# EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS ARCHIVES

## Systemic Reform in a Federated System:
## Los Angeles at the Turn of the Millennium

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**Abstract**
I synthesize some of the lessons we have learned about systemic school reform in order and derive two explicit hypotheses about when such reforms are likely to be more and less successful.  The first hypothesis focuses on program implementation: to achieve success, any systemic reform must overcome challenges at each stage of the policy-making process, from agenda-setting to policy choice to implementation.  The second hypothesis focuses on the federated nature of education policy-making in the United States: any successful systemic reform must offer a program that aligns local efforts with state and sometimes federal policy. I derive and test more specific hypotheses related to recent systemic reform efforts in the Los Angeles region—especially the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, or LAAMP—which ran from 1995 through 2001.  The case confirms the hypotheses and enables a clearer understanding of systemic school reform.

Over the last twenty years the most intense efforts at reforming public education have been focused on large urban districts. As reform efforts continued, it became popular to speak of reforms as systemic, designed to alter the whole of a school district rather than only a few schools or classrooms.

In political and policy terms, "systemic reform" often equated to establishing a large civic coalition—business, labor, elected officials, community organizations—all backing a reform plan that was partly financed by philanthropists or foundations. In Paul Hill's words, reformers agreed that "it takes a city" to carry out effective systemic school reform (Hill, 2000). This pattern of local coalitions of big-city school reformers could be seen from New York to San Diego, from Seattle to Miami, each developing specific initiatives for their own city's school systems.

It is fair to say that none of these reforms have had the systemic effects they intended. Despite two decades of creative and intensive work, urban education in the United States today is substantially similar to urban education in the United States in 1983, before the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). After several waves of systemic reform, urban public school systems are organized and function in substantially similar ways and produce substantially similar outcomes. The challenge for policy analysts is to make sense of all this, to explain the fate of such reforms.

This article seeks to advance the development of such an explanation. In it, I synthesize some of the lessons we have learned about systemic school reform and derive two explicit hypotheses about when such reforms are likely to be more and less successful. The first hypothesis focuses on the consistently vexing problem of program implementation: to achieve success, any program of systemic reform must overcome challenges at each stage of the policy-making process—agenda setting, policy choice, and implementation—in order to bring consequential action in offices and classrooms throughout a district. Each of these stages involves a distinct set of constituencies working in distinct political arenas, and a reform program's success in one arena carries no promise of success in any other. This is especially difficult in a separation of powers system, where policy making and policy implementation are required to be conducted by separate institutions.

The second hypothesis focuses on the federated nature of the American political system: any successful systemic reform must offer a program that aligns local efforts with state and sometimes federal policy. Despite the long history of local control in education policy making, in recent years state governments have come to play an increasingly decisive role, and national policy makers show signs of expanding their reach as well. The interplay among levels of government common in all other policy domains is increasingly visible in education policy making.

I apply this analysis by developing hypotheses that can be tested on the case of recent systemic reform efforts in the Los Angeles region. In particular, I explore the local Annenberg project—the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, or LAAMP —which ran from 1995 through 2001. As we would predict from this analysis, the politically successful LAAMP civic coalition ran into common problems bringing their program into schools and classrooms. As we would further expect from this analysis, the major provisions of the LAAMP program of systemic reform worked best when they aligned with statewide California policy initiatives, and ran into significant barriers when they ran at cross-purposes with state policy. After considering the Los Angeles case in some detail, I close with a brief consideration of the policy and research consequences of

this synthesis for our understanding of LAAMP in particular and the broader politics of systemic urban public school reform in the United States.

# I.  Making Sense of School Reform Politics

**The Implementation Problem**
      Everyone involved with public education has come to recognize that urban public school reform can be fragmented and chaotic, as the political fortunes of competing proposals and reformers wax and wane in various segments of the system (for example, Elmore and McLaughlin, 1988; Cuban, 1990; Hess, 1999; Cibulka and Boyd, 2003).   At its worst, reform can become merely improvisational, with no clear focus or purpose (Kerchner and Menefee-Libey, 2003).  Even when coherent, however, school reforms are rarely implemented smoothly and thoroughly.  They are usually delayed and modified in the process, as they mesh with organizations and previous reforms already in place (Tyack and Cuban, 1995).
      This is certainly not unique to educational policy making.  Charles Lindblom observed decades ago that even in cohesive policy domains, policy making is usually done by trial and error (Lindblom, 1959).  Anthony Downs showed that shifting coalitions and a fickle public made for incoherent environmental policy making, for example, even as the Environmental Protection Agency was being created (Downs, 1972).  If we think of successful policy as progressing from agenda setting, to legislation or mandates, to implementation, scholars agree that this process almost always brings vexing political challenges.  The problem of implementation is nearly universal (Goggin *et al*, 1990; Peters, 1999).
      Yet elementary and secondary education policy presents an unusually difficult case.  It is a huge and disaggregated sector, with more than 15,000 diverse school districts in 50 states cumulatively educating more than 50 million children, spending hundreds of billions of dollars, employing millions of teachers and other staff, and responsible for a wild array of policies (Wirt *et al*, 2003).  Only the health care sector in the United States approaches education in its Byzantine complexity.
      Policy analysts often describe implementation as the tail end of a linear process, which can be depicted schematically as in Figure 1.  This conveyor-belt sequence is a simplification; every aspect of this process is always occurring simultaneously in the education sector, just as it is in every policy domain (Stone, 2002).  Nevertheless, the schematic helps to reveal a powerful conundrum about policy making in general, and education policy in particular: there is a logic to the fragmentation.  Each stage of the policy process involves a distinct set of political players.  To take the examples shown in Figure 1, the Los Angeles civic leaders who in 1994 embraced the national Annenberg Challenge and initiated the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project or LAAMP were powerful agenda setters.  But the members of LAAMP's board played only a limited role in 1995-1996 writing the particular memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between LAAMP and the various school districts that chose to take part in the program, and it was those MOUs that were in effect the enacted policy of systemic reform for several groups of schools in the Los Angeles region.  And the lawyers and policy specialists who negotiated those MOUs, in turn, did not go into classrooms around the region to teach new material to schoolchildren for the next five years.

| | Agenda setting and identification of alternatives → | Policy choice: legislation or mandates → | Implementation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Example:** | Los Angeles civic leaders negotiate agreement with Annenberg Foundation to launch LAAMP as a local affiliate of the national Annenberg Challenge (1994-1995). | LAAMP enters into memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with several school districts in Los Angeles region to change policies on teacher training and instructional practice (1995-1996). | Teachers in participating schools teach children with curricula that mesh across grade levels and schools (1996-2000). |

**Figure 1. Education policy as a linear process?  Examples from the 1990s in Los Angeles**

In education policy as in almost every other policy domain in the United States, initiatives are contested at each step of the way, in each distinct political arena, among the many people and groups that have a stake in the performance and quality of government activity.  Education presents an especially vexing example of this fraught process because the development of K-12 education policy involves an unusually broad and diverse array of political participants, ranging from parents, students, teachers and citizens in local communities up to federal officials and even candidates for President of the United States (Wirt and Kirst, 2001).  Each stage of the policy process offers distinct advantages and challenges to the various kinds of participants.  For example, while civic leaders may have substantial agenda setting power, they may have little influence over actual lawmaking.  Likewise, while lawmakers write the policy, they play no role in implementing reform at the school or classroom level.  Further, few of these participants have strong *incentives* to cooperate with each other.  Even if they did, in a separation of powers system they might not have the *capacity* to cooperate effectively in developing and carrying out reforms.  Thus, the implementation conundrum for school reform, and especially for systemic reform: we would predict that to achieve success, any program of systemic reform must overcome challenges at each stage of the policy-making process and bring consequential action in offices and classrooms throughout a district.

