



## Chicago Annenberg Challenge

To: Friends of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge  
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### *Findings and Observations*

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The Challenge began funding school improvement efforts in 1995. More than half of Chicago's public schools will have participated at one time or another in an Annenberg-supported improvement effort by the end of our initiative in 2001, by which time more than \$40 million will have been granted by CAC in support of school improvement efforts.

As we reflect on our field work, research and the data we've collected thus far, and as we enter our final year of grantmaking, we want to share with you some of our findings and observations to date.

*We are proud of our growing legacy:*

- **Of all we've funded, the greatest improvements have come from our investment in professional development efforts.**
- **We have strengthened the community of external partners willing and able to work with public schools to promote school improvement.**
- **We have provided and expanded financial and other resources enabling important programs to take root, especially programs that nurture a growing professional teaching corps.**
- **We have sponsored important research and contributed to the body of knowledge concerning "what works" in effective school reform.**
- **We have helped create schools where learning opportunities for students have improved.**

*What have we learned about how school change happens?*

- School change is most likely to happen when principals advocate for it. School improvement depends on the *active work* of an “internal agent,” usually the principal or a group of committed teachers, working with an “external agent,” i.e. an outside partner or support provider.
- In partnership with strong principals, external partners who bring new ideas, new resources and impetus for improvement to schools can be significant forces in helping schools to change. Without the internal agent, however, the impact of an external partner will be limited.
- External partners who focus on developing the internal capacity of schools to improve, concentrating in particular on building school leadership and teacher professional community, have the best chance of sustaining and building upon the improvement they initiate over time.
- The effectiveness of external partners depends on several school-related factors, including the base of human resources and internal commitment to change, as well as the coordination of improvement initiatives and support providers.
- External partners help schools focus on their unifying missions and, in many cases, deepen the connection between schools and the larger community. External partners provide essential support and resources and help schools deal with needs and roadblocks. Too many external partners in one school may become counter-productive, however, distracting from a cohesive school mission.

*How prepared are teachers and principals for the challenges they face?*

- The quality of professional development in Chicago public schools has risen over the past two years, especially in Annenberg schools, but additional high-quality professional development is needed.
- Teachers who are engaged in quality, on-site, sustained professional development activities report higher job satisfaction and stay in the profession longer. Professional development is a first step critical to improving teaching, and therefore improving learning, in Chicago’s public schools.
- When teachers can make decisions regarding the kind of professional development activities they take part in, they feel more ownership of and commitment to activities. When teachers collaborate with colleagues, their morale increases.

*What kind of classroom leads to increased student achievement?*

- When teachers challenge students with rigorous assignments and high quality intellectual work, students rise to the challenge. Intellectually challenging tasks produce high quality intellectual work by students.
- Intellectually challenging interactive instruction produces greater gains in student achievement on standardized tests (ITBS) than does "skill and drill" didactic instruction, or "teaching to the test."
- According to a recent study of academic practices, however, teaching which integrates authentic intellectual instruction (rather than "skill and drill") is the exception rather than the rule in Chicago's public schools.
- Children are more engaged by challenging work that is connected to their lives and has value beyond school.
- A combination of strong academic press and strong social supports for the student are most conducive to promoting student academic achievement.
- Parent involvement in the classroom not only enables teachers to give special attention to individual students; their presence in the classroom helps to create a personalized environment.
- When parents make a commitment to and become more involved with their children's education, their children are more likely to succeed academically.
- In schools where there is a higher adult-to-student ratio in classrooms, the resulting more personalized learning environments are contributing to increased student achievement.

*Does private investment in public education make a difference?*

- Student learning cannot improve until school performance improves, which requires investment in school capacity, i.e. improving teacher professional development, better involving parents and community members, and strengthening the leadership of school principals. Private dollars can support these important efforts.
- Even in a large system like CPS, targeted dollars can move a process and enable progress in school improvement efforts.
- For real change to occur we must invest in new ways for parents, family members, teachers, principals and community groups to work in partnership.

As the above indicates, in order to improve, Chicago's public schools need strong leadership, shared instructional beliefs and institutionalized means for diffusing those beliefs. Schools also need opportunities for teachers to learn as teachers, basic resources that support high quality instruction, a healthy learning environment and support from CPS and the community. We are proud to be playing a role in making that happen.

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge was awarded \$49.2 million by the Annenberg Foundation, and then matched the Annenberg gift with more than \$100 million in local commitments to school improvement efforts.

For information on current research surrounding these and other educational issues, contact the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, 322 S. Green Street, Chicago 60607 or The Consortium on Chicago School Research at 1313 East 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Chicago, IL 60307. Visit the Chicago Annenberg Challenge website at [www.chi-challenge.org](http://www.chi-challenge.org)