

Preface

The goal of this book is to show how schools and districts can produce large improvements in student academic achievement. By “large improvements” I mean in many cases a literal doubling of student performance as measured by state tests. Generically, the book uses “doubling” performance to connote large, quantum, absolute gains in student achievement. For example, doubling performance could mean increasing the percentage of students who score at or above the proficiency level from below average levels to much higher levels, such as from 30 to 60% or 35 to 70%. Though increasing such a percentage from 5 to 10%, or from 10 to 20%, represents a doubling of performance, all of the cases and studies in the book reference sites that started at a much higher level and then doubled performance. The phrase “doubling performance” also would include strategies for doubling the percentage achieving at or above the advanced levels, which should be the goal in many states where the state proficiency level is closer in rigor to the basic level of performance of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). For districts starting at higher levels of student performance, the definition of doubling would include a district or school increasing the percentage scoring at or above proficiency from 65 to 95%; even though not literally a doubling, such an increase represents large, absolute gains. Though the phrase “doubling performance” seems like an overpromise to many academics and even some practitioners, in the lay and policy communities it clearly communicates a message of large, significant, and measurable improvement, which is what parents, policy-makers, and the public want.

Drawing from research I have conducted—research conducted by staff in the University of Wisconsin–Madison offices of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), research conducted by staff (including the author) involved with the consulting firm of Lawrence O. Picus and Associates as part of school finance adequacy studies, as well as research by others that has been published largely elsewhere (e.g., Blankstein, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2004; Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin,

2002; Odden & Archibald, 2009; Odden et al., 2007; Supovitz, 2006; Waters & Vargo, 2008; Wise, 2008)—this book identifies and discusses the details of 10 major strategies districts and schools use to make dramatic improvements in student academic achievement. Surprisingly, all of this research has found that, though the specifics differ, the general strategies schools and districts have used to produce large, measurable gains in student performance are quite similar, regardless of school size, metropolitan or geographic location or sociodemographic characteristics.

To implement any powerful education improvement strategy with the goal of doubling student performance, a system needs not only the ten strategies discussed in this book but also both a budget plan and a human capital plan as part of its overall implementation plan. A previous book I recently coauthored with Sarah Archibald reviews the key elements of the budget plan that are needed (Odden & Archibald, 2009).

This book ends with a discussion of the human capital plan that is a foundation for any school and district implementing new educational improvement programs designed to double performance. It argues that the powerful strategies described in the book require talent to implement them and discusses how that talent can be found, particularly by urban schools and districts with large numbers of low-income and minority students, many of which have been lacking in teacher and principal talent.

AUDIENCE

The audience for this book is teachers, teacher leaders, principals, central office curriculum and professional development staff, and superintendents, as well as college and university classes that address school improvement issues, professional development, and the principalship. The book also would be useful for professional learning communities in districts and schools working to determine how to improve student performance; professional learning communities would be the engines that drive the 10-coach passenger train described in this book. School board members, legislators, and legislative staff, as well as education policy analysts also should be interested in this book, as it has many local and state policy implications and, when combined with the budget elements of the Odden and Archibald (2009) book, can be used to decide how to use scarce resources, particularly at the school level.

THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION REFORM TODAY

For the past two decades, the United States has been engaged in ambitious and far-reaching education reforms. The rationales cited for reform

include reasons of international economic competitiveness and enhanced economic and family opportunities for individuals, as well as the moral imperative of an equal and adequate public education as a stepping-stone to postsecondary educational opportunities, high-wage jobs, and civic progress and comity. The prime education goal in the twenty-first century is to educate the vast majority of all children to rigorous student performance levels. This goal includes high levels of attainment for low-income and minority children, as well as for all girls and boys. The aspiration is to have children learn to “world class” performance standards—to be able to know, think, problem solve, and communicate at high proficiency levels in all major subjects, including mathematics, science, reading/English/language arts/writing, history, and geography.

The education system will need to implement multiple and complex changes in order for the country to attain these lofty goals. Change will be required in school and classroom organization, curriculum programs, instructional practices, professional development, use of computer and information technologies, the allocation of fiscal resources, and the way education systems recruit, develop, and manage their most important talent—teachers and principals.

