



# INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE IN SCHOOLING REFORM

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What can South Africa learn from other countries?



The Centre for Development and Enterprise is one of South Africa's leading development think-tanks, focusing on vital national development issues and their relationship to economic growth and democratic consolidation. Through examining South African realities and international experience, CDE formulates practical policy proposals for addressing major social and economic challenges. It has a special interest in the role of business and markets in development.

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CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE  
Informing South African Policy

# INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICE IN SCHOOLING REFORM

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What can South Africa learn from other countries?

Edited proceedings of a workshop held in  
Washington, DC, on 1 and 2 December 2008

CDE Workshop

Series editor: Ann Bernstein

This publication summarises the proceedings of a workshop held in Washington, DC, in December 2008. A longer version is available from CDE. This summary was written by Tessa Yeowart, Charles Simkins, Riaan de Villiers, and Ann Bernstein. The workshop was conceptualised by Luis Crouch, Ann Bernstein, and Margie Keeton.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IN DECEMBER 2008 CDE hosted a workshop in Washington, DC on international experience in schooling reform. The gathering was addressed by international experts, and attended by a small group of South Africans.

CDE arranged the workshop because of its concern about the quality of South African education, and its desire to learn more about schooling reform in other countries.

## **Why the South African education system needs to be reformed**

The workshop underscored the fact that the South African education system is largely failing the community it is meant to serve. South African learners perform very badly in international tests of fundamental skills such as numeracy and literacy. This means that the education system is not providing most learners with the skills they need to find jobs.

Recent studies have shown that economic growth in a country is closely linked to the cognitive skills of its citizens. Poor education in South Africa is a serious constraint on improved rates of inclusive economic growth, which is vital to combat poverty. Moreover, the gap between the few who receive a good education and the many who do not perpetuates social and economic inequality, and limits national development.

The problem is not one of a lack of funding. South Africa spends substantially more on education than most low- and middle-income countries whose school systems significantly outperform ours. Nor is the problem one of access, because school enrolment levels in South Africa are very high. What we have is a serious problem of performance and efficiency: South Africans are receiving a very poor return on a substantial investment.

## **Key lessons from the workshop**

South Africa is not unique. Many countries have tried to reform their education systems, and those programmes have been intensively studied. We can, and must, learn from their experiences. What are the key lessons from this workshop?

- *The central objective of reform must be to improve learning outcomes.*

The only way to improve outcomes is to improve the quality and quantity of instruction in the classroom. Steps must be taken to improve teaching methods, classroom management, and curricula. Above all, teaching time and the quality of teaching must be maximised.

- *The quality of an education system is mainly determined by the quality of its teachers.*

Good teachers are the main determinants of learner performance. A few years with a good teacher can transform the performance of even the most disadvantaged learners. This can play a major role in eradicating socio-economic backlogs and reducing inequality.

Effective schooling systems need to attract and retain talented teachers, and improve their knowledge and teaching skills. Teachers should be adequately supported, and their performance should be closely monitored. Teachers who do not meet required standards must be

encouraged to leave the system, thus making way for others. Teaching must be regarded as a prestigious profession, and good teachers should be rewarded.

- *No children should be left behind.*

Effective schooling systems must ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed. Weaker schools must be supported. This requires efficient monitoring systems and effective intervention programmes.

- *Schools need strong leaders.*

Top systems recruit and train excellent principals.

- *Reformers must pay careful attention to institutional and political factors.*

School systems are generally large and have many stakeholders, including parents; teachers; learners; local, regional and national bureaucracies; and private interests. Many potentially valuable reforms are thwarted by resistance from one or more stakeholders. Teachers' unions, for example, often oppose systematic assessments of teacher performance. As a result, successful reforms require careful political and diplomatic work aimed at removing obstacles to positive change, and securing support for it.

- *Reforms must keep pace with capacity.*

Many reform strategies add to demands on schools without increasing capacity, thus complicating and slowing the processes they are intended to improve. Inefficient processes and poorly performing people need to be removed. Innovations are less likely to work if they are tacked on to failing systems; therefore, reformers need to pay close attention to the problems and dynamics of practical implementation.

- *Competition can play a significant role in improving performance.*

Competition between public and private schools benefits both sectors, and lowers costs across the board. Major benefits can be obtained from various forms of private education, including private education for the poor.

Religious and faith-based schooling can also play a significant role. Schools need not be entirely public or private; there are privately operated but publicly owned schools in several countries.

- *Funding should follow learners.*

At least some funding should go to parents (in the form of vouchers), and move with their children to schools of their choice. This would empower parents, and compel schools to improve their performance or risk losing teachers and resources.

- *Public-private partnerships can play a major role in education reform.*

Broader society has a strong interest in an effective schooling system. As a result, powerful public-private partnerships can be mobilised, which can play a significant role in designing, introducing, and supporting reform initiatives. These are especially valuable if they are based on mutual trust; pilot programmes are introduced which are suitable to be taken to scale; and if capacity is mobilised to strengthen implementation.

- *Corporations and foundations can also play a significant role.*

Private companies (and large foundations) can provide valuable technical and other support. They typically have high levels of expertise in gathering and evaluating data, including monitoring systems, and are administratively efficient. They can therefore help school administrations to run in more goal-oriented and efficient ways.

- *Accurate data plays a vital role.*

Every successful schooling system assesses the performance of teachers, learners, and schools. This information is essential for monitoring the performance of various aspects of the system, and achieving greater accountability. It also enables countries to measure their performance against international standards.

Excellent teachers can only be rewarded if administrators have some way of establishing who they are. Gathering the right data efficiently and accurately, analysing it well, and making it available rapidly, can help schools, teachers and officials to identify many forms of inefficiencies as well as successes, and intervene where this is needed. Accurate performance data also helps parents to choose the best schools for their children.

- *Every school must receive the resources it is entitled to.*

Sometimes basic inputs and resources do not reach all schools. Ensuring that they do can be a powerful change mechanism. Schools, parents, and communities should know what resources their schools are meant to receive, and be able to act when they are not delivered or used inappropriately.

### **Popular interventions that often don't succeed**

Popular interventions such as simply spending more money, reducing class sizes, and giving schools greater autonomy in designing the learning process have not been consistently successful. Countries that spend relatively less often perform well, because what they do spend is spent well.

### **Why some reforms fail, and some good ideas are often not implemented**

Poor schooling systems are the way they are because some people are benefiting from them. Therefore, the first step reformers need to take is to examine why the system is working the way it does. This is necessary in order to work out what is feasible (given competing interests) rather than basing policy on rational or optimal but practically unattainable ideals.

### **Education reform in South Africa is a vital national challenge**

The workshop produced a compelling set of good ideas about how to move South Africa's struggling education system in the right direction.

There is growing consensus on the need to fundamentally improve the performance of the South African education system. What is vital as we move forward is that decision-makers focus on the right priorities. Many countries have tried to reform and yet focused on the wrong issues, which then result in failure.

The words of Luis Crouch, international education expert and long-standing technical advisor to the South African Department of Education, are worth repeating: 'South African policy-makers

need to focus on the real issues in education reform, and turn away from the non-issues. The real issues are the poor quality of education, and the unequal distribution of quality. The non-issues are access to schooling, and completion rates.'

Addressing issues of quality will require debates about how to teach, who should teach, and how to run schools effectively.

The international evidence shows that determined interventions which are properly focused and managed can lead to real improvements within a few years. A significantly improved schooling system would be a national asset, producing people better suited to the world of work, thus reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality, and creating a more prosperous society.

Reforming the South African public schooling system is not a secondary or peripheral issue – it is vital to national development. Successful reform will be difficult, and will require vision, staying power, managerial competence, and political courage. South Africa's future success requires a greatly improved schooling system.

## International experts

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**Martin Carnoy** is a labour economist, a professor of education at Stanford University, and a member of the National Academy of Education in the United States. He has consulted to the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, and other international institutions.

**Luis Crouch** is a vice-president at the International Development Group (IDG) of the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), focusing on education, and a former lead education economist at the World Bank. He has been a technical advisor to South Africa's National Department of Education for many years, and has worked in more than 15 countries in the developing world.

**Joe DeStefano** is vice-president of the Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling based in Ohio. He advises large school districts on education reform and policy issues, building on experience in international education gained with the World Bank, USAID, and the Academy for Educational Development, focusing primarily on Africa.

**Viola Espinola** is principal advisor to the education manager of Fundación Chile, an NGO that provides a platform for interaction among the private sector, the government, and the academic community. She previously worked as an education specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC; the Center for Research and Development in Education (CIDE) in Chile; and the Chilean Ministry of Education.

**Ellen Guiney** is executive director of the Boston Plan for Excellence, an organisation which supports schooling reform efforts in Boston, and co-director of the Boston Annenberg Challenge.

**Kin Bing Wu** is an education specialist at the World Bank, focusing on Asia, and has worked on a major initiative to universalise eight years of education in India.

**Marlaine Lockheed** is a visiting lecturer at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, and a visiting fellow of the Center for Global Development. She was previously at the World Bank, where she was interim director for education, managed education lending programs in the Middle East and North Africa and directed major studies on international education.

**Mona Mourshed** is a partner of McKinsey & Co, a leading management consultancy. She is a founding member of McKinsey's Middle East Office, where she leads the public sector practice in education and health care, and co-author of the widely read study 'How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top'.

**Peggy O'Brien** heads the Office of Family and Public Engagement of District of Columbia Public Schools, where she oversees press and strategic communications, parent and family relationships, and community engagement. She is on Chancellor Michelle Rhee's eight-person management team. She speaks nationally, and has published widely on education.

**Jeffrey Puryear** is vice-president for social policy of Inter-American Dialogue, a leading American centre for Western hemisphere affairs based in Washington, DC. He directs its

education programme, the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (with the Corporation for Development Research of Chile, CINDE).

