

A Report of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative Research Project

by the



Consortium on Chicago School Research *at the University of Chicago*

# **Professional Communities and Instructional Improvement Practices: A study of small high schools in Chicago**

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January 2006

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### *Additional Information*

For additional information about the formative stages of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative, see other reports from our research update series, including *Chicago High School Redesign Initiative: A Snapshot of the First Year of Implementation*; “Creating Small Schools in Chicago: An Early Look at Implementation and Impact” in *Improving Schools*, November 2004; and *Notes from the Ground: Teachers, Principals, and Students’ Perspectives on the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative, Year Two*. These publications can be located on our website at [www.consortium-chicago.org](http://www.consortium-chicago.org).

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# Executive Summary

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For the past three years, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, in partnership with Mills College in Oakland, California, has been studying the implementation and impact of the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI). Begun in 2001 as a collaborative effort of the Gates Foundation, local Chicago funders, and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), CHSRI is a high school reform effort with the goal of opening approximately three dozen small high schools across the city.

In this report we examine the instructional improvement practices of teacher professional communities in CHSRI schools. Specifically we ask: (1) How and when do teachers in small schools focus on instruction within their professional communities? (2) What resources for instructional improvement do teachers receive from their professional communities? (3) What factors support and constrain teachers' instructional improvement activities? (4) How does the small school context shape instructional improvement activities in professional communities?

Drawing on qualitative fieldwork conducted during the 2004–05 school year, we found that:

- **Teachers engaged in two primary types of activities within their professional communities, supportive and developmental practices.**  
*Supportive practices are interactions and exchanges that help individual teachers address specific tasks, problems, or concerns.* Through these practices teachers provide support to one another for performing routine, everyday classroom responsibilities. *Developmental*

*practices, on the other hand, are interactions and activities through which teachers' professional communities attempt to improve the collective instructional capacity of their members and change core instructional practices.* These practices help teachers improve general skills central to the craft of their profession and address collective instructional goals and concerns.

- **Activities in teachers' professional communities were primarily oriented toward supportive practices, rather than developmental practices.**

Most discussions about instruction happened informally between pairs of teachers and provided short-term assistance with things such as problematic student behavior or what content to cover in class. Although there were some exceptions, teachers rarely used group meetings to discuss systemic aspects of core instructional practices or to engage in sustained, long-term efforts to improve their instructional practices.

- **Teachers reported that the daily demands of teaching and other school-related responsibilities competed with, and often distracted from a more systematic and sustained developmental focus on instructional improvement.**

Though teachers recognized the value of, and desired regular collective discussion and activities related to instructional development, they rarely initiated or organized such activities. According to teachers, the day-to-day responsibilities of teaching take attention and time away from a focus on developmental activities. As a result, they infrequently addressed instructional issues in a systematic or sustained way within teacher teams.

- **In one school, clear instructional priorities and strong leadership helped facilitate a developmental focus on instructional improvement.**

Efforts to collectively improve instructional practices were unlikely to happen spontaneously. However, such activities were facilitated by well-defined instructional priorities and explicit efforts to lead and coordinate them. This was especially evident in one school where the principal and lead teacher initiated recurring discussions and activities around developing core instructional practices.

- **Small school contexts may both enable and constrain the development of professional communities.**

Small schools do not necessarily increase teachers' ability to focus on instructional improvement. On the one hand, small schools seem to improve collegiality between teachers and encourage collaboration. This can help teachers engage in informal, supportive practices. At the same time however, teachers in small schools reported having extremely demanding

schedules and needing to take on increased responsibilities. This heavy workload can make it difficult for teachers to prioritize and focus collectively on developing instruction.

Our findings raise several questions for schools, CPS, and CHSRI to consider as they develop strategies for supporting professional communities in small schools.

- **Is formal time set aside in teacher meetings for discussing instruction?**

Creating common meeting time is a necessary, but insufficient, step toward helping teachers work together on instruction. While regular meeting times bring teachers together, they do not eliminate the pressures and demands that can easily distract teachers from addressing instructional improvement issues. To help establish this focus, teacher teams need to make instructional discussions a regular and formal part of their meetings. Additionally, teams should create routines and processes that ensure sustained and systematic attention to instructional practices.

- **Who is responsible for leading developmental instructional improvement activities in teacher communities?**

Strong leadership is necessary for creating and sustaining a focus on instructional improvement. Schools therefore need to identify both administrative and teacher leaders responsible for directing attention to the systematic improvement of core instructional practices. Taking into consideration the current demands placed on both teachers and principals, this effort should include identifying the specific leadership needs of teacher communities and determining who is best able to fill them.

- **Are principals given support for being instructional leaders?**

Given the influence principals can have on the development of teacher communities, it is important to support principals in their roles as instructional leaders. Such support should include training specifically geared toward helping principals create teacher communities focused on instructional development.

- **What strategies exist to help schools address staffing challenges posed by their small size?**

Helping small schools manage the extra demands created by their size could reduce the tension teachers feel between meeting daily responsibilities and engaging in developmental practices. In addition, it may increase the time principals are able to devote to instructional improvement issues.

# Introduction

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In an effort to improve educational opportunities for high school students in Chicago, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other local funders, in conjunction with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), created the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI). Started in 2001, CHSRI aims to open approximately three dozen small high schools across Chicago. With approximately \$20 million in grants from the Gates Foundation and \$6 million in matching funds from Chicago foundations, CHSRI will convert five large high schools into 15 to 20 small schools, as well as open 12 new (not converted) small high schools. To date, CHSRI has opened a total of 12 converted and 11 new high schools.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, in partnership with Mills College in Oakland, California, has undertaken a series of qualitative and quantitative studies of the implementation and impact of CHSRI as it opens small high schools in Chicago.<sup>1</sup> This report examines the instructional improvement practices of teacher professional communities in small schools. Below, we discuss the questions and framework that guided this work.

## Small Schools and Professional Communities

Small school proponents argue that small learning communities may help improve instruction by creating strong and vibrant teacher professional communities focused on teaching and student learning. This view rests on three beliefs about the benefits of small schools. First, proponents point out that small schools can help foster collegial relationships among teachers that will encourage collaboration and the sharing of instructional practices.<sup>2</sup> In addition small learning communities make it easier to establish collective norms about quality instruction and expectations for student achievement.<sup>3</sup> Finally, small teacher

and student populations allow teachers to know students better and personalize their instructional approach.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier Consortium research on CHSRI schools seems to support these views. On survey measures, teachers in CHSRI schools had statistically significantly higher perceptions of trust and collaboration between colleagues than teachers from non-CHSRI schools.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they were more likely to discuss instruction and student learning with each other as well as share a commitment to school improvement for students' academic benefit.<sup>6</sup> Finally, interviews with CHSRI teachers suggested that small school environments help to create collegial professional communities and facilitate discussions about teaching and students.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these findings, other recent studies have shown that small learning environments do not always improve the instructional focus of teacher communities or alter classroom practices. For example, initiatives to create small learning communities in Philadelphia and Cincinnati schools improved the communal culture of teacher communities, but alone did little to improve their instructional focus.<sup>8</sup> Even when small schools help increase discussions about

instruction, this does not always lead to changes in professional practice and teaching.<sup>9</sup>

Collectively, this research suggests that while small schools may strengthen professional communities, they do not inevitably create communities engaged in instructional improvement. How and when do teachers in small schools focus on instruction in their professional communities? What factors support and constrain teachers' instructional improvement activities? And how do small schools shape the activities of teachers within their professional communities? To answer these questions we use a framework for examining professional communities developed from Consortium studies of school development.

