

SEVEN STRATEGIES

for District Transformation

PRACTICAL TOOLS
for District Transformation

ERS




Education Resource Strategies



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A photograph of three young children in a classroom. In the foreground, a young boy with dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie, sits at a desk with his chin resting on his hand, looking down at an open book. To his right, a young girl with dark curly hair, wearing a dark blue sweater with a name tag that says "James", is also looking at the book. In the background, another young girl with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, is looking towards the other two children. The classroom is filled with books and colorful decorations.

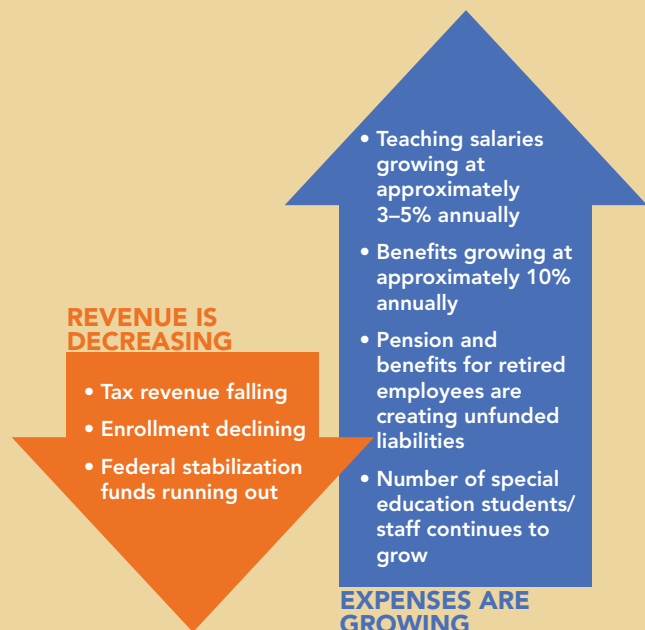
The school systems we have are not the school systems we need.

INTRODUCTION

The school systems we have are not the school systems we need

This is not news. If school systems were working the way they should be, schools that succeeded in reaching high standards with urban children would be the norm rather than the exception. The exceptional schools are finding more effective ways to organize their resources to invest in teaching effectiveness, provide targeted individual attention, and maximize academic time. But traditional schools and districts are caught in a vicious cycle that makes it difficult to take these practices to scale.

Over the past three decades, spending on public schools has nearly doubled,¹ but while there have been incremental improvements in student performance, the majority of urban students are not receiving the education they need and deserve. Why? Most of the added resources have been directed toward employee benefits, staff outside the regular classroom, and special education and other student populations.² As a result,



the majority of students have an educational experience that is not significantly different or better than it was 30 years ago. Districts have introduced innovative programs but have layered them on top of old, ineffective structures, and thus haven't seen the systemwide results they seek.

Given how school system costs are currently structured — with contractual commitments to increase teacher salaries annually, regardless of inflation; rising benefits costs for both active and retired employees; and resources tied up in the “bricks and mortar” of schools that in many big cities are not full — we estimate that the cost just to maintain current services will increase 3–8% each year, before inflation.³

To make matters worse, continued slow economic growth and declining enrollment in many urban districts means that school systems nationwide can expect several more years of reduced revenue. And while the stimulus funds of the past years have helped bridge the gap, there is no evidence that these funds will continue.

School systems need to transform

District leaders face a critical choice:

- Keep the current structure. Costs will continue to rise in ways unrelated to improving performance; districts will be forced to cut jobs and services when they need to be investing in improvement; and students will suffer.
- OR, take this opportunity to remake the very foundations of their organization and cost structure to create more effective systems.

By studying what high-performing urban schools do and partnering with districts deeply engaged in this rebuilding, ERS has identified **seven transformational strategies** that can serve as

1 *NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 1999.*

2 The Parthenon Group, 2007, from NCES; Educational Research Service; Parthenon Analysis.

3 Analysis of ERS partner districts, 2010.



a framework for any district working on transformation. These strategies attack the most important resource “**mis-alignments**” — places where the current use of resources runs counter to proven practices on how to improve teaching and learning. For example:

- **Districts want to give each school a fair amount of money per student**, but formula-driven allocation models give some schools twice as much per pupil as others with a similar student population.
- **Districts want to improve teacher effectiveness**, but more than 90% of the career increase in a teacher’s pay and 25% of district spending on teacher compensation goes by contract toward experience and course credits — neither of which link consistently with effective teaching.
- **Districts spend millions of dollars to reduce class sizes beyond required levels** before they consider whether investing in teaching quality might have a bigger impact on student learning. Research shows that reducing class size by a few students does not always lead to improved results for most students, whereas consistently having an effective teacher reliably returns improvements in student performance.⁴
- **Districts want to turn around their lowest-performing schools**, but programs often take the form of one-size-fits-all models that don’t match the unique needs of the school, or districts pump dollars into schools and then take the funding away once students are showing modest gains.

