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ABSTRACT

The experiences of the first middle school to pilot the ideas and concepts of the Accelerated Schools Project are described. The school is an inner-city public school with a population of at-risk students presently scoring below district and state achievement averages. The 689 students are 53 percent Hispanic, 23 percent Portuguese, 17 percent White, 3 percent Asian, 2 percent Filipino, and 2 percent African American. The Accelerated Schools Project is working to develop schools in which all children will succeed by closing the achievement gap early in schooling and accelerating learning by making it occur more efficiently. The middle school level adds some dimensions to the elementary school applications of the accelerated schools philosophy, in terms of student involvement and curricular, instructional, and organizational changes. The principles of the Accelerated Schools movement are articulated, and how they are applied in the school setting is reviewed. The experiences of the pilot middle school in the San Francisco Bay Area (California) are detailed as they begin to set priorities and create governance structures. The ongoing documentation processes of the pilot school are described. (SLD)

THE ACCELERATED MIDDLE SCHOOL: MOVING FROM CONCEPT TOWARD REALITY

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THE ACCELERATED MIDDLE SCHOOL: MOVING FROM CONCEPT TOWARD REALITY

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Our Middle School is a cooperative partnership of students, parents, staff, and community working together to create an environment in which:

- *All students have the freedom, right, and responsibility to learn.*
- *All students can succeed and celebrate their own and others' successes.*
- *All students develop a love of learning, inquisitiveness about the world around them, and resourcefulness in meeting life's challenges; they are problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and communicators.*
- *All students are prepared, both academically and emotionally, for high school, college, and beyond; they know their choices and can achieve their dreams.*
- *All students connect the past, the present and the future by applying their academic knowledge to the world around them and learning through experience.*
- *All students have the freedom to take risks in a safe and nurturing environment.*
- *All students appreciate and build on the strengths of many cultures.*
- *All students exhibit democratic values, ethics, and principles in their daily activities and interactions.*
- *All students find opportunities to express their individual needs and talents through a variety of artistic, musical, technological, athletic, social, and intellectual outlets.*
- *All students experience happiness, friendship, fun, self-confidence, and well-being during their years at our school.*

This middle school vision statement embodies goals and dreams that most educators reserve for gifted and talented students; it certainly does not represent the goals most educators expect for "at-risk" students. Yet, this is the vision statement of an inner city public school with a population of primarily "at-risk" students who are presently scoring far below district and state averages on achievement measures. The 689 students, who are 53 percent Hispanic, 23 percent Portuguese, 17 percent White, 3 percent Asian, 2 percent Filipino and 2 percent African American, along with their parents and the 70 certified and classified staff members expressed their hopes and dreams for their middle school experience in this vision statement. The school, which is embarking in a totally new direction, is the first to pilot the ideas and concepts of the Accelerated Schools Project at the middle school level.

The Stanford Accelerated Schools Project and the pilot middle school are partners in learning how to transform conventional middle schools into accelerated middle schools. Based on Oakes, Hare's, and Sirotnik's (1986) definition of collaborative inquiry, one could say that the Accelerated Schools Project and the pilot middle school are collaboratively inquiring into creating accelerated middle schools. We are working together toward the same end, building on our different strengths, valuing our unique perspectives, and treating each other as equals in the process.

The Stanford team, made up of a Project Director and two part-time doctoral students, works to galvanize the immense talent at the school site so that all students can enter the competitive educational mainstream as soon as possible. Specifically, we view our role as capacity-builders, doing what a good central office could do in a more optimal world. Rather than facilitating change ourselves, we work with the school community on a weekly basis to help them learn how to work together to make decisions that will transform the school into one that stimulates all children to succeed. One of the first steps the school took in the long and deliberative Accelerated Schools change process was developing its schoolwide vision for the future.

Before going on to describe our efforts toward accelerating the education of early adolescents, I will give some background on the Accelerated Schools Project's efforts at the elementary level. I will then set out the Accelerated Middle School concepts, how they are similar to and different from those at the elementary school level, and what the perceived challenges of translating the model to the middle school level might be. I will then move to describing our efforts to bring the accelerated middle school concept to life, with an emphasis on our work thus far in the pilot school. Finally, I will describe other directions for the Accelerated Middle Schools Project and draw some conclusions about our initial efforts in transforming middle schools.

BACKGROUND – ACCELERATED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Despite the large number of reform efforts over the last decade (and century), schools seem to look and operate just like they always have. In order for school reform to make a real difference in the everyday practices of the school, educators must make deeper changes in their attitudes, meanings, and beliefs of schooling (Cuban 1988). Because schools have not stopped to re-assess the underlying values and attitudes about the entirety of what they do, they continue to rely on the "parts"

philosophy adopting add-on changes in curriculum, instruction, or organization. Schools are not solely at fault for this; central offices and state boards send down mandates, regulations, and required changes for schools to implement, leaving schools without the time or resources to make decisions in any type of deep, lasting or unified way. This top-down bias, along with a related lack of trust, leaves schools frustrated and unable to provide the best education they are capable of.

Making matters worse, education is already organizationally disjointed by many specialized and even categorized programs, each with a different set of goals. Disjointed goals lead the categorical programs to make add-on changes within their schools without communicating with each other, let alone the "regular" education programs. In terms of these specialized programs, there are programs for gifted students, remedial students, special education students, Chapter 1 students, bilingual students – all accompanied by public labels. Everyone knows who the "gifted" students are, and these students tend to receive top-notch instruction designed to build on their strengths. Likewise, everyone knows who the "at-risk" students are, and these students tend to receive the least stimulating instruction, designed to build on their weaknesses. Assuming at-riskness or "Chapter 1-ness" is internal to the student, schools slow down the pace of instruction for these youngsters – pulling them out of regular classes and relegating them to a lower, more mechanical track of classes. Schools serving high populations of "at-risk" students are more likely to provide <u>schoolwide</u> remedial instruction characterized by a focus on mechanics and repetition (Levin 1988). This strategy seems to track students who are labeled "at-risk" to long-term failure.

