Elementary Schools for Equity:
Policies and Practices that Help Close the Opportunity Gap

By Laura Wentworth, Julie Kessler, and Linda Darling-Hammond

scope
Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education

Acknowledgements

Suggested citation: Wentworth, L., Kessler, J., Darling-Hammond, L. (2013). *Elementary Schools for Equity: Policies and Practices that Help Close the Opportunity Gap.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.

SCOPE
Stanford Center for
Opportunity Policy in Education

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education

Barnum Center, 505 Lasuen Mall
Stanford, California 94305
Phone: 650.725.8600
scope@stanford.edu
http://edpolicy.stanford.edu

Table of Contents

Foreword

Public education in the United States stands at a critical point in its history. The advent of the Common Core State Standards, the move to enhance assessments systems, and increasingly targeted federal resources provide opportunities for schools and districts to reform and improve their structures and systems influencing student achievement and teacher practice.

As a leader of a large urban district, I believe there is even more to learn about how best to support our schools. In fact, all educational institutions have a responsibility to build a culture of continuous improvement where they take time to learn from advances in research and practice.

One way educators learn is by examining the bright spots in our schools. *Elementary Schools for Equity* represents a true collaboration between researchers and practitioners to study some of those bright spots in San Francisco in hopes of culling the lessons learned and spreading best practices. Stanford researchers and San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) administrators worked closely in the development of the research questions and identification of the schools for this study. Since the completion of the case studies in 2009, SFUSD administrators reference these findings when making important decisions about policies and supports for schools, teachers, and students.

I hope by publishing these findings and circulating them more widely, other districts in California and beyond can learn from the policy implications. School districts could use these implications to develop contexts ripe for utilizing the new Common Core State Standards and formative assessments. The implications also shed light on the types of schools that will help SFUSD and other school districts actually close the achievement gap and help us fulfill our goals of access and equity, achievement, and accountability.

In this new era of public education, I have learned to leverage our lessons learned and change course midstream when necessary. These implications suggest some large policy shifts for some schools and districts and would most likely take some courageous conversations on the part of policy makers and school leaders. It is my hope that by publishing these case studies, educators find helpful nuggets when reflecting on their next steps in our quest to achieve great heights with our public schools.

Richard Carranza
Superintendent, San Francisco Unified School District

Preface

No one magical solution will solve all the challenges schools face. However, studies of effective schools shine light on the promising practices schools employ for closing the achievement gap. School districts usually have a notion of which schools do the best job supporting student achievement by examining their student test scores; collecting anecdotal evidence from parents, students, and teachers; as well as analyzing other measures of success. However, districts often do not know the specific practices, structures, and policies in each school that are associated with the increases in student achievement.

In *Elementary Schools for Equity*, we present case studies of four schools commissioned by San Francisco Unified School District to help school and district leaders understand the practices, structures, and policies of schools that were most effective at closing the achievement gap. Originally requested by then-Superintendent Carlos Garcia and Deputy Superintendent Tony Smith, the district used these case studies to capture promising practices, using them to inform other schools serving similar students.

The schools at the time of the study (2009) met the criteria of serving large numbers of African American, Latino, and/or English Learner students, having had steady growth in their student achievement, and a narrowing of achievement gaps. They also all had principals with long tenures at the school, which allowed a study of the development of policies and practices over a period of time.

The four schools — Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, San Francisco Community School, Sheridan Elementary, and Edward R. Taylor Elementary all served large majorities of students of color (from 65% to 95%) and large numbers of low-income students: more than two-thirds at three of the schools, and nearly half (48%) at the other. Proportions of limited English-proficient students ranged from 10% to 63% across the schools. Despite the challenges their students faced, all of the schools had achieved an API (Academic Performance Index) score of 800 or more: California's target score for academic performance.

These case studies provide detailed descriptions of these schools' practices to enable others to learn from them. The authors use vignettes to describe classroom settings to bring these practices alive, and artifacts from meetings to illustrate the structures they used to discuss and make decisions about children and teaching. Quotes from principals and teachers describe the policies that support the specific operations of their schools.

Since the study was completed, California schools and families have been under significant duress, as the nation's economic recession has increased unemployment and a

TABLE 1: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AT FOUR SCHOOLS, 2008-2009
(California Department of Education)

	Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy	San Francisco Community	Sheridan Elementary	Edward R. Taylor
African American	35%	13%	29%	5%
Asian	11%	21%	14%	60%
Filipino	1%	8%	15%	3%
Hispanic or Latino	18%	40%	29%	27%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	48%	70%	76%	76%
Limited English Proficient	10%	38%	36%	63%

range of community stresses. In addition, state budget cuts have reduced school spending by as much as $2,000 per pupil in a state that is already one of the lowest-spending in the nation and a city that has one of the highest costs of living in the nation. To say that this has led to increasing educational challenges for these schools is an understatement. It is also worth noting that turnover in principals since we completed our study has posed an additional challenge to maintaining practices and school outcomes.

How have the four schools fared in these last three years? As shown below, changes in achievement levels have tended to be associated, in large part, with changes in demographics. Ongoing score increases at Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy and ER Taylor from 2009 to 2012 occurred as their proportions of low-income students changed relatively little (decreasing from 48% to 47% at Milk and increasing from 75% to 79% at Taylor over that period) and their proportions of English learners decreased slightly (from 10% to 8% at Milk and from 63% to 59% at Taylor) (See Figures 1A to 4B below).

The two schools with large increases in socioeconomically disadvantaged students and English learners saw dips in their test scores. At San Francisco Community School, the proportion of low-income students increased from 62% to 69%, and the proportion of limited English proficient (LEP) students increased from 32% to 42% between 2009 and 2012. Although there was a dip in the school's API score, it began to climb once again in 2011-2012. At Sheridan Elementary, the proportion of low-income students increased from 70% to 87%, and the proportion of LEP students increased from 27% to 40% between 2010 and 2012. These enormous shifts were accompanied by a decline in API

scores, as might be expected; however, the school still outscores most others with these demographics.

Overall, this study posits a new framework for effective schools. By looking across the practices of the four schools, it describes the common characteristics shared by the four schools, in terms of their staffing and professional development practices, curriculum and teaching strategies, and approaches to resource allocation. We identify district policies that could support practices and structures that could help schools close the achievement gap.

It is our hope that these case studies and the cross-case analysis will provide guidance to school districts across California as they work to create a fertile environment for effective schools to flourish.

FIGURE 1A: HARVEY MILK CIVIL RIGHTS ACADEMY'S API SCORE 2005-2012
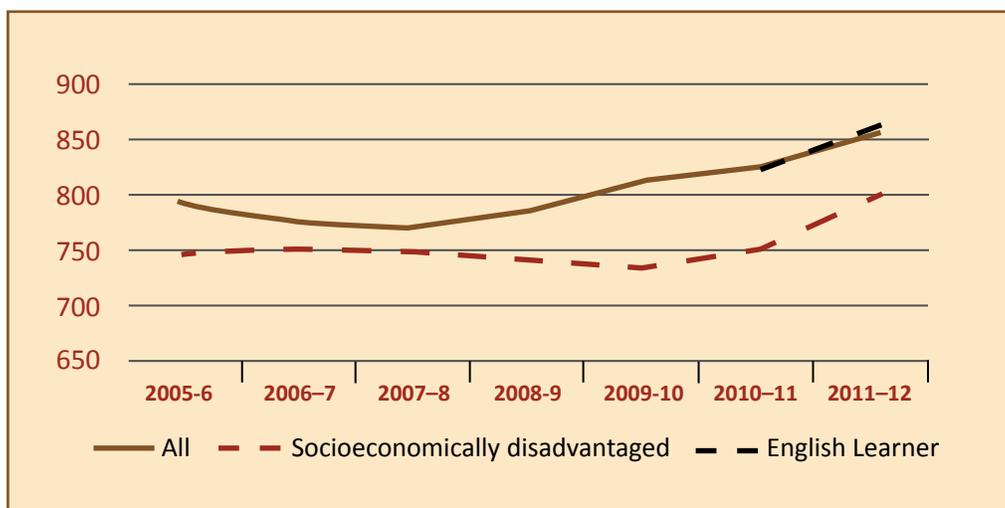
FIGURE 1B: HARVEY MILK ACADEMY'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS 2005-2012
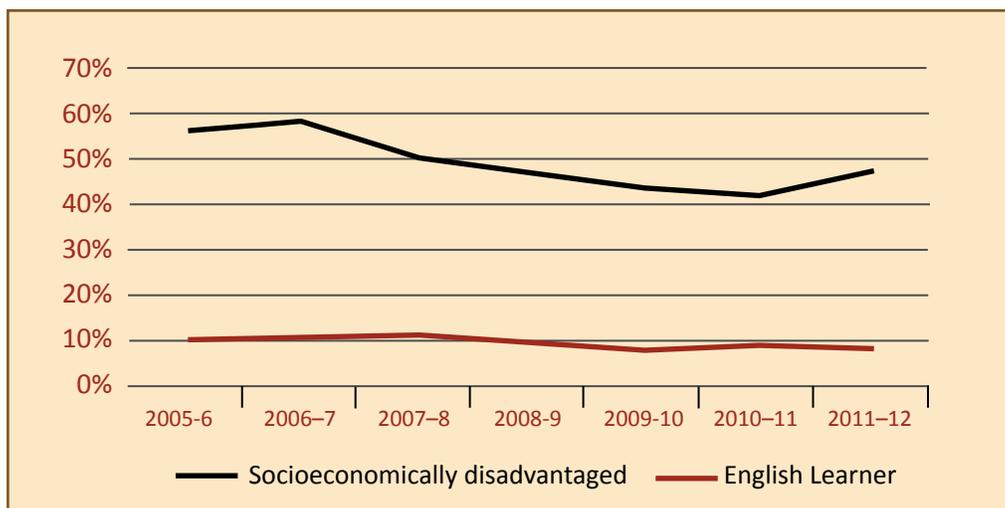
FIGURE 2A: SF COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S API SCORE TRENDS 2005-2012
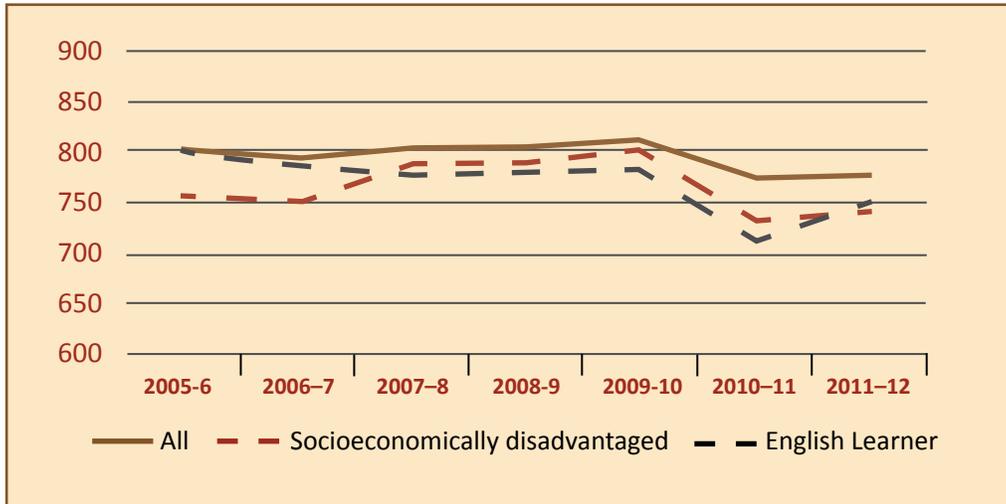
FIGURE 2B: SF COMMUNITY SCHOOL'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS 2005-2012
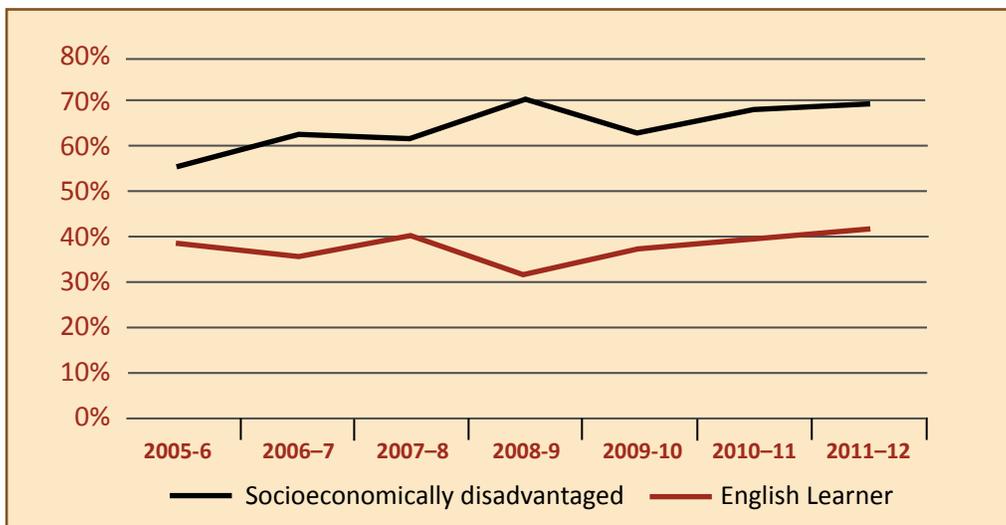
FIGURE 3A: SHERIDAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S API SCORE 2005-2012
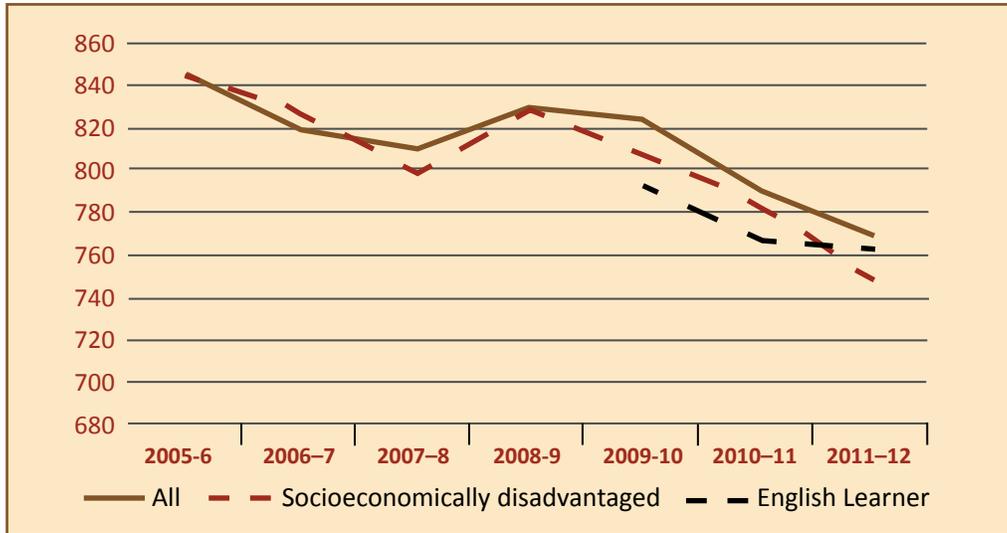
FIGURE 3B: SHERIDAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS 2005-2012
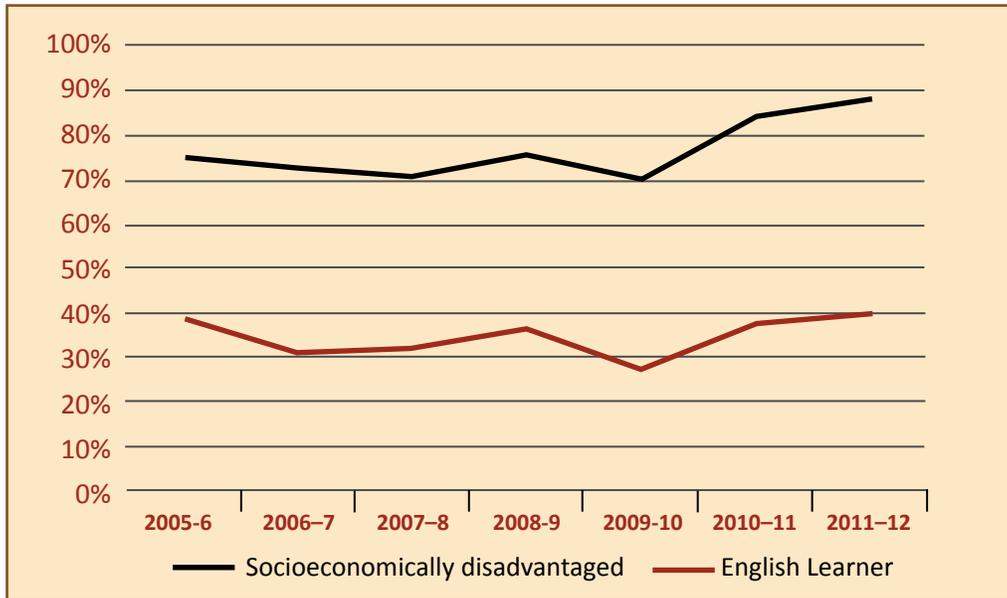
FIGURE 4A: ER TAYLOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S API SCORE 2005-2012
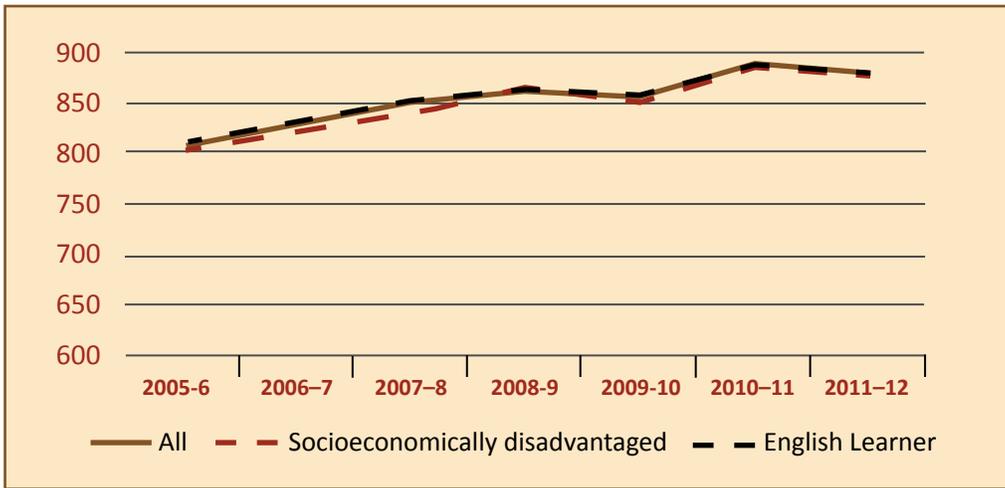
FIGURE 4B: ER TAYLOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS 2005-2012
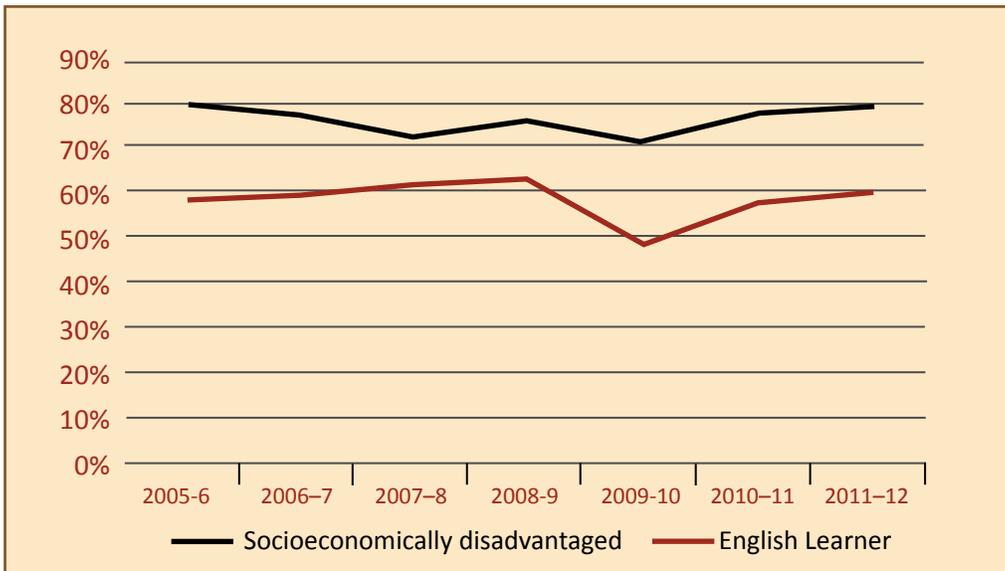
Executive Summary