4 William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, 1996, *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Students Academic Achievement*, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center.

Getting started: What you need to know and do

This guide is part of a series of publications designed to support your efforts to improve resource use in your district. You can:

- Use this overview for a quick introduction to seven resource misalignments in school systems — and seven strategies to transform your system.
- Use *ResourceCheck* to assess whether your district’s current core reform strategies are transformational and to pinpoint areas where reallocating resources can have the biggest impact. You’ll answer questions about your district’s resource policies and practices and use the answers to evaluate and strengthen performance.
- Learn much more about the most pressing resource allocation strategies in these four guides:
 - › *School Funding Systems: Equity, Transparency, Flexibility*
 - › *Turnaround Schools: District Strategies for Success and Sustainability*
 - › *School Design: Leveraging Talent, Time, and Money*
 - › *The Teaching Job: Structuring for Quality*

All of these guides and *ResourceCheck* can be found at www.ERStrategies.org.



How can you reallocate your resources to improve teaching and learning?

SEVEN MISALIGNMENTS — AND TRANSFORMATIONAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THEM

For each of the seven transformational strategies, we describe the common misalignments we've observed, explain the strategies that you must pursue to address them, offer examples of how districts are tackling this challenge, and recommend a list of actions.



The problem: MISALIGNMENTS	The solution: TRANSFORMATIONAL STRATEGIES
<p>1 School Funding: Schools and students with the same needs receive different levels and types of resources that don't match their needs.</p>	<p>Ensure equitable, transparent, and flexible funding across schools adjusted for student need.</p>
<p>2 Teaching: Job structure, salary, and support do not encourage teacher effectiveness and contribution.</p>	<p>Restructure teaching to foster individual and team effectiveness and professional growth.</p>
<p>3 School Design: Traditional school schedules and staffing practices do not match time and individual attention to priorities or foster professional working conditions for teachers.</p>	<p>Support schools in organizing talent, time, and money to maximize learning.</p>
<p>4 Instructional Support: Spending on and organization of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development are not aligned with school needs.</p>	<p>Ensure access to aligned curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.</p>
<p>5 Leadership: Districts make limited investments to build and reward leadership effectiveness.</p>	<p>Build school and district leader capacity.</p>
<p>6 Central Services: Central school services and supervision are not designed to improve productivity and customize support to school needs.</p>	<p>Redesign central roles for empowerment, accountability, and efficiency.</p>
<p>7 Partnerships: Districts do not leverage more cost-effective community and expert resources to provide student support and non-core academic instruction.</p>	<p>Partner with families and communities.</p>

1 SCHOOL FUNDING: Schools and students with the same needs receive different levels and types of resources that don't match their needs.

Everywhere we have worked, district leaders are surprised to learn that there are wide variations in per pupil spending across schools, with some of their neediest schools receiving half as much as other schools in their district. Even when equity is a clear district priority, unexamined formulas and practices — combined with ad hoc exceptions to the rules — create unintentional funding differences. In some cases, schools do receive similar dollar allocations, but don't have the flexibility to use resources in ways that best serve their students. Greater flexibility for schools with resource-savvy leaders can improve results by better matching people, time, and money to student and school needs. But in many districts, school-level budget reporting and allocation rules are not transparent, making it hard to see whether appropriations match priorities.

For example, School A and School B in a northeastern school district would appear to be fairly funded as they receive almost the same per pupil allocation from their school district — \$12,960 and \$13,080, respectively. However, the student needs in these two schools differ significantly. In School B, special education students represent 24% of the student body compared to only 13% in School A. Further, only 35% of the entering students in School B scored proficient on English Language Arts (ELA) standards in 8th grade compared to 68% of the students in School A.

The schools have different levels of flexibility in terms of resources as well. School B operates as an “in-district” charter and can organize time and staff to meet its students’ needs. It can pick the teachers and staff it needs to match student and school needs, while School A must accept district-defined staff positions and select from a small group of teachers and staff based on



seniority. A deeper analysis of the use of resources at the more challenged School B reveals that the principal felt so discouraged about the quality of one teacher that he assigned her to monitor the halls rather than inflict her on struggling students.

STRATEGY: Ensure equitable, transparent, and flexible funding across school adjusted for student need.

