tension between the practices that we are helping people to employ, and then these directives that they are being given from the board and the central office. There is not any level in the school where that is not felt. The principals in particular are aware of this, but the literacy facilitator and teachers can know that it's one way..., then the board comes along and gives them something that looks similar and they call it the same thing. They give them directives about how to carry it out that are totally antithetical to the way that it should be carried out yet they have to do it that way because now they are being required to do that. You have this sort of thing going on all the time.

This partner told us about the sweeping effects of central office actions on individual schools:

> There is not this confidence in the central office that it is well meaning, because there are political forces that are contributing to these countervailing things. It ranges from replacing the principals, to wanting to seize greater control, to mandating after-school programs with no thought to putting in these bridge programs in these transition schools. Tremendous sums of money are put toward things that no one at a grassroots level has any kind of involvement in. Here you got these 200 schools put on this special reading probation, and what do they do? They send out somebody to the school to kind of do an audit. The person coming to do the audit is not an educator, knows nothing really about schools and you are a victim of them and what they think about your school. Those kinds of things, those are the countervailing things that go on, and people just want to go, "Uggh!" I think it's real strong. I wish I had an answer.

The most disconcerting of all the central office policies to the partners was high stakes testing and probation for schools. All of the partners we interviewed mentioned these policies at one time or another in their interviews. Most partners spoke quite negatively about these policies' effects on their work in schools. One partner observed:

> We do not believe that standardized testing should be the end all that determines everything at the school level. And while we very much believe in collaboration, not competition, in peer assessment and self-assessment, in viewing kids' growth over time through portfolios, that often has to take a back seat for several weeks while [the schools] prepare kids for that test.

Another partner told us:

> If you want to have any kind of creative counter balance to the emphasis on testing and the negative effect, I mean that is such a powerful negative force, over the years in conversations we've had with schools. Even schools that aren't on probation will come to meetings and say, "We can't do that because we have to focus on our reading test scores." You cannot argue with them because if their test scores slip then suddenly you've got this whole horrible situation.

Of the system's probation policy, yet another partner said:

> There is a fear of going on probation and what you have to do to make sure that you don't, that's where we have had problems. "We can't do this, sorry, until February we are in test prep." One school almost shuts down.

Still another partner observed:

> Probation would go hand in hand just with the emphasis and the hyper-sensitivity to and obsession with test scores, and standardized tests and the testing system in Chicago, which is so oppressive for teaching critical thinking and teaching the way those of us who are doing research and working in this field and in Annenberg. That is not a positive condition.

Several partners saw some consolation for working with schools that were not on academic probation. As this partner described:

> In an ideal world the board would be a support, especially in a school system as big as Chicago, not a source of dictates. The advantage of it being so big is that there was really nobody messing with us. Nobody really knew what we were doing.

The partners we interviewed agreed on several forms of assistance that would have aided in their efforts to work with the school system. Partners wanted to form a united front that might be able to soften the effects of some central office policies. One partner observed:

> I think that the getting some kind of agreement with CPS would have been really helpful to support the direction of the Annenberg initiative,

> and to not have these various demands coming. Similar to what the charter schools have, some kind of waiver of some sort.

These partners thought that an intermediary organization, such as the Challenge, could serve as a liaison or a buffer, or challenge CPS in situations where its policies threatened their work at the school level. One of the partners we interviewed expressed a disappointment shared by others that the Challenge did not do more:

> It would have been great if somehow Annenberg had been able to establish a really wonderful working relationship with the Board. I think that would be the single one thing. "Yes, you are an Annenberg school. Yes, you can be excused from this. You can have leeway. You want to do this, then we will bend our rules a little bit." So that there could be so much flexibility to do things. A lot more could have happened.