<u>A different view of at-riskness</u>

Instead of viewing at-riskness as an internal trait, Henry Levin of Stanford University and his colleagues suggest another definition. They believe that a big factor that makes some students "at-risk" of being unsuccessful in school is that there is a mismatch between the resources and experiences that get at home and the expectations they find at school. For most middle class children, this match is reasonably close, but so called "at-risk" students enter school without many of the prior skills and experiences on which the standard school curriculum is constructed. Students at-risk are especially concentrated among minority, immigrant, single parent, and non-English speaking families, as well as those in poverty with parents with limited education themselves. These students face cultural and economic gaps

between their own values and experiences and those of mainstream education. The consequences of this "mismatched" situation makes it unlikely that these students will acquire mainstream skills and opportunities for success. Thus, those caught in at-risk situations as children are seriously at-risk of becoming underprepared and unskilled adults.

The bright side of viewing "at-riskness" as a situation is that we can change situations. Changing or remediating the child is not the answer, nor is making unrelated changes in the "parts." As educators we must change the mismatched situation so that schools meet and address the needs of all children and bring them into the educational mainstream.

Comprehensive change through Accelerated Schools

In order to bring all children into the mainstream at an early date, Levin and his colleagues initiated the Accelerated Schools Project – a comprehensive approach to school change begun at Stanford in 1986 designed to enable all students to take advantage of mainstream secondary education by effectively closing the achievement gap early on in their school careers – in *elementary* school (Levin 1986; Levin 1987; Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister, and Rogers 1990; Levin and Hopfenberg 1991). Instead of intervening with the secondary school dropout, Accelerated Schools aim to "accelerate" children's education early on – which means making learning occur more efficiently. Attempting to do for all children what we presently do for gifted and talented children, the Project aims to bring all students into the competitive educational mainstream as early as possible so that they can compete on an equal footing in secondary school. The common and unified focus is crucial and must supercede categorical programs and piecemeal changes in importance.

The Accelerated Schools Project is both a *way of thinking* about academic acceleration for all students and a *concrete process* for achieving it. Since the mid-1980s, over 50 elementary schools across the country have initiated the Accelerated School model. Each of these schools adheres to three central principles: creating a unity of purpose around the needs of the students; empowering teachers and other staff, parents, and students to make decisions and take responsibility for addressing these needs; and building on the strengths of these students (rather than decrying their weaknesses). Creating schools that embody these principles will clearly require

the involvement of parents, the use of community resources, and the extensive participation of teachers in designing the innovations that they will implement.

Although ambitious, only a totally comprehensive approach toward reforming a school's culture as well as its curriculum, instruction, and organization will foster and enable valuable and long-lasting school change. Accelerated School staff seek to make school more relevant and challenging to students. Briefly, the entire *curriculum* of an Accelerated School is enriched and emphasizes language development in all subject areas—math and science included. *Instructional practices* within the Accelerated School promote active and discovery learning experiences. Teachers serve as facilitators of student activities rather than as the sole givers of knowledge. The *organization* of the Accelerated School is characterized by shifting human and other resources in the school. For example, administrators, teachers, and parents participate together in making decisions. Organization can also include articulation with other school levels, and creating a flexible schedule to support innovative curriculum and instruction.

Finally, all accelerated schools use a systematic, all inclusive process for "getting from here to there." The curricular, instructional, and organizational features above are not a checklist of accelerated school ingredients; rather, they are simply practices which are known to accelerate the education of all children. Which of these practices an accelerated school decides to implement will depend on the school's unique challenges and corresponding priorities. Schools determine their priorities by comparing baseline information they gather together during a phase called "taking stock," to goals they set forth in their vision, with input from all staff, students, and parents. Accelerated schools organize governance structures around their priority areas where task forces inquire into the nature of their priority challenge areas – attempting to fully understand their problems before solving them. While the process is a straightforward one on paper, in practice, it challenges the standard operating procedures of schools and school districts. By working through the process over time, participants will discover its power and become more comfortable using it.

While the process itself does not lead to any predetermined outcomes, it is undergirded by a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes which help create the culture for accelerated school change. The following values, attitudes, and beliefs are clearly interrelated: equity, participation, communication, community, reflection, experimentation, trust, and risk-taking. Most of these values stem from the work of John Dewey, who believed that a democratic education implies faith in the potential of both children and adults to understand, and to some extent, shape the world around them (Dewey 1988). Individuals begin to realize this potential, Dewey argues, when, as members of groups, they take active roles in inquiring into shared problems (Dewey 1984). The values support every step of the process and the daily practices of an Accelerated School – from taking stock to the Inquiry Process to curricular and instructional practices. Students engage in discovery learning; teachers become central to decision-making; the values shape the everyday lives of Accelerated Schools. One should be able to sense such a change in school culture by seeing the three principles and the values in everything the school community does.

The journey a school will take to transform itself into a place where all children succeed at high levels will take five to six years. Clearly, transforming schooling takes time. Moreover, determining whether a school has successfully *transformed* itself will demand more detailed and creative measures than the currently available standard measures of success. Until we can appropriately measure drastic changes in school climate, student, staff, and parent engagement in the educational process, and higher order academic outcomes, we are forced to rely on the standard measures. In the last two years of the project, we have observed many encouraging outcomes on these standard measures, even though we believe the change process will occur over a five to six year period for each school. Early indicators show increases in student achievement, and parent participation. For example, one pilot Accelerated Elementary School had the largest gains in language and the second largest in math on standardized achievement tests of all 72 elementary schools in its urban district. Another Accelerated Elementary School boasts that 98 percent of their students were represented at parent-teacher conferences this year. Student retentions and discipline problems have declined and attendance patterns have also improved (Hopfenberg and Gerstein 1991).