**A Federated System**

Let us further complicate the analysis.  Although many urban systemic reform initiatives have focused on a particular city or school district, elementary and secondary education is increasingly governed at the state level.  Locally-focused systemic reform makes sense from an historical perspective, given that local control has been "the hallmark of American education" since the beginnings of public schooling in the 1820s (Kirst, 1995 p. 29).  Systemic reformers have focused on local strategies because that's where the power has always been.

But as Michael Kirst has demonstrated, states began assuming increasing authority over a variety of school policies in the 1960s and 1970s, and the pace of their

growing power has only increased in recent years. States now administer categorical grants (their own and those of the federal government), they oversee and often equalize school finance, they prescribe curriculum, they train most and certify all public school teachers, they provide services to specific populations like the handicapped, and the list goes on and on. Finally, much of the national debate about K-12 schools and school reform in this new century has focused on testing and accountability, a policy issue increasingly controlled at the state level.

What does this state activity mean for urban school reform? Simply put, it demonstrates that we must rethink the notion of systemic reform, commonly offered as a promising strategy for school improvement. The federated system of school governance means that systemic reform must work effectively not only with the various components of an urban school district, but also with state policy. To borrow another common school reform term, any urban reform initiative not well "aligned" with state policy—no matter how well tailored to the particulars of the local situation—is doomed to failure. A city's reformers must either devise a systemic reform program consistent with state policy, or they must convince state policy makers to *change* state law in ways that will advance the local reform.

To return to the schematic notion of Figure 1, we can add a second dimension to the chart that represents the various levels of school governance. In its most complex form, this second dimension might include levels for the national government, the state, the district, the school and the classroom. For simplicity's sake, let's just include the national and state governments, districts and schools in Figure 2. This helps to clarify the example from Figure 1, while for example the LAAMP program focused on Los Angeles area districts and schools, its development and implementation was shaped by national and particularly state politics and policy.

This clarifies a second conundrum. Just as the various participants in the policy process often lack good reasons or capacities to cooperate in implementation, so too the participants at the various *levels* of school government may lack reasons or capacities to collaborate in making and implementing educational programs and policy. Clinton-era struggles between the federal government and state legislatures over Goals 2000 curriculum frameworks illustrate this conundrum well. The interests and values that various state legislatures pursue while making educational policy may bear little resemblance to the interests and values of the U.S. Congress or the White House. Similarly, local political actors and dynamics in urban area school systems may be quite different from those in state capitols or Washington, DC. Nevertheless, federal and particularly state policy makers have the authority to demand that districts and schools comply with their rules and demands. Thus, the federated nature of the American political system drives a second hypothesis about systemic reform: any successful systemic reform must offer a program that aligns local efforts with state and perhaps federal policy.

|  | **Agenda setting and identification of alternatives →** | **Policy choice: legislation or mandates →** | **Implementation** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **National government** | Presidential election campaigns, executive-Congressional negotiations | Title I of ESEA; Goals 2000; subsidizing 100,000 new teachers; Obey-Porter grant program | U.S. Dept of Education grantmaking, oversight |
| **State government** | Gubernatorial election campaigns, executive-legislative negotiations | Three different testing regimes; STAR accountability requirements; teacher recruitment and training; Class Size Reduction | Allocation of money to school districts and schools; oversight of categorical programs |
| **School districts** | LAAMP civic coalition in Los Angeles region | LAAMP reform codified in several districts: families of schools, each with a distinct plan for improvement | Budgeting, teacher allocation, oversight and monitoring |
| **Schools** | Parent involvement in writing Site Action Plans | Limited participation in shaping details of LAAMP program | Principals and teachers carry out LAAMP program and plans |

**Figure 2. Adding a Simplified Second Dimension, with examples from the 1990s**


**Applying This Analysis to the Los Angeles Case**

Let us turn to a consideration of the LAAMP program in Los Angeles to see whether this analysis helps our understanding of the case. Take each of the established hypotheses in turn.

**The Implementation Challenge.** First, we expect that in a complex and fragmented policy making system, any program of systemic reform must overcome the challenges of moving from policy idea to mandate to actual implementation.

There can be no doubt that K-12 public education in Los Angeles is complex and fragmented. At the time civic leaders were forming the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project in 1994 and 1995, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) alone enrolled more than 635,000 students and had an annual budget of more than $4.5 billion (Menefee-Libey & Mokyr, 2003). Though LAUSD was only one of 83 districts in Los Angeles County, it comprised nearly half of the county's K-12 public education system. The sprawling 650 square mile district encompassed all or part of two dozen different cities, and employed more than 50,000 teachers and staff. It had a large, professionalized and hierarchical structure that had evolved over decades of repeated

reorganization and reform. Los Angeles school politics had also evolved into a world unto itself, separated from city politics and dominated by a contentious relationship between the district and a powerful teacher's union, United Teachers of Los Angeles or UTLA (Menefee-Libey *et al*, 1997). Any observer could reasonably *predict that any initiative promising systemic reform of LAUSD, let alone schools in several districts across Los Angeles County, would struggle at every stage of the policy process, from agenda setting to enactment to implementation.*

**The Federated System.** The challenges of carrying out a local systemic reform while coordinating education policy among the various levels of government are also powerful in the Los Angeles case. Indeed, by the mid-1990s California was unusually far along the path toward state-level dominance of elementary and secondary education policy. Nearly 60% of all public school spending in California came from the state's general fund (EdSource 1998, 23). Twenty-three percent more came from property tax revenues, which have been controlled by state law since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978. Inequalities among district expenditures throughout the state are governed by *Serrano vs. Priest*, a California lawsuit that produced a state court equalization decree in 1976.

The state controls more than just the *level* of funding for each district in California. Increasingly since the 1980s, the state controls *what* districts and schools spend their money on. "General purpose" funds, over which school districts have substantial control, have declined from 83.4% of K-12 spending in 1990-1991 to less than 70% in recent years (Legislative Analyst's Office 2002, p. E-76). Allocations of these general purpose funds are often beyond the easy control of school boards and administrators, as a substantial proportion of them is spent on salaries and benefits, most of which are negotiated through collective bargaining mandated by the state. Generally, about 65% of a district's operating budget is mediated by its labor contracts. *Non-*general purpose funds that remain must be spent by districts on specific "categorical" programs, notably special education, class size reduction, child care and development, instructional programs targeted at racial and ethnic minority students, adult education, and so on. This is in addition to the 8-10% of overall funds that come from the federal government, virtually all of which is categorically encumbered (EdSource, 1998 and 2002). At the end of the day, the autonomy of local districts in managing their own affairs—to say nothing about their ability to achieve systemic reform—was sharply constrained by the time LAAMP began its work.