VI. On the Future of External Partners as Agents of School Improvement

Each of the Annenberg partners we studied spent five or six years working with their networks' schools. When we interviewed them for the last time in 2001, we asked them to draw on their experiences and tell us what they believed external partners could contribute to school improvement in the years to come. In this last section we discuss the roles that Annenberg partners thought external partners could perform to promote school improvement and their sense that for all the time they spent working with schools, for their successes and failures, they emerged from the Challenge with greater capacity to serve schools in the future.

In its initial request for proposals, the Chicago Challenge laid out a number of possible functions of external partners that included "brokering outside resources, providing coalition/networking support, organizing community involvement and advocating on behalf of the schools."[38] Although they didn't always use the same language when describing the contributions they thought external partners could make, the partners we interviewed were clear in their collective belief that external partners could play key roles in promoting school improvement. Referring to the problems that many schools face in trying to improve, even if they have abundant resources, one Annenberg partner summed up the contributions that partners can make this way:

> This "physician heal thyself" attitude is a tough thing to do. I think you can say to a school "Here is $2 million additional dollars. Do what you have to do to get yourself to here." Everybody [in a school] is already involved full-time. Who is going to take the time to plan, hire people, manage $2 million dollars in a reasonable fashion?

Among those we interviewed, external partners were the answer.

Roles External Partners Can Play

Despite the differences in their organizational types, their previous work with schools, and the foci of their network activity, the partners we studied largely agreed that external partners could perform several important roles to promote school improvement. These roles included (a) helping schools create a focused vision to guide their development efforts, (b) providing external expertise and sharing it with schools through professional development activities, (c) connecting schools to external resources to support school development, and (d) advocating for their schools and helping to buffer them from outside forces that might compromise their improvement efforts. The partners we interviewed did not claim that they had been particularly successful in performing each of these roles. Instead, they saw promise for partner contributions in each of these areas.

Creating a Vision for School Improvement

First and foremost, every partner with whom we spoke described creating a vision as one of the primary roles external partners could perform to promote school improvement. The partners spoke about how they tried to bring to their network schools an outside perspective, a focus, and a view of what the school might look like in the future that school personnel usually found difficult to imagine on their own. Partners often spoke of their role as a catalyst to bring new ideas and perspectives to schools, create an imperative for schools to act upon those ideas and perspectives, and sustain that imperative over time.

For example, one partner observed that it was very important to school development to have "some outside ideas, some exposure to [new] ideas, and somebody who's going to convene people around those ideas." This partner argued that bringing new ideas

into schools and convening people around them was "not going to happen spontaneously." It required guidance and resources, which external partners could provide. Another partner put it this way:

> An external partner can serve as a catalyst and a change agent in a school, [an] external impact on a closed system. If the intention is to open up the system to new ideas you have to have something that disrupts the equilibrium, an external variable will at least shift the pattern in the school. If it can also shift it in a way that helps the school focus on what it is trying to accomplish, then that's better. It introduces, at least potentially, a kind of permission to try something new that changes the politics of the school. It gives everybody permission to act a different way.

In particular, the partners we interviewed thought that external partners could offer schools a long-term vision of what they could strive to become. Partners spoke of school personnel as being understandably preoccupied with immediate concerns, but they observed that by coming into a school from the outside, an external partner could offer a broader, more future-oriented perspective than simply getting through the day. Reflecting this view, a partner explained:

> Schools do not strategize. They are just responding to the immediate. They are not really capable of long-term vision. I think an external partner can say "Okay, we are at this point. We need to take it to this point." And [a partner] can monitor that. Whereas the schools, [they can't do that], unless they can get out of that putting out fires everyday mentality.

Partners we interviewed believed not only that external partners could bring new ideas for school improvement, they thought that external partners could serve as sources of support for putting those ideas into practice. One partner described an example of the kind of support an external partner can bring:

> You need somebody who is going to be free from the constraints of the system. [In] any of our three schools right now, everybody in those schools is stretched beyond the limit, absolutely totally stretched. So those who have reached a sense of our vision are just going to be so impeded by anything else that they have to do, and so having somebody [like a partner], you can come in and catalyze things.