**Suzanne Roddis** manages EdInvest USA, a joint venture between the CfBT Education Trust, a British education management company, and the International Finance Corporation, which provides an information portal for data on private education. She previously worked for the World Bank, most recently on rural development issues in Africa.

**Martin West** is assistant professor of education, political science, and public policy at Brown University. He is the executive editor of *Education Next*, a journal published by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. He is a research affiliate of the programme on education policy and governance at Harvard University.

**Marcus Winters** is a Senior Fellow of the Manhattan Institute, and a former senior research associate of the University of Arkansas.

## South African participants

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**Ann Bernstein**, executive director, Centre for Development and Enterprise.

**Gail Campbell**, chief executive officer, Zenex Foundation.

**Chinezi Chijioke**, senior associate, McKinsey & Co.

**Tsedu Dipholo**, vice president: education, South African Democratic Teacher's Union (SADTU).

**Brian Figaji**, board member, Centre for Development and Enterprise.

**Mpho Letlape**, managing director: human resources, Eskom.

**Nomsa Masuku**, head: corporate social investment, Standard Bank.

**Lerato Molebatsi**, head: group public affairs and corporate social investment, Sanlam.

**Sarah Morrison**, manager education sector, Tshikululu Social Investments.

**Edward Mosuwe**, chief director: FET Schools, Department of Education.

**Charles Simkins**, head of the School of Commerce, Philosophy and Applied Ethics, St Augustine College.

**Lydia van den Bergh**, general manager, Centre for Development and Enterprise.

**Marietjie Vosloo**, project manager, Sasol Inzalo Education Foundation.

**Tessa Yeowart**, education project manager, Centre for Development and Enterprise.

## About this publication

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**I**N DECEMBER 2008 CDE hosted a workshop in Washington, DC, on international experience in schooling reform. The gathering was addressed by international experts and attended by a small group of South Africans.

The location provided easy access to high-level expertise from many different countries. As a result, the South African participants were presented with much valuable information, a broad range of ideas and stimulating examples of schooling reform in various parts of the world.

This publication records the lessons learnt from this workshop in order to make them available to a broader audience.

The workshop summarised in this publication was one of two workshops about education reform held by CDE in Washington, DC, in December 2008. The second workshop dealt with the role of business in schooling reform in the United States, and was also aimed at informing efforts to reform the South African education system.

This publication and a companion document – entitled *Business and Schooling Reform: What Can We Learn from Experience in the United States?* – present the key lessons that emanated from both workshops in a compact format. Longer versions of the proceedings are available from CDE, and can also be downloaded from [www.cde.org.za](http://www.cde.org.za).

## Introductory remarks

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*Ann Bernstein is executive director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise.*

CDE ARRANGED THIS workshop because of its concern about the quality of South African education, and its desire to learn more about schooling reform in other countries. Our intention was to gather information and ideas that could inform attempts to improve the South African schooling system.

A broad spectrum of experts was invited to talk about schooling reform in various parts of the world. They presented perspectives ranging from purely academic to highly practical, and focused on experiences ranging in scale from cities to entire national systems.

The very poor quality of education in South Africa is one of the most pressing challenges facing the country, and the consequences of not addressing it will be severe. South Africa spends close to the norms recommended internationally on education, but is achieving very poor results. We are being outperformed by most other countries – some far poorer than South Africa.

We started our two-day workshop with a presentation by Dr Luis Crouch who also helped CDE to select the other international participants. Dr Crouch is an international education expert who has worked with successive South African governments on various aspects of the country's public education system. As the workshop progressed, the expert participants agreed on a wide range of issues, and differed only about how to interpret the policy implications of a few aspects of international experience. In the following text, the presentations by the international experts and their responses to questions raised by the South African participants are combined.

## Key issues in South African education

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*Luis Crouch is a vice-president of the International Development Group of the Research Triangle Institute, dealing with education, and a long-standing technical advisor to the South African Department of Education.*

**S**OUTH AFRICAN POLICY-MAKERS need to focus on the real issues in education reform, and turn away from the non-issues. The real issues are the poor quality of education, and the unequal distribution of quality. The non-issues are access to schooling, and completion rates.

South Africa has a problem of a lack of learning, and consequent poor learner achievement. Many students go through the system without actually learning – a problem that starts in the early grades with a failure to instil basic operational skills.

Issues of quality are more difficult to address than issues of access. Addressing quality means working differently; working harder, sometimes for the same pay and often being more accountable. It is popular to build schools, hire teachers, and expand enrolment. However, addressing issues of quality means engaging in difficult debates about:

- how to teach (how complex curricula should be, the type of instruction, appropriate use of textbooks, etc); and
- how to run schools (the optimum balance of power among parents, principals and school governing bodies; the extent of school autonomy; the role and powers of the bureaucracy; the role of private providers; and so on).

Gross enrolment ratios in South Africa are high, particularly for primary but also for secondary schools. Completion rates are similar to those in other middle-income developing countries, and generally much higher than the rest of Africa (about 60 per cent of South African youths get to Grade 12 or its equivalent, though not nearly that many pass matric).

South Africa has overemphasised enrolment over achievement (this is a common trait in southern Africa, but particularly marked in South Africa). Generally, the higher the

South African policy-makers need to focus on the real issues in education reform, and turn away from the non-issues

### **South Africa's poor performance in international tests**

In 2003, South African Grade Eight learners achieved a mean score of 264 in the international TIMSS assessment of ability in maths and science. This score was lower than that of many other developing countries, including Ghana, which had a mean score of 276 points.

Even the best performing five per cent of South African learners scored 490 on average, below the developed country mean score of 500 points. Ninety five per cent of learners in developed countries scored more than 380 points.

In the 2006 PIRLS literacy assessment of Grade Four learners, 80 per cent of South African learners were concentrated in the low achieving band, a higher percentage than countries such as Morocco, Indonesia, and Iran.

*TIMSS 2003; PIRLS 2006.*

numbers enrolled, the better systems perform over time, and the more they are able to instil learning. This is because countries tend to tighten their quality control systems as they grow and develop: quality and access tend to go together. However, this has not happened in South Africa.

There is also a relationship between the overall achievement of learners and equality of learning outcomes. Poorer performing countries have a broader spread between best and worst performers – ie, they have a steeper performance curve, while more developed countries have a flatter curve. This demonstrates that countries can improve their overall performance by addressing poor performers. Paying attention to equity and poor achievement is very important. In South Africa there is no ‘cognitive middle class’, a smaller than necessary ‘cognitive elite’, and huge numbers of learners who have learnt very little.

## The way forward

Through purposeful action, and investing heavily in the basics, a number of developing countries – including Iran, Indonesia, Mexico, Korea, and some European and Eastern European countries – have managed to move large numbers of learners from poor to medium achievement, with small increases in the elite, creating a broad cognitive middle class.

While there is little evidence to show how long it takes to change learner achievement, studies in Zambia, India, and Uruguay indicate that ‘militant intervention’ can increase the scores of poor learners 20 to 30 per cent within three to five years.

The more countries achieve in schooling reform, the more equal they are. This is really a vital lesson. One needs to pay attention to the equality of quality – in other words, the distribution of qualitative achievement.

The more countries  
achieve in schooling  
reform, the more  
equal they are



# BEST INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

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# Four lessons from the world's best performing systems

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*Mona Mourshed is a partner of McKinsey & Co, a leading management consultancy, and leads the public sector practice in education and health care in its Middle East Office.*

**T**HE VAST MAJORITY of schooling reforms around the world do not consistently improve student outcomes. In our research we identified the specifics employed by the small number of school reform systems that have been successful, and distilled these into four lessons. Best performing systems included those of Alberta, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Hong Kong, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Ontario, Singapore and South Korea. Strongly improving systems included those of Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, England, Jordan, New York and Ohio. The four lessons are as follows:

*1. The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.*

Problems arise when teachers come straight out of college, do not interact with their peers, and have no examples of excellence

Teacher quality is the most important lever for improving student outcomes. Top-performing systems recruit talented people, and train them intensively. Those who do not meet strict quality criteria are forced to leave, or are not asked to join the profession, even after having completed their studies. Selection for teacher studies is also very stringent. In these countries, teaching is regarded as a prestigious profession. Starting salaries are very competitive, provide adequate compensation for excellence, and are made affordable by keeping the remuneration curve shallower than in other professions.

*2. The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction.*

Reform needs to focus on improving teaching skills, and changing classroom practice. Given effective support to teachers and in-service training, student performance can be significantly improved within three to six years. Problems arise when teachers come straight out of college, do not interact with their peers, and have no examples of excellence. The best systems improve teachers' skills by bringing professionalism, mentoring and apprenticeships back to teaching. They have comprehensive feedback systems which enable teachers to learn from their mistakes, and improve problem areas. Mindset and organisational shifts are vital.

*3. High performance requires that every child succeeds.*

All students need to be well educated, and schools must continuously track and improve their performance via inspections and examinations. Each country should set standards and measures of success in relation to its needs, and introduce mechanisms to help schools to achieve those standards. Pressure without support does not yield better performance. A performance management system needs to be in place to assess whether targets are being met. Comprehensive data helps to identify obstacles that prevent learners from succeeding, and helps to shape strategies to address them. To reduce wide disparities in education, a great school system has to overcome huge socio-economic challenges. The

harsh reality is that parents are the greatest determinant of how learners do in school – but this can, to a significant degree, be overcome with good teaching.

#### 4. *Every school needs a great leader*

Top performing systems recruit and train excellent principals. They need to find candidates with intrinsic leadership skills, and support them to become effective leaders, not just effective educators.

### Ineffective reforms

In the course of our study, some popular reforms were found to be largely ineffective.