Why extend to the middle school?

If the original aim of the Accelerated Schools Project was to bring all children into the educational mainstream by the end of elementary school so that they could compete on equal footing in secondary schools, then why have we extended the model to the middle school level? There are four main reasons. First, Accelerated Elementary School teachers have expressed concern that the gains made in Accelerated Elementary Schools might evaporate in conventional middle schools. Second, many middle schools have asked whether the central features of Accelerated Schools will work at their level too. Third, while elementary schools provide an opportunity for early intervention, the middle school years are a pivotal time for intervention as well. Adolescents develop quickly on emotional, physical, and intellectual levels yielding intensely curious young adults. Educators must respond to this natural curiosity with positive and meaningful school experiences. Without support and guidance, adolescence is also a time when curiosity can lead to an array of negative behaviors, such as drug use, teenage pregnancy and and the all too familiar dropping out of school. Finally, our efforts to develop Accelerated Elementary Schools are going well. This early success at the elementary level, combined with the opportunity to influence adolescent development, and the expressed needs of middle schools, influenced our decision to link our efforts in accelerating elementary schools to the middle school. With support from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, we are working to create Accelerated Middle Schools.

THE ACCELERATED MIDDLE SCHOOL - IN CONCEPT

While the philosophy and process used with elementary schools are similar to those conceptualized for the middle school, the middle level level adds some interesting dimensions, especially in terms of student involvement and curricular, instructional and organizational changes. The fact that middle schools differ significantly in their size, departmentalization, age of students, and organization will certainly lead to modifications in many practices and projected outcomes as will be described at the end of this section. Before discussing the challenges of translating a similar philosophy and process to the middle grades, let's first take a conceptual look at how the three interdependent principles, the integrated curricular, instructional and organizational philosophy, and the process conceptually play out at the middle school level. Let's first take a look at the principles:

(1) Unity of Purpose involves the development and pursuit of a common vision that serves as a focal point for the efforts of teachers, other staff, students, parents and administrators. This contrasts with the often disjointed planning, implementation and evaluation that occurs when these groups act independently of each other, sometimes in conflict. Teachers, for example, tend to see their responsibilities extending no farther than good practices in their own subject area classroom, or grade level. Additionally, Chapter I, bilingual, physical education, vocational, and special education professionals traditionally work in isolation from the regular instructional program.

A school's unified purpose can take the shape of a vision statement. The vision of an Accelerated Middle School should focus on bringing all children into the educational mainstream – an accelerated middle school must prepare *all* students to take advantage of the full range of high school and postsecondary education and career options. We must not close any doors on these early adolescents; rather, we must work to equip all middle school students with the academic, social and emotional skills and qualities they need to pursue any and all career options they may desire. Developing such a vision requires the combined efforts and commitment of all parties involved - teachers, parents, students, administrators, support staff, and community.

(2) Empowerment coupled with Responsibility is needed to allow the key participants to make important decisions in fulfilling their schoolwide vision. Such empowerment/responsibility is critical if schools are to break the present stalemate in which administrators, teachers, parents, and students tend to blame each other as well as other factors "beyond their control" for the poor educational outcomes of at-risk students. An Accelerated School enables all groups to participate in, and take responsibility for, the educational process. Currently, one of the least empowered groups in a middle school is the students. Giving students a say about how to reach their school's vision can become a powerful instructional experience in addition to serving the important school site decision-making needs.

The areas most appropriate for site-based participation in decisions are curriculum, instruction, and school organization. Such decision-making requires active support from the district's central office, which could occur in the form of information,

technical assistance, staff development, and evaluation, as well as appropriate assessment systems to determine accountability.

(3) Building on the strengths of school staff, students, parents, and communities rather than their weaknesses, is a critical focus of the entire Accelerated School experience. Parents and teachers are largely underutilized resources in most schools. Parents, because they love their children and want them to succeed, can be powerful allies; teachers bring the gifts of insight, intuition, and organizational acumen to the instructional process – but by excluding them from the decisions they ultimately must implement, we leave these qualities largely untapped. Middle grades educators possess a wealth of untapped expertise about teaching adolescents, a strength which very few can boast of possessing, since teacher preparation programs traditionally deal with either elementary OR high school, as if the middle grades did not exist. Related to this, middle grades teachers are also an important link in understanding the many strengths of early adolescents.

Schools typically overlook the strengths of these early adolescents in a number of ways. First, after years of being labeled as slow learners, early adolescents in at-risk situations are quite apt to enter middle schools with walls built up against positive learning. Instead of viewing these students as hopelessly behind, accelerated school staff must view each of these young adults as having strengths which can be tapped to accelerate their learning. A second reason the strengths of at-risk early adolescents are often overlooked is because they do not appear to share all of the learning characteristics of middle-class students. Educators must search for each and every student's unique assets and use them to accelerate student learning. Third, teachers often find themselves underprepared to understand the culture and values of poor, minority, immigrant, and non-English speaking students. These students' strengths may not be as easily recognized since they are less familiar to many teachers from different backgrounds.

