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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help school district leaders build public understanding and support for comprehensive school reform (CSR) by introducing the concept to schools, parents, and the community. Without broad-based public understanding and support, it will be difficult for the district to meet its central goal of improving student achievement. The guide can be used to describe the basics of the New American Schools approach to CSR and how it differs from the ad hoc, piecemeal reform attempts that the school district might have tried before. It can be used to answer questions about why a CSR effort is needed. Additionally, it can help assemble a district leadership team to help schools learn more about the NAS models; make the case for CSR to the community; and identify and engage key stakeholders and work with the community to build long-term, community-based support for CSR. The guide was developed from school district and community leaders who have been through the process before. It can help the user to communicate effectively the path and progress of CSR to multiple stakeholders in the community. (Contains 15 references.) (DFR)

New American Schools

How to Build Local Support for Comprehensive School Reform

Monica Solomon and Maria Voles Ferguson

How can school and district leaders build public understanding of and support for comprehensive school reform? How do we involve the key stakeholders — teachers, parents, students, and community members — in building long-term, community-based support for these efforts? And, how do we ensure that these efforts are aligned closely with the district's overall strategy to improve student performance? Monica Solomon and Maria Voles Ferguson explain how New American Schools fosters community partnerships to engage these stakeholders in discussion and actions that lead to comprehensive school reform.

2

Getting Better by Design

New American Schools

New American Schools (NAS) is a dynamic coalition of teachers, administrators, parents, community and business leaders, policymakers, and experts from across the country committed to improving achievement for all students by dramatically changing America's classrooms, schools, and school systems.

Unlike many reforms that are add-on programs or isolated projects, NAS designs aim to improve the whole school, from curricula and instruction to funding and community involvement. Recognizing that one size does not fit all schools and communities, NAS offers a choice of different designs — blueprints — for helping all students achieve at high levels. (For information on each design, turn to the inside back cover.)

New American Schools has clear and consistent goals:

- Establish supportive and assistance-oriented school systems.
- Develop school and teacher capacity to teach all students to high academic standards.
- Spend resources wisely with an eye to student results.
- Build broad and deep community support for education improvement and excellence.
- Make America's public schools places where all students excel.

New American Schools is results-oriented.

In a short period of time, NAS has generated impressive results. In many schools that are using a NAS design:

- students are producing higher-quality work, achieving at higher levels, and showing improvement on standardized tests and other measures of performance;
- discipline problems are down and student attendance and engagement are up;
- teacher enthusiasm and community involvement are on the rise; and
- student achievement is improving more quickly than conventional wisdom suggests is possible.

New American Schools helps partner districts restructure.

To overcome traditional barriers to school excellence, NAS provides focused assistance to its district partners in five key areas:

- rethinking school finance, including investment funding and resource reallocation strategies;
- revamping professional development infrastructures to support whole-school transformation;
- setting high academic standards and linked assessments;
- giving schools authority to make decisions about curriculum, staff, and spending and then holding schools accountable for results; and
- engaging parents and the public in school-improvement efforts.

New American Schools believes in shared accountability.

The foundation of NAS is a strong partnership built on shared responsibility for results. Clearly defined roles link partners to one another and to results. All stakeholders in a NAS community — teachers, administrators, district leaders, parents, and NAS Design Teams — are expected to take responsibility and to be held accountable for helping to improve student achievement. NAS partners also commit to regular and rigorous assessment of their performance, resulting in the sound business practice of continuous improvement. The RAND Corporation is the independent evaluator of the New American Schools effort.

Getting Better by Design

How to Build Local Support for Comprehensive School Reform

Monica Solomon and
Maria Voles Ferguson

Monica Solomon

Monica Solomon is an independent educational consultant specializing in strategic communications planning and engaging parents, teachers, and the community in school reform efforts. As director of public affairs for Cincinnati (Ohio) Public Schools, she served on the superintendent's management team and implemented a communications strategy to build support for the district's five-year strategic plan, *Students First*.

Maria Voles Ferguson

Maria Voles Ferguson is director of field operations for New American Schools, where she helps schools and districts implement comprehensive school reform programs to improve student achievement. Before joining NAS, Ferguson was director of communication and outreach services for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to help school district leaders build the public understanding and support they need to introduce the concept of comprehensive school reform (CSR) to schools, parents, and the community. Without broad-based public understanding and support, it will be difficult — if not impossible — for the district to meet its central goal of improving student achievement. This guide can be used to help you:

- describe the basics of the New American Schools (NAS) approach to CSR and how it differs from the ad hoc, piecemeal reform attempts that the school district might have tried before (chapter 1).
- answer questions about why a CSR effort is needed (chapter 2).
- assemble a district leadership team to help schools learn more about the NAS models; make the case for CSR to the community; and identify and engage key stakeholders and work with them to build long-term, community-based support for CSR (chapter 3).
- make sure that the new reform elements introduced by NAS are aligned closely with the district's strategic plan (chapter 4).

- effectively communicate the path and progress of CSR to multiple stakeholders in your community (chapter 5).
- match schools to the most appropriate NAS Design Team (chapter 6).
- communicate short-term victories; start to build credibility and commitment to high standards and continuous improvement for both teachers and students (chapter 7).

This guide was developed with input from people like you — school district and community leaders — who have been through the process before. The advice in these pages essentially is gleaned from their advice to us and our own experience during the past several years since introducing hundreds of NAS schools into dozens of communities across the country.

Although the guidance here is the best available at the time of publication, we know that no single strategy fits all circumstances. The educational movement represented by NAS and its Design Teams is very much a work in progress. We are committed to continuous improvement, school by school, community by community. To that end, we ask you to help us begin working on the next edition of this guide — starting now.

Use the NAS Web site (www.naschools.org) to tell us what advice from this guide makes sense and works well. Tell us where we could explain things more clearly. And most important, share with us your own experiences in bringing NAS and other research-based Design Teams into your community. Thank you in advance for your feedback and commentary.

CHAPTER 1: NEW AMERICAN SCHOOLS — A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL REFORM

America's schools confront significant challenges. Faced with a booming student population, a need for many new and highly skilled teachers, and the academic demands of our new technology - and information-based economy, many schools are struggling just to meet basic needs, let alone educate all students to high levels of achievement. But the most immediate challenge for schools is to stem the apparent erosion of general confidence in public school systems.

Americans — parents and nonparents alike — continue to name education as the highest priority on the nation's agenda. At the same time, they are clamoring for change — in the form of top-to-bottom overhaul, charter schools, home schooling, vouchers to allow students to attend private (and perhaps parochial) schools at public expense, and other reforms that were considered radical just a few years ago.

Yet, amid the drumbeat of discontent is an encouraging trend: strong coalitions of parents, educators, community members, and business leaders now are working together to make fundamental changes in teaching and learning in thousands of classrooms throughout the country. They are part of a growing national consensus about what works for students, teachers, and schools: high standards, varied accountability measures that are aligned with standards, quality teachers and principals, ongoing professional development, more effective outreach to parents and the community, and more.

New American Schools, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 1991, is leading the way in introducing reform strategies that work. We are working with districts, schools, and states nationwide to help all students achieve at high levels. NAS is accomplishing this mission by assisting in and supporting the development of innovative, successful schools through the implementation of comprehensive school designs (called "Design Teams," see inside back cover). The designs combine a research-based framework for student learning with continuous, hands-on assistance and training for teachers and school staff. NAS calls this approach "design-based assistance."

NAS designs are not like the traditional pullout programs found in many schools. They do not focus on a select subject area or work with only a small group of students. Rather, they offer schools a *comprehensive* plan for

improvement that addresses all core academic subject areas, all grade levels, professional development and instruction, and school organization. The NAS Design Teams impact all subject areas, all students, and all teachers. For this reason, each NAS Design Team requires a consensus decision from school faculty in support of the design.

The NAS approach to comprehensive school reform is at the heart of a growing national movement in public education. In 1997 and 1998, Congress demonstrated its commitment to comprehensive school reform by allocating $150 million to the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program. This program offers schools three-year grants (of no less than $50,000 each) to partner with a Design Team and implement comprehensive school reform. As a result of this legislation, approximately 2,500 schools nationwide will receive startup funding.

As of February 1999, NAS is working with more than 1,500 schools across the country. The NAS Design Teams represent an investment in research and development that would be impossible for most school districts to replicate. Communities and schools can reap the benefits from the experience of these pioneer schools and the NAS network of educators, business and community leaders, consultants, and researchers. No school should have to start from scratch to improve teaching and learning. The NAS designs offer schools a range of philosophies, visions, and approaches to school improvement, allowing each school to carefully choose the design that best fits the needs of its students, teachers, and community (for details, see chapter 6). While each Design Team takes a unique approach to helping schools, *all* NAS designs include certain essential elements:

The Design Teams strive to help all students reach challenging standards and improve student scores on national, state, and local assessments.

In most of the communities in which the NAS Design Teams work, students are expected to reach challenging state and/or local academic standards. Although the designs were developed to meet local needs and requirements, the NAS Design Teams have focused recently on aligning the designs with challenging standards benchmarked against the best in the nation, specifically in the areas of reading and math.

Implementing a NAS design requires schools to align all of their resources — human, financial, and technological — with a common strategic plan for school improvement.

Most schools in this country face a continuous struggle for resources. Despite the best intentions, research and experience show that many schools spend their resources in a fragmented, ineffective manner. For example, many schools implement multiple programs that are neither aligned with a strategic school improvement plan nor evaluated for effectiveness. Over time, piecemeal programs can become a resource drain for schools, both in terms of money and teacher time and focus. Because NAS designs take a comprehensive approach to school improvement and require focused and committed resources, faculty and administration are forced to evaluate their current programs and practices *as a whole* and to make the appropriate changes.

NAS designs are not untested, "flavor-of-the-month" reform strategies. Teachers, parents, and communities support NAS designs because they incorporate research and best practices, and they are subject to ongoing, independent evaluation and continuous improvement.

Since 1991, the RAND Corporation has served as the independent evaluator of the NAS effort. RAND releases periodic studies and summaries of its findings on the implementation and effectiveness of the NAS designs. Implementation reports were published in 1994 and 1998, and an extensive evaluation of student achievement results associated with design implementation will be released in 1999. NAS also publishes and frequently updates a compilation of quantitative and qualitative results from schools implementing NAS designs. All of this evaluation material, as well as other local evaluations, is used to improve and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the NAS designs. Rigorous evaluation is a hallmark of the NAS effort in both schools and districts.

The NAS designs provide teachers, students, parents, and communities with a shared vision for their school.

With so many public demands for results, schools and communities are inundated with options on how to improve student achievement. With so much need, schools and districts often try many different approaches to reform. The end result is often an abundance of well-intentioned plans that are not focused on any single, unifying vision. This kind of reform overload can sap the energy of both teachers and administrators and contribute to a defeatist "been there, done that" mentality. NAS designs focus on reorganizing and revitalizing the entire school around a common effort to improve both teaching

and learning. The designs provide teachers, students, parents, and community members with a focused strategy — a clear, common plan for school improvement — and the tools and assistance they need to implement that design. Our partners in the field tell us that the process of selecting a design is a powerful and unifying experience for a school and community. Together, the entire teaching staff, all the students, and the community then make the design their own.