Providing External Expertise

Most partners saw their schools as places full of hard-working people who were trying their best to improve but had limited knowledge about what to do differently. One of the partners we interviewed observed: "Many times the schools themselves are doing the best they can. If they could do things differently they would." Most partners saw the provision of external expertise as a crucial role for external partners. One of the partners explained it this way:

> External partners are really vital because they are a whole other source of consciousness. They do a lot of the work and training, and they are very connected to a lot of current thinking in education. A lot of them come from universities, so they are very well read and they go to conferences a lot. They network and they are pretty well informed about some of the best stuff. Some have based their whole careers on being school developers, so they are specialty people, and the school is not about to take this on themselves.

One partner explained an advantage that most partners have is their ability to identify the programs and practices that have the greatest potential for success:

> I think that the quality of the programming, the 'bang for the buck' that you are going to get is on average going to be better coming from [external partners] because [they] have the time and the resources and the human capacity to really focus on what is out there that's really

> working and be selective about bringing it to the schools based on the actual outcomes of those programs.

Several partners considered it most effective if partners brought expertise that was absent in a school rather than duplicate expertise already present. Looking at this issue from a school's perspective, one of the partners we interviewed made the point this way: "If you are working with somebody externally, it just makes more sense if you choose a partner that has expertise that is not in the school. I think [the partner can] add a lot of value that [way]."

Connecting Schools to External Resources

In addition to expertise, the partners we interviewed believed that external partners could provide schools with another valuable resource—the ability to help them make connections to other organizations, groups, and individuals outside of the schools' own purview. Through these connections, schools might be able to gain access to new ideas and leverage additional financial, material, human, and political resources to support development.

One type of connection that several partners thought could be provided was to link schools with other schools through networks. Some partners saw great potential in developing networks to diffuse information and resources among the schools. As one partner told us:

> The schools getting together, they don't do that on their own. They need someone to help them come together to bring the whole group of schools these outside ideas, this additional vision. The schools can't manage that networking on their own.

Networking was seen by a number of partners as a way to pool resources, to expose schools to ideas and information that they themselves lacked. For example, one partner we interviewed portrayed these benefits this way:

> [Schools can] draw on each other's strengths. [They] can compliment each other in ways that a smaller group or smaller number of people working in one institution can't. And that goes for lots of different things, ideas, energy. One school might have a stronger principal, might have a stronger LSC, stronger parent group so that they have a lot of ideas on how to work with those groups that those other schools might not.

Some partners saw that building connections among schools had the additional benefit of creating a new sense of accountability. The joint work that schools do with one another and with their partners might create a sense of mutual responsibility and obligation to act in good faith upon the ideas they develop together and the decisions they make together. One partner observed:

> It helps keep the schools accountable to one another, to what they've decided, to what they say they're going to do, and so they come together and they talk about it and they argue about it and share ideas, and if they didn't have that process to go through I think that it would be too easy to get sloppy.

The community-based partners we interviewed pointed to the role that external partners could play to connect schools to their local communities, infusing "community dynamics" into the schools. According to these partners, such connections can have multiple benefits. These benefits include developing greater community understanding of and support for schools, helping schools better understand the children and communities they serve, and linking schools with potentially valuable human, political, and material resources. Many of the partners we interviewed saw their schools as relatively disconnected from their communities. As one community-based partner observed, "I don't think most of our schools act at a community level." Several partners saw these connections as having benefits for communities as well.

Put simply, stronger schools promote stronger communities. One of the partners reflected:

> An external partner in this case is a very constructive force for change that I think can be an asset to that community that you belong to. It can give you a community you belong to that is stronger than what you can do on your own, and it brings different kinds of resources into the system.