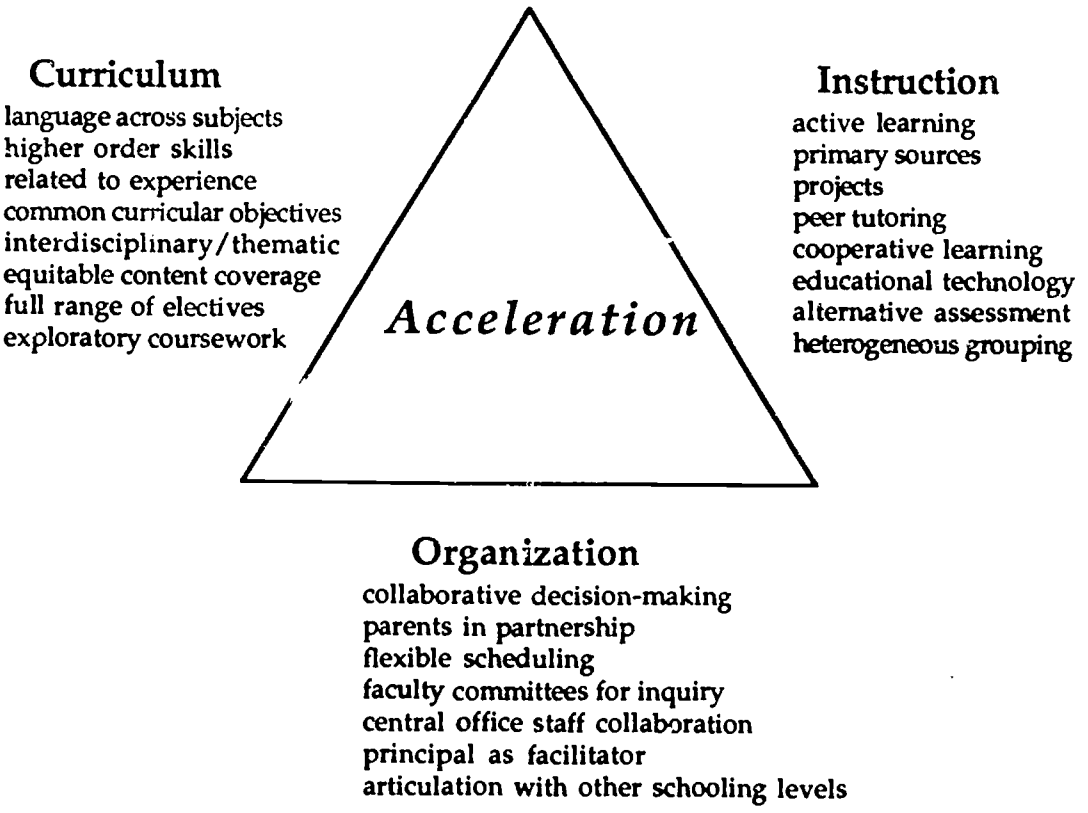
Finally, another untapped resource in our schools is the many styles of learning *all* – not just at-risk – children bring with them to school. Many students learn best through multiple modes: orally, kinesthetically, artistically, etc. Moreover, early adolescents in particular have many budding strengths in terms of learning styles. They are becoming more capable of handling abstract and complex thought (Carnegie Council 1989), more interested in moral issues (Kohlberg 1984), and

intensely curious and eager to solve actively things they consider useful (California State Department of Education 1987).

Principals whose roles are chiefly limited to implementing district directives are also underutilized. In Accelerated Schools, they use their talents to work creatively with parents, staff, and students to attain the school's vision.

Unified Change

No one single feature or "package" makes an accelerated program. The stress is on the school as a whole rather than on a particular grade, subject area, curriculum change, or improvement program. Moreover, the school community chooses which challenges to address and which changes to make. The triangle below illustrates curriculum, instruction and organization practices that research shows as beneficial for all students.



The base represents the way a school is organized or structured including decision making processes, community involvement and interaction with the central office.

The right side incorporates instructional strategies and includes some examples of teaching and learning in accelerated schools. The left side encompasses the curriculum of the school including an interdisciplinary focus, using materials relevant to students' lives, and language and writing throughout the curriculum.

As discussed above, most educational reforms focus only on the parts or a specific side of the triangle in a piecemeal way. For example, it's not uncommon to read about a reform that only talks about restructuring the organization of a school (base of the triangle), or using new curricula (left side), or implementing new instructional approaches (right side). These changes are usually done independently with relatively little impact on the overall school program or student learning. For example, in a given middle school, two teachers could go to a cooperative learning workshop, another could call in a community science project, and another could read up on various learning styles – all in isolation from one another and the school community as a whole. Moreover, the insight into the new instructional strategies rarely affect the schools curriculum or organization. Indeed, a change in any one dimension of schooling will necessitate change in the other dimensions. The culture and organization of the traditional school does not allow for such integration of information or building on the many school site strengths. The Accelerated Middle School creates a framework where everything the school community does involves working together toward a common vision. The model offers a unified approach in which all parts of the school work dynamically together on behalf of school staff, parents, and students.

One might view the triangle as a description of middle schools that capture the strengths specific to early adolescence. Because adolescents change so quickly on physical, emotional and intellectual fronts, they have particular needs which must be embodied in the middle school experience (in fact, the number and magnitude of changes in this period are second only to to the prenatal and early childhood periods). Indeed, the middle grades provide one of the ripest environments for some of the most stimulating curricula and instruction. Curiosity, an ability to engage in abstract thought, a desire to take on responsibility, and other early adolescent characteristics are all superb qualities around which to design innovative curriculum and instruction. Encouragingly, these characteristics also line up with what we know about motivation and learning. Research shows that student motivation increases when learning is adapted to their interests, allows them to

take on responsibility, provides them with opportunities to interact with peers, induces curiosity, suspense, and dissonance, and includes game-like features. (Brophy,1987). When young adults – especially at-risk young adults – believe that taking responsibility for their actions will lead to certain success, they are much more motivated to achieve those outcomes (Greene 1985).

Getting From Here To There

Simply giving schools the freedom to make decisions does not ensure that deep and meaningful change will occur. In order to truly function as Accelerated Schools, school communities need to build their capacity to establish a unity of purpose, to make responsible decisions, and to build on strengths. For these reasons, we offer a systematic process schools can use which results in a unified purpose, shared decision-making authority and responsibility, and building on the many strengths unique to each school site. The process is the vehicle schools can use to achieve their dreams.

