



National Center for Urban School Transformation



SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY

Trapped in School Improvement VS. Thriving in Continuous Improvement

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National Center for Urban School Transformation

Dedicated to identifying, studying, and promoting the best practices of America's highest achieving urban schools in a manner that supports urban districts in transforming teaching and learning

<http://www.ncust.org>

4th Annual Symposium: May 7th & 8th, 2009 in San Diego

How Are They Different?

- Some Title I schools seem trapped in school improvement, amassing greater and greater sanctions each year.
- Other Title I schools seem to thrive in a culture of continuous improvement, achieving greater and greater accomplishments that exceed expectations.

NCUST Identifies and Studies Title I Schools that Achieve Impressive Results

- Majority of students meet low-income criteria, no selective admissions criteria, and in an urban district; yet:
- Higher achievement than state average and higher than 90 percent of similar schools
- Small or no achievement gaps
- Exceed AYP criteria for at least two years
- Low suspension/expulsion rates
- High attendance rates
- High graduation rates
- No disproportionate racial/ethnic enrollments in gifted or special education
- Other evidence of high achievement

Recent NCUST Award Winners

- Louisa Alcott Elementary, Cleveland, OH (2008)
- Bridesburg Elementary, Philadelphia, PA (2008)
- William Dandy Middle School, Ft. Lauderdale, FL (2008)
- Dreamkeeper's Academy, Norfolk, VA (2008)
- Franklin Elementary, Bakersfield, CA (2008)
- Henderson Middle School, Richmond, VA (2008)
- MacArthur High School, Houston, TX (2008)
- Signal Hill Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2008)
- Southside Museums Elementary, Miami, FL (2008)
- Harriet Tubman Blue Ribbon School, Newark, NJ (2008)
- Tucker Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2008)

Recent NCUST Award Winners

- Community Day Charter, Lawrence, MA (2006)
- Ginter Park Elementary, Richmond, VA (2006)
- Linwood Elementary, Oklahoma City, OK (2006)
- Muller Elementary, Hillsborough County, FL (2006)
- Whittier Primary School, Peoria, IL (2006)
- Cecil Park Elementary, Mt. Vernon, NY (2007)
- Columbus Alt. High School, Columbus, OH (2007)
- Detroit Edison Academy, Detroit, MI (2007)
- Edison Elementary, Long Beach, CA (2007)
- Gideons Elementary, Atlanta, GA (2007)
- Pillow Elementary, Austin, TX (2007)
- Rancho Cucamonga Middle, Cucamonga, CA (2007)

How Are They Different?

- These award-winning schools seem to thrive in a culture of continuous improvement, achieving greater and greater accomplishments that exceed expectations. They stand in stark contrast to other schools (sometimes in the same neighborhoods) that seem trapped in growing school improvement sanctions.

The Differences Are Not Accidents

*Our systems are perfectly
designed to achieve the results we
are currently achieving.*

W. Edward Deming

But...The Differences Are Subtle

*There are common elements, but
important differences!*

Common Elements	Thriving in Continuous Improvement
Focus on improvement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Use data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Teach standards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Promote professional development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Engage teachers	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Engage students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Engage parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Trapped in School Improvement	Common Elements	Thriving in Continuous Improvement
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Focus on Improvement

- Trapped schools focus on meeting state/federal criteria.
- Trapped schools focus on getting to “the bar.”
- Trapped schools focus on a demographic group.
- Thriving schools focus on changing students lives.
- Thriving schools focus on pursuing excellence.
- Thriving schools pursue excellence for every group.

Use Data

- Trapped schools offer teachers old data that are difficult to understand and difficult to act upon.
- Trapped schools use data to reinforce stereotypes about who can't learn.
- Trapped schools use data to help allocate blame.
- Thriving schools use fresh data to help teachers know if students have learned what they attempted to teach.
- Thriving schools use data to combat stereotypes about who can't learn.
- Thriving schools use data to celebrate accomplishments and identify exciting growth opportunities.

Teach Standards

- Trapped schools try to “cover” every standard.
- Trapped schools focus almost exclusively on tested subjects.
- Trapped schools focus on standards at a low level of understanding.
- In trapped schools, teachers think they teach standards without getting students to learn standards.
- Thriving schools promote deep mastery of key standards.
- Thriving schools integrate learning across a broad curriculum.
- Thriving schools pursue higher levels of understanding consistently.
- In thriving schools, teachers constantly seek evidence that students are learning the standards they are trying to teach.

Promote Professional Development

- Trapped schools offer random acts of professional development.
- Trapped schools have no systems for ensuring that professional development leads to changes in actual teaching.
- In trapped schools, administrators engage minimally in teacher professional development.
- Thriving schools focus professional development over time on one important opportunity for instructional improvement.
- Thriving schools use systems to ensure that P.D. leads to changes in classroom instruction.
- In thriving schools, administrators are in classrooms, reinforcing key P.D. concepts every day.

Engage Teachers

- Trapped schools engage teachers by promoting blame and threatening sanctions.
- In trapped schools, teachers are treated like independent contractors who fly solo, bearing individual responsibility for student learning.
- In trapped schools, teacher collaboration does not lead to changes in actual teaching.
- Thriving schools engage teachers by promoting a shared opportunity to make a difference for students.
- In thriving schools, teachers are part of powerful teams that support each other in improving student learning.
- Thriving schools use teacher collaboration to maximize changes in teaching in accordance with professional development.

Engage Students

- Trapped schools engage students by demanding effort to meet high expectations.
- Trapped schools create new ways to help students know they are failing.
- Trapped schools hope “unmotivated” students will leave, so “motivated” students can prevail.
- Thriving schools entice student effort by making learning relevant, interesting, and fun.
- Thriving schools create new ways to help students see themselves as competent, intelligent learners.
- Thriving schools motivate all students by helping them know that they are appreciated, valued, and respected.

Engage Parents

- Trapped schools engage parents in conflict by blaming them for their children's lack of school success.
- Trapped schools create and promote limited ways for parents to engage in and support their child's education.
- Thriving schools engage parents by helping parents see that educators appreciate, value, and respect their children.
- Thriving schools work with parents to find varied ways to engage parents' talents and interests in support of their children's education.

Hint for Distinguishing Trapped vs. Thriving Schools:

*Nothing changes unless
teaching and learning changes!*

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The District Role

- Many “thriving schools” exist in spite of their “trapped districts.” In those cases, schools are fortunate to have exemplary leaders who create an oasis of hope in a desert of despair.
- In other cases, “thriving schools” are a part of a change brought about by district leadership.
- Districts leaders can set the tone that encourages or discourages thriving schools.

Wise District Leaders Ensure That:

- District policies are informed by the successes of thriving schools within their district and in neighboring districts
- School leaders have the training and support they need to lead thriving schools
- Schools have the tools they need to become thriving schools
- District offices are designed to support, more than dictate