- **Reducing class size.** Of 112 case studies of reductions in class size, 89 showed no impact on performance, nine had a positive effect, and 14 had a negative effect. This shows that reducing the size of classes does not necessarily improve results.
- **Giving schools autonomy to customise the learning experience.** We compared charter schools and public schools in the United States, and there is little to no difference in performance levels. It is likely that time required by school leaders to manage and run autonomous schools takes time away from supporting teachers and supervising the system.
- **Increasing education spend.** Despite large spending increases in most OECD countries, and the highest ever per pupil spend in the United States, performance in many of these countries has stagnated. In Scandinavia, the top performer, Finland, spends the least, and Norway, a less strong performer, spends the most. A minimum level of expenditure is important, but the key issue is how the money is spent, and whether it is biased towards improving classroom performance. Improving funding is a necessary but not sufficient reform.

Pressure without support does not yield better performance

### Replicate what works

The challenge is to find what works in given classes and schools and then replicate those practices in every school in the system. This may mean fundamentally changing learning and teaching systems, creating new school frameworks, and providing a comprehensive set of tools and practices to enable effective learning. The changes happen within the school system, but their success depend on improvements in the policy and administrative environments, so that all elements of education are working towards the same goal. A high level of commitment is required across the board for long-term success.

## Schooling reform policy: competition and funding

*Martin West is assistant professor of education, political science, and public policy at Brown University; executive editor of Education Next; and a research affiliate of the programme on education policy and governance at Harvard University.*

**T**HERE IS A stronger case than ever for finding ways to improve the performance of students at public schools. Recent research by Eric Hanushek (2007) has demonstrated

a strong relationship between a country's cognitive skills and economic growth. It also shows that years of schooling completed are not directly associated with economic growth, so increased enrolment only works if students learn effectively at school.

## Competition improves results

One way to improve results, which is receiving growing support, is introducing competition from the private sector. Proponents of this approach argue that competition will enhance the quality of public sector schools, and help to contain costs as well. Critics claim that the benefits of competition are unproven, and that a greater reliance on private schooling may lead to the increased segregation of students along socioeconomic or other social divisions.

These reforms may not have a strong impact in the short term, as they are often adopted in ways that soften their competitive effects. For example, in the case of voucher systems, if school budgets are held constant regardless of the number of students leaving, this does not have the necessary incentive effect. On the contrary, it introduces a perverse incentive by making life easier for those schools producing the poorest results.

Studies have shown a modest positive correlation between the share of private schools in an education system and student achievement. A large part of improvement in achievement accrues to students attending public schools (through improved performance of public schools due to competition). We have also found that competition tends to reduce education spending at both private and public schools, showing that higher performance in these systems is achieved at lower cost.

In OECD countries the *private operation* of schools is positively associated with student performance, while the *private funding* of schools is negatively associated with student performance. Therefore, a public-private partnership comprising private service provision and public funding may be optimal.

Evidence also shows that socioeconomic status gaps are smaller in countries with more private competition in education.

## Accountability and school choice

Greater competition introduces incentives to lower-performing schools that usually only exist at high-performing schools. In Florida, public schools were graded and given four years to improve, or students – and their funding – would be moved to better schools. These schools made considerable and sustained improvements, compared to schools which did not face this threat.

Years of schooling completed are not directly associated with economic growth, so increased enrolment only works if students learn effectively at school

# DEVELOPING COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

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# Eight lessons from middle-income developing countries

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*Marlaine Lockheed is a visiting lecturer at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University, and a visiting fellow of the Center for Global Development.*

**D**ESPITE HUGE INCREASES in enrolments and pupil retention worldwide, many students in developing countries are not reaching international standards of learning in core subjects, and South Africa is no exception. It faces two very challenging issues: reaching minimum competency benchmarks for the whole student body, and reducing or eliminating inequity in performance among schools.

Drawing on literature reviews, case studies, and randomised trials of policies and practice, eight lessons can be distilled from interventions that have worked in other middle-income developing countries.

## *1. Assessing what pupils are learning is important*

Assessments at the classroom level are essential to help teachers ascertain whether pupils understand material

Assessments at the classroom level are essential to help teachers ascertain whether pupils understand material. National assessments allow the monitoring of achievement at the system level, and, together with regional and international assessments, provide a factual basis for identifying problems, targeting interventions, and monitoring changes.

## *2. A theory of change that focuses on the classroom learning is important*

School and classroom learning must be at the centre of any change model. Effective learning models also include a management system to ensure that inputs get to schools and classrooms as well as families that support the education of their children.

## *3. Basic school inputs make a difference to what happens inside the classroom*

Basic inputs include buildings, curriculum, learning materials, teacher knowledge, learning time, and teaching processes. Important challenges here are multiple languages, and mother tongue learning. Cross-country research consistently finds that bilingual teachers and instructional programs are important in the earliest grades. Textbooks, teaching guides, and classroom libraries are essential for literacy.

## *4. Children must be teachable*

Families play a vital role in the teachability of children. Preschool participation, healthy nutrition, and support for learning at home are essential. Some countries have taken steps towards introducing early childhood development programmes, outreach to mothers to support children's intellectual development, and social support programmes. Other interventions focus on health such as immunisations, HIV awareness programmes for older children, safe drinking water, and clean latrines. Targeted school breakfast and lunch schemes for poor children are important. In less developed countries, school environments must cater for students with little or no family support.

### 5. *Time, particularly teacher-student contact hours, makes a big difference*

One thousand hours of contact instruction a year is an international average. Teachers must be punctual, attend their classes, and arrange for substitutes when they are absent. Many countries have introduced incentives for teacher presence, such as paying attendance bonuses and using cameras to monitor their presence in the classroom. Students need to attend school regularly. Attendance can be encouraged with incentive programs, such as cash transfers to poor families, or scholarship programs, particularly for secondary school. After school homework and tutoring can increase the hours of learning for children who fall behind. In addition, school buildings need to be accessible and capable of functioning in a variety of weather conditions.

### 6. *What happens in the classroom matters*

Teachers need to know their subject matter, how to identify gaps in student knowledge, how to remedy these effectively, and how to motivate students. Teaching methodology is important: rote learning and chalk-and-talk are not effective, as teaching should be interactive. Primary school teachers need a solid general secondary education, followed by short, focused, practical pre-service training. Sustained teacher support and ongoing professional development makes a difference, as teachers learn to be teachers by teaching and learning from more experienced peers.

Teachers need to know their subject matter, how to identify gaps in student knowledge, how to remedy these effectively, and how to motivate students

### 7. *School management and autonomy for instruction*

Decentralisation does not always lead to higher achievement. Education systems which allow schools to have autonomy over instructional matters (such as textbook selection) seem to have higher achievement than systems with less autonomy. However, there is no conclusive impact for autonomy in staffing or management decisions.

### 8. *Equity matters*

Disparities in urban and rural outcomes linked to socioeconomic status need to be addressed through policy interventions aimed at ensuring that basic learning inputs reach all schools. Recent popular interventions to keep students in schools are conditional cash transfers (CCTs) targeted at children likely to drop out. Other interventions are targeting supplementary resources to schools that lack basic inputs or where performance is lower than average. Incentives for teachers who teach in disadvantaged schools are also important.

## The economics of school quality

*Eric Hanushek*

In a major study that has provoked the interest of analysts and policy-makers worldwide, the economist Eric Hanushek has identified a direct relationship between the cognitive skills of students in a given country on the one hand, and individual earnings and national economic growth on the other.

According to Hanushek, after one generation the economic effects of an improved education system are enough to pay the entire national education bill. However, improving school quality requires more than just increased investment. In order to enable a schooling system to contribute to economic growth, other elements such as appropriate market, legal and governmental institutions that support a functioning modern economy need to be in place.

While policy-makers and researchers have tended to focus on the quantity of schooling, this is a very crude measure of knowledge and cognitive skills. In response to this shortcoming, Hanushek and Kimko (2000) developed a measure of labour force quality based on international differences in mathematics and science knowledge, and used this to explain variations in economic growth across countries.

Their research shows that improving teacher quality has a major impact on student performance. Having a 'good' teacher (one standard deviation of quality above the mean) moves the average student up by more than four percentile points in a given year. If a student has a good teacher as opposed to an average teacher for five years in a row, the increased learning is sufficient to close the average gap between a typical low-income student and a higher-income student.

They point out that improving the quality of teachers takes much longer than simply increasing the number of learners in schools. If this is done only by means of selective hiring and retention policies whenever replacements are available, it will take a long time before a teaching force is significantly improved.

*Hanushek 2008; Hanushek and Kimko 2000.*

Having a 'good' teacher moves the average student up by more than four percentile points in a given year

## The importance of teacher quality in Latin America and Southern Africa

*Martin Carnoy is a labour economist, professor of education at Stanford University, and a member of the National Academy of Education in the United States.*

**S**CHOOL REFORM IS complex and expensive, and many of the problems encountered lie outside the education system. Yet chances of success are increased if one clearly understands the relationships between classroom inputs and outputs. Evidence conclusively points to the importance of teachers and teaching in improving learning gains. Our research, which compares school systems in Latin America and southern Africa, shows

that what teachers know, how they teach, and opportunities provided for learning play vital roles in learning gains.

The degree of teacher supervision, evaluation, and support correlates positively to good teaching. Cuba, the top performer in Latin America, has a high degree of teacher supervision, particularly during the first three years of schooling. Principals and vice-principals visit classrooms two to three times a week, observing and giving feedback to teachers, who then listen and act accordingly.

Teacher training and induction play a major role in how well teachers teach. Teachers must be taught how to teach besides improving their content knowledge.

The efficacy of teaching methods varies widely. Standing in front of a class and delivering a 'lecture' is still widely practised despite its ineffectiveness in improving learning gains. Rote exercises are widely used, which provide no assessment of whether concepts are properly understood. The research suggests that while passive and teacher-centred methods are not very effective, tightly managed instruction that is fairly direct, and with the teacher directing the instructional process (but not necessarily acting as the source of all knowledge), as opposed to methods that overemphasise 'discovery', can be quite effective.