A school community can initiate the Accelerated Schools process in four steps. These four steps should take a middle school approximately three to five months to accomplish – some of the steps will involve full-time attention, while others can be accomplished as part of the normal course of the school day. In the first step, the school *takes stock* of the "here –" where the school is at the onset of the change process. The entire school community gathers quantitative and qualitative information on the history of the school; data on students, staff, and school facilities; a description of curricular and instructional practices; information on the community and cultures of the parents; particular strengths of the school; data on attendance, disaggregated test scores, and other measures of student performance; and the major challenges faced by the school. The process of collecting, analyzing, and discussing baseline information provides a useful record of the school's status at the start to compare later with progress. All members of the school community must participate in setting out research questions, gathering data, and analyzing the data. Such all inclusive involvement creates a fuller picture of the baseline situation as well as fosters a sense of ownership of the process. Indeed, just working together begins to build unity of purpose in the school.

The second step in initiating the Accelerated Schools Process is to ***create a vision*** for the school that will become the focus of change. Again, the entire school community should engage in creating a vision – including teachers, support staff, principal, vice principals, parents, central office administrators, the community, and the all important students. It is crucial for all parties who will be both involved in and affected by the planning, implementation, and/or evaluation of educational programs be included in this process. The all inclusive nature of defining a vision results in ownership of a common goal and long-term commitment to achieving that goal. The process of discussing individual dreams for the school could also help foster student-adult, parent-child, and school personnel-parent bonding.

The school community will create the vision in a series of both small and large meetings, where the participants focus on imagining and describing a school that will work for students, staff, and community. In this step, the school community asks itself, "What knowledge, skills, and attributes do we want our students to have when they leave our school?" Alternatively, school community members could ask themselves, "What kind of middle school would I want to send my own child to?" or "What do we want our middle school to look like in five-six years?" Out of this series of discussions, a vision for the future will emerge which will be the focus of Accelerated School implementation.

The third step involves the ***setting out three to five priorities*** for inquiry by comparing the vision with the baseline information gathered through taking stock. The school community must compile and synthesize all of the differences between the present situation and the future vision. They may identify a very large number of challenges – often 40-50. The school community takes the list of challenge areas and reduces it to three or five initial priorities which will become the immediate focus of the school, since an organization rarely can work effectively on more than a few major priorities at a time. Determining these priorities may generate intense and heated discussions that get to the heart of staff concerns. The dynamics of the discourse are themselves useful because they help the staff realize that they are responsible for change and for choosing those areas where they must begin.

After setting our priorities, the school ***establishes its governance structures*** including the cadres or small task force groups that will work on the priorities. All staff and representative students and parents self-select into one of the priority

groups. Finally, the school constructs the steering committee and school community-as-a-whole. At this point the school is ready to begin working on its priority areas using the Accelerated Schools Inquiry Process.

The ***Inquiry Process*** is the mechanism cadres use to move the school toward the vision and accelerated practice along all three dimensions of the triangle (curriculum, instruction, and organization). Through the Inquiry Process, teachers, administrators, and parents identify and define educational challenges, look for alternative solutions, and implement and evaluate those solutions. One full cycle of the process can take up to a full school year because it entails a wide range of issues which touch upon all facets of the school – on culture as well as pedagogical practices.

The Inquiry Process provides schools with the opportunity to examine challenges in an in-depth manner in contrast to the traditional sporadic in-service days. Inquiry also encourages the school community to produce knowledge as well as to transmit it – building on the many strengths at the school site. In addition, Inquiry empowers those at the school site to make the changes they know are best for students (Polkinghorn, Bartels & Levin 1990). It is important to note that Inquiry will lead different schools in extremely different directions since Inquiry is the vehicle schools use to achieve their vision, which will be, by definition, unique to their school community.

Concept to Reality: Differences and Challenges

What makes acceleration so promising – the comprehensive approach addressing all three schooling dimensions at once – is precisely what makes it so challenging. The changes and innovations arrived at through Inquiry at the elementary level are not necessarily appropriate for the middle school level. Clearly, middle schools differ from elementary schools along the dimensions of curriculum, instruction and organization. Along curricular lines, middle schools teach more advanced subject matter and must articulate between elementary and high school constraints. Along instructional lines, middle schools use more teacher directed, book-oriented approaches and less hands-on activities. Along organizational lines, middle schools are generally much larger and departmentalized, and teachers often teach a single subject. Time is scarce and parents and students are relatively uninvolved.

All of these and other differences translate into challenges middle schools may face as they work to transform into accelerated schools. For instance the fact that middle schools are larger than elementary schools has implications for school governance structures, curriculum development, and instructional strategies. We offer some other challenges middle schools could potentially face in transforming themselves into Accelerated Schools by schooling dimension: Along organizational lines, middle schools may have difficulty deciding on a unity of purpose since they are departmentalized and have large faculties that have not often worked together. The existing departmental structure could also present challenges in creating accelerated governance structures. Implementing the Inquiry Process could present challenges in terms of scarce time, lack of schoolwide problem-solving skills, and traditional lack of parental, student, and community participation.

Along curricular lines, creating enriched, interdisciplinary, relevant curricula may be difficult due to the traditional middle school content and the departmental bent. Also, articulating between elementary and high school may be particularly difficult for an accelerated middle school if they receive children from traditional elementary schools and send them on to traditional high schools.

Along instructional lines, pursuing active, relevant, and group learning experiences runs counter to the often used lecture and worksheet style instruction found in most middle school classes. Also, applying these instructional strategies to subject matter taught at a higher level could also be challenging.

Overcoming the challenges

In order to overcome the perceived challenges involved in creating accelerated middle schools, we have embodied the values that direct our philosophy – those of participation, reflection, communication, experimentation, trust, equity, and risk-taking. We have communicated with a wide variety of participants and asked them to reflect on the accelerated middle school concept. In turn, we have reflected on their input and experimented with some actual pilot-testing of the concept.