### **What Is Professional Community?**

Through extensive, in-depth studies of Chicago's public schools, the Consortium has compiled compelling evidence demonstrating the importance of teacher professional community for school development.<sup>10</sup> Professional community refers to the interactions and activities among teachers focused on improving student learning and teaching.<sup>11</sup> In this study we focus only on those interactions that take place within schools. We examine groups of teachers with clear collective identities such as grade-level teams, as well as informal teacher exchanges.

By working collectively to improve instruction, teachers begin to develop mutual trust and engage in open dialogue about their practice.<sup>12</sup> Such dialogue helps to deprivatize teachers' work, connecting them to the experiences, knowledge, and support of the larger school community.<sup>13</sup> In the process, schools develop a core set of values and norms about teaching and student learning that will assist them in identifying meaningful goals for improvement.

There are three key elements that contribute to strong professional communities in schools. First, teachers in strong professional communities are highly collaborative. They exchange information about what they have learned from professional experience, research, and training as well as work together to improve practices. Second, teachers in strong communities also engage in reflective dialogue about their instructional practices and assumptions regard-

ing student learning. These discussions are an important source of learning outside of formal professional development opportunities. In addition, they can serve as a tool for monitoring progress toward instructional goals. Finally, collective responsibility permeates strong professional communities. Teachers develop a sense of accountability and responsibility for adult and student learning. They are committed to their colleagues' growth as well as their own, and believe that all faculty are responsible for student academic achievement.

Knowing whether teachers engage in these three sets of practices, however, only provides a general sense of the strength and depth of professional community in schools. It is equally important to know the social, normative, and professional benefits that communities provide. Such benefits are rooted in the specific content of these practices and the context in which they take place.<sup>14</sup> How a group of teachers collaborate, what they collaborate on, and when they do so determines the actual resources teachers derive from, and the meaning they attach to collaboration. It is this aspect of professional community that serves as the focus of our study.

### **How We Did the Study**

To capture the details of the content and context of interactions within professional communities, we used qualitative research methods to document (1) teachers' informal and formal discussions about instruction, (2) instructional improvement activities in schools, and (3) teachers' views about instructional development. This research does not attempt to make any generalizations about the quality of professional communities in CHSRI schools or compare them to communities in similar Chicago high schools. Such issues are best addressed through large-scale analysis of the Consortium's teacher and principal surveys. Rather, we describe the processes that shape the focus and potential instructional impact of professional communities.

We conducted fieldwork for this study during the 2004-05 school year in seven CHSRI schools. Our sample reflects the diversity of CHSRI schools in

terms of when the schools were launched, the number of special education students in schools, and the eighth-grade ITBS scores of incoming freshmen. Five of the schools enrolled primarily African-American students, one enrolled primarily Latino students, and one enrolled a racially mixed population with black and Latino students.

This research was carried out in two phases. During the first phase, we visited six schools, interviewing the principal and four to five teachers in each school about several issues, including instructional improvement goals and activities, formal and informal opportunities for teacher learning, standardized tests and accountability, views regarding changes in teaching, and the perceived challenges of instructional development. We also observed one to two staff meetings at each school. Finally, we interviewed two CHSRI staff members and three Area Instructional Officers from CPS about the supports they provide and their perceptions of the schools' development.

During the second phase of our research we conducted focused studies of professional communities in two schools from the first phase. We also studied a third new school that was not part of the first research phase. In each, we interviewed the principal about teacher teams that were meeting in their school and the instructional improvement activities in which they were engaged. We then attended the meetings of at least two teacher teams in each school over a four-month period, paying particular attention to instructional improvement goals, discussions, and activities. In each school one team that we observed was developing an action research project with the support of the CHSRI staff.<sup>15</sup> The other teams were grade-level or departmental teams recommend-

ed by the principal because they were either working on an instructional improvement project or were a good example of a high functioning group. Teacher teams met approximately once a week. Although there were a few exceptions, we attended these meetings regularly. Finally, we interviewed four to eight teacher team members from each school about their discussions with colleagues regarding students and teaching practices as well as their perceptions of their school's improvement efforts. Over both phases of our field work in seven schools, we conducted a total of 59 interviews and observed 47 staff meetings.

We supplemented this research with observations of professional development workshops on action research sponsored by the CHSRI staff. In addition, we attended consultations conducted by CHSRI staff to give individualized support to schools. We also attended CHSRI's monthly principal meetings, which supplied information on the support and resources given to schools by CPS and CHSRI. Finally, throughout the year we collected and reviewed several documents, including schools' written plans for advancing academic achievement, handouts from professional development workshops, written descriptions of schools' action research plans, and other materials relating to instructional development.

In the next two sections we present findings from our research. Part I identifies and describes the two primary types of practices that we observed in teacher communities, as well as some of the challenges associated with them. Part II considers how small school contexts may shape teachers' activities within professional communities. Finally, we end the report in Part III by discussing the implications of our findings for supporting teacher professional communities in CHSRI schools.

## Part I

# Supportive and Developmental Practices

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In theory, strong professional communities should be an important resource for teachers in their efforts to improve instruction. The benefits that professional communities provide, however, depend on the specific activities in which teachers engage. Through our fieldwork in CHSRI schools, we identified two types of activities within professional communities for supporting instruction: supportive and developmental practices. *Supportive practices* are interactions through which teachers exchange information, advice, and approaches for addressing specific tasks, problems, or concerns. Through these exchanges teachers support each other in performing their routine classroom responsibilities. *Developmental practices*, on the other hand, are interactions and activities through which teacher communities attempt to improve the collective instructional capacity of their members and change classroom practices. These practices include questioning the effectiveness of teaching routines, sharing student work to identify possible areas for instructional improvement, developing plans for improvement, and implementing and monitoring improvement strategies.

Supportive and developmental practices can overlap in terms of their substantive focus. For instance, some of the supportive practices we observed involved individual teachers receiving help from colleagues with differentiating instruction for specific struggling students. Teachers also described developmental practices related to differentiated instruction, such as collective discussions about how learning centers, double periods, and other arrangements could help them effectively address multiple student learning needs. However, while supportive and developmental practices can both be used to address a wide and overlapping range of instructional issues, they differ significantly from one another in terms of their purpose, scope, and potential impact on a school's overall instructional program.

