



Shift, Share, and Design: Building Capacity to Improve Student Learning Environments in New York City

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**Shift, Share, and Design:
Building Capacity to Improve Student Learning
Environments in New York City**

**Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone**

**Submitted by
Paul-David Perry II**

**To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership**

April 2014

Dedication

To my first and best teachers: Nushka, Poppy and Peedy. You modeled true care for children and ignited a fire within me to ensure that every child receives that same love.

I hope that I make you proud every day.

And for all the children who have ever been forced to learn in conditions and institutions not built for their truest nurturing...this one is for you.

Acknowledgements

I first must thank my fathers, P.D. Perry and Kenneth Long. I can and will (one day) fill entire books with the stories of struggle, love, challenge, mercy, and joy that have marked your lives before and after you carried me out of the hospital in your arms. I wake up every day and I feel blessed that I was given not one, but two, incredible fathers who taught me to love myself, love others, and practice that love in the work that I do. My love for children and the vocation that it informs are outgrowths of the love you gave to me. I am eternally grateful.

I am grateful to Deborah Jewell-Sherman, my advisor. You have been all but a mother to me during my time in the program and in many ways, I would not be here without your guidance and support. Thank you for holding me accountable, vouching for me, using your political capital on my behalf, and keeping me on track. I needed it and you delivered. Thank you for teaching us to tell our stories by sharing your own, for representing us in more ways than you may always feel comfortable doing, and for making this place—Harvard—feel a little bit like home with your warmth and kindness.

I am grateful to Andrés Alonso. You jumped into this not knowing me very well but I appreciate the trust and care you have shown to me in this process. You kept me accountable for addressing actionable ideas in this capstone, for providing me with practical models of the work currently being done, and for helping me frame the

right question to answer in this work. Your humility and human touch is inspiring. And your passion for our underserved youth of color is palpable and well-informed through your tremendous experiences and impressive accomplishments on their behalf. It is an honor to have you in my corner.

I am grateful to my supervisor, John Duval, for having faith in my ability to be a contributing member of our incredible team, for giving me the space and trusting me to produce quality work, and for being a continuous source of support and encouragement. It is the mark of a great leader to organize others so well and with such consideration for both each individual's merits and the interaction therein. I have learned so much from the way you lead and manage our work and I hope to emulate it in the future.

I am grateful to my ESI teammates in New York (in no particular order): Tabari Bomani, Vadewatie Ramsuchit, Brandon Corley, John Clemente, Darius Mensah, Harvey Chism, Natalie Ferrell, and Dave Weinberg. I am also grateful to those who have supported our team: Leonard Medlock, Trayvon Braxton, Jorge Laboy, and others at the NYC DOE. I am doubtful that I will ever be so blessed as to work with such a talented, thoughtful, creative and funny team of educators. Thank you for challenging me, sharing your experiences so that I might learn from them, keeping me honest, and most of all, getting "it" and being in this for the right reasons.

I am grateful to my cohort. For letting me be the “nomad” of the group and accepting me in that way. For making me think more broadly, much more deeply, and for teaching me that team and relationships matter more than any lone individual’s bright ideas when it comes to moving systems and changing hearts. Thank you for being open to my remaining a member of this group, even when I did not want it and when I wasn’t the nicest about it. I know that we will do great and important work together, for kids, in the years to come.

I am grateful for the generosity and support of the Ed.L.D. Steering Committee, Faculty and Program Staff. From the mundane to the outrageous, I have asked much of this program and have received so very much in return. Thank you for supporting me as an individual learner at virtually every turn, for taking our input into account, for growing with us, and for keeping the focus on learning and growth at every moment. You are all building something very special here and it is already making a difference around the country. You have much to be proud of.

I am thankful to have had two incredible partners during my residency year: Hueling Lee and Bob Goodman. Hueling kept me accountable the whole way through, gave me some tough love when I most needed it, and shared her incredible expertise and residency journey with me which helped me to better understand my own path. I am so grateful for the constant source of support and connection to the cohort that you gave me Hueling. Bob helped me work through the personal leadership challenges that I faced throughout the year and has been an outstanding

coach since Year One of the program. We have truly grown in our working relationship, and Bob has shown me so many different ways of thinking about and working through the challenges that I have come across. Because of you Bob, I am a better listener, a more supportive teammate, and a more reflective and open practitioner. Thank you so much for modeling good coaching with me.

I would be remiss not to thank all of the incredible teachers and mentors in my life. From formal letters of recommendation to quiet conversations, I always walk away more informed, wiser, and more grounded by humble guidance. Thank you for being my extended family and support network.

Finally, I would like to thank my dog, Astaire. As always, he has been a faithful companion through the capstone writing process as he has been throughout my career in graduate school. He brightens up my life and it is a pleasure to come home to a friend who is always happy to see me.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	8
Introduction.....	10
Review of Knowledge for Action.....	22
Strategic Project.....	56
Implications for Self.....	88
Implications for Site.....	93
Implications for Sector.....	97
Conclusion.....	101
Bibliography.....	104
Appendices.....	107

Abstract

Action/Research Question

Serving as a School Design Fellow with the [Expanded Success Initiative School Design Fellowship](#) within the New York City Department of Education, I have been working with a team of educators to develop and launch a breakthrough high school model that will dramatically increase college and career readiness for students of color in New York City, the nation's largest school district. We will launch three schools in Brooklyn and Queens this fall. This capstone will focus on a central question: **How might we transform the interaction between schools and communities in order to positively influence the learning environments for children?** A related subsidiary question is: *How might schools create enabling conditions for students while we transform the learning model in schools?* For purposes of this capstone, learning environments are defined broadly as community-based partnerships, advocacy and activism connected to improvement of neighborhood resources, family engagement strategies, support services and operations within the school and beyond, and finally the built environment of the school itself. The implication here is that all of these factors impact learning in profound ways.

Research for Action

I start with a foundational base that briefly establishes what has already been well-established: the contextual reality of students' lives impacts their learning deeply. I note the limitations of current educational policy to address these contextual

concerns while spending a little time articulating exactly how these contextual challenges (poverty, unemployment, lacking healthcare, etc.) impact student learning and child development. I then strive to create a “bridge” between conventional education policy—which tends not to address such concerns—and promising practices currently underway in the field. I then delve into the research around these promising practices that strive to improve learning environments for students.

Strategic Project

My strategic project involved working with the team to engage in prospective thought and initial action to begin improving student learning environments as part of our design work. Such attention to learning environments was not implicit in the initial design of the fellowship, which focused heavily on changing instructional and staffing practices.

Implications

The implications of this work emphasize both the promise of what schools can do to improve surrounding learning environments as enabling conditions as well as the limitations of this work at the school site level. An overarching finding is the degree to which the work of creating strong enabling conditions for learning must be integrated across sectors even if thought leadership and work initiation begins in schools based on students’ needs.

Introduction

*"I stop and stare at the younger,
My heart goes to 'em,
Every test and stress that they under,
And nowadays things changed,
Everyone's ashamed of the youth,
Cause the truth look strange,
And for me it's reversed,
We left 'em a world that cursed,
And it hurts."*

- Excerpt from "Ghetto Gospel" by Tupac Shakur

One in Ten

The conventional wisdom is that Black and Latino youth are underachieving in comparison to their White and Asian peers. What if that is just not true? What if Black and Latino youth are actually *overachieving* given the odds that we adults have stacked against them? There is a laser-like focus in popular education reform on eliminating the so-called "achievement gap," or, the disparities that exist between these groups on standardized tests. What if that is the wrong framing question?

Note that when speaking of 'the achievement gap' it is understood by virtually everyone that this does not refer to a gap between Africans and Asians or a gap between Africans and Latinos or a gap between Africans and anyone else other than Europeans. Therefore, right away, it seems something more than achievement is being discussed when the gap language is used. –Asa Hilliard

This construction holds white wealthy students' performance as the standard of excellence without interrogating whether or not their performance is worthy of comparison (Royal, 2012). This manner of framing the problem does not ask if how they performed is excellent, but rather serves as an interracial comparison that suggests that Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, special education students, and those receiving free and reduced-price lunch should do whatever white students are

doing (Royal, 2012). As a framing point, I will assert strongly that starting from such a deficit-oriented perspective has and will continue to lead us down the wrong path towards fragmented and futile efforts to improve the lives of our nation's children. A useful alternative has been offered is the term "education debt." Gloria Ladson-Billings argues that such a term "holds us all accountable" and "challenges us to think about the incredible debt that we as a nation have accumulated" with regard to students and their families who have been underserved by school systems and broader society for centuries (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The idea of the education debt enlists all of us to "begin to pay down this mountain of debt we have amassed at the expense of entire groups of people and their subsequent generations" (Ladson-Billings, 2007). I adopt this radical, new way of thinking because it is progressive and active; it asks us to think about interventions and supports that will build up communities rather than attribution of blame towards those communities. Our initiative in New York City, which I will explain in greater detail shortly, exists because only one in ten Black and Latino boys are graduating from high school ready for colleges and careers. This is the scope and scale of the current education debt that we face. One in ten is the metric that motivates us at the broadest level, but it is really the faces and stories that we see and hear every day across this city that truly frame and center this work for us.

Young Men's Initiative

Recognizing that the city was graduating larger number of Black and Latino students but that these students, particularly boys, were not persisting in colleges and careers, the Bloomberg administration started the Young Men's Initiative (YMI) in

2011. The city invested \$42 million over three years in areas such as education, health, employment and the criminal justice system. The programs are meant to break down barriers to success for young Black and Latino men.

YMI is a strong example of a Collective Impact approach that embraces the idea that “large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination” (Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2012). The city rightly recognized that the focus areas called out under YMI intersect in the lived experiences of Black and Latino men and therefore require coordinated attention. A man who has his education, employment and legal matters in order will be set back quite significantly if his health goes unattended, and so forth with the focus areas as well. I will delve into this more deeply in the Review of Knowledge for Action but this notion of collective impact is an important framing concept for this capstone, one which I will return to regularly given its importance with regards to my strategic project. Finally, this framing of YMI also suggests that our city leaders are now viewing the plight of Black and Latino men as a highly adaptive problem that will take concerted and coordinated effort to ameliorate (Linksy & Heifetz, 2002). There are a set of conditions that must exist from real, sustainable adaptive change to take root. Such changes must enable the capacity to thrive, build on the past, occur through experimentation, rely on diversity, displace and rearrange the “DNA” of the previous system, and it must take time (Linksy & Heifetz, 2002). This set of conditions greatly informs the impetus behind our work this year.

Expanded Success Initiative

The Expanded Success Initiative (ESI) exists as the education arm of YMI. Within the New York City Department of Education, it is situated in the Office of Post-Secondary Readiness (OPSR). This office, our office, is responsible for innovative reforms such as the P-Tech 9-14 model in which students can attain an associate's degree while still in high school and serve in structured apprenticeships through the school's close ties with industry partners. Another initiative is embeds technological learning standards and capacity building within schools to ensure digital literacy for students. The first piece of ESI launched in 2012 and provided forty high schools with grants and capacity to launch specific programs to support college and career readiness for Black and Latino youth. Initial evaluation of this program has given us significant insight into the success factors for young men of color in city high schools. From how high expectations from staff affect them to how they go about avoiding gang membership, this asset-focused research gives us a strong foundation for creating positive learning conditions for the youth who enter our schools next year (Harper, 2014). More research is currently underway in these schools and will yield results in the coming months that will support existing schools and our new model high schools as well.

The ESI School Design Fellowship, where I am serving my residency, sits parallel to the "ESI 40" program and seeks to design and launch a breakthrough model for high schools that will prepare students of color for college and career readiness at significantly higher rates than the current one in ten. Our team has been involved in a design process that borrows heavily from design thinking and lean start-up methodologies with the goals of 1) establishing a culture of innovation that leads to

the long-term success of the schools and 2) sharpening the focus on the needs of students and communities where the schools are located. This “user-centered” approach is embodied most fervently in the on-going participation of approximately twenty students from the existing ESI schools as part of our Student Fellowship. We meet with students each week to challenge all assumptions about the current design of school and remain rooted in the perspective of experience. This continual questioning and collaboration with young people seeks to understand student motivation, honor their voice, and anticipate the challenges of implementing a redesigned high school model as it relates to instruction and student support.

A December to Remember

Our initial plan was to open eight schools with the redesigned model. The schools would work in concert (across district and charter lines) while creating economies of school through sharing of staff and other resources. We ran into trouble on two fronts with regard to this goal. First, we applied to the state for four charter schools to be operated by one board of directors, something which had never been done before. After some back and forth with state officials, and for reasons that are not entirely clear to our team, the state asked us to withdraw our charter application. We suspect it was a mix of misalignment between our vision of the schools and their vision of the ideal charter school as well as concerns about the incoming mayoral administration’s projected policies around refusing to provide free space for approved charters and our lack of preparation for this in our budget projections. Nevertheless, our initial ambitions were scaled back from eight schools to four at that point.

We faced further disappointment in December when we learned that two of us, myself and another colleague, were removed from the Office of New Schools' (ONS) process for starting new district schools. Again, the reasons were not clear why this occurred but there had been considerable political conflicts between our office and the Office of New Schools as our strategy to start new schools exists as an implicit critique of work they have been leading for over a decade. There were also "jurisdictional" questions all through out the process in terms of what we were exempt from and what we were required to do as part of the ONS process. At the start of the process, we were told by superiors in our office that there would be "no way" that any of us would be knocked out of the process, but alas, we were. I walked away from the experience humbled, somewhat disappointed and shocked that district offices could be working against each other in this way and utterly unguided by any unifying strategy, and concerned about my own personal career trajectory. The plan had always been for all of us to become school leaders at the end of this yearlong fellowship and suddenly the ground had shifted beneath us. The ground continued to shift as the Bloomberg Era came to a close at Tweed (DOE Central Office). Bill de Blasio had won the election and the whole education community was waiting on him to appoint a new chancellor. In mid-December, Vanda Belusic (Executive Director of the Office of Post-Secondary Readiness—John Duval's supervisor) organized a meeting for our team with Carmen Fariña, one of de Blasio's closest education advisors and one of his top candidates for the chancellor position. We had a cordial meeting and Carmen was noncommittal (at that point) about taking on the position. We told her about ourselves and shared with her the

broader mission of the fellowship. She intrigued and pushed us to expand our focus to middle schools, one of her signature areas of focus. A few weeks later, the kind yet firm grandmother figure we had met with on that rainy December day was named Chancellor.

New boss, not the same as the old boss

As the new year dawned, our team decided against rushing an application for another charter by March. We needed time to put together a more active board that would give us political clout after submission of the application to get beyond whatever was stopping John King, the Commissioner of Education, from approving our application. We would flesh out the model significantly, start the district schools, and firm up our work as a team before submitting again over the summer. Carmen came on as Chancellor and the departures of the old regime began. People began jockeying for better and different positions. We had hoped that the new schools process would land in OPSR but the office was taken over by a deputy from our office with the promise of better cooperation which we are hopeful about, at best. It could still yield a greater number of schools for us within this year, which is a bit alarming but also promising in its own way.

Jobs for next year became a concern for our team. Dave and Darius had remained in the ONS process and were slotted to be the principals of the new schools. We arranged an agreement with a leadership pipeline program for assistant principals to assume the cost over one to two years for two of our team members to serve as assistant principals in our two schools, taking care of four of our nine team members (excluding John Duval). The move by the deputy in OPSR to ONS elevated

John's profile in OPSR, allowing him to reshape our office and possibly provide jobs for the rest of us. To date, that work continues.

At a citywide meeting with principals, Carmen made a dramatic policy change quite suddenly that affected our team (and me specifically) greatly. The new policy stated that in order to serve a district principal, one needed to have seven years of pedagogical experience, two of which could be at the assistant principal level. As a number of us on the team did not have this number of years in the classroom, it impacted our job prospects on the district leadership side. Overall, I felt very disappointed in the unnuanced nature of the policy. Someone could easily have served quite poorly in a teaching or assistant principal position only to replicate that poor performance as the leader of a school. Looking at the bigger picture, our team was focused on developing a competency-based high school that focused on mastery of skills (moving away from a focus on seat time and Carnegie units where possible) while the district leadership was doubling down on strictly using "years served" as a measure of qualification for school leadership.

A spot of good news fell into our laps in February when President Obama announced the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, which essentially served as a nationalization of the Young Men's Initiative and highlighted the good work being done in New York City, of which we are a part. This elevated the profile of our work a bit and gave us some political cover within Tweed and around the city to enhance our work. It also gave the team a needed boost after what seemed like a winter of bad news, instability at the district office, and very personal concerns about jobs in the near future.

Slotting in

As March came to a close, our team began to feel greater security and the benefits of John's work at Tweed. A third school in Brooklyn was secured due to the departure of the initially selected leader for that school. This called for a significant reconfiguration of the team's slots for 2014-2015:

EPIC North

- Principal: Dave Weinberg
- Assistant Principal: Paul Perry

EPIC South

- Principal: Darius Mensah
- Assistant Principal: Brandon Corley

Nelson Mandela School for Social Justice @ Boys & Girls High School

- Principal: Tabari Bomani
- Assistant Principal: Vadewatie Ramsuchit

Office of Postsecondary Readiness

- John Duval
- Harvey Chism
- John Clemente
- Natalie Ferrell

At the time of this writing, this configuration is prospective, pending various political and bureaucratic machinations. For Brandon's projected position and my own, our team has requested a waiver from the Chancellor's office relating to the newly-stated regulations around experience and educational credentials necessary

for school leadership positions. This has made me very nervous and we continue to wait on final confirmation on this small potential hitch on which the integrity of our first-year implementation plan lies.

Overall, we felt a distinct sense of security and frankly, happiness, as we secured a place for everyone in the future of the initiative. I believe this was an important necessary condition for beginning our team's above-mentioned work to reconceive our broader strategic plan and move forward with our work.

Privileging "Place"

I want to be clear in saying that, for purposes of this capstone, my privileging of "place" (See Appendix VIII - Driver Diagram) or student learning environment is a strategic choice. First, the research is compelling and suggests strongly that learning environment is a major component that has been missing from our national discourse around education reform for the past few decades with regard to its outsized impact on student learning. Similar to national trends, we assumed that the War on Poverty had been waged and largely lost. Meanwhile, teachers and other school staff remain faithfully stationed on what is left of the front lines of that so-called war. Secondly, my team's work and the very conception of the project focuses heavily on "people and practice" or the learning model and the staffing structure inside the school itself, which is appropriate and needs significant transformation. My suggestion is simply that there is an important third component (learning environment) that, left unattended, could mitigate the (likely) strong positive impacts of our new approaches to people and practice. Lastly, student learning environments have incredible personal import for me. I left the classroom because I

felt, like so many educators, the incredibly stifling pressures of “external” forces on my students, their families, and their learning. I was lucky enough to go home every day after school ended while my students had to live in those conditions full-time. I want to be clear that whenever I discuss learning environments, I offer them as partial explanation but never *justification* for the outcomes we see in our schools.

In this capstone, I will first dive deeply into “place” and the idea of learning environments as it relates to their impact on student learning. This will frame the reasons behind my work on the strategic project. I will then describe my strategic project work to embed a focus and active work on learning environments improvement into our team’s work on the new high school model. After describing the project, I will explore qualitative results along with my analysis of the progress on this project to date. Next, I will discuss the personal progress I have made during this residency along with a discussion of the site and sector implications that I perceive relative to this work. I will conclude with a final, overarching evaluation of the knowledge base that I have synthesized, a review of the strategic project and the self, site and sector implications, along with some final thoughts on life beyond the residency and the work to follow.

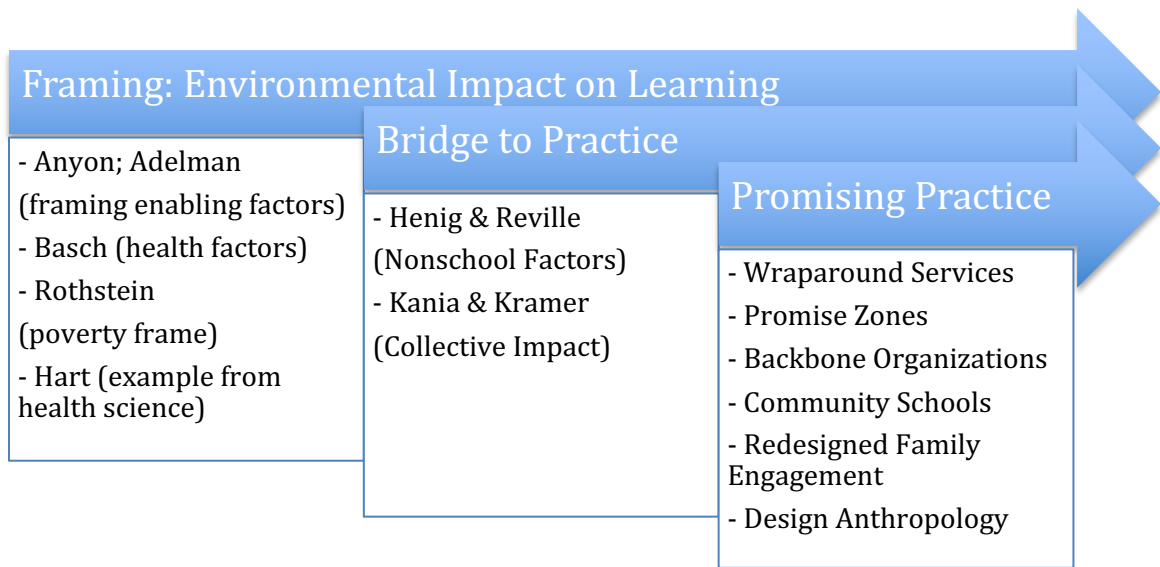
Review of Knowledge for Action

*“Make me wanna holler,
Throw up both my hands,
Make me wanna holler,
The way they do my life,
This ain’t livin...”*

- Excerpt from “Inner City Blues” by Marvin Gaye

A Note on Framing

The overall intent of this Review of Knowledge for Action is to 1) briefly re-establish the degree to which environments impact student learning/growth, 2) create a bridge to practice for *how* schools and school system might think about and address learning environments improvement work, and 3) demonstrate the existence of promising practices in the field being deployed to improve student learning environments. While a great deal has been written/researched and a great debate writhes within the education sector about the extent to which contextual factors and environments impact student learning, it is important to briefly review this body of knowledge for a foundational understanding of what is to follow in the practices we will review and employ. The “bridge to practice” is meant to offer more actionable ways of conceiving and addressing the issue as we consider “enabling factors,” “non-school factors,” and Collective Impact below. Finally, learning from and adapting promising practices in this area of work is critical to systems transformation work. I will address below, to a greater extent, how limited this has been on the part of our team given that we have only fairly recently learned and gotten access to our school sites, but that this understanding of current practice will shape our incipient work rather deeply.