It is difficult to evaluate the performance of teachers in a meaningful way. Specific inputs associated with an improvement in student performance need to be isolated. Experience shows that very few teachers do consistently well, and very few consistently badly; most perform in the middle.

In sum, our research shows a clear relationship between student learning gains and teaching quality.

In Chile, levels of co-operation between the education ministry and the private sector are unusually high

## Outsourcing school improvement: the case of Chile

*Viola Espinola is principal advisor to the education manager of Fundación Chile, an NGO that provides a platform for interaction among the private sector, the government, and the academic community.*

FOR SEVERAL DECADES, Chile implemented reforms that had shown good results in other parts of the world, yet student performance did not improve. The government searched desperately for something that would work. It eventually developed a strategy for improving low-performing schools that relies on public-private partnerships. The private sector contributes significantly to the quality of education, supporting schools to improve learning achievement. Levels of co-operation between the education ministry and the private sector are unusually high.

The partnership was made possible when, in 2008, increased per capita subsidies were legislated for priority students and vulnerable schools. This followed the 2006 'Revolution of the Penguins' in which secondary school students took to the streets to demand better education. Many changes followed these protests, the most significant of which made schools responsible for yearly progress in student achievement.

Principals and teachers could be removed, schools closed, and a supervisor appointed. The withdrawal of official accreditation statutes and authorisation by local administrations, the cancellation of subsidies, and fines for non-compliant schools were also approved. Based on performance, schools are now classified as Autonomous, Emerging, or Recovering.

## Better schools: more learning opportunities

Fundacion Chile's Better Schools programme, which started as a pilot funded by private companies in 1999, is now implemented in 50 schools. Its main purpose is to improve school effectiveness and the quality of learning by providing support to schools and local administrations. More specific goals are to increase enrolment and improve attendance (since schools receive money based on child attendance), reduce drop-out rates, reduce learning gaps within classrooms as well as between schools, increase graduation rates, improve results in national assessment tests, and ensure that improvements are sustainable.

The Better Schools model works in four intervention areas:

- direct support to teachers and school management;
- training teachers, directors, technical co-ordinators, and consultants;
- coaching local administrations; and
- providing educational materials.

The programme takes four years to complete, and involves five steps:

- 1) **Negotiation:** funders and local administrators discuss the selection of schools
- 2) **Diagnosis:** a baseline profile is constructed, and indicators are identified for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. A four-year improvement plan is developed by the local administration, teachers, and the Better Schools team.
- 3) **Mastery:** Staff demonstrate the acquisition and use of competencies and tools.
- 4) **Ownership:** Schools incorporate all the new functions as part of their regular activities.
- 5) **Autonomy:** Visits are phased out, and results and lessons learned are reviewed. Specialists provide limited support online, and schools are evaluated twice a year.

Cost per school averages US\$34 000 a year, and cost per student about US\$50 a year. Costs per school range from US\$26 000 to US\$37 000 depending on the size of the school, and include consultants' and specialists' fees, external school assessments, travel and school visits, training workshops, and educational material. Schools want to make use of this support because they need to achieve the performance targets, and teachers and schools are therefore generally willing to work with the support teams.

## Success of the programme

The model was introduced about four years ago in its current form. Therefore, no schools have yet 'graduated,' although improvements are already evident in the results of some schools, and a steady decline has been averted in others. The model is regarded as having potential, and could go to scale across the country. However, the number of NGOs that can provide assistance is not large, particularly in the rural areas. The government is trying to provide incentives and support to NGOs interested in providing assistance, but the accreditation and capacity development is time-intensive and costly. Fundacion Chile is

Some countries in Latin America have pioneered education reform for more than two decades, yet their performance has not improved

now organising a network of private sector participants who will meet monthly to discuss achievements and strategies for further improvements.

## Generating systemic support for education reform

*Jeffrey Puryear is vice-president for social policy of Inter-American Dialogue, a leading American centre for Western hemisphere affairs based in Washington, DC, and directs its education programme, the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas.*

**B**ASED ON EXPERIENCE in Latin America, there are essentially four important steps in an education reform plan:

### Understanding the situation – the diagnosis function

In order to change, you need to understand what is going wrong. If you gain a clear picture of this, you can address it. Some countries in Latin America have pioneered education reform for more than two decades, yet their performance has not improved. It could be that they are trying to tackle the wrong problems. To correctly diagnose and unpack problems, you need a core group of good analysts with expertise and experience.

### Sounding the alarm – the communication function

Once you have identified the underlying problems, you need to communicate clearly and simply about what the problems are. This is essential in order to build demand among educational stakeholders for quality education.

To make changes, you need a consortium of influential interest groups, including parents, the mass media, and religious groups. You need to create a core group of informed and energetic leaders who are capable of pressing for policies that improve quality. You need to talk to people's different interests, so that they see the value of change. You need to develop a political agenda, not necessarily in the partisan sense but as a way of allowing presidents to deal with entrenched interest groups. Business and civil society leaders need to play a large role in raising this awareness.

You also need to involve a team of experts in education. You need people who can work with you to develop an agenda. If you begin to promote policy change without a solid analytical base, effective change will not occur.

### Pointing the way – setting the agenda, and showing people what they need to do to make things better

You need to identify the top issues requiring a solution, and lay out the policy agenda. We see this as winning the 'battle of ideas,' changing the conventional wisdom, the way people think about education. To establish a good policy agenda, you need to learn from other parts of the world.

If you are going to be serious about education reform, you must be in for the long haul

## Promoting policy change

Once you get the policy in place, it needs to be implemented. You have to look at how policy decisions are made in a given country, understand the policy process, and come up with a strategy with roles for business, media, and government. The capacity to translate policy into actual reforms is obviously important. This is always a problem in poorer countries, but various solutions are possible.

Communication remains important. If pressure continues from different sectors, you increase the chance that something great will happen. You need to continue encouraging the demand for quality education.

To conclude, if you are going to be serious about education reform, you must be in for the long haul. You have to change entrenched aspects of the education system, including the recruitment and behaviour of teachers. Recent research has revealed a clear link between the quality (not quantity) of education and economic growth. By measuring enrolments as education, we have had the wrong focus; there is a weaker relationship between quantity and economic growth. Learning is what counts, not just people in school.

By measuring enrolments as education, we have had the wrong focus; learning is what counts, not just people in school

## Improvements in China

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*Kin Bing Wu is an education specialist at the World Bank, focusing on Asia.*

**E** DUCATION POLICY IN China has sought to achieve nine years of universal and compulsory education. Net enrolment ratios reached 99,5 per cent in 2007, made possible by demographic transition and increased public and private investments in education. Education budgets have grown significantly over the past decade, but per capita spending remains low compared to other fast-growing economies.

Fiscal decentralisation is a source of major inequality, as education spending is seven times higher in Shanghai than in the poorest areas in China. To address this disparity, the government started central fiscal transfers to the poorest counties in the mid-1990s. Since 2006 further reforms have provided central government funds to enable rural schools in particular to meet operating costs without charging fees, provide free textbooks, and subsidise boarding fees for poor students. Compulsory education was made free only in September 2008.

A recent World Bank study found that maths students in the second poorest province in China were performing well above the international average. It found no clear link between test scores and per student expenditure, showing that outcomes are driven by important interventions beyond finance.

Three major factors were found to have an impact on performance:

- the concentration of minority schools (which offer bilingual education) in a particular area;

## Education reform in Latin America

*Jeffrey Puryear*

Public education in Latin America has been failing for decades, and has traditionally been low on the lists of priorities of most governments, which tend to focus on macroeconomic and fiscal policy, and promoting and consolidating democracy.

As in South Africa, enrolment levels are high, but the quality of education is poor, with learners from Latin American countries achieving the lowest scores in international tests of any world region.

Schools vary greatly in quality, and are also very unequal – poor children generally attend low-quality public schools, and richer children attend relatively high-quality private schools.

Education in Latin America has been monopolised by large government bureaucracies, with very little external influence, critique, oversight, or discussion. Stakeholders have had little influence over or information about education. The effect was that few stakeholders realised or recognised the extent of the problem.

Our initial investigation showed that the root of the problem was poor education policy, which made it almost impossible to improve the situation in the classrooms. Macro policies focused on inputs instead of outputs. There was a lack of accountability, performance incentives, and quality control.

Through communication we have challenged complacency around educational quality. The most visible and successful of our communication tools is the series of Education Report Cards – a user-friendly analysis of what is happening in regional or national education systems. The idea is to communicate to a diverse and non-specialist audience around the region what the problems in education are. In Colombia we are piloting these at the state or provincial level.

Civil society is now playing a bigger role. We started with business sectors, which were concerned about education, but intervened only sporadically. They are now developing their own positions and saying, ‘we think this is what needs to be done in our education systems’.

In charting the way forward, our approach has been to try and influence or improve quality, and we are promoting the following policy recommendations:

**Set standards and measure:** Education quality needs an empirical basis and empirical rigour, linked to modern educational standards. Most countries in this region did not have these, although many had national assessment systems.

**Give local schools and communities more control over and responsibility for education.** This is the decentralisation and school autonomy model.

**Strengthen the teaching profession** by raising salaries, reforming training, and making teachers more accountable to the communities they serve. The issue of accountability is the most controversial and the most fundamental. The issue is not only one of training teachers, but also of how they are managed.

**Invest more money per student in pre-school, primary, and secondary education.** Latin American countries tend to overinvest in higher education, but only the rich and middle classes make it to university. This tends to subsidise the rich and deprive the poor.

**We have focused strongly on accountability**, and recently hosted our third international conference on this subject. We have also produced a series of policy briefs on accountability: short documents designed to help people who are not specialists to understand what accountability means.

Today, nearly every country in Latin America has a national achievement test. There is an increasing awareness that if you are a modern country, you need to find out how the learning of your children stacks up against others.