Supportive practices are oriented toward providing teachers with practical support for performing and managing the tasks inherent to their jobs. Developmental practices, on the other hand, aim to help teachers improve general skills central to the craft of their profession. Supportive practices occur through informal interactions between individual teachers or spontaneous and unstructured group conversations. In contrast, developmental activities happen within collective and structured contexts. Supportive practices also tend to occur in response to immediate and pressing concerns, and primarily lead to short-term exchanges with little follow-up. Developmental practices are proactive attempts to address systemic concerns within long-term projects involving sustained and regular activities. Finally,

supportive practices facilitate the exchange of disconnected techniques and practices for addressing specific, individual concerns. In doing so, they contribute to isolated improvements and additions to teachers' existing practices. With developmental practices, teachers share information connected to a common focus or problem. These exchanges can lead to fundamental changes in classroom practices across a group of teachers.<sup>16</sup>

Below, we describe the supportive and developmental practices that we observed and learned about in our three case-study schools. We begin by examining the supportive practices within teacher communities and the ways in which they help teachers carry out routine tasks. We then describe the developmental practices we observed in schools, discussing the ways in which they were constrained and the factors in one school which helped facilitate their use.

### Supportive Practices in Schools

Teachers have a myriad of tasks for which they are responsible each day. At minimum they must maintain a productive classroom atmosphere, prepare and deliver units of instruction, and monitor the academic and social progress of their students. In addition, teachers in small schools are frequently

called upon to help with additional tasks outside their classrooms. Teachers readily comment that their profession requires a lot of effort and at times can be stressful:

I'm overwhelmed with the day-to-day. There [are] a lot of things that you're pulled into doing and different directions that aren't teaching. We have meetings just about every day of the week during one of our planning periods. There [are] lesson plan forms that have to be turned in. There [are] call log forms—like any time somebody's absent from my division, I have to call home. We're encouraged, if there [are] any discipline problems, that we call home. Photocopying. There [are] so many little things that you just end up having to do. It's a very fast, very tight day.

Teachers in CHSRI schools often managed the “tight day” and its concomitant pressures by engaging in supportive practices within their professional communities. These practices were mainly used to address student and instructional concerns.

**Supportive vs. Developmental Practices**

| Dimensions                    | Supportive Practices   | Developmental Practices                             |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Focus                         | Supporting routine tasks                                     | Improving instructional capacity                    |
| Context                       | Informal, individual, and group interactions                 | Formal, collective interactions                     |
| Prompts                       | Reactive   | Proactive   |
| Timeframe                     | Short-term solutions   | Long-term projects                                  |
| Type of information exchanged | Disconnected pieces of information about individual problems | Connected sets of information about common problems |
| Depth of change               | Isolated, corrective changes                                 | Systemic, fundamental changes                       |

## Student Issues

Teachers described talking about individual students with one another almost daily, and most of the supportive practices we observed focused on students. At one level, these conversations are a way for teachers to share information about students' behavior, academic performance, and other pertinent issues. Supportive practices help teachers to know their students better as individuals and contribute to the personalized environment of the school.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, conversations about students are an aid for meeting some of the everyday challenges of teaching. For example, they provide information about possible sources of students' behavioral or academic problems. One teacher explained that talking with a colleague about students is a way to

try to figure out is this a student who is really serious about school and they just happen to be struggling in my class in particular, or is this a student who is struggling across the board? If it's just they happen to be struggling in my class in particular, I feel like that's something I can handle just by adjusting my instruction in some way. If it's across the board, I feel like it's something that probably we need to look at as a staff and take a more holistic approach.

Conversations about students also help teachers share and develop strategies for addressing student problems. One teacher told how she was struggling to engage a particular student in her class. After talking with other teachers and counselors she found out that the student had severe disabilities and possibly an attention deficit disorder. This information helped her

change the way that I approach him. Instead of sitting him in the back and just ignoring him . . . I know that he needs to feel busy. [If he doesn't] feel busy with every task that I give, because he may not be able to do every task well, I can move him around students

that can help him, that can serve as tutors for him when I'm in some other part of the room.

Another teacher described changing how she assessed two students to accommodate their particular learning styles. She learned from colleagues that these students

respond really well to projects that contain some sort of art in them, some sort of drawing. They have a hard time writing things out on paper, have a hard time taking tests, so in order to get them to really show if they understand anything it's through drawing and I did that last year and this year with the end of the year project. They've all been more visual instead of writing. Hopefully where they were lacking before in the written work, they'll make up for it in the visual, hands-on project.

In both of these cases, teachers tailored their approaches for addressing students' academic needs through conversations they had with other teachers. Their stories illustrate how such conversations can help teachers respond to the routine challenges of teaching.

## Instructional Issues

Supportive practices also provide assistance with carrying out instructional tasks. For example, teachers often exchanged ideas for new exercises, approaches, and content to cover in classes. Two teachers shared:

I stop in J's classroom quite a bit, and we sit down, and she'll tell me about something that's working really well in her class and give me ideas for what I can do, particularly because I'll [have] those students next year. So how can [I] carry on this idea that she started with, how I can tie into that next year?

I do talk to other teachers to get ideas. Right now I'm sending everybody an email on a project for the last couple of weeks of school, and I don't have any more ideas, and [I'm asking] if they could throw something out there.

Teachers also give one another advice about implementing new or unfamiliar teaching strategies. One teacher told how she will

go and ask teachers for suggestions if I want to get into a new topic area and [get] a little more guidance in terms of how to really make it effective. A lot of time they've done it before, so they can share from their own experience what has worked in the past.

In one particular case, an English teacher wanted to create a unit that would present struggles for civil rights from multiple perspectives. A social studies teacher helped her develop a strategy for accomplishing this by sharing his knowledge of, and experience with, document-based questions. He recalled that

somebody had mentioned [using] document-based questions in [their] classes and Ms. A wasn't sure what those are. You usually use them in social studies, but she thought it might be a technique that she would want to use, and so I sat down with her and explained how they're used in social studies and how they might be able to fit into her unit in class.

Through these exchanges the English teacher learned a new "strategy of doing these document-based questions ... I took that strategy and I changed it to suit what I was doing, so that was helpful."

Finally, teachers reported helping colleagues teach specific content to students by reinforcing the content or skills in their class. For example, in one grade-level teacher meeting a math teacher coordinated with a science teacher to work on graphs and

tables in both of their classes. The science teacher told the math teacher that his students were having trouble reading and making graphs in order to complete assignments in his class. In response, the math teacher offered to spend time covering graphs in her class to help prepare the students for their science work. In another case, a teacher told how he noticed that many of his students in a colleague's biology class were failing and losing interest in the subject. To help motivate their common students, he described how he took his colleague's recent project

and integrated it with a topic for my class. What I thought I was doing was saying to the students, "hey I know you don't value what you're learning in biology because you're failing, but here's how that project is related to this class and how it relates to you. This is why she's having you learn this because that subject matter relates to this particular topic." Having a conversation with another teacher is trying to make a connection for the students.