Though there is growing knowledge about what can be done by schools and districts to dramatically improve student performance, many are not aware of such strategies. By drawing on research that I and others around the country have conducted on places that have produced large and measurable gains in student academic learning, generally as measured by scores on state tests, this book outlines the key strategies that all schools and districts can deploy to attain those same goals.

This book complements the Corwin book published in 2009 by Odden and Archibald entitled *Doubling Student Performance . . . and Finding the Resources to Do It*, by going into more depth on the processes and strategies that have been used. This book does not address the resource issues but refers to the Odden and Archibald (2009) book for those interested in the resource dimensions of the strategies. How to turn those resource needs into an adequately funded state school finance system is described in the textbook I coauthor with Lawrence O. Picus (Odden & Picus, 2008).

The arguments and processes discussed in this book reinforce those who argue that schools and districts have significant control over issues that can lead to dramatic improvements in student learning. As such, it is a counterpoint to a movement for “bigger and bolder” education reforms that focus on issues outside of education such as reducing poverty, improving health care, making neighborhoods safer, and starting young children in preschool. The book shows that even when these other issues remain problems in the local school community, schools can still execute multiple aligned strategies that have been shown to have large positive

impacts on student learning. This book certainly does not oppose those other, complementary, initiatives to improve conditions of children and families now in poverty, but it stresses the many, many actions schools and districts can implement *now* to improve student learning. I would argue that the steps outlined in this book compose the big and bold education reforms that parents and the public should insist be put into place in all schools *now* and that over time can be complemented by other programs that enhance family income, children's health, and community living conditions so they reinforce what occurs in schools.

Of course, the above line of argument assumes that there is knowledge about what works in education and that district and school leaders want to know what those strategies and programs are. Does such knowledge exist? As suggested in the previous paragraph, there is a strident debate occurring within the ranks of those who study and work in schools. One group argues that schools cannot do it all, and poverty, health care, and other issues need to be addressed before schools can make a big difference. Another group argues that schools need more money, smaller classes, and more involved parents.

Though I support the noneducation initiatives proposed by the first group and know that in some instances more money is needed, I side with those who have concluded that many of the challenges that schools face in improving student performance are created by the systems themselves:

- Our system often gives the districts and schools with the most difficult educational challenges inadequate funding.
- The education system too often does not recruit top teacher and leadership talent and simply takes what is left in August after most individuals with talent have accepted jobs in other districts.
- The education system too often puts too many inexperienced and undertrained teachers into the most challenging classrooms in high-poverty schools and communities.
- Too many teachers do not teach all elements of a rigorous curriculum and reduce expectations for student performance.
- Too many districts waste teacher and student time “prepping” students to take state tests rather than simply teaching them what they need to learn in authentic ways.
- Professional development is too often a mile wide and an inch deep with little or no impact on instructional practice and student learning.
- Most problematic, too often schools shortchange students from poverty backgrounds by not setting high goals and thereby not even trying to double their performance.

In short, there are many education system actions that could be changed and if changed in the directions outlined in this book would alter student performance and produce significant gains for the education system.

As this book shows, and for those who have read my writings over the years, it is clear that I have concluded that we know a substantial amount about what works in education, from how kids learn complex material to strategies districts and schools can implement to boost—literally double in some case—performance. I take this perspective, believing that there is considerable research on how all children can learn complex materials, with this knowledge being nicely summarized in a series of books from the National Research Council (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Donovan & Bransford, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Further, there is extensive research on individual programs that work such as, for example, comprehensive preschool for children aged three and four, small classes in the early elementary grades, individual and small-group tutoring, curriculum-based professional development, and academic-focused summer school (for a review, see Odden & Picus, 2008, chap. 4).