This growth in state control continued throughout the period under investigation here. California's governors ushered in dramatic school reform initiatives: among other things, Pete Wilson (1991-1998) embraced the Stanford-9 standardized test, literacy programs, and Class Size Reduction, and Gray Davis (1999-2003) secured passage of the Academic Performance Index (API), a high school exit exam, teacher development programs, and a set of reading initiatives (Kirst, Hayward and Fuller, 2000). Indeed, even when the economic slowdown and a decline in tax revenues forced California governments at all levels to scale back, both major party candidates in the 2002 campaign for governor proposed ambitious K-12 reforms, and Arnold Schwarzenegger in his 2003 gubernatorial recall campaign proposed no reductions in school spending. A similar pattern has played out in the state legislatures. During the 2001-2002 term, for example, the California Senate and Assembly education committees reported out 196 bills, of which 90 were passed into law (California Assembly Education Committee, 2002). Thus,

we can *hypothesize that California is perhaps the ultimate setting in which any urban systemic reform initiative must coordinate with state policy in order to survive.*

In the remainder of this article, I test these hypotheses about the challenges of implementation and federalism by applying them to the case of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project's program of systemic reform during the period from 1995 through 2001. The broader description of the Los Angeles region's school reform politics and policy is drawn from archival and field research conducted by the author since 1993, including personal interviews with personnel from LEARN and LAAMP, administrators at the school district office and school sites, school board members, teachers and their union, as well as members of the broader community. Findings from that research have been reported in Menefee-Libey *et al.* (1997), Shipps and Menefee-Libey (1997), Bryk *et al* (1998), Kerchner and Menefee-Libey (2003), and Menefee-Libey and Mokyr (2003).

The description of LAAMP operations contained in this article is based on personal observation, individual interviews, focus groups and the collection and analysis of documents conducted as part of a broader ongoing research program by Charles Kerchner, David Menefee-Libey, DeLacey Ganley, Jason Abbott and Stephanie Clayton. Members of the research team interviewed most of the LAAMP board's executive committee members, some of the board's other active members, and superintendents from virtually all LAAMP-participating school districts. Focus groups were held with LAAMP staff, and selected interviews were held with educational leaders outside of LAAMP itself. All together, approximately 50 interviews were held, each lasting between 45 minutes and 3 hours. Respondents were assured of anonymity. This research program produced two previous reports: Kerchner, Abbott, Ganley and Menefee-Libey (2000), and Ganley, Kerchner, Menefee-Libey and Abbott (2001). It was affiliated with the Los Angeles Compact on Evaluation (LACE), an Annenberg-sponsored collaborative based at the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles. This article draws on LACE reports as noted. As of August 2004, information about LAAMP and many of the organization's important documents were still available online at http://www.laamp.org.

## II. Systemic Reform in Los Angeles

In early 1994, shortly after Ambassador Walter Annenberg announced his plans to give $500 million to public education, Annenberg's friend and advisor, Vartan Gregorian, called University of Southern California (USC) president Steven Sample to ask if Los Angeles would be interested in participating in the Annenberg Challenge. Gregorian was assured that Los Angeles would indeed be interested, and the effort to form what became the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project began. Although LAAMP was a new organization, it joined an ongoing stream of reform efforts that shaped the Annenberg Challenge while, in turn, being shaped by it.

Current approaches to school reform began to develop in California and Los Angeles in the early 1980s, just as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the federal government's attention-grabbing report that is considered the origin of the current school reform era, gained national attention (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In California that same year, Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill

Honig pushed successfully for legislative passage of the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act, popularly known as SB 813, which mandated sweeping reforms of curriculum and assessment as well as increased parental involvement in schools. Less than two years later, a group of business and civic leaders formed the Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP), a nonprofit organization that helped to develop innovative curriculum and provide assistance for teachers and schools in LAUSD.

Reform proposals in Los Angeles shifted to systemic approaches in the late 1980s, first in 1989 when after a two-week strike the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) settled a labor contract with LAUSD that mandated a shift toward site-based management (SBM) of the district's schools and budget. (A time-line of political and organizational events is shown in Figure 3.) Pressure came from a markedly different direction a year later with the launch of Kids 1st, a community-based effort pressing for safer and better schools. Kids 1st included several grassroots organizations, all with ties to the Industrial Areas Foundation: United Neighborhood Organizing Committee of East Los Angeles (UNO), South Central Organizing Committee (SCOC), East Valleys Organization (EVO) and the San Fernando Valley Organized in Community Efforts (VOICE). It was chaired by businessman Richard Riordan and UTLA president Helen Bernstein. The group commanded attention by mobilizing 3,000 people to join a "safe schools" rally in July 1990. It commanded even more attention when it mobilized 15,000 for a similarly themed rally the following October.

In early 1993, less than a year before the national launch of the Annenberg Challenge, many of these Los Angeles efforts came together to produce Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN), the reform effort that provides the most important context for LAAMP.

**Figure 3. A Time-Line of Important Educational Reform Developments in Los Angeles and California, 1989-2001**

| | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **California Governor** | George Deukmejian | | Pete Wilson | | | | | | | | Gray Davis | | |
| **California state-level policy develop-ments** | | Recession begins. Prop 98 sets floor for general fund spending on schools | CLAS (California Learning Assessmnt System) test. | Charter school law. | Prop 174 voucher initiative defeated | CLAS ended. Prop 187 (immigrant services) passed | | CSR (Class Size Reduction) initiated | STAR (Standard-ized Testing And Reporting) | Prop 227 (Limiting bilingual instructn), Teacher recruitmnt & training changes | API (Academic Perform-ance Index), Literacy initiative | | State budget shortfall |
| **LAUSD district super-intendent** | Leonard Britton | | William Anton | | | Sid Thompson | | | Ruben Zacarias | | Ray Cortines | Roy Romer | |
| **UTLA teacher union president** | Wayne Johnson | Helen Bernstein | | | | | | | | Day Higuchi | | | |
| **LAUSD and Los Angeles region develop-ments** | LAUSD teacher strike and settlement | Site-Based Manage-ment (SBM) initiated | | School district budget cuts. | Board endorses LEARN | Clusters reorganiza-tion initiated | LAAMP program initiated | | | LEARN model abandoned, Zacarias begins re-centraliza-tion | "Reform" school board elected | Sub-districts initiated | LAAMP program ends |
| **Civic leadership develop-ments** | | Kids 1st | LEARN formed | | Richard Riordan elected LA Mayor | Annenberg Challenge, LAAMP organized | | DELTA created | Riordan reelected, begins recruiting school board candidates | | | Los Angeles Alliance for Student Achieve-ment organized | James Hahn elected LA Mayor |
| **Grass-roots leadership develop-ments** | | Kids 1st | LEARN formed | | Ernie Cortes, UNO effort begins | LAAMP organized | PLP, LA PIQUE | | | | FIS (Families In Schools) | | |