In short, teachers develop new ideas for classroom activities, get advice on implementing unfamiliar teaching approaches, and reinforce instructional lessons through informal exchanges and collaborations with colleagues. These activities help teachers manage and perform their daily instructional responsibilities.

## **Developmental Practices in Schools**

Almost all CHSRI schools created structures—such as whole-staff, grade-level, and departmental teams—for teachers to regularly work together in groups. Ideally, scheduling meeting time for these teams would not only allow teachers to address administrative issues, but also create a forum for them to collectively discuss instruction and efforts to improve it. In practice, however, the team meetings rarely led to significant engagement in developmental practices.

In this section, we examine the developmental practices occurring in our three case-study schools. First, we describe the difficulties of teachers in two schools to collectively discuss instructional improvement issues. We then present their perspectives on the sources of this difficulty. We conclude this section by discussing how one school was able to engage in sustained developmental practices and the challenges schools face to strengthen these efforts.

### Limited Developmental Practices

Teachers in schools A and B regularly discussed instruction informally with their colleagues, some even did so daily. Yet they reported that discussions about

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*[Teachers] reported that discussions about instruction rarely occurred within grade-level or departmental meetings . . . Group instructional discussions tended to be spontaneous, unstructured, and prompted by individual concerns.*

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instruction rarely occurred within grade-level or instructional meetings. When they did happen, group instructional discussions tended to be spontaneous, unstructured, and prompted by individual concerns, as these three teachers discuss:

Other than deciding if we're going to go to professional development or not, [we do not] usually [discuss instruction in meetings]. Maybe once in a while if somebody asks a question of how would you approach the situation, maybe [we would] get advice from somebody.

Maybe once a month a discussion [about instruction] comes up. In grade-level meetings it comes up about once a month or so . . . Every once in a while in our grade level team meetings, we'll discuss projects that we're doing across the curriculum or share ideas of what we've been doing. We probably didn't do any for the first four or five months that I was here as a grade-level team . . . We've started to do a little bit more, but I'd say the average is still probably about one [instructional discussion] a month for the whole school year.

There's no professional development or really deep conversations about how am I teaching, what are my philosophies on teaching, and how they connect to yours. I think there's room for more of that and there should be more of that, but again I think it's something that happens more informally.

Instead, much of the meeting time was filled with administrative issues. As the head of one department described:

During the course of the school year [instructional discussions] have been more limited, just because of our department times we have to deal with getting orders together. There [are] so many administrative things, disseminating information, that [we have] to take care of. We haven't really had time to sit down and have those more formal conversations about instruction.

A teacher at another school concurred, saying:

It seems like our grade level meetings are more bureaucratic. I'm on the junior-level team and everything on the junior level is pretty much test scores. That's the basis of

our junior year for the student is getting test scores in, making decisions for college, [and] the ACT. Everything is mandated. I haven't seen where we as a grade level have been as proactive with sharing practices in the classroom.

Though infrequent, there were some developmental activities within schools A and B. In both, teachers who went to conferences shared what they learned with colleagues in whole staff meetings. In addition, both schools are trying to improve writing instruction for students and have trained their staff on how to implement writing improvement strategies.

While important, these efforts were nonetheless limited. There was little follow-up with teachers, either at the whole-school level or within smaller teacher groups, on what was being implemented across classrooms, how improvement plans were progressing, or how to further develop improvement efforts. For instance one teacher described how her school's staff, as part of their writing program, needed to have students complete specific types of writing assignments by the end of a particular month. However, she said,

Some people did and people didn't do it. There was never a check to make sure that these things would be turned in to the English teacher ... There was never anything to go back and say "you didn't get to this yet, do you need help," that kind of thing. The plan was to have it all done and it looked good on paper, but the follow-through didn't work.

In sum, there were very few formal and structured discussions in teacher groups around instructional improvement. When instruction was discussed in groups it tended to be informal and geared toward supportive rather than developmental activities. And though there were school-wide efforts to improve instruction, these did not automatically lead to sustained and regular dialogue in smaller teacher teams.

## The Essential Tension(s) of Teacher Communities

In their article on teacher communities, Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth identify what they call the "essential tension of teacher community."<sup>18</sup> For them, this is the pull between a focus on improving professional practice—writing new curriculum, creating new assessments, developing new instructional approaches, etc.—on the one hand, and the continuing intellectual development of teacher—supporting teachers as lifelong students of their subjects and disciplines—on the other. At the center of these two aims, they write, "is a contrast between the promise of direct applicability and the more distant goal of intellectual renewal."<sup>19</sup>

Teachers in the schools we studied, however, described a different tension: balancing a desire for improving professional practice with the pressures of responding to everyday responsibilities. Though developmental practices were rare within teacher communities we studied, most teachers think they are an important part of improving instruction and would like to see them take place more often. Nonetheless, teachers admit that they do little to initiate and organize regular and formal discussions on instructional improvement within their groups. The primary reason they give for not doing so is the centrality of their daily work demands.

Teachers contend that the day-to-day responsibilities of teaching and school life compete with, and detract from developmental activities. For example one teacher recalled how at the beginning of the year, staff in her school discussed strategies for developing their curriculum. These discussions centered on creating a curriculum map, identifying essential content to cover during the year, and helping teachers take advantage of opportunities to create interdisciplinary units with their colleagues. Despite the usefulness of these conversations, she said that they eventually stopped. When asked why, the teacher explained:

I think it's because we get so wrapped up with what we're trying to do in the classrooms that sometimes we don't think about

the bigger picture any more. We started out that way, but then we never really went back to it and that's what happens. I think everyone's just so focused on getting their stuff done and I, myself included. I think that's kind of what happens ... I think we only went back to our curriculum maybe two or three more times. We never went back and said now I'm not doing this any more, I'm doing this. We never really took the initiative to go back.

Similarly a teacher in another school said that discussions about people's general beliefs and perspectives on teaching are rare because

I think we get focused on the day-to-day survival, like "I need an idea to get across this material and strategy, do you have any ideas?" Our conversations are more about that rather than the global belief system.

Thus, teachers' need to focus on meeting classroom responsibilities and other immediate demands takes attention away from thinking about "bigger picture" issues and "global belief systems" and discourages them from engaging in more general and collective discussions about instruction.