I n 2007, the School Redesign Network, now a project of the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), partnered with Justice Matters, an organization committed to promoting racial justice, to author a report titled *High Schools for Equity*. It profiled a set of California high schools that were highly effective in preparing students of color from low-income families for college and career success. The report initiated a larger conversation among educators and policy makers about what can be done to improve outcomes for all California students.

In 2008, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) invited a team of researchers, including the authors, to study schools within the city, including elementary schools that were, like those profiled in *High Schools for Equity*, achieving strong educational outcomes with low-income students of color. We sought to identify schools in San Francisco that could be used as models for district and school leaders in achieving the district's three goals: access and equity, achievement, and accountability.

We found many highly effective schools that supported these goals, and selected four to study in depth. Our subsequent research, conducted throughout the 2008-2009 school year, was guided by the following questions:

- What practices, structures, and policies allow these schools to increase "academic productivity" and close achievement gaps?

- What replicable characteristics do these schools share that could be used to promote a more equitable education in other schools?

Our findings have implications not only for improving the educational experiences of students in San Francisco, but also in California and beyond. Elementary Schools for Equity illustrates that creating a system that supports the learning of all students is not an impossibility, but it does take clarity of vision and purposeful, consistent action to create, systematically, a web of supportive elements that are mutually reinforcing. On the pages that follow, we describe how the kinds of school designs we studied can become the norm rather than the exception.

The California Context

Although our study is about four San Francisco schools, SFUSD shares many characteristics with other large, urban districts in California and elsewhere. When National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores are used to compare the difference in reading and mathematics achievement between African American and Latino and White students, California ranks among the states with the widest achievement gaps. For example, in 2011, on fourth-grade mathematics and reading tests, California had the third and fifth widest gaps among states between Latino and White students,

respectively. The gap between African American and White students was the fourth widest in the nation on the eighth-grade mathematics test. Among California students, our analysis of historical NAEP performance indicates that in many grades and subjects, the achievement gap has not significantly narrowed between these groups. For example, in 2011, the gap between Latino and White students on the fourth-grade mathematics test was not significantly different from what it was in 1992, the gap between these groups on the eighth-grade mathematics test was not significantly different from what it was in 1990, and the gap between these groups on the fourth-grade reading test was not significantly different from what it was in 1992. The same also holds true for African American students as compared to Whites on the eighth-grade mathematics and reading tests between 1990 and 2011 and between 1998 and 2011.

The persistent achievement gaps noted above have occurred against a larger backdrop of growing segregation by race, class, poverty, and language in California. In 2004, California was one of the top five most segregated states for African American students, and one of the top three most segregated states for Latino students (Orfield & Lee, 2006). More recent research indicates that the trend in public school segregation appears to be accelerating. In their study of densely populated Southern California, which educates the West's largest population of African American students and a fifth of all U.S. Latino students, Orfield, Siegel-Hawley, and Kucsera (2011) found this region of California to be the most segregated state for Latino students (p. 2). The authors noted that about a third of all African American students in the region "were enrolled in intensely segregated learning environments—schools where 90-100% of students were from underrepresented minority backgrounds" (p. 7). By contrast, although White students make up a quarter of the region's public school enrollment, the average White student attended a school that was 50% White (p. 7).

Any discussion of how to remedy achievement gaps cannot occur without considering the resources that flow to schools, and California's budget woes are well-documented. Over a five-year period, state funding for K-12 education in California has declined by approximately 16%, from approximately $50 billion in 2008 to $42 billion in 2012 (Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2012, p. 1).

Although California spends more per capita on public education than the national average, it spends less per pupil than the average state. Thus, at a time when California's schools are becoming increasingly segregated, achievement gaps are persisting, and the current fiscal climate is showing little indication of improvement, educators will be forced to do more with less. Even given the innovative resource allocation strategies described in this report, California faces significant obstacles in improving the educational outcomes of its most vulnerable populations (Public Policy Institute of California, 2011a; Public Policy Institute of California, 2011b).

Research Methods

When Carlos Garcia assumed the position of superintendent of SFUSD in 2007, he led the development of a strategic plan titled, "Beyond the Talk: Taking Action to Educate Every Child Now." The plan contained three goals: access and equity, achievement, and accountability. With the help of SCOPE, Garcia set out to identify the common features and characteristics of San Francisco schools that held the greatest promise for attaining those goals.

We identified schools with a demonstrable record of improved student performance over time, as measured by standardized test scores. To narrow the list of candidates, we used a measure of "academic productivity," which assesses the value schools add to student achievement, taking into account their students' characteristics and starting points. Since many San Francisco schools scored high on measures of academic productivity, we also considered the size of the school, the tenure of the principal, and whether the school served high numbers of students from low-income families and African American and/or Latino students. We identified four schools meeting these criteria at the time of the study: Edward R. Taylor Elementary School (Taylor), San Francisco Community School (S.F. Community), Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy (Milk), and Sheridan Elementary School (Sheridan).

Common Characteristics of the Schools Studied

Over the course of our investigation, which took place between 2008 and 2009, we documented the characteristics of these schools, looking for trends in how they were led, staffed, and resourced. We also took note of the relationships among members of the school community, which we defined to include teachers, students, families, and other stakeholders in the educational process. We found that while each school had unique features, each had the following characteristic in common:

- Each school was led by a dedicated principal who supported teacher recruitment and development, thus ensuring the school had a solid foundation to provide challenging learning experiences to students based on their individual strengths and needs.

- Each school made the most of scarce resources, ensuring that all resources (people, time, materials, and funding) were aligned with the district's goals.

- Each school was marked by a high degree of relational trust among all members of the school community.

Steady leadership to support change: The four schools in this report were led by principals who prioritized the recruitment and development of teachers. In paying close at-

tention to hiring, the principals ensured continuity of instruction and helped foster the development of a collaborative culture focused on supporting students' non-academic and academic needs. Because each of the four principals had been leading their respective schools for several years, they had the opportunity to get to know their teachers well and to develop "successful teacher" profiles for their school.

Learner-centered curriculum and instruction: Each of the principals gave their teachers the flexibility to plan learning experiences for students based on their individual strengths, needs, and backgrounds. The teachers in these schools had the freedom to deliver an intellectually challenging program of instruction that promotes critical thinking and reasoning skills. Teachers participated in planning groups for the purpose of scrutinizing student work and other sources of information to develop pedagogical strategies and content that take into account each student's culture and background knowledge.

Allocation of resources to promote equity: In each of the schools studied, the principal articulated a vision of teaching and learning consistent with the district's goals – access and equity, achievement, and accountability – and ensured that all resources, such as people, time, materials, and funding, were aligned with those goals. Collaborative structures, such as grade-level planning teams and standing committees, coordinated services to ensure personnel were allocated based on student needs. These structures also provided teachers with time to plan consistent learning experiences for students within each grade, and as they progressed from one grade to the next.

Relational trust: Perhaps the most striking finding of our study was the extremely high sense of trust that existed among all members of the school community, including teachers, students, families, and other stakeholders. The principals and the rest of the staff developed close, trusting relationships with parents and other community members, thus ensuring broad support and engagement in the school's initiatives. Throughout our investigation, we observed a series of individual relationships that had the cumulative effect of building the capacity of all community members to exchange social capital, contribute to the school improvement process, and advocate for students. While each interaction differed based on the parties involved, each was marked by a deep sense of trust.

For example, teachers and parents engaged in meaningful conversations about the strengths and needs of their child. These parents, who were engaged as partners in the education of their child, were then more likely to support the principal's efforts to make curriculum and instructional changes. These principals were able to shape environments that encouraged teachers to try out innovative practices. Relationships among staff members helped build a knowledge base about what good teaching and learning looks like. And teachers knew their students well, which enabled them to provide socio-emotional as well as academic support. The relationships among the members of each community were key to each school's success.

Policy Recommendations

Our study affirms the belief that schools can pursue identifiable strategies that enhance their success in serving low-income students and students of color. Our recommendations, described below, are modest in that they do not require considerably more resources than most large urban school districts already possess; rather, we see the challenge as one that is related to developing the capacity of principals and teachers; giving school leaders the flexibility they need to align resources with school and district priorities; and improving communication and outreach with the broader school community.

Human capital policies: Our findings suggest that performance improves when schools are given more autonomy for making decisions about hiring and retention, professional development, and standards for relationship building. Policies that support localized school staffing decisions, professional development structures, staff retention, and leader stability, enable leaders to cultivate school environments around a shared vision and shared values. In addition, all four schools set high professional standards and worked to build teachers' capacity to analyze assessment data and anecdotal information about students, and to reflect on their teaching practices during planning sessions. By this we are not suggesting the need for a standardized assessment regime beyond what already exists in California. We do, however, see a need for teachers to have access to strategies and tools for understanding better what their students know and do not know, particularly in the areas of critical thinking and reasoning.

Curriculum and instructional policies: All four schools in this study emphasized the importance of teacher collaboration and professional learning time. Policies that promote the incorporation of collaboration time into school schedules and teaching loads support shared planning, partnering, and professional development, critical factors in enhancing the instructional core. In addition, the schools in this study put student assessment data and strong student-teacher relationships to pedagogical use by crafting personalized and culturally relevant instruction plans. Districts and schools should encourage the learning of personalized instruction methods and create expectations for culturally responsive pedagogy.

Funding policies: The findings from this study suggested two important policy areas for school funding: fiscal fairness and budget autonomy, and building and aligning partner efforts. Students are more likely to succeed when funds are allocated based on student need and are appropriately resourced to address specific student populations. By decreasing the compliance demands associated with multiple funding streams, district and school leaders and their local partners can focus their efforts on ensuring greater educational equity across schools, and from neighborhood to neighborhood. In addition, policy makers should encourage schools to develop strategic visions and help them build relationships with outside partners to pull in additional resources in support of school priorities and student achievement.

Communication and outreach policies: A school's communication with internal and external community members can be an important factor in school-community relations. All four schools in this study built relationships of trust to cultivate parent and community involvement, and improve teaching practices. Policies that allow district and school leaders to build supportive relationships with the larger school community are critical factors in student achievement.

Chapter 1:
Finding Gap-Closing Schools in San Francisco

On a Thursday evening, parents, students, and community members packed into a second- and third-grade classroom at S.F. Community School's Project Open House. Guests signed in as they entered the room and picked up a list of questions and a rubric about a project recently completed by the students. A roller coaster track designed to accommodate marbles extended from the ceiling, ran across the tops of tables, and spiraled downward to the ground. Students stood in line next to the section of track they constructed; each grasped their prepared presentations and tried not to fidget. They made last-minute adjustments to the twists and turns of the track to ensure the structure functioned as intended. As the presentation began, the audience watched as each student described their portion of the track, and explained the scientific concepts underlying the project, like friction and velocity that govern how the marble zooms down the track. The teacher climbed up a ladder and released a marble. As the marble sailed through the track, the audience gasped appreciatively. The presentation ended with audience members posing questions for the students, and the students readily answering.

The students worked on this roller coaster project for eight weeks, learning concepts such as acceleration and deceleration, writing summary paragraphs about the process of building their roller coaster, and reading both scientific and fictional accounts of roller coasters. Throughout the project, students worked in groups to build multiple versions of their roller coaster and experiment with the best models. After this, they combined their efforts to construct one large track. The project required them to apply language skills through written and oral explanations of their work, practice interpersonal skills to resolve disagreements, and engage in trial and error experimentation to get their model right.

During the project, the teacher presented 10-15 minute mini-lessons on key concepts related to physics, group work, and writing. The rest of the time, the teacher let the students take the lead in applying what they learned, getting involved only as needed to set expectations for the work.

Having "looped" with the third-grade students—meaning that most of the third-grade students were taught by the same teacher as second graders—the teacher knew the students well and used these relationships to tailor their learning. For example, the teacher strategically grouped students with different skill levels, providing English learners and students with disabilities with additional attention, as needed. The teacher met weekly to plan this project with two other second- and third-grade teachers. Throughout the project, the teacher checked for understanding by using simple formative assessment

strategies, such as taking notes on the vocabulary used by the students when discussing the project in their groups. The final product presented at the Project Open House—the roller coaster—was the summative assessment.

Scenes like these were common across the four elementary schools we studied in San Francisco: Taylor, S.F. Community, Milk, and Sheridan. Their combined ability to accelerate student achievement allowed them to close achievement gaps between Asian and White students and African American and Latino students. In the case studies that follow, we identify the characteristics that we believe contribute to these schools' shared success in serving students more effectively and equitably than is generally the case in California.

In Chapter 2, we describe the unique characteristics of the schools. Each of these descriptions begin with a narrative vignette that puts the reader inside the school and helps them understand what sets these schools apart from other schools. In addition, we give particular attention to the characteristics these schools share with those cited in effective schools studies, such as Edmonds (1979), Williams, et al. (2005), Sebring, et al. (2006), Calkins, et al. (2007), and Vasudeva, et al. (2009).

In Chapter 3, we offer a framework for effective schools in San Francisco based on the common characteristics shared by the four schools. Recognizing that school improvement is a continuous process, we also highlight what we perceive to be the challenges as well as the strengths of each school. The principals and teachers at these schools were very open in expressing the weaknesses of their schools, and spent most of their time addressing them. As such, we hope to provide insight into how otherwise successful schools engage in a process of continuous improvement.