**From LEARN to LAAMP in Los Angeles: Forming the Civic Coalition and Setting the Agenda**

In March 1993, after two years of political organizing, program development, public outreach, and government lobbying, LEARN gained an endorsement of its sweeping school reform proposals from the board of LAUSD. LEARN's program of decentralized decision making and broad collaboration among principals, teachers, parents, and other "stakeholders" promised to remake the district and refocus LAUSD schools on student achievement. LEARN planned to start small in September, with fewer than three dozen participating schools, and then expand to encompass all of the more than 650 schools in the district within five years. In its reports of the board's endorsement of the plan, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that "School board member Mark Slavkin said the plan will serve as 'a new constitution for this school system.'" Member Jeff Horton expressed the view that a program with such public support was bound for success: "We nave never seen such broad participation in a school reform movement in the history of this district." (Banks and Chavez 1993) In fact, this ambitious systemic program would take four years to reach more than half the district's schools and it foundered on central office and school-level resistance, but LEARN's civic coalition did command broad support during its first two years of the program's implementation.

During LEARN's early stages, Ambassador Walter Annenberg announced his plan to give $500 million to improve America's public kindergarten through high school (K-12) system. Annenberg's December 1993 announcement initially was received with ambivalence in Los Angeles, where LEARN and a variety of other reforms were already well established politically. People wondered whether the city needed an additional reform program, particularly one from out of town. Still, Gregorian, then the president of Brown University, articulated an Annenberg Challenge vision of a public-private collaboration that was consistent with the city's recent history of educational reform. In addition, Theodore Sizer's ideas about school autonomy fit well with broadly accepted ideas about reform in Los Angeles. Sizer was head of the Annenberg Institute and founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The Annenberg Challenge also carried advantages not lost on local reformers: linkages to a visible national network and, of course, badly needed fiscal resources. Unfortunately, like LEARN, the LAAMP program commanded little legislative or financial support from state policy makers in Sacramento.

The Annenberg Challenge sparked enough interest among educational reformers in Los Angeles that several local civic leaders, including some LEARN "Working Group" members, began the work needed to bring the Annenberg Challenge to Los Angeles. Although this group was initially led by USC's Steven Sample, he quickly handed leadership to Virgil Roberts, an attorney and longstanding school reform activist. Roberts had previously worked with LAEP and LEARN. As his first main task, Roberts helped assemble an initial board of directors who could write and submit a proposal for a new school reform initiative in Los Angeles (LAAMP 1994). In December 1994, the Annenberg Foundation rewarded this group's efforts when it announced that it was allocating $53 million to support LAAMP.

From early 1994 Roberts and his colleagues worked to develop the LAAMP organization and its program. The two tasks were deeply intertwined; they developed a broader civic coalition capable of developing and sustaining a program of systemic reform. As the leaders pulled together LAAMP's board of directors and filled top staff positions,

several of their decisions had important consequences for the program, its public
viability, and its effectiveness in schools.

Three pivotal decisions about the scope of LAAMP—each taken at the strong
urging of Sizer and Gregorian at the Annenberg Foundation but with active agreement
from the reform players in Los Angeles—stand out as especially important.  First, the initial
leaders agreed to form a *new* school reform organization in Los Angeles instead of making
LAAMP a project of an existing organization or group.  Affiliating with local universities
was an available option, particularly because several of the early organizers of the LAAMP
effort came from local institutions of higher education, namely USC and the University of
California, Los Angeles (UCLA).  The most obvious preexisting organization with which
LAAMP could have teamed was LEARN.  As noted earlier, LEARN already had established
a community base and a working board of directors; it had successfully campaigned to gain
broad endorsements of its reform program from foundations and institutions; and it was
the official reform effort of LAUSD, complete with the support of the school board.  A
relationship with LEARN was obviously important to LAAMP, for LAAMP's first major
financial decision was to contribute nearly $5 million to help fund LEARN's training
program for the 1995–1996 school year.  But the Annenberg Foundation and LAAMP's
leaders had a vision that in many ways extended beyond the scope of LEARN, so they
declined to simply merge the two projects.  For example, LAAMP would take a more
prescriptive approach than LEARN when it came to using standardized testing and other
assessments as performance indicators for schools, the professional development of
teachers, and collaboration with other reform participants beyond a single school, among
other things.  As one of our respondents noted:

> "The LEARN reform . . . was not going in that direction, didn't have its
> roots there.  Its roots were more in 'We're going to structure [school-level]
> leadership so that they can have power over budgets.'  And that's really, in practice,
> where they were headed—that, and teachers shall have decision-making.  And that
> was a very, very powerful strategy in practice.  The [LAAAMP] proposal to the
> Annenberg Foundation, while it includes this, is very very rich in the action
> principles for reform, which include authentic assessment, which include peer and
> collegial support for each other, collaboration.

The leaders of LAAMP clearly saw their approach as being unique in Los Angeles, and
wanted to build an organization around this approach.  Their decision to create a new
organization gave LAAMP the advantages of relative autonomy and a fresh start, but it also
substantially delayed implementation of the LAAMP plan because the new organization had
to spend the time to develop its own board, staff, and program.

In a related decision, LAAMP's early leaders agreed with the Annenberg Foundation
that LAAMP would be a *metropolitan* project.  That is, it would invite participation not only
from within LAUSD (which itself spans several cities in addition to Los Angeles), but also
from other school districts in Los Angeles County.  This metropolitan approach to school
reform was unusual for Los Angeles and, indeed, for any region in the United States.  It is
much more common to have school policy concentrated at the district and state level; rarely
do reform efforts attempt to work across districts.  Doing so, however, made sense to
LAAMP's coalition of civic leaders because increasing numbers of suburban school districts
all over the country face traditionally urban problems, such as poverty, low achievement,
high student transience and attrition, overcrowding, and loss of coherence.  An interview
respondent told us:

> "There was a core of the people who'd been involved with LEARN but then
> there were also many people who hadn't been who came on and, you know, made a

> very high-powered, prestigious group with a reform mandate that was county- or
> region-wide. Now LEARN was only, only L.A. Unified School District so, you
> know, [LAAMP's] mandate was broader."

The new project's leadership agreed that the problems of urban schooling spanned far
beyond L.A. city limits. More specifically, the leaders of suburban districts in the Los
Angeles region saw that they continued to share many traditionally "urban" challenges,
particularly those associated with great diversity, high proportions of immigrants, and many
limited or low proficiency English-speaking students. Furthermore, by working with a
reform effort that spans the Los Angeles metropolitan area, districts might gain
opportunities to learn from each other's ideas and experiences. If successful, LAAMP's
metropolitan focus might have important regional and national implications.