Another teacher described how one month her school's staff focused on helping students improve their use of sentence structure and dialogue as part of a school-wide writing improvement plan. She said she noticed "individual motivation" to keep up with the plan but for the most part "the follow up hasn't been there" to make sure tasks are being implemented. When asked why this was the case she said,

I think that we have so many things to cover in our meetings and we have meetings every other day. We've gotten to the point where some people are just burnt out from meetings and again I think part of it is being so new there [are] so many issues, because there [are] not a whole lot of precedents to fall back on. So we had our juniors taking the PSAE, which was huge for the school and that was the focus, getting them as well prepared for those as we can. Professional development that we're mandated to do, attendance issues. It's just there [are] always so many issues [to address] ... that it's hard to really sit down and focus on the smaller things.

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*I think we get focused on the day-to-day survival, like "I need an idea to get across this material and strategy, do you have any ideas?" Our conversations are more about that rather than the global belief system.*

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Instructional tasks, as well as other more general school responsibilities such as accountability requirements for standardized tests and attendance, require significant amounts of time. As the teacher's comment illustrates, these demands limit the time available for addressing issues that are important, if not pressing, such as writing improvement plans.

Because there is not, as one teacher put it, "enough time in the day to get it all done," teachers must prioritize how they spend their time. As would be expected, teachers prioritize more immediate and pressing responsibilities. One new teacher explained that there were few instructional conversations in his meetings because "we're busy. Everybody's just busy. It's the preparation. Once you get to the classroom, that's easy. It's the preparing." In addition, he added as a new teacher he wanted "to be comfortable with what I [am] doing first before I [start] piling all of this other stuff on."

The perception that developmental improvement activities might significantly add to work responsibilities is understandable. Selecting and gathering student work to discuss with colleagues, for instance, is not something teachers might normally do in the course of their day. In addition, organizing and leading discussions, planning follow-up actions, and monitoring progress all require significant amounts of time and labor. Given a choice, it seems few teachers would casually add these additional tasks to their schedule:

I think teachers are really busy for the most part, and yeah there are prep periods and you can use it to relax or grade papers or do one of a million things. Or you can go in and sit around a classroom with kids for 45 minutes [and observe a peer]. And just more often than not the choice is made to do something else instead.<sup>20</sup>

### **Achieving Developmental Practices**

Unlike teachers in schools A and B, teachers in school C regularly engaged in developmental practices. They reported having collective discussions in their staff meetings about a wide range of topics including people's general philosophies on teaching and student learning, the consistency of assessments for students across the curriculum, how their curriculum aligns with state learning standards, writing assignments across the curriculum, and how to meet the learning needs of all students in the school regardless of their abilities. Furthermore, these were not one-time conversations, but issues the staff came back to several times and which they planned to address over the summer and into the next school year.

Yet, teachers in this school, like their colleagues in other schools, expressed that they too felt a tension between performing daily responsibilities and working on general instructional improvement. Their experiences highlight two factors that may help professional communities successfully manage this tension and facilitate developmental practices.

First, a well-defined set of instructional priorities helped structure and focus collective improvement efforts in school C. For example, one of the principal's instructional goals for the year was to

implement a standards-based curriculum. We have a vague understanding of what that is as a group. Different people have a different knowledge base but my hope is that at the end of the year we . . . not even at the end of the year, at the end of this semester, we have at least a common language about what standards-based curriculum looks like and what it will look like at [our school] and then we can shape [it for] the second semester and the subsequent years.

The principal felt this was an important issue to address because the school has a responsibility to help students perform well on standardized tests:

If teachers are teaching in isolation or teaching what they like to teach most, what they teach best, that's not really benefiting the students. The students are not learning what they need to know in order to be successful on [standardized] exams. Not that the exams are the end all, but they are an indicator, and we do have to prepare these kids to compete in the society that we live in. And whether we like it or not, in order to go to college you have to pass standardized exams.

Creating a standards-based curriculum, therefore, was not a random improvement activity. Rather it was strategy for addressing a specific set of student learning needs that the school had identified as important. This particular concern, as well as several others, provided a focus for collective discussions and improvement activities.<sup>21</sup>

Well-defined instructional priorities alone, however, will not lead to developmental practices. We found that developmental practices also require intentional efforts to initiate and organize them. In

school C, sustained, collective instructional improvement activities happened during professional development organized by the principal or lead teacher. Although teachers did spontaneously generate fruitful discussions about instructional improvement issues, they did not engage in regular and systematic improvement activities in group meetings without deliberate coordination.

For example, activities around aligning the curriculum to the standards occurred through a series of professional development workshops organized by the principal. These workshops provided the staff with a structure to talk about their curriculum and how to develop it. The meetings also prompted

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*Well-defined instructional priorities alone, however, will not lead to developmental practices. We found that developmental practices also require intentional efforts to initiate and organize them.*

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teachers to discuss several other related issues. One teacher described how the staff frequently had conversations about general perspectives on teaching and learning during the workshops:

This year the main focus of our professional development has been on standards-based instruction, and so pretty much every time that we talk about that there's some level of debate about [its] value. First of all, what it means, second of all, how valuable it is. We talk about the quality of the standards themselves and whether they're too specific or too broad or how to best use them in planning

our lessons. That always brings about some discussion.

Another teacher commented that she hoped the staff would move beyond simply discussing students' progress, to sharing student work with one another. Although this had not happened as much as she would like to see, she thought they had recently made progress toward this goal by discussing assessments together:

[We are sharing] and looking at our assessments to really see if they are student friendly and really if they hit the higher level thinking skills . . . and are they really consistent with what the PSAE is asking. And it really helped me as a teacher to get some feedback from my colleagues. Is this assessment only assessing literal knowledge? Okay, here are some suggestions that you could use to maybe beef up the assessment where students can apply some of the skills here that you're trying to test them on.

She continued that they started having these discussions

when the principal started. We started having this big discussion on assessment outcomes and standards, because I think we're trying to move somewhat into a standards-based curriculum type format, so we started looking at it that way. Do these assessments address the standards, again are they student friendly? We started with just a series of workshops led by the principal.

Thus, collective activities for improving standards-based instruction happened in school C, not because of spontaneous teacher initiative, but rather through the intentional efforts of the principal to organize professional development around it. These findings illustrate that developmental practices require someone, whether a principal, department chair, or

another teacher leader, to take an active leadership role and initiate and organize teachers' instructional improvement work. In all three schools, if no one took the lead in organizing collective activities, they tended not to happen at all or if they did happen, they were short-term efforts, producing little follow-up or substantial changes.

Daily tasks, then, do not preclude teachers from participating in developmental practices, but may hamper their ability to *lead* them. When organized, teachers participated in collective improvement efforts, even if doing so meant assuming extra work. Teachers were, however, unlikely to organize collective, formal, or sustained efforts to improve instruction in their teacher teams as daily tasks occupied much of their time and attention.