Advocacy and Buffering

The Annenberg partners we interviewed also believed that external partners could be advocates who worked on behalf of their schools with various outside agencies. External partners could serve as buffers that might help schools stay the course in their development efforts and to maintain the vision that partners helped schools to develop. As one of the partners we interviewed observed, "School change is going to happen slowly, and it's going to get disrupted by all kinds of stuff." Even as they said they needed buffers themselves, most of the partners thought that they could help schools weather the disruptions caused by administrative changes, teacher turnover, and changing policies and procedures from the CPS Central Office.

Partners saw "outside" status as being particularly advantageous to external partners, providing them the leeway to act when schools themselves might be constrained politically. As one partner described:

> There's that helpful guardianship, the buffering, being able to intervene in places where people cannot. The idea of the partner not being connected to the school, it helps a lot. That the relationship brings both safety and safety to take a risk.

Enhanced Capacity to Serve

Beyond their observations about the roles that external partners could play to promote school improvement, the partners we interviewed saw themselves as better able to serve schools in the future because of what they had learned from working in the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. The partners claimed to have developed a great deal during their five or six years of work and they told us that they planned to use their new knowledge and skills as they moved into their post-Annenberg work. Their reflections on their learning and development suggest that they saw themselves as a legacy of sorts of the Challenge—a stronger, more experienced, more capable resource for school improvement in Chicago.

After years of work with their schools, the Annenberg partners we interviewed told us that while their overall vision of strong schools and their goals for school improvement remained consistent, most were not able to foresee the exact course they needed to take to achieve their goals. Their routes included numerous detours, obstacles, and surprises. And it was in their encounters with problems that the partners' found the impetus for their own learning and development, and, according to the partners, for improving their work with schools. Time after time, this theme was replayed in the interviews.

When they spoke of their own development, those partners that had worked with schools before the Challenge said they had learned to sharpen their foci or add new dimensions to their partnering. Most did not report great changes in their overall philosophy or direction. They talked about being "more intentional, more focused" on the same mission, or changing the way that they delivered professional development, but the focus of that development remained intact. Several of these partners came to recognize the power of taking teachers and school administrators to visit "model" schools and classrooms as a strategy for improvement.

By contrast, those partners that had not worked with schools in long-term partnerships before Annenberg thought that the experience had profoundly changed their organizations and their relationships with schools. These partners, all from the cultural institutions and neighborhood groups, claimed to have learned a great deal about working with schools. As a result some claimed to have shifted their approach from addressing community concerns "from the outside-in" to working "from the inside-out," becoming more directly involved with teachers and their professional development. They said they

learned more about how to motivate teacher participation in school improvement.

While one of the primary sources of learning and development was their day-to-day experiences working with schools, many partners established formal means of feedback and evaluation that also served as sources of learning. More than half of the partners we interviewed hired outside evaluators and all conducted some form of internal evaluation. Most commonly, they used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to assess teacher, parent, and student engagement in their school improvement efforts. They also used data, such as test scores, attendance rates, and dropout rates. They tallied tangible changes, such as books circulated in literacy programs, assessments completed, and numbers of teachers attending professional development sessions or working with classroom consultants. They conducted observations of teachers at work, in class, or in meetings. Several engaged the school staff as reflective partners in their evaluation efforts by having them make formal public presentations, conduct school or network self-assessments, create and review portfolios, and present poster sessions on their activities.

One partner described how it employed a variety of evaluative strategies:

> We're constantly monitoring how many teachers are participating in professional development. We are doing follow up with them. We're watching the scores; we're looking at participation in community service. So we're all sort of constantly doing our own self-monitoring.

Another partner made use of several sources of data from inside and outside its schools:

> Test scores, moving off the bottom quartile, mobility rate, attendance rates, school climate, we have several measures of that. We use the Consortium data. We have our own internal assessment of school climate. We survey and we will ask principals about changing teaching behavior, like, "How many teachers are using cooperative learning? How many teachers are considering developmental pathways?" And things like that.

Several partners described the ways they learned about their own effectiveness from the assessments they used with their schools and teachers. One partner told us:

> When the schools do a self-study, we help them look at the data and analyze what they've achieved and what they haven't achieved. It's also a pretty strong information for us about what we've accomplished with them, and where we are road blocked, and where we've needed to strengthen what we do.