Paradoxically, despite this embrace of challenges beyond the Los Angeles Unified
School District, LAAMP's leaders failed to incorporate in their plans any work with policy
makers in Sacramento, the state capital. They recognized that state policy would influence
their systemic reform efforts, but they made no plans to seek state support or even
accommodation of their program. As noted below, this would have substantial implications
for the ongoing evolution of the LAAMP program and its implementation.

A third organizing decision made early on had equally powerful consequences.
LAAMP's leaders decided to exclude representatives from the local educational
establishment—namely, teacher unions and school district administrators, especially from
Los Angeles Unified. Looking back, one focus group participant explained it this way:

> "The decision was made at the start in the initial discussion, and initial press
> about it that the school districts, and in this case L.A. Unified, would not be
> included in the planning process and would not have license to be invited into the
> room to consider the future of education in the metropolitan region. We can debate
> that, but I think that was a key turning point in establishing the tone and a
> relationship with the school district that LAAMP has lived with for better or for
> worse from the very start."

This marked a sharp departure from the two most important reform initiatives in LAUSD's
recent history: the site-based management program begun in 1989 and, more notably, the
newly established LEARN project, which relied heavily on the participation of high-level
union leaders and public school administrators. Instead of involving those actors in its civic
coalition and in the agenda-setting stages of its work, LAAMP would instead engage them
at the later stage of policy enactment and implementation.

The LAAMP board cemented its decision to be an exclusive organization when it
chose Maria Casillas over Helen Bernstein as LAAMP's executive director. Bernstein,
former president of the UTLA, had been on the forefront of school reform efforts in Los
Angeles and had shown great ability by leading UTLA to embrace LEARN. Her reputation
as an aggressive unionist concerned some members of the LAAMP board, which wanted to
dissociate its program from teacher unions and the baggage that came with them. Others
were concerned about Bernstein's close association with former LEARN leader and now
Mayor Richard Riordan, worried that LAAMP would be dominated by Riordan and his
allies for their own purposes. When Riordan proposed Bernstein as the leader of the
project, he met immediate resistance. A LAAMP insider told us:

> "I think it was a disservice to Helen that they tried to shove her down the
> throats of everybody because if they had not tried to do that, people wouldn't have .
> . . said, 'Wait a minute.' So you know, but it wasn't that she was a unionist. . . .
> That's not why people were saying 'No. Not Helen.' It was, 'Why Helen and who

> decided it was Helen and why are we going through a [selection] process if you
> already decided it was Helen?"

Alternatively, Casillas had strengths of her own as a candidate for leadership of the project. Although a former LAUSD teacher and administrator who had served on LEARN's original community board, she had left the district and spent two years as an administrator in El Paso, Texas.  By hiring Casillas as executive director of LAAMP, the board signaled that, while LAAMP would include leaders who were sophisticated about what it would take to fully implement a systemic reform program, it would not be a creature of the Los Angeles Unified or Los Angeles city establishments.

LAAMP's board had ties to a broad range of communities in this diverse region. Although they did include several leaders from the existing network of school reform activists, they were successful in reaching beyond it.  Many board members worked hard and effectively to secure the local financial support the Annenberg Challenge required to match its initial $53 million gift, and create the $103 million pool of resources dedicated to the project.  Board members also served as public agenda-setters for LAAMP, explaining how the program's work could help improve the region's schools.  But their targeted audience was the Los Angeles region's public opinion and school establishments, and they did not focus much attention on the state capitol in Sacramento, where dramatic policy initiatives were under way that would both shape and constrain LAAMP's efforts at systemic reform.

## Developments in California Education Policy

Throughout the time LAAMP's civic leaders were developing and carrying out their program of systemic reform, policy makers in Sacramento continued to press their own school reform agenda.  As this article's driving hypotheses would predict, these state initiatives proved pivotal to many, if not most, of LAAMP's activities.  Four sets of state policies proved especially important: testing requirements for students and schools; class size reduction; teacher recruitment, training and retention programs; and a broad literacy initiative.

At the time LAAMP began in 1995, California had no statewide assessment scheme. The previous program, the California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) had collapsed in political controversy in 1994 (Kirst *et al*, 1995, chapter 2), and each district was allowed to pick its own assessment tool.  Well after LAAMP's work was under way, Governor Pete Wilson and the legislature reestablished a statewide program in 1997, the Standardized Testing And Reporting (STAR) program, built around the Stanford-9 test.  Governor Gray Davis subsequently convinced the legislature to dramatically increase the impact of that test in 1999 with the Academic Performance Index (API) system of publishing summary and ranked test scores for every school and district in the state.  Further, a high-stakes state graduation exam is scheduled to take effect with the class of 2006.

Of equal importance, by the middle of 1995 the California economy had begun to recover from a prolonged recession and was well on its way to a sustained boom.  As LAAMP started its operations, public schools in Los Angeles and throughout the state were still suffering from the effects of the early 1990s recession.  A combination of tax limitation measures and rapid enrollment growth starting in the 1980s dropped per pupil funding for schools from approximately the national average per student to more than $1,200 below the national average by 1995.

LAAMP's programs began just as the mid-1990s economic recovery started generating increased tax revenues for the state.  By the mid 1990s, Governor Pete Wilson

and the legislature — prodded by the Proposition 98 mandate to spend a constant proportion of growing state tax revenues on elementary and secondary education — were ready to spend more money on schools. But instead of sending the increases unencumbered to districts and schools, state policy makers chose to allocate the money through categorical programs. Most notable was the Class Size Reduction program begun in 1996, a program costing more than $1 billion per year which offered increased funding to school districts if they reduced kindergarten through third grade enrollments to 20 or fewer per classroom (Wexler *et al* 1998). The program—and its funding—was expanded in 1999 to cover certain high school English and mathematics courses, but the impact on school districts was no less confining.

A third major state educational initiative came in 1998, when the state legislature mandated new teacher preparation, induction and retention programs be created at the state and district levels (EdSource 2003). This was particularly necessary because of the large numbers of new teaching positions created by the Class Size Reduction law. It was particularly important to poor urban districts like LAUSD, which were already suffering from shortages of qualified teachers. Those districts were particularly hard hit by Class Size Reduction, because that program created opportunities for large numbers of experienced teachers to migrate out of the urban districts to more affluent districts and their easier working conditions.

Finally, a fierce controversy arose in 1998 over language instruction in California, particularly over existing bilingual education programs. Most public attention focused on the debate over Proposition 227, a ballot initiative mandating a dramatic reorientation of language instruction toward immediately teaching English to non-English speakers. The following year, the legislature followed the lead of newly elected Governor Gray Davis in creating an intensive new literacy program—targeted at both English speakers and non-English speakers—as a substantial categorical grant to school districts.

