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S U M M I T

**Linking Entrepreneurial Innovation and Systemic Change in Public Education**

A Report on the Seventh Annual NewSchools Summit

May 4, 2006

Empowering Entrepreneurs to Transform Public Education





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .4

Plenary Session: Connecting Innovation to System Change . . . . .6  
*Entrepreneurs face challenges in their efforts to dramatically transform public education*

Panel: Turning Around Underperforming Schools—Conditions and Characteristics  
 for Success . . . . .9  
*Clear control and cultural alignment needed to create dramatic change in chronically failing schools*

Panel: District Portfolio Management—Charter Schools as Partners . . . . .11  
*Navigating new partnership strategies yields both opportunities and challenges for districts and school managers*

Panel: The Future of Teacher Education . . . . .13  
*Developing high-quality teachers requires significant practical training as well as ongoing support*

Panel: Creating a New Public Education System—Entrepreneurs in New Orleans . . . . .15  
*Charter school leaders take advantage of opportunity to create new, better schools for students post-Katrina*

Lunchtime Session: Putting Students Front and Center—Voices of the Future . . . . .17  
*Local charter school students highlight individual attention, teacher quality as successful elements of their schools*

Panel: Charter School Performance—What Are the Measures of Success? . . . . .19  
*Researchers explore shortcomings of current charter school research, suggest alternative approaches*

Panel: Rethinking Teacher Unions for the 21st Century . . . . .21  
*Relationship between unions and district management shifts as both sides seek improved outcomes for students*

Working Session: Data-Driven Decision-making—How Ready Are You? . . . . .23  
*Attention to time, resources, culture necessary in creating a cycle of instructional improvement*

Town Hall Meeting: Entrepreneurs’ Ideas for Improving No Child Left Behind . . . . .25  
*Leaders call for changes to current requirements that hinder schools seeking to serve struggling students*

About NewSchools Venture Fund . . . . .27

## INTRODUCTION



On May 4, 2006, NewSchools Venture Fund convened its seventh annual Summit. Each year, the Summit brings together an incredibly talented and passionate group of leaders who are committed to ensuring that all students receive high-quality educational opportunities. This year, more than 400 entrepreneurs, educators, business and community leaders, policymakers and philanthropists gathered in Northern California to explore new approaches to change, and to reflect on the work that still needs to be done to transform our nation's public schools. "This network—and your activities as a part of it—is essential to NewSchools' self-defined role as a catalyst for change," explained Ted Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer of NewSchools, during his opening remarks. "But more importantly, this network is part of a growing social movement to change American public education in fundamental and important ways."



These agents of change in public education rarely have the opportunity to connect across the boundaries of sector, political party and geography. At the Summit, they are able to collaborate and leverage one another's expertise and resources in support of improved student achievement. While it is impossible to capture on paper the interactive and inspirational spirit of the Summit, we know from past experience that the discussions and relationships fostered by the event help to keep these leaders focused on continued progress over the year ahead.

This year, participants engaged in deep conversations around some common themes, including:

- **Charter schools continue to influence the work of school districts.** Prompted by accountability demands and other trends, district leaders across the country are finding that charter school systems can serve as effective partners. One of the most popular sessions at the Summit explored the conditions necessary for successfully turning around chronically failing public schools, and in doing so considered the perspectives of a traditional district leader, a national education service provider and a local charter management organization. Recognizing the need for additional capacity, some districts have begun to move toward a "portfolio management" approach by contracting with a number of external providers to launch new schools or manage existing schools that have not performed adequately. Another session considered this evolving strategy and found that when executed thoughtfully, portfolio management may present school districts with an opportunity to consider new ways of organizing their operations, and provide charter school operators with a way to broaden their impact.
- **Effective measures of charter school performance are critical to ensure quality and sustainability of the movement.** A research panel at the Summit considered the current state of charter school research, which suffers from a number of shortcomings—most notably the temptation to draw conclusions about the entire diverse movement from small-scale studies. Panelists highlighted the need to increase the number of focused, rigorous research studies and evaluations that consider the specifics of the charter school's educational model alongside the value-add for students and overall results.

- **The staffing of schools is a crucial determinant of student achievement.** Though few question this widely accepted belief, two sessions at the Summit highlighted areas of practice and policy that strongly influence staffing. A discussion on preparing high-quality teachers drew lessons from both traditional schools of education and alternative routes, and indicated a shift toward more practical, hands-on programs that give teachers more significant experience in the classroom. Meanwhile, another session explored the collective bargaining agreements negotiated between teacher unions and districts, which also have a major impact on the distribution of high-quality (and low-quality) teachers in a school district. Increasingly, teacher unions and districts are finding new ways to work together such that the interests of teachers are balanced by explicit considerations of what is best for students.
- **Data can be an important force for change in the hands of educators.** As public education continues to shift away from an emphasis on inputs and toward a focus on results, it is important that school systems take a systemic approach to the use of data. An interactive working session on data-driven decision-making at the Summit gave educators a framework for considering how data can inform instruction, which was designed to help them think through their own school system's readiness to gather, analyze and act upon data in a meaningful way.
- **Remember the “Stockdale Paradox.”** In the now-classic business book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins quotes Admiral Jim Stockdale, a military officer during the Vietnam War who stressed the importance of confronting “the brutal facts of your current reality” while also retaining “faith that you will prevail in the end.” Likewise, the theme that emerged from the plenary session—and carried throughout the day—is that the work of entrepreneurs must press on, despite the slow pace of broad systems change and the daunting nature of the needs that remain. Many also took inspiration from another session that focused on education entrepreneurs in New Orleans, who seem poised to have a dramatic impact on that city’s public school system by leading efforts to rebuild it from scratch in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Ultimately, the Summit provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress of entrepreneurial education reform, to take stock, and to gather steam for continued efforts throughout the coming year. “Together, we’ve achieved much: the growth of charter schools, the establishment of standards-based accountability systems, the growth of real educational choices for kids and families in America’s cities, and the development of new tools and practices for schools and classrooms,” observed Ted Mitchell. “Yet there is more, much more, to be done. As we gather today, we are confronted by the brutal fact that our current system is failing ... the failures of our education system compromise the very promise of American democracy, a promise of equality, opportunity and access. It is a commitment to individuals and to society as a whole.”