In Chapter 4, we examine the policies that support and impede the success of these schools. We conclude the chapter with policy implications.

The San Francisco Context: A Reflection of California Realities

SFUSD possesses challenges common to many of the large urban districts in California, such as achievement gaps between African American and Latino students as compared to their more advantaged peers, very high numbers of English learners, and increased segregation in the public schools.

Achievement gaps: The newspaper headlines common at the time of our study highlighted the disparities in student achievement in San Francisco and elsewhere. The *San Francisco Chronicle* ran articles titled "S.F.'s black students lag far behind whites" (Tucker, August 2008) and "Big lag in test scores for blacks, Hispanics" (Tucker, August 2009). Later, Governor Jerry Brown's 2010 education plan acknowledged the achievement gap head on: "We must continue to focus on narrowing the achievement gap and reducing the State's drop-out rate, both of which disproportionately affect students from low-income families" (Brown, 2011).

FIGURE 1: CALIFORNIA TOP 8 LARGE URBAN DISTRICTS IN CALIFORNIA, AVERAGE STUDENT PERFORMANCE, HIGHEST AND LOWEST BANDS OF PERFORMANCE ON THE CST
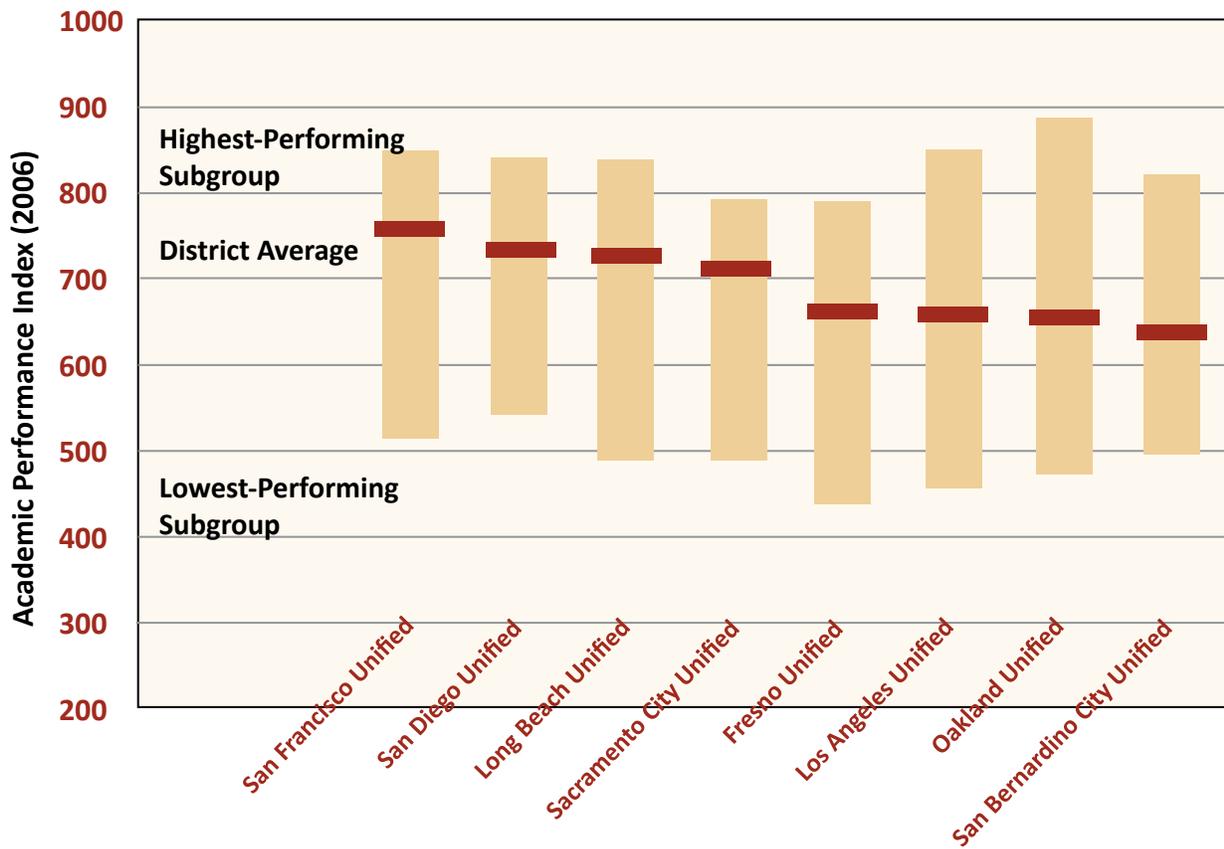
In a 2010 news release, the California Department of Education announced that over an eight-year period, the achievement gap had closed by only 4 percentage points between Latino students and White students and by only 1 percentage point between African American students and White students as measured by standardized test scores. In 2007-2008, of the eight largest urban school districts in California, SFUSD had the widest achievement gap between its district average and its lowest-performing students (Figure 1).

English learners: San Francisco Unified School District has a significant number of English learners. At 40 percent, San Francisco has nearly double the rate of English learners as the nation as a whole. High-incidence languages include Mandarin or Cantonese, as well as Spanish. Dozens of other languages are spoken in schools across the city. Signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA, required states, districts, and schools to disaggregate student achievement data by racial and ethnic groups, as well as by disability, income, and English learners.

San Francisco's practices with regard to English learners have been under scrutiny since the 1970s. At that time, a class-action lawsuit was filed against SFUSD on behalf of 1,800 Chinese-speaking students for discrimination and failing to meet the needs of children with limited English. In 1974, the United States Supreme Court sided with the plaintiffs in *Lau v. Nichols*, which required schools throughout the United States to accommodate students with limited English proficiency and provide equal educational opportunity. The "Lau Decision" forced San Francisco and the rest of the country to adjust their policies to meet the needs of English learners. Because of the consent decree, San Francisco's efforts with English learners were closely watched. SFUSD was required to create a Lau Action Plan describing district policies for English learners, which is reviewed and revised on a regular basis (San Francisco Unified School District, September 2008b).

Segregation: Some researchers have argued that San Francisco, among other districts, shows signs of re-segregation (Biegel, 1999; Orfield & Boger, 2009). In 1978 the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sued the city, alleging unlawful racial discrimination by the district and the state in the operation of the public schools. In 1983, NAACP and SFUSD reached an agreement. Under the ensuing consent decree, no racial group could constitute more than 40 or 45 percent of the enrollment at any given school, and at least four of the nine designated racial and ethnic groups had to be represented at every school in the district. While desegregation was achieved through voluntary busing and enforced racial and ethnic diversity in the schools, it also limited who could attend San Francisco's top-performing schools. In 1994, a group of Chinese American families known as the Ho plaintiffs sued the district when they discovered that their children could not attend San Francisco's top-ranked Lowell High School. They argued that the implementation of certain provisions of the NAACP consent decree constituted racial discrimination in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Ho plaintiffs won, and in 1999 the court ordered the district to stop basing admission and school assignment decisions on race and ethnicity. In 2005, a federal judge ended the consent decree, claiming the involvement of the legal system may be contributing to the ongoing re-segregation of San Francisco's schools. This gave the district the power once again to oversee the assignment of students to its schools. In 2010 the district adopted a policy that weighs students' test scores and proximity to a neighborhood school as factors for student assignment.

"Excellence for All": In 2001, San Francisco's new superintendent at the time, Arlene Ackerman, aligned her strategic plan for the district with the consent decree requirements. "Excellence for All" called for a focus on achievement for all students, the equitable allocation of district resources, and accountability for results. To accomplish these goals, Ackerman made policy changes that affect San Francisco schools to this day (Childress & Peterkin, 2007).

First, Ackerman instituted a Weighted Student Formula (WSF) to make resource allocation more equitable. WSF connected resource allocation to academic and school-based

issues. Schools with students requiring more resources, such as English learners or students from low-income families, received higher weights in their budgeting formulas.

Second, a school received more funding under WSF if the district designated it as a STAR school (Students and Teachers Achieving Results). Ackerman designed the STAR program to provide struggling schools with more resources, such as additional personnel and materials. For example, each STAR school received an Instructional Reform Facilitator (IRF) who acted as the school leader for instruction and curriculum, sharing the expectations of instructional leadership with principals. STAR schools also received long-term substitutes to avoid loss of instructional time, as well as parent liaisons to increase and support parent involvement in schools.

"Beyond the Talk": The San Francisco School Board adopted the district's current strategic plan, "Beyond the Talk," in May 2008. With its focus on access and equity, student achievement, and accountability, the plan echoed some parts of Ackerman's agenda.

Our study took place during the initial phases of this strategic plan and reflects two components. The first is the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), and the second is the district's identification of equity and access as one of its three main goals (San Francisco Unified School District, June 2008a).

During the 2008-2009 school year, the BSC was introduced as a new approach to school-based planning. The BSC is a framework adapted from the business sector that aligns measures and objectives with the larger goals of the organization (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). Because the timeframe of our study corresponded with the implementation of the BSC, we were privy to staff meetings, leadership meetings, and teacher professional development meetings that focused on aligning the work of the school with the goals articulated in the strategic plan. As such, we were able to collect information from conversations on topics such as equity and access, which, in the absence of the BSC or the plan, may not have otherwise occurred. These conversations gave us important insight into the beliefs of the educators working in the schools, and how they perceived their roles, individually and collectively, in achieving the goals of the school and the district.

Study Methods

The school selection process

We sought to identify schools that seemed to be effective in supporting the district's goals of access and equity, achievement, and accountability. Following the example of Edmonds (1979) and other studies of school effectiveness, we hoped to learn why some schools are more successful in closing achievement gaps than others, particularly for students of color from low-income families. Guiding our study are two principle questions: What practices, structures, and policies allow these schools to increase "academic productivity" and close achievement gaps? What replicable characteristics do

these schools share that could be used to promote a more equitable education in other schools?

To select the schools for study, we used student achievement data from 2002-2003 to 2007-2008 to measure how much value a school adds to a student's initial level of achievement while controlling for other characteristics, such as socio-economic status or ethnicity.[1] We refer to this model as a measure of "academic productivity." The model evaluated a school's productivity by comparing student performance on the California Standards Test (CST) at one school with the achievement of students with similar characteristics in other schools. Schools with higher than average ratings of academic productivity were considered for the study.

Second, we identified schools that served high percentages of traditionally underserved populations (e.g., African American, Latino, English learners, and/or students receiving free and reduced lunch). We then identified those schools that were effective at closing achievement gaps between these populations and White and Asian students.

Finally, SFUSD requested that we omit schools from consideration that were undergoing leadership transitions.

Of the approximately 60 elementary schools in San Francisco, four fit our criteria: Taylor, S.F. Community, Milk, and Sheridan. All of these schools served students in kindergarten through fifth grade, with the exception of S.F. Community, which served kindergarten through eighth grade. All of the schools were small, with the exception of Taylor, which was one of the largest elementary schools in San Francisco. More than 50% of the students served in the schools were either African American, Latino, or from low-income families as measured by their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. Aside from Milk, more than 30% of their students were classified as English learners, with Taylor having the most English learners at 61% (400 students).

We profile the schools in Tables 1 and 2. Over a five-year period, the schools in our study outperformed similar SFUSD schools as a whole in reading and mathematics. All four schools showed signs of closing achievement gaps as measured by the API (Table 2). For example, Taylor had an 84-point increase in its school-wide API growth score with comparable increases for its low-income and English learner groups, but almost double that amount of increase in API for its Latino students. S.F. Community had

---

[1]The model's equation used student achievement in English language arts or mathematics as the dependent variable and student prior year of achievement, student demographics, grade of the test, number of students retained, and a measure of school fixed effect in the independent variable. For statistical purposes, the fixed effect measure allowed the research team to compare the school's levels of productivity by capturing how much of the school's effect influences the students' achievement. The value-added model computes productivity ratings into a standardized score or "z-score" with positive values reflecting above-average achievement gains, and negative values reflecting below-average achievement gains. This study examined whether schools had above-average achievement gains in both English language arts and mathematics over a five-year period, from 2002-2003 to 2007-2008.

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF FOUR SAMPLE SCHOOLS

	Subject	Productivity		GR**	# of ST**	%AA** (#)	%His** (#)	%FRL** (#)	% EL** (#)
		5 Yr	2008						
Taylor	ELA	0.09*	-0.17*	K-5	633	5% (30)	27% (168)	76% (477)	63% (396)
	Math	0.09*	0.13*						
Milk	ELA	0.16*	0.04*	K-5	217	35% (76)	18% (39)	48% (103)	10% (21)
	Math	0.04*	-0.01						
S.F.C.	ELA	0.13*	-0.07*	K-8	275	13% (35)	40% (110)	70% (191)	38% (103)
	Math	0.11*	0.07*						
Sheridan	ELA	0.19	0.02	K-5	198	29% (61)	29% (62)	76% (163)	36% (78)
	Math	0.17	0.21						

*p< 0.05 **California Department of Education, 2008-2009

Productivity Key	Highly Productive	Average	Less Productive

TABLE 2: FOUR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IN SAN FRANCISCO API SCHOOL-WIDE AND BY SUBGROUP*

	Sch 2003	Sch 2008	+	His 2003	His 2008	+	FRL 2003	FRL 2008	+	EL 2006	EL 2008	+
Taylor	769	853	84	609	768	159	765	842	77	806	857	51
Milk	665	772	107				610	748	138	793	772	-21
S.F.C.	673	802	129	646	749	103	637	782	145			
Sheridan	653	810	157				646	799	153			

*Note: The darkened portions do not have large enough subgroups to calculate an API score.

comparable increases school-wide with its Latino and low-income groups (S.F. Community's subgroup of English learners is too small to register an API). Milk had comparable increases for its school-wide API growth score and its low-income API growth score. Sheridan had the most substantial increases in its API school-wide and for its low-income students at 157 points and 153 points, respectively, between 2003 and 2008 (Sheridan did not have enough Latino or English learners to register an API).

Data collection

The study was conducted during the 2008-2009 school year, and consisted of site visits over a three-month period followed by periodic follow-up visits over an additional three months. We collected documents; observed classrooms and other school activities; and interviewed school staff, parents, students, and school and district leaders. (See Appendix A for more detail about the study methods.)

Chapter 2:
What Do the Schools Do?

On a sunny day in February, the hallways at Taylor Elementary School hummed with the sound of more than 600 students reading, writing, and working together. While the students worked in their classes, Principal Virginia Dold, a second-grade classroom teacher, a social worker, and a reading specialist convened around Dold's desk for a Classroom Student Support Team (Classroom SST) meeting. At the start of the meeting, Dold handed each person a worksheet with the names of four "focal students" selected by the classroom teacher as a sample of student skill levels in the teacher's classroom. The four worksheets outlined goals and assessment results for these students from a series of benchmark assessments. The group studied the data to help the classroom teacher adjust her instructional practices for her class as a whole, and to allocate additional resources to support students who were behind.

Dold initiated a discussion about one focal student, Hannah,[2] and reminded the group that Hannah's goal was fluency. The teacher provided the team with evidence of Hannah's progress in fluency, noting that Hannah had progressed by four levels, and shared anecdotal information that indicated signs of progress during small group work. Next, the social worker checked her records to see if Hannah had been tested for a learning disability in the past, and described what she learned in a past meeting with Hannah's parents. In consideration of her progress on fluency, the reading specialist proposed to shift Hannah's goal to writing and word blending.

While conversations like these are not necessarily new to public schools, the Classroom SST is relatively unique in that it is a very purposeful, systematic way of analyzing data and other information on student performance, and shifting resources and supports accordingly. Approximately 60 such meetings occurred throughout the year, and the principal and other relevant staff members were involved in each, representing a significant commitment of time and personnel. Each person involved in the Classroom SST had specific roles and responsibilities: The principal provided substitutes to release classroom teachers for these meetings; the classroom teacher selected the students for the focus sample and compiled relevant assessment data for each; the social worker contributed information about the students gleaned from meetings with families and other staff members; and the reading specialist lent expertise with student groupings and reading interventions. The proceedings of the SSTs were carefully documented, and the outcomes of these meetings, including instructional decisions, were collected by the principal to inform organizational decision-making at the macro level.

_____

[2] Aside from the school principals, these case studies use pseudonyms for people's names to protect their privacy.

E.R. Taylor Elementary School

Taylor serves approximately 600 students and is one of the largest elementary schools in San Francisco. The school's vision embraces students' academic and non-academic needs, such as the social and emotional supports necessary to help them achieve classroom success. Located in a lower-middle-class neighborhood, Taylor predominantly serves students from Chinese, Vietnamese, and Latino families. At the time of the study, Virginia Dold had been the principal at Taylor for six years, which had allowed the school to maintain a consistent focus for a relatively long time. Dold used a case management approach to monitoring student progress and making instructional decisions, ensuring each student was well-known by multiple adults in the school. Over a six-year period, the principal had honed this approach with the staff, adjusting the schedule accordingly to provide for Classroom SSTs and other forms of collaboration. This in turn provided teachers with sustained opportunities to learn from and with one another, enabling the school to develop a shared body of knowledge about what good teaching and learning looks like at Taylor.