When people say we need to improve teaching, they tend to focus on training. This is partly correct, as training in Latin America is not necessarily appropriate, and may be very theoretical. However, this is not just a training problem but a management problem. Teachers need to be professionally managed, with objectives that align with the quality of education. This aspect is more difficult to change than anything else.

*From presentation by the author.*

- teacher in-service training, particularly in student assessment; and
- poverty (the percentage of poor students within a school).

It is possible to address the first two factors through education policy interventions.

## Notable aspects of the Chinese system

**Monitoring and support:** teachers support each other and observe each other's lessons. Records are kept and checked by the principal and inspector, who also spend time observing and monitoring. (This is similar to the Cuban approach, as noted by Carnoy.)

**Good-quality teachers** are developed by identifying those who are unqualified, giving them an opportunity to upgrade their qualifications within a set period, and dismissing them if they do not achieve this. Rural teachers are paid good salaries, and there is prestige attached to the profession.

**Discipline and commitment:** If teachers are absent, deductions are made from their salaries. A point system determines whether teachers get a bonus or a deduction from their salary, based on various factors including the behaviour of their students. This means that teachers spend a lot of time on social issues, including visiting families and keeping records of visits.

**A systematic teaching methodology,** including elaborate lesson plans, and systems to check on students' homework and exam scores.

**A highly centralised curriculum,** which specifies measurable outcomes required at the end of each grade. Since 2000 the government has invested in infrastructure and telecommunications in the western region, which has allowed these areas to access educational TV programmes that teach English and maths.

# THE UNITED STATES AND REFORM

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# The broader context of US education reform

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*Marcus Winters is a Senior Fellow of the Manhattan Institute.*

**A**NALYSTS AND OTHERS generally agree that student achievement in the United States is lower than it should be, with a clear racial achievement gap, and inadequate high school graduation rates. Also, results have been stagnant since the mid-1970s despite a doubling in school funding, which points to inefficiencies in the system. Most reform efforts are aimed at urban areas, where the most serious problems exist. There are also differences among individual city reform programmes, given that states and local districts run their own school systems, and the federal government plays a very limited role.

## School incentives

These have been the major focus of reform programmes in recent years. Most of them have tried to mimic suburban schools within an urban system, and fall into one of three categories:

- **choice** – the ability of students to move to another school or system;
- **accountability** – via parental and governance pressure on schools; and
- **performance pay for teachers** – ensuring a dedicated and high-performing teacher workforce.

## School choice

Public school attendance is usually determined by the area in which one lives. School choice gives parents the means to choose other education options. In theory this introduces market forces which act as incentives for schools to improve – notably losing funding if students leave. Two main interventions promote school choice: vouchers, and charter schools.

- **Vouchers** help low-income students to attend private schools. Studies have found that vouchers have a positive impact (although a recent study in Washington found no positive effects). While vouchers may not be a panacea, evidence suggests that having them is better than not having them.
- **Charter schools** are public schools that operate outside many of the public regulations, including union contracts, but fall under the public accountability system. According to recent studies, charter schools are having a positive impact.

School choice therefore seems to have a positive effect, although this is not major.

## Accountability

These interventions try to introduce command incentives in terms of which achievement is attached to rewards or sanctions. There are certain measures or benchmarks which schools and students need to achieve. Schools are graded, and students can be held back for a year if benchmarks are not achieved. Evidence shows that these measures are having positive results.

Currently, teachers are paid according to years of experience and qualifications, factors that may have little impact on productivity and student performance

## Performance pay for teachers

Teacher quality is the most important factor in terms of student achievement. Therefore, education reform is focusing closely on changing systems for teachers, such as introducing performance-linked pay. Currently, teachers are paid according to years of experience and qualifications, factors that may have little impact on productivity and student performance. It is expected that a more direct link between student performance and teachers' salaries will act as an incentive to better teaching. The current sparse evidence on these programmes is relatively positive.

## A national experiment in Washington, DC

**Peggy O'Brien** heads the Office of Family and Public Engagement of District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS).

**I**N 2006 ADRIAN Fenty was elected mayor of Washington, DC on the strength of his school reform platform. He immediately requested and received mayoral control of the DC public schools from the city council, and hired Michelle Rhee as chancellor. Rhee is a radical reformer with considerable experience of big city schools. She was determined to lead an administration focused solely on students and their performance, and soon earned a national reputation.

Within the first year of the reform programme, DC-CAS (District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System) test results showed promising improvements. In the July 2008 examinations:

- Elementary schools increased their reading scores by 8 percentage points, and mathematics scores by 11 points.

Within the first year of the reform programme, District of Columbia test results showed promising improvements

### The DC school system

Washington has 123 public schools (with 46 000 students), governed by the mayor and the chancellor (head of the education department). The largest concentrations of students are in the two poorest wards in the city.

There are 22 000 students in charter schools, which are governed by the Public Charter School Board. Unlike many other cities, charter schools do not report to the chancellor or mayor. There are also a significant number of independent schools and some religious schools, mostly Catholic.

Studies have shown that in 2006 only 12 per cent of eighth graders in public schools were proficient in reading, eight per cent were proficient in maths, and only nine per cent of ninth graders ultimately finished college within five years. In some schools, there is a 70 per cent achievement gap between white and black students.

*National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>*

- Secondary schools made nine percentage point gains in both reading and mathematics.
- The number of schools with proficiency rates below 20 per cent dropped from 50 to 29.
- Some of these schools doubled or tripled their average reading and mathematics scores: of the 19 schools that did so, 14 are in the city's neediest neighbourhoods (DCPS 2008).

## Five-year plan

Under Rhee's guidance a five-year plan was introduced, aimed at achieving six inter-related goals:

- creating compelling schools (including placing social workers, psychologists, art, music, and physical education teachers in every school);
- attracting great people (hiring and retaining the best educators and managers in the country);
- creating an aligned curriculum (rigorous, and imparting skills and knowledge for productive lives beyond school, either in college or the workforce);
- gathering and using comprehensive and accurate data (to enable well-founded decisions based on measurable results);
- ensuring an effective central office (streamlined and efficient); and
- engaging with the community (partnerships with parents, families, and community members, so that parents know what a good education is and how to demand it for their children).

Improving the performance of principals is a central feature of the reform programme

## Importance of the principal

Improving the performance of principals is a central feature of the reform programme. The chancellor appoints principals on a one-year contract. They meet with her at the beginning of the school year to identify their goals, and review them with her at the end of the year. Last year Rhee did not renew the contracts of 50 principals. Another part of

### No Child Left Behind

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the United States federal government stated for the first time that every student had to be tested, that those tests had to be reported, and school districts would be held accountable for ensuring that all students reach 'proficiency' by 2014. States and districts put together the plans for what levels of proficiency they would reach, and steps to enable them to reach it.

Critics say the law has introduced severe sanctions without commensurate support and increased resources. The focus of schooling has narrowed to test preparation and a limited number of subjects such as English and maths at the expense of others. Some think it is unfair to hold teachers accountable for student performance.

Proponents welcome the emphasis on measurement and accountability, and the vigorous national debates that have arisen around standards and testing. The focus on individual student performance as a measure of success is regarded as valuable.

*From presentation by Lydia Logan.*

the strategy has been to find the best performing principals (from within the district and outside of it) and place them in the lowest-performing schools.

## Evaluation of teachers

Teachers have typically been classified in terms of their qualifications and length of tenure. In a proposed new contract with the Washington Teachers' Union, public school teachers might have a choice between two tracks: they either keep tenure and seniority, and become eligible for a 28 per cent salary increase over time; or they give up tenure and seniority, are put on probation for a year, and from then on are judged entirely by the success of their students.

In the latter case, teachers will be evaluated in terms of test scores, evaluation by the school's principal, a third-party team, and the students' portfolios. Their salaries will immediately increase and they will get bonuses for good student performance, successfully teaching scarce subjects, and teaching in a high-poverty school. A well-performing teacher could make almost \$140 000.

## Foundation support

The programme has been made possible by the generous support of several large foundations which have committed significant funding to improving teachers' salaries. This has given the district a chance to reconfigure budgets to fund this in the longer term. While it is not clear what will happen with the trade union contract, the district is proceeding in the development of a new system of teacher evaluation which will begin in the coming school year.

## Effective schools

Officials have worked with schools to identify what they need to become more effective. The essentials are leadership, job-embedded professional development, resources, a safe and effective learning environment, and family engagement. Principals are evaluated against these elements of effective schools. Information about the schools and performance is shared publicly, and school budgets are available on the internet.

An important principle of the reform plan is to promote shared decision making at the local level. In the Local School Restructuring Teams, elected staff, parents, community members and students come together with principals to make reform decisions about the school. The local school improvement plan is aligned with the DCPS business plan.

## Legal consequences of poor performance

In terms of federal law, notably the No Child Left Behind Act, schools that do not adequately meet their annual progress plans are given restructuring status, which means they have to do whatever is needed – change leadership, staff, or both – so that students can begin to succeed. In Rhee's first few months in office, 27 schools were given restructuring status. By the end of her first year, 23 schools had been closed by the Chancellor although not all were closed due to poor performance. Pupils were moved to other schools.

## Challenges for reform

Reforming an existing education system raises numerous important and difficult issues. The public needs to support and invest in the reform process, and a central part of this

Information about the schools and performance is shared publicly, and school budgets are available on the internet

is a good communication strategy that directly addresses people's fears and concerns. Parents affected by change will naturally be concerned. It is important to involve them in decision-making (such as the Local School Restructuring Teams in DC) and empower them with information (such as the soon-to-be-opened parent centres around Washington, DC).

## Improvements in Boston

The superintendent commissioned a new system for teacher preparation to replace traditional university programmes, which he judged to be inadequate

*Ellen Guiney is executive director of the Boston Plan for Excellence, which supports schooling reform efforts in Boston, and co-director of the Boston Annenberg Challenge.*

**T**HE REFORM OF Boston's schooling system started with the appointment of Superintendent Tom Payzant in 1996. He established a general framework for reform, Whole School Improvement (WSI), which sets out six essential things that 'good schools' do:

- organise activities around instruction;
- obtain and regularly use detailed data about students' performance;
- offer professional development for teachers that is embedded in their daily work;
- build leaders;
- manage resources effectively; and
- reach out to parents and the community.