It's the Inequality, Stupid

*While they're standing in the welfare lines
 Crying at the doorsteps of those armies of salvation
 Wasting time, in the unemployment lines
 Sitting around, waiting for a promotion
 Don't you know, they're talkin 'bout a revolution
 It sounds like a whisper
 Poor people gonna rise up and get their share
 Poor people gonna rise up and take whats theirs
 -Tracy Chapman, "Talkin Bout a Revolution"*

I hesitate to rehash this notion but we continue to miss it in our consideration of what “counts” as education policy: inequality has deep negative impacts on student learning and development. The impacts are multi-layered and multi-faceted. In the late 1970s, Jean Anyon examined fifth-grade classes in five New Jersey schools across the economic spectrum, from working-class to wealthy districts. Anyon focused on what she called the “hidden curriculum” of each school — the type of work students were assigned, and the ways they were expected to complete it (Anyon, 1980). In the working-class schools, she found, work entailed the rote

following of procedure, with no analytical thought encouraged. In the middle-class school, she wrote, “work is getting the right answer.”

In a more affluent school, Professor Anyon found, work emphasized creativity. In the wealthiest school, work meant “developing one’s analytical intellectual powers.” These differences, she concluded, helped recapitulate existing class divisions. The children of blue-collar families, for instance, received “preparation for future wage labor that is mechanical and routine,” while those of wealthy families were taught skills that would help them assume leadership positions (Anyon, 1980).

Our model explicitly seeks to avoid this phenomenon through a focus on culturally relevant practices and a competency-based instructional model. But beyond the hidden curriculum that working class and low-income students face on a regular basis in their schools, there remains the hard reality of the conditions they face in their communities and their homes and how those conditions affect their learning. These conditions and their negative impact on learning have been well-documented but they are worth considering more fully. Anyon argues persuasively that the nature of these conditions and their impact on learning are cause for a broadening of what counts as education policy:

As education policymakers and practitioners, we can acknowledge and act on the power of urban poverty, low-wage work, and housing segregation to dwarf most curricular, pedagogical, and other educational reforms. The effects of macroeconomic policies continually trump the effects of education policies (Anyon, 2005).

To remove economic barriers to school quality and consequence, we can legislate a significantly higher living wage; we can create jobs in cities that offer career ladders and prepare low-income residents to fill them. And, like a number of European countries, we can tax wealthy families and corporations to pay for these and other investments. We should enforce federal antidiscrimination measures to integrate segregated housing and create public transit routes so low-income urban residents

*without cars are not denied access to jobs in the suburbs. **Policies like these would create a social foundation on which high-quality schooling would rest.** As has been the case in affluent suburbs, economic access creates the financial and political conditions in families and communities for educational commitment and reward* (Anyon, 2005).

The first notion, that macroeconomic policies trump the effects of education policies, is one that roils the current discourse in education. There is a prevailing notion, on the political right and left, that we can fix all of our societal problems through education. We believe that it is “the great equalizer.” I agree with Anyon that this is, ironically, an impoverished viewpoint. Such a viewpoint is ahistorical and decontextualized, ignoring the progress of nations that have aligned their economic and education systems accordingly and have experienced great success as a result:

In many ways what is most distinctive and impressive about Finland is the degree to which its education system has developed in close alignment with its economy and social structure. as described above, the story of the development of Finland’s education reforms cannot be told without reference to the development of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s and the high-tech, information-based economy of the last two decades (OECD, 2010).

As Anyon notes, nations like Finland have created a social foundation on which high-quality schooling can rest. However, in the United States, we continue to have a ridiculous chicken-and-egg debate over whether we should try to end poverty before or after we improve our education system. The first response to this is that both systems, the economy and our education system, are arguably due for transformation given the results they have been rendering. The question becomes one of sequencing: which transformation needs to come *first*? One piece of instructive evidence is a counterfactual question with an almost rhetorical answer:

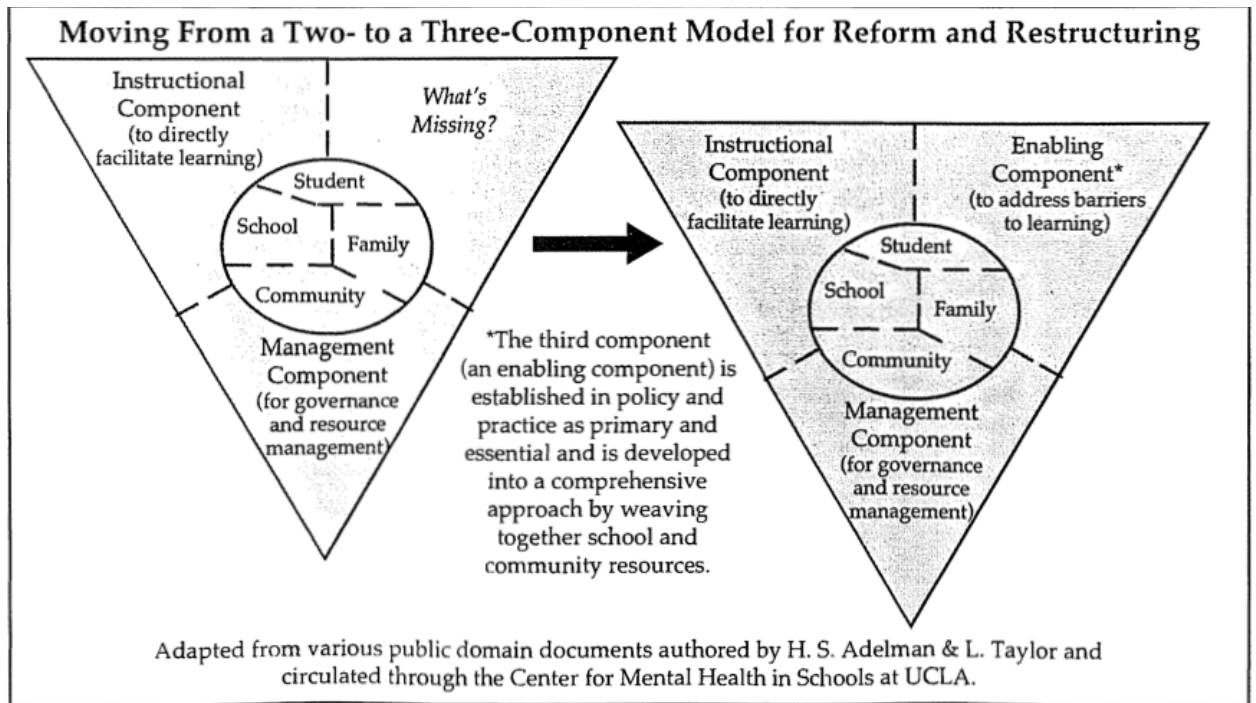
what nation has transformed itself (its economy and education system) through educational reforms alone (or as the leading driver)? To some degree, educational and economic reforms should happen in tandem, but *we must be attentive to the ways in which economic circumstances are enabling or disabling preconditions for educational transformation.*

Addressing Barriers to Learning

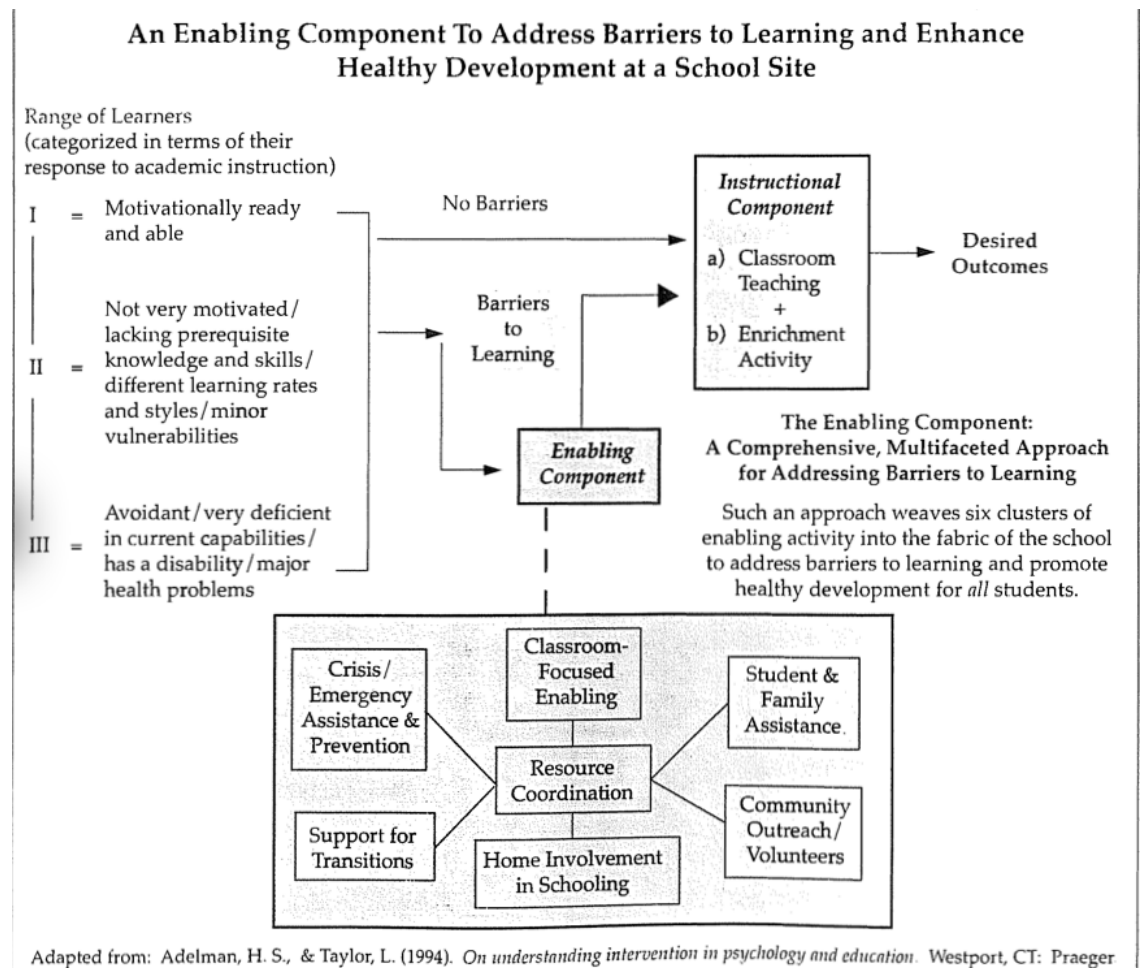
*Your child's future was the first to go with budget cuts,
If you think that's hurts then,
Wait here comes the uppercut,
That school was garbage in the first place,
That's on the up and up."*

Excerpt from "Words I Never Said" by Lupe Fiasco

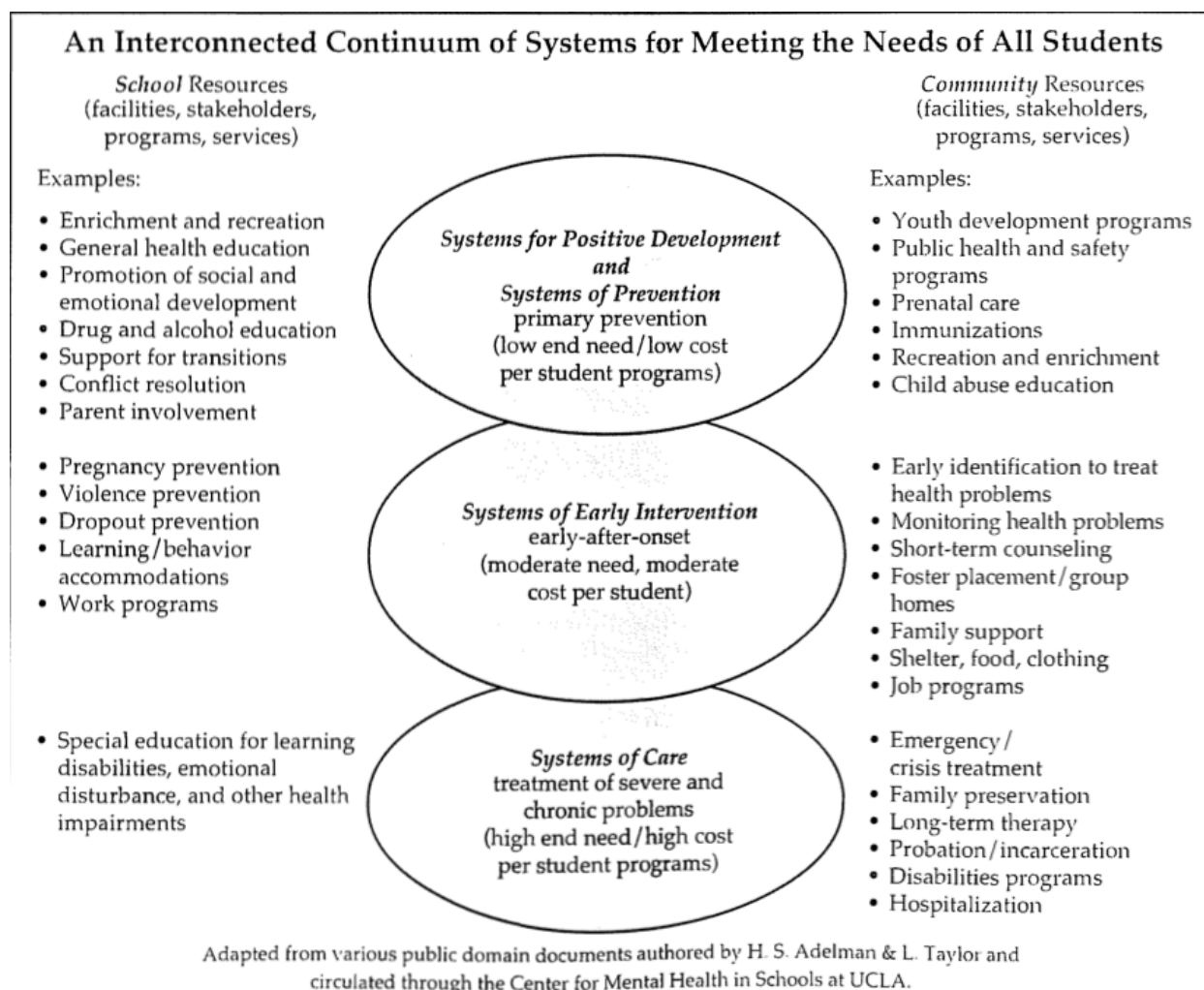
Amazing things happen when researchers come down from the "ivory tower." In the 1980s, a group of mental health researchers at UCLA stepped into urban schools and noticed an important and problematic pattern: while educators recognizing innumerable barriers to learning in the lives of their students, they often tried to treat these barriers with interventions involving only curriculum, instruction and classroom management (Adelman, 2002). A broader analysis reveals this to be true at the sector level as well.



The team of researchers—placing students, families, the community and the school at the center—posited that an important third component beyond instruction and governance needed to be considered in order for educators to adequately address students’ needs. They called this third component the “enabling” component, which would be focused on addressing barriers to learning for students (Adelman, 2002). In the context of our team in New York, a similar pattern emerged as we focused heavily on redesigning instruction and the way that the school was organized while little existed in the model to address barriers to learning.



At a deeper level of specificity, we can recognize the causal chain which students with few to no barriers to learning are passed through to the instructional component and generally reach their desired outcomes. Students coming to school with barriers to learning (or those who develop them in school or have them created for them by the school itself) are not as equipped to benefit from even the most dynamic instruction. In this case, the enabling component ideally clears barriers to learning for students through structures such as family assistance, crisis intervention, resource coordination and much more (Adelman, 2002).



When school resources and community resources are effectively marshaled, students are provided with three tiers of support ranging from systems of care that treat severe or chronic problems, to systems of early intervention that prevent the need for higher level care brought on by the formation of strong barriers to learning, to systems for positive development that also serve a preventive function while truly creating the enabling conditions for learning (Adelman, 2002).

Educationally Relevant Health Disparities

Low-income students of color are struggling to learn under deeply-challenging

conditions. This is not a deficit-oriented perspective, it is an accurate depiction of the lived reality of many of our children and their families. The debate is often confused on this point, but strong educational practice demands that we take into account educationally relevant health disparities that shape how our children learn:

Educationally relevant health disparities impede motivation and ability to learn through at least five causal pathways: sensory perceptions; cognition; connectedness and engagement with school; and absenteeism and dropping out. Some health factors influence primarily one pathway while others influence multiple pathways. The causal pathways themselves are interrelated: for example, the student who is struggling cognitively is likely to feel less connected and less inclined to attend, which will further undermine educational progress (Basch, 2010).

It is important to note here the difference between believing that low-income youth of color have difficulty learning because of who they are versus understanding how their circumstances *make it difficult for them to learn despite their very real natural talents*. These resulting educationally relevant health disparities come from socially-constructed circumstances in which these students families find themselves.

Poverty, food insecurity, parental unemployment, childcare disparities, lack of educational resources and support in the home are contextual factors that account for about two-thirds of the largest differences in NAEP eighth grade reading scores (ETS, 2009). Family income has been shown to substantially influence child and adolescent wellbeing. The impacts are complex and seem to vary according to the age of the child and other contextual factors. Deeper poverty earlier in life has particularly severe impacts on children's ability and achievement-related outcomes such as high school completion (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997.) Over half of all black children have a parent who has either been unemployed or underemployed

during the past year (Rothstein, 2010). How could such a circumstance not impact their learning? Related to the issue of parent employment are other contextual conditions that impact student learning:

- **Greater geographic disruption:** *Families become more mobile because they can no longer afford to keep up with rent or mortgage payments. They are in overcrowded housing; they often have to double up with relatives in apartments that were already too small. Children have no quiet place to study or do homework. They switch schools more often, fall behind in the curriculum, and lose the connection with teachers who know them well enough to adapt instruction to their individual strengths and weaknesses. Inner-city schools themselves are thrown into turmoil because classes must frequently be reconstituted as enrollment rises and falls with family mobility. Even the highest-quality teachers cannot fully insulate their students from the effects of this disruption (Rothstein, 2010).*
- **Greater stress:** *Families where parents are unemployed are under greater psychological stress. Such parents, no matter how well-intentioned, often become more arbitrary in their discipline and less supportive of their children. Children from families in such stress are more likely to act out in school and are less able to progress academically. The ability to comfort and support such students may be a more important indicator of a teacher's quality than her students' test scores, which may still be lower than the scores of students coming from stable and secure homes (Rothstein, 2010).*
- **Poorer health:** *Families where parents lose employment are also more likely to lose health insurance. Their children are less likely to get routine and preventive health care and more likely to miss school days because of illness. They are less likely to get symptomatic treatment for illnesses like asthma, the most common cause of chronic school absenteeism. Children with asthma, even when they attend school, are more likely to come to school irritable, having been up at night with breathing difficulty (Rothstein, 2010).*

Skilled teachers recognize these factors in the lives of their students. All of these conditions have been well-documented, since the Coleman Report of the 1960s and to date, yet education policy and the broader political discourse do not do justice to these disabling conditions in the lives of our children:

There are those who will argue that there is no established causal relationship between conditions that contribute to poor life expectancy rates and the conditions

that contribute to low school achievement; that conditions that can grind 15 years off a child's life span don't also grind off abilities to succeed in school. Such arguments are the "hard bigotry" of ideology (Ravani, 2011).

Importance of Coordination

Understanding that healthier students are better learners, our nation already spends a great deal on health-related programs and services within and beyond our schools. However, many of these programs are categorical and fragmented rather than strategic and coordinated, thereby limited their potential [social] return on investment (Basch, 2010). It is telling and tragic that, despite compelling evidence linking health and academic achievement, there is no U.S. Department of Education initiative to reduce educationally relevant health disparities as part of a national strategy to close the achievement gap. Consequently, the majority of the nation's schools have not implemented strategic or coordinated school health programs and policies (Basch, 2010).

For the nation's schools to address educationally relevant health disparities in a strategic and coordinated way there must be a fundamental social change in the goals of schools, the way schools are financed, the personnel and services available and accessible, and the amount of time devoted to help youth learn social-emotional skills. Such change will not occur without leadership at the U.S. Department of Education (Basch, 2010).

The broader point is that we should not have to so extensively document the very acute and real effects of these health and contextual factors on educational outcomes. These factors still influence the overall quality of life for these youth and their ability to contribute to our democratic society. This broader point makes a focus on environmental thinking and reducing educationally relevant health disparities a moral imperative above and beyond considerations about their impact

on learning.