Shared leadership

Dold structured the governance of the school in a way that enabled the staff to form relationships with each other and with community members. In observing the Classroom SSTs, we saw how Dold acknowledged the views of everyone in the room, engaged them by asking questions about student performance, and sought their input on instructional decisions. Dold was not so much a leader of the Classroom SSTs as she was a member. However, her presence at the meetings enabled her to make explicit connections between the work and the school's vision. As a consequence, her staff members understood how their work with individual students contributed to organizational goals.

Dold also built a sense of shared leadership throughout the school by giving individuals, teams, and committees opportunities to exercise leadership. In addition to the Classroom SSTs, Dold engaged her staff in monthly grade-level planning sessions. Because she could not attend all of these sessions, she delegated responsibility for convening them to the vice principal of the school. The vice principal also managed the Positive Management Team, which proactively supports positive behavior in the school. In that role, she supported teachers in using the strategy and met individually with students. According to Dold, "Unless you deal with the emotional and social issues, then the distractions come in. It is setting that foundation so they can take advantage of the academic program that is being given to them."

Principal Dold's leadership style worked because she developed trust among members of the school community, including staff members, students, and families. One teacher described how Dold would go to the cafeteria every morning to hand out lunch cards, a routine usually delegated to teachers or aides.

"She does it for the kids," the teacher said. "But I think it helps for the teachers to see her

there, too, because she is also in the trenches. She does not separate herself from us in that sense."

In subtle ways, Dold enhanced her credibility with teachers. Dold also understood the importance of being visible to members of the school community and engaging with students and families on an informal basis. During the morning lunch card routine, Dold would confer with students, giving them the opportunity to interact with her outside of her usual role as school leader.

Dold also used more formal structures to engage families and community members. Teams such as the Leadership Team, the School Site Council (SSC), and the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) comprised parents, teachers, and staff members. These groups involved all stakeholders in making important decisions about school operations, and made their members feel vested in the school's success.

Dold solicited the support and involvement of external organizations and community groups. For example, Dold actively sought grants that could provide the school with additional resources. She invited potential funders to visit and see firsthand how the school was helping children from the community succeed, which built pride and a sense of ownership among stakeholders in the school's vision. One local business owner contributed funds to the school for the duration of Dold's tenure. It was not just their trust in Dold that made funders want to support the school financially; it was also how Dold used the resources they provided her.

"We have built [this financial support]," Dold said. "[The benefactor] started giving us $10,000, it's what you do with it.…[Outside resources] want to come here…because we welcome them, we make it available."

Careful coordination of supports for students and families

All of Taylor's social, emotional, physical, and extracurricular supports for students were concentrated in one room called the Healthy Start Room, named after the original grant of $1.2 million received a number of years ago. Funded by a benefactor during the time of the study, the room housed multiple personnel: two parent liaisons, a nutritionist, a nurse, an after-school coordinator, and two social workers. A Coordinated Services Team aligned the services provided by these personnel and the outcomes of the Classroom SSTs. The team collected data on the impact these services had on each student's academic and non-academic achievement, and shared this information with the school's benefactor on a biannual basis, thereby ensuring accountability for resource use.

The Healthy Start Room staff provided a layer of close relationships between students and staff members, facilitating the delivery of student supports and services. Social workers from the Healthy Start Room convened monthly classes on health, nutrition, and violence prevention, and the staff of the Healthy Start Room also served as a resource for students

who were having emotional difficulties. Many of the students we interviewed for this study reported that they felt supported in school because of their interactions with staff from the Healthy Start Room. According to a Healthy Start Room staff member, "I think [the Healthy Start Room] is a safe place for the kids. They know when they come in here they are going to meet a friendly face, someone who cares about them."

Inside the classroom, we observed regular interactions between teachers and students, as well as between students. Teachers were observed meeting with individual students, as many as 15 students in a 30-minute period, providing them with feedback on their performance. Many of the teachers at Taylor organized the desks in their rooms in clusters or pairs to facilitate interactions between students. Teachers were observed providing additional, small-group instruction to English learners and students with disabilities based on their individual needs. These interactions were not entirely about academics. By engaging in purposeful interaction with every student, teachers got to know each student well. As one Taylor teacher noted, "For me, it means that my focus is simultaneously academic and social/emotional. It means getting to know my students and evoking their personal interest in my academic plans for them, but also having a genuine connection with them."

These relationships helped teachers determine which services and supports would best provide their students with the necessary social, emotional, and physical well-being for academic success.

Staff members at Taylor also took deliberate steps to provide families with the services they needed to support their children in school. From the Healthy Start Room, Taylor's social worker and after-school coordinator connected parents and students with outside community organizations. For example, the social workers helped a number of parents work with a local organization called Family Connections, which provided after-school programming, parenting classes, and mental health services such as one-on-one counseling and play therapy. The social workers invited Family Connections staff to sit in on the Classroom SST meetings for those students receiving their services. The after-school coordinator also provided parents with on-site resources for childcare aligned with Taylor's vision of attending to each student's non-academic needs as well as their academic needs.

Taylor's Healthy Start Room staff actively involved parents in the school community. Parent liaisons coordinated a food bank, parent focus groups, translation services, and a weekly parent volunteer group to encourage stronger home-school connections. The school had clearly adopted a philosophy that parents' capacity to support their children increases when parents receive the support they need to provide an enriching, safe environment for the students. Because many of Taylor's families were Chinese or Spanish speakers, the school hired two parent liaisons who could speak these languages. The liaisons provided on-site translation services anytime parents interacted with staff members, including parent-teacher association meetings and other events. They also translated the school newsletter and fliers that were distributed to parents.

Taylor had other structures in place to develop relationships with parents. One of the more unique structures was the "Morning In-Take," in which Dold would encourage parents to line up with their children while she made announcements and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Everything communicated to families—including via loudspeaker—was translated into each parent's home language. The Morning In-Take was often followed by an informal coffee session in which parents were encouraged to share input with the principal.

A focus on teacher hiring and development

Dold placed a priority on teacher development, which extended to how teachers were recruited, hired, trained, and evaluated. Above all, Dold was explicit with teachers about the high expectations she had for all staff members.

"I tell them when I am hiring them, 'There are a lot of expectations here that you will meet with other people and that you will go to professional development,'" Dold said. "I think the peer pressure is the most important. That does go back to those older teachers that really walked the walk."

Dold's hiring decisions were based not on credentials or years of experience, but rather on how the hiring team thought the candidate would work with his or her colleagues. "I look for people who are going to work well as a team," Dold said. "A couple of years ago we had someone apply for fifth grade who had a lot more experience than the young woman that I chose, but I just could not see her working with the other fifth-grade teachers."

When prospective teachers were interviewed for positions within the school, they understood that they were expected to commit substantial time to collaboration, planning, and ongoing professional development. Once hired, these values were conveyed through structures such as the Classroom SSTs and monthly grade level planning meetings. All meetings were governed by an agenda that included objectives, action items, and next steps. The proceedings of these meetings, including any relevant decisions, were recorded by the vice principal and placed in each teacher's mailbox.

Dold also used the evaluation process to convey her expectations to teachers. When we interviewed her, Dold described several situations in which she provided struggling teachers with multiple opportunities for improvement matched to their needs. Fortunately, the district provided a process called Peer Assisted Review (PAR), which helped distribute responsibility for improving poor performance among teachers. Developed in partnership with the district and the union to coach struggling teachers, PAR included a process of peer support from more experienced teachers and documentation of that support. It was clear from our interviews that Dold was using PAR not only as a form of assistance, but also as a way of emphasizing that the responsibility for improving poor performance was shared by everyone in the school.

The collaborative structures at Taylor helped grow teachers' professional capacity, which

consequently helped with teacher retention.

"I think the principal makes the biggest difference at this school," one teacher said. "It's all about the principal and the leadership. I mean, if you feel you are working on a team with a good leader, you are going to stay."

In addition to leveraging the expertise of staff members within the school, Dold also brought in external expertise as needed. For example, Taylor contracted with Partners in School Innovation, a professional development provider, to help ensure all new teachers at Taylor had a solid foundation in the planning strategies used at each grade level.

Alignment of curriculum and instruction

Dold understood the importance of maintaining consistency in the school's core instructional program, while also giving teachers opportunities to supplement the program with their own resources.

Taylor's policies supported the alignment of pedagogical strategies by sharing curricula across grade levels and carefully building concepts and skills from grade to grade. Teachers used the highly structured Houghton Mifflin program in kindergarten through fifth grade.

"We use Houghton Mifflin school-wide so everyone is on the same page, and we can have collaborative discussions," according to Dold. "The key is doing it together."

Consistent use of the Houghton Mifflin program allowed Taylor teachers to develop a common language and vocabulary for talking about instruction, whether within or across grade levels. Because Houghton Mifflin set clear expectations for student progress, the teachers held one another accountable for fidelity to the program.

Dold also understood the importance of balancing the consistency of Houghton Mifflin with flexibility for teachers to try out innovative classroom practices and to supplement the program with their own resources. Dold met regularly with grade-level teams to discuss the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies and materials teachers were using; highly successful strategies from one teacher's classroom were often shared with another, thus ensuring that everyone in the school learned from and contributed to the expertise of their colleagues.

Dold designed the school day to ensure students participating in Taylor's after-school program received targeted support in the form of "academic tutorials." These tutorials offered students opportunities to learn, practice, and apply knowledge gained during the regular day. Students also participated in enrichment classes such as nutrition, science, art, book club, and gardening. The after-school coordinator was included in meetings with other school personnel, including meetings with individual teachers, to ensure that after school-services were aligned with core instruction.

After teachers administered assessments, collected the data, and entered it into the school's online reporting system, they met with Dold, their colleagues, and other staff members to analyze the data and determine how it would "drive" or shape their instruction. In general, teachers based their choice of instructional strategy on these results.

The information these assessments provided also informed how the school allocated its human resources.

"When it looked like only 17% of our Latino kids were proficient, we really said we've got to do something," Dold said.

Among other things, Dold shifted two district-funded paraprofessionals from covering 30 classes to covering struggling Latino students enrolled in fourth and fifth grade, most of whom were English learners.

Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy

Opened in September 1996, Milk represents the values of inclusion and diversity favored by many in San Francisco. Eighteen years after the death of Supervisor Harvey Milk, a well-known San Francisco political official and champion of the civil rights movement, a city supervisor campaigned to name a school after him.

"We had a huge opportunity, and people took the name seriously," Principal Sande Leigh said.

City officials, local business owners, teachers, and parents rallied behind the mission of the new school: empowering student learning by teaching tolerance and non-violence, and celebrating diversity, academic excellence, and strong family-school-community connections.

Compared to Taylor, Milk is small, serving more than 200 students. The majority of students served by the school are African American (35%) and Latino (18%); about 50% of Milk students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Given the school's commitment to diversity as expressed in its mission, its leaders seek out students who are traditionally underserved, including African American and Latino students, and students from low-income families. To attract these students, Milk takes advantage of SFUSD's open enrollment policy backgrounds.

"It may seem we are not trying to recruit White families, [but] we need to have a diverse pool of families," Leigh said. "Our recruitment is diverse. When it comes time [to] spending energy for recruiting and hosting events, the priority is [city neighborhoods that traditionally have been home to underserved students and their families]."

The school teaches students principles such as empathy, acceptance, and understanding,

what some at Milk believe are the main tenets necessary to achieve social justice and civil rights.

"We have to learn to interact so it's just second nature," one Milk teacher said. "It is something that we have to overcome to be better citizens in the world."

Value-driven leadership

As at Taylor, the principal set the tone at Milk through her communication of a specific set of core values that guided the school's mission: civil rights, social justice, inclusion, diversity, and strong relationships. Like Dold at Taylor, Leigh's leadership style reinforced the notion of value-driven leadership through collaboration. Milk employed the use of teams such as the school's Leadership Team, School Site Council, and a Care Team (a team focused on case management, similar to the approach used at Taylor) to instill the values of democracy and civil rights.

Leigh did not spend her time controlling meetings, but instead facilitated them by doing more listening than talking, providing opportunities for team members to work in small groups, and using exercises like the "wall walk" to actively solicit the views and perspectives of all participants. "I am not a micromanager," Leigh said. Instead, she developed a sense of trust with the teachers and families by providing them with autonomy and outlets for their voices to be heard. For example, at staff meetings and professional development sessions, Leigh encouraged teachers to take leadership roles in small groups. As was the case at Taylor, Leigh was careful to assign roles to team members, such as timekeeper and note taker. Leigh encouraged the sharing of ideas, debate, and collective input into decisions about instruction and programming.

Leigh utilized her extensive experience in the world of education and politics to uphold Milk's vision for civil rights.

"I have a solid political training. I think that is really key," Leigh said. "I was an anti-war activist. It gave me a grounding of activism, a political sense of the world, and a desire to change it and some skills to know how to do that.…It allows me to listen and to hear all sides of different kinds of people."

Leigh's drive also helped infuse all practices, structures, and policies with civil rights as the focus. From instruction, to professional development, to meeting with district officials, Leigh and the Milk staff reaffirmed their vision for the school.

"I'm not trying to define that they all need to be Nelson Mandelas when they grow up, but they do need to have the materials to be able to intersect in the kind of the society that is different than the society we have now," Leigh said. "I'm hoping they can change that society."

Leigh ensured that she was accessible to staff members. According to Leigh, "Accessibility, I think, is key. I think people really know by now that with all my failings, things they squabble about and things they don't like about me, that I have that moral imperative and they do trust that portion of it."

Leigh made herself accessible by arriving at the school before everyone got there, and not leaving until everyone had gone home. Our observations indicated that teachers were comfortable approaching Leigh. For example, we regularly observed teachers coming into Leigh's office to share their opinions and ideas as to how the school could be improved. Because Leigh listened to them and acknowledged their views through her decisions, Milk teachers seemed to respect and trust that Leigh's decisions were in the best interest of the school community.

Family involvement a priority: From the school secretary, to the principal and parent liaison, Leigh took deliberate steps to get families of students involved in the day-to-day school activities. With the help of the secretary, staff members became acquainted with parents the moment they walked into the school's main office. Since the school's inception in 1996, the same school secretary had greeted families. Her interaction with students set the tone for their relationship with the school. Leigh described Milk's secretary as "the heart of the school….She strongly builds community….[She has] connections with all the families….She knows the stories of everyone in the whole school." The secretary conveyed that information to the staff and teachers. "I make it a point to know," she said. "Everyone should know every kid."

Leigh also welcomed parents at the Morning Circle, where parents mingled with staff members before school. Leigh managed the School Site Council and Care Team meetings, all of which engaged Milk families. When hiring staff members, Leigh was careful to ensure they represented the backgrounds of the students and families served by the school. "When I saw [the African American secretary], I said, 'Thank you, Jesus,'" one of Milk's parents said. "It is so multicultural. [It's] a little city here! I am sure other parents felt that way." A gay couple spoke of the importance of having a gay man on the Milk staff. They felt like the school embraced their son's reality of having two fathers and made their family feel comfortable.

The parent liaison, whose position was funded by the district and whose job description was developed by Leigh, ran the school's Parent and Faculty Committee (PFC) meetings. This committee acted as a main community building and fundraising resource for the school. In fact, the PFC created a separate, nonprofit 501(c)(3) fundraising organization, called "Friends of Milk," to manage the flow of resources to the school. For example, the PFC used the funds it raised to support more parent involvement, including providing meals and child care for parents who attend PFC meetings. The liaison also created a website, sent home a weekly folder, and created detailed bulletin boards throughout the school. To gather input from various parent communities, the parent liaison and Leigh made home visits and held meetings in the neighborhoods served by the school.

School-wide inclusion policy: Milk had an inclusion policy to ensure that students receiving special education services were included in regular instruction. Leigh incorporated specialized teachers and para-professionals to create a "mainstreamed" classroom environment that provided appropriate instruction for all students based on their diverse learning needs. This focus on inclusion also extended to the way staff members at the school interacted with community members.

In one classroom, a student named Sam who was diagnosed with autism, worked one-on-one with a para-professional, while other students participated in a mathematics lesson focused on order of operations. During another part of the lesson, Sam sat with the group and participated as the students tallied the points they earned in a lesson where they used currency in a virtual mini-society. As some of the students voted on how to use their points (either for their individual purposes or to support the community to which they each belonged) another student helped Sam understand when to raise his hand while voting. In another part of the lesson, the teacher called students to the board and asked them to write out verbal problems using the appropriate notation. The teacher started this part of the lesson by calling Sam to the board and having him solve problems like simple addition and subtraction problems. The students clapped and cheered when Sam got his answers correct.

To ensure that all students felt included and engaged, Milk's teachers took into account what they knew about each student to craft instruction that engaged students and personalized learning.

"The connections that you have with them [add value]—how much do you know about the individual kid and tapping into things for them," one teacher said.