WSI provides a framework for instructional improvement, school reorganisation, and measures of success. Each school forms its own plan for achieving these essentials. The Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), a non-profit organisation that encourages and supports

### The Boston school system

Boston has 140 public schools, serving 60 000 students. The school system is relatively well funded, with more than a third of the funding coming from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, about 8 per cent from federal government, and the rest from the city itself.

There is a large parochial school system, with a small but growing number of fundamentalist religious schools, mainly evangelist religions. The largest growth sector is Charter schools which are run independently but report to the state. There are about 5 000 students in Charters.

Some 75 per cent of students in public schools are eligible for the federal lunch programme, which requires a household income of less than \$24 000 for a family of four. By and large, the middle class in Boston do not use public schools, but there has been some return in recent years.

As in most American cities, the problem area for performance is high school – about 30 per cent of students who start high school do not finish.

[www.bostonpublicschools.org](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org)

the schooling reform programme, has partnered with the city to help it deliver on these reforms. Successful elements of the reform programme are discussed below.

## The Effective Practice Network of Schools

The EPN was established for sharing ideas, and testing and spreading good practice. Twenty-five school leaders talked, shared ideas, and tested innovations in a well-resourced and well-supported context. In the last ten years, Boston Public Schools (BPS) and BPE together raised \$100 million from national foundations to test ideas that were relatively unproven, and document them. Some of these reforms have been extended to a wider group of schools, with district budget support.

## Teacher development

A major challenge was to refine the district's professional development model for teachers in order to deepen and broaden their skills. The initial one-to-one coaching model proved of limited value as it was voluntary and its structure severely limited the number of participants. It was not reaching about half the teachers, many of those in real need. The model was changed to identify teams of people working together in schools, resulting in the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) programme, which placed value on existing expertise and shared team learning and critique. Following indications of success, the programme was scaled up, and the city's superintendent began to streamline budgets and systems to support systemic teacher development and extend CCL.

## Teacher training

In a controversial move, the superintendent commissioned a new system for teacher preparation to replace traditional university programmes, which he judged to be inadequate. In partnership with BPE, he established the Boston Teacher Residency (BTR), in which teachers are placed in apprenticeships with a very good teacher. It has the following key features:

- Trainees take courses for a month before and after the year spent with qualified teachers (master teachers) before they are certified.
- During the year, they participate in course work one day and evening per week.
- They are assessed throughout the year, and surveyed again once they have graduated.
- BPE teaches the courses, hires instructors, and has designed the courses to cover eight competencies teachers should have.

Now in its sixth year, BTR has trained 200 teachers, with 75 currently in the pipeline. The greatest difficulty has been finding good instructors, particularly in specific areas such as special education. This model is being replicated in numerous other American cities, including New York, Chattanooga, Philadelphia, and Denver.

Our experience has shown that you can turn many people into very good teachers if you do it right. The supply of great people who want to be teachers is limited, and we therefore have to develop our pipeline. By providing the right opportunities and support, and following this through during their first three years of teaching, one can make more effective teachers. Teaching is not easy, and may continue to draw on the lower performers in college, but with the right structures, curriculum, direction and supervision, one can develop committed people into very good teachers.

This model is being replicated in numerous other American cities, including New York, Chattanooga, Philadelphia, and Denver

## Consequences of poor performance

People who have no interest in teaching, or who are poor teachers, are encouraged to leave. Last year about 80 of Boston's 5 000 teachers were evaluated and removed. BPE supports principals in their tenure decisions, and together we are working to increase the control principals have over teachers, in the face of strong labour unions which make it difficult for schools to remove poor teachers. An additional problem is that many principals are not equipped to evaluate teachers well.

## Data-driven decision-making

Data analysis has been made accessible and indispensable to teachers. There is now a huge emphasis in the United States on test scores and standardised tests, but while these are an essential part of an accountability system, they are not very useful for helping teachers decide what activities and learning to focus on in the classroom. Teachers don't receive scores until the year after testing, so there is no scope to change or improve on problem areas, and the tests are not designed to diagnose the particular needs of children. Therefore, we developed new assessments specifically testing for teachers' knowledge, and put in place an ongoing cycle of assessing student learning needs, teaching in response, and assessing again.

People who have no interest in teaching, or who are poor teachers, are encouraged to leave

## Factors influencing reform

Reform's success depends on stability and time – at least five years.

- In many districts the constant turnover of superintendents and school boards results in instability, but Boston enjoys a stable environment.
- The superintendent had a hypothesis that the most important thing to do was to improve instruction in the classrooms, through the sustained development of teachers and the implementation of structured curricula at a deliberate pace. He structured his budget accordingly, and stuck with this hypothesis for more than 10 years, which enabled him to make an impact.
- Payzant viewed the school district as a large and inclusive network which included the mayor, school boards, superintendents, the central office, schools, teachers, universities, reform organisations, local corporate sectors, and churches. He chose to focus on long-term systemic and structural change for Boston rather than small reform projects.

BPE has been able to participate in this reform due to a solid relationship of trust with Payzant; the corporate sector, which provides our funding; and the education system itself, from government through to school leaders. All role players need to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the system and ways to implement reform in order to achieve success.

## Charter schools

Charter schools are publicly funded schools managed by independent boards with greater freedom in staffing decisions, curriculum, and assessment in return for accountability for producing certain results. Their goal is to give students a quality learning experience and offer parents and students choice within the public school system. Specific performance conditions are outlined in each school's charter, issued by the district's Board of Education. If charter schools fail to meet the required standards, their operating contracts can be revoked.

Charter schools are emerging as one of the most dynamic educational reform initiatives in the United States. Today there are about 4 300 charter schools in the United States, comprising 4,5 per cent of all public schools, and serving 2,6 per cent of all public school students. While annual growth has slowed slightly since 2000–01, the number of charter schools has quadrupled over the past ten years, and 365 new charter schools opened their doors in 2007–8. They are traditionally founded by teachers, parents or educational activists as well as non-profit groups and universities.

Charter schools vary considerably from each other in terms of the populations they serve, their academic missions, the quality of their work, and the results they produce. The nature of charter schools involves innovation and experimentation, so both failures and successes are to be expected. Existing studies of charter schools point to the following;

- Charter schools are showing positive results in student learning in both reading and maths.
- Elementary charter schools appear to outperform middle and high charter schools.
- Charter schools are more likely than other public schools to focus their educational designs on specific missions and populations; adapt their school day and year to meet the needs of their students; customise their programmes to help struggling students; and bring college preparation courses to inner-city students.

It was evident from the CDE workshop that the quality of charter schools is uneven. Standards need to be tightened. One way of doing this could be by introducing authorisation standards around proven models. In the long run, the success of the charter movement will depend on whether it is able to build on its successes, and abandon its failures.

*Lake 2008.*

We developed new assessments specifically testing for teachers' knowledge, and put in place an ongoing cycle of assessing student learning needs, teaching in response, and assessing again



# SCHOOL CHOICE IN EUROPE

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# School choice and financing in Holland and Denmark

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**D**ENMARK AND HOLLAND have long histories of school choice, and both see this as an inherent right. While both countries perform relatively well in international tests, Holland performs significantly better than Denmark, and has one of the best performing school systems in the world.

## Denmark

School choice has been a feature of the Danish system for almost 200 years. Today there is a mixture of public and private schools, including religious schools, folk schools, Montessori schools, and discipline-specific schools. Private schools have become increasingly popular in recent years.

The Ministry of Education publishes curriculum guidelines, but schools are free to set their own curricula within the identified aims and proficiency areas. Most follow the guidelines closely. Today, schooling is compulsory up to a ninth and tenth year. Completion rates are high at around 96 per cent. Students have to meet certain academic standards, which are tested at intervals. However, the results of these tests are not made public, and it is illegal to publish them.

The Danish Evaluation Unit has no authority over private schools, although its methods of evaluation are made available to all schools. School choice is therefore made mainly by word of mouth, although parents are beginning to lobby for the publication of results. Parents can choose to hire inspectors to check for quality.

The government provides the same funding to public and private schools which meet the regulatory requirements: they must be non-profit, governed by a board whose members are elected by parents, employ licensed teachers, and comply with labour laws. The funding mechanism is based largely on a voucher system. Schools therefore receive grants based on the number of pupils enrolled, and the value of the voucher is determined by the age of students, seniority of teachers, subjects taught, and so on. They also receive operational, building, and leisure grants.

Schooling and its funding is a municipal responsibility. Parents make a small contribution to school fees unless they are constrained by income. However, teachers' salaries are determined by the Ministry in collective bargaining with unions. The unions do not oppose school choice, as private and public schools offer the same standards and conditions of employment.

The advantage of the voucher system is that it is demand-driven. It is economically rational, as funding follows children, and the immediate budgetary impact on schools is meant to force them to improve. Demographic changes are automatically reflected in government budgets.

School choice has been a feature of the Danish system for almost 200 years

## Sweden's approach to school choice

Sweden introduced a choice-based schooling system in the early 1990s, partly to address declining school standards and partly because of its belief in the 'right to choose'. It was one of the first countries in the world to introduce a voucher system for funding pupils at both public and private schools. Today, about 17 per cent of high school pupils and nine per cent of elementary pupils attend private schools.

Education is free and compulsory, but not monopolised by state provision. Public funding, based on the average cost per student in state schools, follows children to the school of their choice (state or independent).

The consequent competition among public and private schools for pupils and their funding has led to improved standards in both types of schools, greater innovation, and more effective expenditure. It is a popular system, which is also supported by Swedish trade unions, as the following measures are in place to ensure equal access and reduce inequality:

- schools cannot charge additional tuition fees, including application fees;
- schools cannot select students according to academic ability – they must be accepted on a first-come-first-served basis; and
- all schools are given resources relative to the needs of their pupils.

