Building the Capacity of Schools to Meet Student Needs

Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D.

New York University

I. Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

Organizing Schools for Improvement, 2010 – Bryke, et.al.

1) A coherent instructional guidance system
2) Development of the professional capacity of faculty
3) Strong parent-community-school ties
4) A student-centered learning climate
5) Leadership that drives change

Building Capacity Requires:

- Clear understanding of student needs
  - Academic and non-academic needs
- Ability to understand what your staff needs to be effective in meeting student needs
- Ability to identify, access and utilize resources to meet student needs
- A plan for creating a culture that is aligned to your school's goals
- A plan for engaging your parents as partners to reinforce educational goals

Discussion:

- How would you rate your schools on the five essential ingredients of school improvement?

- In which areas does the district need to engage in capacity building work?

- Who are your allies in this work? Where will the district obtain the support needed to sustain the work?

Building school capacity requires an understanding of how to:

- Build partnerships between schools, local government and CBOs in response to:
  - Health and social needs of children – PS 188
  - Extended learning plan aligned to the academic plan - PS 28 Brooklyn, NY;
- Provide professional development for teachers based on student needs – Serving ELLs at Edison Elementary School in Portchester, NY, Multicultural HS
- Ability to implement and modify reforms based upon demonstrated effectiveness
  - Literacy across the curriculum at Brockton HS

Turning around under performing schools: Understanding the difference between technical and adaptive work

- Technical work - A focus on managing the operations of the system, insuring that procedures are working and that employees are in compliance with policy.

- Adaptive work - A focus on the dynamic and complex nature of the work, its substance, meaning and purpose. Work guided by a long term vision, with medium and short term goals. An awareness that we are trying to achieve our goals in a constantly changing environment
  - Ron Hiefitz - Leadership on the Line

District support to struggling schools

- Must be able to identify assets and weaknesses

- Must engage in collaborative problem solving

- Must provide access to examples of successful schools and classrooms

- Must model effective and responsive leadership

Draw Lessons From Best Charter Schools

- Develop process for creating new, innovative schools
- Incubate new schools within struggling schools, allow them to grow
- Engage community in new school development process
  - Career academies focused on jobs of the future
  - University sponsored schools
  - Full service schools

Key Adaptive Questions:

- **What does it take to educate the children you serve?**
    - How do they learn at home?
    - How do they use literacy and math?
    - What are they interested in?
    - How do we engage them?
    - What challenges do they and their parents face?
    - What are their unmet needs that may impact learning?
    - What are their dreams and aspirations?

Creating buy-in, building community

- Shared ownership of the challenges by analyzing data together
- Develop a plan that responds to the data
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Deliberate and solicit feedback on the plan
- Evaluate the plan regularly to monitor whether or not its working and to maintain quality

PS 28 obtains highest gains in literacy and math in Brooklyn -2012

Brockton scholarship winners 2012
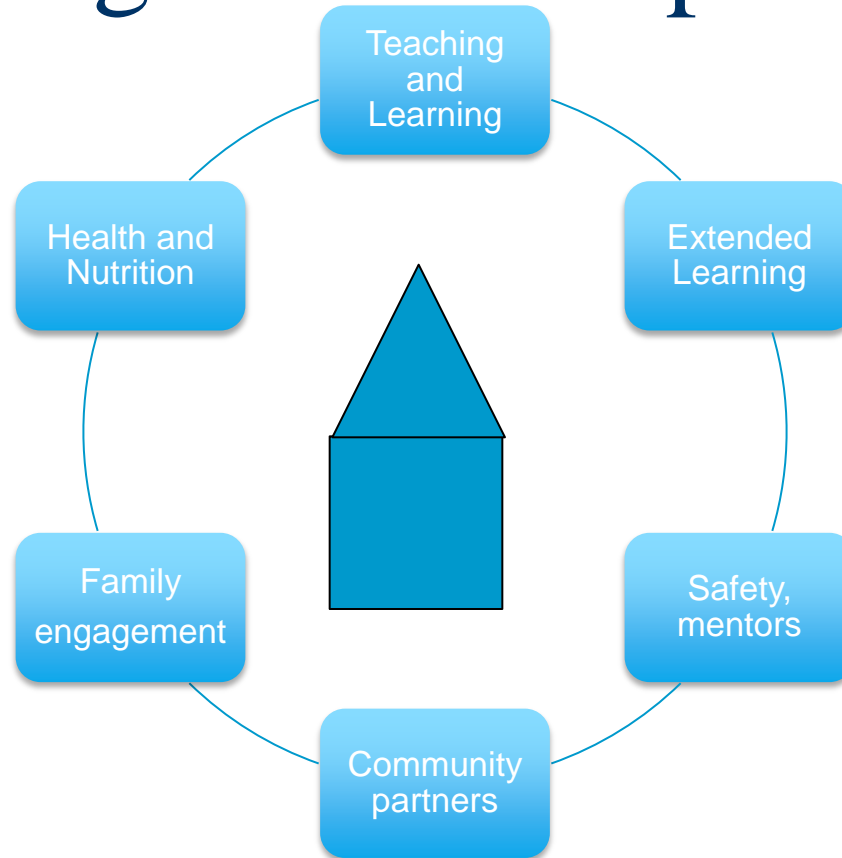
Adams Scholars 2014