School systems that want to ensure that all schools reach high standards need to ensure that the level and the type of resources match the needs of students. Most districts will need to improve the way they give resources to schools, moving from funding practices that maintain uniformity and conformity to practices that give the most support to the schools and students with greatest need and encouraging new models for providing that support. Schools need to get their “fair share” of district money to meet the needs of their students (equity) in ways that everyone can easily understand (transparency) and that allow them to use resources to meet their unique needs (flexibility).

Spotlight: Philadelphia

The school district of Philadelphia revised its budget reporting practices to more clearly represent expenses at the central versus school level in 2009. Prior to this revision, only expenses directly managed at the school (e.g., teachers, special education staff, etc.) were reported at the school level, and all centrally managed functions were reported only at the district level. In addition, school expenses were not categorized or grouped in meaningful ways.

After the revision, centrally managed functions delivered at the school (e.g., facilities, transportation) were reported for each school including categorical and grant funds. All expenses at each school were then categorized as instructional, instructional support, pupil/family support, and operational support so that it was easy to see how much the district was investing in each area in each school.

Take action!

- Allocate resources equitably across schools, adjusting for student and school needs.
- Create transparency and predictability that builds trust and allows school leaders to organize resources to fit school and student needs.
- Ensure school leaders have the flexibility to organize people, time, and money to fit school and student needs.



2 TEACHING: Job structure, salary, and support do not encourage teacher effectiveness and contribution.

In most schools, the structure of the teaching job looks more like that of an assembly line worker than a creative, committed professional and team member. Teachers work in isolated classrooms with limited support and collaboration to accomplish ever-increasing challenges. They are expected to do the same job the day they are hired as the day they retire and to move in lockstep across their careers. They are given limited support to develop their skills and improve their practice over time. They have few options to take on more responsibility and help develop others without leaving the classroom for good. The Widget Effect characterizes this approach as a “denial of individual strengths and weaknesses, it is deeply disrespectful to teachers; in its indifference to instructional effectiveness, it gambles with the lives of students.”⁵

In most districts, more than 90% of the pay increase over a teacher’s career accrues from years on the job and additional course credits. Depending on the average age of the district’s teaching force, this means that somewhere between 20% and 40% of all district spending pays for experience and course credits — neither of which link consistently with teaching effectiveness

STRATEGY: Restructure teaching to foster individual and team effectiveness and professional growth.

Districts need to restructure the teaching job to emphasize teacher teams, differentiated roles, and more flexible job definitions and schedules. A more effective system includes new ways to evaluate teacher effectiveness, attract and hire top talent, support and develop individuals throughout their careers, and retain effective teachers. Districts must identify struggling teachers and provide sustained support to help those with potential to become

better educators (and remove those who don’t), and reward teachers who excel in the classroom and/or who take on challenging assignments or leadership responsibilities. Strong systems give the best teachers opportunities for advancement that do not require them to leave the classroom full-time and forever.

Spotlight: Perspectives Charter High School, Chicago

Hundreds of high-performing individual schools have restructured the daily work and careers of teachers to reward results and create collaborative teams. Perspectives Charter High School in Chicago, for instance, is committed to helping students make connections between the real world and their classrooms. As part of its hiring process, Perspectives identifies candidates who extend learning beyond the textbook and are willing to keep learning themselves.

Teachers engage in professional development and collaborative planning time 276 hours a year — 152 hours more than the average teacher in Chicago. They work together in grade-level and content-based teams to align curriculum from 6th to 12th grade, examine results of student assessments, create teaching goals for the year, and identify how to tailor instruction to meet students’ needs. Four experienced teachers serve as part-time instructional leaders to observe, coach, and evaluate four to eight teachers in their content areas. While teachers’ salaries are similar to those in other Chicago schools, raises are based on evaluations, and the school offers bonuses to teachers who assume additional responsibilities.

⁵ Daniel Weisberg, Susan Sexton, Jennifer Mulhern, and David Keeling, 2009, *The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness*, The New Teacher Project: Brooklyn, NY.

Spotlight: Cincinnati

Examples of district-level efforts to restructure the teaching job are harder to find because so many barriers exist to accomplishing the systemwide overhaul required. Cincinnati Public Schools' efforts in the early 1990s illuminate the possibilities and challenges. Under the leadership of Union President Tom Mooney and Superintendent Steven Adamowski, the district organized schools into teaching teams that shared responsibility for the learning of a group of students over time. Teams had blocks of common time scheduled weekly where they used protocols for looking at student work to jointly adjust instruction and define their professional learning needs.

These teams were led by highly paid teacher leaders who met clearly defined standards of proficiency on a rubric jointly developed by the union and district. Highly effective teachers were able to earn top salaries in as few as five years if they met the defined standards. To make sure that teacher evaluations were objective and reliable, the district invested in training a cadre of master teachers who worked full-time to perform the evaluations along with the principal. Principal and teacher evaluators received training by the union and district and spent hours evaluating teachers together to ensure consistency in rating teachers.