Another partner described:

> We set up a process of visiting a classroom and then within a day or two, having a debriefing with the teacher to talk about what we have observed and where the teacher can go next with this, and we type up all of our notes. We are getting a very good picture of where [our initiative is] right now, and where the strengths and limitations are, and where it needs to go next. So, as far as the classroom process is concerned, that's the kind of evaluation we are doing now.

Partners also had their own internal processes for evaluating their work with schools. One partner said:

> We have done some formal retreats ourselves. Twice a year, we systematically say, "This is what we are doing. This is what we are finding. This is what we like. This is what we don't like." And moving from that perspective. Then we've had facilitators come in to help us through that process.

Another partner described an involved self-assessment process that included internal and school-based evaluation:

> [There is a quarterly meeting at our organization] and it's open season for your projects there.

> People can ask you why you are doing what, and what was successful and what wasn't. We have all day staff meetings where we basically analyze and strategize. We have them once a quarter, and then there is a summer retreat. We also get an awful lot of analysis and feedback from the schools themselves. We have a lot of meetings with our constituents. We feel very strongly that after we do something people will give immediate feedback, we will debrief.

Finally, several of the partners credited the Chicago Annenberg Challenge for creating a context conducive to partner development:

> I think the most positive, and this has been significantly positive about Annenberg, is that that they have really have been partners in mission. They have allowed this to be an ongoing learning exchange. I think Annenberg being a real partner in mission has allowed us to redesign [our work with schools] as it needed to be, to kind of learn from where things were going. I think the fact that Annenberg was open to saying we will trust you to figure out what is needed and to experiment with that instead of saying, well if you weren't investing in reducing class size then you are not a real network or whatever. That has really allowed and encouraged some experimentation and innovation.

Another partner put it this way:

> The things that have turned out to be transformational are things that we only conceived of midstream, and the fact that Annenberg has been willing to support that and that it has been a six-year development process have been a big advantage, because frankly I think if we had to accomplish this in two or three years it never could have happened. It took two or three years just to get people knowing each other well enough to be willing to work together.

VII. Summary and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this report was to give voice to the insights and perspectives of a sample of Chicago Annenberg external partners and to convey what they believed that they learned from working in schools about their improvement. We began this report by introducing Annenberg's external partners and the foci of their work. We also described the various contexts in which they worked to promote school improvement.

The primary sections of this report focused on what partners believed they learned about promoting school improvement, what support they thought they needed to work effectively with schools, and what they thought external partners could contribute to school improvement in the future. The partners we studied stressed the importance of four major factors in promoting school improvement—leadership, communication and trust, coherence and coordination, and adequate and sustained resources. They pointed to the importance of professional support, networking, and a supportive central office in their own work with schools. The partners we studied believed that external partners could play a number of important roles in supporting school improvement in the years to come. They considered external partners to be important sources of vision and impetus for school improvement. They saw them as external sources of expertise. And, they believed that partners could serve as advocates and buffers to protect and sustain local initiative. Finally, these partners pointed to their own learning and development during the course of their work with Annenberg schools, concluding that they garnered an enhanced capacity to serve schools better in the future.

We noted in the methodology sidebar in Part I that this is a report based on self-reports and perceptions of the partners we studied. We mentioned that, as a whole, all of the external partners receiving Annenberg grants tallied more than 200 years of experience working with schools. Our sample of 19 partners spent a cumulated total of nearly 100 years working with schools. While we did not collect data to directly corroborate what they told us, the partners' perspectives on working with schools are quite consistent with data we collected in other strands of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project and reported in its various technical reports.[39] Their perspectives are also quite consistent with the literature on school change that we cited in those reports.