Beyond Myopia

There is a strong argument to be made that, in such conditions, efforts to narrow the achievement gap that focus solely on educational interventions are obtuse at best (Rothstein, 2010). The current focus of this generation of “reformers” has been on teacher quality. This is scapegoating. Blaming educators exclusively for their failure to raise student achievement in this economic climate undermines the credibility of public education. To some degree, it makes sense to credit educators for preventing students from falling even further behind in such conditions. (Rothstein, 2010):

No matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what accountability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn. Health-related problems play a major role in limiting the motivation and ability to learn of urban minority youth, and interventions to address those problems can improve educational as well as health outcomes. This is why reducing educationally relevant health disparities must be a fundamental part of school reform (Basch, 2010).

Basch connects us back to Anyon’s point about what should count as education policy in our contemporary context. They would both argue that we need a wider berth as strictly educational interventions have proven marginal. More importantly, it is a definitional issue, Anyon might say. We have too narrowly defined what constitutes education policy and limited ourselves to matters of curriculum and instruction only, when we know in our hearts and minds based on our daily interactions with students, that so much more goes into learning than just that in which we have been trained. Basch notes that attending to these health factors would have a synergistic, force-multiplier effect on the student learning:

The causal connections between multiple health factors and motivation and ability to learn will be greater than the effects of individual factors. This is based on the expectation that at least some variance would be additive. However, it is reasonable to believe that the functional effects of reducing multiple impediments to motivation and ability to learn (e.g., breakfast, physical activity, sleep) would be not only additive but also synergistic; therefore, school health programs must focus on multiple educationally relevant health disparities to maximize the educational yield from investments (Basch, 2010).

For many, this feels like a “kitchen sink” approach. Arguably, educators have always concerned themselves with these contextual factors and, to the best of their abilities, attended to them in order to support student learning. The question at hand is one of how an entire system orients itself towards supporting learning. Basch encourages us to address multiple relevant and intersecting health disparities lest we allow any one to detract from learning given their interconnectedness.

The Power of Environments and Alternative Reinforcers

*If I ruled the world,
I'd free all my sons,
I'd love 'em, love 'em, baby*
- Excerpt from “If I Ruled the World” by Nas (ft. Lauryn Hill)

It is helpful to consider the effects of environment in other fields to understand its incredible impact in the context of education. The work of Dr. Carl Hart is instructive. His research with crack cocaine users underscores the importance of environments and context when it comes to understanding addiction and other social phenomena. Years of research on addiction had scientists placing rats in sterile rooms with no other substance than the given drug being studied as a way of learning about the nature of addiction. Dr. Hart reinterprets these early experiments and suggests that the rats in the studies were stressed out by having been raised in

solitary conditions with no other options. In these conditions, with literally no other options and the stresses of a confined environment, the rats chose to use the drug consistently over time. Dr. Hart suggests that humans perform much the same in such constrained circumstances (Hart, 2013).

His research points to the idea that if you enrich the environment, use of the drug as a coping mechanism abates. Dr. Hart's research has demonstrated convincingly that the key factor is the environment and that the presence of "alternative reinforcers" (for non-abusive behavior) is critical when seeking a positive change in behavior.

Dr. Hart came to this conclusion through placing such alternative reinforcers (cash payments, vouchers for merchandise, etc.) in rooms with crack users while offering different levels of dosage along with varying amounts of compensation in the form of the alternative reinforcers. The study found that the crack users more often took the reinforcers as their perceived or real value increased (Hart, 2013).

Addiction, as is the case with virtually all behaviors, has a social element that is magnified in societies where work is scarce and other means of fulfillment are not available (Tierney, 2013). Folks living in poor neighborhoods deprived of options are exercising a certain level of rationality in choosing to consistently take a drug that gives them temporary pleasure. Dr. Hart's work demonstrated that only ten to twenty percent of crack users exhibit signs of genuine biological addiction to the drug, counter to the ways in which we popularly conceive drug users (Hart, 2013). Dr. Hart's work offers some important commentary about our approach to dealing with drugs and perhaps even leads us to question whether drugs unto themselves are the problem. It is far more convenient and simpler for politicians and journalists

to focus on the so-called evils of drug use rather than grapple with the underlying social problems that often come part and parcel with drug use (Tierney, 2013). Dr. Hart also suggests that the scientific community is much to blame in this instance. Hart suggests that scientists have had their environments enriched (pun intended) by the same politicians who treat drug addiction as a crime and punishment issue. He suggests that they have ignored the research demonstrating the limited nature of actual biological addiction and have created a skewed focus on pathology (Hart, 2013). As with this context in the health field, a similar story is playing out in the education sector. The much larger and more complex problem that is the stifling learning environments in which we ask children to learn is being ignored in favor of a skewed focus towards the pathology of our teachers and student and an insistence that they are the ones to blame for less-than-ideal learning outcomes.

Shifting Focus to Non-School Factors

“The universe of things we might want to do to improve society is so large that people are afraid to open the door.” – Jeff Henig & Paul Reville

I remain optimistic that the education sector will rise to the occasion of addressing so-called non-school factors in the lives of our children. Our drive towards better, more transformational learning for our students is literally unattainable in the current context of rampant inequality and the challenges that it brings for our students and their families:

Our vision of the future of education reform is simple: American schools won’t achieve their goal of “all students at proficiency” unless they attend to nonschool factors. Though the nation is now in partial denial about this, we project that this will change—not because of sudden prosperity and deep public-sector pockets, nor because of a broad shift in public sentiment that activates new moral commitments to

the ideal of educating other people's children, but as an outgrowth of the same hard-nosed, pragmatic, evidence-based orientation that for the moment is supporting the unlikely claim that schools can do it alone (Henig & Reville, 2011).

Their argument is powerful because it suggests that the dynamism and evidence orientation of the current system can be redirected, as with Judo, towards a broadened focus that includes non-school factors as strong levers for change within the sector. Henig and Reville offer three clear reasons for why and how this shift will occur. First, they suggest that our current strong focus on outcomes and evidence will reveal the limitations of the schools-only approach (Henig & Reville, 2011). The implication here is that the current evidence fetish in education will allow us to eventually realize that the no-excuses accountability movement has not yielded results in closing opportunity gaps for students despite its near three-decade hold over the discourse in the field. They use Massachusetts as an illustrative example:

Take Massachusetts, for example: In the nation's leading education achievement state, the performance gaps associated with income have remained consistent throughout the education reform era. Consider results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The reading gap between low-income and other 4th graders was 27 points in 1998 (203 to 230, respectively); 11 years later, both groups of students had made substantial gains ... and the gap between the two groups was 28 points (215 to 243). The story in math and for both the reading and math tests at grade 8 is the same: substantial improvements for both groups combined with absolutely no narrowing of the achievement gap (Henig & Reville, 2011).

The inability of the no-excuses accountability movement to reduce gaps in achievement in even the highest-performing state in education very clearly demonstrates the persistence of opportunity gaps created by inequality. Their second assertion is that the attention being paid to the bottom line and return on investment will be expanded to capture the significant spillover that occurs among

schools, social service agencies, and other policy venues (Henig & Reville, 2011).

The suggestion here is that the causal arrow is bi-directional. When schools perform well, communities benefit through a number of human- and social-capital outcomes that are not limited to school performance. When the housing sector or healthcare initiatives perform well, we see corresponding benefits in achievement rates and school attendance, for example. At present, though, these cross-sector effects are left out of cost-benefit analyses making it hard to accurately measure the true social return on connected programs inside the educator sector and beyond (Henig & Reville, 2011).

The third factor is the influence of new information technology and governance arrangements in education. The current education technology landscape increasingly allows us to personalize learning for students and truly hone in on the interventions—school-based or otherwise—necessary for their growth and development through consistent and targeted assessment. In terms of governance, Henig and Reville suggest that the migration of responsibility for education out of local, single-purpose school districts and towards state and national government as well as horizontally away from special-purpose school board towards general-purpose entities like city government (e.g. mayoral control in New York City) will allow for better service integration and policy coordination to serve the whole child and whole communities (Henig & Reville, 2011). I am optimistic about this final point, but after nearly a year spent working in the nation's largest school district and one that is run under the auspices of mayoral control, I can report that significant silos continue exist and that the connective tissue needs to be in place in

terms of management and collaboration in order for this promising circumstance to produce cross-sector results.

All Together Now

“Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination.”

- John Kania & Mark Kramer

The Collective Impact approach offers one method for achieving the kind of cross-sector coordination necessary to solve the large-scale social changes we face today. Education is embedded within the context of much broader social problems as mentioned above. The question our team has been striving to answer is: *how exactly* should school systems and school leaders engage in cross-sector collaboration in order to address these large-scale social issues that impact our work with students? Everyone seems to agree that collaboration is a good thing, but the actionable concern is about how to do it most effectively. This capstone and my work this year is an exercise in uncovering some answers to this important question. Collective Impact work involves the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors aligning to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem (Kania & Kramer, 2011). While the social sector is full of examples of partnerships, network and other types of collaborative efforts, they rarely constitute a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff (even if borrowed part-time from existing organizations), a structured process, shared measurement, continuous communication and mutually reinforcing activities among all parties (Kania & Kramer, 2011). All of these elements represent key differences between what exists in the social sector today and what is more likely to have a systemic impact.

The problem with relying on the isolated impact of individual organizations is further compounded by the isolation of the nonprofit sector. Social problems arise from the interplay of governmental and commercial activities, not only from the behavior of social sector organizations. As a result, complex problems can be solved only by cross-sector coalitions that engage those outside the nonprofit sector. – Kania & Kramer, 2011

A strong example of Collective Impact work comes from an organization called Strive that works in greater Cincinnati and northern Kentucky. Strive brought together over 300 leaders of local organizations who agreed to give up their individual agendas in favor of a collective approach to improving student achievement. These leaders came from a wide range of institutions in the local community. Rather than focusing on one point on the educational continuum—such as extracurricular programs or tutoring—the group decided to work on improving all parts of the continuum simultaneously. In doing so, they acknowledged the interactivity between the various parts of the continuum.

No single organization, however innovative or powerful, could accomplish this alone. Instead, their ambitious mission became to coordinate improvements at every stage of a young person's life, from "cradle to career. – Kania & Kramer, 2011

After four years of work, Strive partners improved student success in dozens of key areas across three large public school districts. Despite the recession and budget cuts, thirty-four of the fifty-three success indicators that Strive tracks have shown positive trends, including high school graduation rates, fourth-grade reading and math scores, and the number of preschool children prepared for kindergarten (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

The early examples of Collective Impact work reiterate the idea that large-scale social change comes from improved cross-sector coordination rather than from

isolate interventions of individual organizations who only address one aspect of problems that exist along a continuum. The few examples of this work that do exist point to strong positive outcomes when existing resources are simply repurposed and better coordinated in an integrated approach (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Examples like Strive leave me with exciting questions and ideas about the potential of our schools—particularly given that there are multiples sited in close proximity—to lead this collective impact work in our communities. This approach has the potential to touch on our “Place” driver through advocacy and activism, community-based partnerships, family engagement and virtually all of the secondary drivers of that aspect of the work. Concretely, my hope is that our team prioritizes this type of work in their leadership roles in the school community. Research such as this, grounded in recent promising practice, gives me the confidence that schools can indeed serve as hubs for this work.

A Note on Promising Practices

What follows below is the final portion of the Review of Knowledge for Action, which will focus on promising practices in the field to address student learning environments. The practices addressed generally vary from more integrated and system-level strategies to more site/school-based approaches. The important point to note is the *interoperability* of the practices when implemented together, which I indicate and assess at various points throughout my analysis of the research.

The Original Zone

Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) is a well-heralded example of a holistic approach to youth development and reshaping learning environments for kids. Their success has

been well-documented and their pipeline approach is well-structured and grounded in a few decades of practice. At present, HCZ is not exactly operating a collective impact model but rather striving to deliver a holistic suite of services under the guise of one organization. Their academic portfolio involves programs that begin with parenting classes for parents of new babies (Baby College) through a College Success Office that supports students from the zone through college, with after-school programs, job placement, charter schools and other academic support programs nested in between. Their Family, Community and Health portfolio focuses on community redevelopment and health and human services for families in the zone. These two portfolios paired together have undoubtedly helped to spur what has been billed as “Harlem’s Second Renaissance.” Families of means (of all colors and persuasions) are descending upon Harlem as the perception and reality around its “liveability” improves. In terms of results, multiple studies of HCZ have shown strong positive academic and health impacts for the students it serves. When the question was asked whether the outcomes for students came from the schools or the wraparound services, the authors of the study stated that they “could not disentangle whether communities coupled with high-quality schools drive our results, or, whether high-quality schools alone are enough to do the trick” (Dobbie & Fryer, 2009). While it is difficult to disentangle and truly pin down the impact of quality schooling matched with quality wraparound services, perhaps that difficulty in and of itself is telling in terms of the power of the pair. Even typically conservative and critical organizations such as The Heritage Foundation found it

difficult to disregard the evidence at hand and cast aside the importance of supportive services paired with high-quality schools:

“Furthermore, full integration of the schools with the numerous support services may be the key to meeting the needs of this particular population. The philosophy and effectiveness of the schools and the social services, such as the HCZ’s work with young mothers, may mutually reinforce each other in ways that are crucial but difficult to identify given the limited data. The HCZ officials on the ground are convinced that the mutual reinforcement of social services and education is fundamental to achieving their goals for the entire neighborhood, and they emphasize this point repeatedly in their comments and material. While test results can provide a snapshot of academic achievement, they are an incomplete indicator of the overall health of an entire community” (Hanson, 2013).

I would argue that our inability to disentangle the two (high-quality schools alongside community services) is a strong indicator of their mutual reinforcement and an important implication for future practice. Furthermore, I would agree that we need better and broader indicators of student and community health (beyond standardized test scores) to more fully understand the impact of education and related initiatives.

Zones of Promise

Recognizing the promise of programs like HCZ, President Obama has committed his administration to deepening the connecting between education and social services in communities. The idea of Promise Neighborhoods and Promise Zones sprang up from the work done by HCZ. Promise Zones are now located in Los Angeles, San Antonio, Philadelphia, Southeastern Kentucky and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Within three years, the administration plans to bring the total number of Promise Zones to twenty across the nation. The Promise Zones bring together the central elements of the multiple place-based strategies initiated during President Obama’s

first term. These include Promise Neighborhoods, emphasizing schools designed to provide services to students from “cradle to career;” Choice Neighborhoods, centered on improved housing; and the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation grant program, focused on public safety. In addition, Promise Zones are designed to attract and encourage economic investment and provide job training and jobs (Iasevoli, 2014).

The policy innovation here is getting the federal Departments of Education, Health & Human Services, Treasury, Agriculture, Justice and Housing and Urban Development to work together toward the goal of ending poverty with each being accountable for its unique role. In the past, these organizations have carried out that work separately. A further innovation in practice is putting schools at the center of these agency networks. So far, Promise Neighborhoods themselves have been demonstrating early, promising results. Of the nineteen schools in the Promise Neighborhoods, eleven have seen test score gains. Three of the schools are too new to have comparative test results. The schools with test results available saw on average a seventeen-point gain on the Academic Performance Index, the scale California has used to rank schools and is tied primarily to the test scores of their students (Iasevoli, 2014). At the city level, particularly in New York under the auspices of mayoral control, how might city services be aligned and organized to maximize their impact and focus on community improvement to support student learning? Our bet is that pioneering schools like EPIC, as the center of cross-agency collaboration, can help the the city understand how to integrate the work of various departments into coordinated, place-based strategies. The actionable link here is

that our school leaders, given that there will be two in each school, will lead much of this work at the school level and across the EPIC network of schools.

The Other Zone

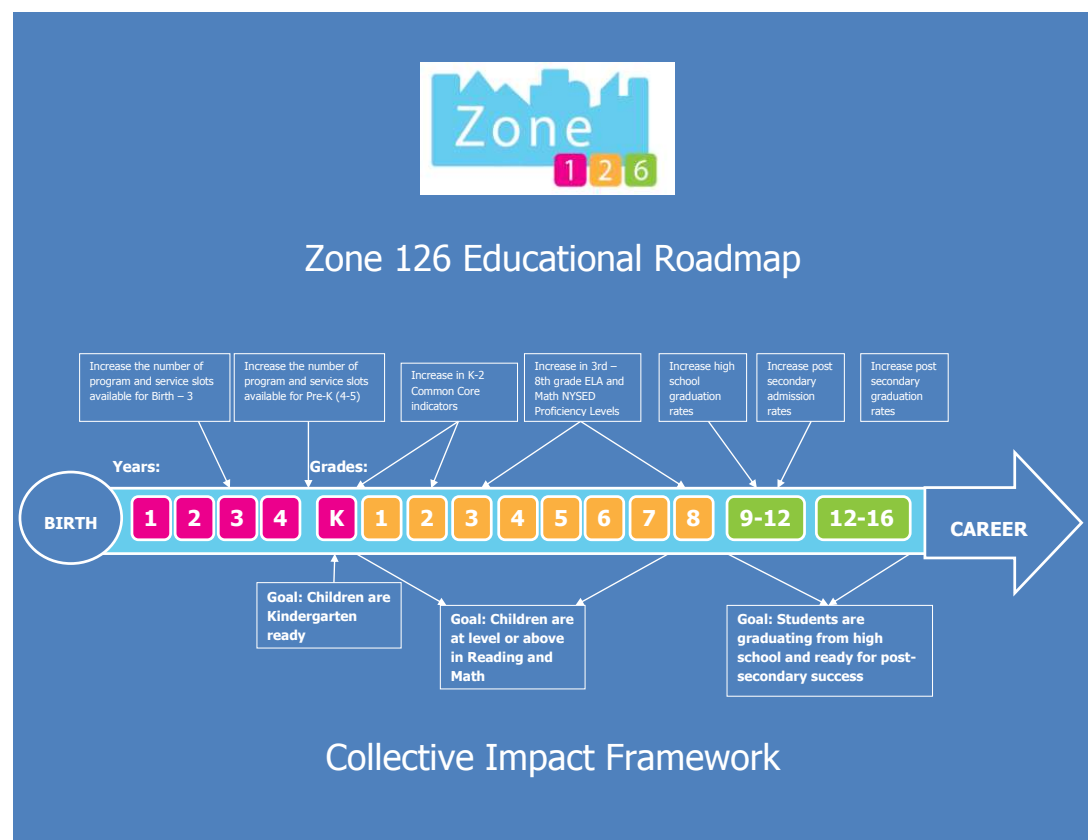
A strong example of Collective Impact work in New York City is a nonprofit called Zone 126 in Queens. Rather than serving as yet another nonprofit providing direct services in a narrow area of work, Zone 126 serves as a “backbone organization” whose focus is coordinating and mobilizing a wide cross-sector of stakeholders to “drive children’s success from Cradle to Career within the Zones of Promise in high-need zip codes of 11101, 11102 and 11106 of Astoria and Long Island City.” The organization’s vision is: “For every child to graduate from high school prepared for college, and enter the workforce equipped with the skills needed to thrive in a 21st century world.” Unlike many nonprofits, they completed an extremely thorough community needs assessments as part of their entry plan into the neighborhoods.

Through this process, they came to a very clearly defined problem:

More than 20,000 families are living in concentrated pockets of poverty in Astoria and Long Island City. Over 8,000 are children. A child in poverty faces multiple environmental, social, and physical barriers to academic success. Zone 126 exists to break down those barriers.

To address this problem, Zone 126 brings community organizations, public agencies, and private supporters together to provide vital programs for academic support, enrichment, health, nutrition, parent education, and youth development. From cradle to career, local and national research-based programs operate in each of the ten schools within the Zone. The organization independently evaluates the immediate impact of these programs as well as their effect over time. Zone 126 has

taken great care in the creation of a cradle to career roadmap—grounded in their initial needs assessment along with formative and summative data collective over time as programs are implemented and reviewed—that serves to clearly sketch out interventions and goals over the life of children within the Zone.



A high-level roadmap of this sort serves to galvanize and organizations the partner schools and community-based organizations that Zone 126 seeks to coordinate and support. The key learning here is that individual organizations do not necessarily have to cease their work and re-orient what they do within a collective impact framework, but they are asked and compelled by their peers in the field to better *align and coordinate* their current work and perhaps make small changes where necessary.

This idea of collective impact work is catching on as communities as far-flung as Baton Rouge, Louisiana (through an initiative called [MetroMorphosis](#)) have embarked on similar initiatives to employ a citizen-led innovation framework that brings leaders together to identify adaptive challenges and develop new, more integrated solutions to cross-sector problems plaguing the community there. More and more, communities are realizing that these problems will only be solved through better coordination and that schools themselves and nonprofits existing in “silos” cannot effectively address these broad concerns on their own.

Seeing the Light from the SUN

Ultimately, the synergies between cradle-to-career strategies and community schools are endless. They are truly complementary and both rely on the core principles of “collective impact,” yet they are fundamentally different in their structure and approach. community schools use a strategy that says if you can effectively align a whole host of academic and social supports in a particular place—using the school as a hub—you will maximize impact, reach more people, and improve academic impact in a way that would not happen otherwise. Our All Hands Raised Partnership represents a fundamental shift in the way we do business in an entire community, from the level of CEOs and elected officials to educators and other practitioners, to arrive at a shared vision and decision-making structure to drive collective impact on a community-wide scale. In other words, a community schools strategy can fit perfectly as a core strategy within a community that has adopted a cradle-to-career approach to working together.