Early results were promising, and the district could demonstrate that higher-rated teachers achieved greater gains in student performance. However, in the first year, these highly trained evaluators rated only a small percentage of teachers at the top level of proficiency, disappointing many teachers who expected to be rated as "expert." In short order, the union voted out the leaders associated with the new scheme and voted to decouple compensation from teacher evaluation.

Now the district has an expensive evaluation system with limited utility. The district cannot reward its best teachers with additional compensation. And it does not use the information on teaching effectiveness to deploy the best teachers where they are most needed to improve school or teacher performance. Thus, they are forced to bring in external coaches who don't know the school and staff to try to improve instruction. This approach applies an expensive band-aid instead of building the ongoing "learning organization" district leaders had first envisioned.

Take action!

- Measure and report teacher effectiveness in a way that informs all other aspects of the human capital system.
- Recruit and hire talented individuals to work in teams that match experience and capability to the needs of the school.
- Ensure teams include expert coaching support and schedule time to collaborate to improve instruction in response to student needs.
- Structure individual professional development and career opportunities to encourage professional growth and retain the most effective teachers and leaders.
- Create new compensation models and career paths that reward the greatest contributors and attract top talent to the biggest challenges.



③ SCHOOL DESIGN: Traditional school schedules and staffing practices do not match time and individual attention to priorities or foster professional working conditions for teachers.

Nationwide, urban districts average one teacher for every 15 students and one adult for every eight students,⁶ yet general education teachers report overflowing classrooms, huge teacher loads, and major challenges providing students the individual attention and time they need. The only way teachers can ensure that students get individual attention in many schools is to assign them to special education status, where the student-teacher ratio is significantly lower. After-school tutoring or summer school does not integrate with students' daily instruction and is not designed to help them catch up to their peers. Teachers report limited, if any, time for collaboration with other teachers to improve instruction.

At the secondary school level, the school day is most often organized into blocks of time that do not vary by subject or student. Class sizes do not vary systematically based on student need or teaching skill. Teachers teach five sections of 25 to 30 students each, regardless of the level or achievement of those students or the skill of the teacher. There is limited opportunity to vary time for individual learning except by having students repeat a class or take a lower-level course. The average school year for students is 180 days, and each day averages the same 6.5 hours it did decades ago — despite the more ambitious learning goals for students in the information age.

In addition, many districts have outdated portfolios of school sizes and programs. Some have too many small or underfilled schools that are tying up valuable resources but are not structured to provide high-quality instruction. For example, a K–5 school of 200 students may have some grades with only one larger classroom and others with two very small classes.

Class sizes will vary dramatically each year because of enrollment unless the district makes the strategic choice to focus resources on these grades. Serving students with specialized learning

needs in these smaller schools can require schools to add expertise that is not fully used because of the small number of students needing these services. Worse, because many districts find it difficult to recruit teachers in special education and English language learning (ELL), many of these students in small schools do not have access to the expert instruction they need.

STRATEGY: Support schools in organizing talent, time, and money to maximize learning.

Whether envisioning new designs or starting from scratch, many high-performing charter schools and some innovative district-run schools reallocate their existing resources to extend time for teachers and students and provide individual attention for students in prioritized subjects and for targeted individual needs. They do this by rethinking every aspect of their organization and how they use talent, time, and technology.

Individual schools should not have to reorganize themselves on their own. Districts can provide innovative templates for staffing, scheduling, and professional development that schools can use as a starting point. These new designs also should include templates for organizing to serve different numbers and combinations of students with specialized learning needs (such as special education or ELL). Districts also need to ensure that school leaders have the capacity and flexibility to create new models and hold schools accountable for ensuring their designs support student needs.

In addition to supporting individual schools in becoming more strategic, most districts need to take a critical look at their programs and portfolios of schools. Being strategic about the array of schools and programs can significantly reduce costs while enhancing program effectiveness.

⁶ *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2009: Table 33.

Spotlight: Amistad Charter School, New Haven

The high-performing Amistad Charter School in New Haven has taken a deliberate approach to rethinking school size, student and teacher grouping, professional development, and scheduling. The school has defined a K–12 continuum with three schools of set sizes and staffing ratios. Each grade level has three classrooms per grade, making planning and regrouping possible and allowing cost-effective sharing of specialized support.

Classes in grades K–2 have two teachers for every 28 students, with one of these teachers being a novice teacher and the other a lead teacher who has more expertise and responsibility and is paid more. A reading specialist works with these teachers to create skill-based reading groups of eight to 10 students. Students have 30 minutes daily of individualized instruction based on assessed areas of strengths and weaknesses, using the popular Response to Intervention model. Teachers work an eight-hour day so they have time to collaborate and learn together with their principal and instructional leaders.