This tension is especially significant for CHSRI schools, given how instructional leadership tends to be distributed within them. Most CHSRI schools were created with the goal of giving teachers many opportunities to assume leadership roles. As a result, several principals interpret instructional leadership primarily as a teacher responsibility. Teachers themselves assume most of the work related to instructional improvement. If principals are only marginally involved in instructional improvement efforts while teachers struggle to balance competing work demands, leadership for encouraging and sustaining developmental activities may be limited in CHSRI schools.<sup>22</sup>

## Part II

# The Benefits and Costs of Small School Contexts

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**A**dvocates of small schools often argue that small learning communities will encourage teachers to work with each other to improve teaching and student learning. In this section we examine this contention by considering the role small school contexts play in shaping the supportive and developmental practices of teacher communities. Our analysis suggests that small schools help create contexts that are conducive for supportive practices, but in which it is challenging to organize developmental practices.

### Encouraging Supportive Practices

Our fieldwork across seven CHSRI schools found that teachers perceive that small schools help create highly personalized and collaborative environments. For instance, many people described developing better and more collegial relationships in small schools:

In a small school, your staff is a lot smaller and you're not teaching with 100 teachers and [so] . . . you see everyone in the meeting and when you're having a meeting you know who's not there. . . So regardless you become closer with these people and . . . definitely there are friendships that are developed.

I did my student teaching at School X on the north side. The English department has 40 teachers. I like the small size [at my current school] because you feel like you know everybody and you develop a professional relationship with people. They know who you are, they know where you're coming from instructionally and philosophically so there aren't as many surprises... That I really like.

Thus, the small school context allowed teachers to get to know more of their colleagues, both personally and professionally, in ways that were difficult to do in larger high schools.

Teachers also reported that a small staff leads to more collaboration:

We've got a very small staff, so there's a much more personal interaction. It's not that it's more friendly, but we really have to cooperate more, because there are so few of us. There's more potential for teaching for instance. I mean if I want to do something with sociology for instance, we have one sociology teacher. That's easy; I just go to her and she teaches all the kids.

Because we have a common prep, all of us have seven periods and that's very hard in traditional high schools to have everybody on staff able to meet at the same time. That doesn't happen in the traditional high schools. That happens in a small school and because of that we can touch bases.

The types of collaborations teachers described taking place in their schools—working together to help students, sharing instructional and student information, and providing professional assistance to one another—are all activities that we observed in our three case-study schools and which we identified as supportive practices. This suggests that small school contexts may help create environments conducive to these practices.<sup>23</sup>

## Constraining Developmental Practices

Small schools seem to also produce conditions that make it difficult for teachers to organize and sustain developmental practices. Because CHSRI schools are generally funded with the same enrollment formula used to allocate resources to all CPS schools, teachers in them reported having large workloads and more daily responsibilities. For instance, CHSRI schools sometimes cover required classes by assigning teachers additional new courses to teach in a given term. One principal explained how in his school,

Probably one of the great challenges of small schools is because you have less personnel... I have several of my teachers teaching three preps...and actually at one time teaching four preps, which is four different classes, and obviously that's a lot.

In addition, programming and scheduling challenges resulting from smaller staffs can lead to oversized classes. A teacher explained,

If you do the math, you say each class, because there are five classes, the numbers are such that it's 28 kids per class, but it doesn't work out because of programming. Some classes have over 30 students in them... We were asking for a second social studies teacher that could teach sociology specifically. That's where we put the most emphasis on the first year of the [school] theme, but the [district school] board said no. Those

students that don't need an additional English or math class, they're in that sociology class. We only have one sociology class, and we have to address that population. Guess what that class has 32, 33 students in there, in small rooms.

Finally, schools have to offer extracurricular activities, sponsor school events, and staff other non-teaching situations. Because of the small number of staff available, school leaders described struggling to cover these responsibilities. One principal observed:

In some cases "small" has worked against us. I need somebody to run a detention program after school and I can't get anyone because no one wants to do it. I bet you if I had 125 people, one person would want to do it.

Teachers described being overwhelmed from needing to assume multiple responsibilities:

Everybody is wearing 100 hats here. In a large high school this person might do the dance committee this time and this person might do this thing. Right now we're it. I mean today for example I'm the detention teacher. A couple of us are homebound teachers. I'm going to be the high school coordinator, I'm on the literacy team... It's a lot of work and you are constantly reinventing the wheel and not only do we have to be the regular teacher, we also have to worry about all of the other stuff that comes with. . . Working together with teachers is sometimes a very good thing and sometimes it's not for our purposes, because I still have things that I need to get done, too.

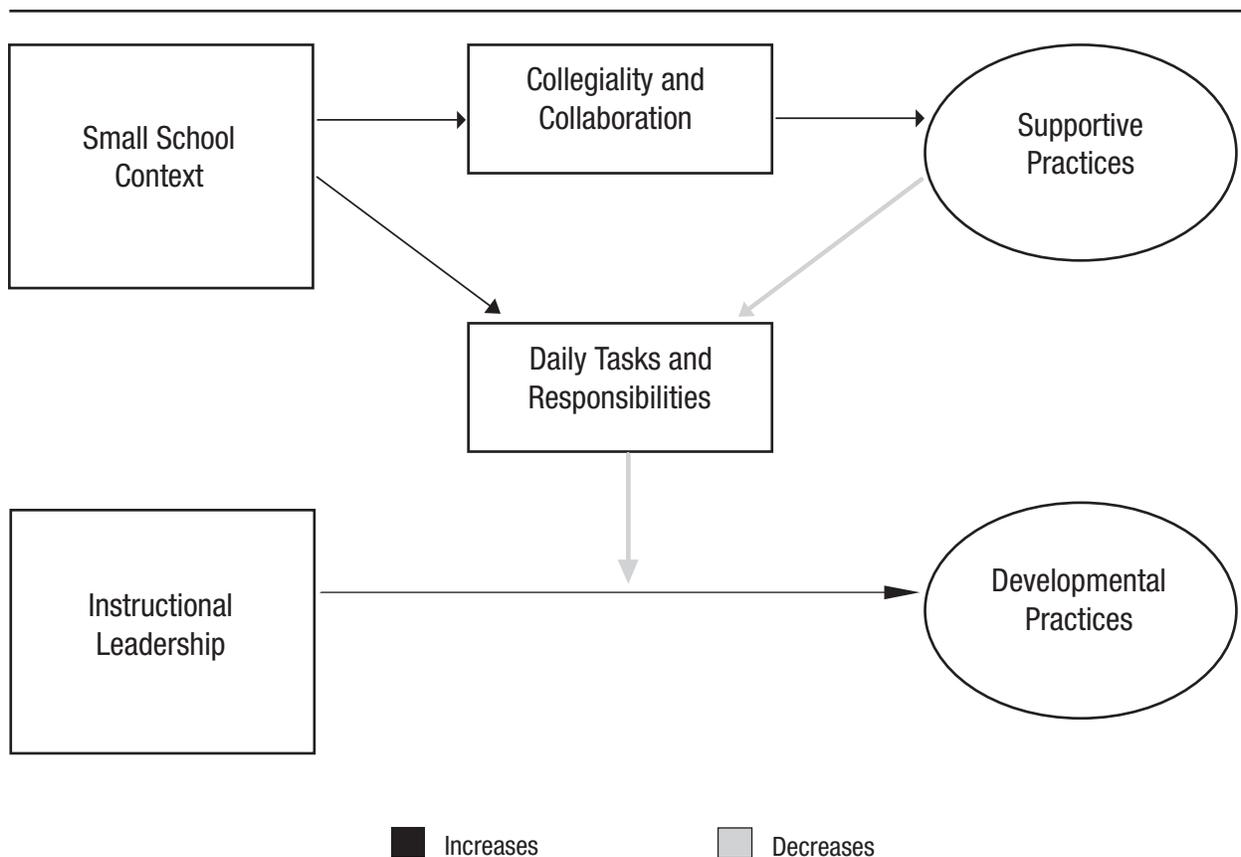
Large workloads have been a problem for teachers in CHSRI schools since the beginning of the initiative.<sup>24</sup> Their experiences mirror those of teachers in