- Nate Waas Shull, All Hands Raised Partnership

In Oregon, community leaders formed a multi-jurisdictional community-building initiative—with leadership drawn from the elected officials of Portland and Multnomah County as well as from school districts, businesses, and community organizations—identified community schools as the strategy they wanted to fund and implement. The Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools initiative was officially launched in 1999 with eight demonstration sites. While

wide-ranging services were available before SUN, they were not coordinated to target local needs (Potapchuk, 2013). Today, sixty-seven schools in six districts are a part of the SUN strategy, and students who access SUN services and supports have been consistently experiencing improved attendance, strong academic growth, and increased youth assets since 1999. In 2011–2012, attendance rates increased to 95 percent in K–12, over three-quarters of students increased benchmark scores in reading, and high school students earned 7.8 credits on average, compared to the six needed to graduate on time. A recently published quasi-experimental study demonstrated that high school students who participated regularly in SUN supports had significantly better school attendance rates and earned a greater number of credits toward graduation than peers who did not participate in SUN (Potapchuk, 2013).

After initial success under the SUN system, local leaders were introduced to the work of the Strive Initiative in Cincinnati in 2010 and realized that they were missing a layer of regional level leadership in the form of a unified group with a shared vision, data-driven accountability, a collective impact framework, and broad representation from business, foundations and community advocates. Thus, the backbone organization All Hands Raised was formed and partnered with SUN's Coordinating Council as well as Portland State University as co-conveners to address SUN's goals:

1. Eliminating disparities in children and youth success
2. Linking community and family supports to children and youth success
3. Ensuring that all students enter school prepared to learn.

In this partnership, SUN's community schools and multi-jurisdictional approaches are seen as building blocks for the strengthening of a broader cradle-to-career continuum (Potapchuk, 2013). The SUN and All Hands Raised example demonstrates the mutually-reinforcing nature of community schools and linked multi-jurisdictional strategies as part of a larger collective impact approach that focuses on solidifying a cradle-to-career continuum.

Community Learning Centers as Drivers of Collective Impact

*"Where the eyes, the eyes with the will to see,
Where the hearts, that run over with mercy,
Where's the love that has not forsaken me,
Where's the work that set my hands, my soul free,
Where's the spirit that'll reign, reign over me
Where's the promise, from sea to shining sea,
...We take care of our own,
Wherever this flag is flown."*

Excerpt from "We Take Care of Our Own" by Bruce Springsteen

In Cincinnati, a new initiative is now leveraging public school facilities as hubs of educational, recreational, cultural, health and civic partnerships in an effort to optimize conditions for learning and revitalize communities. These "community learning centers" (or CLC's) are premised on five core elements:

1. A commitment to comprehensive, sustained **community engagement** to ensure the development of partnerships responsive to the school – community's shared vision for the school as the center of the neighborhood.
2. **Site-based governance** charged with establishing the unique vision for each community learning center, steering the selection of community partners, and evaluating the performance of those partners.
3. **Partnership networks** comprised of providers in each area of need to provide district wide capacity and equitable access to quality services, e.g. Growing Well (physical health), MindPeace (mental health), Adopt A Class Foundation (business mentors), College Access, Leave No Child Inside (Nature and Environmental) and Alliance for Leadership and Interconnection (green built environments and curriculum).
4. **Cross Boundary Leadership** knits together the partnership network leaders

as a collaborative team to provide coordination and integration of interdisciplinary resources.

5. **On-site Resource Coordinators** provide the critical infrastructure at the site level to develop, integrate and manage the community partnerships

While community schools themselves are nothing new, this approach takes that approach (which I will discuss shortly) a step further by doing more than simply locating services in schools but also developing community leadership by giving families agency and fostering partnerships with community-based organizations that address other aspects of children's lives. One could interpret this strategy as a micro-collective impact approach centered on the school site as the locus of control. In fact, this model was seen as so promising to New York City leaders that many have visited the CLCs in Cincinnati to better understand how we might replicate the model here in New York.

In terms of results for Cincinnati Public Schools, they have been impressive thus far. The city became the first urban district in Ohio to receive an "effective" rating, making it the highest performing urban district in Ohio. It also earned the distinction as the first district-wide Award of Excellence from the Coalition for Community Schools. The district raised high school graduation rates from 51% in 2000 to 81.9% in 2010. It also surpassed its initial enrollment projections including the return of middle class families to neighborhood schools. The CLCs initiated hundreds of community partnerships, which brought in millions of dollars in additional resources for the students and their families (Community Learning Center Institute, 2011).

Another example of strong multi-partner collaboration exists in the form of Elev8 Chicago, an initiative funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. Similar to Cincinnati's CLCs, Elev8 brings together a diverse array of service providers into middle schools, tightly coordinates the services they deliver to students and families, and brings in top-notch evaluation practices from local universities to continually reassess the work being done thereby fostering a cycle of continuous improvement in service delivery. Thus far, Elev8 has significant increases in student attendance, greater participation in expanded learning opportunities, heightened sense of belonging on the part of students, increased parent participation in programming, and higher numbers of students going on to attend high-quality and/or selective enrollment schools (Atlantic Philanthropies, 2012). The Elev8 experience underscores the critical importance of service delivery coupled with tight feedback loops and sound evaluative frameworks, especially given the considerable cost and extensive reach (into the lives of families) of these programs. Constantly reassessing student and family need relative to the services provided allows schools and systems to allocate resources more responsibly and in ways that allow them to consistently improve (Henig & Reville, 2011).

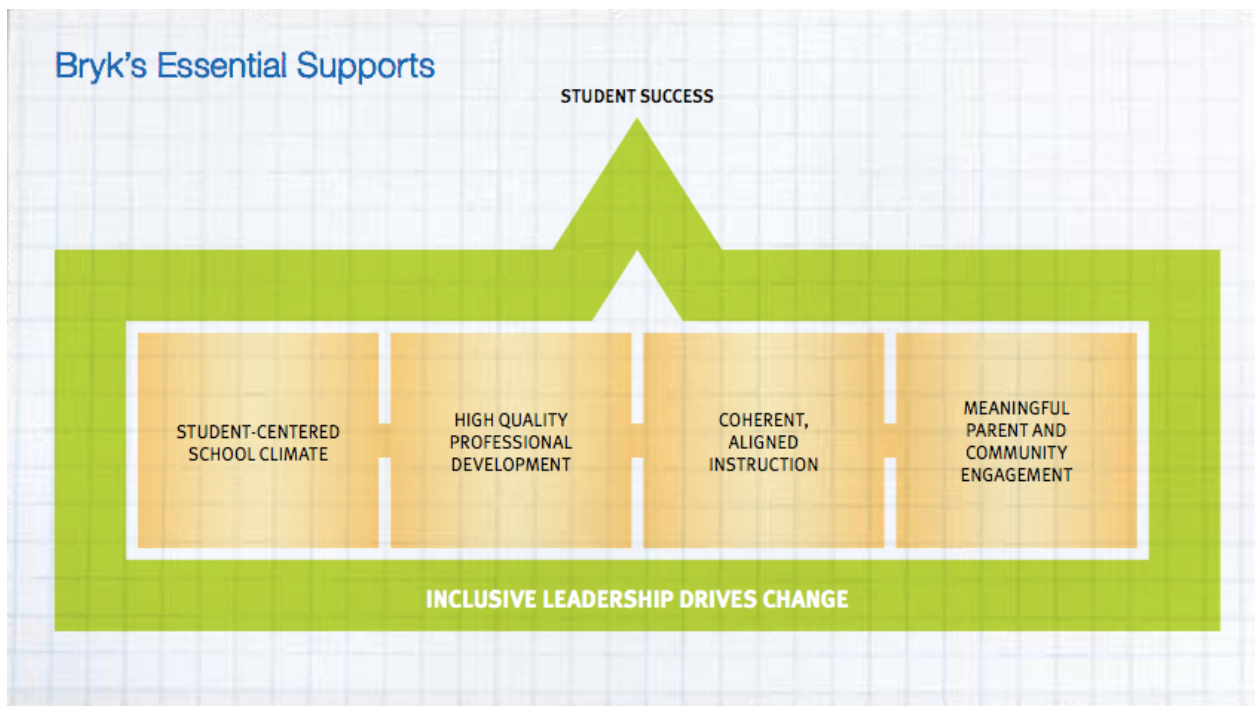
Community Schools as Social Centers

We begin to see that we are dealing with a complicated interaction of varied and vital forces, only a few of which can be pigeon- holed as governmental. The content of the term "citizenship" is broadening; it is coming to mean all the relationships of all sorts that are involved in membership in a community.

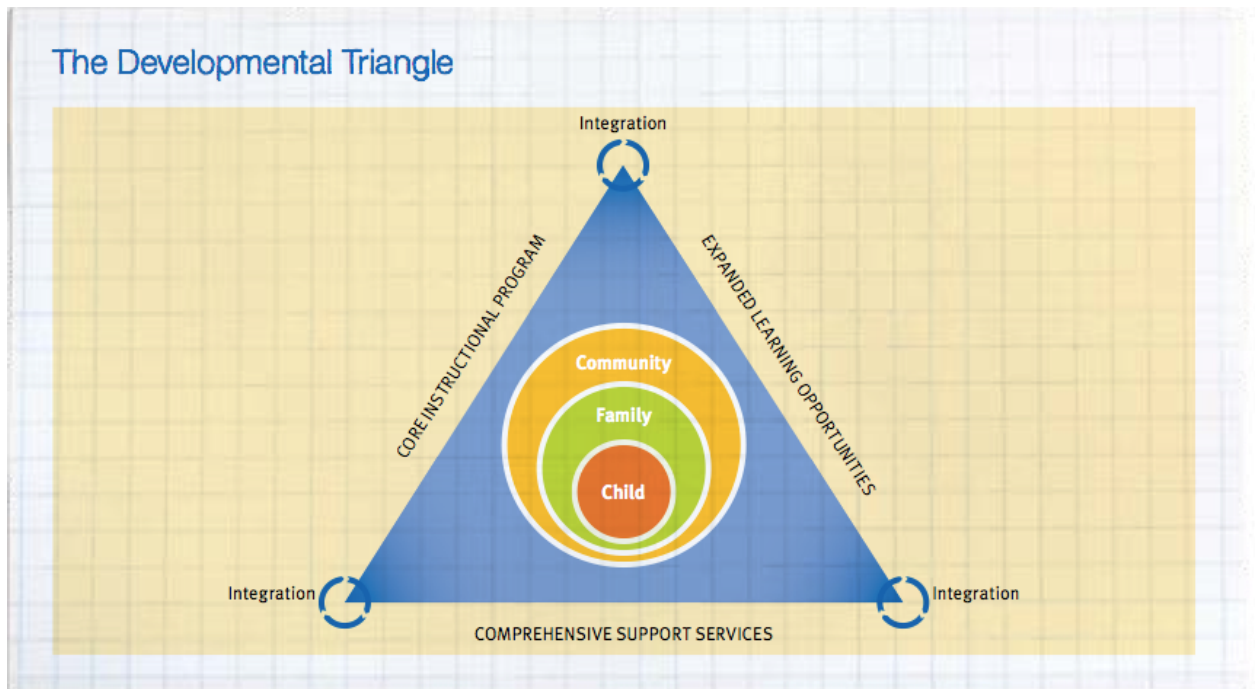
-John Dewey, "The School as social centre," *The Elementary School Teacher* (1902)

Community schools have been described as "a strategy for organizing the resources of the community around student success." Through means that extend beyond

traditional teaching and learning practices, these schools reconceive education as a coordinated, child-centered effort in which schools, families and communities work together to support students' educational success, build stronger families and improve communities (NCCS, 2013). These schools combine the five essential supports that Tony Bryk found to be critical for student success: a student-centered school climate, high-quality professional development, coherent and aligned instruction, and meaningful parent and community engagement tied together with inclusive leadership that drives change (Bryk, 2010).



Bryk notes that these essential supports need to be integrated and mutually reinforced to achieve the goals of school improvement and student success (Bryk, 2010). In New York City, the Children's Aid Society (CAS) has been the leading provider of community school options as they operate their own charter schools and support districts school implementing this model.



CAS has proven that community schools are an effective strategy for supporting low-income students on the road to success in school and life. Strictly in terms of outcomes, independent evaluation of their programs found the following:

- *Children who participated in community school afterschool programs demonstrated greater gains in math and reading than non-participants, particularly when they attended the program for more than one year.*
- *Student and teacher attendance was higher at community schools than at matched comparison schools.*
- *Teachers, parents, and students at community schools rate school climate more positively than do their peers at comparison schools.*
- *Parent/caregiver involvement was significantly higher in community schools than in comparison schools.*
- *Furthermore, some Children's Aid community schools offer on-site (or school-linked) health and mental health services for students. Based on data it collected between 2007 and 2009 on several indicators of child health, Children's Aid found that on-site health clinics in four community schools helped prevent emergency room visits by students that would likely have occurred if these students had attended a traditional school without built-in access to health services. The data also revealed that school-based health clinics at Children's Aid community schools provided more timely access to mental health services than traditional schools (Martinez & Hayes, 2013).*

CAS was even able to measure its impact beyond outcomes but also in terms of social return on investment (SROI). This measure demonstrates the benefits of the community schools intervention relative to the cost of achieving those benefits. The numbers represented are the ratios of the net present value of the investment. For example:

SROI results for two of Children's Aid community school sites (PS 5 and Salomé Ureña) were [strongly] positive. In fact, The Children's Aid Society programs at PS 5 produce a 10.3 to 1.0 ratio; at Salomé Ureña, a 14.8 to 1.0 ratio. A ratio of 10.3 to 1.0 indicates that an investment of \$1 delivers \$10.30 in social value; a ratio of 14.8 to 1.0 indicates that an investment of \$1 delivers \$14.80 in social value (Martinez & Hayes, 2013).

Often times, such broad-based social interventions are not easily boiled down to such clear quantifiable evidence when it comes to their effectiveness. This analysis shows that CAS community schools are making a demonstrable difference in the New York. Such evidence of the very tangible social benefits are what leaders require to sustain and secure support for community schools moving forward.

Transfer Schools

One of the more influential antecedents of our model is the transfer school model that has been met with significant success here in New York. Many of these schools have found creative and impactful ways to support and address the learning needs of youth who were not well-served in traditional comprehensive high schools or even in small schools that have begun to predominate in the district. One such example is the case of South Brooklyn Community High School (SBCHS), which partnered strongly with Good Shepherd Services (GSS) to support so-called over-age, under-credited youth. SBCHS was responsible for providing strong student-centered instruction while GSS was responsible for providing sound youth

development practice and supportive services. The two entities, in partnership, consistently track key metrics in domains that range from graduation rate, student satisfaction, hiring and retention, credit accumulation and other key indicators of their work (GSS, 2007).

GSS initially started out with a focus on providing residential care for troubled adolescents. The organization eventually became convinced of the need to surround vulnerable children and families with comprehensive services in their communities and thus avert the need for costly out-of-home placement (GSS, 2007). GSS has developed geographic networks of comprehensive services in Brooklyn and in the Bronx, providing a broad array of individual, family and school-based services to prevent youth from becoming disconnected from family, school and society. In addition, they help those who are already disengaged (i.e., out of school, out of work and lacking the support of caring adults) find hope and motivation to reconnect with their community (GSS, 2007). This model clearly demonstrates the type of tight and well-integrated partnerships that our schools will likely need to foster as well as the types of wraparound services we will need to provide or connect for our students as we support their learning.

From Engagement to Partnership

"It takes a village to raise a child"
-African proverb

Our team has always been committed to the idea that "families and communities have something great to offer and schools should do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds" (Henderson, et al.,

2007). But putting that belief into practice was much more difficult for us. As a fellowship, we were disconnected from the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Office in the Department of Education and all of our ideas on family engagement were taking a backseat to the development of the school model itself. We were even told by Ron Walker, President of the Coalition for Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC), at a conference in December that he did not see enough mention of family engagement in our so-called “transformative” model. He was spot on. Reaching back to our work with Karen Mapp, I recalled the powerful framework she explained to use in Beyond the Bakesale. We adopted this framework with one modification, calling “Addressing Differences” by a different title which was “creating access for families and community members.” Overall, the integrity of the initial framework remained. Our approach to family-school partnerships will focus on:

1. Building relationships
 - a. Making regular home visits
 - b. Opening the building for community services/organizations
2. Linking to learning
 - a. Holding regular student symposia
 - b. Working with CBOs to support student learning
3. Creating access for families & community members
 - a. Using culturally relevant curricula
 - b. Working with local CBOs to engage families
4. Supporting advocacy
 - a. Open process for resolving disputes using restorative practice
 - b. Student-led conferences between parents and teachers
5. Sharing power
 - a. Staff will work with local organizers to improve school community
 - b. Parents will serve on key committees and working groups

While this work is prospective, the group understands that the framework is

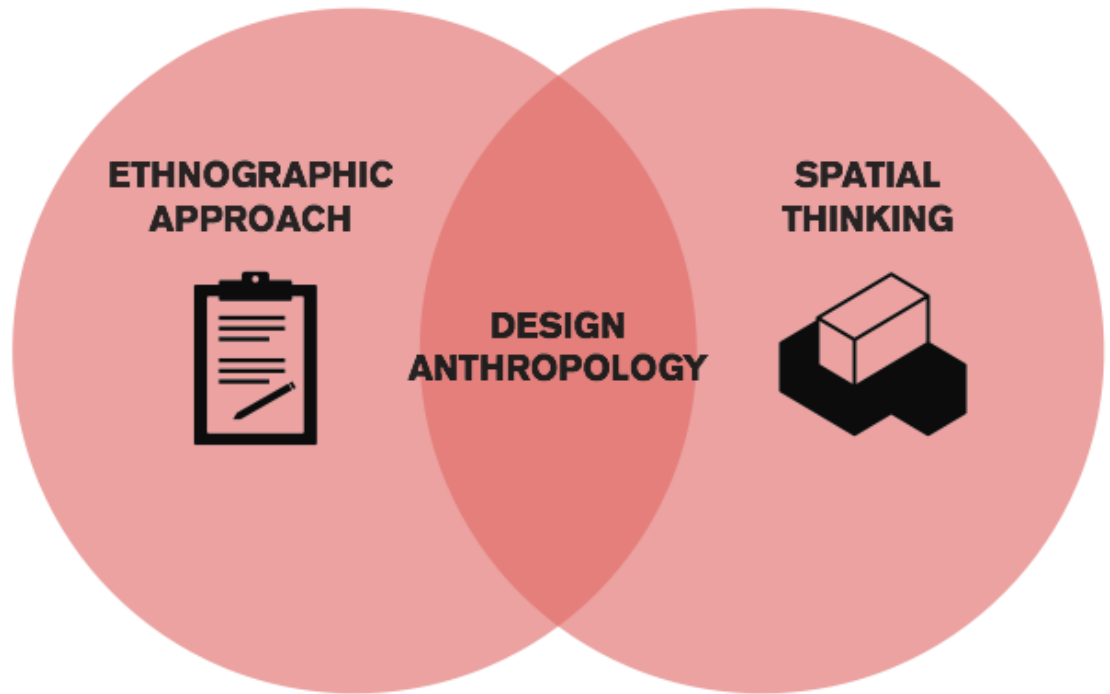
research-based and grounded in observable and promising practice from schools around the country achieving strong results while partnering with families and community members in so doing. As we sketch out our work moving forward, we will continue to return to this framework and building upon its foundation in our work.

A Responsive Space

Building a responsive school requires that those who actually dwell in the space be part of the planning process--be they students, faculty, or community members. Not involving everyone can cripple the outcome for years to come.

–Henry Sanoff, “A Visioning Process for Designing Responsive Schools,” (2001)

Our project with the Graduate School of Design to transform the built environment at Blackstone Elementary in Boston had a profound impact on me. It broadened my notions of design and helped me understand how space impacts learning in very tangible ways. To address this reality, our team hired DKS, a multi-disciplinary design firm that works closely with their clients to understand their needs and produce innovative design solutions. This firm engages in what they called “Design Anthropology,” which is an approach to design that combines ethnography and spatial thinking to truly understand the needs of the users of any given space and develop the space accordingly (Kurani, 2013).



Our work with DKS aligned quite nicely with our Design Thinking approach in terms of being user-centric and prototyping and testing solutions with the community that we serve. We conducted a neighborhood tour in which we walked through the community and focused on identifying relevant characteristics that will impact learning for our students as a first step in beginning to understand how we might create a learning network within our schools and in the broader community:

- Community
- Social Capital
- Socioeconomic Patterns
- Civic Realm Patterns
- Built Realm Patterns
- Culture
- Identity Circulation
- Infrastructure Systems
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy
- Landforms
- Natural Systems

The essence of Design Anthropology lies in its intentionality and its focus on user impact. Most design processes roll out as portrayed below without critical questions being asked on the front-end. Design Anthropology frames the entire design process with questions around user needs, intended impact and how the status quo might need to evolve to reach that intended impact (Kurani, 2013).

DESIGN ANTHROPOLOGY	PROGRAMMING	CONCEPT	SCHEMATIC	REFINEMENT	DOCUMENTATION
how to achieve intended impact? what do we learn from status quo? what do users truly need? what is unique here?	how much space to allocate for each room? 1	how do the project pieces fit together? 2	what are the different possible solutions? 3	what conditions must be met for implementation? 4	how are the spaces detailed and constructed? 5

Shift, Share & Design – Toward a Theory of Action

You will recall that this capstone is centered on the following question:

How might we transform the interaction between schools and communities in order to positively influence the learning environments for children?