Most of these policy initiatives could be reconciled with systemic reform in Los Angeles, but all state-level factors worked to LAAMP's benefit. Throughout the course of the organization's life, Los Angeles and California were repeatedly divided by controversial ballot initiatives concerning schools. The stage was set in 1993 by Proposition 174, which proposed a voucher scheme that would have severely disrupted the funding of public education. (It failed.) The turmoil continued in 1994 with Proposition 187, a successful effort to deny a variety of publicly funded services—including education—to illegal immigrants and their children. Although its educational provisions were later voided in court, the initiative dominated public discussions about schooling just as LAAMP was launched.

**Families of Schools: Policy Choice and the Enactment of the LAAMP Program**

Throughout the twists and turns of its organizational development and the turmoil of state politics, LAAMP remained accountable to the Annenberg Foundation under the terms of the proposal it had submitted in November of 1994. That proposal blended the expressed commitments of the Annenberg Challenge with school reform ideas that had already gained broad support in Los Angeles. The core idea of the proposal was to reach beyond individual schools to establish and assist school "families," each constituted by a high school and the middle and elementary schools from which it primarily drew its students (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 2003). The notion of focusing assistance on families rather than

individual schools was encouraged by Gregorian, and it captured an unrealized ideal of the LEARN reforms.

With LAAMP's assistance, principals and teachers and parents within these families would collaborate to develop coherent curriculum and instruction that would be integrated from kindergarten through high school graduation.  All efforts were to support LAAMP's "Seven Principles" (LAAMP 1994):

1. Strive to become stable learning communities where students are known so well that they can be helped academically and socially no matter what their primary language.
2. Exercise productive local control over resources and decision-making.
3. Create a broad, intellectually challenging curriculum to which every student has access.
4. Value inclusiveness among parents and stakeholders in school decisions and activities.
5. Provide purposeful professional development as an incentive to help build a stable learning community.
6. Allocate time in schools and Families of Schools in ways that enable teachers to get together and talk about what they are teaching and how they are teaching.
7. Engage in regular internal and public assessments and discussions of student and school performance, giving the school and the public the opportunity to understand and support the school's basic mission to increase student achievement.

LAAMP participants would also work with parents to guide each child up through the "family" system from elementary through high school.

Implementation of such a complex program in such a complex setting was bound to be difficult, and was bound to change the shape of the program as it went along.  LAAMP encountered difficulties almost immediately, both from the Annenberg Foundation and from the schools they hoped to assist in the Los Angeles region.

The Annenberg Foundation grew uncomfortable as LAAMP began to develop its implementation plans during the spring and summer of 1995.  Gregorian insisted that each city's Annenberg Challenge program around the country would have a coherent theory of action – a specific program of school reform intended to improve student achievement.  The various programs could then be evaluated and compared at the end of the five-year Challenge.  But LAAMP, working to further develop an approach that had begun under SBM and LEARN, proposed instead to let each school family propose *its own* program of school improvement, or "family learning plan."  LAAMP would encourage each school family to write a plan that identified a core program of improvement, and LAAMP would then assist them in "broadening and deepening" that program and its impact.  The evaluation would then focus on the effectiveness of LAAMP's assistance and on student achievement in the schools, rather than on some specific LAAMP-wide program of school improvement.  A LAAMP insider put it this way in an interview:

"The decision the board made was that we weren't going to prescribe to people how they did it.  What we were going to say is that any school district that was engaged in reform, a reform that embodies our Seven Principles, we would consider supporting them in deepening and broadening their reform.  And that was a fundamental decision by the board because we had an option of maybe saying, 'This is what we want,' like in New York. . . . almost saying 'this is what we think reform ought to be and everybody that's prepared to do this, apply to us and we will fund it.'  Or we could say, 'We're not going to tell you how to do reform.  You tell us what you're

> doing and if it matches what we think will work, we'll fund it and we will take a
> look at it and we'll see what works. Sort of the difference between having a cookie
> cutter plan and sort of throwing it out at I guess a market approach and saying,
> 'Who can do the best reform?'"

The Foundation was never completely comfortable with this bottom-up approach, but by
the end of 1995 it was willing to accept it. The dispute helped to delay implementation of
LAAMP's program for more than a year, however.

Relationships were also sometimes tense between LAAMP and some of the schools
they hoped to assist. LAAMP's leaders made it clear that any school hoping to receive
LAAMP support and assistance must have a specific plan of action up front, and apply for
admission to the program on the basis of that plan. The organization's leaders spent much
of 1995 hammering out a Memorandum of Understanding with Los Angeles Unified about
how LAAMP would work in that district, confirming that in LAUSD only LEARN schools
—each of which already had some form of Site Action Plan—would participate in LAAMP.
There was some disagreement about whether LAAMP would simply provide funding for
ongoing LEARN activities, or whether LAAMP would require each LEARN school to
modify their reform efforts to join a "family" network of LAAMP schools. As the year
progressed, LAAMP began to draw criticism from the *Los Angeles Times*, the Annenberg
Foundation and others about their delay in paying out money and implementing the
program in the broader metropolitan region. (Colvin and Pyle 1995) Some of this criticism
originated with suburban school district leaders who had their own contacts within the
Foundation. LAAMP responded in December 1995 by soliciting proposals from families of
schools throughout Los Angeles County.

Many school districts had some difficulty with this process, illustrating the
challenges that arise when systemic reform moves from elite planning to detailed policy
choices and implementation. The LAAMP board decided against offering planning grants
to schools to help them develop their proposals, fearing that such grants would further
delay the applications and siphon off money from the assistance program itself. A focus
group participant explained:

> "Our board decided there would be no planning grants. In other words, in
> every [participating] school district, every school that could get others to join it and
> form a family, became eligible in the county [outside of LAUSD]. In L.A. Unified, if
> you had a family of LEARN schools formed, you automatically became eligible for
> these funds. . . . But we were concerned that if we gave the money away without
> proposals of some kind . . . it was problematic."

Many leaders in those districts were under the impression that LAAMP was offering a first-
come, first-served assistance program, and they rushed to compile and submit proposals by
the March 1996 deadline. The LAAMP staff soon communicated to several districts,
however, that first-come would not necessarily mean first-served: the quality of their
proposals was insufficient to warrant their participation in the program. Only 12 school
families – many involving LEARN schools in LAUSD – gained approval by the end of the
1995-96 academic year. Two more were added shortly afterward, to round out the group of
14 "Cycle 1" families. These misunderstandings gradually got worked out, and LAAMP
eventually selected 28 families – 7 more designated Cycle 2 and the final 7 designated Cycle
3, with all the families totaling 247 schools – for the program by the end of the 1996-1997
academic year.

**Implementing the Evolving LAAMP Program**

The LAAMP program began to take a clearer form once the initial school families were identified and the LAAMP staff began working on learning plan development and actual implementation in the fall of 1996.  Although the organization remained committed to a broad program of reform described as The Seven Principles (the language of which continually shifted in subtle ways), it became clear that school families could not realistically work effectively on all seven principles simultaneously.  Each of the families had generally done substantial work pulling themselves together into a more or less coherent group in order to write their initial proposals.  After acceptance into LAAMP, they continued to develop their proposals into workable family learning plans with the assistance of LAAMP staff.  The time and energy needed for planning and development mandated that equal attention and care could not be given to each of the principles.