Additionally, teachers and other staff members served with Leigh on the Care Team to manage students' well-being and to coordinate additional services and support in service of the school's inclusion model. Each member of the team managed a specific grade level and collected information from his or her colleagues about the students in their classes. Some members of the team also presented concerns about students they observed on the playground or in the after-school program. Team members decided which students needed to have a Student Success Team (SST) meeting to ensure they were adequately supported. As is the case at Taylor, the SST included the principal, the classroom teacher, parents and any other staff members who worked with or had knowledge of the student. At the time of the study, the Milk staff had conducted SSTs on approximately 50 percent of the school's student population during that school year.

Milk's teachers strengthened the school community by running a school-wide program called "Families." The Families program built emotional support networks between students and adults to help students feel included in the lunchroom, on the playground, and in school in general. Once a month for an hour on Fridays, students participated in a cross-grade, multifaceted curriculum that included storytelling, public speaking, and

an exploration of each student's heritage. Building on the principle that it is important that all students be well-known by the adults in the school, Families gave teachers and students alike the opportunity to build relationships with students from every grade level. "It is how they learn to play across the yard," Leigh said. One Milk teacher added, "I have seen [students] since they were little bitty kid[s]."

Personalized instruction and curriculum

Milk's teachers approached their instruction and curriculum through the lens of personalization. All teachers tailored their instruction by examining each student's progress using assessment results and other information, including observations. We observed teachers working with students in a number of ways.

Small group instruction: Most of the teachers at Milk took 10-15 minutes to provide whole group instruction, then spent the remainder of the hour rotating among smaller groups of students to provide additional instruction. We observed teachers employing different techniques with each group of students, something that would not be possible in a whole group format. Teachers reported that the practice was effective, maximized time, and ensured that even individual students had their needs met within the timeframe of the lesson. "I think through the small groups that I use I get through to [English learners] fairly well," one teacher said. "You just try to incorporate all these strategies into your daily routine."

Instruction that utilizes students' background knowledge: In developing their lesson plans, Milk's teachers took into account each student's personal interests, background knowledge, and current level of knowledge and skill development. "We are trying to concentrate on multiple intelligences so that other kids even in fifth grade [who] are writing at a third- or second-grade level [are included]," one teacher said. Milk teachers purposely provided multiple points of access to students based on their prior knowledge, level of skills, and general interest in giving students the maximum opportunity to learn new content.

Curricula with depth and breadth: As at Taylor, Milk's teachers used the core programs adopted by SFUSD: Houghton Mifflin (reading) and Everyday Math. However, Milk teachers supplemented the core program with lessons and materials that emphasized themes and ideas relevant to the culture of the community. "Some of the curriculum is a little on the dry side and it over-generalizes, so you can't really figure out what to focus on [with] each specific kid if you want to get really in depth with the children," said one teacher. To build depth and support students' application of literacy skills, one teacher enriched her social studies and reading curricula by teaching a unit on elections. Students planned speeches and fundraised for their campaigns, gave presentations, and sponsored a school-wide spirit day.

Presenting authentic tasks: The teachers at Milk assigned tasks to students that placed

them in settings that resonated with their experiences outside of school. For example, one Milk teacher gave the following scenario to a class: Their mom has sent them to the corner store to buy three loaves of bread. They have $12, but bread loaves cost $4.99 each. What would they do? The teacher asked the class, "Do you think this happens in real life?" and then helped students use reasoning as well as mathematics skills to solve the problem. The teacher reminded students these problems occur often in the real world, and that they will not have a calculator to aid them.

San Francisco Community School

S.F. Community is a small school of about 275 students. It serves students enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade, and, like Milk, seeks to include English learners and students with disabilities. The former group comprises about 40% of the school's population. Latino students comprise the largest racial or ethnic group at the school, and 70% of S.F. Community's students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

S.F. Community opened in 1972 when a group of parents in San Francisco rallied together to found a new school. The parents hoped to develop a public school option that invited students, parents, and teachers to participate as full partners in the educational process. They sought a school that functioned more like a family, in which the adults had a responsibility to develop connections with students and help them in their schooling. The school's founders also wanted a school that reflected the racial and economic diversity of San Francisco. Originally the school's leadership included parents. Finding that parents come and go, the school became a teacher-led organization in which a Head Teacher rather than a principal assumed responsibility for leading the school.

Teacher decision-making

Perhaps the most unique feature of S.F. Community is that a Head Teacher, rather than a principal, has primary leadership responsibility for the school. Many of the functions typically assumed by the principal or by vice principals are handled by committees of teachers. Every three years, a new Head Teacher is selected from among the ranks of the staff members. Many of the school's decisions are made by the Lead Team, which has representatives from each grade level. In considering a course of action, the Lead Team will either make the decision or put the decision to a vote by the entire staff. Most decisions, however, are reached by consensus. As a result, the hierarchy at S.F. Community is much flatter than at most public schools.

Each of the school's many committees operate on a similar format that includes selecting a facilitator, timekeeper, and a "process checker" who ensures that the committee functions according to the established norms and customs of the school. All meetings include time for teachers to celebrate the accomplishments of their colleagues. The diversity of committees at S.F. Community may seem daunting to some, but as one teacher said, they provide "so many different structured opportunities for people to

talk and communicate about what is going on. There's a system in place that allows all the teachers to communicate their concerns."

Parent involvement

S.F. Community stressed the importance of teachers working closely with families. One teacher said, "Throughout this school, there is an emphasis on recognizing that families know a lot more about their children than we do." The Head Teacher explained, "[We attempt to] create an environment that encourages and supports families to be involved in academic progress." S.F. Community teachers realized that they could not reach their standards of student achievement without parent support. Therefore, they concentrated on creating trusting relationships between families and the school that encouraged families to become involved in tracking their children's academic progress. According to one teacher, "We've done a lot of strategic thinking about how to create a school environment that encourages, celebrates, and supports the families of those students, the traditionally underserved students, to be involved in the academic progress of their kids."

S.F. Community used a number of strategies to involve families in their children's academic progress, such as bi-annual parent, teacher, and student conferences, which historically maintained high attendance rates. The school also convened Open Houses during which students demonstrated what they had learned to an audience that included parents and community members. S.F. Community also had an extensive portfolio assessment process in fifth and in eighth grade, in which students publically presented parts of their portfolio to families and community members as part of the graduation process.

S.F. Community took additional steps to engage families in the school community with the hope that this would inspire them to be more involved in their children's academic progress. Aside from committees like the School Site Council and the Parent Action Committee, the school hosted picnics at the beginning of each school year as well as four camping trips during the year to encourage families and students to develop close, trusting relationships with teachers and other staff members. The Parent Action Committee hosted fundraisers such as a pancake breakfast and carnival, during which, in the words of the Head Teacher, families and teachers "develop trust by flipping pancakes together."

When teachers noticed that most parent committee participants were White and middle class, the school hired parent liaisons who reflected the school's majority non-White population and who had cultural and linguistic connections to the school's African American and Latino students. Staff members reported that this increased participation on committees by parents of color and low-income families.

Robust teaching standards

As a teacher-led school, S.F. Community's staff prioritized many of the values observed at Taylor and Milk: stringent hiring standards; the expectation that all teachers will collaborate; and the use of data to help guide instructional decision-making.

S.F. Community's rigorous hiring standards contributed to the high level of professional capacity among its staff. S.F. Community's leadership made sure that teachers were aware of their professional expectations before they accepted a position at the school. According to one teacher, "We have extra commitments on top of our contract.…When hired, some teachers turn away." S.F. Community teachers all agreed to a set of commitments that outlined the extra time they were expected to devote to committee work and other responsibilities.

S.F. Community's leadership ran a five-day Before School Institute and a two-day Winter Retreat to lay the foundation for strong teacher relationships. At the retreat and in meetings throughout the year, teachers participated in team-building activities. For example, they were asked to write down whatever was on their mind and then pair with a colleague from another grade level to share their thoughts. In another activity, each teacher drew a topic out of a hat and the older teachers talked to younger teachers about their topic.

Because teachers were expected to be involved in many facets of the school and participate in numerous committees, the initial team-building activities helped teachers develop the necessary trust and understanding to get through a busy school year. At S.F. Community, teachers provided their colleagues with social-emotional as well as technical support.

"There is a level of trust that gets built over time because everything is with other teachers," according to one teacher. "The leadership model means we are always together. It's a lot of shared responsibility, and it is really supportive."

With strong relationships as a foundation, teachers had numerous opportunities to collaborate with each other.

The hallmark of S.F. Community's leadership stemmed from its use of committee-based governance; consequently, teachers sat on multiple committees where they were asked to collaborate. For example, teachers participated in weekly team planning sessions as part of a Developmental Learning Team (DLT), and some participated on the professional development (PD) team. The PD team planned staff retreats and staff meetings focused on professional development, which occurred every three weeks. One grade-level representative from each DLT made up the PD team, and therefore, each grade level had its needs represented with the team during professional development planning.

Differentiated instruction

S.F. Community teachers varied their instruction to ensure different levels of support for students as they progressed from simple tasks to more complex tasks. For example, one S.F. Community teacher modeled for his kindergarten and first-grade students how to plan a story with a beginning, middle, and an end by sharing his story about learning to swim the butterfly stroke. Teachers also provided students with relevant background

knowledge prior to starting a unit. For example, a teacher introduced a project on Romeo and Juliet by reading the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, a Roman myth with a similar plot to Romeo and Juliet.

S.F. Community teachers grouped students in multiple ways during lessons. "Sometimes I have them at mixed skill level groups as far as grammar and spelling and that kind of thing," one teacher said. "Other times I have them grouped by tables so that I can target certain students. [The tables] are usually split [by grade level], and I have low- and high-performing [students] at all the tables, and mixed by language, too." Different combinations gave students access to content that may still have been above their grade level and allowed students to help each other learn new concepts. S.F. Community's leadership also used after-school tutoring to vary instruction, estimating that approximately 70 students receive one-on-one tutoring in the afternoon.

To decide how to best vary their instruction, S.F. Community teachers drew upon a deep understanding of their students. While teachers collected data using assessment tasks and other forms of assessment, they also derived knowledge from their relationships with students. For example, teachers at S.F. Community would eat lunch with students on a daily basis and "loop" with their students, meaning they taught students for two consecutive years as they progressed through the grades. According to one teacher: "I know [my students'] strengths and weaknesses, I know their personality styles and they know mine."

Project-Based Learning

S.F. Community teachers used Project-Based Learning (PBL) as the platform for their instructional program. Teachers created units of learning based on projects that encouraged students to study topics in depth. Projects usually covered more than one discipline. For example, a project might combine skills in reading with science and mathematics. In the elementary grades, students participated in two projects per year with a break between each project; at the middle-school level, students participated in four projects per year. The elementary projects had a science focus, and the middle-school projects had a cross-discipline focus.

Most PBL projects used hands-on learning to create common experiences among students, for example, building boats and launching them in the San Francisco Bay, or listening to bird calls in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park and then studying the different bird species in class. "One of the big things that I think causes a gap between those who do well and those who do not is an experience base," one teacher said.

"I believe there are a lot of kids that come in with all kinds of experiences that other kids don't have, and they have a lot more to attach new learning to that," another teacher said. "I feel like my job is give kids shared experiences that they can then attach more information to." Other times, teachers related the project topic to students' own daily experiences. A fourth- and fifth-grade project had students studying the realities of un-

documented workers in San Francisco, a firsthand experience for some S.F. Community students and their families. The common experiences in projects provided meaningful building blocks for students as they grew their knowledge and skill set.

Multiple measures for assessment

S.F. Community had high standards for utilizing assessment data to inform teachers' practice. The school expected teachers to utilize multiple measures as evidence that students had reached the desired standard. Therefore, teachers assessed students using multiple measures, including pre-assessments, formative assessments, standardized tests, and district surveys to inform their instruction.

Often referred to as data-driven planning, S.F. Community teachers closely scrutinized data from state tests, formative and summative assessments, school-wide rubrics, and common benchmark assessments. The analysis of assessment data took a certain set of skills that S.F. Community teachers practiced on a regular basis in their committee meetings. For example, at a winter retreat, the middle-grade teachers looked at their students' grade point average across sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, disaggregating the data by ethnicity and free and reduced lunch status, to observe trends. They also disaggregated data showing the grade point average of the top and bottom 10 students, respectively, in eighth grade. The teachers wanted to see if there were common trends across those students' experiences that might inform policies supporting struggling and advanced students.

S.F. Community teachers worked together to create common assessments and rubrics to evaluate student work. For example, they created school-wide rubrics to clarify what they agreed were the standards for teaching and learning, and used these rubrics to evaluate the tasks students completed. The school developed these rubrics for informative writing, narrative writing, and literature to articulate across grade levels the desired writing standards results for teachers and students alike.

A particularly powerful aspect of the assessment system was the use of performance assessments to set common benchmarks and expectations for students graduating from fifth and eighth grade. For example, in fifth grade, students had a portfolio assessment that included a literature essay, a summary, a narrative, an on-demand task, a report connected to a project, a reading fluency test, a response to an article using comprehension strategies, a mathematics challenge that incorporated problem solving, a mathematics unit test that required students to demonstrate key mathematical concepts, and a sample from a mathematics project.

"The biggest part is they have to present it and reflect on their learning," according to one teacher. "They have to say how they are ready for middle school."

During the first part of fifth grade, students focused on completing and saving the work.

Later in the school year, students pulled out the work they had accumulated and started revising pieces for their portfolio. Each piece had a cover sheet and a written component explaining the relevance of the work. The students then planned a presentation based on their portfolio for their spring conference.

One teacher told the story of a Latino English learner's portfolio process. Noting that she had been concerned about his progress to the point of wondering if he would be able to be promoted, the teacher observed: "He started to get proud of his work and really wanted it to be finished. He wanted his family to be proud of him when they came to the portfolio presentation.…[I]t turned the tide on him because he went on to middle school and has not had a lot of problems." While this student met the standard for his fifth-grade portfolio, the public aspect of the portfolio process motivated him to do the work.

Sheridan Elementary School

At the time of the study, Sheridan's principal, NurJehan Khalique, had been in the role for eight years. Leadership played a very important part in creating what staff members reported as the "magic" of Sheridan. According to parents and teachers, Khalique had transformed the school into a place of learning as well as a place of community. In the years preceding her arrival, the school had undergone several administration changes. Khalique came from a background in nonprofit work and civil rights advocacy, and had many years of experience as a teacher and administrator. Her teaching experience included working with students with severe cognitive disabilities.

Steady, strategic leadership

Examples of Khalique's approach to leadership could be seen in her work developing the school's pre-school and her support of collaboration among staff. Three years prior to our study, parents and community members approached Khalique about the possibility of adding a pre-school to Sheridan. As many of the parents had young children, she believed that a pre-school would fill an important community need while also drawing parents to the school. When it opened, the pre-school also had the capacity to serve students with disabilities, reflecting Khalique's background and commitment in that area. While the program for students with disabilities began as a separate program from the rest of the pre-school, they have since been combined into one, with preschool teachers working alongside special education teachers.

Another example of Khalique's proactive style of leadership could be seen in the school's hiring practices. Khalique described the main criterion for a Sheridan teacher as someone who believes that all children can learn. However, she had also had to deal with the difficulty of navigating district hiring and teacher placement policies that allowed transfers based upon vacancies, without consideration for the needs of the school.

 Khalique attributed much of Sheridan's success to a wide range of support staff. When the school was in restructuring under NCLB and classified as an underperforming STAR

school, it received supplementary funding to hire an "instructional reform facilitator," a school nurse, a social worker, a student advisor, a parent liaison, and a psychologist. All played a role in supporting students and families at Sheridan. These staff members participated in Sheridan's Student Study Teams (SSTs) and engaged with families of struggling students. They also provided extra support to teachers in meeting the needs of diverse learners. Once Sheridan was no longer an underperforming school, Khalique had to fight to keep the support staff that helped the school succeed. Through lobbying and advocacy, Khalique managed to retain these staff members, but if they lose their funding, it could impact Sheridan's ability to serve its students and families.

High expectations for families

Sheridan's leadership and staff viewed families as a necessary part of the equation for student success. They relied on families to support the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of their children. In general, Khalique had high expectations of parents, and she set the tone for Sheridan families. "The atmosphere is set from the day you walk into the principal's office. There's a lot of pressure, peer pressure, for us to try to emulate Ms. [Khalique] and it works," one Sheridan parent said.

Indeed, Khalique wanted families to be more involved in the school. Just getting parents into the building was important to Khalique, and her open-door attitude reflected that priority. "She never really closes her door, any time of the day you can come in," one parent said about Khalique. "At other schools you have to make an appointment to see the principal, but with her, it doesn't matter, you can come in even though she has somebody in her office, you can just come in."