After pausing to reconsider this question in light of the relevant research referenced above, I will offer the following theory of action as a foundational premise upon which my Strategic Project has been based:

***IF I shift my team's thinking** on the importance of student learning environments, **share the work** with them as we strive to improve student learning environments, and **design the future** of this work with them as our schools come online, **THEN** the students that we serve will benefit through better learning and life outcomes.*

Thus, I will share the results for and analyze my strategic project through a framework that rests upon my three primary goals for the project. The three core goals are as follows:

1. *Shift thinking*: My goal was to shift my team's thinking on improving student learning environments and pushing them to include a focus on this tertiary body of work in our core elements of school design.
2. *Share the work*: My goal was, once buy-in was garnered, to include other team members in the work so that it took root and transformed the way we designed and operated our schools moving forward.
3. *Design the future*: My goal was to support the team in effectively planning for prospective work on learning environments improvement as the design fellowship comes to a close and school start-up begins.

While these three goals generally represent a broad chronological ordering of the entire arc of the project, they are more realistically understood as iterative elements that I returned to with the team at various points throughout the project.

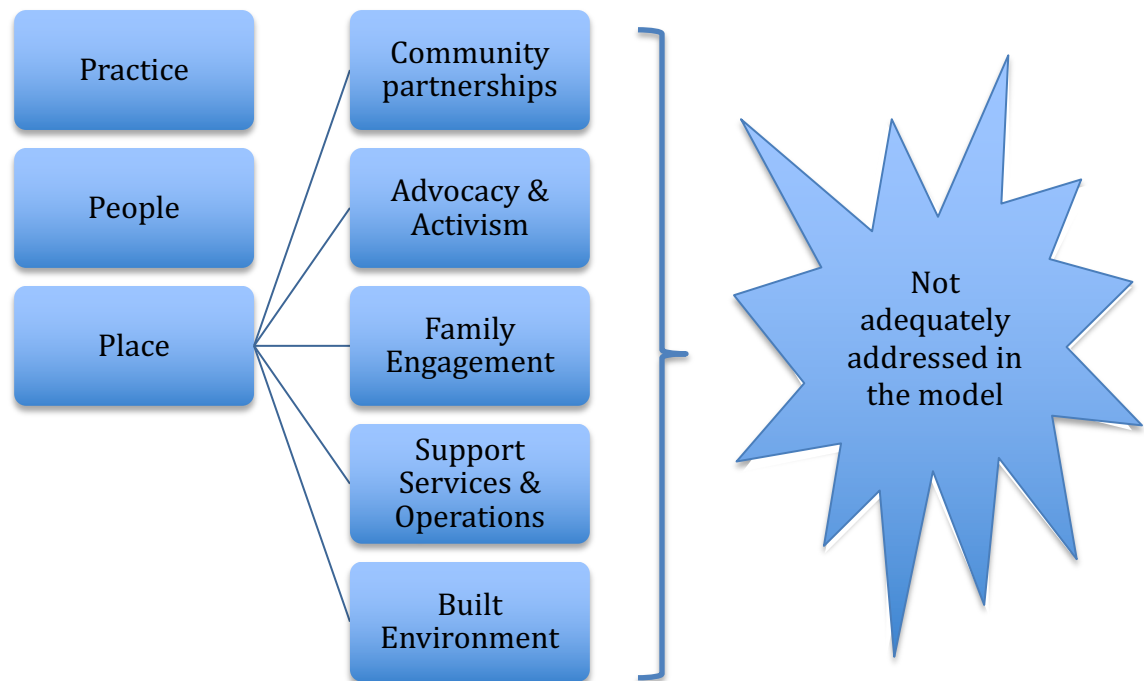
Strategic Project

*"I can't believe this is the land from which I came
Ya know I really do hate to say it,
The government don't wanna see,
But if Roosevelt was livin,
He wouldn't let this be."*

- Excerpt from "They Don't Really Care About Us" by Michael Jackson

Shift Thinking

On a team rightly and deeply focused on employing a better method for designing schools and developing an improved learning model for those schools, how might I move the team toward recognizing the importance of student learning conditions and taking action to improve them as part of our work? In brief, that has been the essential question that has grounded my strategic project.



The theoretical basis of this project rests with the research around Collective Impact and community schools, as referenced above. Fortunately for me, most of my team was familiar with these ideas at their most basic level and very sympathetic to them. But, as is the case for many educators, it was hard for my team to get past theoretical agreement with Heifetz’s notion that education transformation is an adaptive problem that demands cross-sector solutions (Linksy & Heifetz, 2002). The problem feels too big. And the way our work was organized, according to ten design elements, did not lend itself to addressing the broader conditions that our students face outside of the school walls. We talked a good game about learning happening “anytime, anywhere,” but we were not quite at the level where we could begin to address the “disablers” of student learning that transcend those same school walls. We were very focused on the enablers of powerful learning in our school design and

curricula. So my first task was to build on this rather general level of agreement and turn it into something actionable.

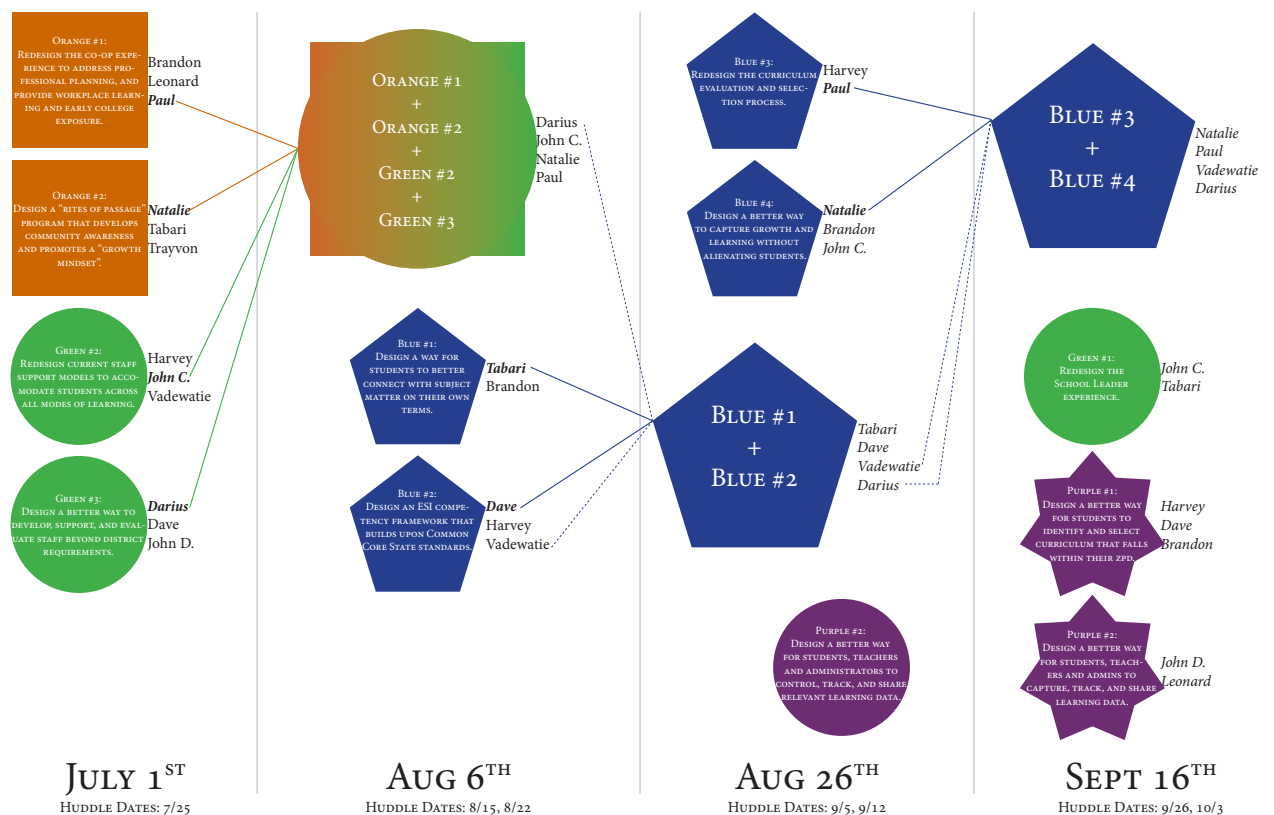
In its simplest form, the goal of my strategic project has been to develop a way for schools to eliminate barriers to learning for children. There is an admitted tension here between a school's stated "academic" goals around providing children with instruction according to agreed upon standards versus providing (or ensuring students get access to, when necessary) a more holistic suite of services that both complements and supplements their academic learning. We already ask our schools to do a great deal for our children. Questions about the limits of a school's ability to serve the whole child and where services are best located (in or out of the school) are complicated ones and local conditions in communities often offer the best answers to us on a per school basis. At a sector level, this work touches on a fairly significant debate happening in our sector presently in which different ideological camps debates the merits of addressing poverty as it relates to student performance in schools. To me, this is an impoverished debate (pun intended) simply because it is not an either/or question. We can and must do both—address poverty and its negative impact on our students while dramatically improving how learning happens in our schools. My goal has been to demonstrate how we might do both well in the context of a designing and launching new high schools in the nation's largest school district.

While still in need of further refinement, the essence of the strategic project is determining what a "learning environment improvement strategy" looks like at a school-level as well as across a small network of schools. This is a heavy lift unto

itself, but the more ambitious hope is that this work will be informative for the larger school district in terms of the work that they do. Perhaps a not-so-pie-in-the-sky dream is that districts will one day develop their own Learning Environments Improvement offices as a parallel partner to the curriculum and instruction offices that address how the district monitors, understands, and addresses barriers to learning for students while continuously improving learning environments and the learning model. That is the dream. But perhaps it must start at the school-level, first.

First Reorganization - From Ten to Eleven

Our initial structure had our ten design elements broken down into discrete mini-projects that rotated in two-week cycles and were eventually bundled together by aggregation teams that made sense of what was created in the smaller teams.



It was clear to me that a strategy around improving learning environments could not fit within the existing ten elements and that it would need to be added as an eleventh element. After a few conversations with colleagues and my supervisor on the matter, an eleventh element was added to the framework called “Community Coordination.” John paired me with Tabari Bomani, a colleague and veteran of the district for nearly twenty-five years with deep roots in the community. This pairing made a lot of sense in the first reorganization of our larger project. Rather than working on larger three- or four-person teams on a discrete mini-project, we now found ourselves on two (three for some) two-person teams focused on one of the larger elements, now eleven of them with the addition of Community Coordination. This added a level of ownership and raised the stakes to some degree as it gave each team greater responsibility over a bigger piece of the model. This first reorganization demanded a higher degree of trust from the group in terms of authorizing our colleagues to manage and make decisions about essential pieces of the larger model. I was also tasked with Data Management as my second team, with John Duval.

Second Reorganization – A Focus on Deliverables

In the midst of some significant setbacks, our team narrowed our focus to the OSF deliverables that were necessary to maintain our primary funding stream. This move was not entirely myopic in that the deliverables were linked to school start-up in tangible ways. Taken together though, they did not constitute the full scope of the model we were initially intent on launching. Relevant to my strategic project, the

OSF deliverables did not include any mention of student learning environments in any meaningful way. We organized ourselves into two teams, Orange and Blue, and tagged the deliverables to each team.

Orange OSF Deliverables			
Competency framework mapped to Common Core and other Domains	ELA and Math Modules with Embedded Assessments through CRE lens	Advisory Curriculum	Data Ecosystem Blueprint Action Plan

Blue OSF Deliverables				
A sequence of workshops and facilitator guides on culturally responsive youth development strategies	A sequence of workshops and facilitator guides on culturally responsive college advisement strategies	A school-wide plan for implementing a restorative justice approach	A guide and rubric for interviewing new teachers to assess cultural competence	A classroom management behavioral guide developed 'by teachers' from ESI schools

During this time period, roughly from early January through mid-March, I admittedly did very little to shift the team's thinking on learning environments or to push for re-engagement around the issue. Interestingly, other members of the team began calling out how that particular stream of work was missing after this second reorganization. To some degree, this signaled the impact of its initial inclusion on my colleagues' thinking. They seemed to realize its important and remind me occasionally about the absence of that part of the work in the new configuration. I was heartened by this but also somewhat at a loss given the general inertia of the group moving towards completing the deliverables.

Third Reorganization – Three P's

Amidst the turmoil noted in the Introduction, we solidified our model. We spent a great deal of time hashing out student and staff competencies as we moved into

preliminary recruitment of those two groups. Inherent in the initial design of our model was a sort of “kitchen sink” approach to the model itself. In other words, we started with ten key elements that we insisted were critical to the success of this new high school model. The elements were not all the same grain size and not all, arguably, equally important in general and certainly not in the first year of implementation. Furthermore, from a community engagement standpoint, when folks asked us to describe the model, most of us would call up the ten elements in our mind (to the extent that we could) and simply mention a few of the elements at random without considering what elements were most important and/or clear for our audience. In fairness, the model started as dense as it was because many of those elements were working in isolation in exemplar schools across the country but were never merged together to create a unified model that served our target population as well as we were planning. All of the elements were important enough to mention and include in the model but all of the elements were not the primary drivers of the innovation we were proposing.

Help came in March in the form of the Carnegie Foundation Summit on Improvement in Education. It was our team’s introduction to Improvement Science and, specifically, driver diagrams. Just as our website was launching, and student and staff recruitment were beginning in earnest, we stumbled upon a way of organizing our elements and clarifying our overall approach. We landed on Practice, People and Place as our three main drivers:

In 2011, New York City launched the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) to improve the education, employment, justice and health outcomes of black and Latino young

men. The **Expanded Success Initiative** (ESI), an extension of YMI, focuses on increasing students' college and career preparedness. With support from the **Open Society Foundation**, ESI comprises two strategies. The first is testing and disseminating the best practices of 40 local high schools working to improve their academic, youth development and school culture practices. The second involves the creation of an innovative high school model that, through NYC DOE's **School Design Fellowship**, results in a comprehensive model that holistically prepares all students for college, career and life success. The new ESI high school model incorporates a combination practices, structures, and resources to ensure that students graduate with a positive sense of self, "I can..." mentality, and capacity to transform the world around them. The new ESI high school emphasizes three key areas of work: practice, people and place.

I. PRACTICE: *Culturally relevant and purposeful learning experiences leading to the mastery of skills*

- **Competency-based framework** integrating academic, social-emotional, college and career-readiness learning goals.
- **Personalized learning pathways** that challenge students while providing them with targeted support.
- **Ongoing and varied assessments** that afford students multiple and diverse opportunities to achieve and demonstrate mastery.
- **Integrated technology and data use** to personalize learning and facilitate access to resources.
- **Early College and Workplace Place Learning** opportunities for students that form a "readiness bridge" into post-secondary opportunities.
- **Youth Development** strategies that emphasize restorative practice, cultural relevance and developmental appropriateness.

II. PEOPLE: *Culturally relevant staffing and development based on students' real-time needs*

- **Flexible adult roles and schedules** that accommodate students' varying needs.
- **Personalized professional learning** plans that support the continuous growth of our staff.
- **Adult competencies** based on our learning priorities and students' needs which serve as bases for staff selection and professional development.
- **Leadership pipelines** that foster professional growth, collaboration and mentorship.
- **Holistic and purposeful evaluation** that emphasizes effective teamwork and individual growth and development.

III. PLACE: *Culturally relevant environments that nurture growth, community and positive identity*

- **Community-based partnerships** connecting services, supports and real-world learning opportunities.
- **Advocacy and activism** that surfaces and addresses constraints that hinder student growth.

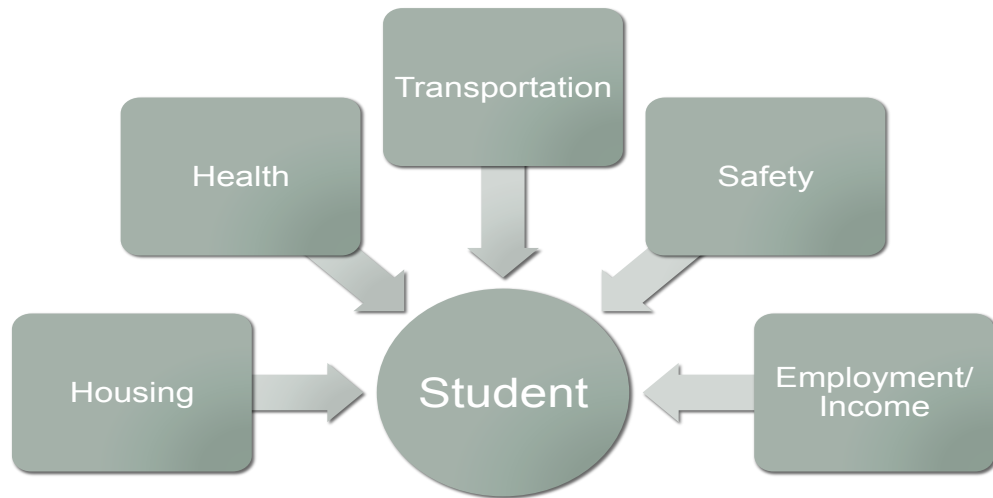
- **Family engagement** that ensures real partnership and shared leadership by the community.
- **Support services and operations** systems that remove barriers to learning for students.
- **Built environments** that are intentionally designed to support transformational learning.

From this baseline, we created a “driver diagram” where we clarified our core areas of work. John Duval reminded us that we were in the business of starting new schools, not merely fulfilling deliverables for OSF. We had pigeon-holed ourselves and allowed the deliverables to drive our work since January and that would need to change moving forward. We added a fourth “P” for “Process” and retooled the way we worked as a group, which had us ignoring our norms and working less productively than our true capabilities. Each of the four “P’s” had five secondary drivers (six in the case of Practice) mapped to them and then a number of deliverables, actions and norms attached to each secondary driver (See Appendix VIII). I co-led this reorganization work with Natalie Ferrell and consulted with John Duval as he spent more time at Tweed working the backchannels to ensure the integrity of our work within the district.

Share the work

After the first reorganization, Tabari and I dove into Community Coordination eagerly, first doing some research and general framing of our thoughts on the issue. We came up with the following major areas for barriers to learning:

Barriers to Learning



Our notion was that addressing these five core areas in students' lives would serve to reduce significant barriers to learn. Our focus would be on rigorous and regular screening to continually understand how students were faring in these areas and how the schools might leverage support on their behalf. We envisioned students having a tablet as an organizing tool for their learning with a home screen that looks something like this (imagine an iPad):

Academic - ELA competencies - Math competencies - Science competencies	Social-Emotional - Persistence - Self-regulation - Social awareness
College & Career - Resumé - FAFSA - SAT - Personal Statement	Whole Learner - Housing - Health - Transportation - Safety - Employment/Income

In the Whole Learner quadrant, students could self-assess how they and their families were doing in key areas and also connect with services for support in those areas. The overall innovation and goal we were moving towards was scaffolding students into increasingly accurate self-assessment and self-service around these barriers to learning. At first, they might need a lot of support in the way of adults assessing their needs in these areas and connecting them with services but that eventually students would exercise their agency to address these issues using a supportive infrastructure provided by the school (in partnerships with community-based organizations, etc.). After some testing of this prototype with students, some told us that they would be reluctant to use a tool such as this due to privacy concerns and that they might only do so in emergencies or other extreme circumstances. In general though, they were open to the idea of the school helping them access services but seemed to convey (at least in the case of our student fellows) that it was not a critical part of their daily thinking. This initial feedback dissuaded us a bit and discouraged us from iterating, as we perhaps should have done on what we designed in this instance.

Family Engagement

In small teams, we embarked on broad community engagement as part of our work to secure charters for four schools through the summer and into the early fall. We met with community members in storefront churches, parks, and public housing complexes to name a few venues. These meetings were really part of a listening tour—“empathy work” as we call it—to better understand community needs and desires as we were designing the new high school model. It was clear during our

meetings that community members were not used to this new type of advance engagement prior to the opening of new schools. Many seemed heartened to be even asked their opinion about what new schools opening up in their community should be doing to serve them.

In February, John tasked me with leading our external communications work. I spearheaded the creation of our schools' website (www.epicschoolsnyc.org) along with promotional materials for our high school recruitment fairs and community outreach. When our initial pro-bono contact for our design work fell through, I was able to connect with a friend who does that sort of work and we got him a contract in just a few days. His flexibility and responsiveness ended up being invaluable to us as we designed our logo and other materials. We made it a point to focus on producing high-quality materials as so many schools fail to do this and it has a real impact on how families and students feel about the schools. It is hard for families to take pride in a school that does not outwardly take pride in itself.

Support Services & Operations

The Office of New Schools loosely asks school leaders to complete a start-up checklist that we have been following as a helpful guide to launching our schools. Our task more recently has been to align this work with our broader model. Most of the checklist refers to operational concerns that need to be addressed ("the basics") as a school comes online. As we have shifted to the "Three P's" organizing framework, we have embedded aspects of this checklist into our work. We learned our lesson from the OSF deliverables in terms of not allowing a list of deliverables to drive our work and to keep a broader focus on starting high-quality schools. With

reference to support services, we are planning to survey and better learn the needs of our students and families as we start-up so that we know what services we should provide within the school versus connecting students with community-based organizations to care for students' broader needs. At the same time, we have built the roles of youth development director, youth advocate and learning coach into our model as staff members who will focused on surrounding students with the necessary support services to create healthy learning environments for students.

Built Environment

Our contract with DKS has begun in earnest and we have already embarked on some initial community mapping in an effort to create a robust "learning network" for students in Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park, the neighborhoods in which our schools are located (See Appendix XI). In the first year of this work, we have decided to focus on marginal changes to the internal layout of the school to support learning along with community mapping to support community engagement. We will also document our process closely this year in order to build a case for a focus on improving built environments to support learning in our schools and across the districts in years to come. In subsequent years, we will continue to document our efforts to align physical space to the learning model along with asking for significant changes to the physical structure in order to support stronger student learning.