Moreover, there is increasing research, from multiple sources, on schools and districts that have “put it all together” and dramatically improved student performance, with many districts and schools actually doubling student achievement over a four- to six-year time period (e.g., Blankstein, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007; Fielding et al., 2004; Fullan et al., 2006; Herman et al., 2008; Hightower et al., 2002; Odden & Archibald, 2009; Odden et al., 2007; Supovitz, 2006; Wise, 2008). The winners of the Broad Prize in urban education show that large urban districts can boost student performance by large amounts; the winners, including Boston; Brownsville, Texas; Garden Grove and Long Beach, California; and New York City, are testimony to what can actually happen on the upside in urban education. These are not a few isolated instances of high performance; they represent scores and scores of schools and districts all over the country producing large gains in student achievement. As a result, they represent dozens of “existence proofs” that schools can make a large difference *now*, even though more funding is probably needed in many cases and other social, economic, and health policies could augment these education system advances.

To be sure, the education system probably does not have sufficient knowledge to educate *all* students to proficiency at world-class standards. But I argue and show in this book that there is sufficient knowledge to start now and make giant strides toward that goal. The primary evidence derives from districts and schools that have restructured their school program and in many cases literally doubled student performance in the process, paying for many of the changes through resource reallocation

and deploying any new resources to their powerful new education improvement strategies. The book draws from the cases discussed in the Odden and Archibald (2009) book and enhanced with other case material from more recent studies, conducted mainly by the UW–Madison CPRE group, of Boston, Long Beach, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Aldine school system outside of Houston—all urban districts with large numbers of students from poverty and minority backgrounds.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into 11 chapters. The first nine chapters discuss the details of each of the 10 elements used to double student performance. Chapter 10 discusses the talent and human capital management issues that compose the “people” side of implementing the 10 steps.¹ And Chapter 11 puts it all together and describes in summary what the dramatically improving school does.

Chapter 1 identifies the first strategy as understanding the performance problem and the challenges to improve performance that face most schools in America, particularly schools with large numbers of low-income and minority children. It documents this first step as critical and as the key first step of any large-scale, organizational change process, which certainly is the case for a system seeking to double student performance. The chapter not only argues that this step is key but also identifies how various schools and districts engaged in this step by implementing multiple initiatives aimed at helping all key staff understand the performance status/problems of the school or district and fully understand the distance between current and desired performance. This chapter also discusses the multiple factors that stimulated several schools and districts to engage in the process of doubling student performance and reallocating resources, as many people often ask what it takes to get more schools and districts to adopt the agenda of making dramatic improvements in student performance. Finally, the chapter notes that in most cases, the emphasis in this strategy is on analyzing student performance data and not student demographics, because schools can impact student performance but cannot change demographics.

Chapter 2 discusses the second strategy, which is setting very high and ambitious goals regardless of the current performance level or student demographics. One key aspect of schools and districts that make a big difference in student performance is that they set goals to make large

differences. This chapter makes this point and identifies the various ways schools and districts have expressed these goals. It notes that although many of the schools and districts enroll large concentrations of low-income and minority students, these schools clearly have not been influenced negatively by those demographics. They believe all kids—including the kids in their classrooms—can learn to high standards; they set very ambitious goals for the future performance of their children, goals that are even more ambitious than “stretch goals”; and they attain those lofty goals in most instances.

Chapter 3 addresses the core educational issues that are the prime issues educators in schools can change: the curriculum and instructional program. Schools that produce high levels of student performance focus on what they can impact—everything that happens in schools: recruitment and selection of teachers; the assignment of teachers; the organization of curriculum and instruction; academic expectations; the specific curriculum, textbook, and instructional materials used; and instructional practice. They do not focus on poverty, the lack of health care for many urban children, problems with parent involvement, full funding of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the problems with the state testing system or the accountability glitches of NCLB, and others. They address the pieces of the education system over which they have control. And that allows them to act. This chapter identifies multiple curriculum programs that have been adopted, some new Web-based curriculum and instructional tools that have been used, as well as the visions of effective instructional practice these districts create.²

Chapters 4 discusses the fact that all schools and districts making large improvements in student performance go beyond analyzing just state tests and administer and use a variety of additional measures of student performance—benchmark and formative assessments. This chapter describes several of these instruments, including those such as the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) from the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) and the Wireless Generation that have made their formative assessment systems available on hand-held computer devices with the results linked to Web-based professional development systems. The chapter makes the point that while no set of state tests are perfect, the places producing gains in student learning go far beyond state tests, incorporate more data on student performance, and use it in implementing a cycle of continuous instructional improvement that continuously toggles between data on student performance—formative, benchmark, or summative—and curriculum and instructional strategies, and their impacts on student achievement.