More specifically, in 1989-90, we developed a design for an Accelerated Middle School by building on our knowledge of Accelerated Elementary Schools, evaluating the needs of early adolescents, synthesizing some of the ideas from the reform movement about exemplary middle schools and visiting middle schools across the

country. In order to test our ideas against "reality," we shared our initial concept paper with a variety of educators nationwide in two ways. First, we conducted focus groups with teachers, principals, and central office administrators in the Boston Public Schools, the Oakland Unified School District, and the San Jose Unified School District. Because the actors at the school site are the real agents of change, we placed great value on their expert reactions and advice on the initial concept paper. Specifically, they resonated with the philosophy and viewed the Accelerated Schools model as a road from "here to there." Second, we asked for comments from educators in a wide variety of roles – policy, advocacy, educational associations, foundations, higher education, school systems, and research institutions. These reviewers provided support and specific, constructive feedback for the report. We synthesized the feedback from both the focus group participants and reviewers and re-worked the initial concept paper into a more focused design for an Accelerated Middle School.

The next level of experimentation came in the form of testing out the concepts *with* the process in two-day exploratory training sessions during the summer of 1990 with two different sites. These exploratory training sessions proved to be interesting and thought-provoking. The first group brought up important organizational questions, dealing with existing governance structures and setting up the process.

The second site has become the home of our pilot accelerated middle school. Only by working over time with practitioners can we truly understand what accelerating the education of secondary students will entail. Working in partnership with a pilot middle school, we are beginning to come to the most appropriate solutions for addressing the challenges to accelerating middle schools.

THE ACCELERATED MIDDLE SCHOOL IN REALITY – WORK WITH A PILOT SCHOOL

At this point, I would like to relate our experience to date with a pilot middle school in the San Francisco Bay Area. Before beginning, it is important to remember, as noted above, our role has been one of capacity-building. We have not made any decisions for the school, we have not contributed to taking stock research, we have not contributed to the vision, nor have we given input on setting priorities. Rather; we have provided technical assistance, helping the school community use a systematic process to achieve their goals. In turn, as the first accelerated middle

school, they are helping us learn about how the process might work best in a secondary school setting.

Instead of relating each step of our journey together to date, I will organize my description around the Accelerated Schools Process and the examples and insights that I believe are most noteworthy. I will begin with our initial two-day workshop, then describe taking stock, then the development of a vision, setting priorities, creating governance structures, and finally, beginning the Inquiry Process.

Initial Workshop: Two days before teachers were officially due to come back from summer vacation, the full staff of the pilot middle school came to Stanford for the first of two days of "training" or capacity-building. Since the workshop was our first and only planned solid time together, we felt we wanted to describe the entire philosophy and process so that everyone would have a "map" of what was to come. We shared the philosophy, principles, and curricular, instructional, and organizational tenets of Accelerated Middle Schools through a combination of talks and active group exercises. We concluded the day by describing the overall process and doing some preliminary dreaming about the vision. The second day of the workshop, the Stanford team went to the pilot school's media center. We spent most of the day simulating the Inquiry Process and practicing the group problem-solving skills Inquiry requires. At the end of the day, we set the stage for taking stock.

Taking Stock: We began the process of taking stock by asking the pilot middle school staff which areas *they* felt were important to examine. They chose seven different broad areas to research in order to get an idea of their baseline situation – Curriculum and Instruction, Achievement, Family Involvement, Community Resources, Attitudes, School Organization, and Discipline/Climate. Every teacher and administrator self-selected into one of these research areas. In groups, they collaboratively developed a detailed set of questions they wanted to answer about the present situation of their research area, which they divided into survey-type questions and non-survey research questions (to be gathered from records, interviews, etc.). The administrators and the Stanford team helped to streamline the survey questions into master parent, student, and staff surveys. Survey

questions were long and short answer with staff survey questions ranging from: "How do you group your classes?" to "Would you send your child to this school?" to "How often do you use the following methods of instruction....?" to "How much influence do you have over the following decisions?" to "How well multicultural ideas and concepts are woven into the school...?" The student survey questions tried to capture how students felt about school and why. What courses did they like and dislike and why. Also, questions aimed to capture students hopes, dreams and self-esteem. The parent survey, which was translated into Spanish and Portuguese, had questions dealing with home-school communication, parent involvement, curriculum and instruction, and school climate and student behavior.

The surveys went out and came back with the help of students, parents, teachers, support staff, administrators in the central office, and the Stanford team. Teams of survey collectors took the questions each research group had asked and the corresponding answers and sent them back to the research groups for analysis. The seven groups analyzed the mammoth amount of taking stock information and reported out to the staff as a whole. The effort culminated with information-filled posters and overheads and well-designed staff presentations to each other. One of the administrators facilitated the staff in making connections and finding themes in their research findings.

As an outside party to the school, our team witnessed the amazing potential of the group beginning to build. The experience of working together catalyzed their realization of their strength as a team. The self-esteem of the staff began to rise as they saw that they were valued as creators of knowledge. They were encouraged by their self-discovered strengths and sobered by their self-discovered challenges. Low achievement in particular subject areas began to create a feeling of tension, until a few teachers helped their colleagues view the achievement challenges more objectively as something they could change, rather than as something to which to attach blame. They accepted responsibility for their challenges because *they were empowered* to improve on them. One teacher commented, "our vision will become our new reality."

Creating a Vision: While taking stock started to build unity of purpose, creating a vision catalyzed this into a product the school could celebrate. While we encouraged broad participation, the pilot school involved every single individual in the school community in developing the shared vision. Each teacher, support staff member, student, administrator, and over 172 parents (at a record turn-out Back-to-School night) dreamed about what they would want the school to be and contributed these dreams to the vision. Representative groups of parents, teachers, staff, students, and Stanford team members synthesized hundreds of pages of vision thoughts of the entire school community to 17 single-spaced pages to a single-page coherent vision statement.