Sheridan demanded a certain level of involvement from families in several key areas, prominent among which was nutrition. At the time of the study, Sheridan had an in-house nutritionist who could be found regularly patrolling the cafeteria and working in classrooms. Parents were not allowed to bring sweets, candy, or cake to school for birthday parties and holidays. Instead, they were encouraged to provide nutritious foods like pita chips, hummus, fruit smoothies, and blueberry muffins. While some families initially disagreed with this policy, over time it had become a point of pride among families that Khalique helped transition their children to healthier eating habits.

Sheridan made an effort to attend to the realities of students and families after school to support their success during school. For example, the school offered parenting classes in the evenings, ran a food bank each week for families who were struggling financially, and staffed a nutritionist to help students make healthy food choices.

Sheridan's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) also supported families. It reached out to less visible families through potluck dinners, evening events, the food bank, and the SST. The PTA at Sheridan met regularly and had a core group of about 10 parents to plan events, engage in fundraising, and try to increase parent participation in the school. The school events they organized ranged from evening exhibitions of student work to international

potluck dinners that brought families together around food and hospitality. While social in nature, the PTA used these strategies to get parents to come into the school, learn about supports and services, and keep them aware of what was going on at school.

A commitment to all children's learning

The vision for Sheridan—as parents, teachers, and administrators described it—was centered on the belief that *all* children can learn. With its diverse student population, Sheridan had high expectations for all students, regardless of ethnicity, English proficiency, or background. Walking into a classroom at Sheridan, it was not immediately obvious who was an English learner, who was having trouble in school, or whose parents were on the PTA. Engagement of all students was the main characteristic of Sheridan. According to one teacher, "It's about making sure everyone feels comfortable with who they are. I understand, just based on my background, that African American and Latino students are usually disproportionally represented in the lowest quartile of testing and things like that. So I try to focus and make sure that all of my students are excelling and doing well."

One of the ways that Sheridan engaged all students was through the SST, which met every six weeks. The SST worked to identify students who were in danger of falling behind academically and intervened early enough to accelerate their performance. The teams, composed of administrators, teachers, and support staff, used multiple sources of data to identify struggling students and then used student work and other information to make action plans for student success. Sheridan teachers also expressed concern about making their instruction rigorous for all students.

"Every child is different and has different ways of learning, and so we do take that into account," according to one teacher. The teacher went on to describe a student who was performing below grade level, for whom he had high expectations.

"He may do the same type of work, but it may be on a different level," the teacher said. "All my students have at least 20 minutes of reading per night, and it could be anything that they want to read because I don't want to make a chore out of it.…This student has special passages that he reads every night that are at his level that he reads over and over again to improve his fluency. So he may not be reading at the same level as the other kids, but he's doing the same type of work."

A culture of rigorous instruction: Sheridan took three key steps to build a web of rigorous instructional practices across classrooms. The staff chose to emphasize one skill—writing—in their professional development on instruction. They also emphasized group work among students as a school-wide instructional strategy. Finally, they adopted common instructional strategies that all teachers learn and practice together.

The instructional program at Sheridan focused on the production of writing, beginning in kindergarten. Evidence of this focus was prominent in every classroom activity. Sheridan students routinely won city and statewide writing contests, and student work was posted

on every available school surface. In each grade, teachers focused not only on the production of writing, but also on teaching the students about the writing process itself.

Another way in which Sheridan attempted to engage all students was through its focus on group work at all ages. Desks were clustered in L-shaped structures or absent altogether in favor of tables that allowed students to face one another. In every classroom, a large percentage of time each day was spent in structured discussion in pairs and small groups. This created an environment in which all students' voices were heard, and where opportunities for verbalizing the language of the writing process, and academic language in general, were frequent for all students.

Staff also learned student engagement strategies during their professional development time. For example, Sheridan teachers would discuss a common instructional strategy each month, which they referred to as a "focal strategy," and commit to using it in their classrooms that month. The focal strategy was written across each week of the calendar, posted on the walls in the room, and evident in classroom practices. In one classroom, students were reading a story about a young boy who is tired of being told he looks like his mother and wants to look like his father instead. The students were seated in pairs, and their task was to tell their partner one thing the boy did to try to solve his problem. Luis, a Latino boy, and Jon, a recently arrived English learner from the Philippines, were sharing a table. The teacher used "talking chips" to ensure everyone in class had an opportunity to speak.

When the teacher called on Jon, who had not said anything yet during this class period, he did not respond. He may have been too shy or he may not have had enough English to answer her. He looked down at his table and the class got very quiet. Despite repeated attempts to elicit a response, Jon remained silent – even when Luis whispered the answer to him. Suddenly, from across the room an African American girl called over in a helpful voice to say, "We can't hear you Luis." Luis told him the answer again in a louder voice, and this time Jon responded, "He asked his mom" and gave her one of his talking chips. Everyone in the class exhaled at the same time, smiled, and moved on.

In many schools, a student like Jon might spend much of his day in silence. As an English learner, he could easily end up on the fringes of his classroom with little voice of his own and low expectations for his abilities. In this classroom, however, instructional strategies were used that ensure that all students have opportunities to participate each day. When he succeeded, the class shared his success.

Common, consistent professional development

The professional development teachers received at Sheridan was designed to maintain rigorous instruction in every classroom. One of the ways in which its leaders provided that support was through the focal strategies. Each month's professional development was dedicated to a different instructional strategy focused on supporting equity and engaging all students. Another example of a focal strategy was choral reading.

"A lot of [our PD] is around whatever our school focus is," according to one teacher. "So our school focus is writing, and we always have the ongoing thing with the reading so we have PD around those areas….We talk at each meeting about the skills that we are working on as a school, so I feel like the support is ongoing."

Sheridan also provided teachers with common professional development and multiple opportunities for collaboration focused on teacher practice. Aside from formal weekly staff meetings, grade-level teams met separately each week with either the instructional reform facilitator, an instructional coach provided by the district, or Khalique herself. This was a time for curriculum development, instructional planning, and for discussing specific students and their learning. One teacher described the feeling among the staff as, "We don't have a lot of animosity, we don't have little cliques here, when we have new teachers they all feel included. It doesn't matter if it's a kindergarten teacher, you'll have a fifth-grade teacher say, 'Oh this is what I have.' We are very close-knit and it really shows, and it kind of filters down to the students."

This sentiment stemmed in part from the many collaborative opportunities at Sheridan, but it also derived from the organizational culture that Khalique established among the staff, which promoted professionalism as the norm. Willingness to collaborate and a desire to engage in discussion about instructional practices were two of Sheridan's hiring criteria. Sheridan rarely had to hire substitute teachers because a group of retired former Sheridan teachers continued to substitute teach at the school.

We attribute this professionalism to the teachers' trust in Khalique's leadership. Over the years, Khalique developed a level of trust with the teachers that stemmed from the school's success in raising student achievement with the help of focal strategies. The instructional reform facilitator described each teacher's willingness to use the focal strategies because of the trust they had in Khalique.

"So even if we introduce something new and teachers think maybe this is not the best thing, I know that they have trust. So much of the work has gone well in the past that it's like, 'OK, we'll try it. It's good, it's positive. And I know that if I try it and it doesn't work, I won't be penalized for it. If I need help, I'll get support for it, so why wouldn't I try it?'"

The impact of the instructional strategies resonated across the school because of each teacher's dedication to implementing them in each classroom.

Chapter 3:
New Designs for New Outcomes

I t was a Tuesday afternoon at Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, and students from different grade levels scurried into a fifth-grade classroom to start a class called "Families." The teacher greeted them by name as they came in, and asked each to take a seat. Many students entered with big grins on their faces and wide eyes, especially the students from kindergarten and first grade who were entering a fifth-grade classroom. The fifth-grade students who stayed in their homeroom popped popcorn in the microwave and laid out napkins.

Milk's leadership used "Families" as a time for building relational trust across the school. "Families" gave teachers a chance to get to know students that they did not teach every day, and students got to know a new teacher and students from other grade levels.

Every teacher ran "Families" a little bit differently. The teacher in this classroom started "Families" by going around to each student, starting with the kindergarteners, and asking them to stand on their chair and tell the group one word describing how they feel.

The teacher went through this structure with students from each grade. For the first graders, the teacher asked for a word that meant *tough*; for the second graders, she asked for a word with a sports theme; for the third graders the teacher asked for "the happiest word you can think of"; for the fourth graders, she asked them to stand on their chairs and to name words that mean *happy.*

The teacher made sure everyone had popcorn and settled the students down for storytelling. As the teacher told the story, the students sat, eating popcorn, and raised their hands to ask questions. The teacher made the story interactive, asking for input from the students and prompting them to make predictions about what might happen next.

Instructional Leadership as a Foundation

All four schools experienced strong, steady instructional leadership over time. Principals supported teacher development and cultivated a shared vision for the schools among the students, families, and community members they serve. Substantial research documents the importance of this kind of leadership for school success (Davis et al., 2005; Boyd et al., 2009; Horng, et al., 2009).

Stability

With tenures ranging from six to 13 years, each of the schools was marked by stable leadership, and most of the leaders had come up through the system. At Taylor, Principal Virginia Dold, originally a resource teacher, was subsequently mentored and shaped into a leader by the previous principals at Taylor. Milk's principal had been the school's only leader for 13 years; she had taught at S.F. Community and received training as a teacher leader in that setting. S.F. Community's leadership expected each of their Head

Teachers to serve one year as a Head Teacher in training, shadowing and fulfilling some duties for the current Head Teacher while still teaching during training. The Head Teacher then served three years, facilitating all the teacher committees as well as the school's relationship with the school district. Sheridan's principal had been at the school eight years and shared leadership with the instructional reform facilitator.

Attention to personnel

Strong instructional leaders paid keen attention to hiring, development, recruitment, retention, and stability of the teaching staff in the schools. Despite restrictive district policies governing teacher assignments, each of the leaders was able to exert influence over the hiring process.

Principal NurJehan Khalique of Sheridan Elementary offered an example of the importance the schools' leadership placed on hiring strong teachers. Khalique was on a mission to hire excellent, high-performing teachers who would also bring diversity to her staff and act as role models for her students.

"It was also very important for me to have an African American male teacher," Khalique said. "What's important to me is diversity, people that care and have high expectations."

Khalique had heard of a dynamic male teacher working in the district—we'll call him "Steven"—who happened to be African American. As part of the district workshop for placing teachers, teacher vacancies were listed on a wall in a school, and teachers could decide which schools they wanted to interview with from the list during the workshop. Khalique and her Instructional Reform Facilitator went to the workshop with the sole purpose of seeking out Steven.

While Khalique did not know what Steven looked like, she decided it was important to be the first person to greet him. The two Sheridan leaders decided to stand at the front door, and ask any African American man that walked through the door, "Are you Steven? Are you Steven?" Then, Steven finally walked through the door.

"This poor man," Khalique said. "He must have thought we were two crazies, but we finally got him to come."

After some cajoling from Khalique, Steven decided to join the Sheridan staff.

Principals of other schools were also driven to find and hire strong teachers who could rise to their expectations. While both Taylor and S.F. Community teachers spoke of the very high expectations placed on them when hired, each described the collaborative structures that enabled them to meet these expectations, including grade-level teams, Student Support Teams (SSTs), and the wide range of committees and groups that gave teachers opportunities to exercise leadership in their schools. In both of these schools,

we observed a very high level of instructional planning, both within grades and across grades, and in each school, teachers felt supported by their colleagues and school leadership.

Modeling

In each of the schools, the school leader modeled for their teachers the kind of professional behavior needed to support all students. For example, we observed the principal at Taylor intervene directly with a student who was struggling with emotional issues. Rather than intervening with the student as a disciplinarian, the principal showed great empathy in understanding the root cause of the student's concern and was able to return the student to his class without incident. At Milk, the principal's background in and support for social justice pervaded every aspect of the organization, from the curriculum, to how the school was staffed, to the students and families the school works to attract. At S.F. Community, the position of Head Teacher virtually required the school leader to model professionalism, because he or she was simply a leader among peers. At Sheridan, the principal's "open-door" policy modeled professional discourse and a productive exchange of ideas.

Learner-Centered Curriculum and Instruction

The four schools developed a learner-centered approach to curriculum and instruction. In this definition we include pedagogical strategies and content that attend to the needs of student groups; facilitate teacher planning; are based on data gleaned from multiple measures of student performance, including anecdotal evidence; are grounded in culturally relevant content that gives students plenty of opportunities to learn the curriculum; and ensure that students learn higher-order thinking and reasoning skills.

Elmore (1996) suggests the levers for enhancing school improvement sit within the instructional core of the teacher instruction, content of the curriculum, and efforts of students. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that for each area of learning, each student operates within a certain Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD, which dictates where a teacher should intervene if they want to challenge students appropriately and accelerate their achievement. A learner-centered approach is needed to identify and address the students' level of readiness and approach to learning.

Attention to the needs of student groups

Some of this focus on learners is a result of policy requirements in SFUSD. San Francisco's *Lau* Plan requires schools to tailor instruction and curriculum for English learners. To comply with the 1974 ruling in *Lau vs. Nichols*, SFUSD developed an action plan to address the instruction of English learners and accelerate English learner achievement in the city. As such, the Lau Plan requires the teachers at Milk, S.F. Community, and Taylor to pay specific attention to the needs of their English learners and tailor instruction accordingly.

Each school took a case management approach to addressing the diverse needs of their students. This approach included a range of staff members, each with specific areas of expertise such as pedagogy, content, special education, and family engagement. As such, the supports they developed for all students could be adapted for English learners or any other learning issue. All staff members purposely executed the plans these schools developed for students, and each shared accountability for student success.

Teacher planning for instruction

At all four schools, the leaders encouraged teachers to develop dynamic, student-focused learning experiences. The leaders facilitated this by providing planning time on a regular basis. Each leader set agendas for the planning meetings and organized reports on assessment data. At Taylor, Dold led bi-annual SST meetings, as well as monthly grade-level team sessions that planned instruction based on analysis of student assessment data and student work samples. At Milk and Sheridan, the principals utilized the instructional reform facilitator to organize weekly grade-level planning meetings. Milk and Sheridan teachers reflected on their instruction and adjusted for students' individual needs. S.F. Community teachers used their DLT teams at each grade level to examine assessment data and adjust instruction according to what would help students advance their skills and knowledge.

Use of multiple measures

Through intensive instructional planning combined with strategic professional development, the schools cultivated a high level of skill and knowledge among their teachers in data analysis. Consequently, teachers gained experience using data to inform instruction. The data are disaggregated at the classroom level and subsequently analyzed on an individual basis. In all four schools, teachers examined data from multiple measures, including formative and summative assessments, authentic assessments like project-based assessment tasks solving real-world problems, standardized test scores, and benchmark assessments. Teachers used assessment data to figure out what level of instruction would challenge students and then employ one-on-one and small-group instruction to target each student's needs. The groups were flexible based on students' assessment outcomes, sometimes changing weekly and even daily to suit the needs of students.

If teachers saw an area in the assessment data where students needed additional or enhanced instruction, school leaders would plan teacher training during their next opportunity for school-wide professional development or grade-level team planning sessions. In the case of S.F. Community, the need for professional development was conveyed to the DLT representatives on the Professional Development Team. At Taylor, Sheridan, and Milk, the need for professional development was relayed through the grade-level representatives on the school leadership teams. In general, the school leaders and teachers planned school-wide teacher professional development based on the areas of professional growth that would best support students' learning as evidenced through student assessment data on multiple measures.

Use of student evidence

The teachers in these schools used their knowledge of each student's academic progress to make instruction and curriculum relevant for students. Each school placed an emphasis on student-teacher and family-teacher relationships as a means of collecting anecdotal evidence about each student's cultural background, experiences at home, and general level of skills and knowledge. All four schools expected teachers to know their students well and have close relationships with them. At S.F. Community, teachers got to know students by eating lunch with them on a daily basis, and a number of teachers at Milk and Taylor spent additional time with students by working one-on-one with them during the regular day and in the after-school programs. Sheridan and Taylor teachers paid attention to their focal students as a way of tracking the needs of individual students and targeting them with focal strategies.

The teachers got to know students and families by communicating with them on a regular basis. Teachers distributed their email addresses and cellphone numbers, held biannual student-teacher-family conferences, and attended school events. The principals and staff of Milk, S.F. Community, and Taylor all participated in an opening exercise before school that allowed teachers to mingle informally with families. Family-teacher relationships formed easily at Milk and S.F. Community because the schools were small. At S.F. Community, teachers looped with students, teaching the same students for two grade levels.

Teachers used the information they learned from parents to inform instruction and develop personalized learning plans for their students. At all four schools, teachers tested their hypotheses about students' needs by referencing multiple data sources, weighing both the assessment data and the anecdotal evidence from their relationships. This exploration of multiple forms of data also took place in the school teams that coordinated academic and social supports to students.