Chapter 5 identifies the intensive and ongoing professional development programs and strategies implemented by these schools and districts. This was a uniform finding from all schools and districts that we and others have studied, and it makes good sense. Often, the initial analysis of state testing data requires some professional development, as not all teachers and principals are skilled in analyzing the meaning of state test data. Further, the adoption of new curriculum programs requires additional professional development to help all teachers acquire the expertise to teach the new curricular materials well; moreover, most of the professional development linked to the new textbooks and other curriculum materials was provided by district staff or other consultants, not by the textbook companies. In addition, extensive and ongoing professional development is needed as the schools and districts work to develop the system's new approach to good instruction; such professional development around new instructional practices continues for several years and has not stopped in any of the places we studied that doubled performance. Finally, considerable professional development is needed on how to take the information from the formative assessments and design instructional programs that meet the needs of the students in each classroom.

Chapter 6 describes how the schools and districts used time more effectively and efficiently. Since time is virtually a “fixed” school resource, the chapter discusses the multiple ways that schools and districts took this fixed resource—about six hours of daily instruction over about 180 days of the school year—and used it to help them attain the goal of having all kids, but particularly the children in the middle and bottom, achieve at much higher levels. This chapter also describes the time and staffing needs of good professional development programs and identifies several ways schools and districts found and used time during the day for “job-embedded, ongoing” professional development.

Chapter 7 illustrates how all the districts and schools provided multiple extra help strategies for students struggling to achieve to proficiency or even higher performance standards. Some of these strategies are also ways of using time more effectively, and thus some of these strategies are discussed in Chapter 6 as well. The extra supports reflect a strong American value of giving multiple opportunities for its citizens to accomplish certain goals, in this case learning to a rigorous performance standard. But these extra help strategies also reflect a long-held theory of learning—namely, that given sufficient time, most students can learn to high standards. The combined strategies represent the concrete ways these places provided extended-learning time but held

performance standards constant. Extra help and time were provided during the regular school day and year, outside the regular school day, and outside the regular school year, and the chapter describes these multiple, extra-help strategies.

Chapter 8 describes how these schools and districts created professional and collaborative school cultures inside the school—what some refer to as “professional learning communities” (PLCs)—as they implemented all their strategies. The chapter argues that these school/district cultures were largely a product of the activities discussed in the previous chapters, not something created by the schools and districts before engaging in the processes to double student performance. However, because the schools and districts engaged in the doubling performance processes in collaborative approaches from Step 1 onward, the leaders understood that the way to attain their ambitious goals was to proceed in a professional and not bureaucratic manner, with the goal over time of developing a collaborative and professional school culture—that is, a PLC. The chapter also identifies what education system leaders can do to create the conditions that support the effective operation of professional cultures and PLCs. This chapter also describes how the schools and districts created and used widespread instructional leadership by teachers, principals, and central office staff, a strategy often called “distributed leadership” in the educational research literature. This chapter identifies the various types of leadership roles played by different actors and spends some time arguing that since principals often cannot engage in all the instructional leadership roles that are needed many successful principals move teachers into such instructional positions, such as instructional facilitators or professional development coaches.

Chapter 9 describes why I call the schools and districts that doubled student performance “professional organizations.” The organizations that doubled performance were professional organizations because they actively sought, from sources outside of the school, research evidence about how to improve schools, best practices from other schools and districts, and the top experts on how to provide the best reading, mathematics, science, and professional development programs. No school or district studied by others or us produced such large improvements in student performance relying on just their own knowledge. This chapter describes various ways schools and districts reached out to the professional education community to get the best and most current knowledge and practice and brought that into their schools to strengthen their overall improvement strategies.

Chapter 10 discusses the talent and human capital management issues underneath these school and district strategies to improve performance, focusing mainly on the talent challenges for large, urban districts. To improve student performance, schools and districts need a powerful education improvement strategy, the main features of which are discussed in the first nine chapters, but they also need the talent to execute the strategy. Sufficient teacher and principal talent often is not present; so this chapter discusses, mainly for urban schools and districts with talent shortages, what strategies can be launched to get the needed talent. It notes that this human capital side of improving student learning is very important but often not discussed; it also shows how schools and districts in the most impoverished communities can acquire talented teachers and principals.³

Chapter 11 functions as a short summary of all preceding chapters and describes in brief all the moving parts of a school that are continuously improving and that can, over the medium term, double student performance.