national studies of small schools who reported feeling just as overworked three years into reform as they did during the first year, despite early expectations that teacher capacity issues would begin to improve after the start-up phase.<sup>25</sup> Given these findings, small schools may be challenging environments in which to organize developmental practices.

In sum, small school contexts play a contradictory role in supporting instructional improvement efforts

in teacher professional communities. As Figure 1 illustrates, small schools indirectly help teachers engage in supportive practices such as informal instructional collaboration. Because of large teacher workloads however, small schools may constrain teachers' efforts to engage in developmental practices and systematically change instruction.

**Figure 1: Practices in Teacher Professional Communities**



## Part III

# Conclusion and Implications

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Teachers engage in a variety of interactions and activities in their professional communities, from pairs of teachers discussing individual students to groups of teachers analyzing student work. Within this variation, we found that teachers' activities fall into two broad categories. Supportive practices help teachers address specific problems and challenges associated with their daily classroom responsibilities. In contrast, developmental practices facilitate the collective improvement of core instructional practices. While each type of practice provides important resources, only developmental practices are likely to lead to significant changes in instruction across groups of teachers.

In order to occur, developmental practices require well-defined instructional priorities as well as someone to assume an active leadership role by initiating and organizing teachers' instructional improvement work. Teachers in the schools we studied reported however, that the demands of daily classroom responsibilities often take attention away from a focus on systematic instructional development. This distraction may be further exacerbated by the large workloads teachers experience in small schools, making it challenging for them to assume the duties necessary for leading collective improvement activities.

To support professional communities in small schools, school leaders, CPS, and CHSRI will need to intentionally direct teachers' attention to collective instructional development and help them work together to systematically improve teaching practices. Addressing the following questions may assist in this effort.

- **Is formal time set aside in teacher meetings for discussing instruction?**  
Creating common meeting time is a necessary, but insufficient, step toward helping teachers work together on instruction. While regular meeting times bring teachers together, they do not eliminate the pressures and demands that can easily distract teachers from addressing general instructional improvement issues. To help establish this focus, teacher teams need to make instructional discussions a regular and formal part of their meetings. Additionally, teams should create routines and processes that ensure sustained and systematic attention to instructional practices.
- **Who is responsible for leading developmental instructional improvement activities in teacher communities?**

Strong leadership is necessary for creating and sustaining a focus on instructional improvement. Schools therefore need to identify both administrative and teacher leaders responsible for directing attention to the systematic improvement of core instructional practices. Taking into consideration the current demands placed on both teachers and principals, this effort should include identifying the leadership needs of teacher communities and the individuals best able to fill particular needs.

- **Are principals given support for being instructional leaders?**

Given the important influence principals can have on the development of teacher

communities, it is important to support them in their roles as instructional leaders. Such support could include providing training specifically geared toward helping them create teacher communities focused on instructional development.

- **What strategies exist to manage staffing challenges posed by schools' small size?**

Helping small schools manage the extra demands created by their size could reduce the tension teachers feel between meeting daily responsibilities and engaging in developmental practices. In addition, it may increase the time principals are able to devote to instructional improvement issues.

# Commentary

by

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While offering valuable insights on Chicago's small high schools initiative, this report also contributes to national conversations on high school reform. Whether it involves suburban school leaders organizing teachers to address the underachievement of specific subgroups of students, or large urban districts implementing comprehensive reform models, school improvement depends upon teacher professional communities as an important mechanism for improving instruction. This timely study adds to our understanding of how and under what conditions professional communities are able to contribute to school improvement.

The authors of this report find that teachers are more likely to engage in supportive practices that address daily problems than in developmental activities that lead to collective instructional improvement. This study also identifies the constraints that prevent teacher teams from engaging in developmental activities and outlines possible supports to ensure that the work of teacher professional communities translates into changes in instruction and higher achievement for students. These findings raise broader conceptual and practical questions about how the work of teacher teams is related to other elements of a successful high school, such as school leadership and professional development.

## **Implications for teachers**

School leaders may support the notion of teacher professional community but wonder exactly what a strong professional community looks like at the high school level. By distinguishing between supportive and developmental practices, this study provides teachers with a tool for reflecting upon the effectiveness of existing collaborative teams. It also raises several questions for both researchers and practitioners to consider. For example, what is the balance of activities that characterize a successful team? Do supportive practices need to precede the adoption of developmental practices?

High school teachers are often members of at least two teams—a grade-level team (where they share students but teach different content areas) and a departmental team (where they work in the same discipline but may not have common students). As members of grade-level teams, teachers are likely to focus on ensuring that students are known and feel cared for, easing the social and academic transitions to high school, and building connections across content areas. In contrast, departmental teams need to focus on assessing students' strengths and weaknesses in content areas, identifying topics for reteaching, and, in the long term, modifying curriculum and instruction to ensure that students are capable of advanced

work. Given these differences, should the balance of supportive and developmental practices be different in grade-level and departmental teams?

### **Implications for school leaders**

Leadership is an essential support for teacher professional communities. As this study (and the experience of many high school leaders) points out, relying upon spontaneous teacher initiative is not likely to result in teacher teams taking collective action to improve student learning. Effective leadership, however, can make a difference in whether teachers engage in supportive or developmental practices. Further research on this type of instructional leadership would help clarify the shared and unique tasks of principals, lead teachers, grade-level team leaders, and department chairs.

At the management level there are critical questions about who is responsible for creating a schedule of regular meetings, for setting agendas, for facilitating meetings, and determining which teachers are assigned to which teams. In terms of accountability, there are critical questions about how the work of teacher teams is linked to improving student achievement. For example, who sets or approves team goals? How are team goals connected to school and system goals? Who holds teams accountable for monitoring and improving student achievement? Are individual teachers evaluated in terms of their participation in teacher teams?