The NAS designs can help build a lasting foundation for quality teaching in schools by providing high-quality professional development for teachers and administrators.

The designs provide teachers with the training, materials, and support they need to help students meet challenging standards. The professional development component of the NAS designs is central because it helps build the long-term capacity of all teachers and increases staff retention. Teachers and administrators in NAS schools also become part of a national network of schools implementing the same design. These active networks provide opportunities for teachers to work with peers who share a common vision; to use materials and tools that have been developed by fellow educators to support that vision; and to benefit from the practical experience of others.

Finally, NAS research and experience shows that partnership is at the heart of most successful comprehensive school reform efforts.

For its part, NAS is committed to helping schools, districts, and states as they explore the concept of design-based assistance and a comprehensive approach to school improvement. Working with the NAS staff, a cadre of expert consultants, and all the members of the growing NAS network, districts can develop a strategy to:

- introduce a variety of designs to their community and give each school the freedom to choose the design that is best for its students;
- put in place policies and practices at the district level that support schools in successfully implementing and sustaining their chosen designs; and
- achieve more dramatic and lasting results for students.

CHAPTER 2: DEMONSTRATING THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM

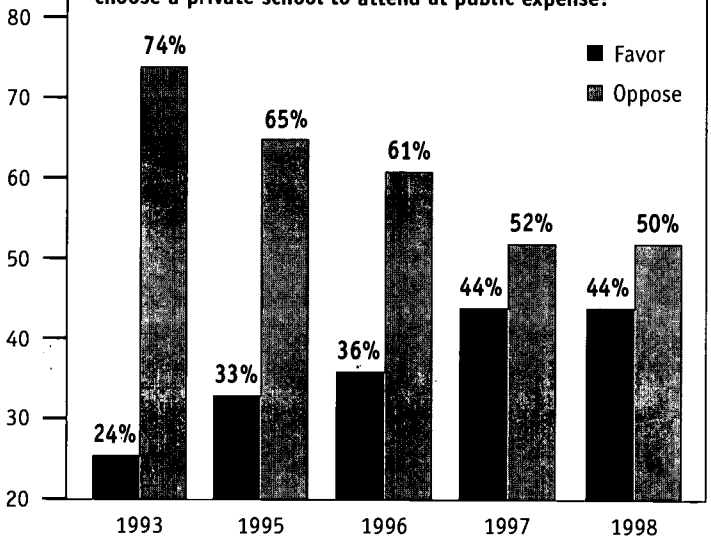
Most seasoned educators know that too many reform efforts have failed because they were introduced to teachers, parents, and the community without any sense of context or urgency. In order to gain support for a reform effort, district and school leaders must clearly show how this effort will help raise student test scores, meet the needs of teachers and students, and otherwise address the concerns of parents and the community.

According to the Education Commission of the States' *Listen, Discuss and Act: Parents' and Teachers' Views of Education Reform*, "traditional wisdom holds that most people think their schools are fine; it's those other schools that need to be improved. But more than half of the parents in this survey say they believe schools in *their community* have gotten off on the wrong track; fewer than four in 10 think their local schools are headed in the right direction." Other national surveys by A-Plus Communications, Gallup, and Public Agenda show that public support for public schools — even local schools — is declining, while support for vouchers, privatization, and home schooling is rising.

For districts, demonstrating the need and establishing a sense of urgency for change and improvement requires a multifaceted approach to public engagement: listening, conversing, and reporting. Engaging all critical

CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?



Source: *1998 PDK/Gallup Poll*

stakeholders in a substantive discussion about why schools need to change, what good schools should look like, and what kinds of support they need to succeed must take place early and often.

In many cases, local communities don't have any choice; new state standards, tests, and accountability systems often are driving community change. That is, a growing number of communities will have to make major adjustments if their children are to pass the new state tests. But even if changes are mandated from the state, communities usually have a lot of discretion to determine the exact shape of those changes. And local school leaders still have the challenge of helping their citizens understand the benefits of these changes.

Using Data to Tell the District Story

One way to establish a sense of urgency and unify stakeholders around the need for school improvement is for districts to create a data story. A profile of a district's data — test scores, promotion rates, graduation rates, attendance, and customer satisfaction results — should be compiled for release and discussion with internal audiences (administrators, teachers, support staff) and external audiences (parents, community members, business leaders, taxpayers).

When there is a clear need for change within the district, the data story can create a heightened sense of internal urgency among principals, teachers, and support staff. In schools and districts where the need to change is not so obvious or where the situation has not yet reached the boiling point, data can help make the case for continuous improvement. No matter what the district profile is, data give principals and teachers a vehicle for communicating about comprehensive school reform to parents and the school community. Once aware of the data, parents begin to ask questions and consider solutions. Schools and districts then can build on their interest and begin the process of developing a broader action plan to support and strengthen public schools.

Data need not be perceived as the enemy; rather, it is a powerful engagement tool to:

- provide a clear starting point for stakeholders to agree on the need for improved student achievement;
- allow educators, parents, and community and business leaders to identify strengths and weaknesses and to plan strategically about short- and long-term goals and targets;
- provide a solid basis for making local, state, and national comparisons on student achievement;
- monitor progress over time; and
- establish a process and a format for reporting results to the public.

The key to successfully demonstrating the need for comprehensive school reform is to tell your data story, tell the whole story, and tell it in ways your audience will understand. Districts and states may want to package their data stories in easy-to-follow presentation packets to facilitate conversations in meetings, forums, and discussion groups. Although the method of engagement may differ for various audiences, the information provided should be clear, consistent, and reproducible. Graphs, charts, and contact lists with telephone numbers should support your data story (for details on how to communicate effectively, see chapter 5.)

In addition to preparing the data story, districts also should consider comparing local student achievement data with state, national, and international student achievement data. These kinds of comparisons can frame a powerful picture for stakeholders, especially when that audience includes local business leaders and others concerned about the ability of U.S. students to compete in the new global economy. The most rigorous of the national comparisons is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is considered the "nation's report card." Results and background can be found through the National Educational Goals Panel at www.negp.org.

WHAT DOES YOUR COMMUNITY EXPECT?

One powerful approach to finding out what your community wants from its schools is to ask citizens what they value. What specific indicators would tell them that schools are improving? What measures should be used to hold schools accountable — test scores, teacher qualifications, use of technology? How much annual progress is good enough? As part of the 1999 *Quality Counts* annual report from Education Week, A-Plus Communications led a national research project that asked parents and taxpayers questions like these. A summary of their findings and recommendations, *Reporting Results*, provides a good starting point to learn what your community expects. The report includes sample report cards, suggested questions to ask your community, and feedback from around the country. To order this report, visit www.apluscommunications.com.

Internationally, the Third International Math and Sciences Study (TIMSS) is considered the toughest benchmark. Studies in the late 1990s showed that American 4th-graders held their own in math and science internationally, but that American performance declined significantly among 8th- and 12th-graders, even among our best students. For details, visit the TIMSS Web site at http://nces.ed.gov/timss.

In addition, districts should provide an historical overview of the district and surrounding community to help provide context for the changes that now require schools to improve. This should include a look at district achievement data. If the data are available, it can be compelling to see how students have performed over a 10-, 20-, or 30-year period — especially if you can compare local trends to state and national trends.

Each district has a unique message about data. For high-performing school districts with high levels of student achievement, gathering support for a new reform effort can be a major challenge. Communities like this tend to be comfortable with their current status and see no reason to change. However, as you will see in the example below, even the best school districts have a data story to tell:

Jefferson County, Colo., a large, affluent district where many students achieve at high levels, is using NAS Design Teams to implement comprehensive school reform in many of the district's 140 schools. One way Superintendent Jane Hammond brought public attention to the need for across-the-board improvement was through *Stepping Out of Line*, a study that compared each school's socioeconomic status with academic achievement. Hammond says the report established the need to improve dramatically the achievement of low-performing students and help high-performing students achieve at even higher levels. "We found that one of the lowest socioeconomic schools was performing at the third-highest achievement level," says Hammond. The study helped *all* schools build the case for how to improve and challenge students beyond what they already know. "I have yet to hear one parent, teacher, or student say, 'we're good enough'; there is consensus in Jefferson County that we can always do better," Hammond observes.

School leaders in Jackson, Miss., and Memphis, Tenn., use a variety of data to help teachers, parents, and the community understand the need for change:

The Jackson Public School District relies on data to help internal and external audiences focus on the change process and the need for design-based assistance, says Martha Roberts, executive director of curriculum and instructional services. "We use a variety of data to help all of us — administrators, teachers, parents, and community members — understand where we are, how we can get better, and where we intend to be." The data shape professional development initiatives with teachers and help faculties make decisions, such as selecting a Design Team, to improve teaching and learning in the district's classrooms. In addition, the Jackson Public School District publicizes test scores, standards, and benchmarks to schools, parents, and the community via newspaper inserts, parent magazines, cable television, and parent workshops. The data are communicated using charts and graphs that show improvement over a period of time.

In **Memphis, Tenn.**, Superintendent N. Gerry House makes sure parents, community members, and business leaders understand the district's reform agenda by meeting "face to face" with numerous groups, including the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs, elected officials, community councils, churches, and school councils. "It's the face-to-face interaction that matters," says Janice Crawford, executive director for communications and administrative services. "We also produce a newsletter targeted to business leaders that focuses on topics such as design-based assistance, school reform efforts, and standards that the Chamber of Commerce includes in a monthly newsletter to its 6,000 members," Crawford adds.

DATA PRODUCT

Districts typically collect or have access to the following data:

- district fact sheets (demographics, number of schools, number of teachers, facilities, etc.)
- statewide and standardized test scores
- ACT and/or SAT scores
- student attendance rates
- graduation rates
- customer satisfaction surveys (from parents, students, and staff)
- financial information (charts and graphs on district income, revenues, and funding sources)
- teacher quality and qualifications
- safety and school climate
- success stories (highlight specific schools that have improved and show why)

If local surveys highlight other issues that are important to the public, begin assembling data on those indicators, too.

DATA AS THE DRIVER IN MARYLAND

"Data is the driver," says Joan Koslovsky, director of New American Schools for the state of Maryland. "Before a school district or school selects a Design Team, school communities must look at the data, both hard and soft, and ask, 'what do the data tell us about the needs of a school?'" Koslovsky says. In addition, she believes, data drive decisions about modifying instruction and mapping out a continuous improvement model for the whole school reform effort. Too often, schools are not data driven, says Koslovsky, an experienced educator and former superintendent for St. Mary's County, Maryland.

Parents, Koslovsky believes, endorse changes in the educational program when they have access to and concrete analysis of data. "Parents see the data, they understand where their children need to be to meet the standards, and then they actively pursue ways to help them get there," she says.