Even before the details of each family learning plan were set, all school families had by the end of 1997 embraced a clear commitment to public engagement and reporting.  At the urging of the LAAMP board, they agreed that all participating schools needed to communicate with their communities about what they are working on, and what kinds of problems and progress they were encountering.  By early 1999, this commitment was integrated into what LAAMP came to identify as Data Driven School Reform (DDSR).  That is, school families regularly collected data on multiple indicators of school and student performance to refine and improve their learning plans and implementation, and they regularly reported their findings to the broader community, including an annual report with specific reports on test scores and other indicators of outcomes.  This was a new idea at many of the LAAMP schools, as one insider told us in an interview:

“Once we fully understood how we could leverage . . . the annual report, there was an ‘Ah-ha’ at the schools, then all of a sudden they’re looking at student data, and that was the hardest thing.  Schools would focus on process data, you know, like ‘We met ten times, and dah dah dah” because that’s what they were used to out of Title I.  And we were saying, ‘No no no, we want to see the student data.  We want to see an increase in the student data, and how is your professional development linked to it.’  And then, all of a sudden, we started going out and we’d go to the school family governance meetings and they’re talking like this.”

The influence of state policy on the development of Data Driven School Reform cannot be overstated.  Prior to the 1996 enactment of Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) and the 1999 creation of Academic Performance Indexes (API), schools and districts usually resisted publishing test score data, and such data played only a limited role in shaping curriculum and instruction.  (See Figure 3 for chronology.)  Despite LAAMP’s 1995 initial commitment to “Create, use, and publicize ongoing assessments of student and school performance in order to create accountability at the school, the Family of Schools, and district levels” (LAAMP 1995), it is extremely unlikely that they could have achieved this goal unless the publication of such data were required by the state.

A second common commitment was to a literacy program, embraced by 23 LAAMP school families.  Responding both to Governor Gray Davis’ statewide literacy initiative and to perceived needs within their own schools, the schools worked to assure that all their students could read by the end of the third grade, and that they continued to develop their reading and writing skills across the curriculum.

In addition, several school families were funded to deepen their efforts toward one or more of LAAMP’s three strategic initiatives: parent involvement, teacher training, or technology.  One group of school families chose to focus its attention on involving parents

in the day-to-day activities of schools. These schools work with a variety of LAAMP-related groups including PLP, a Weingart Foundation funded program, and the Parent Institute for Quality Education.

A second group of four families has focused on the professional development of teachers. They became identified as "DELTA Families" and worked closely with the emerging DELTA Collaborative between LAAMP and teacher training programs at California State University's various campuses. The urgency of this work was clearly spurred on by the state's 1997 creation and 1999 expansion of Class Size Reduction program, which brought an influx of emergency-credentialed teachers into Los Angeles schools, without the level of training and preparation expected from previous generations of teachers (Griffin, 1999).

A third group of six school families targeted the role of technology in student learning, and worked under LAAMP's collaboration with the Los Angeles County Office of Education's Technology for Learning program. These programs began rather late in the life cycle of LAAMP and received LAAMP funding for only two years, ending in 2000. Yet they carried out substantial work training teachers in the use of instructional technology and in integrate that technology into their teaching and curriculum (Friedman *et al*, 2000).

By the middle of 1997, LAAMP as an organization had homed in on two driving commitments. One was that LAAMP should focus on student results: families and schools moving toward curriculum, instruction and professional development that demonstrably improved individual student achievement according to standardized tests and other measures. This assessment and accountability agenda was cemented in place by the LAAMP board's commitment to outreach and public "reporting." As articulated in one of the organization's quarterly reports, the board agreed that there "is a continuing need to restore confidence in public education by identifying reform measures that are taking hold," and they wanted to "deepen commitment to the role of holding public education accountable to the public for improving student achievement" (LAAMP, 1997). Thus all LAAMP family schools would be involved with public reporting at all levels, from making information available to parents and community members at individual schools to sponsoring glitzy high-profile annual "reporting events." This was consistent with LAAMP's longer term aspirations to leave a "legacy" of systemic change in performance and expectations of local schools even after the five-year program had ended.

LAAMP's first annual reporting event, held at the Burbank Airport Hilton in November 1997, set the pattern for future events. Stakeholders created presentations that reviewed learning plans, budgets, survey results, and other indicators. The day-long event included overview presentations on the Annenberg Challenge and LAAMP, but it also included specific presentations by each participating school family. Teachers, parents, community members, and even some students made presentations on their experiences with LAAMP. They were encouraged to explain the difference that implementing school family learning plans were making in student achievement and to support their presentations with data. The final LAAMP reporting event in October of 2000 continued in this pattern (LAAMP, 2000). Each school family presented extensive information and data as the project neared completion.

Such public events, although not necessarily as upscale as the annual reporting events, are part of a new dynamic in Los Angeles school reform, reinforced by state mandates to report test scores. Stakeholders nevertheless remain ambivalent about such events. On one hand, the events raise the visibility of school reform before the media and the general public, and they help to improve the public conversation about schools. They provide real information about schools rather than the standard fare of rumors and

stereotypes.  One crucial purpose of LAAMP was to help prepare school leaders for that level of exposure, which was something new.  As a LAAMP insider reported to us in an interview,

> "You go back to the real basic stuff, first of all.  I think a lot of these folks that are out there, cluster leaders and principals and others, are real bureaucrats.  I mean, they don't want to accept that they are, but they are.  They are driven by the pink memorandum and the yellow memorandum and the culture of 'Do the right thing for whomever is evaluating you.'  And because student performance is at such low levels and because you know have the technology that can just make it more public, in an accountability system like that, you know today it's in the [news]paper.  And it's their school compared to schools like yours.  You can't shelter yourself from that information.  What we have is the ability to come in from the outside as partners.  And we're not evaluating them.  We are simply trying to inspire them, provide them with good information to help them do their job."

That is a genuine challenge, because school family participants reported spending a tremendous amount of time and energy on preparing for the events, which in and of themselves did little to improve their schools and in some ways created school-level resistance to the ongoing implementation of the program.  The public dynamics of the events — with their pressure to find and deliver short-term good news — may in some ways have undercut the purposes of data-driven reform, which is a slow process of trial and error.  Reporting results became so charged that these public events faced the danger of becoming more important than the ability of schools to learn from the data.

## The Aftermath: Transition and Scale-up

By the start of the 1998–1999 school year, all LAAMP families were up and running and the organization had established a relatively stable program.  The Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project had, albeit with a number of delays and with several modifications of its initial expectations, successfully navigated the process from agenda setting to policy formation to program implementation.  Their program of systemic reform would be completely in place for two full years before the Annenberg Foundation's $53 million and a similar sum from local grants and contracts would run its five-year course.