This prevents independent schools from taking resources and the 'best' students from public schools and depleting the quality of those schools. It also prevents segregation between socio-economic groups.

Independent schools are run by bodies other than municipalities (which run the public schools), and governed by different rules, giving them greater freedom to organise their operations, with no need to follow the national curricula, syllabi, or time tables. However, their operations must comply with the spirit and content of comparable education provided by the municipality, and in line with the values and general objectives in the Education Act. They have to participate in national tests, reviews, and evaluations required by their municipality and the National Agency for Education.

As long as basic requirements are met, anyone can own and run a school, including for-profit companies which have an incentive to expand and cut costs through scale (as opposed to non-profit schools, which tend to have waiting lists). The biggest school chain, Kunskapsskolan ('Knowledge Schools'), runs 30 schools, and teaches nearly 10 000 students. It also offers courses online.

### Important features of the reform programme

Parents are funded instead of schools. This increases choice and competition among schools, which is more effective at raising standards than bureaucratic control.

Giving public funding to independent schools has created new opportunities without creating an immediate threat to teachers or other interest groups.

Reforms leave space for local adaptation – change arises through empowerment of students and parents. The independent schools often have an alternate pedagogy, focused on a specific religion, sport, or special needs.

### Implementing the Swedish system in other countries

Implementing the system in Sweden was made easier by the fact that, before the introduction of vouchers, the private school sector was almost non-existent. Countries with a pre-existing private school sector would need to consider whether private schools would be willing to provide places at the same cost as state schools, and give up their right to select pupils.

Other challenges include:

- persuading government to fund parents rather than schools. In most systems, public funds are distributed directly to schools, which automatically undermines a parent's choice.
- limiting top-up fees: Chile, which has had a voucher system for more than 25 years, allows top-up fees, but they are capped and progressively taxed.

*Swedish National Agency for Education 2006; Barker 2005; Stanfield et al 2006.*

The system was introduced gradually at different levels from 1990. It has required the development of new management skills and capacity in the Ministry of Education, and the role of the ministry has changed from control and direct management to guidance, supervision, and monitoring quality.

## Holland

Holland has a strong history and tradition of school choice dating back to the 19th century. Today about 65 per cent of primary schools are private (34 per cent of these are Catholic, 27 per cent Protestant, and 5 per cent private other), as are close to 80 per cent of secondary schools. It is relatively easy to establish a private school based on demonstration of demand, although regulations have been introduced to make this more difficult. While schools can impose criteria for admission, most have no restrictions, and there is no significant elite school sector.

Public and private schools receive the same level of funding from government. Schools are financed by lump sum grants which go directly to the school boards, who submit annual audited budgets to government. Most school boards oversee four or five schools, which makes the system more efficient. Both private and municipal schools can charge fees and find sponsorships. Additional subsidies are provided for minority pupils and students who live in underprivileged areas.

Most school boards  
oversee four or  
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more efficient

The system is heavily regulated, and the Ministry and Education Inspectorate have a total of about 3 000 employees. All state-funded schools teach subjects designated by the Ministry. Attainment targets and the number of teaching hours are set. School inspectors make 10 000 visits each year, and assess teaching methods, observe lessons, and so on. Their reports can lead to warnings, and even to the closure of schools.

In 1997 a newspaper went to the courts to be allowed to publish a school's test scores, and won. School results have been published every year since then, and a strong tradition has developed of providing information about school performance. Choices about school attendance are based on this information.

Public and private schools abide by the union contract. Teachers can be paid for good performance, although this is not welcomed by the unions. The number of teachers and their working conditions are set by the state, but schools appoint their own teachers.

Although the Dutch system performs exceptionally well by international standards, it is complex, heavily regulated, and expensive. Moves are currently under way to try to make the system more efficient, partly by encouraging the growth of existing schools rather than the opening of new ones.

## LESSONS AND STRATEGIES

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# Why good ideas are often not implemented

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*Joe DeStefano is vice-president of the Center for Collaboration and the Future of Schooling, based in Ohio.*

**A**DDRESSING HOW TO get reform implemented is as important as identifying reforms to implement. The current system exists because someone, somewhere, is benefiting from the way in which it is organised. Changing the current system requires addressing the reasons why it operates as it does.

When implementing reform programmes, it is helpful to understand the divide between the rational and the feasible. The rational is objective – what research tells us is a good idea – but the reality of what is negotiated among competing interests becomes the feasible.

Strategies can be built around three reform dimensions: technical, institutional, and political.

- **The technical dimension** includes pedagogy, classroom management, good curricula, teacher training, and assessment systems. This is typically the most straightforward area, but it is still hugely complex.
- **The institutional dimension** is commonly referred to as the ‘rules of the game’ What are the incentive structures? Who gets what? What is the institutional capacity, and are there sufficient resources? What sorts of institutional dimensions does one need to invest in?
- **The political dimension** includes the will, leadership, and ideology needed to drive reforms, and provide a sound technical basis for supporting reforms.

Part of this reform dimension is civil society, and the extent to which actors outside the system or the public sector have roles to play, or are allowed to form coalitions in support of different reforms. It is vital to understand the driving forces behind the changes. Part of the reform process involves investing in changing the way in which people think about the role of different parts of the system, or the nature of the problem to be solved. Investing in understanding how problems are defined and talked about, by whom, and what coalition of interests can be brought together in support of a particular idea, are all very important.

We tend to over invest in the technical, invest to some degree in the institutional, and underinvest in the political. It is important to think about making investments in the political and institutional dimensions if the technical solutions are to have a chance of success.

## Three key concepts

Support for reform can be organised around three concepts:

- **Clearing space** – thinking about what needs to be cleared out in order for the new to be tried, rather than layering reforms on top of others. This includes clearing intellectual space, such as preconceived ideas and mental models, as well as political space – ‘buying’ space, cutting a deal to try something, and isolating narrow interests and traditional beliefs.
- **Filling the space** – experimenting and modelling technical and managerial changes that will get the system to operate differently. Build an understanding of factors that

Addressing how to get reform implemented is as important as identifying reforms to implement

help or hinder success, and allow the measurement of impact. Piloting on a small scale is useful but very different from changing an entire system in terms of degrees of complexity, resources, and the extent to which existing interests are threatened.

- **Reform support infrastructure** – this consists of actors and networks that will collaborate and help bring about successful reforms. This builds capacity, and increases the chances of success and sustainability. The network could generate demand for reforms, create opportunities for dialogue, mobilise constituencies, and present data and analysis in compelling formats.

Reform support relies on a set of tools for successful implementation, including:

- **Communication and dialogue** – public support and demand for change are vital for successful reform, building coalitions through communication and putting people together.
- **Data** – putting information together that will motivate and inspire.

We need to use on-the-ground experience to learn how to:

- create the conditions for success;
- invest in making the system work at its most basic level;
- create tangible, compelling images of successful change;
- focus on changes that will contribute to measurable improvements in learning; and
- communicate effectively.

The objective is not to try to ring-fence a piece of policy, but to put in place the means to know what is happening at an early stage, so that if the consequences are unintended, we can adjust and respond accordingly.

To increase the chances of success, reformers need to expect and plan for uneven implementation, build on early success, communicate and have strategies for overcoming institutional and political obstacles, build public support, and organise and channel demand for change.

We have a serious problem of performance and efficiency: South Africans are receiving a very poor return on a substantial investment

## Key insights from the workshop

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**T**HE SOUTH AFRICAN education system is largely failing the community it is meant to serve. Among numerous indicators, South African learners perform very badly in international tests of fundamental skills such as numeracy and literacy. This means that, among other things, the education system is not providing most learners with the skills they need to find jobs.

Major recent studies have shown that economic growth across countries is often closely linked to the cognitive skills of its citizens. Poor education in South Africa is a serious constraint on improved rates of inclusive economic growth, which is vital to combat poverty. Moreover, the gap between the few who receive a good education and the many who do not perpetuates social and economic inequality, and severely limits national development.

The problem is not one of a lack of funding. South Africa spends substantially more on education than most low- and middle-income countries whose school systems significantly outperform ours. Nor is the problem one of access, because school enrolment levels in South Africa are very high. What we have is a serious problem of performance and efficiency: South Africans are receiving a very poor return on a substantial investment.

South Africa is not unique in this respect. Many other countries, developed as well as underdeveloped, need to improve their educational systems. Many studies and experiments have been conducted in such countries throughout the world, revealing a great deal about the demands of successful reform. We can, and must, learn from their experiences, and apply our energies and resources more effectively. What are the key lessons from this workshop?

## A focus on learning outcomes

Many countries have tried, at great expense, to improve their schooling. Not all have succeeded. Those that have managed to improve their education systems adopted the improvement of learning outcomes as their central objective. This has guided their search for effective reform programmes, monitoring systems, and public—private partnerships. Given a large and complicated system, it is easy to find things to change, but worthwhile interventions must improve learning outcomes. This mostly means increasing the hours of effective time spent in the classroom. Therefore, steps should be taken to improve teaching methods, classroom management, assessment, teacher training, and curricula. Other interventions should support the goal of making learning more effective, and reform should focus on implementing and replicating measures that are known to work.

Given a large and complicated system, it is easy to find things to change, but worthwhile interventions must improve learning outcomes

## Four key lessons from international practice

An authoritative study of the determinants of success in education systems in a large number of countries, conducted by the global management consultancy McKinsey, has found that most attempted school reforms do not lead to consistently improved outcomes. The smaller number of successful reforms point to four general lessons:

- The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. This means that top performing systems need to attract and retain talented people, and remove ineffective ones.
- The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction. Reform has to make a positive difference in the classroom, among other things by improving the skills of teachers, and improving how teaching is conducted.
- High performance requires that every child succeeds. Top performing systems don't 'give up' on a small number of poorly performing learners - they expect all to meet definite and often demanding standards. (This is the principle behind the 'No Child Left Behind' policy in the United States.) This in turn requires efficient monitoring and interventions that support poorly performing schools.
- Every school needs a great leader. Top systems recruit and train excellent principals.