Community Partnerships

Finally, our work around Community Partnerships has been the deepest and most promising in terms of our initial results in this area. Our initial meeting with Children's Aid Society, even despite the aforementioned missteps, began the first

steps of a learning partnership in which we explore their community schools work and develop similar structures in our schools. We developed a growing partnership with Project SAFE, an organization supported by Lutheran Family Services, which will provide free sexual health and peer education courses for our students. Brotherhood/Sister Sol is working closely with us on developing culturally relevant curricula and advisory programs that reflect the cultures of our students and families. We are even exploring the possibility of starting Brotherhood/Sister Sol chapters within our schools as well as sharing jointly funded staff members who work between the organization and our schools. The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, a renowned local nonprofit working in over 700 schools in New York City, is co-developing a school-wide restorative practice plan with us. The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (Metro Center) at New York University is supporting our work by co-developing professional learning curricula on cultural relevance for our school staff. We have developed a loose partnership with The Door as an all-purpose resource center where we will send youth in need of services that our schools cannot provide themselves. We are working with City Year New York as a “pipeline provider” that will help us identify, recruit and place exiting corps members as learning coaches in our schools as well as for curriculum development support. At one of our school sites, we are moving into a building in which a local community-based organization—South Asian Youth Action (SAYA)—maintains an office in the school and we are already in talks with them about how we might develop a mutually-beneficial partnership that would allow for continued shared space.

Design the Future

Our work on the Built Environment with DKS has powerful implications for the future of our schools. First, the initial community mapping work allows us to enter the communities we will be serving in a learning stance and with a respectful presence that helps us understand the assets in play in the communities. This work also sets us on a longer term trajectory towards both reshaping the physical design of our schools to improve learning while also creating a community-wide “learning network” that allows us to coordinate and harness community resources in a Collective Impact framework. The latter piece is admittedly a multi-year endeavor but nevertheless a worthy goal. Potentially serving as a co-leader of one of the schools (or even at the district office) gives my teammates and me in similar positions a wonderful opportunity to lead on this work.

More broadly, we will continue to prioritize our work on the five secondary drivers under “Place.” For example, Advocacy and Activism has been highlighted as an area that will begin most likely when the schools themselves start up and we are able to gauge community input on what issues and how they would like to organize with school staff. The team is in the process of developing more granular workplans and deliverables for each of the secondary drivers under “Place.”

As we move forward, we are consciously looking to strengthen the connective tissue between our work at the school sites and other offices, agencies and organizations that are engaged in similar work. For example, I will be meeting with one of the leaders of the district’s Digital Ready initiative who organizes their Expanded Learning Opportunities portfolio. This connection has the potential to provide our

schools with district resources to connect students with organizations and businesses in the community where they could extend their learning and experience enriching internships and other work opportunities. In this same vein, our team will be liaising with the district's Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) on a range of learning environment-related issues from restorative practice, school-CBO partnerships, school climate and safety, and other areas of work. Our team is also strategically placing a team member in the central office to develop a tighter partnership with City Hall to give us political "cover" and support for our work as it expands moving forward.

Overall, we find ourselves with a very unique and high-potential perch in the burgeoning national dialogue around educating youth of color. With the launch of the national My Brother's Keeper initiative, our presence at national conferences such as the COSEBOC Annual Gathering and the Reinventing America Summit, the opportunities to build and scale are slowly emerging as our schools come online. While much of the work in this area is prospective, we plan to move towards building strong community schools, nestled within "promise zones," that benefit from cross-jurisdictional Collective Impact strategies at the city-level. The key here is proceeding with the development of strong schools engaged in promising practices as a proof point for conversations about expanding that work at the local community and city-wide level. This connectivity between the school, community and larger city is crucial to the overall success of our work and we have in place strong prospective plans to work on all levels as we foster healthy learning environments for our students.

Exploring the Results

To restate, I will measure my results using the aforementioned strategic project goals:

1. Shift thinking
2. Share the work
3. Design the future

Shift Thinking

Across three reorganizations of our design fellowship team, we seem to have come full circle on the issue of “Place” and how we define and improve student learning environments. After their initial exclusion from the first iteration of the ESI design elements, we added them in the first reorganization of our team, a significant achievement. I will not claim full responsibility for this but I am certain that my badgering John Duval and my teammates on the issue pushed their thinking on it and John even sat me down to address its inclusion as an eleventh element. In the midst of a difficult time for the team, we “lost” our focus on learning environments in the second reorganization. Our team’s focus, which we have no identified as a mistake, shifted too narrowly towards the OSF deliverables and we organized around this deliverables accordingly. The bigger picture of school startup was also somewhat lost in that moment as well. I do not attribute the loss of focus to any real change in perceived importance on the part of the team. Rather, the deliverables due to OSF were very tangible and more near-term. Also, given the dramatically different “jobs” picture, I suspect the team needed something so tangible to cling to

in that moment. In the third reorganization, which is still in progress, the team came around pretty strongly in favor of more clearly defining our learning environments work, even giving it the name “Place” within our three P’s framework. We clearly articulated five areas of focus (Community partnerships, advocacy and activism, family engagement, support services and operations, and built environment) that would serve as drivers for the learning environments work. This final shift represents a significant reframing, broadening and deepening of our original ten design elements. It is more of a strategic plan to holistically address the needs of our learners with “Place” as a core aspect of that work.

In brief, the most significant result in terms of thinking being shifted has been this change in the structural language of our project and the resultant streams of work that have been prioritized as a result of this shift. Our project started out with ten elements focused mostly in instructional improvement and new ways of deploying staff. Now, partially as a result of my work on this strategic, five new elements (in the form of secondary drivers under “Place”) have been added to our core organizing framework and work on them is underway.

Share the work

Good work is already underway in at least four of our secondary drivers that fall address student learning environments (“Place”). (For now, advocacy and activism has been identified as an area of further work down the line as the schools open and community members begin to identify the issues around which they wish to organize with the support of the school).

Family Engagement

In terms of Family Engagement, we have already begun to support families through student recruitment efforts, developing a website and other marketing materials with ample information about our school model, along with targeted outreach to families in the communities we will serve.

Support Services and Operations

In terms of Support Services and Operations, we are being diligent about not just ensuring that our school start-up checklist is completed but connecting the way we devise our school operations plan to match the projected needs of our students and the eventual shape of our learning model. Over the summer, we will begin to get a sense of our students and then surround them with the support services they need to ensure powerful learning.

Built Environment

With Built Environment, we have begun to accomplish what most new schools fail to do (not solely due to lack of will): initiate the process of aligning our built environment and community resources with our instructional model and the needs of our students. This was a real stretch for the team as educators typically resign themselves to prescribed spaces with very traditional functionalities and pay little attention to the various ways that space enables or disables learning. In the first year, the Design Anthropology work will be to make marginal yet still significant changes to the internal layout of the schools in which we are located to improve student access to powerful learning while also making a strong case for further redevelopment of the schools' built environment based on our growing understanding of our students' needs. In succeeding years, we will continue to

develop the case for improvements to the built environment and attempt to embed our efforts into the work of the School Construction Authority at our school sites and potentially across the district much longer term.

Community Partnerships

In terms of measuring these particular results moving forward, we are striving to be thoughtful about our drivers as we consider the number and nature of our community partnerships and the degrees to which they serve the needs of our students and help us to fulfill the promise of each key driver. This particular area of work is an absolute force multiplier for our work. These partnerships expand the work of the school beyond its own walls, especially in terms of impact on students' lives and outcomes. The importance of integration rather than duplication becomes critical with such partnerships, as schools need to carefully monitor their time spent on managing such engagements.

Design the Future

In terms of Designing the Future of this work, we have a strong plan in place for at least the Built Environment piece of the work (See Appendix ____). Our work with DKS will continue through school start-up this fall and likely beyond as we continue to build a case for further improvements within the schools and community-wide. More broadly, there is a tension within this aspect of the work given how place-based it is and the fact that we only recently gained full confirmation on our school site placements. Furthermore, a strong understanding of how a learning environment can be improved to serve all learners come from the learners themselves, to whom we do not yet have access. We are still negotiating access to

the buildings in which we will be operating next year so that makes learning environments improvement challenging at this stage.

The clearest and most significant result here seems to be the combination of the work done under Shift Thinking and Share the Work such that, when taken together, serves to demonstrate how we have Designed the Future of this stream of work. In other words, now that we have fully prioritized “Place” within our core organizing framework and operationalized workstreams according to the corresponding secondary drivers, we have begun to design the future for this area of work. Much of the work and results are still very prospective, but a strong foundation has been laid.

Analysis

As I begin to analyze the effectiveness of my strategic project, it is important to again return to the central question and theory of action of this capstone:

How might we transform the interaction between schools and communities in order to positively influence the learning environments for children?

<i>IF I shift my team’s thinking on the importance of student learning environments, share the work with them as we strive to improve student learning environments, and design the future of this work with them as our schools come online, THEN the students that we serve will benefit through better learning and life outcomes.</i>

Overall, my sense is that this strategic project was a success. Given where we started as a team and where we currently find ourselves, I am excited about the prospects for this work moving forward and believe that we have come a long way in deepening and expanding our understanding and work to improve the lives of the children we serve. With that said, I should note that I came upon my Strategic Project in reflection rather than through intentional planning. I stumbled upon it,

really. I would like to think that, somewhere in my subconscious, I maintained the “Shift, Share & Design” framework from Day One. This is not the case. That said, I was able to locate something about which I am incredibly passionate, shift the team’s thinking on it, share the work with them, and co-design the future of this work with my teammates to varying degrees of effectiveness across the various domains.

In terms of shifting thinking, I believe that I was reasonably successful in this aspect of the work. My sense is that it was a short leap for most of my teammates and that the details of the work moving forward will determine the degree to which thinking has truly been shifted. But overall, getting the team to expand our work into a third core area of practice is no small feat and a major contribution to our efforts.

In terms of sharing the work, I found my work to be fledgling in this area. Our various reorganizations did not help with this, but neither did my own propensity to “own” work rather than delegate strategically. I hope to improve upon this moving forward.

In terms of designing the future, I believe that the inclusion of “Place” set us on a good course for this but that the details need to be fleshed much more specifically in the coming months as we finalize the model and get to know our communities. Much of this work is hard to pre-plan, but we can be much more strategic about the partnerships we develop and our overall plan to pull on multiple levels at the school, community and citywide levels to address our students’ needs.

As I analyze the results, I want to recognize that the culture of our organization (the ESI fellowship) is one of innovation, thought leadership and openness to

experimentation truly helped to advance this strategic project. I cannot imagine pushing for this type of work in the context of a traditional district office. That would have been an entirely different and likely more frustrating experience, which is an important observation on the state of work in our school districts.

Environmental factors definitely supported the success of this project as well. The mayoral election in New York called the question on rampant inequality in the city (and across the country), which gave the project some important political cover on the team, in the district and in the community. People were more willing to even *hear* arguments about improving learning conditions for kids in this context.

Relatedly, the transition at Tweed also opened up an opportunity for innovative leadership by creating a vacuum into which our team fit nicely, in part thanks to the maneuvering of John Duval. Finally, I want to allow myself some credit for the individual and group conversations, the emails, the work and the general efforts that I deployed to shift my team's thinking, share the work with them and design the future for "Place" in our work together. I was not always fully conscious of how "strategic" my work was, but, in reflection, I am glad that my passion for improving learning environments has become an integral part of our overall strategy and something on which I can focus professionally for years to come.

Shift thinking

Among the three domains identified in my strategic project, this aspect was arguably the lightest "lift." I say this because the team seemed largely aligned on the general importance of learning environments, but generally at a loss about how we

might practically address this area of work given the scope of our project. Even so, there were contextual factors and personal steps along the way that impacted this part of the work, which I will address here.

Focus on the learning model

For many educators, the problem of inadequate learning environments for children feels too big. Not only that, we are not trained to address them in typical teacher and school leader preparation programs. Even the Ed.L.D. program could benefit from deeper analysis of and work on improving student learning conditions as part of their systemic focus on improving the education sector. Given this, as educators, we tend to focus on that which we feel we can control—the instructional model. We double down on our efforts in this area because it seems the most tangible and is the area over which we have the most control. This, of course, ignores the obvious impact of the learning environment on even our best work in the instructional domain.

I will argue here that this well-intentioned and programmed myopia is an incredible detriment to the sector and our practice. If we cannot improve student learning environments ourselves, we must at least be organizing others to do so with us. We need to be communicating through word and deed to those with control over our students' learning environments what the ideal conditions are for students to do their best learning and growing.

In the context of this project, the team started out in this somewhat traditional way. Why we styled ourselves as innovative, and were in very real ways, we were missing a major part of the picture. We were innovative in a narrow, yet important lane, not

fully realizing how our innovations would be impacted by contextual factors in the lives of our students and their families. This is a microcosm for what is happening in the sector writ large. As Adelman argues, changes in instructional practice and governance are effectively disabled by learning environments not designed and resourced to fully and faithfully benefit from the changes in the former two areas. Therefore, much of the work in terms of shifting team thinking involved embedding learning environments as a priority in the first place. We have effectively done this by including “Place” among the primary drivers for our work. The work moving forward then is to build a common language, focus, and practice around how we do this. Still, I worry that we will divide ourselves into functional teams and miss some of the very important connectivity between “Place” and the other drivers. I am still not sure that I nor the team fully understands the extent to which “Place” serves as an enabling condition for the other drivers. By the very nature of our work, we may not know the full extent to which “Place” helps to determine how our students will respond to our dynamic new learning model. I am committed to ensuring that we are as fully prepared for this as possible on the front-end and am working to design the future of our model such that it is highly responsive to the constantly adapting needs of our students with regard to “Place.”

Impact of multiple reorganizations

Our multiple reorganizations, as learning conditions themselves, both enabled and disabled our work around learning environments. In two instances, the outset of our project and the second reorganization (focused on the OSF deliverables), the larger

organization of our project disabled a focus on learning environments. In both instances, learning environments simply were not included as a high leverage driver of change in our new school model. Little to no work was being done on the issue and our focus was pointed towards the instructional model, which continues to be the most robust part of our work.

In the first and most recent reorganization of the team, the learning conditions changed strongly in favor of our addressing learning environments improvement in a more concerted fashion. “Community Coordination” was a somewhat haphazard but earnest start on this work. The initial outreach and testing that we did with our ideas was important to the later iteration in the Three P’s model. Perhaps the biggest “assist” for the notion of “Place” came from the driver diagram and our use of this tool to frame our broader work. This tool allowed us to tease out the various aspects of “Place” and the other primary drivers in a way that made sense for the team. We began to see the connections between the primary and secondary drivers and quite simply the importance of things like built environment and support services as contextual factors in the lives of our students. The diagram and our resultant re-framing of our work put down into word and strategic picture what many educators feel instinctively when we utter comments such as, “This school looks like a prison, I don’t know how kids are supposed to learn here,” (built environment) or “We need local community organizations to provide more enriching afterschool opportunities for our kids” (community partnerships). Overall, the multiple reorganizations could be seen as providing fertile ground for new ideas to flourish, such as “Place” did in a few instances. At the same time, the

question of scope creeps in as our second reorganization was remarkably narrow and begs the question of how we allowed ourselves to work with such a constricted frame on our work given the larger task (starting schools) that lies before us.

Tools & Silos

For reasons that have proven helpful and somewhat limiting to our work, the Expanded Success Initiative School Design Fellowship is set apart from the rest of the district. This has allowed us to design beyond constraints and strategize for deeper and longer term impact, but has also given us fewer tools and created a bit of silo than might have existed if we were better integrated into the work of the larger district. That said, this is a broader contextual problem with the DOE. District offices operate in a feudal model with warring lords, competing vassals and subordinated serfs all vying for positionality, pots of money and recognition. This is the problem we ran into with the Office of New Schools and speaks to a rather fundamental “problem” that we created under Bloomberg/Klein and continues into the new administration. That is a discussion for an entirely different capstone, but it impacts our work in myriad ways. In this specific case, we do not have explicit connections to entities like the Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD) within the DOE and other city agencies with whom we should arguably be liaising with to facilitate learning environments improvement work. While there are questions about OSYD’s “mandate” and the degree to which it influences the regular practice of schools, the reality remains that initiatives like ours are not equipped, in their very structuring, with the means that these other offices carry, to address the problem of inadequate student learning environments. Could I and/or other team members have connected

with these offices and other agencies earlier on to begin collaborating and planning this work? The short answer is yes. Longer term, this is what we must do.

Another relevant point is that this work is so place-based and time-sensitive that, until recently, it has been too early in the model development process to engage in a full-scale initiative to address student learning environments. I have tried to consciously stage this for the team and it makes a great deal of sense that, now that we have a sense of “place,” we are beginning this work in earnest. My sense is that this is no coincidence. I also believe that we will deepen this work greatly once we analyze the needs of our students and their families at the respective school sites. Finally, it seems that bringing on a vendor—in the form of DKS—that engages in a tangible facet of learning environments work was incredibly helpful for the team. We are a team that responds to prototyping and testing, given our Design Thinking foundations, and this is essentially what DKS has brought to the table through its previous work in this area. Through tangible examples of how Design Anthropology has powerfully improved learning environments for students everywhere from Australia to Massachusetts, the team had something to grab onto in this otherwise nebulous area of work. By showing how the built environment has a very real impact on student learning, our contract with DKS opened up the door for our broader understanding of “Place” and how we might support our broader work through this key driver.

Reimagining “Scale”

During the most recent election season, the city was enthralled with the story of young Dasani Coates, one of the over 22,000 homeless children in New York City.

New elected officials were ushered into office promising to solve such intractable problems. One incoming official even had Dasani hold the bible on which she was sworn in. Despite these hopeful promising, the scale and scope of these entrenched societal issues that affect our students' daily lives feel so untouchable to many of us as individuals. This leads us to instinctively question efforts to address these social ills. Layer on top of that our general distrust and disdain for all things "government" and we find ourselves feeling rather powerless and skeptical of new programs developed to tackle these issues. We see small-scale solutions and immediately question their replicability. But what if we conceived of scale a little different? What if did not think of scale as every school doing the same thing and achieving the same goal?

What if "scale" looked more like each school meeting the unique needs of its students with a personalized suite of services (academic and otherwise) as they co-develop enabling learning environments for each learner? And what if "scale" was conceived of as a set of good choices within a community that meets the many varied needs of the learners within it as a complete set of learning experiences? As we develop our network of schools, we are beginning to transform our thinking about scale towards an ideal that is more actionable and centered on user needs in this way.

In this thinking, there are tensions between that can and must be done at the school-, community-, and citywide levels of the work. This is a notion that streams throughout all domains of this analysis. In terms of Shifting Thinking, part of the work is coming to agreement about what can and must be done at the school-level.

Our team has not reached consensus on this and I imagine will continue to wrestle with this issue as our schools come online. We will address this essential question in practice as we determine the limits of our own work in the schools. At the same time, we will plan for calling the question for that which we cannot address at the school-level.

Share the work

On a day-to-day basis, this domain was the most challenging to enact. Much of this work felt prospective and not always central to the team's work. Also, I am still on a learning curve towards becoming a leader who delegates strategically and effectively engages members of a team according to their talents and passions, which impacted this work significantly.

Deliverables, Ownership & Projects

It is difficult to share the work when the overarching organizational structure around the work is constantly changing. This is perhaps one downside to the "nimble team" approach, consistency and focus can shift as well if reorganizations do not happen with a central aim in mind. It was not until mid-March that John Duval sat us down to remind us that the OSF deliverables were not our central focus but rather preparing to start great schools. This re-centered our work greatly but the damage had been done in terms of time lost as we focused too narrowly on the deliverables. In a sense, there was no "work" to share from January through mid-March given the way the team was organized. I allowed myself to be cowed by the

new structure and did not push for re-inclusion of community coordination work and I will own that misstep.

At the same time, this notion of “ownership” on teams can be powerful and problematic. We have been playing with the idea of everyone owning the work even though certain individuals are tagged to driving the work. Sometimes, when team members perceive someone as the owner of a workstream, they disengage from it and buy-in is lost. Their otherwise helpful input and expertise are not integrated into that workstream and that area of work is made less rich because of it. The team came to see me (and Tabari to some extent) as the owners of this work on learning environments thereby exempting themselves from focusing on it. At the same time, I accepted that ownership, partly a function of ego, and did not always share the work with the team. There is a big difference between sharing the work and reporting out about it. People often confuse the two in practice.

Finally, as it was framed in the first reorganization in the form of Community Coordination, the work was seen as a “project” rather than a central organizing structure for the work among other major pillars. In this way, the focus then narrows to rather discrete deliverables such as individual partnerships with community organizations or a one-off activity of some sort, rather than a driver of the broader work. The driver diagram helped us move past this framing and towards a more holistic conception of “place” and its impact.

The Importance of Place & Staging

Sharing the work was also very difficult to do given its place-based nature and our lack of securely identified school sites prior to mid-March. This is a critical contextual element for two reasons. The first is that work to improve learning environments requires an environment with which to engage. This seems simplistic, but we lacked this until mid-March. Once we had it, we jumped into the work as a team, which is telling regarding how much we care about this aspect of the work. Secondly, our work with DKS has taught us the importance of process and staging when it comes to doing empathy work, needs assessments and community asset mapping within neighborhoods as an important first step in improving learning environments. This is the first step and once we had our locations secured, we engaged in this work together by spending a day walking through the community and mapping out key elements that might support and hinder learning for our students. This is all to say that sharing the work prior to this critical first step would have been a misstep and albeit impossible given how the work needs to be structured.