### **Implications for district policy makers**

Questions about leadership have implications for district policymakers as well. District leaders need to ensure that principals receive explicit training in all aspects of instructional leadership, including the development of the knowledge and skills needed to create teacher professional communities and to ensure that the work of teacher teams improves student learning. Because principals will, in turn, need teacher leaders who are skilled at facilitating teacher teams, districts may need to provide sustained profes-

sional development in understanding the purpose of teacher professional communities and in facilitation skills, such as setting group norms, analyzing student achievement data, writing goals to improve student learning, developing formative assessments to monitor student learning, and using protocols for looking at student work. To facilitate the work of teacher teams, schools or districts should provide teacher teams with data from standardized tests, grades, attendance, and other assessments, as well as the tools to analyze data in order to improve instruction.

### **Implications for small schools**

While this study is useful to educators involved in planning or implementing high school reform in a variety of school settings, some of the findings will be of particular value to those involved in creating small high schools. The good news is that teachers in small schools are more likely to have a strong sense of professional community and to engage in supportive practices. The bad news is that teachers in small schools not only feel the classic teacher dilemma of never having enough time to do what needs to be done, but they may also have additional teaching and non-teaching responsibilities that limit their ability to organize and sustain developmental practices. The work of teacher professional communities in small high schools may be further constrained by the limited number of teachers in each discipline. A mathematics department of three teachers may not possess a deep knowledge of mathematics from pre-algebra to calculus, a broad repertoire of ways to explain essential concepts, or familiarity with new curricular materials. To solve instructional problems and to implement solid interventions, high school teachers need regular access to peers who teach the same content, can help determine why students are struggling, and can suggest effective curricular or instructional interventions. In addition to finding new ways to address the large workloads for teachers at small schools, school leaders and district policy makers will need to support departmental teams by providing

access to an extended professional community and creating opportunities for content-based professional development and access to new curricula.

### **Conclusion**

In small and comprehensive high schools, in urban and suburban districts, high school reform efforts are moving forward on the premise that strong teacher professional community is an essential element for improving instruction. By looking at the current state of teacher professional communities in small schools in Chicago, this study addresses some of

the crucial questions about achieving high school reform. As they engage in the messy work of implementation, educators and school reformers need to have a clear picture of what teacher professional communities should be expected to do on a daily basis and over time to create instructional improvement. Educators and reformers also need to know how to facilitate teams and how to connect the work of individual teams to instructional improvement across the school. Finally, they need to work together to build a knowledge base for linking teacher professional communities to other elements of reform such as leadership and professional development.

# Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Sporte, Kahne, and Correa (2004) and Sporte, Correa, and Kahne (2003) for descriptions of principal, teacher, and student experiences during the first two years of CHSRI implementation.

<sup>2</sup> Kahne, Sporte, and Easton (2005); Lambert and Lowry (2004); Fine and Somerville (1998); Lee and Smith (1995).

<sup>3</sup> See Newmann and Wehlage (1995) and Lee, Bryk, and Smith (1993).

<sup>4</sup> Lambert and Lowry (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Kahne, Sporte, and Easton (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sporte, Kahne, and Correa (2004); Sporte, Correa, and Kahne (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Supovitz and Christman (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Stevens and Kahne (2005); Wallach and Gallucci (2004).

<sup>10</sup> According to the Consortium's Theory of Essential Supports, there are five domains of school development: school leadership, parent and community partnerships, a student-centered learning climate, professional community, and the quality of the instructional program. Professional community is one component of professional capacity. See Wenzel et al. (2001), Sebring et al. (1996), and Easton et al. (1991) to learn more about the Theory of Essential Supports.

<sup>11</sup> See McLaughlin and Talbert (2001); Bryk, Camburn and Louis (1999); and Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996) for similar definitions.

<sup>12</sup> See Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) and Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996); Little (1990, 1982).

<sup>14</sup> See Little (2003) for one of the few discussions of this issue.

<sup>15</sup> Action research projects are a process for teachers to systematically document, reflect upon, and assess selected instructional and learning practices (see Sagor, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Though supportive and developmental practices are two distinct analytic categories of activities, teachers could potentially engage in interactions that connect the two together. For example, a pair of teachers could have discussions about their individual problems (supportive practice) with implementing a school-wide writing program that they have been creating with a larger group of teachers (developmental practice). We did not observe instances of this happening, however.

<sup>17</sup> Stevens and Kahne (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001), p. 951.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 952.

<sup>20</sup> A possible alternative interpretation of teachers' descriptions of daily tasks is that they are justifications for not engaging in developmental practices. In other words, teachers' accounts may be a strategy for negotiating attempts to avoid collective instructional development or an excuse for its absence. While it is possible that this interpretation explains the behavior of some teachers, those cases do not negate other teachers' experience of daily tasks as a contextual situation that shapes their choices and actions. Furthermore, we have found little evidence that CHSRI teachers actively avoid or have negative views of collective improvement activities. As we mentioned earlier, most teachers reported that they would like to engage in developmental activities more often and that they think they are an important tool for instructional improvement. In addition, on 2003 and 2005 teacher survey measures, compared to teachers in similar schools CHSRI teachers reported higher levels of commitment to improving student learning and perceptions that they are continually learning and trying new things (Kahne, Sporte, and Easton, 2003; Kahne, Sporte, and de la Torre, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> One challenge CHSRI schools face in developing clear instructional goals is how to manage the pressures associated with accountability requirements (Stevens and Kahne, 2005). Several principals reported that accountability requirements encourage schools to articulate their academic goals in terms of improving test scores and basic academic skills. Such goals, however, are outcome oriented and focus on student performance rather than instruction specifically. In addition they do not necessarily help principals develop a vision of instruction or a plan for how to improve it.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that distributive leadership in and of itself is an unproductive strategy. Rather, our findings caution that its effectiveness may be reduced if schools give teachers additional leadership responsibilities without considering, and addressing, the limits of their capacity to fulfill them.

<sup>23</sup> A related issue to consider in future studies is how small schools shape teachers' general attitudes about de-privatizing their instructional practices. Several studies have highlighted that teaching is often perceived as an individual, autonomous profession (Little, 1982, 1990; Huberman, 1993). We know very little, however, about the views regarding the sharing of instructional practices that teachers bring with them into small schools or the ways in which these environments may change them.

<sup>24</sup> Sporte, Kahne, and Correa (2004); Sporte, Correa, and Kahne (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Shear et al. (2005). Teachers in ambitious reform efforts are also likely to experience high levels of stress and burn-out that can weaken their commitment to reform and lead to long-term career disappointment (Little and Bartlett, 2002).

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# Consortium on Chicago School Research

*at the University of Chicago*

## Mission

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 among 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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