The study has also shown that popular interventions such as simply spending more money, reducing class sizes, and giving schools greater autonomy in designing the learning process have not been consistently successful. Countries that spend relatively less often perform well, because what they do spend is spent well.

## Education reform must be institutionally and politically aware

Successful reform efforts pay careful attention to institutional and political factors. They depend on appropriate reform networks, which can often include non-state actors such as private foundations and NGOs focusing on education.

School systems are generally large and have many stakeholders, including parents; teachers (often highly unionised); local, regional and national state bureaucracies; and private enterprise. Many potentially valuable reforms are thwarted or at least impeded by resistance from one or more stakeholders. Teachers' unions, for example, often oppose systematic assessments of teacher performance. As a result, a general prerequisite of successful reform is careful political and diplomatic work aimed at removing obstacles to positive change, and securing support for it. Successful reforms also generally involve building new institutions at which various stakeholders regularly – but not too frequently – meet to monitor the reform process and obstacles to it. If the institutional 'rules of the game' support the aims of reform, then reform is more likely to succeed.

Many reform strategies add to demands on schools without increasing capacity, thus complicating and slowing the processes they are intended to improve. Inefficient processes and poorly performing people need to be removed. Innovations are less likely to work if they are tacked on to failing systems, so planners need to pay close attention to the problems and dynamics of practical implementation. Again, this points to the need to find solutions that work, and scale up their implementation.

## Teacher training and recruitment is vital

Many contributors emphasised the importance of good teachers. A few years with a good teacher can transform the performance of learners, among other things eradicating socio-economic backlogs. This is one of the most direct ways in which excellent education can help reduce inequality. Teacher quality therefore imposes a ceiling on the quality of an educational system. While some improvements could be achieved in South Africa by making better use of existing teachers (among other things by having them spend more time actually teaching), any reform beyond the immediate has to focus on improving and renewing the teaching workforce. Several experts emphasised the value of apprenticeships, and other approaches to developing early career teachers. One of the most successful educational systems in a relatively poor country is that of Cuba, and it involves extensive monitoring and supervision of teaching staff. Less intensive but nonetheless successful monitoring programmes have been established in several Latin American countries, as well as parts of other countries (including Boston in the United States).

Many experts also noted that where reforms had been successful, teaching was a prestigious profession, and that teachers who performed well were rewarded for doing so. Another point that came up repeatedly in a number of case studies was the need for performance monitoring, and measures to support teachers who do not meet the required standards, as well as the need to encourage those who persistently fail to leave the system to make way for others. In China, under-qualified teachers are given a deadline for upgrading their skills, and if they fail to meet it they are dismissed. While there are various ways of addressing the problem, there is no escaping the fact that significant education reform in South Africa has to incorporate measures for attracting, training, and retaining good – and, if possible, excellent – teachers.

The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers

## Competition improves performance

Competition between public and private schools benefits both sectors, and lowers costs across the board. Schools need not be entirely public or private; there are privately operated but publicly owned schools in several countries. In many instances, new forms of private schooling have given poor people better access to quality education. Major benefits can be obtained from various forms of private education, including private education for the poor. This may include a greater role for religious and faith-based schooling. Payment systems that reward teachers who achieve better than required results can also improve performance. It was noted, though, that while private provision can be helpful, public subsidisation, particularly for the poor, is often a better option than relying on purely private funding.

Besides the above, reforming school funding so that at least some funding goes to parents (in the form of vouchers) rather than schools (or to schools, but on a capitation basis, so that underperforming schools lose income and staff) empowers parents, and gives schools a competitive reason to improve performance. The gains from such competition, though, depend partly on the availability of information about how well schools are performing. This point is reinforced below.

Reform has to make a positive difference in the classroom, among other things by improving the skills of teachers, and improving how teaching is conducted

Related to the value of competition and markets is the fact that private companies and foundations can sometimes provide valuable technical and other support. They typically have current expertise in gathering and evaluating data, including monitoring systems, and are administratively more efficient. They can therefore be a valuable ally in the process of helping to make school administration run in a more goal-oriented and efficient way. The promising reform process under way in Chile makes extensive use of partnerships – requested and initiated by the state – with local businesses, which have a genuine interest in having a school system that successfully produces employable young people.

## Research, testing and accountability

Every successful schooling system assesses the performance of teachers, learners, and schools. This information is essential for monitoring the system, and achieving greater accountability. Standardised tests can help determine whether quality learning outcomes are being achieved and more and more countries have one or more national achievement tests in their schooling system. Having a credible bar to aim for would enable South Africa to measure its progress towards meeting international standards. Monitoring teachers can show how many are within reach of the international benchmark of one thousand hours of effective teaching a year. Excellent teachers can only be rewarded if administrators have some way of establishing who they are. Therefore, gathering the right data efficiently and accurately, analysing it well, and making it available rapidly, can help officials to identify many forms of inefficiencies as well as successes, and intervene where this is needed. Such data needs to be available to provide tools for managing the schooling system, as well as helping parents choose the best school for their children. Without high-quality data of the right kind, reformers will be shooting in the dark.

Sound data about outcomes requires a curriculum or a curricular framework that effectively specifies learning goals, so that assessments can be based on clear criteria, and teachers who meet those goals see their learners performing well. Therefore, a framework of clear learning standards, based on curricula, and serving in turn as a basis for an effective assessment system, is vital.

## Ensure that every school gets what it is entitled to

Sometimes basic inputs do not reach all schools. Ensuring that they do can be a powerful change mechanism. This usually doesn't mean increasing the total amount spent on schooling, just improving efficiency and equity in allocation. Schools, parents, and communities should know exactly what resources their schools are supposed to receive, and be able to act when these resources are not delivered or spent inefficiently.

## Lessons for reformers

A number of important ideas about successful schooling reform emerged from the workshop.

The promising radical reforms of schooling in Washington, DC, led by Michelle Rhee, involve a large number of technical and political measures. Much can be learnt from them, even though it is still too early to say how successful they are. Although the role of parents in reform is complicated, the Rhee administration has found it useful to try to ensure that every parent 'knows what a good school looks like'. These reforms illustrate the importance, and sometimes the difficulty, of building constructive relationships with teachers' unions, and of having an internal leadership team that meets regularly to monitor the reform process and obstacles to it. A major component of the plan has been a publicity campaign emphasising the goal of improving learning for students, making clear that this primary goal would trump other considerations. This has helped to create the political space for difficult or possibly unpopular measures, such as removing poor teachers and principals.

There will always be competing interests involved in education reform, and those in leadership positions need allies, and good teams to support them. Trust is a vital aspect of the difficult business of managing change. Fortunately, a bold strategy and inspirational leadership can attract new energy to the public service, or to a wider public private coalition. A committed leader or leadership team is essential but not necessarily sufficient for successful reform. A sound reform strategy, outlining different phases and requirements for implementation, is vital. Different interventions and people will be appropriate for different stages of the strategy. Gathering sound data on the impact of reform measures is essential for making decisions, learning from mistakes, moving forward, enabling accountability, and dealing with unintended consequences.

## Concluding remarks

The lessons learnt from our Washington workshop on international experiences of education reform can be grouped into three categories.

First, some experts suggested that efficiency could be significantly improved while working largely with the present workforce. Interventions to improve teacher punctuality, to simplify and improve school administration and increase actual teaching time would help significantly. Appropriate supporting materials would help weaker teachers, and appropriate testing would help to establish where teaching is poor. Some administrative and institutional inefficiencies could certainly be removed and better relations with parents and other stakeholders could help to improve demands for better teaching performance.

That said, the experts repeatedly emphasised the importance of improving the teaching corps, and securing better school principals. While this can partly be achieved by training

Innovations are less likely to work if they are tacked on to failing systems, so planners need to pay close attention to the problems and dynamics of practical implementation

and retraining existing personnel, it requires bolder thinking beyond the very short term. Teaching has to be an attractive profession in which good teachers enjoy appropriate career advancement, where good leaders become principals, and where unsatisfactory performers are assisted for a limited time and, if they don't improve, are removed to make way for better ones. The ways in which teachers are selected, trained, and monitored need to change.

The third category involves more general lessons that apply to all those in the previous two: competition can help everyone, public-private partnerships can be useful engines of reform, education reform is politically tricky and depends on building alliances, and requires hard data that help ensure effective management of the system and appropriate accountability.

The workshop has produced a compelling set of good ideas about how to get South Africa's struggling education system moving in the right direction. There is a growing consensus in the country that the schooling system needs to be greatly improved. What is vital as we move forward is that decision-makers focus on the right priorities. Many countries have tried to reform their education systems, but focused on the wrong issues, which then resulted in failure.

The introductory remarks by Luis Crouch, international education expert and long-standing adviser to the South African education department, are worth repeating:

*'South African policy-makers need to focus on the real issues in education reform, and turn away from the non-issues. The real issues are the poor quality of education, and the unequal distribution of quality. The non-issues are access to schooling, and completion rates.'*

Addressing issues of quality will require debates about how to teach, who should teach, and how to run schools in a country such as ours. The international evidence shows that determined interventions which are properly focused and managed can lead to real improvements within a few years.

A significantly improved schooling system would be a national asset, producing people better suited to the world of work, thus reducing unemployment, poverty and inequality, and creating a more prosperous society.

Above all, reforming the South African public schooling system is not a secondary or peripheral issue. Successful reform will be difficult, and will require vision, staying power, managerial competence, and political courage. South Africa's future success requires a greatly improved schooling system.

Successful reform will be difficult, and will require vision, staying power, managerial competence, and political courage

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