The board and staff in 1998 began to turn their attention to two related issues.  The most immediate concern was with continuity.  LAAMP was chartered as a five-year program, and needed to turn its attention to continuing the programs beyond 2001.  LAAMP achieved several successes in this regard.  It transferred the Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to use Technology (PTTT) program, a multiyear project funded in 1999 by a $1.48 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, to the private Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP).  LAAMP also fostered the formation of new organizations and the continuation of others. The LAAMP board supported, and financed with a $1 million grant, the creation of the Los Angeles County Alliance for Student Achievement, a civic leadership organization that drew participants and staff from the former LEARN and LAAMP projects, though that organization dwindled within two years.  LAAMP board and staff members were also instrumental in founding Families in Schools, a non-profit organization to continue and strengthen parent involvement.  Finally, LAAMP transferred control of the DELTA program initiative has been transferred to LAEP, after it had been strengthened with additional grants.

These continuities nevertheless revealed that the apparent success of LAAMP's design and implementation were less than systemic. LAAMP's family network approach to school improvement required a substantial investment of outside resources and assistance into each school family's development and implementation of a plan tailored to their particular needs. Indeed, many of these plans benefited from collaboration with other school families, even across school district lines. Yet their survival required ongoing grants and support from various government and philanthropic organizations, support that by its very nature will never be provided systemwide. To put the LAAMP program in perspective, the $103 million raised and spent by the program in its five years is nearly trivial in Los Angeles County, where more than $13 billion is spent each year on K-12 education. LAAMP's resources were targeted for maximum leverage, and the project never ran out of cash, but the requirements for continuity are daunting.

This raises the second concern of the LAAMP staff in 1998 as they began to look in a more focused way at the future: they worried about the problem of scale, or "scaling up" in educational jargon. How could the lessons learned through LAAMP be shared beyond the LAAMP families to influence the broader development of school reform throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan region? The Annenberg model was to create concentrated and visible programs of innovation and improvement in selected cities and regions, in order to provoke broader emulation and improvement across the country, or at least across the metropolitan areas where the programs were carried out. But the extensive (and expensive) organizing and programmatic work required for even the twenty-eight LAAMP school families proved daunting. Even if the program had gained widespread attention and admiration in the Los Angeles region – and there is no evidence that it did – the LEARN experience suggested that scaling up would run the risk of diluting LAAMP's efforts and reducing the effectiveness of its program.

This challenge was complicated further by the indeterminate impact of the LAAMP project. Researchers including the present author gathered and analyzed extensive data throughout the five-year program and found mixed results. On one hand, LAAMP as an organization was found to have a substantial impact on the public debate over school quality and reform in the region. The project strengthened and continued the civic coalition that supports public school reform in the Los Angeles region; it started school families, a powerful and potentially lasting innovation in how school districts are organized; and it helped focus attention on student outcomes as the legitimate measure of reform (Kerchner, Abbott, Ganley & Menefee-Libey, 2001). In-depth research into the workings of school families also revealed a powerful tool for bringing coherence and effectiveness to teaching and learning (Wohlstetter, Smith, Stuart & Griffin, 1999). Researchers were, however, unable to detect a significant impact on student achievement during LAAMP's brief period of full implementation (Baker & Herman, 2002).

## III.   Conclusions and Implications

What conclusions can we draw about systemic reform from this case? In the simplest terms, the LAAMP case confirms the hypotheses developed earlier in this article. First, LAAMP's experienced and politically sophisticated civic coalition leaders were able to master the challenges of shepherding their reform through agenda setting to program enactment and policy implementation. Their relative success is completely consistent with research on policy design and implementation in general. In particular, they had sufficient organizational capacity and resources to create meaningful incentives for stakeholders to

join in (Goggin *et al*, 1990).  They also blended clear and explicit top-down principles and mandates with a flexible process of bottom-up design and implementation (Elmore 1982).

By their own standards, however, the work of LAAMP's civic coalition leaders fell short.  Their expressed intention was not simply to create an effective program for 28 families of schools.  They proposed *systemic* reform, a program which would create a ripple effect throughout the public education system in the Los Angeles region, from the school boards down into the classrooms.  They intended that other schools and districts emulate their actions and embrace their decentralized approach to school change and improved student achievement.  This is the very definition of systemic reform.  They also intended that their program would become self-sustaining, that schools and school districts would continue the family-based practices of school improvement initiated by LAAMP and assisted by public and private sector organizations.  Though many of the particular initiatives and programs of LAAMP continue, the systemic aspirations so visible at the beginning are now gone.

This case also confirms the second hypothesis presented at the outset: that systemic reform must be aligned with state policy in order to survive and succeed.   LAAMP proved adept at adapting to many state initiatives: Standardized Testing And Reporting (1996) and its successor, the Academic Performance Index (1999), Class Size Reduction (1996 and 1999), teacher recruitment and professional development programs (1998 and 1999), Governor Davis' statewide literacy programs (1999).  Indeed, LAAMP's development of Data Driven Reform built on and extended statewide testing and reporting programs in ways that lawmakers in Sacramento could only have hoped for.  In many cases, adapting to state mandates also meant that families of schools could use state categorical money to reinforce their own local initiatives.

Still, one of the centerpieces of LAAMP – school families – will in the longer term suffer from being completely ignored by state policy makers.  LAAMP created a potentially powerful reform in school families.  It will take sustained support and development if they are to continue, however.  School families are a much more radical departure from conventional school bureaucracies than they appear on the surface.  Both in Los Angeles and in the surrounding school districts that created school families, the family structure created information pathways and coordination that was somewhat independent of the school hierarchy and that sometimes threatened it.  School families were not subdivisions of districts in which the leadership was given authority over the principals and teachers within.  Instead, they resembled networks or collaboratives to which people attached themselves because they provided useful services, information, and support (Wohlstetter *et al*, 2003).

These networks will not be naturally self-sustaining.  They are threatened both by burnout and by bureaucratization.  Although the school superintendents we have interviewed tell us that they intend to keep and strengthen school families, these organizations require resources.  One of LAAMP's tactical lessons has been that funding a family coordinator position was nearly essential to creating a robust network of schools.  As the LAAMP program and the resources that accompanied it dwindle away, it would be surprising to see school families survive as a feature of school reform in the Los Angeles region.

Perhaps the best opportunity for school reformers in Southern California to gain policy support for school families and other networks of teachers and parents will come as the state's new high school exit examination—yet another sweeping state mandate—comes into full force.  All school districts have become acutely aware that student success on the high school exam requires that schools and educators connect across the traditional boundaries between elementary and secondary schools.  This connection was one of the

original LAAMP goals, and, as we have seen, LAAMP families encourage connections—the sharing of teaching strategies and the communication of vital information about students.

The example of school families illustrates the broader point that this case study confirms: the autonomy of local systemic reform efforts in American cities is an illusion. The state is now the most powerful policy agent in California's K-12 education system, just as it is throughout most of the United States. The various policy making systems of elementary and secondary education in the United States may be terribly complex in practice, but this theoretical point is relatively simple. A local reform program cannot succeed without being aligned with state policy, or at least with the acquiescence of state policy makers.

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