There are many ways for school districts to establish a sense of urgency among stakeholders to improve schools. Understanding the need for comprehensive school reform is the first step. Once the conversation begins, districts must rely on a variety of engagement strategies to keep the conversation going.

But data can take you only so far. If used well, information can help convince key stakeholders in the community that business as usual isn't good enough, that major changes are needed. The challenge then is to convince these stakeholders that the major changes they seek can be achieved if the community is committed to supporting schools and the district office as they plan and implement a CSR strategy.

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING THE DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM AND ENGAGING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Early on, the school district should appoint a leadership team, which should have two initial responsibilities: learn more about NAS and its Design Teams and begin to build public understanding among key stakeholders about why comprehensive school reform is needed.

Too often, new school reform initiatives become the responsibility of one or two people within the district. A much better approach is to create a leadership team that involves key staff members and other local education stakeholders to serve as ambassadors for the comprehensive reform effort. They should represent a broad range of key departments and stakeholders including:

- superintendent's office representatives
- school board members
- teacher union leaders and members
- curriculum and instruction staff
- assessment and accountability staff
- staff from Title I and other compensatory programs
- discretionary reform program staff
- budget and school finance staff
- program evaluation staff
- professional development staff
- public affairs (communications, engagement, media, and community relations) staff
- parents, including PTA leaders and members, local school decision-making committees, etc.
- community business leaders
- representatives from local foundations, agencies, religious groups, etc.

A district's leadership team should include people with institutional knowledge of the school district, especially those who know the history of past reform attempts. One person should head the leadership team and become the primary liaison with NAS and the Design Teams. This person should be familiar with district operations and have ready access to district and school leadership. Experience from districts across the nation implementing NAS designs suggests that districts should appoint a senior person who has direct access to top leaders and the authority to make decisions.

Learning about Designs and Comprehensive School Reform

The members of the leadership team should take responsibility for learning about design-based assistance and overseeing the process of introducing designs to schools. New American Schools provides tools, materials, and guidance to help administrators, teachers, parents, and other leaders learn about Design Teams and tie into the extensive NAS network. Initially, states, districts, and schools can learn about design-based assistance by taking the following steps:

Review print, video, and online materials about NAS and its Design Teams. The NAS Web site at www.naschools.org is a good place to start. A variety of NAS publications, in-depth information on NAS design teams, evaluation data, and general information on CSR is available on the NAS Web site. In addition, interested districts should contact the Educational Research Service at 703-243-2100 or visit its Web site at www.ers.org to obtain copies of *Blueprints for School Success: A Guide to New American Schools Designs.* This comprehensive guide includes helpful information for schools, districts, and states, as well as a resource list that points to various

STAFFING THE EFFORT

Although everyone in the district should be aware of and involved in the implementation of designs, a core group of talented and energetic people is critical to launching and maintaining this kind of reform effort. The overall direction of the effort should be managed by a full-time member of the district leadership team who has both the capabilities and the resources to plan and coordinate the process of introducing designs to schools. This person becomes the primary liaison with New American Schools staff and the NAS Design Teams. He or she also works directly with schools to exchange information about the process, develop relationships with Design Team staff, and report progress regularly to the district leadership team.

In the Memphis City Public School District, Executive Director Dale Kalkofen, a cabinet-level administrator, directs the NAS effort. A group of design facilitators, who provide direct support to the schools that are implementing designs, reports to her. Kalkofen believes that design-based assistance and the involvement of NAS is paramount to the district's efforts to improve schools. "Design-based assistance is not an 'add-on' to the continuous improvement efforts of Memphis City Schools," Kalkofen says. "New American Schools is central to improving achievement for all students."

To direct and coordinate its own comprehensive school reform efforts, Broward County (Fla.) Public Schools has created a new position, director of whole-school reform. A partial job description includes:

- directing the process of selecting, planning, and implementing NAS designs;
- serving as a district liaison with NAS and supervising the implementation of the designs at school sites;
- developing and implementing a plan to provide a channel of information about the school reform process to schools, district personnel, and the community — and to get feedback from all these audiences;
- directing the submission of all documents related to the planning, implementation, evaluation, and documentation of designs; and
- researching and identifying funding sources to continue implementation of designs.

District leadership is committed to ensuring that schools receive support to implement design-based school change and thereby fulfill the district's accountability and improvement expectations. They have assigned resource teachers as liaisons among schools, central offices, and Design Teams. Nancy Terrel, director of strategic planning for Broward County Public School District, says the model ensures that "first and foremost, everyone at the district level and in the schools focuses on the transaction in the classroom."

Sally B. Kilgore, director of the Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute, agrees the district must assign a single senior person to serve as an interpreter and spokesperson for the design. But she adds that Design Teams need "an open relationship with *multiple* people at the district level. Central office administrators responsible for curriculum and instruction, technology, and professional development need to meet regularly with Design Teams to plan and communicate a shared agenda for improvement."

sources of additional information. In the fall of 1999, a 10-part video series on CSR and NAS also will be available (for more references, see Appendix B).

Request an on-site visit from NAS staff. After reviewing materials, district and state leaders can request an on-site visit from NAS central or field staff. During this visit, NAS provides in-depth, personalized information about how the NAS strategy can complement the district's agenda and goals. In addition, NAS staff can learn more about the local context for designs and make suggestions to help the district plan an effective introduction and implementation process. Participants in the discussions should be knowledgeable about the NAS initiative and designs before the meeting to allow time for problem solving and action planning, rather than a simple information exchange.

Visit demonstration sites. District and school staff can visit demonstration sites either outside or within their own school districts to see first hand how particular designs operate in classrooms. Teachers interact with faculties that are implementing a design in order to help them choose the right design. Principals noted that this was one of the most powerful ways to convey information about designs. Visitors also noted that the on-site tour enabled them to "visualize" the design better and that they were more aware of "where we are going." An up-to-date list of NAS demonstration sites is available on the NAS Web site at www.naschools.org.

Identifying Key Stakeholders and Building a Guiding Coalition

Armed with a better understanding of comprehensive school reform and NAS and with your district's data story, the leadership team must build a guiding coalition of stakeholders to transform the vision of comprehensive school reform into a successful reality. Districts should tailor the data story discussion to target audiences, including:

- teachers, principals, and school support staff
- parents, community leaders, and business leaders
- the general public
- the media

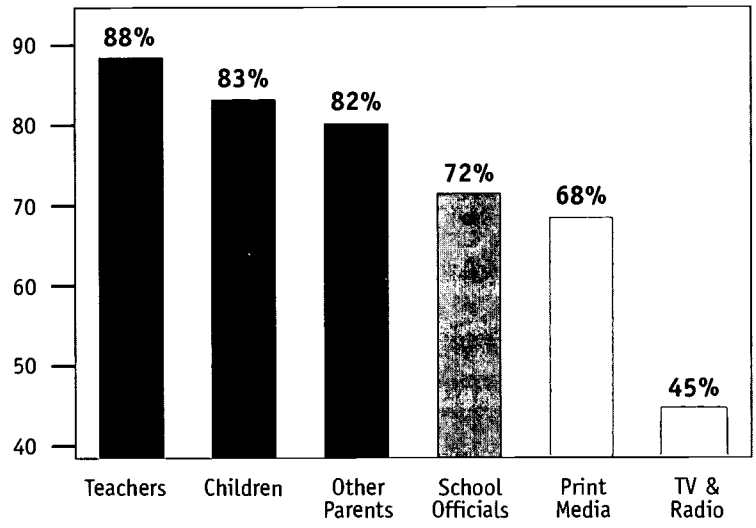
Teachers, Principals, and School Support Staff. Teachers and support staff are a critical audience for telling your data story. Without their support, the effort will fail. The importance of engaging teachers in comprehensive school change is underscored in an Education Commission of the States survey, *Listen, Discuss & Act*, which found that parents rely on teachers for information more than any other source, including the media.

Too often, teachers are unaware of student data and how to use it to improve student achievement. Consider a typical school. Teachers work hard with students in their classrooms and know how each child is progressing toward defined academic standards. But, for the most part, they are unaware of exactly where their students stand in relation to other students in their school or district. Districts may release overall test scores for publication in the local newspapers, but too little attention is given to communicating results to schools and teachers.

The best way to communicate the data story to teachers and school support staff is one on one or in small groups with superintendents or members of the leadership team. Meet at the local schools. Present the data in clear language on overheads and distribute copies to each participant. The principal should invite parents who serve on local school decision-making committees and others to attend. This is an opportunity for meaningful discussion about the need for improvement, solutions, and agreed-upon next steps. Leave ample time for questions and answers. Follow-up can take place at regular school-faculty meetings by scheduling time to analyze and discuss different aspects of the school's profile, providing updated data to teachers and support staff, and providing teachers with year-round access to student data.

Parents, Community Leaders, and Business Leaders. Open the discussion on school results to the broader community through public forums with structured and substantive discussions. Use targeted mailing lists and

Who parents rely on "heavily" or "somewhat heavily" as sources of information about education issues



Source: *Listen, Discuss & Act: Parents' and Teachers Views on Educational Reform*, Education Commission of the States, June 1996

send personalized invitations to meet with the superintendent, school board members, and teacher union leadership. At the meetings, share the data story and conduct facilitated discussions, recording remarks, concerns, and issues. Consider summarizing the results and feeding them back to the public. Establish regular times for people to come together to discuss recent data and related progress. Create parent reports on the district's data, mail them home, and give local schools the tools and resources to create their own parent reports. Remember that, if parents have ready access to applicable or understandable data, they can use the information to help their children be successful learners. The bottom line: share results, report the data to key constituent groups, and indicate how design-based assistance will improve student achievement over time.

The General Public. Clearly, citizens and taxpayers have a stake in their local schools, whether they have children in public schools or not. Taxpayers want to believe that their public schools are succeeding, students are achieving at higher levels, tax dollars are being well spent, and the district has strategies to ensure each student's success. Again, you must tell the public the whole story and engage them in the discussion.

The Media. The local media is an important way of getting your message out. School district leaders should visit editorial boards of local newspapers and general managers of local television and radio stations. Use cable television, Web sites, community newspapers, and district publications to reach broader audiences. Report results often and in an understandable and consistent format (see more about working with the media on page 22).

But don't rely on media alone. As with teachers and school staff, face-to-face communication is most effective. Use existing networks (community groups, church groups, etc.), organizations (Chamber of Commerce, United Way, The Urban League, etc.) and events (Rotary Club luncheons, Chamber of Commerce dinners, etc.) as opportunities for conversation.

Remember, during these early conversations, you don't have to "sell" the whole package all at once. The first step is to convince multiple stakeholders that some form of comprehensive school reform — as opposed to incremental changes — is needed to provide the community with the quality schools it wants. Only after people agree that major changes are needed in their local schools will they be ready to consider the specific reform approaches offered by NAS.