Spotlight: Children’s School of Rochester, New York

The Children’s School of Rochester, NY, another perennially high-performing school, has taken a different approach that addresses the same three strategies of investing in the quality of teaching teams, ensuring targeted individual attention, and maximizing academic time.

In this school, about one-third of students have either ELL needs or special education needs. The school receives an additional staffing allocation to serve these students. Instead of creating a separate program for these students, however, the school integrates them into grade-level groups of 42 total students each. Three carefully selected teachers with a balance of expertise in literacy, math, ELL, and special education share responsibility for daily instruction. Teacher teams constantly assess student needs using both standardized and school-developed assessment practices. Although each student is assigned to one “base homeroom” of 14 students, the teachers structure student time and groupings every day to match the needs of students *that day* with the team members’ expertise.

Take action!

- Promote state of the art “Strategic school designs” and ensure leadership capacity, flexibility and accountability to implement them.
- Build teaching teams that maximize combined expertise and have time for collaboration and access to expert support.
- Maximize instructional time on core academic subjects while varying time based on subject and student priorities.
- Provide schedules, groupings and structures that create targeted individual attention and personal relationships between students and teachers.
- Implement cost-effective strategies for students with special learning needs that integrate with general education and emphasize ongoing assessment and response.
- Create a portfolio of schools sizes, program offerings and governance structures that balances cost with choice, equitable access to high quality options and innovation.



4 INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT: Spending on and organization of curriculum, assessment, instruction, and professional development are not aligned with school needs.

Many districts have worked hard in recent years to align curriculum with state and local academic standards. This alignment is important, but only the first step. In many cases, there has been no corresponding investment in assessments and professional development to ensure the delivery of standards-based curriculum.

Districts' investments in professional development for teachers vary widely — from less than 1% in some districts to over 5% in others.⁷ Yet even the districts investing the most dollars in professional development are not reaping the rewards of their investments because efforts typically are fragmented. Programs are “one size fits all” instead of tailored to what each teacher needs, and training is delivered in artificial settings but not reinforced every day in the classroom. Teachers do not have regular access to expert support. They do not have effective assessments that they can use to evaluate how well they are delivering quality instruction based on curriculum standards. And they do not have time to collaborate on improving instruction to meet goals.



STRATEGY: Ensure access to aligned curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development.

Districts and schools must effectively implement curriculum and instruction that align with state standards. Teachers must use a variety of assessments — formative and summative, standardized and teacher-developed — to ensure that students learn the material. It makes no sense for individual schools to be recreating scope and sequence and developing formative assessment tools completely on their own without leveraging these efforts across systems and states.

Districts can play a major role in accelerating the alignment of curriculum and the use of formative assessments. Whether districts pursue a highly centralized approach to curriculum and instruction — defining the curriculum, pacing, and instruction — or a decentralized one — schools selecting their own approach — they play a key role in helping schools to find or create high-quality options that support district standards. And where schools are not succeeding in improving student performance, districts are accountable for ensuring that schools and teachers implement coherent, aligned curriculum and assessments and receive professional development support to do so.

⁷ Regis A. Shields and Karen H. Miles, 2009, “A Grand Bargain for Education Reform,” *Strategic Professional Development Review*, Harvard Education Press.

Spotlight: Boston

In 1999, Boston Public Schools leaders Tom Payzant and Tim Knowles took on the challenge of improving early reading and writing, and quickly discovered that elementary schools were implementing a wide variety of approaches to literacy. Some schools had no schoolwide curriculum at all. Because of the district's high student mobility, Boston chose to implement one literacy strategy systemwide.⁸ District leaders decided to implement a common approach to assessing early reading and writing skills and to invest heavily in coaching teams of teachers to work together to roll out the new assessments and materials.

As Payzant and Knowles began to implement the program, they found that the line item for professional development totaled only \$525,000 — not nearly enough for their plan. However, by digging deeper into the budget, they found a total of \$12 million dollars in central office professional development expenditures spread over fragmented and competing programs. In addition, the district had 11 contractual days for teacher professional development that could be reorganized and integrated to support the new approach. By combining all available funds to support an integrated approach and giving schools more flexibility in using professional development time, the district was able to implement an initiative that ultimately resulted in the Broad Prize for Urban Education for improvements in student achievement.

Take action!

- Provide access to curriculum that aligns with academic standards and the instruction, assessments, and professional development provided in schools.
- Provide access to assessments that align with standards and include timely feedback about student progress in meeting standards.
- Provide access to high-quality professional development that fits school needs and system strategy.