Many Accelerated Elementary Schools have had special functions to celebrate their vision. When we first introduced the idea to the middle school, the idea did not seem to excite anyone. Yet once they finished their vision, they decided to celebrate it. This whole vision development culminated in a magical day of a vision celebration where the entire school community gathered together as a whole for the first time to celebrate their vision (they previously gathered in grade levels so as to keep things under control).

The vision celebration day began with balloons, posters, and the school's Jazz Band playing songs which added to the crowd's energy. The principal and student body president opened the festivities with a sense of purpose. A student who worked on the vision synthesis gave a talk about her experience working with teachers, administrators, parents, and others to write the actual vision. The Band then delivered a special Accelerated Rap to the school. Students demonstrated posters they had made of the "possible." Then six students spoke individually about what the vision meant to them. This was particularly striking because it was the first time in the school's history that Hispanic students had spoken in front of the school. Up to now, only "GATE" (Gifted and Talented Education) students had spoken publicly. Indeed, the vision motivated a more diversified set of students to write and publicly deliver personal statements to their school community. Slides of students and staff flashed on the wall while pop music about having a vision played. Then classes paraded their classroom-created quilt pieces illustrating what the vision meant to them. All of the quilt pieces will be sewn together for a school quilt. For the grand finale, the entire school community marched off to proclaim their vision publicly. Led by the jazz band and accompanied by mounted policemen,

over 700 people marched to the county supervisor's office where the county supervisor came down to personally address the school and then to the mayor-elect's office at city hall, where the new mayor addressed the school.

One can ask any student about the vision celebration day last December. They remember. For, it was one of the first times their opinions have been valued, they participated fully and as equals, they were trusted, and they felt the substance of an entire activity was relevant to their lives. From the poignant student speeches, to the flawless march on city hall, to the posters, to the quilt pieces, the vision celebration was rightly student-centered. The event was also important for the staff at the school in that they received public recognition for all of their hard work in their less public activities such as taking stock and developing the vision. It also began to bond different groups of staff together who had previously been organizationally separate, such as support staff, different subject area teachers, physical education teachers, administrators, and media center professionals.

The vision creation and celebration at the middle school differed greatly from those at the elementary school – perhaps because the middle school students are actually young adults. They demonstrated that they have important qualities to offer and they want to belong. In their early adolescent quest for truth and justice, middle grades students may be quite important in keeping the school community accountable to the vision.

Setting Priorities: One of the first places the vision comes to life is in the stage of setting priorities for action. At this point, we asked the school to compare all of its taking stock information to its vision. In order to do this, we split the vision up into each mini-paragraph (or bullet) and divided the ideas among the staff to interpret the statement for its meaning. For example, if part of the vision stated: "All students have the freedom, right and responsibility to learn," then the staff group had to determine what this statement actually means and how the taking stock information differed from it. Of course, they gathered many more differences than they could handle as priorities so they clustered differences into similar areas and then prioritized them. After a few hours of hard group work and heated discussions, the staff came up with five priority areas for inquiry: Curriculum, Instruction, Student Interactions, Culture, and Family/Community Involvement.

Two things are particularly striking about the priorities the school chose. First, the staff strayed from the stereotypical middle school subject area view of the world into broader cross-cutting priority areas. Second, the staff chose "Culture" as an area, which is surprising because the staff is predominantly made up of white females who never mentioned any worries about how different they were from their predominantly Hispanic and Portuguese student population. Yet, in taking stock the very few questions which dealt with culture in the school yielded some essential information (One question asked if different cultures were respected; another asked how multicultural the curriculum was.). While the staff surveys rated these fairly positively, the student and parent surveys did not rate them as highly. The parent and student responses to these two questions could have been easily overlooked or overshadowed by the sheer volume of information the staff had to digest in taking stock. Yet, the staff recognized the discrepancies and elevated the differences to a priority area for Inquiry. If the staff had not taken stock, this would not have occurred. This is precisely why we ask schools to take stock... so that change is not made from the gut perspectives of a few; rather, it is made with a sense of reality – combining hard, teacher researched data along with the perspectives of all participants.

Creating Governance Structures: The five priorities agreed upon in the last stage became cadres or small task force areas for further inquiry. Cadres, the steering committee, and school community as a whole are the three governance levels in an Accelerated School. The first step toward creating these governance structures occurred through the staff's self-selection onto one of the five priority areas – Curriculum, Instruction, Culture, Student Interactions, or Family/Community Involvement. All staff in the school – including campus monitors, secretaries, instructional aides as well as teachers and administrators – chose which cadre they wanted to join. The cadres chose facilitators and met for the first time. Before delving into the Inquiry Process, each cadre added parent, student, and community members to their groups and set out additional roles such as recorder, timekeeper, etc. The cadres, made up of 10-16 people, are larger than they have been at elementary schools for two reasons. First, the middle school is larger than most elementary schools. Second, the pilot middle school has made a concerted effort to include all parties in the school community in the decision-making structure. We usually prefer smaller working groups, however, we agree with the school

community's emphasis on including all members. Over time, we will learn how the larger group size affects the Inquiry.

The Principal felt that the Vice Principals, cadre facilitators, and central office representative would make up the steering committee. In order to streamline efforts toward the vision, the Principal asked the school-as-a-whole if they would mind combining the old steering committee, made up of department heads, with the new steering committee. Everyone bought into the idea quite enthusiastically. The idea certainly made sense, but we were surprised by the ease of the decision, given questions raised by our first exploratory training group last summer about the perceived permanence of existing governance structures. Perhaps taking stock, working on a vision, and setting priorities together built trust among the staff so that they could take the risk of experimenting with a new governance structure together. Moreover, steering committee members are already talking about the fact that they may not have department heads one day down the road.