CHAPTER 4: GETTING STRATEGIC — AND CONNECTING THE DOTS

Unlike many school reform activities, comprehensive designs are not "off-the-shelf" packages that administrators purchase and distribute to teachers who simply read the directions and use the program. The designs require both the schools and the district to rethink current policies and practices and then sometimes make difficult choices and changes. This kind of change effort requires strong, consistent leadership and a strategic planning process that involves all stakeholders.

Commitment and communication must start at the top. It is the superintendent's responsibility to ensure that there is knowledge of and support for the designs at all levels of the district administration. A perceived lack of commitment or interest from district leadership is a major disincentive for schools considering comprehensive designs.

Building a Common Reality Through a Strategic Plan

We assume that most, if not all, districts have a strategic plan for school improvement. (See box, page 14, for a summary, or see Appendix A for a detailed description of the strategic planning process Cincinnati used — with assistance from NAS — to develop its widely acclaimed strategic plan.) For districts with a strategic plan, the major challenge is to make sure the changes being proposed as part of comprehensive school reform are aligned with that strategic plan. Otherwise, the district runs the risk of having schools heading off in several directions at once — the elements of comprehensive school reform layered on top of or to the side of the district's existing strategic plan and reform initiatives. That's a sure-fire recipe for resistance and confusion.

Instead, be sure to align and integrate any changes in policy and practice with the district's existing plan. Connect the dots among all programs and reform initiatives so they add up to a unified whole — a focused reform effort that all stakeholders can understand and support. Use an open engagement process and involve multiple stakeholders — administrators, teachers, parents, students, community members, and business leaders — in this important work. This approach is more time consuming than top-down dictates, but it ensures the kind of long-term buy-in that is needed to make and *sustain* changes of this magnitude.

Mapping Resources

One of the first undertakings of the leadership team should be to conduct a resource-mapping effort to identify existing reform programs and potential sources of support and opposition.

Resource mapping is essential as the leadership team begins to develop the district's strategic plan. It builds agreement and understanding within the leadership team, reducing the possibility that schools will perceive the new initiative as an add-on, one more "flavor of the month." From a public engagement standpoint, the resource-mapping effort puts internal and external audiences on the same page and gives the district a strategic focus that helps it thoughtfully introduce designs to school communities in a compelling and effective manner.

Elements of a Resource Map: Ask Key Questions

District Reform Efforts

- How long has the program or model been in existence?
- Do we have evidence that student achievement is improving?
- Do we have realistic goals and effective evaluations in place to measure progress?
- Does the program have the support of teachers in the school?
- Do we have evidence of parent and community support?
- How is the program funded?

Professional Development

- Do we have a systemic professional development policy in place?
- Who is responsible for selecting and developing professional development opportunities? Are teachers involved?
- Is professional development strategic and aimed toward improving teaching and learning in schools? Is it tied to school improvement plans and schoolwide reform initiatives?
- How do teachers find out about professional development activities?
- Do individual schools have flexibility to determine training and professional development?
- Where do the resources for professional development come from?
- How, if at all, are teachers compensated for participating in professional development?
- Are there professional development opportunities for principals and support staff?

(See *How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure*, M. Bruce Haslam, *Getting Better by Design Series*, Vol. 4, from New American Schools.)

Resource Reallocation

- Are resources directed toward achieving the district's stated goals?
- Has the district identified major categories of spending (salaries, professional development, curriculum, assessment, facilities maintenance, transportation, etc.)?
- What percentage of the district's budget is transferred to the schools? What is the district's long-term goal for allocating money directly to schools and teachers?
- Have federal, state, and private funding sources been appropriately coordinated?
- Does the public understand cost per student, sources of revenue, and expenditures?

(See *How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation*, Allan Odden, *Getting Better by Design Series*, Vol. 3, from New American Schools.)

Community Engagement

- What community resources — both traditional and nontraditional — support the district's reform initiatives?
- Do parents and community members support and agree with the district's current direction? How does the district measure customer satisfaction?
- Does the district have the support of the business community?
- Is there a coherent plan to coordinate the work of social service agencies, foundations, religious organizations, and associations to improve student learning and behavior in schools?

(For more information on communications and community support, see chapter 5.)

Determining District Readir

Answering these key questions is an important first step for the district leadership team, teachers, and other stakeholders as they begin to develop a strategic plan. These guiding questions can help the district leadership team assess its own level of "readiness" for comprehensive school reform. Research and experience show that most districts must rethink how they allocate resources in order to support a comprehensive school reform effort.

Based on what other districts have learned while implementing comprehensive designs, NAS has developed a self-assessment tool for districts engaged in comprehensive school reform. The tool lists the characteristics of both a "traditional" school district *and* a district whose policies and practices have been aligned with a comprehensive school reform effort. The following descriptions highlight some of the major changes you can expect to see.

▶ District Reform Efforts

Traditional: Educators hold different expectations for different groups of students.
CSR District: Educators believe all students are capable of reaching high standards and that it is the school's responsibility to help students achieve those goals.

Traditional: Textbooks, rather than standards, drive curriculum.
CSR District: Standards and a related curriculum are in place to guide school instruction.

Traditional: Assessments are aligned poorly with curriculum, instruction, and standards, and test scores are referenced to national norms rather than performance standards.
CSR District: Student assessments use multiple, diverse approaches and are aligned with instruction and curriculum based on community and state performance standards.

Traditional: The district holds schools accountable for student achievement but does not provide support.
CSR District: The district is organized to help schools reach their performance goals and share accountability with schools for results.

Traditional: The district provides few incentives for staff to transform their school.
CSR District: The district develops an incentive system for schools implementing designs that might include: salary increases for time spent implementing a comprehensive school reform design; bonuses for all staff based on student performance improvement; and opportunities for additional control of funds.

▶ Resources

Traditional: The district has limited or no investment funds for comprehensive school reform.
CSR District: Schools have access to investment funds through lump-sum funding to the school or through a fund created at the district level for schools implementing designs.

Traditional: The district views investment as limited to buildings and equipment.
CSR District: The district sets aside a percentage of its operating budget for investments in CSR. This set-aside can be augmented with grant funds from outside sources.

Traditional: All funds are allocated annually to functional activities.
CSR District: The district has a multi-year investment strategy that is updated annually.

Traditional: The district's allocations for school-level improvements are governed by formulas based on school demographics.
CSR District: The district targets a portion of investment funding to schools that are beginning to implement comprehensive school designs.

Traditional: The district has responsibility for developing both the technology infrastructure and the technology system at each school.
CSR District: The district creates a systemwide technology infrastructure and each school has the flexibility to create a technology program that suits its instructional goals.

ess: A Self-Assessment Tool

▶ Professional Development

Traditional: Professional development is an add-on, individualized task for teachers and administrators that is not aligned with the goals and objectives of a comprehensive school reform effort.
CSR District: The district office and community agree that teaching and professional development is at the center of any school improvement effort. The district aligns its professional development components with those in the designs so there is effective, consistent training and development for teachers.

Traditional: Centralized decision-making and isolation of individual teachers, combined with a lack of collaborative planning, limits capacity of school staff to engage in a long-term comprehensive improvement effort.
CSR District: School staffs have the training and experience they need to make informed decisions about implementing comprehensive designs and sustaining a change process.

Traditional: The district is responsible for determining the content, format, and schedule of professional development training.
CSR District: Responsibility for planning and paying for professional development is vested with school staffs.

Traditional: There is limited evaluation of professional development activities, and evaluation results do not inform the planning and design of future activities.
CSR District: There is continuous evaluation of professional development activities, and evaluations are used to give feedback to Design Teams and to inform the planning and design of future activities.

Traditional: Instructional practices are governed by state and district guidelines.
CSR District: Schools have the ability to restructure teacher time over the day, week, and year to align instructional practices with the requirements of the comprehensive school design.

▶ School Operations

Traditional: There is a standard schedule for all schools in the district.
CSR District: Schools organize their schedules to support the design and focus academic needs on key areas such as reading and math.

Traditional: The district has an approved textbook list; funds for book purchases cannot be applied toward comprehensive school design.
CSR District: Schools are able to purchase appropriate materials that support implementation of a comprehensive school design.

Traditional: Personnel decisions are made according to the union contract and the district.
CSR District: Schools have the power to hire, train, and release staff to support the instructional needs of the design. As much as possible, union contracts and personnel practices are aligned to support this arrangement.

Traditional: Incentive systems are based on seniority.
CSR District: Teacher rewards and advancement are based on effort, student results, and other results-based indicators.

Traditional: The district controls the budget.
CSR District: Schools manage their budgets within established parameters and are free to allocate funds to support comprehensive designs aimed at reaching the district's student achievement goals.

▶ Community Engagement

Traditional: The public has little understanding of what goes on in schools, what is needed to improve student achievement in their community, and how long it should take.
CSR District: The public has a broad understanding of comprehensive school reform, understands the need for ongoing professional development, and is aware of the time frame needed to see results.

Traditional: Communication with parents and the community is through newsletters and PR materials.
CSR District: The public is provided maximum access to clear and quality information on school activities and data on student performance, and there are mechanisms for discussion and feedback.

Traditional: Parent- and public-engagement skills and efforts are not rewarded at the school or district level, and training is not routinely available.
CSR District: District and school leaders are trained to communicate effectively with parents and the public, and their efforts in these areas are evaluated continuously.

CASE STUDY
PLANNING STRATEGICALLY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM CINCINNATI

The *process* used to develop a district strategic plan is as worthy an effort as the strategic plan itself. The Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) in Cincinnati, Ohio, has received national attention for its five-year strategic plan, *Students First*. With expertise, support, and assistance from partners such as New American Schools, Education Commission of the States, the Panasonic Foundation, IBM, and the National Science Foundation, the district spent months developing the elements of the plan. The district then released a draft version, which was revised and strengthened during a four-month public-engagement process.

Steps to Follow When Developing a Strategic Plan

1. Communicate the Need
2. Engage the Public
3. Think Strategically
4. Set Bold, Measurable Goals and Targets
5. Share the Results

CPS developed *Students First* based on the research and experience of New American Schools. NAS has learned that districts must focus on the following activities if they want to support design-based assistance:

- creating high standards and aligning assessments to set clear guidelines;
- building or rebuilding a professional development infrastructure that supports the implementation of designs;
- engaging the public around student performance;
- decentralizing authority over budgets, staffing, and curriculum and instruction to schools; and
- reallocating resources to support design implementation.

CHAPTER 5: ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING GOOD COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communication is essential throughout the process of introducing comprehensive school reform to communities. Districts need good communications within the leadership team and among the team and all the key stakeholders. And they need good communications at all stages of the process — building the data case for change, revising the strategic plan, and getting NAS' and other quality designs into individual schools. Like the notion of comprehensive school reform itself, the kind of communications that NAS advocates is new to most districts.

For years, states and districts simply told teachers, parents, and communities about educational changes in their schools. Evidence in states and districts across the country tells us that one-way, top-down communication no longer works; neither does an exclusive reliance on the news media. Lots of press releases, positive headlines in the local paper, and a good "spin" on a school story are helpful, but not sufficient.