⁸ A few demonstrably successful schools that implemented their own schoolwide approach were allowed to opt out of the district program.

5 LEADERSHIP: Districts make limited investments to build and reward leadership effectiveness.

Creating strategic school designs, implementing aligned curriculum and assessments, and developing effective teaching teams all depend on having highly effective school leaders.

Yet, districts invest very little to induct new principals and to build school leader capacity over time. Some districts have created evaluation rubrics that define what master principals must be able to do, but few link professional development, compensation, or career paths to whether principals master these competencies or achieve results.

We have found wide variation in what districts invest to identify, nurture, and support new principals, from a low of a few thousand dollars to over \$100,000 per principal. And very few districts have systematic plans for measuring and developing existing principal capacity. Some districts have scheduled regular time for principals to meet in regional groups or with networks of principals that have similar challenges, but few devote significant resources to planning these meetings or bringing in expertise in response to identified needs.

The lack of a systematic approach to building capacity is even more apparent at the central office leadership level, where few leaders have defined professional development plans and districts invest very little to build a collective vision or capacity.

When districts do invest in these areas, it may be with “soft money,” using foundation support or a one-time grant instead of recognizing leadership development as an essential, ongoing expense.



Strategy: Build school and district leader capacity.

To move to a model that builds principals' capacity to initiate, lead, and maintain instructional improvements, districts must clearly define what effective leaders need to know and be able to do. Districts then need to use that definition to hire the right leaders, place them in the right situations, measure their performance, hold them accountable, and give them the right career support. In addition, being deliberate about leadership development with consistency across the district will ensure a ready pool of high-potential leaders to draw on as opportunities arise.

Spotlight: New York, Atlanta, Oakland

In a report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, *Central Office Transformation for District-Wide Teaching and Learning Improvement*, researchers at the University of Washington identified "differentiated support" as a promising practice in three urban districts committed to the development of principals as instructional leaders. In the New York, Atlanta, and Oakland, CA, school districts, central office administrators worked with school leaders one-on-one and through principal networks to identify and meet individual development needs. In each district, principal competencies and expected results were clearly defined and part of the principal evaluation tool.

Principals learned how to observe instruction, provide feedback to teachers, and plan for individual and group professional development with "walkthroughs" in schools, followed by discussions with their peers and supervisors. Those who were skilled instructional leaders were provided additional help with operational issues so that they could maintain their focus on instruction. In an example of one-on-one career development, a principal who had been a strong instructional leader in a middle school was moved to a high school to provide coaching support to an assistant principal to help her develop the skills needed to lead a high school.

Take action!

- Define and measure leadership effectiveness in a way that informs all other aspects of the human capital system.
- Hire and facilitate the assignment of talented individuals who bring the right set of skills, as fully developed as possible, to each school and to each district leadership role.
- Structure professional development, career opportunities, and compensation to encourage professional growth and retain the most effective school and district leaders.



6 CENTRAL SERVICES: Central school services and supervision are not designed to improve productivity and customize support to school needs.

While the private sector has increased efficiency and effectiveness in services such as procurement, transportation, accounting, and information technology, the education sector largely has been left behind. Investments to develop new systems are often the first to go in budget cuts that focus in the short term on protecting instructional resources. Even when investments are made in 21st-century systems or processes, the hard work required to change behaviors and reap the intended benefits often isn't done.

Central office leaders often are cast as the “enforcers” — focused on compliance and accountability, but without the expertise or authority to work closely with schools to understand what they need and how the central office can best support these needs. The result is an adversarial relationship between schools and central administration that drains resources and impedes innovation and progress.

Strategy: Redesign central roles for empowerment, accountability, and efficiency.

District operations must be reorganized to move from industrial age control models designed to ensure compliance to systems that use data and technology to empower local school leaders and teachers, customize service to schools, and improve efficiency. Central systems should be used to assess and provide what each school needs. New systems of accountability should empower and expand upon the success of high-performing schools while providing support to underperforming schools before they fail students. Districts need an explicit strategy for turning around very low-performing schools that is integrated with the overall reform plan, and district operations must be redesigned and streamlined to reflect this new service and support function.



Spotlight: Baltimore

Under the leadership of a new superintendent, the Baltimore City Public School System made large cuts in the central office, moved control of millions of dollars to schools, and changed the focus and structure of district administration from monitoring and compliance to the empowerment of principals. Principals who had been responsible for spending \$100 per pupil suddenly had \$8,000 per pupil under their control through a dramatic change in the school funding system combined with increased budgetary autonomy. The district supported principals by collecting, reporting, and organizing data for their use. A local foundation underwrote training to give principals the analytical and decisionmaking skills needed to manage the significantly larger pot of resources.