Finally, the table on the following pages functions as a quick reference guide to all the school and district examples throughout the text. This at-a-glance table lists all the schools and districts, identifies the size of each district, and then categorizes each as rural, urban, suburban, and secondary or elementary (or both).

NOTES

1. Chapter 10 discusses the issue of talent acquisition primarily for urban districts, as that is what my colleagues and I researched over the past two years. Hopefully, in the future, we or others will research this issue for rural districts as well, as they also have talent shortages.

2. The text identifies several specific curriculum programs and textbooks that have been adopted; this should not be necessarily taken as an endorsement of these programs by the author, who is simply reporting what the districts and schools did. Further, many times the schools and districts stated that they adopted “research-based” programs, and the text simply reports these statements without analyzing the pluses and minuses of any research that might have been referenced.

3. Again, this chapter focuses exclusively on urban districts because those were the districts studied on this issue.

School/District Profiles

School/District	Total Students	Setting			Grade Level(s)			Pages
		Rural	Urban	Suburban	Elementary	Secondary	Both	
Abbotsford School District (WI)	625	✓			✓			xix, 5, 21, 108, 116
Aldine School District (TX)	60,000		✓	✓			✓	xix, 2, 7, 10, 16, 37-39, 102
Boston City School District (MA)	56,000		✓				✓	xix, 5-6, 17, 19-20, 121, 122, 126, 128-129, 132
Capitol View Elementary School (GA)	252		✓		✓			xix, 20, 25
Chicago Public Schools (IL)	410,000		✓				✓	xix, 5-6, 19, 45, 121, 122-123, 124-126, 132
Columbus Elementary School (Appleton, WI)	174		✓		✓			xix, 2, 41, 92
Dayton's Bluff School (St. Paul, MN)	312		✓		✓			xix, 6
Elmont Junior-Senior High School (NY)	2,000			✓		✓		xix, 13, 22, 34, 102
Franklin Elementary (LaCrosse, WI)	235	✓			✓			xix, 33-34, 103
Hamilton County (Chattanooga, TN)	3,320 in 8 K-5 schools		✓		✓			xix, 6, 75-76, 130-131, 132
Kennewick School District (WA)	15,000	✓					✓	xix, 4-5, 18-19, 28-29, 35-37, 51, 74-75, 77, 78, 88, 103, 107, 143-146
Long Beach School District (CA)	88,000		✓				✓	xix, 16-17, 25, 40-41, 57, 121, 128

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School/District	Total Students	Setting				Grade Level(s)			Pages
		Rural	Urban	Suburban	Elementary	Secondary	Both		
Madison (WI)	25,000		✓		✓			xx, 8, 18-19, 29-30, 44, 51, 57, 80, 88, 101-102, 103	
Monroe School District (WI)	2,500	✓			✓			xx, 5, 21, 31-33, 79, 88	
Montgomery County School District (MD)	139,000		✓	✓			✓	xx, 3, 8-9, 17, 39-40, 51-55, 57, 63, 68-69, 101-102, 104, 105, 107	
New York City Department of Education	1,040,000		✓				✓	xx, 5-6, 19, 25, 57, 121, 123, 125, 126, 130, 132	
Oakland Heights Elementary School (AR)	370	✓			✓			xx, 21-22, 25	
Richmond School District (VA)	21,500		✓		✓			xx, 30-31	
Rosalia District (WA)	240	✓					✓	xx, 10, 21, 22, 88	
Spokane School District (WA)	28,700		✓				✓	xx, 7-8, 20	
Stanton Elementary School (Philadelphia, PA)	485		✓		✓			xx, 21	
Victory K-8 School (Milwaukee, WI)	590 (90,000)		✓		✓	✓		xx, 21	
Viers Mill Elementary School (Montgomery County, MD)	500		✓		✓			xx	