As a condition of their support for change, parents, teachers, and community leaders want to be consulted about issues such as standards, assessments, professional development, and school safety. They want direct access to information. And they want a say in important decisions affecting their children, students, and community. As a result, policymakers and practitioners are using new communications tools to engage teachers, parents, and others to improve achievement for all students.

The following is adapted from a report published by the Education Commission of the States, New American Schools, and A-Plus Communications, called *Building Support for Schools: A Practical Guide to Strategic Communications*. This step-by-step guide offers advice for states and districts to organize their communications efforts strategically to build support for quality schools.

In general, a strategic communications plan has multiple benefits. It:

- ties school improvement plans to the public's priorities. For example, it helps put the key data points into context in order to make a strong case for comprehensive school reform, as noted in chapter 2.
- keeps you focused and helps you see how each piece of the plan moves you closer to the goal, tying directly into the strategic plan itself.

- provides a coherent picture of the overall work, not a fragmented laundry list of programs and activities. This helps achieve the alignment and integration discussed in chapter 4.
- allows districts to match the work to the available resources (both money and people) and identify where to go for additional help.
- involves more proactive planning and less communication by crisis; the work that should be routine and predictable *becomes* routine and predictable.

The key elements of a strategic communications plan and how they relate to building public support for comprehensive school reform are:

Set specific communications goals. Determine exactly what you want each stakeholder group to do.

Listen to what people want. This will help you explain specifically and convincingly how comprehensive school reform addresses each group's priorities.

Pinpoint your target audiences. This work also is done by the leadership team discussed in chapter 3. Having a goal that says, "communicate with the public," doesn't help. There are many different publics, such as teachers, parents, business leaders, and students.

Be clear about what you want to say. Make sure your messages make the best case possible to each targeted group.

Use plain language. Avoid jargon. Make sure your messages make sense.

Identify the most effective communicators. Typically, the best strategy is to have teachers talk with teachers, parents with parents, and so forth. This is where you might want to make use of veteran NAS teachers, parents, and others from communities that are using comprehensive school reform successfully to get better results for students.

Show student work. If you have examples of student work to make the case for change, use them. Also use examples of student work from a school or district that has changed; let people see the difference. Visits to demonstration sites also are especially compelling testimony.

Create opportunities to communicate. Plan ahead and take advantage of existing organizations and meetings. If necessary, call new meetings, develop new publications, or produce public service announcements.

Implement the plan. Planning is one thing, getting the work done is another. Firmly establish who will do what — and when.

Get the resources right. This might mean reallocating resources, or matching resources to needs, a central element of comprehensive school reform.

As a condition of their support for change, parents, teachers, and community leaders want to be consulted about issues such as standards, assessments, professional development, and school safety.

Set priorities. You'll never have enough time, money, or people to communicate with everyone about every key issue related to comprehensive school reform. You should decide on the two or three key audiences and the two or three key issues that will be the primary focus.

Evaluate results. Set up evaluation measures, with specific performance targets, at the beginning. Implement the plan, determine what works and what does not, and make adjustments. Like comprehensive school reform itself, strategic communications planning requires effective use of data.

CHAPTER 6: MATCHING SCHOOLS WITH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL REFORM MODELS

Selecting a design can be an empowering and unifying experience for a school and community. The critical first step is to ensure that the educators and parents who have the most at stake are prepared to choose the most appropriate design and implement it successfully. This section looks at:

- helping each school assess its needs;
- introducing and matching designs;
- supporting teachers in selecting a design;
- defining the role of the district in the matching process; and
- involving parents in design-based assistance.

Conducting a Needs Assessment in Schools

First, each school should conduct a needs assessment similar to the assessment that the district did earlier. This ensures that schools know what to look for when choosing a design and gives teachers and parents the chance to drive the reform effort in their schools. The needs assessment should be led by the principal, teachers, and parents, with support and guidance from the district. The heart of the needs assessment, of course, is a thorough examination of student performance data to identify areas of greatest weakness, which then become the focus of the reform effort.

The resulting document should become the guide for day-to-day operations; it should not be left on the shelf to collect dust. Schools generally are not accustomed to this kind of data-driven planning, but it is a key to success.

Ideally, by the time schools begin conducting a needs assessment, principals, teachers, support staff, and parents will have heard about comprehensive school reform and NAS. District leaders will have communicated to schools the need for this approach, been clear about how it differs from traditional piecemeal programs, and stressed the need for improved student results.

The Role of the District in Assessing School Needs

In its most recent research, *Lessons from New American Schools' Scale-Up Phase, Prospects for Bringing Designs to Multiple Schools* (Susan J. Bodilly, March 1998), RAND found that higher levels of implementation were associated with districts:

- whose leadership was perceived by teachers as stable, strongly supportive of the effort, and skilled in communications;
- that lacked political crises;
- that had a culture of trust between the central office and the schools;
- that provided school-level autonomy commensurate with the need to promote the design; and
- that provided additional resources for professional development and teacher planning time.

Susan Bodilly, senior social scientist with RAND Corporation who has been evaluating design-based assistance for years, says her research underscores the need for districts to play an active role in helping schools assess their needs. "Districts need to help schools do a thorough needs assessment, analyze their data (not just test scores), build capacity, and help schools plan for both short- and long-term goals."

Steps districts should take to help assess school needs:

- Communicate the need for NAS-style comprehensive school reform and how it fits into the district's strategic plan, goals, and vision.

LEARNING ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL DESIGNS

The National Education Association's (NEA's) Keys to Excellence for Your Schools (KEYS) initiative assesses school quality from the teachers' perspective. KEYS uses 11 research-based indicators of school quality to define conditions that correlate to student achievement. A set of questions related to each of these quality indicators helps schools match their own practices to those of successful schools. *For more information on the KEYS initiative, contact the NEA at 202-822-7350.*

In addition, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) has developed a set of tools designed to help states, districts, and schools make knowledgeable choices about comprehensive school designs. This school self-assessment supports looking at schools through four lenses:

1. Learning and teaching
2. Governance and management
3. School improvement and professional development
4. Parent and community involvement

Schools are asked to make judgments about their schools by answering questions in each of these categories and providing evidence for the judgments. *For more information, call NCREL at 1-800-356-2735.*

- Provide understandable data to schools — test scores, enrollment, suspension/expulsion rates, attendance rates, and customer satisfaction surveys. Aggregate the data in a clear format to provide a complete analysis.
- Take time to work with individual schools, helping them analyze student performance data carefully and thoughtfully, and highlight why change is needed and how comprehensive school reform can help.
- Reinforce the importance of state and local accountability measures (performance on district and/or state standardized tests) and review the current performance of schools, noting how far most schools will have to go to meet the accountability requirements.
- Inform schools in advance of curriculum changes, technology initiatives, and new textbook and supplemental material adoptions.
- Help schools determine how resources currently are spent and whether those resources are focused on raising student achievement.
- Be realistic about implications; existing programs that are not effective may need to be eliminated.

An individual school can conduct its needs assessment in conjunction with a Design Team, according to Greg Farrell, president of Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB). Meeting with the principal and faculty in the initial stages of partnering, ELOB

CASE STUDY
ATLAS COMMUNITIES: MAPPING FOR AN IDEAL MATCH

ATLAS Communities, a NAS design, helps schools build their individual and institutional capacity to create and sustain communities of lifelong learners. A structural foundation allows all members of a school community to work together to solve problems and build an educational agenda that supports the growth and development of every student. This educational agenda is created by a broadly participatory, data-driven process.

To ensure that decisions are made by those who are affected most by the results, ATLAS Communities has developed *Charting the Course: The ATLAS Pre-Implementation Process Map*, a four- to six-month assessment schools undergo to determine if ATLAS is the right Design Team for them.

Linda Gerstle, director of ATLAS Communities, says *Charting the Course* is the starting point of a community journey toward school transformation. "*Charting the Course* builds capacity and common understanding in a school by asking the right questions before a school decides to make a commitment to ATLAS," she says.

The assessment process has three key principles:

- It is data driven and jointly constructed by ATLAS core staff and the school community.
- It is based on a model of school systems as accountable entities.
- It is a demonstration of organizational development for the school district over the course of four to six months.

Charting the Course starts with the formation of an ongoing Exploration Team. This district-level team is made up of the principal, teachers, parents, district central-office personnel, and community members. Through a two-day initial retreat facilitated by ATLAS staff, a series of monthly on-site meetings, and a culminating event, the Exploration Team completes a district portfolio that serves as the basis of the joint decision to proceed (or not) with ATLAS.

"Choosing a Design Team like ATLAS is a major commitment to a systemic approach to change," says Gerstle. "It should never be a rushed decision, but one that looks at every dimension of schooling — teaching and learning, assessments, family and communities, management and decision-making, and professional development."

Because ATLAS looks at schools as pathways that involve students and teachers in a continuous journey of teaching and learning from prekindergarten to grade 12, *Charting the Course* brings school communities together, perhaps for the first time. "People representing all grade levels who have never met before sit down to talk," says Gerstle. "The process is an up-front investment that helps whole schools transform." After all, Gerstle adds, "the stakes are too high" for a less-than-ideal match.

representatives take them through a series of questions that are directly related to ELOB design principles to determine the faculty's willingness to accept the design in the context of their needs. Questions include: Do you have block scheduling and would you be willing to consider it? Do you work in teacher teams? Is there a commitment to extensive professional development? "This assessment," says Farrell, "allows everyone to see if there is a willingness and capability for an ELOB match."

RAND's research confirms that implementation is more likely to fail in schools that are forced to implement a particular design than in schools that are free to choose among designs.

Sally B. Kilgore, director of the Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute, agrees that Design Teams can "help schools learn about themselves." With the district's support and embrace of a design, schools are ready to seek help from Design Teams in determining what has worked, what hasn't worked, and how to improve student achievement, Kilgore notes.

Introducing and Matching Designs

A partnership between a school and a Design Team, initiated by the school and based on shared expectations and commitments, is a powerful vehicle for school transformation and improvement. But before any partnerships are made, schools must have the opportunity to learn about the designs so they can make smart choices.

Districts need to provide extensive information to schools about designs in a variety of ways to various audiences (see Chapter 2 for details). Leadership should meet face to face with each school's leadership team, walk them through NAS and Design Team materials, and discuss how design-based assistance is linked directly to the district's strategic plan.

The act of choosing is, in itself, a powerful motivator for schools undertaking a restructuring process. RAND's research confirms that implementation is more likely to fail in schools that are forced to implement a particular design than in schools that are free to choose among designs.