The district reorganized central staff into cross-functional teams serving networks of about 15 schools each. These teams included an academic lead, special education staff, operations and human resource support, a budget expert, and a social worker. Together the teams supported the principal in creating his or her school improvement plan and aligning resources and support to achieve it. These teams shared accountability for improving student performance and their level of service was monitored through a combination of “customer” surveys administered to school principals and process metrics measuring the speed and quality of service. The district is currently revising its information and accountability systems to align with this new approach.



Take action!

- Measure school performance and progress in ways that guide support.
- Organize central roles, timelines, and processes to differentiate support provided to schools based on their needs.
- Organize resources, roles, and processes to support low-performing schools.
- Ensure efficient provision of school operations and services in a way that maximizes resources devoted to instruction.
- Develop an integrated data infrastructure that facilitates districtwide monitoring, analysis, and problem solving to improve performance.

7 PARTNERSHIPS: Districts do not leverage more cost-effective community and expert resources to provide student support and non-core academic instruction.

More and more districts are recognizing that to educate urban students effectively; they must ensure that these students receive a variety of physical, social, and emotional supports that have not been traditionally delivered through schools.

In some cases, districts have jumped in to fill this void, adding positions and other resources. These services are critical, but may not always need to be provided by district staff or funded with district resources. Outside providers may be able to leverage existing programs, expertise, and facilities to provide higher quality at lower cost.

Even as schools strive to find more resources to meet higher academic standards in the core subjects, urban students especially need access to art, music, drama, and athletic opportunities that engage them and help them make meaning of the world in different ways. Most districts and many union contracts require that any school instruction be provided by certified district employees paid at the same levels as academic teachers and subject to the same scheduling restrictions. This means that districts may spend as much to offer physical education as they do to provide math or that they pay above-market rates for social workers and other social and emotional support for students.



Strategy: Partner with families and communities.

Shifting from traditional models of separate services to more integrated and cost-effective models of serving students will require districts to partner in new ways with families, communities, and outside expert providers. Most communities have myriad other resources — community colleges, local business and artists, youth service organizations — that would benefit from strong schools and that may be able to cost-effectively augment or expand support in these areas. In some instances, community partnerships can provide creative and cost-effective instruction to supplement instruction provided by classroom teachers.

In addition, numerous suppliers are organizing to provide online and other instructional offerings that expand curricular offerings at lower cost and sometimes higher quality.

Tapping into community and other external resources will require investing resources to coordinate and integrate this support, but districts can leverage community resources and expertise to better support students as a result.

Student needs neither begin nor end at the schoolhouse door. Aligning with community organizations to meet all student needs can have a dramatic impact on student performance and capacity to achieve.