Implementing culturally relevant curriculum with multiple points of entry

While the four schools each had different approaches to utilizing the district curriculum, they all made the curriculum culturally relevant and accessible to students from a variety of backgrounds. Taylor and Sheridan's teachers had common school-wide curricula, S.F. Community teachers used mostly teacher-created materials, and Milk teachers used a combination of district-adopted and teacher-created materials. Yet, even Taylor and Sheridan teachers made efforts to supplement their curricula with relevant content. S.F. Community teachers situated projects in real-world events, problems students might experience in their immediate communities, or scenarios they could relate to, like building a roller coaster, issues related to immigration status, or paying attention to the food they eat. Milk's teachers infused themes related to civil rights, diversity, and social justice into the curriculum.

Focus on higher-order thinking skills

Milk and S.F. Community teachers placed an emphasis on accessing higher-order think-

ing skills situated at the upper end of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating. At Milk, for example, we saw teachers lead students in a debate over the best strategy for bargaining with a used car salesman. Students had to analyze the mathematical elements of the debate as well as the interpersonal dynamic with the salesperson, and then synthesize their analysis into a coherent argument against the opposing debate team. At S.F. Community, students deconstructed a short story during their fifth-grade portfolio presentation. Their peers evaluated the presentation and provided feedback about the quality of their analysis based on a common rubric.

In addition, such dynamic instruction takes a high level of teacher capacity. These schools spent a lot of time hiring the appropriate teachers and supporting their development. While most teachers reported that they felt supported in their work, some expressed concerns about the continued high level of expectations, and whether it was sustainable.

Relational Trust

Trust was a key ingredient in the success of the schools. We define *relational trust* to mean the trust that is built by multiple interactions among parties in service of a common goal, whether it involves principals working with teachers to accomplish the school's goals, teachers working with students to reach instructional goals, or teachers and families working together to enhance the lives of students in their communities. The degree of relational trust present in a school is a function of the school's relationships with the broader community, the school's relationships with parents, and the professional relationships among educators and students in schools.

Research supports the idea that relationships and trust are necessary for school improvement (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Meier, 2003). Relational trust alone cannot improve schools because trust does not procure the expertise needed for quality instruction. However, issues of relational trust can either support or undermine the school improvement process.

Student enrollment policies

All four schools are subject to SFUSD's enrollment policy, which allows for family choice, but limits choice based on student characteristics. Lawsuits in 1983 and 1994 led the district to adopt a controversial assignment system that takes into account a student's socioeconomic background, but not race, when assigning students to schools. In theory, the district's race-neutral "diversity index" is designed to desegregate schools based on socioeconomic factors.

Staff members from all of the schools discussed how the district's enrollment policy had impacted their school populations and the degree to which there was a strong foundation for building relational trust. For example, most of the parents at Taylor, S.F. Com-

munity, and Sheridan had opted into the school, indicating a high level of trust in the schools. In 2008-2009, Taylor had 170 requests for its general education program in three kindergarten classes, and S.F. Community had 147 requests for two kindergarten classes, while Milk had 85 requests for two kindergarten classes.

While most students attending Taylor lived in the neighborhood where the school is located, the staff also reported that some parents living near other public schools chose to enroll their children at Taylor. The staff at Taylor described how parents chose Taylor for its reputation of high academic achievement. Consequently, Taylor has benefitted from the open-enrollment policy. Most of the students enrolling in S.F. Community came from the neighborhood surrounding the school, and, similar to Taylor, many parents chose to enroll in S.F. Community for reasons aside from convenience. Parents interviewed for this study mentioned that they had heard of S.F. Community's reputation for support and academic achievement from parents of children attending the school. While Taylor's and S.F. Community's staff must still develop relational trust with parents and community members, their reputation in the community lays the groundwork for this trust.

Milk's enrollment characteristics were quite different from Taylor and S.F. Community's; as a consequence, the staff had to make a more concerted effort to develop trust with parents through community outreach. Most of the students attending Milk were not from the surrounding neighborhood. Principal Sande Leigh and her parent liaison made strategic efforts to recruit families from neighborhoods with low-income children of color. They hosted parent information nights in neighborhoods across the city. As a consequence, families from diverse neighborhoods have attended Milk over the years. This reputation has helped Milk maintain substantial African American and Latino student populations. However, the staff is still required to engage families by going into the community on home visits and talking to parents before and after school.

Relationships with the broader community

To provide their schools with an environment suitable for cultivating trust, the school leaders at each of the schools actively sought political support and additional resources for their school. Politically, these schools had developed relationships with community leaders, such as Milk's relationship with a city supervisor. They had also advocated for policies, such as SFUSD's "Small Schools Policy," which provides S.F. Community with additional autonomy and extra resources, or Sheridan's request for a pre-school on its campus. All four schools garnered additional resources by applying for grants and developing relationships with nonprofit organizations. Taylor's leadership developed a strong bond with a local business owner who became an ongoing benefactor, donating money every year to support Taylor's Healthy Start Room. Each school's leadership included funders in their school community by inviting them to events and conducting regular progress update meetings.

Relationships with families

To build relational trust, the staff at the schools developed close ties with families. In

each of the schools, the principal or head teacher managed committees of staff members with the express purpose of cultivating ties between families and school. The schools made daily efforts to communicate with parents, either through a morning assembly or with regular communication between teachers and parents. Milk's policy of hiring staff representatives who shared parents' culture, race, ethnicity, or language, and Taylor's use of teachers to run after-school programming, gave families more reasons and opportunities to develop relationships with staff members. All of the schools had parent liaisons and other structures to support family involvement in student achievement, such as Parent Teacher Associations and School Site Councils.

In each of the schools, the principals were actively involved in coordinating the services delivered to students and families. At Milk and Taylor, the principals led a morning opening exercise that staff referred to as "Morning Circle." Families and students formed a circle on the small school playground and the principal gave general announcements, issued rallying calls, and sometimes led students in an alternative pledge called, "Pledge to the Planet." Prior to the start of Morning Circle, the principal, staff, and teachers talked informally with family members and students.

The hiring processes at these schools, managed primarily by the principals but also influenced by staff members, also played a role in family relationships with the schools. Each school took into account the race, ethnicity, culture, and language of their families when hiring staff. Milk's teachers explicitly sought to hire staff members who reflected their family population. S.F. Community and Taylor also made a point to hire parent liaisons for their Latino and African American parents who were fluent in the families' language. The Sheridan principal will track down a good African American male teacher in hopes that he will provide better representation among Sheridan's staff of the school's student body.

Other positions, such as the secretaries at Milk and S.F. Community, the outreach coordinator at S.F. Community, and the social workers at Taylor played important roles in developing family ties to the school communities. The secretaries at S.F. Community and Milk provided positive first impressions for parents walking through the door. Other positions, such as the outreach coordinator at S.F. Community, the nutritionist at Sheridan, and the social workers at Taylor, connected parents to external organizations and resources that support families. For example, the staff at Sheridan, Taylor, and S.F. Community ran food banks for families on a weekly basis on their school campuses.

Resource Alignment Around a Shared Vision

Across the four schools we saw considerable efforts to align resources, including personnel and practices, around a common vision. This required a clearly articulated vision guided by steady leadership; the alignment of all available resources with that vision; the articulation of that vision to all staff, particularly new teachers; the use of teaming to align efforts; and alignment of instruction within and across grade levels.

An organization's ability to act together to address a certain problem or goal can be considered a form of civic capacity (Stone, 2001). By that definition, these four schools have a high level of civic capacity. Civic capacity allows schools to more effectively address school improvement issues, and relies on focus and alignment to mobilize resources in support of the goal. Williams, et al.'s 2005 study of effective California elementary schools cites the alignment of district efforts and evaluation of schools and the alignment of instruction through planning as key features of effective school systems and schools. We hope that our findings add to the body of research on alignment.

Sustained leadership with a clearly articulated vision

At the time of the study, all four schools had leaders with long tenures, allowing them to send a consistent message regarding the school vision and priorities over time. In addition to providing steady leadership, the principals also clearly articulated the school vision to their teachers, students, and families. Milk's focus on civil rights, Taylor's focus on serving students' academic and non-academic needs, and S.F. Community's focus on strong minds and hearts reverberated throughout the comments of the school leaders, teachers, and staff. Each leader's emphasis on the vision matched the comments and actions of teachers and staff. For example, all of the Taylor teachers referred to the focus on students' academic and non-academic needs. At Milk, teachers cited civil rights as the focus of their school. Teachers at S.F. Community all referred to the school's "Virtues and the Powerful Ways of Thinking," which were the key tenets underlying the school vision. At Sheridan, staff and families all talked about the "Sheridan Way" and a common vision that all students could learn. Teachers and staff could articulate both the goals and objectives laid out by the school vision and how their actions would help them achieve that vision.

Budgeting with the school vision in mind

School leaders aligned their resources from the district and outside resources through grants and donations to make their work toward their vision even more robust. SFUSD instituted a district-wide "Weighted Student Formula" to distribute funds to schools weighted by the number of students at each grade level receiving special education services, classified as English learners, and by socioeconomic status. School leaders received lump sums based on the weighted allocation and had flexibility in deciding how to spend those funds. Final budgets were reviewed by SFUSD personnel and approved by their School Site Councils.

The four schools in this study all used the budgeting autonomy afforded by the Weighted Student Formula to align resources with their school vision. For example, when Taylor classrooms had the majority of their struggling readers at fourth and fifth grade, the principal redirected the efforts of the school's paraprofessionals and focused their efforts toward the fourth- and fifth-grade classes. S.F. Community allocated less money to the salary of its school leader to afford a part-time teacher to institute school reform mea-

sures and teach algebra. Sheridan's alignment of its STAR resources provided support for its SSTs by maintaining support staff, parent liaisons, and other personnel.

The leaders of Milk, S.F. Community, and Taylor raised additional funding to support practices and structures aligned with their school vision. They used those funds to hire personnel and purchase supplies that supported the vision. For example, at Taylor, the annual donation from its benefactor funded many of the staff in the Healthy Start Room and provided resources that helped the school address the social and emotional well-being of students. S.F. Community teachers applied for grant funding to hire their two parent liaisons. Milk's school community raised money through its Parent Faculty Committee to fund dinner and childcare during the School Site Council and PFC meetings to attract parents who might not otherwise attend. All of these funds were specifically targeted at fulfilling each school's vision. For Taylor, the teachers could not achieve their vision of the "whole child" without the work of the Healthy Start Room. For S.F. Community and Sheridan, the strength of the school community depended on the outreach of parent liaisons to families traditionally disengaged from school. At Milk, the principal used her additional funds to empower families to attend meetings, become involved in their child's education, and procure childcare and dinner for evening meetings.

A clear vision for new teachers

The leaders at Milk, S.F. Community, Sheridan, and Taylor all paid special attention to the teacher hiring process. While S.F. Community had some hiring autonomy through the district's Small Schools Policy, union contracts dictated hiring at Milk, Taylor, and Sheridan. This put constraints on which teachers they could hire. Even in the face of these constraints, each school made an effort to articulate the school vision and expectations for teachers during and after the hiring process. The four schools relied on their grade-level planning team and committees to reinforce new teachers' understanding of the school vision and hold teachers accountable to that vision in their practices. At Taylor, a focus on the whole child meant new teachers could expect social and emotional support for their students as well as support for students' academic achievement. At Milk, a focus on civil rights required teachers to support the access of all students to a high quality education.

Aligned efforts

All four schools in San Francisco had teams and committees that focused the efforts of teachers and staff on common goals and objectives aligned around the school vision. For example, Taylor's leadership used its Positive Management Team to direct efforts toward improving student behavior school-wide, which helped them achieve the social and emotional support needed to fulfill their vision of educating the whole child. Teams at each of the schools coordinated efforts by staff to deliver social, emotional, and academic resources in support of student learning. These efforts to address students' social and emotional needs helped teachers focus on high-quality instruction. A committee at

S.F. Community helped the school achieve its vision of "strong hearts" by figuring out ways to support students with overwhelming needs on a case-by-case basis.

Teams and committees in each of the schools met on a weekly and monthly basis. School leaders (including principals, coaches, vice principals, and social workers at all four schools) managed these teams and committees. The four schools shared certain meeting practices and structures, such as distributing agendas ahead of the meeting, setting meeting norms, and structuring the content of the meetings in ways that ensured the active participation and input of all members, and the use of data in guiding decisions about resource allocation and instruction.

These teams and committees also kept staff accountable to the school vision. The meetings encouraged teachers and staff to review their purpose and alignment with the school vision. In general, teachers reminded each other of the vision, with Milk teachers protesting one proposed decision based on the fact that they were a "civil rights academy," and S.F. Community teachers reviewing their meeting norms prior to every meeting. Sheridan teachers referred to their support for each other as the "Sheridan Way." Taylor's grade-level team meetings had a specific agenda that outlined the intended outcomes of the meeting.

Vertical and horizontal alignment of instruction

Milk, S.F. Community, Sheridan, and Taylor teachers did not share a common approach to instruction, but they each had practices, structures, and policies that helped align their dynamic instruction both horizontally across a grade level and vertically across all grades in the school. Taylor's principal used a core curriculum, Houghton Mifflin, to align the curriculum and instruction in the school's English language development classrooms and bilingual classrooms. This gave grade-level teams access to the same materials so they could plan lessons around the same content. For Milk, the curriculum funded by STAR provided common materials and benchmark assessments that kept Milk teachers working on similar content. In addition to its core reading and mathematics programs, Sheridan employed common focal instructional strategies. S.F. Community teachers used projects across grade levels and common rubrics within the portfolio assessment system; as a result, all teachers utilized common standards.

Policy Connections

The dimensions of the schools we have described here were shaped in part by San Francisco's distinctive policy context. For example, San Francisco's policies related to English learners influenced instruction and curriculum by encouraging schools to look closely at the achievement of their English learners. San Francisco's school budgeting policies influenced the alignment of personnel, practices, and resources by giving school leaders more autonomy to align resources with the school vision. San Francisco's student enrollment policies influenced the relational trust built among the school com-

munity by allowing students and parents to choose the schools they attend.

Chapter 4 considers a broader set of policies related to each of the themes. These policies have implications at the school, district, and state level. As these schools operate within the larger policy context of California, their features may have broader implications for policies beyond San Francisco.

Chapter 4:
Policies that Relate to Equitable Practices and Structures

To create and sustain schools that can accomplish the goals we have identified above, districts must develop a policy structure that enables and does not impede these practices. Our analysis points to four areas of district and school policy and practice that are particularly important to developing high-performing schools:

    1) Human capital policies

    2) Curriculum and instruction policies

    3) Funding policies

    4) Communication and outreach policies

Human Capital Policies

Human capital policies dictate the hiring, professional development, and placement of teachers, leaders, and administrators. This study points toward policies that allow schools to build and maintain capacity for strategic planning, implementation, and continuous improvement related to a shared school vision. These themes relate to policies around hiring and retention, professional development, and standards for relationship building.

Hiring criteria for teachers

Leaders from all four schools emphasized hiring as a strategy to increase professional capacity and teacher quality. All four aligned their hiring policies with a shared school vision. When schools had the opportunity to hire new teachers, they proactively sought out good recruits, presented these criteria to candidates for the open position, and chose which teacher to hire based on the criteria. Research points to the importance of a leader's ability to cultivate a school climate with a shared common vision (Boyd, et al., 2009; Sebring, et al., 2006). In the case of these four schools, the shared common vision extended to all corners of the school, including hiring, which helped the school leaders assemble a team of teachers that could buy in to the school's vision even prior to stepping into the classroom. These cases suggest that, rather than treating teachers as interchangeable widgets, districts need to be equally assertive about recruiting an excellent pool of teachers, to create policies that allow school-level participation in hiring, and to encourage school leaders to hire quality teachers around a shared school vision.

Teacher capacity and leader stability

All four schools had practices and structures that kept quality teachers returning year after year to their schools. Most teachers at these schools reported that they liked teaching at their school because they had highly regarded and stable school leaders who

had been at the site for up to 13 years. These school leaders supported structures that develop teacher capacity, like grade-level team planning, teacher leadership opportunities, and ongoing training. Other research also points to the importance of stability of high-quality teachers and school leaders (Allensworth, et al., 2009, Horng, et al., 2009) and the importance of teacher quality and capacity (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996, 2003; National Academy of Education, 2009). District policies should help to cultivate school leaders who understand and can support instruction. Furthermore, district practices should appreciate the value of leadership stability. Finally, districts should provide schools with the resources necessary to support on-site teacher training, time for grade-level instructional planning, and other practices associated with teacher retention and instructional quality.

Professional standards and data use that encourage reflective practice

All four schools had school leaders who set high professional standards for their teachers, and created thoughtful and deliberate systems and structures for analyzing data and reflecting on their teaching practice to better meet student needs. They worked to build teachers' capacity to analyze assessment data and anecdotal information about students, and to reflect on their teaching practices during planning sessions. They also expected teachers to help collect the data through writing samples, quarterly reading assessments, benchmark assessments, and anecdotal evidence collected through their daily interactions with students. They set the expectation that teachers and leaders would focus on building relationships with their students and parents as a means of collecting information that could inform instruction. And they provided an opportunity for analyzing these data in weekly or monthly grade-level team planning sessions, which provided a direct link to teacher planning for instruction.