Capacity Building

- Intervene early and effectively in response to academic and social needs
    - Minneapolis 3rd grade drop-out prevention plan
- Personalize the learning environment – PS 12, Academy of Business and Technology, Bronx
    - Use of data systems to monitor performance
    - Implement interventions to meet student needs
- Engage parents in effective partnerships that reinforce child development and learning
    - Partnerships focused on learning needs - McCormick Middle School, Boston
    - Addressing parent needs – Eagle Academy

Building School Capacity

Teaching and Learning

Extended Learning

Health and Nutrition

Safety, mentors

Family engagement

Community partners

Discussion

- In what areas should the district's capacity building efforts be focused?

- What role will you play in this work? What skills/supports will you need to be effective?

- What will you do to generate buy-in from staff, parents, students and community?

II. Identifying and Responding to Student Needs:

What does it take to educate the children you serve?

- Analyze student achievement data
  – What do the patterns reveal?
- Work with teachers to develop tools for diagnostic assessment
- Talk to parents and students about their needs and interests
- Work with social workers, nurses and CBOs to identify non-academic needs
  – What are the challenges confronting their families and neighborhoods?

Developing Professional Development Strategies in Response to Student Needs

- Achievement data will suggest areas where your staff needs to concentrate
- Conduct regular classroom observations to get a sense of your teachers' strengths and weaknesses
  - Look for evidence of learning
  - Engage senior teachers in peer mentoring
  - Provide new teachers opportunity to observe effective teachers
- Ask teachers what kinds of training and assistance they need – collaborative problem solving
- Bring teachers together on a regular basis to analyze student work

Teaching and Learning

- We want teachers to see teaching and learning as connected activities: teach the way students learn
  - Use teaching strategies that foster engagement e.g. Socratic seminars, debate, project based learning
  - Focus on evidence of mastery of skills and knowledge – learning occurs through revision
  - Focus on performance – what can our students do?
  - Class time must be on-task work time for students, direct instruction and passive learning kept to a minimum

Culturally Responsive Teaching

- Make expectations and standards explicit by modeling and exposing students to high quality work
- Utilize diagnostic tools to check for understanding
- Awareness that not all students learn in the same ways
  - Utilize different teaching modalities
- Learn about student interests in order to make their lessons culturally relevant
- Draw on cultural resources and frame of reference to enhance motivation and engagement
  - Funds of knowledge, popular culture, oral history, etc.

Obstacles to School Improvement

- School policies and practices are at odds with academic goals
  - Ineffective discipline - over reliance on suspension, failure to address underlying causes of behavior problems, discipline not connected to educational goals and character development
- Inability to utilize your most effective teachers
  - Too many teachers are isolated
- Inability to achieve consensus and "buy-in" among key stakeholders on plan for change

Developing School Culture: Focus on Students

- Create opportunities for students to display leadership at school
- Solicit student ideas for school improvement
  - Provide opportunities for leadership
- Cultivate attitudes and habits that promote academic achievement
    - Confidence and competence
    - Self discipline, self motivation
    - Organizational and study skills
- Implement extra-curricular programs that help in developing these traits: Chess, Robotics, Poetry