If nothing else, this report helps us understand better the individuals and organizations that worked long and hard as Annenberg partners on behalf of school improvement. However right or wrong they may be in their observations and interpretations, however effective or ineffective they may have been in their work, their ideas and insights are useful for understanding how those working with schools "on the ground" see the task of school improvement and for the role of partners to promote improvement in the future.

Endnotes

[1] Hallet, Chapman, and Ayers (1995). See also Sconzert, Shipps, and Smylie (1998).

[2] See Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[3] See Shipps and Sconzert with Swyers (1999b). See also the Chicago Challenge's directors of grants and project records.

[4] Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[5] See Smylie et al. (1998), Wenzel et al. (2001), Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[6] These strategies are described in greater detail in Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[7] Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[8] Bullough and Kauchak (1997), Lieberman and Grolnick (1996), Pennell and Firestone (1996).

[9] Annenberg Institute for School Reform (1998), page 8.

[10] Shipps et al. (1999b).

[11] Annenberg Institute for School Reform (1998), pp. 5-6.

[12] More detailed information about the Challenge's grant making can be found in Shipps et al. (1999b).

13 More detailed information about the amounts of money distributed by the Challenge can be found in Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[14] Among the schools in the project's field research sample, the average annual budget in 1999 was approximately $3,810,000. See Newmann and Sconzert (2000) and Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[15] See also Smylie et al. (1998).

[16] For more information on school reform in Chicago, see Shipps, Kahne, and Smylie (1999a), Bryk et al. (1998), and Hess (1991, 1993). For a detailed analysis of the influence of Chicago school reform on the development of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, see Shipps et al. (1999b).

[17] Wenzel et al. (2001).

[18] Wenzel et al. (2001).

[19] Timar and Kirp (1987).

[20] Fullan (2001); Newmann and Wehlage (1995); Smylie, Conley, and Marks (2002).

[21] Hall and Hord (1987).

[22] Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[23] The methodology by which these measures were constructed and analyzed is explained in detail in Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[24] Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[25] Wenzel et al. (2001).

[26] Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[27] See also Wenzel et al. (2001).

[28] Newmann and Sconzert (2000), p. 53.

[29] Smylie et al. (1998).

[30] Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[31] See Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[32] Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk (2001) document the academic benefits that schools achieve from coherent instructional programs.

[33] Bryk et al. (1998).

[34] For a more indepth discussion of lack of time for professional development and school improvement in the Chicago Public Schools, see Smith (2000).

[35] See also Smylie and Wenzel (2003) for a more indepth discussion of human and social resource capacities in Chicago Annenberg schools.

[36] Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

[37] Newmann and Sconzert (2000).

[38] Hallet et al. (1995).

[39] See Smylie and Wenzel (2003).

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This report reflects the interpretations of its authors. Although the Consortium assisted in the development of this research, no formal endorsement by its Steering Committee members, their organizations, or the Consortium should be assumed.

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The Consortium on Chicago School Research aims to conduct research of high technical quality that can inform and assess policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools. By broadly engaging local leadership in our work, and presenting our findings to diverse audiences, we seek to expand communication between researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. The Consortium encourages the use of research in policy action, but does not argue for particular policies or programs. Rather, we believe that good policy is most likely to result from a genuine competition of ideas informed by the best evidence that can be obtained.

Founded in 1990, the Consortium is located at the University of Chicago.

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Improving Chicago's Schools

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

1. **Outcomes for students.** Change in academic achievement, including basic skills and higher levels of learning. Also change in social attitudes, conduct, and engagement among students in Annenberg schools.

2. **School development.** Improvement in key organizational conditions of Annenberg schools that affect student learning. These conditions include school leadership, parent and community partnerships, student-centered learning climate, professional development and community, and quality instruction, as well as the Challenge's organizational themes of time, size, and isolation.

3. **Networks.** How networks, their external partners, and other change mechanisms promote the development of Annenberg schools.

4. **Larger contexts needed to support school development.** How the Challenge develops as an organization to support networks and school development. How the broader institutional contexts of Chicago affect the development and accomplishments of the Challenge.

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