This kind of data-driven decision-making using multiple measures is often noted in studies of effective schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Vasudeva, et al., 2009; Williams, et al., 2005). Other research suggests that setting high standards for teachers and school leaders and supporting their ability to analyze and reflect on school-related data can improve teaching practice and student learning (Marsh, et al. 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Districts can support this process by adopting professional standards that include these expectations as the basis for teacher development and evaluation systems, by supporting the development of these skills through professional development, and by enabling and expecting leaders to support these kinds of reflective processes with teachers.

Curriculum and Instruction Policies

Policies related to instruction and curriculum shape what Elmore refers to as the "instructional core" (the relationships between the teacher, content, and student) (Elmore, 1996). The "instructional core" implies attention to the content of the curriculum, teachers' delivery of the content through a strategic approach to instruction, and assess-

ment of what students learned. The themes from the cross-case analysis point toward policies that allow teachers and leaders to inform and enhance the instructional core using multiple measures of student achievement and a focus on their shared vision. These policies include:

Schedules that allow for shared planning and learning

The four schools in the case study placed emphasis on making time for collaboration and professional learning. They created this time by utilizing extra resources (e.g., flexible substitute teachers, budgeting autonomy, grant funding, etc.) to craft a schedule for grade-level team planning meetings, opportunities for teacher training (both on-site and off-site), and partnerships with parents and external organizations. Some research indicates that flexible scheduling can be advantageous to schools, including longer blocks of instructional time to meet the needs of diverse learners, and more effective use of time with fewer transitions between classes (Irmsher, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Ort, 2002; Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007). District policies that build collaboration time into school schedules and teaching loads, and that allow schools flexibility to plan their schedules could help school leaders and teachers engage in the collaborative work that relies on shared time for planning, partnering, and professional development.

Personalized and culturally relevant instruction

These schools each paid close attention to getting to know their students through assessment data and strong relationships, and then they used that information to craft personalized learning experiences for students. At all four schools, personalized instruction included providing students with culturally relevant pedagogy. To make their approach to instruction culturally relevant, these schools built content related to students' cultural and ethnic backgrounds within the context of learning new knowledge and skills in the classroom.

For example, in one classroom, students studied immigration by examining the immigration raids that took place in local neighborhood businesses. In another classroom, students explored a new concept in mathematics within the context of buying something at the corner store when you do not have enough money. Research suggests that schools better engage students when they support students' cultural capital (Carter, 2005; Sleeter, 1996; & Banks, 1993) and when they personalize learning experiences for students by connecting them to students' prior knowledge and experiences (Calkins, et al. 2007; Vasudeva, et al., 2009; & Friedlaender & Darling-Hammond, 2007).

To support such practices, districts and schools should create expectations for instruction that support culturally responsive pedagogy within a framework of personalized instructional methods, and support professional learning about these methods.

Funding Policies

Funding policies shape how the state and district deliver resources to schools, as well as how schools deliver resources to students. These case studies point out how important it is that district policies allow leaders to cultivate resources from the surrounding community, align resources with the school vision, and differentiate the delivery of resources based on student needs. Policy implications include the need for school-site budget autonomy and the flexibility and opportunity to build and align partners' efforts in support of schools.

Fiscal fairness and budget autonomy

Compared to most other California school districts, San Francisco provides greater fairness both in allocating funds and in flexibility for spending these funds to meet student needs. During the tenure of Superintendent Arlene Ackerman, San Francisco instituted a Weighted Student Formula process that allocates funding to schools based on the needs of their students. Once principals receive their allotted funds, the district gives them significant autonomy over fund use. These two conditions supported the practices that bolstered student achievement in the case study schools. For example, Taylor used some of its discretionary funds to hire substitute teachers for classrooms to free up teachers for monthly grade-level planning sessions. Some school districts have instituted early release days or late-starts so teachers can collaborate in their grade-level teams.

The policy implications are two-fold. First, state and district policies that allocate funds based on pupil needs, such as weighted student formula approaches, can make it more possible for schools serving low-income students to succeed. Of course, all of these schools also needed to raise money beyond those provided by the state and district, and it is important not to lose sight of the fact that resources beyond the low base currently provided in California are important. Second, flexibility in spending funds can enable leaders to focus on key priorities for improving practice and outcomes in their contexts.

Research on school budgeting indicates that school-site budgeting can improve achievement when there is support for leaders to learn how to make productive decisions (Odden, 2001; Hadderman, 1999). Policies supporting school-based budgeting will be most successful when accompanied by training for school leaders related to the kinds of investments that can produce stronger instruction and better student outcomes.

Building and aligning partner efforts

The schools we studied formed strategic partnerships with outside organizations and community members in support of their goals and visions for student success. The school leaders and their staff applied for and received grants and donations of money and services, and also maintained relationships with their funders through annual meetings and by inviting them to public school events. The external funding is cultivated based on the alignment with the vision of the school and the overall goal of raising

student achievement. Unfortunately, many schools are not able to take advantage of or benefit from partnerships in a meaningful and productive way because they lack these connections and they are pulled in too many different directions in response to competing demands and directives. This undermines their civic capacity—that is, their ability to act together to address a certain problem or goal. In these schools, the shared school visions clearly articulated by their school leader and personnel allowed outside organizations to know where their resources and efforts could align with the schools' efforts.

Policy makers could help support this kind of work in at least two ways: 1) Expecting and supporting schools in developing a vision, using tools like San Francisco's Balance Score Card, and resisting the temptation to diffuse schools' efforts by pulling them in a dozen different directions at once; 2) Helping school leaders connect with potential partners, and helping to build their knowledge and skills for cultivating resources from outside partners that specifically align with their school vision and support student achievement.

Communication and Outreach Policies

Communication and outreach policies shape how the schools communicate with both internal and external community members and can potentially influence school-community relations. The cross-case analysis suggests the importance of policies that allow district and school leaders to develop relationships with parents and community members that garnish political support, align efforts, and build trust as a means to support student achievement in a coordinated way.

Communications and experiences that build supportive relationships

The four schools all focused on building relationships as a means of developing trust, utilizing that trust to make improvements in teacher practices, and cultivating parent and community member involvement. The school leaders played a large role in developing and maintaining these relationships, and they encouraged their teachers and staff members to pursue these types of relationships with parents and community members, with a strong focus on supporting the overall school vision.

As Bryk and Schneider (2002) found, such communications build the trust on which school improvement depends. If teachers see their principal making relationship-building a priority through one-on-one meetings, active listening, and deliberate follow-through with their commitments, then teachers and other staff will more likely follow their lead, thus creating a strong web of relationships throughout the school.

While every school leader has a different approach to developing these relationships, districts can incorporate standards for strategic communications and outreach into principal evaluation plans and can support professional learning for leaders in this domain. Districts can also use their own communication resources to help schools strategically communicate with their community members to develop the relationships that most relate to improvements in student achievement.

Conclusion

Schools need a supportive system of structures and policies to enable the practices displayed at these effective elementary schools. These San Francisco schools used their dynamic leadership to buffer themselves from their policy context and accomplish their goals. However, there are certain instances in which district policies support these schools and facilitate some of their most effective characteristics. To enact supportive policy contexts for schools, states need to work closely with local school districts and schools to develop:

- Human capital policies that provide schools with more autonomy for teacher hiring, professional development structures, staff retention and leadership stability, and national standards for teacher expertise in data analysis;

- Curriculum and instruction policies that: promote the incorporation of collaboration time, shared planning, partnering, and professional development—key factors in enhancing the instructional core; encouraging teachers to use data and their relationships with students to craft personalized and culturally relevant instruction; and providing expectations for personalized and culturally relevant instructional methods;

- Funding policies that promote fiscal fairness and budgeting autonomy as well as building and aligning partner efforts;

- Communication and outreach policies that build relationships of trust as a means to cultivate parent and community involvement and improve teaching practices. In general, communication and outreach policies should allow district and school leaders to build supportive relationships with the larger school community.

References

Allensworth, E. M., Ponisciak, S., & Mazzeo, C. (2009). *The schools teachers leave: Teacher mobility in Chicago public schools*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing.* Washington, DC: Authors.

Banks, J. (1993). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education. *Educational Researcher, 22*(5), 4-14.

Becker, H. (1996). The epistemology of qualitative research. In R. Jessor, A. Colby, & R. Shweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and human development* (pp. 53-71). Chicago: University of Chicago.

Biegel, S. (1999). *San Francisco Unified School District desegregation*. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles.

Bloom, B. S. (Ed.). (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: Handbook I: Cognitive domain*. Longman, NY: Longman.

Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Ing, M., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2009). *The influence of school administrators on teacher retention decisions*. Retrieved March 21, 2010, from http://cepa.stanford.edu/content/influence-school-administrators-teacher-retention-decisions

Brown, J. (2011). *Jerry Brown: Governor 2010—Let's get California working again*. Retrieved February 20, 2011. Document has since been removed from Jerry Brown's web site.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: The Russell Sage Foundation.

Calkins, A., Guehther, W., Belfiore, G., & Lash, D. (2007). *The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst performing schools*. Boston: Mass Insight Education & Research Institute.

Carter, P. (2005). *Keepin' it real: School success beyond black and white*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Childress, S., & Peterkin, R. (2007). Pursuing educational equity at San Francisco Unified School District. In S. Childress, R. F. Elmore, A. S. Grossman, & S. M. Johnson (Eds.), *Managing school districts for high performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Darling-Hammond, L., Ancess, J., & Ort, S.W. (2002). Reinventing high school: Outcomes of the coalition campus school project. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(3), 639-673.

Darling-Hammond, L., Rustique-Forrester, E., & Pecheone, R. (2005). *Multiple measures: Approaches to high school graduation*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network.

Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing successful principals.* Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

Edmonds, R. (1979, October). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership*, 37, 15–27.

Elmore, R. (1996). Getting to scale with good education practice. *Harvard Education Review*, 66(1).

Friedlaender, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). *High schools for equity: Policy supports for student learning in communities of color.* Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures.* New York: Basic Books Classics.

Hadderman, M. (1999). School-based budgeting. *ERIC Digest,* 131. Retrieved April 3, 2010, from http://www.ericdigests.org/2000-2/budgeting.htm

Horng, E. L., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2009). Principal preferences and the uneven distribution of principals across schools. *School leadership Research Report,* (9)2. Retrieved February 28, 2010, from http://www.stanford.edu/~sloeb/papers/Principal%20Preferences%20(revised).pdf

Irmsher, K. (1996). Block scheduling. *ERIC Digest,* 104. Retrieved April 1, 2010, from http://www.ericdigests.org/1996-4/block.htm

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1996). Using a balanced scorecard as a strategic management system. *Harvard Business Review.*

Marsh, J. A., Pane, J. F., & Hamilton, L. S. (2006). *Making sense of data-driven decision making in education.* Retrieved September 10, 2012, from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2006/RAND_OP170.pdf

McLaughlin, M., & Talbert, J. (2006). *Building school-based teacher learning communities: Professional strategies to improve student achievement.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Meier, D. (2003). *In schools we trust: Creating communities of learning in an era of testing and standardization.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Merriam, S. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. Merriam & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 3-17). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

National Academy of Education. (2009). *Teacher quality: Education policy white paper.* Retrieved March 21, 2010, from http://www.naeducation.org/xpedio/groups/naedsite/documents/webpage/NAED_080867.pdf

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What matters most: Teaching for America's future.* New York: Author.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America's children.* Retrieved March 21, 2011, from http://nctaf.org/wp-content/uploads/no-dream-denied_summary_report.pdf

Odden, A. (2001). The new school finance. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(1), 85-91.

Orfield, G., & Boger, J. C. (Eds.). (2009). *School resegregation: Must the south turn back?* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2006). *Racial transformation and the changing nature of segregation.* Harvard, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.

Orfield, G., Siegel-Hawley, G., & Kucsera, J. (2011). *Divided we fail: Segregation and inequality in the Southland's schools.* Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at UCLA.

Public Policy Institute of California. (2011a). *Planning for a better future: California 2025*. Retrieved February 20, 2011, from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_111BKR.pdf

Public Policy Institute of California. (2011b). *Just the facts: California's state budget: The governor's proposal*. Retrieved February 20, 2011, from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/jtf/JTF_Budget0111JTF.pdf

San Francisco Unified School District. (2008a). *Beyond the talk: Taking action to educate every child now, Version 1*. San Francisco: Author.

San Francisco Unified School District. (2008b). *San Francisco Unified School District's services to English learners: The new Lau Plan*. San Francisco: Author.

Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Bryk, A. S., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S. (2006, September). *The essential supports for school improvement*. Retrieved November 8, 2008, from http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/EssentialSupports.pdf

Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review. (2012). *Overview of the 2012-13 budget bill*. Retrieved February 19, 2012, from http://sbud.senate.ca.gov/sites/sbud.senate.ca.gov/files/overview/OverviewOfThe2012_13BudgetBillSB957.pdf

Sleeter, C. (1996). *Multicultural education as social activism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Stone, C. (2001). Civic capacity and urban education. *Urban Affairs Review, 36*(5), 595-619.

Taylor, S., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods* (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Tucker, J. (2008, August 15). *S.F.'s black students lag far behind whites*. Retrieved February 20, 2011, from http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-08-15/news/17121378_1_black-students-black-communities-achievement-gap

Tucker, J. (2009, August 19). *Big lag in test scores for Blacks, Hispanics*. Retrieved February 20, 2011, from http://www.sfgate.com/education/article/Big-lag-in-test-scores-for-blacks-Hispanics-3288921.php

Vasudeva, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Newton, S., & Montgomery, K. (2009). *Oakland Unified School District, new Small School Initiative evaluation*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Williams, T., Kirst, M., Haertel, E., Woody, E., Levin, J., Levine, R., et al. (2005). *Similar students, different results: Why do some schools do better? A large-scale survey of California elementary schools serving low-income students*. Mountain View, CA: EdSource.

Appendix A

Case Study Methods

To document the practices, structures, and policies of these four schools, we used case studies to provide what Merriam (2002) calls "an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution or community" (p. 8). We concentrated on four schools as the unit of analysis. These case studies are ethnographic in nature considering they capture the school culture and in general show a broad set of detailed descriptions of the different elements of each school.

In general, these case studies cast a wide net in an attempt to capture as many details about the school as possible and provide a substantial snapshot of each school. The cross-case analysis looks at the larger themes and uses those themes to develop hypotheses about effective schools in San Francisco. Becker (1996) advocates for "breadth" in ethnography, but we also combine some "thick description" as described by Geertz (1973) and attempt to use our eyes as a camera to capture certain practices and structure in depth, in real time as they happen. These case studies provide a broad lens, but the cross-case analysis focuses on the common themes that appear across all four cases to highlight the similarities and differences. We use the cross-case analysis to hypothesize about the practices, structures, and policies that support effective schools in San Francisco.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a six-month period in the winter and spring of 2009, with the majority of research taking place in the first three months and with follow-up visits to schools in the last three months. Only the authors of this study collected the data for the four case studies profiled to help control for researcher bias and increase reliability. At each school, interviews and observations were conducted according to the data collection plan. The data includes interviews with the principal, teachers, support staff, parents, and community members, as well as observations of classrooms, teacher planning meetings, and other meetings and events related to the school. Additional interviews were conducted with district administrators to help triangulate the data. In general, data collected included recorded interviews, typed interview notes, typed observation notes, documents collected from the school, and school and district website content. Some researchers might call this research method analytic induction, as defined by Taylor and Bogdan (1998). We formulated a hypothesis based on prior research from effective school studies, and we studied the four cases of the schools to see if there was a fit between the cases and the hypothesis. We then used our findings to either support the hypothesis or reformulate our theory and develop a new hypothesis based on the case study findings.

A number of elements influenced the data collection tools. First, and foremost, our prior research on effective schools studies acted as the lens through which we viewed these

schools. To make sure we did not overlook other important elements at each school, we started our interviews with school personnel and parents by asking questions that were open-ended, such as, "What is the reason for this school's success?" or "What changes have you seen at this school while working here?" We also presented a less structured set of interview questions about the success and challenges of each school when we interviewed district officials. The content of the district official interviews were used to help guide the choices of observations and questions during the data collection process as well as to triangulate data. For example, one district administrator pointed out the challenge at Milk of having opinionated staff, so we attended leadership team and staff meetings where teachers had opportunities to share their opinions and examined how those opinions influenced the elements at each school.

Also, the goals of San Francisco's strategic plan, *Beyond the Talk*, influenced data collection tools because of the nature of the funding for this study. The San Francisco Alliance, a nonprofit philanthropic organization that funds district reform efforts in San Francisco, commissioned the School Redesign Network to produce six case studies on San Francisco schools and wanted the data collected to be oriented toward San Francisco's three goals of the new strategic plan, *Beyond the Talk*. We mapped San Francisco's goals and objectives onto the characteristics stemming from prior research on effective schools to make sure we covered the goals of *Beyond the Talk*.