Design the future

The term “design the future” comes from one of our core competencies for students in our competency-based framework. Our goal is for students to leave our schools ready, willing and able to design their own futures using the right tools at their disposal. My sense is that our team and my strategic project succeeding strongly in this aspect of the work. We expanded our thinking while keeping a focus on our central goal over the long term and stretched ourselves significantly in doing so. Our

planning is still rather prospective, but I am confident that the details will be filled in adequately as the work rolls out in our communities.

Priorities

The biggest success in this area, as we plan for the future of this work, was to designate “Place” as a primary driver and to clearly spell out our secondary drivers with a high degree of specificity. Connecting these drivers to our aim—ten out of ten youth graduating college and career ready—maps this area of focus to future work and forces the team to plan accordingly. We may decide to reorient in the future, but for now, we are in the initial stages of designing a future that involves serious attention to student learning environments and how we might improve them.

Context for Collective Impact

In the context of mayoral control, the Young Men’s Initiative (YMI), significant foundation support, and the scale of the district itself, there exists an incredible opportunity for Collective Impact work in New York City. This work offers significant potential for holistically addressing the tangled web of policy constraints that ensnare youth of color and inhibit their futures. At the same time, Collective Impact work requires much more than potential energy and positionality. It requires integration and collective agreement in terms of a centralized approach to addressing multi-faceted problems. YMI has many of the marking of a Collective Impact approach, but it is missing key pieces of integration. ESI represents a major arm of YMI, yet we have not been asked (nor have we really taken it upon ourselves at this point, in fairness) to integrate our work with the other arms of the initiative. This is rather telling and points to the challenges inherent in any Collective Impact

approach when it comes to getting people together to align their work. Any attempts to design the future of this work has to consider this current state of affairs and move to remedy them. To our credit, our team is placing a number of individuals within the DOE infrastructure who will likely begin to have these conversations with partners across the city thereby planting the seeds for this higher-level coordination.

Proof Points

On a smaller scale, our biggest designs for the future are those of the schools we are starting this fall. Our goal is to test the limitations of what can be accomplished at the school and community levels in our first year of implementation while simultaneously preparing the ground (citywide) for broader Collective Impact work. In short, our team members at the school-level will be doing their level best to build community learning centers similar to those in Cincinnati, promise zones in partnership with local organizations, and full-service community schools similar to those in Harlem while simultaneously documenting the limits of what can be done at the school level to those at the community and city levels. Our intention for our schools is that live at the edges of what promising practice looks like and are consistently calling the question on how their practice can be better enabled by contextual factors (some beyond their control) and to have those factors addressed through their advocacy and good work. This is the most ideal state for our schools and implementing such a cutting-edge school model will be the truest embodiment of designing the future.

Implications for Self

Growing as a team member

I came into this new team committed to apply the learning from my experience with my cohort in the Ed.L.D. program. Specifically, I know that I struggled to be a colleague, teammate, and friend in the cohort. I was overly committed to being the “nomad” and did not do enough to honor and learn from the experiences and expertise of my cohort mates. I wrongly conflated my perception with the cohort (as being conflict-averse, cowed by issues relating to race, class and social justice, etc.) with individual members of the cohort who did not share always share those tendencies or perspectives. Overall, I recognized the opportunity with this new team and committed myself to employing the tools learned about teaming and group dynamics in the Ed.L.D. program along with what I learned from the mistakes that I made to this new team and our work together.

I committed to serving as the team’s “Chief Vulnerability Officer” early on. I pushed the group to engage in Public Narrative work and they responded to it so well. It really brought the group together and set us on a path to consider how we share our unique stories with the communities we will serve when the schools open. Months later, as we engaged in community engagement and student recruitment work, colleagues would relate that they continued to benefit from our initial Public Narrative work in their conversations with community members. It made them better stewards of the model we had developed together and allowed them to connect more deeply with families. This made me proud.

Overall, I have pushed the team to consider the mutual importance of *process and product* and this notion that the two influence each other in deep and contextual

ways. In virtually every case, processes impact the products that are ultimately produced. We learned this lesson deeply in our design thinking work. Bringing in Public Narrative, Immunity to Change, Group Relations theory and other frameworks for understanding our issues around teaming has proven challenging in terms of meeting everyone where they are and creating a sense of group ownership in this part of the work. The pull of the deliverables and our general cultural disposition towards product and away from process make this difficult. All of this is to say that being a member of this team has taught me a great deal about what it means to be a member of a highly-functional team that is constantly trying to evolve itself and get better. Even in moments of resistance, I feel an openness among my teammates to try new things and “go along” with protocols that address process, even if they feel that we discuss such things too much. I can only attribute this openness to their incredible characters and our initial work to build trust and cohesion.

A better understanding of leadership

Working on an entirely flat team has been a powerful learning experience that I hope to carry with me into future work. I have seen first-hand how such a way of organizing can lend itself to creativity and increased speed and iteration on ideas and work while also leading to drift, groupthink and myopia at times. It has taught me that flatness is strong ideal to be utilized in group work but with key structures and processes in place to protect against some of the potentially harmful consequences of such a team organization style.

In this, I have learned to “manage up” with John Duval in ways that have strengthened our relationship and hopefully made us better at what we do. I have made a point to always ask him for pointed and constructive feedback on my work. He has more than delivered and pushed me to be constantly reflective in my work and to improve on the feedback he has given me. I believe I have also pushed him on ways that I feel he could be leading our team to improve our work as well, and I am grateful that he has accepted these critiques and moved on them. This experience has made me re-evaluate my relationship with authority and re-assess the kind of leader I wish to be next year in the schools and beyond. John’s leadership has demonstrated how a leader hires for his own weaknesses, grants a great degree of autonomy, creates a trusting environment for staff to operate, and encourages learning from failure and experimentation. John created space for me to advocate for the addition of our eleventh element and to get the group to adopt the driver diagram as an organization framework for the entirety of our work. Such creative freedom requires a lot of trust from one’s supervisor and John has given us just that. He has also been very thoughtful about how and where to deploy us, a key skill that I have absorbed as I think about how to improve my own delegation skills.

Make it manageable, then share it

As a systems-thinker, this project has made me very conscious of my tendency to overwhelm people with the spectre of my systemic-analyses. To the point that they feel no good options to address the systemic issue exist, I have learned to make even systemic work manageable for people and to plug them into smaller pieces of the

work in order to get at the larger systemic problem. The question is not how one person can take on a systemic problem, because, by definition, they cannot. But they can plug into systemic transformation work in their own unique way that begins to move the wheel in the right direction. Giving people meaning in that more bite-sized sense is truly important and something I have striven to do with my strategic project. I am growing in my ability to give people agency even in the context of systemic challenges. It is not easy but is so important if we are at all serious about solving these broad, cross-sector challenges.

Know Thyself

Upon learning about the stages of adult development, I have felt challenged to become self-transforming. This is in part because of my competitive nature; competitive with myself in this instance. (I also received some good advice from my leadership coach, Bob Goodman, about using my competitive nature to push myself in other areas where I might need more support and growth). But I am also intrigued by the idea of growing and developing in this way because I know that it will make me a better leader. So I committed myself to asking for feedback more regularly and integrating it into my work as often as possible. The goal was to create tighter feedback loops and therefore faster growth. So in my meetings with John Duval and others, I would ask, very pointedly, for constructive feedback. Over the course of this year, I have been pushed by supervisors, colleagues and friends to be more patient (or least convey it), to take greater care using my rhetorical swiftness as it can overwhelm and corner people in conversation, to strive to better understand and respond to context and hierarchy regardless of my personal desires,

and to spend more time thinking about scaffolding complex concepts and work for people. This feedback has been absolutely invaluable and has helped me become a more reflective and responsive colleague and friend. While it is still sometimes difficult to hear and I sometimes want to debate and argue various points when I do hear such things, it has become good practice to ask and recognize how it gives others entry points in who I am and is another way of showing vulnerability. I must admit that I still find myself surprised from time to time how different people can experience the “same” situation so differently and have such divergent readings of a situation, but knowing that this is even possible makes me a better leader and thinker in any given moment and I am grateful for that. Overall, this residency has helped me to know myself so much better and to be more open, publicly reflective and vulnerable with those around me in ways that, I hope, move our work forward.

Full immersion

As an assistant principal in one the schools next year, I will have an incredible opportunity to build on these lessons learned. I look forward to jumping headlong into driving the work that I describe in this capstone. I will work towards realizing many of the promising practices I mention in the communities that we serve. I will do the hard work of building community partnerships, collaborating with families, students and other stakeholders, and generally pushing a learning environments improvement agenda at every level.

For me personally and professionally, so much of my career to date has been about systems-thinking and academic pursuits. For the first time in my career, I will no

longer be a student *and* practitioner; I will be wholly in the work. While I will always continue to be a lifelong learner, I look forward to being fully immersed in the practice of all that I have learned and written about in my academic career.

Implications for Site

For better results, integrate and innovate

I struggle mightily with this idea of “the system.” I recognize the importance of having some sort of public system that serves all learners and I realize the need for all of us to be deeply invested in that system as both users and caretakers. At the same time, the current nature of the system grinds my soul and pushes me to strongly consider this idea of “exit” (as posited by Albert Hirschman) when it comes to my involvement. The idea that within the same system (which is ideally driving towards collectively agreed-upon goals), there exists warring factions driven by competing egos and dueling interests is incredibly problematic to me. I get the ideas behind the notion of creative destruction and how a little competition can drive some level of innovation, but I have also seen and felt the limits of these differences in practice in terms of how they affect children’s lives. ESI should not have to battle with ONS for schools when both should be working to fulfill the goal of increasing college and career readiness for Black and Latino youth. At the same time, our work should be more deeply integrated with parallel initiatives such as Digital Ready and OSYD because our work is often overlapping and usually complementary. Similar examples abound in a place like Tweed, but the point is that a certain higher level of integration and coherence is required to elicit radically improved outcomes. John Duval keeps pushing our team on this notion of what needs to be “cut,” given how

schools often just add new initiatives without rethinking how existing initiatives are currently integrated into a coherent web of services for students and staff. We have an incredible “program bias” in education because we are trying to serve so many varied needs, we think that adding more will mean that we can meet more needs. Taking a moment to integrate work and consider what is not working and can be shelved will be critically important to the success of the district.

R&D and false dichotomies

Related to the above point is this notion of research and development in the context of education. We do not engage in this particularly well at this point for two reasons: 1) we have an overly-nostalgic connection to earlier ways of doing things and somewhat stale methods of practice, and, 2) we are simultaneously and counterintuitively very quick to adopt new products and practices without much testing and consideration of user needs. Inside of this is a supposed tension between the “old school” and “new school” in education. My sense is that this tension is a false dichotomy and a dangerous one at that. For example, the school leader experience “policy” that was passed by the new administration quite recently embodies both the misguided nostalgia in the sector as well as the severe lack of thoughtful research and development in the field currently. In brief, because the previous administration replaced many veteran school leaders with younger school leaders with fewer years of instructional experience and generally moved the central office away from a focus on teaching and learning, the new administration swept in and imposed a policy that required school leaders to have seven years of

instructional experience (and five years for assistant principals). This new policy affected me and other members of our team on a very direct level. But this policy and the moves of the previous administration call into the question our goals and priorities when it comes to school leadership. Do we want school leaders who, possibly as a function of their youth, lead schools with fresh ideas around teaching and learning? How do we know that these younger school leaders actually have innovative ideas and that they haven't fully embraced a very traditional instructional approach that does not serve all learners? Do we want school leaders who, possibly as a function of their experience, have a deep understanding of child development and sound instructional practice? How do we know that these leaders have not been practicing poor instructional practice and apply very little understanding of child development in their work? I ask these questions to illustrate the point that we need better research and development to ascertain and develop the skills and habits of mind that we need in our school leaders down to each person we entrust with the solemn duty of leading a school. We cannot be so unnuanced in our understanding of school leadership to pretend that "years of experience" is a useful proxy for all of those things, given how varied those years often are from person to person.

I worry that we are allowing the pendulum to swing from one ideological perspective to the other between these two administrations rather than towards a rational and research- and practice-backed approach that is based on the fully-understood needs of our students. Our great hope is that our schools can serve as this important middle ground and will be able to foment the important

conversations about constraints in policy, practice and thinking that limit the district's work and prevent it from reaching its goal of serving all students well.

Kitchen sinks and environs

Bill Clinton once proclaimed, "There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be fixed by what is right with America." The same might be said of the largest school district in the United States; that across 1700 schools, 75,000 teachers and 1.1 million students and a \$25 billion dollar budget, the answers have to be in there somewhere. We have seen some of this across the dozens of schools we have visited across the city as we have developed our model. Our initial design elements were pulled from some of the "best practices" happening at schools around the city, particularly in innovative corners like the i-Zone. Initiatives like ESI have been formed to promote these best practices in existing schools and embed them in newly-designed schools. We have a strong sense of what works, we just have not figured out how to link the different elements of what works *together*. Our initiative seeks to accomplish that with our kitchen sink approach and phasing in the pieces of what works over time while constantly assessing each elements importance as we monitor students' needs continuously. The district arguably needs to build on this approach and move away from the "let 1000 flowers bloom" approach because, as an Ed.L.D. colleague so eloquently stated, "autonomy is not a theory of action." Restorative practice works. Personalized learning works. Inclusion works. Competency-based instruction works (better than time-based instruction). We have

answers, but the great question is how the district “scales” know-how across schools in the way it develops its workforce, supports its schools, and crafts its policies. Relatedly, the district needs to focus its attention much more strategically on student learning environments. Whether through its own resources or under the auspices of mayoral control to leverage citywide resources, the district needs to be front and center on confronting poverty and its pervasive and deeply deleterious impact on our students and their learning. As a district, it needs to consider some of the drivers we have identified and take new action around them in its work. Without this missing third piece (along with instruction and governance), other reforms will continue to meet the grinder of inadequate student learning conditions.

Implications for Sector

Schools as backbones

Schools are perfectly positioned to serve as hubs for Collective Impact work. Given the challenges that our students are confronting and its profound impact on their learning, schools have little choice—if they are serious about serving all learners—but to link their work to a larger conception of child development. They are the perfect place for community-level backbone organizations to exist. School leaders themselves are well-positioned to serve as coordinators of these backbone organizations—with significant support from colleagues in other sectors—given how fundamental education is and what they are exposed to on a daily basis in terms of students’ and families’ needs. Schools and school leaders have so much “data” in their schools about how students and families are or are not being served and supported by the broader society. If we begin to retrieve this data in useful

ways and take action on it in partnership with colleagues from other related sectors, we might be surprised how much we can accomplish for our students. This would require a serious reconsideration of the role of schools, different staffing and scheduling models, and other significant changes but, if it is what our students need and the current way of doing things is not working, why not?

At the same time, how can we educators, particularly at the school level, be responsible about the limits of our work when it comes to student learning environments? How can we be respectful of our own profession and recognize where it begins and ends in the context of this work? What are the limits of what can be done at the school level? My next broad point will address these questions to some extent, but they are critical to ask continually as we investigate the degrees to which schools can develop better learning environments given their resources and scope. There exists a tension, perhaps, between the instructional work of schools and work that relates to “Place,” even as we suggest the need for their deeper integration. Navigating that tension with an eye towards not diluting any of the various streams of work is the strategic duty of any school leader.

Districts as backbones

Taking the analysis up a level, could districts serve as backbone organizations at the city-level under a Collective Impact framework? Particularly in a place like New York City, with the power of mayoral control in play, how might districts link their work with related sectors and more fully meet students’ needs? Districts can capitalize on their scale and the reverence that citizens have about the importance

of education by serving as backbone organizations at the city level and coordinating services to create better, enabling learning environments for children. If schools are being smart about their data and serving as community backbone organizations at the neighborhood-level, then districts can very naturally build off of aggregating the data they get from schools and figure out ways to more fully support the inputs being deployed at the school level through funding, policy change and marshaling broader resources from partner sectors in order to help the schools better execute based on their local understanding of students' needs.

At the same time, districts and their local partners are a party to statewide and national trends as well. They can only do so much. What is a school or district to do when the governor cuts children's healthcare or funds for universal pre-K or job placement programs for the parents of students? Districts can backfill and try to cover up holes, even in their own budgets, but there are limits to how much they can paper over policy mistakes made a level or two above their sphere of influence. As "tiered" as our governmental system may seem, it is deeply connected, more marble cake than layer cake. Because of this, at every level, we need to be thoughtful about the highest leverage interventions *at* each of the levels.

Source of social change

How might the education sector hold other sectors accountable, in radical new ways, for the ways in which they do or do not prepare our students for transformational learning? We have millions of students coming to us underfed, underhoused, underclothed, undernurtured, and underhealed by our colleagues in

the agricultural, housing, health and other sectors. Many of their parents are not guaranteed full employment by our government and the labor and economic system that it regulates and thereby creates. As a sector, we have over fifty million students walking through our school doors every day which means that we should have a much stronger influence over domestic policy in other sectors and in a broader sense than we currently do. In this sense, the best way to hold the other sectors accountable is to align our efforts with a cradle-to-career approach that is currently gaining credibility in terms of its holistic focus.

As I mentioned earlier, the federal government can use its significant convening power to bring these sectors together, to dig into the data on students' needs, and to ensure alignment nationwide. Instead of one-off competitive grant competitions and inaccessible regulations that are not based on user needs, the federal Department of Education could more strongly prioritize equity in the realm of student learning conditions through its direction of federal dollars and its organizing powers. The first inklings of this are already underway through some of the Promise Zones work but greater urgency is arguably needed. Such coordination should be a central focus for a body that is so removed from day-to-day practice in schools.

Conclusion

"A new paradigm of education policy is possible — one that promotes equity-seeking school change and that includes strategies to create conditions that will allow the educational improvements to take root, grow, and bear fruit in students' lives." – Jean Anyon

Framing the challenge

The inclination on the part of educators to leverage their incredible power within our classrooms, our schools, and our school systems to address students' learning environments and the barriers to learning therein is indeed a noble cause and that work should continue and improve in its integration with other sectors. But the very idea of the rugged individual teacher or administrator working alone to eliminate so many of their students' barriers to learning runs somewhat counter to the notion of collective impact that will be necessary to solve the large-scale social problems that weigh so heavily on our students, their families and our learning institutions. We cannot do it alone and we should have the humility and strategic vision to recognize this reality. At the same time, we must signal to our colleagues in related sectors the ways in which we should partner to remove barriers to learning for our students, together.

Tell the truth, then act on it

Barriers to learning for students are very real, but learning environments can be shaped to reduce the impact of those barriers if not eliminate them altogether. The current debates in the sector have either ignored these barriers in a very decontextualized fashion or disregarded their significance. In order to reach our students more fully and effectively, these barriers and the learning environments in which students are asked to learn within need to be a consistent thread in our national discourse on education. In the same way that a conversation with your doctor about your health would be incomplete without mention of one's diet, we can no longer afford to misdiagnose what ails our sector by ignoring the context.

The very good news is that strategies exist and are currently underway to effectively address these barriers to learning. From wraparound services located within community schools, to whole neighborhood transformation efforts, to cross-jurisdictional collaboration anchored by backbone organizations, there are real solutions gaining serious traction in the ways that they are building better learning environments for kids. Many of these solutions can be adapted across contexts with local tweaks here and there of course. Communities should be open to the idea that it may take some combination of these practices, layered in together, to truly begin to improve learning environments for children in those communities. Also, these practices take time and many will need years to be phased in, in order to be fully effective.

A perch with limitations

My position within the School Design Fellowship certainly allowed me the opportunity to explore this issue of student learning environments with few limitations inherent to the work, which I greatly appreciated. At the same time, the nature of the system and positionality limited my reach from my perch. In the same way that schools and even districts are limited in terms of the completeness with which they can address student learning conditions, so too was I limited by a perch of creativity and openness but not necessarily capacity or expertise in this particular small body of work. A central idea for this strategic project has been exploring the furthest extent to which each level (the school, the community around it, the city, the state, etc.) can foster better learning environments given their unique skill sets

and scopes. Understanding these limitations at every level is critical to fully realizing a collective impact approach that is truly integrated and successful.

Next Steps

We first need to bring greater nuance to the national discourse around education reform to include student learning environments and their impact on learning. We can no longer afford to have decontextualized conversations about instruction and governance absent a lens that also considers environmental factors that interact with those two domains.

Secondly, we need further research, prototyping and testing of solutions at the school, community, district, state and nationwide levels to address barriers to learning for students. We must hone in on what the highest leverage interventions are at each level. This should be done through relatively low-stakes pilot programs that are linked to leading indicators to allow for quick iteration and learning from initial results.

Finally, we need thoughtful action. Assessment cannot be just academic, it must consider learning environments. Building off of more holistic assessment, interventions cannot solely serve academic purposes, they must also consider the conditions in which children are asked to learn alongside the skills they are striving to acquire. Educators can lead the way on this by clearly identify where students need broader support and calling for that assistance strongly in the places where schools themselves just are not enough.

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Appendices

Appendix I – ESI Mission & Vision

A Breakthrough School Model

VISION

A breakthrough high school model serving Black and Latino young men that centers on developing the academic and personal skills which will impede the school-to-prison pipeline.

MISSION

Design and launch high schools that close the opportunity gap and seamlessly prepare Black and Latino young men and women for college and careers.

GOALS

- Build a fellowship to design and create the redesigned school model; a collaborative cohort approach to school development will yield a network of leaders.
- 8 ESI schools proposed to open in 2014; both charter and district models; exploring 'redesign' as programs within schools
- Research and document what works/does not work.

OUTCOMES

- Double the number of Black and Latino male college graduates in the next 10 years.
- Codify key learning and implications that can be scaled system-wide and inform policy.