As a school gathers additional information and moves toward reaching consensus on a design, faculty members and administrators might consider the following questions:

- How does this design fit with our own local vision, goals, needs, and objectives?
- What is the district's role in helping us implement this design? What changes at the district and state levels will be necessary or helpful to implement this design successfully?
- Does this design require significant changes in the way we teach and assess students (such as using interdisciplinary, project-based curricula; multi-age groupings; and/or performance assessments)? Are these changes consistent with the expressed values and needs of the community, the professional views of the faculty, and the current data on student performance?
- What sort of professional development does this Design Team provide? What changes would this design require in the way teachers work? Is it consistent with our plan for upgrading the teaching and learning program at this school?
- Does this Design Team provide student performance standards and curricula, or will we develop our own standards and curricula? If standards and curricula are provided by the Design Team, are they compatible with those already established by the district and/or state?
- What role does the community play in schools working with this Design Team? Is there an emphasis on service to the community? Does the design involve integrating social and family services into the school?
- Are we willing to eliminate existing programs and activities that are contradictory to this design or that duplicate elements of this design? Are we willing to eliminate those that are not contributing to high student achievement and focus our efforts on implementing a comprehensive design?

RAND Corporation, in *Lessons from New American Schools Development Corporation's Demonstration Phase*, identifies some of the components that schools should look for in effective Design Teams. According to the authors, Design Teams that provided the following information were more likely to be accepted by the school, though this does not guarantee successful introduction of the design into the school:

- a thorough, compelling introduction of the design provided by the team for all staff;
- relevant training that models behavioral changes or new processes provided to all administrators and teachers at the school;
- specific materials and models to use in classrooms, committees, or other forums for reform;

- help of the Design Team members or presence of a school-level facilitator to aid staff in day-to-day implementation;
- teacher teaming to work on design issues or curriculum development;
- participatory governance to ensure continued teacher support of the design; and
- perhaps most important, teacher time for curriculum development, teacher-to-teacher interactions, and practice at the individual and school levels to become adept at new behaviors.

For more information see the *Comprehensive School Reform Series*, published by the Education Commission of the States: *Identifying Effective Models, Criteria and Questions, Allocating Federal Funds*. To obtain copies, visit the NAS Web site at www.naschools.org.

Comprehensive Models for School Improvement: Finding the Right Match and Making It Work, published by Educational Research Service, is available through www.ers.org or by calling 703-243-2100.

Supporting Teachers

It is essential that the entire school staff be included in the information-gathering effort. While a few teachers or administrators might take the lead in obtaining the information, all staff members need an opportunity to explore, discuss, and ask questions about implementing a design. It is important to devote several faculty meetings or other times to discuss what it means to choose and implement a comprehensive school design.

"Thoughtful discussion about design-based assistance needs to occur in every school, by group, and at all levels," says Merri Mann, director of the United Teachers of Dade. She says teachers need to feel comfortable about the selection process and with the designs. "Districts and schools need to give teachers time to get to know the designs through a variety of forms and forums. Teachers want to know if a design will work in their school and need ample time for discussions around teaching and learning and how the designs are tied to the school's improvement plan.

ELOB's Farrell echoes the need for Design Teams and schools to take time to analyze the match as well. "Schools need real and focused time to explore designs in order to implement them successfully," Farrell says. Once the match is made, it is the responsibility of the Design Team to be responsive to the school's needs and tailor the design accordingly, he explains. "The match is a long-term process and commitment, one that requires annual review to discuss shared goals, targets, problems, and continuous improvement."

As far as sources of information about designs are concerned, practitioners believe that teachers learn best about designs from other teachers. "When teachers can talk to other teachers about designs, there is a great sense of understanding and credibility," says Jim Cleerer, former teacher and current site director for Co-NECT in San Antonio, Texas.

Modern Red Schoolhouse's Kilgore agrees, "Teachers want to hear about designs from other teachers who are implementing the designs in their own classrooms." Kilgore adds that, in addition to site visits, teachers can view videotapes or link to classrooms via satellite.

Once faculty members have had sufficient time to explore information from various sources about the designs, they need to come together as a group to reach

CASE STUDY
SUCCESS FOR ALL AND EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY: PARTNERING FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

Dick Lewis, director of district relations for the Success For All Foundation, provides a model matching effort in East Orange, New Jersey.

"Superintendent John Howard had investigated Success For All on his own prior to calling me," recalls Lewis. "We met for several hours, and in a subsequent meeting he brought in his key instructional leaders." Lewis emphasized the importance of this step to ensure that Success For All fits into the district's overall goals and long-range plans. "It's not enough to simply work one on one with a school," says Lewis. "The design must be part of the district's strategic plan."

To strengthen the partnership agreement and sustain the effort with the East Orange School District, Lewis worked with the district to develop the "Success For All/Roots and Wings District Partnership Standard Operating Procedures." Elements of the partnership agreement include:

- alignment with district goals and objectives;
- a system for adopting the designs;
- accountability measures for student achievement and a system for sharing student progress;
- professional development and training plans, both short- and long-term;
- a strategic plan for budgeting and funding the effort; and
- quality assurance that the design will be implemented in a systematic manner.

"All districts will go over bumps — superintendent turnovers, budget crises, school board politics — but if a design is not part of the district's long-range plan, then everything is vulnerable," says Lewis. "That's the benefit of the partnership agreement; it's a commitment that 'we're in this together for the long haul.'"

consensus to move forward with one of the designs. Each NAS Design Team requires that between 60 and 80 percent (depending on the design) of a school's teaching staff vote in favor of implementing the design before the team will agree to work with that school. This requirement reflects the Design Teams' experience that, if faculty members have the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful exploration process and choose the design that best fits their school, they are more invested in contributing to the success of the design than if the choice is mandated. In the vast majority of schools across the country, teachers and parents who play a substantive role in the discussion and selection of a design are comfortable with the choice.

The Role of the District in the Matching Process

Research continues to show that matches between schools and designs are most successful when the district supports the matching and implementation of designs. In her 1998 report *Lessons from New American Schools' Scale-Up Phase: Prospects for Bringing Designs to Multiple Schools*, Susan Bodilly from RAND wrote that higher levels of implementation are associated with:

- clear understanding of the design;
- time to plan for implementation;
- free acceptance of the design by teachers and schools;
- stable school leadership; and
- lack of pre-existing crises or tensions.

The outcome of the matching process should be more than simply a pairing of schools and Design Teams. It should represent a serious commitment by the school community to work with a Design Team on an intensive restructuring effort, a commitment by a Design Team to work with a particular school to achieve predetermined goals, and a commitment by a district to support each school actively in implementing a design.

District leaders, through the leadership team, can make these outcomes a reality by taking the following steps.

Step One: Setting the Stage for Success

- Make clear to district-office support staff and school staff the relationship between the NAS initiative and existing district initiatives; express solid and consistent confidence that comprehensive school reform can help schools improve and help students reach high standards.
- Explain to schools what a comprehensive design is and how it differs from traditional piecemeal add-on programs — and be realistic about its implications.
- Appoint at least one full-time liaison to manage the process of introducing designs to schools. The liaison, with staff support, is responsible for planning and coordinating the introduction process, working directly with schools to share information and answer questions about the process, regularly interacting with district leaders to report on progress and bring up emerging issues, and developing relationships with Design Team staff.
- Communicate directly with Design Team leaders to establish shared expectations about capacity and implementation requirements.
- Provide Design Teams with information about the district and schools, including demographic information, current reform initiatives, how funds currently are used, the scope of professional development activities, the nature of the political situation in the district, and high-profile issues taking place in the community.

WHAT PARENTS WANT TO KNOW

It is a good idea for school leaders to place themselves in parents' shoes when they prepare public engagement strategies for informing parents and others about comprehensive school reform. You can anticipate questions from parents such as:

- What changes will there be in my child's classroom?
- Will teachers take the required training during school hours? If so, who will teach my child during those times?
- How much does this design cost?
- Will my child still have access to art, music, and physical education?
- How will I know if my child is improving in school? What should I look for?
- Will there be ways other than state and district tests to judge my child's performance?
- Is there enough district support and commitment for these reforms or will it be cut because of a financial crisis?
- What happens if the principal leaves? Will the school stay committed to these changes?

Step Two: Planning and Alignment

- Align the school-improvement planning process to support schools choosing a comprehensive design. Consider the school's burden when making demands for multiple plans. In some districts, schools are permitted to submit their plan for implementing a design in lieu of the various plans previously required (e.g., a Title I schoolwide or school improvement plan).
- Reinforce the importance of local accountability measures (performance on district and state tests) and review current performance of schools.
- Work with individual schools to help them analyze student performance data carefully to highlight why change is needed and how comprehensive school reform can help.
- Offer training in decision-making and consensus-building skills.

Step Three: Finding and Reallocating Resources

- Consider how resource reallocation can help schools pay for Design Team services and materials in both the short and long term.
- Give schools control over their professional development budgets to free up resources for design-related training activities.
- Help schools redesign their schedules in order to give teachers more time for planning and collaboration, and use established professional development time to support teachers in doing design-related work and training.
- Coordinate the introduction process with district and school planning and budgeting timelines.

Parents as Partners in Choosing Designs

As discussed in Chapter 3, when districts are first learning about designs, a leadership team is identified to support comprehensive school reform and to serve as ambassadors to the reform effort. Parents are represented on this leadership team and take responsibility, along with other members of the leadership team, for bringing designs to schools. Parent and community support is essential if the effort is to be sustained and integrated into a school's long-term vision.

At the local level, parents should be part of the leadership team, exploring designs and communicating their findings back to the school community at large. Parent engagement is one way to begin building broad-based awareness and understanding of schoolwide reform within a school.

Once a school selects a Design Team, school leaders must keep parents informed of the changes taking place in the school. Unfortunately, too often parents are not aware that a school has adopted a design; if they are aware, they have little knowledge of the magnitude of the change or what it means for their child.

District communications offices certainly can help communicate these changes through direct mail, Web sites, public presentations and forums, and the media. But the school's leadership should take the lead in facilitating two-way communications about comprehensive school reform.

There are several ways to communicate with parents.

- Include information about the changes at school in every issue of the school newsletter. Be specific and give examples, but do not use jargon.
- Invite parents in to see student work every few months, not just at the open house. Remember to invite the community — social service agencies, churches, foundations, and the media.

PARENTS IN NEW JERSEY: INVOLVED FROM THE BEGINNING

The New Jersey Department of Education requires parent and community involvement as schools embark on whole-school reform efforts across the state.

New Jersey Assistant Commissioner of Education Barbara Anderson notes that each school undergoing a whole-school reform effort must build parent and community involvement into their school-based planning process. And New Jersey regulations require that parents serve as members of the school management team — the team responsible for exploring, choosing, and implementing designs. With direct support from the state department of education, the school management team guides the school through the whole-school change process, making decisions on budget allocation, professional development, and staffing.

"While the department provides support to districts and schools selecting models and designs," says Anderson, "it is important that decisions be made at the school, and parents are critical stakeholders in that decision-making process." The state requires parent involvement to send the message that "parents are partners in our schools; we cannot succeed without them."

Further, Anderson believes that parents of students in schools where comprehensive school reform efforts are under way must be engaged in the changes taking place in their students' classrooms. "Parents need valuable input to make informed decisions to help their children succeed," Anderson says.