Spotlight: MetWest High School, Oakland, California

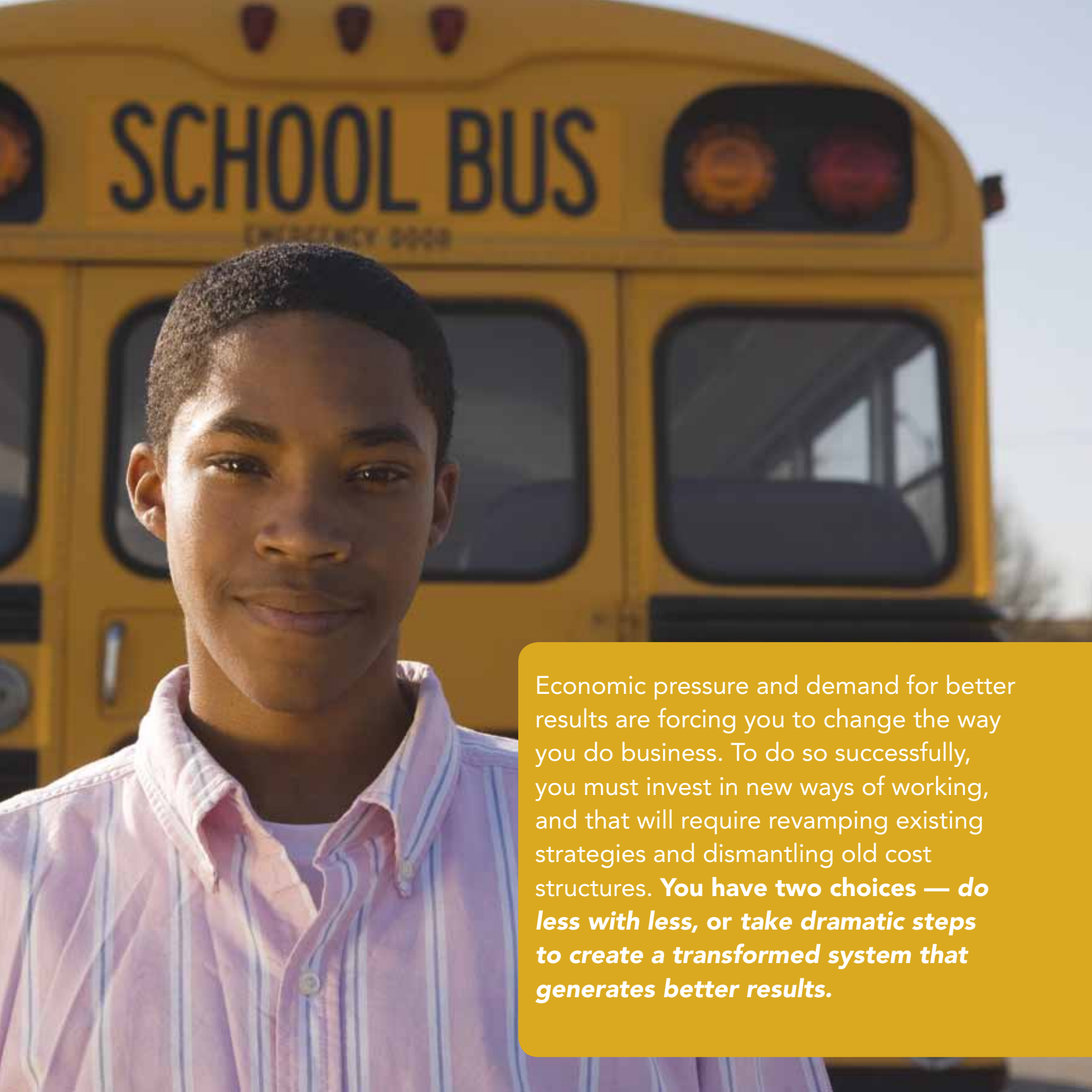
Students at MetWest High School in Oakland (CA) Unified School District are expected to take charge of their own learning and design their own course of study. This ambitious undertaking is far from independent study, however. Among the players on any student's team are parents, advisors, and workplace mentors who help students design a project-based, personalized curriculum. Every student is matched to an internship within the community, and advisors frequently meet with families to discuss a student's learning and growth.

MetWest hosts monthly potluck family nights, which give students, parents, mentors, and advisors an opportunity to catch up. Parents also participate in the school's hiring process and fundraising activities. In addition to the organizations that offer internships, some of the school's partners include Casey Family Programs (counseling), the Oakland Museum of California (art classes), 826 Valencia (writing workshop for 9th graders), and organizations that provide active electives for students (kayak program), and Laney College, across the street from the school, where students use the college's library and gym and take college-level courses.

Take action!

- Use local expert resources to augment instruction and provide enrichment and wellness.
- Actively involve parents and family members in students' learning and in the daily work of the school.





Economic pressure and demand for better results are forcing you to change the way you do business. To do so successfully, you must invest in new ways of working, and that will require revamping existing strategies and dismantling old cost structures. **You have two choices — do less with less, or take dramatic steps to create a transformed system that generates better results.**

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR DISTRICT TRANSFORMATION

Based on firsthand observations by Education Resource Strategies, Inc., of resource use in large urban school systems, this series is designed to help districts begin the process of identifying and addressing resource decisions that don't support improving student performance. This guide is one of six publications specifically designed to help district leaders analyze and optimize school system resource allocation.

ResourceCheck

ResourceCheck is an easy-to-use online self-assessment tool all district leaders can use to measure current resource use relative to best practices. This tool will give you a quick sense of where you should look deeper to get a better picture of what your district is doing. Users answer questions about district resource policies and practices and use the answers to evaluate performance.

Seven Strategies for District Transformation

Targeted for superintendents, this guide presents a comprehensive vision of seven strategies presented in *ResourceCheck* that are integral elements of effective district transformation.

Resource Guides

Targeted for district leaders including chief operating officers, chief finance officers, and chief academic officers and their staffs, four guides offer practical guidance and action steps that can help districts successfully challenge and transform their education system. Guides include *School Funding Systems: Equity, Transparency, Flexibility*; *Turnaround Schools: District Strategies for Success and Sustainability*; *School Design: Leveraging Talent, Time, and Money*; and *The Teaching Job: Structuring for Quality*.

All six electronic publications can be found at www.erstrategies.org.

ABOUT ERS

Education Resource Strategies, Inc. (ERS), is a nonprofit organization that works extensively with large urban public school systems to rethink the use of district- and school-level resources and build strategies for improved instruction and performance.

ERS



Education Resource Strategies

1 Brook Street
Watertown, MA 02472

617.607.8000

www.ERStrategies.org