Appendix II – ESI School Design Elements

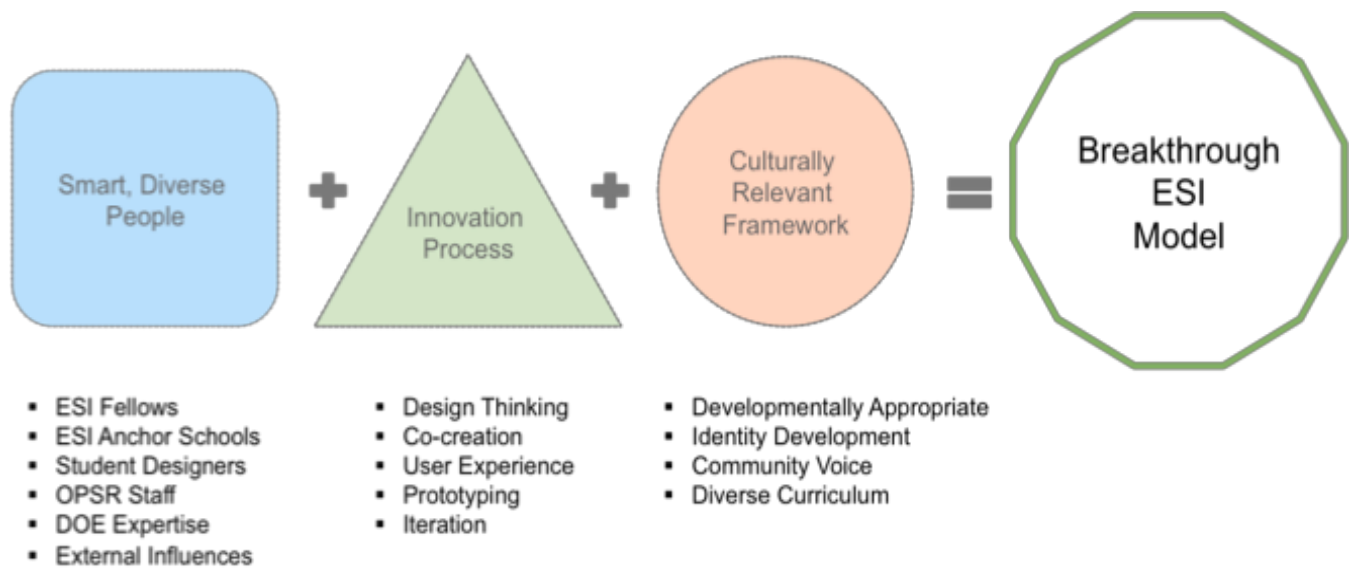
ESI Model Core Elements

A mastery framework of standards, curriculum and instruction that is aligned to the academic rigor of the Common Core; filtered through a culturally responsive lens.	A scope and sequence of assessments aligned to the mastery framework and state standards; including performance based assessments; these include access for students with disabilities (SWD) and English Language Learners (ELLs).
A digital pathway in which each student can access of the resources and assessments in order to personalize their learning.	A data management system that enables adults to flexibly personalize curriculum and instruction, while aligned to the mastery framework.
A sequence of workplace learning experiences that align to the mastery framework; implemented through an apprenticeship infrastructure with industry and community partners.	A sequence of early college experiences that align to the mastery framework; implemented through college access programs that include family engagement and financial planning.
A teaching and instructional delivery model that supports the mastery framework and college and career experiences by redefining adult roles in ways that are responsive to personalized student learning.	A flexible staffing strategy that includes redefining leadership roles ; and that generates a pipeline of culturally competent human capital , including adults with ELL and SWD expertise.
Rites of passage experiences, guidance and youth development supports that define school culture around college and career readiness benchmarks.	An operating system for nimble start-up that can sustain and support the management of the model with fidelity, within and across schools.

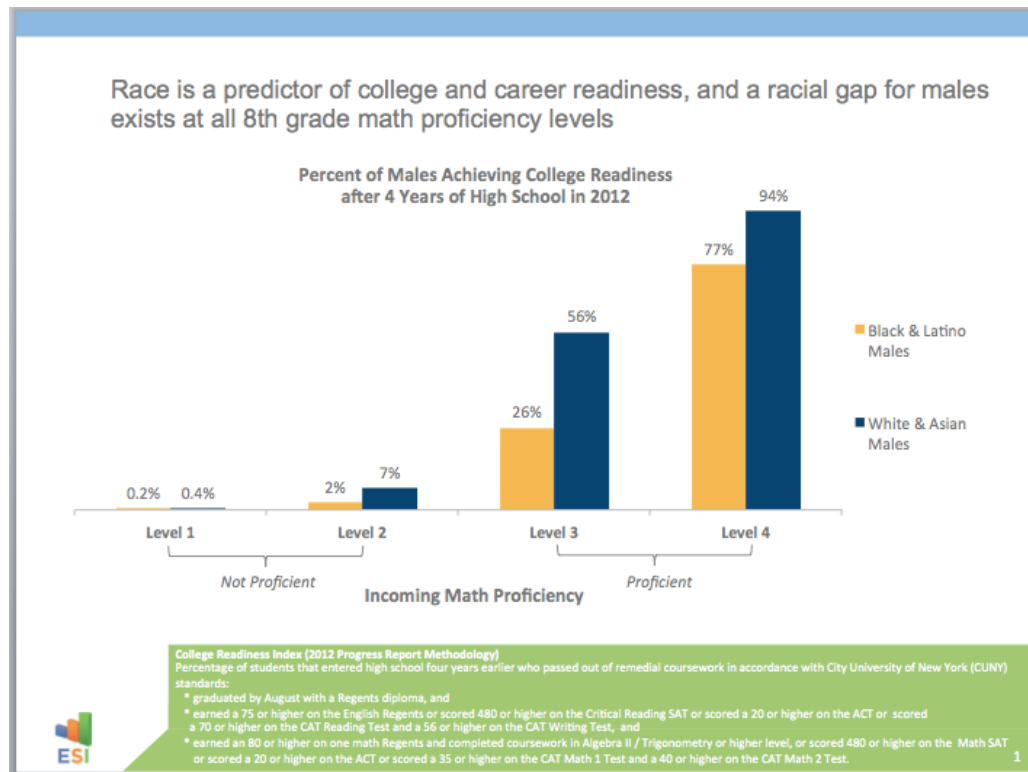


Appendix III – ESI Theory of Action

ESI School Design Theory of Action



Appendix IV – Racial Predictability & Math Proficiency, NYC 2012

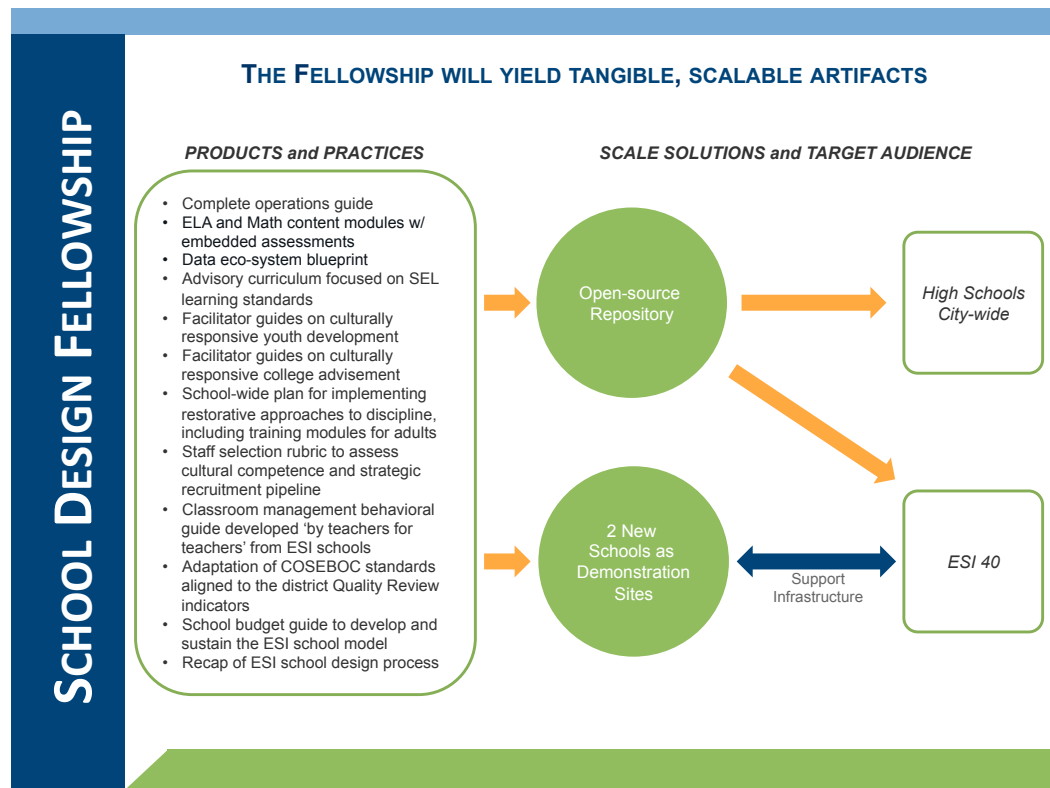


Appendix V – Phases of Design Thinking

The five phases of the design process:



Appendix VI – Scaled Impact



Appendix VII – CRE Statement

Definition

A culturally relevant school is one in which the historical, cultural, socio-economic and other contexts and identities of the students serve as the lens through which all aspects of the school are developed. We embrace an **expansive definition of cultural relevance** that includes our multiple shared identities (and the intersections between them) across lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, age, nationality and other domains. We **reject and actively challenge oppression** in all of its forms as a hindrance to human freedom and expression. These ideals **infuse every aspect of the learning environments** we create with students.

In such an environment, students begin to view themselves, their history, their current context and culture not as deficient, but as **valuable social capital**. At the same time, our culturally relevant school environment will surface, address and ameliorate the damaging effects of white supremacy and Eurocentric education as a means to promote students' positive racial/ethnic development. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a **research-backed approach shown to have a positive impact on the academic outcomes of African and Latino youth**, and other groups that have been and are currently being marginalized. The goal of creating a culturally relevant school environment is best achieved when all aspects of a school work together in an effort to achieve alignment to a common culturally relevant framework.

A. Instructional Program

We will build and adapt **curricular resources and methods** that will provide a variety of vantage points and voices to ensure cultural relevance across the curriculum. A great deal of attention will be paid to the selecting **resources that are written by and/or are responsive and relevant to our student's culture**, ethnicity, economic realities, sexuality and gender identification, etc. Through **personalized learning pathways focused on mastery rather than grades**, students will explore their own current cultural reality, norms, mores, and taboos. Students will be given the tools and opportunities to also create and share experiences and work that celebrates their own culture and the cultural diversity of the school. The **history of African, Latino, Indigenous people and other ethnicities, and their struggles against White Supremacy**; as well as an examination of the students own ability to challenge and transform their current context, will also be respected, examined and used. We embrace **an expansive view of cultural relevance** that pushes our learners to explore and challenge the contours of power and how it is expressed through racism, classism, sexism,

heterosexism, ageism and other forms of oppression.

B. Staffing & Professional Development

Our recruitment and onboarding process will screen staff for a basic **awareness of broader social, economic and political contexts that shape culturally relevant instruction**. Staff will be selected based on their **willingness to stretch both their mindset and their practice** beyond comfortable surface understanding of and response to cultural relevance, and institutional/personal racism and bias. School staff will participate in **pre-service professional development** experiences geared toward increasing staff's capacity to develop and deliver culturally relevant instruction. Staff will participate in **job-embedded professional development** experiences that will push their understanding of CRE and constantly improve their practice. Staff will **co-develop and utilize toolkits** that will include protocols and culturally relevant rubrics which will be used when adapting curricula, selecting texts, organizing student experiences and selecting/adapting assessments.

C. Youth Development

Culturally Relevant Youth Development promotes pathways to **positive racial/cultural development** for our students. The various aspects of our youth development approach will surface and support the **social emotional growth of our students through culturally-rooted rites of passage, supportive peer groups, structured mentorship and a strong focus on postsecondary preparation**. While our youth development practice will be guided by clearly articulated social and emotional competencies and the goals of post-secondary **college and career readiness**, the experiences that seek to achieve these goals will reflect the culture, norms, gender identification, etc. of the students. Along with staff, students will develop goals and benchmarks that will allow them to assess whether or not the school is successfully achieving its culturally relevant goals and objectives. **Student agency** will be a critical and driving element of our overall youth development strategy. Our students will graduate with an advantage in our increasingly globalized world as they continue to hone their knowledge and skills as they relate to cultural relevance.

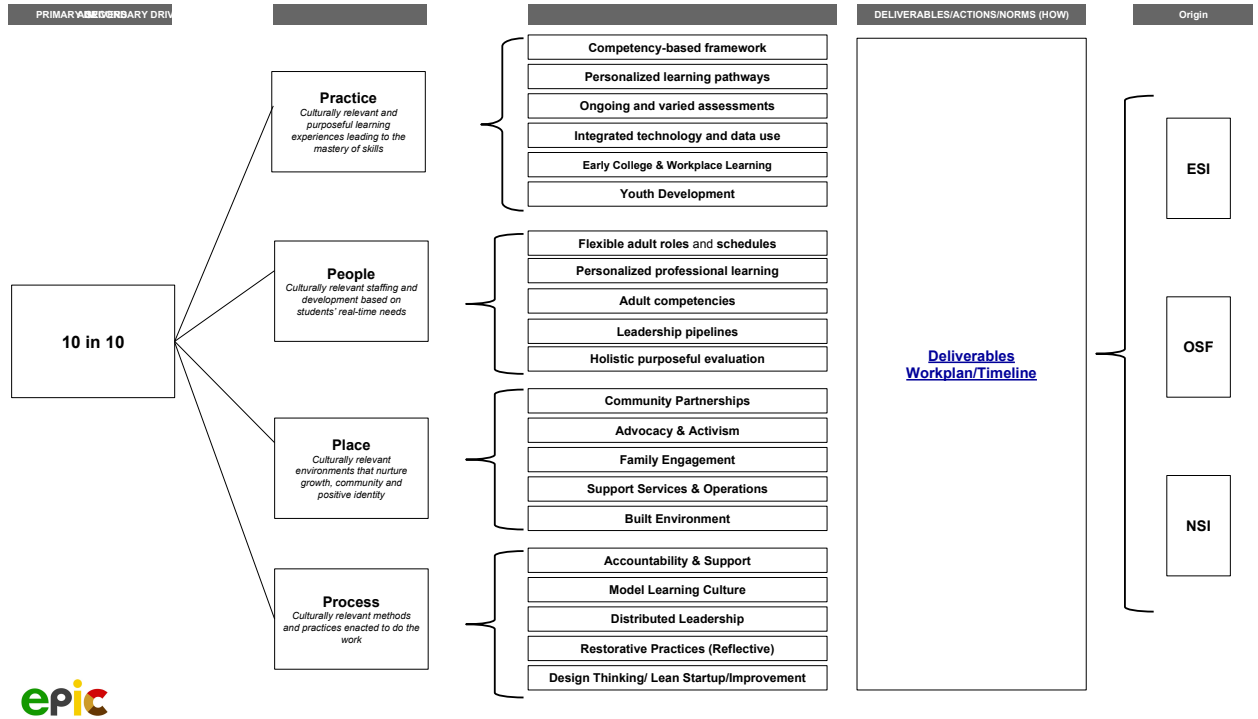
D. Family-School Partnership

As the African proverb *"It takes a village to raise a child"* instructs us, we believe that **families and communities have something great to offer** and we will do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds. Our approach to family-school partnerships focuses on **1) building relationships, 2) linking to learning, 3) creating access for families &**

community members, 4) supporting advocacy, and 5) sharing power.¹ We will grow **a culture of trust and partnership** between families, community members, and formal educators toward the goal of creating a culturally relevant environment for students. We know through **research and practice** that students who are part of a school community that values and work closely with their families, their community and other key cultural institutions, have **improved academic and social outcomes**. A few of our **concrete commitments** are as follows: to provide significant community access to our school facilities and resources, to welcome community members for student learning symposia, to develop culturally relevant curricula with community input, and to partner with local community-based organizations to provide additional support for students.

¹Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, (2007). "Beyond the Bake Sale--The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships."

Appendix VIII – EPIC Drivers



Appendix IX – Design Anthropology Workplan

SCHEDULE

USHERING IN CHANGE

DISCOVERY, VISIONING, & DESIGN PROCESS

Stage	Date	Time	Activity	Location	Notes
Pre	March 15 - 21		Project Planning & Framework		
Discovery	March 15 - April 4		Research & Analysis		
Visioning	March 19 - 20	10am-2pm	Meeting w/ ESI Team	on site	
Discovery	April 8 - 11		Site Data Collection	on site	
Discovery	April 13 - 18		Site Ethnography	on site	
Visioning	April 21 - May 4		Workshops: ESI Team + DOE Students Parents Teachers Community	ESI	
Design	May 5 - 27		Strategy Design		
Design	May 18 - June 1		Report		
Review	June 3 - 5		ESI Team Report Review	ESI	
Execution	June 9 - August 22		Coordination w/ DOE School Construction Authority		

Appendix X – Family Engagement Framework

4 Versions of Family-School Partnerships			
Check the boxes that have the most statements under them marked or circled. Check only 1 box in each row			
Partnership School	Open-Door School	Come-if-We-Call School	Fortress School
All families & communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds.	Parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we're working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.	Parents are welcome when we ask them, but there's only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get community help if we need it.	Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support. We're already doing all we can. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way.
☐ Building Relationships - Family center is always open, full of interesting materials to borrow - Home visits are made to every new family - Activities honor families' contributions - Building is open to community use & social services are available to families	☐ Building Relationships - Teachers contact families once a year - Parent coordinator is available if families have questions or need help - Office staff are friendly - Staff contact community agencies & organizations when help is needed	☐ Building Relationships - Better-educated parents are more involved "Many immigrant parents don't have time to come or contribute" - Staff are very selective about who comes into the school	☐ Building Relationships - Families do not "bother" school staff "Minority families don't value education" - Parents need security clearance to come in - It is important to keep community influences out of the school
☐ Linking to Learning - All family activities connect to what students are learning - Parents & teachers look at student work & test results together - Community groups offer tutoring & homework programs at the school - Students' work goes home every week, with a scoring guide	☐ Linking to Learning - Teachers explain test scores if asked - Folders of student work go home occasionally - School holds curriculum nights 3 or 4 times a year - Staff let families know about out-of-school classes in the community	☐ Linking to Learning - Parents are told what students will be learning at the fall open house - Parents can call the office to get teacher-recorded messages about homework - Workshops are offered on parenting	☐ Linking to Learning - Curriculum & standards are considered too complex for parents to understand "If parents want more information, they can ask for it" "We're teachers, not social workers"
☐ Addressing Differences - Translators are readily available - Teachers use books & materials about families' cultures - PTA/PTO includes all families - Local groups help staff reach families	☐ Addressing Differences - Office staff will find a translator if parents ask in advance - Multicultural nights are held once a year "Minority" parents have their own group	☐ Addressing Differences "We can't deal with 20 different languages" "Parents can bring a translator with them" "This school just isn't the same as it used to be"	☐ Addressing Differences "Those parents need to learn English" "We teach about our country—that's what those parents need to know" "This neighborhood is going downhill"
☐ Supporting Advocacy - There is a clear, open process for resolving problems - Teachers contact families each month to discuss student progress - Student-led parent-teacher conferences are held 3 times a year for 30 minutes	☐ Supporting Advocacy - Principal will meet with parents to discuss a problem - Regular progress reports go to parents, but test data can be hard to understand - Parent-teacher conferences are held twice a year	☐ Supporting Advocacy - School calls families when children have problems - Families visit school on report card pick up day & can see a teacher if they call first	☐ Supporting Advocacy - Parents don't come to conferences - Problems are dealt with by the professional staff - Teachers don't feel safe with parents
☐ Sharing Power - Parents & teachers research issues such as prejudice & tracking - Parent group is focused on improving student achievement - Families are involved in all major decisions - Parents can use the school's phone, copier, fax, & computers - Staff work with local organizers to improve the school & the neighborhood	☐ Sharing Power - Parents can raise issues at PTA/PTO meetings or see the principal - Parent group sets its own agenda & raises money for the school - Resource center for low-income families is housed in a portable classroom next to the school - PTA/PTO officers can use the school office - A community representative sits on the school council	☐ Sharing Power - Principal sets agenda for parent meetings - PTA/PTO gets the school's message out "Parents are not experts in education" - Community groups can address the school board if they have concerns	☐ Sharing Power - Principal picks a small group of "cooperative parents" to help out - Families are afraid to complain. "They might take it out on my kid" "Community groups should mind their own business; they don't know about education."

—from "Beyond the Bake Sale"—The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships (2007) by Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies

Appendix XI – Design Anthropology Community Mapping

NAME _____
DATE _____
TIME _____
SITE _____

NEIGHBORHOOD TOUR

USHERING IN CHANGE

DISCOVERY, VISIONING, & DESIGN PROCESS

1. What is the surrounding environment signaling to you?
How does it make you feel?

3. What learning opportunities do you see? Consider:
partner organizations and businesses, facilities and
equipment, technology, recreation and social spaces.

5. What areas/aspects of this neighborhood seem less
child and student friendly?

2. How might this neighborhood differ from the
neighborhood(s) your students are coming from?

Culture?

Amenities?

Institutional presence?

Human capital?

Safety?

Other?

4. As a visitor, how do you perceive the campus and its
presence as you walk around it? Consider: fences, signage,
entrance, landscaping, adjacencies, views, facades, and
building aesthetics.