- Create forums for parents to discuss the changes and ask questions of the principals and teachers.
- Ask Design Teams for help in communicating about the designs to parents and the community.
- Use parent-teacher conferences to foster two-way communication between the classroom and home.

According to a 1996 ECS survey, three-quarters of parents surveyed want to make connections with other school communities working on similar efforts in education reform. They believe this interaction will make them more comfortable with proposals designed to change their schools. The research strongly supports the need for schools with Design Teams within a district to interact and communicate with each other.

ECS and NAS developed a booklet, *Comprehensive School Reform: Criteria and Questions*, to guide state and district policy-makers to ask questions about school reform models and the Design Teams that develop them. The section on parent and community involvement suggests asking the following questions.

- Does the Design Team developer require evidence of parent and community support before entering an agreement with a school?
- Does the developer concretely and thoroughly explain what role parents and community members will play in implementing the design? Is the developer flexible and responsive to new suggestions?
- Will the developer make clear, easy-to-understand information widely available to the community?
- Does the model have a proven track record of involving parents and community members in a meaningful way?
- How has the developer ensured and demonstrated to parents and community members that its model will meet the needs of their children?

CHAPTER 7: COMMUNICATING SHORT-TERM WINS AND BUILDING CREDIBILITY

It takes years to implement fully and see results from comprehensive school reform. However, your community can expect some visible improvements in the first year. It is important for schools, districts, and Design Teams to discuss and draft a clear set of mutual expectations for student achievement from the start. Schools and districts also should put an evaluation process in place to measure improvements at all levels.

The RAND research and the experience of the NAS Design Teams show that improved student achievement depends on a variety of factors at the school, district, and Design Team levels. Because improved student achievement is not the sole responsibility of Design Teams, it is essential that schools and districts continue to engage teachers, parents, and the community in all stages of the implementation process. Research shows that schools and districts that communicate about the implementation process and highlight short-term wins to parents and the community do the best job of managing expectations and maintaining support for the schools.

What kind of information should schools and districts share with parents and the community? In the first year of implementation, most schools implementing NAS designs see the following results:

- higher attendance rates
- fewer discipline problems
- lower student and teacher transience
- improved attitude among students and faculty
- increased parental and community involvement

Until schools start to see clear results in student achievement, this kind of positive feedback about the school's overall environment helps satisfy the public's concern for improvement. With some of the more curriculum-specific designs, schools see student achievement results within a year. All Design Teams should be able to demonstrate measurable achievement gains within three years. Of course, any data on improved student achievement should be shared with the public immediately.

Working With the Media

There is no question that it can be difficult to get reporters interested in something as broad and far-reaching as comprehensive school reform. But, while research tells us that parents receive most of their information from teachers and other parents, the general public — taxpayers and community and business members — gets most of their

information about schools from the media. Here are some tips for working with the media:

Give reporters news with substance. Stories about comprehensive school reform always should include facts and results or anticipated results. Go back to your data story in building a case for change.

Remember that it is the media's job to ask tough questions and report both sides. Americans rate education as a priority; editors want to appeal to the public's demands for accountability, results, and straightforward action for schools. Always prepare individuals — from the superintendent to principals and teachers — for tough questions from reporters. Provide media kits, test scores, commonly asked questions and answers, and contacts in local schools.

Build a base of support. Members of the leadership team are the ambassadors for comprehensive school reform. These stakeholders are the most credible voices for change to carry your message to the media. Reporters want to talk to teachers, parents, community members, and representatives from the business community about changes in schools.

Avoid jargon. A news release laced with educational jargon will wind up in the wastebasket. Write news releases, fact sheets, and reports in language your average neighbor would understand and embrace.

Show what you are doing and what you must do to improve. Always frame your message in the context of your state or district's strategic plan. Release information (test scores, reports, surveys) in conjunction with the district's mission, goals, and action steps for improvement.

Meet regularly with reporters. Conduct news conferences when you have genuine news to share with the public. More importantly, invite the media in for quarterly briefings with the superintendent and members of your leadership team. Comprehensive school reform is not a one-shot story; it is a transformation that takes time and requires consistent reporting along the way. Regular media briefings will help your district manage long-term expectations for improved results.

CASE STUDY
MEDIA RELATIONS IN MEMPHIS

Janice Crawford, executive director for communications and administrative services with Memphis City Schools, says her district keeps the media informed about comprehensive school reform efforts in a variety of ways. "We invite the media to annual design fairs, hold media briefings, and meet with editorial boards of local newspapers on a regular basis," says Crawford. "Face-to-face engagement with the media is key to helping them understand our long-term strategy for improving schools. The school district makes sure television station managers and newspaper editors are briefed on the district's progress to ensure that management, in addition to reporters, sees the value of our efforts."

A communications contact person in each school provides the district's communications department with a file of classroom story ideas "that make the designs real and come alive." Crawford's department then develops news releases and shares them with reporters or uses the story ideas for the district's internal publications.

Maintaining Involvement in the NAS Network

Districts and schools implementing NAS designs benefit from being part of a strong national network. For most schools and districts, the implementation process is marked with both successes and challenges. In order to maintain the momentum, schools and districts are encouraged to stay connected with the NAS network throughout the implementation process. Members of the NAS network are ready to share the wealth of their experiences with others and can provide newer schools and districts with insights and advice about all stages of implementation.

Members of the NAS network can:

Participate in national leadership conferences. NAS hosts one to three national conferences each year. These conferences provide an opportunity for participating states and districts to interact with one another, Design Team leaders, NAS staff and consultants, and a variety of invited speakers and panelists. The conferences focus on specific aspects of maintaining effective design implementation over time and building local capacity. Check the NAS Web site at www.naschools.org for information about the next leadership conference.

Form relationships with other NAS districts and states. Through leadership conferences, technical assistance activities, and suggestions from NAS staff, participating districts and states can connect with other sites experiencing similar challenges. These relationships have helped members of the NAS network and provide support, good ideas, and collegiality.

Receive technical assistance from NAS staff and consultants. NAS is involved in a major effort to develop practical tools to help districts build supportive environments for reform. NAS also is building a cadre of top consultants to provide high-quality assistance to districts involved in implementing designs. Members of the network will receive frequent updates on the progress of this effort and will be invited to take advantage of the tools and assistance immediately upon their availability.

Receive NAS publications. NAS and its dissemination partners, including ECS and the Education Research Service, periodically release new publications pertaining to various aspects of NAS and the Design Teams. The NAS Web site (www.naschools.org) often includes the text of new publications and always tells visitors how to obtain copies of new or existing publications. In addition, RAND Corporation publishes regular reports on its evaluation of the NAS initiative. To obtain RAND documents or additional information, contact RAND Distribution Services at 310-451-7002 or online at order@rand.org.

CONCLUSION

New American Schools produced the strategies and suggestions offered in this guide to help districts, states, and schools successfully implement comprehensive school reform by engaging the entire community in the effort to raise student achievement. We at NAS believe that the process of exploring and selecting designs represents an opportunity for schools and districts to build on the commitment and capacity of their own communities. NAS designs were developed to support schools as they strive to improve teaching and learning for all students. By offering schools and communities research-based frameworks for school improvement and on-site, consistent professional development and training, the NAS designs empower educators, parents, and community members to make good choices about strengthening and improving their schools. We hope schools and districts across the nation find this publication both practical and inspiring. We welcome your comments and feedback.

APPENDIX A: PLANNING STRATEGICALLY

LESSONS LEARNED FROM CINCINNATI

The *process* used to develop a district strategic plan is as worthy of effort as the strategic plan itself. The Cincinnati (Ohio) Public School District has received national attention for its five-year strategic plan, *Students First.* With expertise, support, and assistance from national partners, such as New American Schools, the Education Commission of the States, the Panasonic Foundation, IBM, and the National Science Foundation, the district spent months developing the elements of the plan. The district then released a draft version, which was revised and strengthened during a four-month public engagement process.

STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Communicate the Need.
2. Engage the Public.
3. Think Strategically.
4. Set Bold, Measurable Goals and Targets.
5. Share the Results.

1. Communicate the Need

The Cincinnati Public Schools data story is not unlike that of many urban school districts across the country — low test scores, high dropout rates, low student attendance, and high rates of suspensions and expulsions. Although teachers, parents, and the community recognized the need for improvement, none had specific information about district or school data. In preparation for release of the draft plan, former Superintendent J. Michael Brandt initiated a public engagement campaign around school and district data. He started with his own teachers. Brandt visited all 79 schools, met with the faculty and support staff, and presented each school's data story. The presentation included standardized test scores, state proficiency tests, SAT and ACT passing percentages, the district assessment tests, and even customer-satisfaction results. To reach district staff, parents, and the community, this information also was communicated widely in the local media, internal publications to all district employees, parent mailers, on the district's Web site, and on community cable television.

2. Engage the Public

The district released a draft version of the strategic plan, *Students First,* in August 1996, and there was immediate controversy and concerns that not enough stakeholders were at the table when the plan was developed. The district quickly reacted to these concerns and initiated four additional months of public engagement (August–December 1996) with teachers, administrators, parents, community members, business leaders, and students. These meetings and discussions resulted in a more refined and generally accepted strategic plan. This process allowed the community to play a meaningful role in the continuous development of Cincinnati Public Schools. Parents and local businesses were invested in the system. Teachers and district employees understood the district's goals and vision. Public engagement became not only an essential part of the planning process, but also a key part of the plan itself.

By the time the first draft ... was released ... , internal and external audiences had a clear understanding of the need for change.