Inquiry: The middle school has only just begun Inquiry in February, so it is still very early to draw conclusions. In working through the Inquiry Process, teachers explore and reflect on their challenge area with the goal of fully understanding their problems before attempting to solve them. Teachers in the pilot middle school are hypothesizing about why families are not more involved, what their real problems are in terms of instructional strategies, and how and why cultures are undervalued among other things. We do not have enough team members to sit in on each cadre, but we do cover three of the five regularly and the other two when possible. We support the facilitators by answering questions before meetings and helping to guide the cadre members to become comfortable using the Inquiry Process. Hypothesizing about problem areas and testing hypotheses represents new territory for schools and requires some support. We look forward to continuing to work with them to understand the underlying causes of their problems and begin to work toward creative and collaborative solutions.

Although it is still early, our initial observations lead us to believe that while Inquiry challenges teachers in general because it represents such a different way of solving problems, middle school teachers seem to be more accepting of the process on average than elementary teachers. Only by working with more middle grades

practitioners will we be able to understand why middle school staff seem to see see the power of the process more readily than elementary educators.

Documentation of Pilot School Efforts

Each week we learn new lessons about acceleration in the middle grades. In order to keep track of all this information, we conduct the following activities. First, we videotape major events such as the initial workshop, the vision celebration and certain school-as-a-whole meetings, such as when the staff was taking stock and setting priorities. Second, we keep field notes on our weekly visits to the school noting what occurred and making observations. Third, we keep copies of all school information such as newsletters, daily bulletins, and most important, all of the baseline data gathered during taking stock. Finally, we have engaged a senior ethnographer to document process of a conventional school transforming into an accelerated one.

OTHER DIRECTIONS FOR ACCELERATED MIDDLE SCHOOLS

In addition to our work with a pilot accelerated middle school, we are working on three other related activities: the creation of a resource guide, the development of a five-day capacity-building workshop for another middle school, and the development of strategies to articulate with accelerated elementary schools. Out of our experience with the pilot school, we will create a resource guide with a focus on implementation for those interested in establishing themselves and operating as accelerated middle schools. It will include rationale for accelerated schools, background and discovery exercises on the three principles and the values of acceleration, description on how to initiate the process with clear steps schools can use, a full chapter on the Inquiry Process, information on adolescent developmental needs, curriculum, instruction, and organization, parent involvement, community involvement, central office participation, and project evaluation. The guide will be completed this summer and is designed to be used in conjunction with training by Accelerated Middle School staff members.

Second, the pilot middle school and the Stanford team will collaboratively design and deliver a 5-day workshop to the full staff of a middle school which has committed to transforming itself into an Accelerated School. This will occur in the summer of 1991. We call the workshop one of capacity-building rather than training, since there is no training "package." Rather the expertise is in the school;

we just work with the school community to galvanize those strengths and guide them toward acceleration for all students.

Finally, one of the reasons we extended the model to the middle grades was to provide opportunities for the students who graduate from accelerated elementary schools confident and comfortable with stimulating educational experiences and who must then enter conventional middle schools that are tracked and relatively unengaging. We would especially like to provide support to middle schools interested in transforming that receive children from accelerated elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

The Accelerated Schools Project is an evolving one. Instead of offering a "package," we offer a philosophy and process, along with many lessons learned at the elementary level. While we feel that we know enough to share our philosophy, process, and lessons learned with elementary schools across the country, we are just beginning to understand how the philosophy and process play out at the middle school level. We certainly have learned some lessons about transforming middle schools, but we must work with other middle schools in different settings to come to the point where we can share the Project on the scale that we can with elementary schools.

In terms of our initial observations on the model's extension to the middle school level, we are excited by the willingness the school has had to embrace the process. The staff, and teachers in particular, have seen the power of the process and are using it. The additional staff that come with a middle school have been an asset. For example, the vice principals and counselors are important supporters and resource people. Also the campus monitors and instructional aides are becoming crucial members of the school team. One campus monitor shared that she has never felt so much a part of the school as she has since they began the Accelerated Schools Project. Just as teachers and administrators find their roles changing, all of the other staff at the middle school level will find their roles transformed as well. Most encouraging is the student involvement in decision-making. We look forward to the multi-faceted potential of the students in the Accelerated Middle School experience.

In terms of challenges, as we expected, we are seeing some different challenges in practice than we conceived of before the partnership. First, since middle schools have subject areas and students need to take these for the appropriate credits, the calendar year has a push on scheduling. This external push interferes with the flow of the staff's inquiry into the various priority areas. In the pilot school, they are trying to use the Inquiry Process in the cadres dealing with the schedule, but on a faster track. Also, while we hear talk about eventually shifting departmental lines and moving toward a more interdisciplinary curricula, we all need to remember that changing such things will take time, since years of tradition make such deep curricular, instructional, and organizational change difficult. This is one of the reasons Inquiry is so powerful, because *staff choose the changes they want to make in response to their own self-discovered needs.*

By far the most pressing of challenges are the budget cuts throughout the state. Twelve of the teachers at the pilot school, each of whom are important members of a team that has been building capacity together for the last eight months, received termination of contract letters. The budget crisis is shocking and tremendously disappointing for the entire school community. The school is drawing on the power of the Accelerated Schools process to combat the crisis and try to move forward toward their vision. Despite the devastation and losses stemming from the budget crisis, the one thing the school states they will not lose is their commitment to the Accelerated Schools Project and the success of all students.

In moving the Accelerated Middle School concept toward reality, we are learning many lessons about capacity-building at the secondary school level and will weave these lessons into our resource guide and training. We look forward to sharing this model and an accompanied sense of enthusiasm with middle schools across the country.

(Note: Much of the first half of this paper is drawn from our concept paper on Accelerated Middle Schools called "Toward Accelerated Middle Schools" by Hopfenberg, Levin, Meister, and Rogers listed below.)

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