3. Think Strategically

The Cincinnati Public Schools set specific goals and targets for students to meet or exceed in *Students First.* This new vision for Cincinnati Public Schools provided a framework for organizational change that focused on improving student achievement in every school. Schools were challenged to "think strategic," and they were required to have a clearly defined mission statement, core values, five-year strategic goals, measures, five-year targets, and strategies to meet them. Thinking strategically also meant defining and refining the traditional roles of the district, the schools, teachers, students, parents, and the community. By setting specific goals for schools and students to meet or exceed, *Students First* shifted the community's focus to what actually happens in schools and classrooms. Teaching and learning became the priority, and schools began to align their classroom practices to meet the goals and targets laid out in *Students First.* Some of the school-level changes that occurred as a result of *Students First* are:

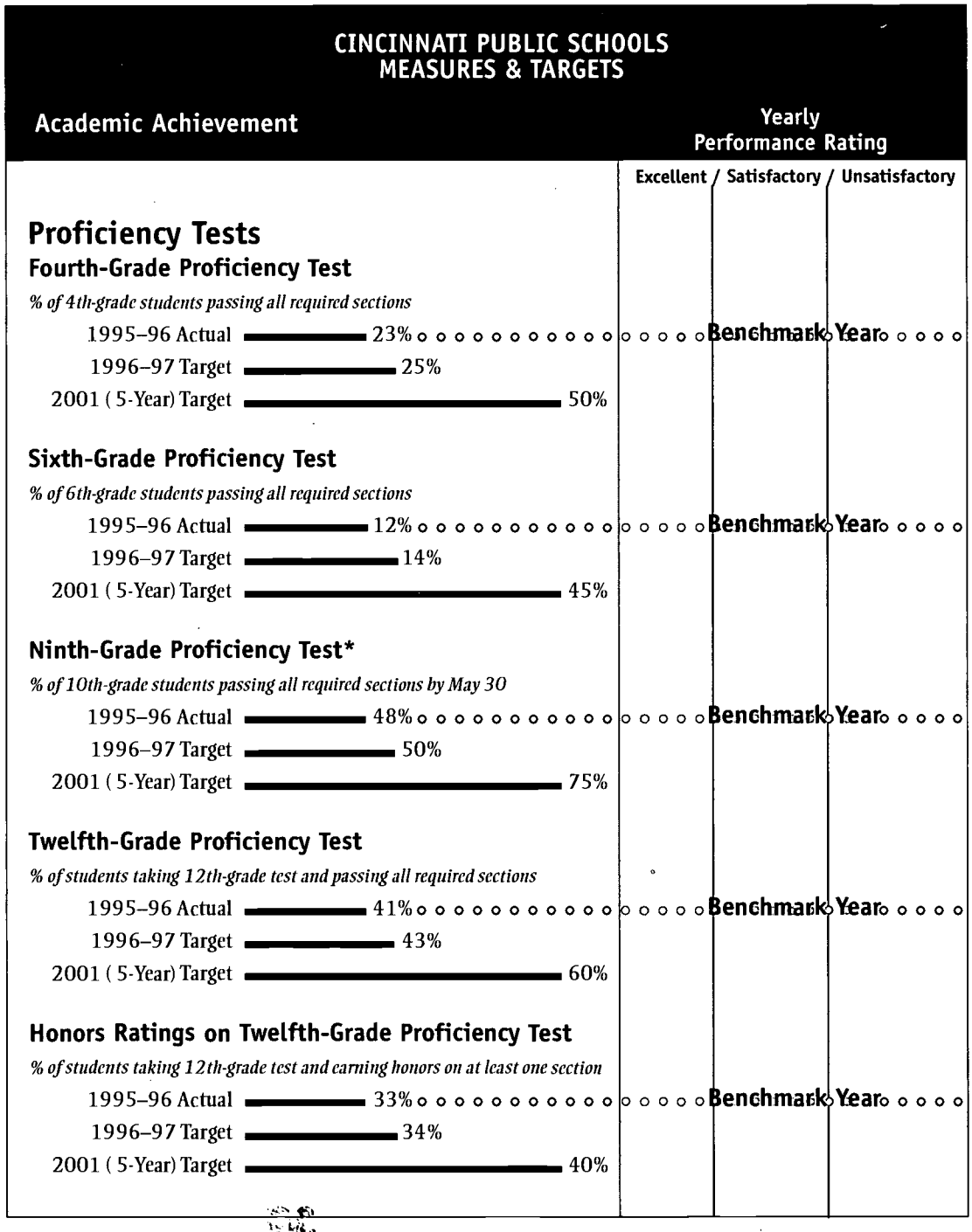
- Principals and teams of teachers are responsible for student achievement at all levels.
- Students are grouped in multi-age levels instead of by grades.
- Active, hands-on learning is emphasized in all classrooms.
- All schools adopt a program focus such as a New American Schools Design or magnet school.
- Most schools are organized as grades K–8 and 9–12.

- Decision-making is decentralized, with teachers making professional judgments about how students should meet the district's defined academic standards.
- School budgets are decentralized, with teachers, parents, and community members deciding how money is spent at their school.

4. Set Bold, Measurable Goals and Targets

Three simply stated strategic goals are outlined in *Students First*:

- All students meet or exceed high academic standards.
- All schools are safe and orderly learning environments.
- All employees of Cincinnati Public Schools are focused on satisfying the needs of our students and our customers — parents, taxpayers, and others.



*Students must pass the 9th-grade test to graduate. This shows those who have passed by the end of 10th grade.

Students First is driven by results. Within each of these strategic goals, the plan sets five-year targets for student performance on 28 educational achievement measures. Yearly targets are determined and reported alongside the actual target and the five-year targets. Each year, the district publishes *Measuring Up*, an annual performance report that gives "performance ratings" to show how well the district met the improvement targets on each measure. The rating is the same four-point scale that teachers use in the classroom to rate student progress on district promotion standards. This allows principals, teachers, all district employees and, in particular, the general public to track the district's progress over a five-year period.

The measures and targets section of *Students First* is the road map the public uses to determine student performance — past, present, and future — over a period of time. Most importantly, it helps everybody move in the same direction to ensure that students succeed.

5. Share the Results

A strategic plan is doomed to fail if it sits on shelves in administrators' district offices. If the plan and the measures and targets defined in the plan are shared widely and regularly with key stakeholders, everyone begins to feel accountable for results and improving student achievement. *Measuring Up*, Cincinnati Public Schools' Annual Performance Report, is designed to inform the community and district employees about progress on the district's mission of educating all students to meet or exceed defined academic standards. The report includes highlights of the year on the district's three primary goals: high academic achievement, safe and orderly schools, and customer satisfaction. Student performance data on 28 educational achievement measures is included in *Measuring Up*. Known as the district's "report card to the community," *Measuring Up* is released through a heavily attended news conference.

Local newspapers report each of the achievement measures, and editorial boards take particular interest in the district's accountability measures. Television and radio stations produce special reports, and key stakeholders and constituent groups are invited to attend special briefings with the superintendent. *Measuring Up* then is mailed to local and national organizations, foundations, policymakers, and state departments of education. In addition, each of the district's 6,500 employees receives a "snapshot" of the report, and individual school annual progress reports are created for each of the district's 79 schools, using the same reporting procedures and format. These school reports are compiled in a notebook and are available in schools and public libraries and to the local media.

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Volume 2 *How to Create and Manage a Decentralized Education System*, Allan Odden.

Volume 3 *How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation*, Allan Odden.

Volume 4 *How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure*, M. Bruce Haslam.

Volume 5 *How to Make the Link Between Standards, Assessments, and Real Student Achievement*, Robert Rothman.

Volume 6 *How to Create Incentives for Design-Based Schools*, Paul T. Hill.

Volume 7 *How to Build Local Support for Comprehensive School Reform*, Monica Solomon and Maria Voles Ferguson.

New American Schools Designs

As of February 1999, New American Schools (NAS) is at work in more than 1,500 schools around the country. NAS district partners commit to transforming a minimum of 30 percent of their schools within five years. Most partners are on track to meet and exceed this goal by year three. The eight NAS designs are listed below.

America's Choice School Design

Formerly known as the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, America's Choice is built on a framework of high academic standards and matched assessments. It incorporates a standards-based curriculum focused on the basics, conceptual mastery, and applications. The design quickly identifies students who fall behind and brings them back to standard, and includes a planning and management system for making the most efficient use of available resources to raise student performance.
For more information: 202-783-3668;
e-mail: schooldesign@ncee.org; www.ncee.org.

ATLAS Communities

The ATLAS design centers on pathways — groups of schools made up of high schools and the elementary and middle schools that feed into them. Teams of teachers from each pathway work together to design curriculum and assessments based on locally defined standards. The teachers in each pathway collaborate with parents and administrators to set and maintain sound management and academic policies, ultimately resulting in improved student performance.
For more information: 617-969-7100;
e-mail: Atlas@edc.org; www.edc.org/FSC/ATLAS.

Co-NECT Schools

Assisting schools in creating and managing their own high-tech equipment and network, Co-NECT uses technology to enhance every aspect of teaching, learning, professional development, and school management. Co-NECT schools are organized around small clusters of students who are taught by a cross-disciplinary team. Most students stay in the same cluster for at least two years. Teaching and learning revolve around interdisciplinary projects that promote critical skills and academic understanding, as well as integrate technology.
For more information: 617-873-5612;
e-mail: info@co-nect.com; www.co-nect.com.

Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound

Built on 10 design principles, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) operates on the belief that learning is an expedition into the unknown. ELOB draws on the power of purposeful, intellectual investigations — called learning expeditions — to improve student achievement and build character. Learning expeditions are long-term, academically rigorous, interdisciplinary studies that require students to work inside and outside the classroom. In ELOB schools, students and teachers stay together for more than a year, teachers work collaboratively, and tracking is eliminated.
For more information: 617-576-1260;
e-mail: info@elob.org; www.elob.org.

Modern Red Schoolhouse Institute

This design strives to help all students achieve high standards through the construction of a standards-driven curriculum, use of traditional and performance-based assessments, establishment of effective organizational patterns and professional development programs, and implementation of effective community-involvement strategies. Students master a rigorous curriculum, develop character, and promote the principles of democratic government. These elements of the traditional red schoolhouse are combined with a high level of flexibility in organizing instruction and deploying resources, use of innovative teaching methodologies, student groupings for continuous progress, and advanced technology as a learning and instructional management tool.
For more information: 888-275-6774;
e-mail: skilgore@mrsh.org; www.mrsh.org.

Purpose-Centered Education®
Audrey Cohen College

The Audrey Cohen College system of education focuses student learning on the study and achievement of meaningful "purposes" for each semester's academic goals. Students achieve their purposes by using their knowledge and skills to plan, carry out, and evaluate a Constructive Action® to benefit the community and the larger world. Leadership is emphasized and students are expected to meet high academic standards.
For more information: 212-343-1234;
e-mail: JanithJ@aol.com; www.audrey-cohen.edu.

Roots and Wings

This elementary school design builds on the widely used Success For All reading program and incorporates science, history, and mathematics to achieve a comprehensive academic program. The premise of the design is that schools must do whatever it takes to make sure all students succeed. To this end, Roots and Wings schools provide at-risk students with tutors, family support, and a variety of other services. While the "roots" of the design refer to mastery of basics, the "wings" represent advanced accomplishments that students achieve through interdisciplinary projects and a challenging curriculum provided by the design.
For more information: 800-548-4998;
e-mail: rslavin@inet.ed.gov; www.successforall.net.

Urban Learning Centers

The Urban Learning Centers (ULC) design is a comprehensive K–12 model for urban schools. The curriculum and instruction are designed to ensure that all students are taught in a K–12 community, enabling new strategies to overcome barriers by addressing the health and well-being of students and their families. Governance and management also are restructured to engage community members in decisionmaking and to ensure that the design can improve and evolve. ULC also incorporates the extensive use of advanced technology as an essential element for implementation of the design.
For more information: 213-622-5237;
e-mail: gpruitt@laedu.lalc.k12.ca.us; www.lalc.k12.ca.us.

New American Schools

Papers in the *Getting Better by Design* series include ...

- ◇ **Design-Based Assistance as a Cornerstone of a School Improvement Strategy**
- ◇ **How to Create and Manage a Decentralized Education System**
- ◇ **How to Rethink School Budgets to Support School Transformation**
- ◇ **How to Rebuild a Local Professional Development Infrastructure**
- ◇ **How to Make the Link Between Standards, Assessments, and Real Student Achievement**
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