The commitment of many people contributed to the success of the NewSchools Summit and this publication, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, whose support and guidance were critical. We also thank those who participated in the Summit for their ongoing involvement in this national conversation about improving public education, and their important work toward that end throughout the year.



## PLENARY SESSION: CONNECTING INNOVATION TO SYSTEM CHANGE

*Entrepreneurs face challenges in their efforts to dramatically transform public education*

### Speakers:

#### Ted Mitchell

Chief Executive Officer,  
NewSchools Venture Fund  
(moderator)

#### Reed Hastings

Founder and Chief Executive  
Officer, Netflix and Co-Founder,  
EdVoice

#### Wendy Kopp

President and Founder, Teach  
For America

#### Deborah McGriff

Chief Communications Officer,  
Edison Schools

#### Tom Vander Ark

Executive Director of Education  
Initiatives, Bill & Melinda Gates  
Foundation

Over the last decade, entrepreneurs have made great strides in improving education for underserved children. Some have created new pathways for promising new teachers and leaders to engage in educating public school students. Others have developed new tools and practices that make the work of educators more effective and efficient. Still others have started and continue to manage thousands of charter schools and dozens of charter school management organizations that provide students and their families with new options for a high-quality education. Despite these gains, there is still a daunting amount of work to be done to create sustainable, high-performing systems of public education across the country. “Indeed, it is an enduring paradox in education reform that while a growing number of promising innovations have emerged—offering clear examples of alternative approaches—systems change is elusive,” explained moderator Ted Mitchell of NewSchools Venture Fund. “How is it then that we can secure the ground we’ve gained, and move beyond the pockets of innovation we have created, toward a system of public education that is rigorous, just and equitable?”

In this session, a group of four nationally prominent education leaders wrestled with this question from a number of angles. While entrepreneurs and others in the business sector accept failure as the price of innovation, “we haven’t gotten to the point in education yet where we can experiment and it’s okay not to be successful,” explained Deborah McGriff, a former urban superintendent who now works at Edison Schools, a national for-profit education management organization. Indeed, public education seems designed to “mute” innovation, noted Tom Vander Ark, who leads the education work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “It does take a superhuman leader to run a great school, because they have everyone and everything working against them,” Vander Ark added. “We have to create great systems of schools where mere mortals can run good schools.” Some felt it would take major governance reform to correct for this system-wide resistance to broad improvement.

“Democracy is not the solution, it’s the problem,” asserted Reed Hastings, former head of the state school board and a charter school advocate. He explained that the reason school districts fail to innovate—despite the competitive pressure that entrepreneurs place on them—is because the school boards that control them are democratically elected. Hastings believes these board would be more effective as oversight bodies that monitor the progress of a portfolio of school management providers, “in the same way that the FAA or SEC oversee industries,” rather than running schools themselves.

### Key Questions

- What is the connection between entrepreneurial innovation and sustainable change in public education?
- Why have so many promising entrepreneurial efforts failed to achieve their intended impact on the broader system?
- In what areas and ways does entrepreneurial innovation have the potential for more dramatic improvement of public schools and school systems?



The panelists were divided on the issue of whether charter schools—which are in some ways a grand entrepreneurial experiment in what massive governance change could look like—have taken advantage of this opportunity. Vander Ark pointed out that many charter schools are of low quality, due at least in part to “sloppy authorization and lax accountability” in many places.

Although Hastings agreed with the concern about charter school quality, he maintained that charter schools remain a promising innovation that has gained significant ground. “We’ve been wildly successful at growing, we could be further ahead on quality, but I think it’s an enormous amount of progress that we’ve made in 10 years,” he said. “It’s by far the best opportunity out there for change.” Hastings added that the evolution of markets tends to be messy and complicated, and urged the charter school movement to embrace objective criteria for closing underperforming charter schools. He pointed to the California Charter School Association as an organization that has led the charge on this front in its home state, persuading its members that closing poorly performing charter schools is important for the whole movement, and even working behind the scenes with some superintendents to ensure that such schools are shut down.

Teach For America founder Wendy Kopp drew a different conclusion from the experience of the charter school movement: even with major changes to governance, creating better schools still entails a great deal of work. “I fear we’re using the systemic barriers of governance as an excuse to not take on the hard work,” Kopp said. “If we’re really going to effect broad systems change, we’re going to have to operate as high-performing institutions in any other sector operate.” Citing Jack Welch of General Electric, Kopp believes entrepreneurs should be focused on the elements of success that have



driven businesses forward: talent development, use of technology, actionable data, and a strong results-driven culture. She urged panelists and the audience to maintain an “internal locus of control” and unwavering focus on quality, so that “if all the barriers went away tomorrow, you’d be ready.” Hastings agreed, saying, “We’re not going to sell the world on our theory until we prove it, and the way we prove it is by having tons of great charter schools and CMOs [charter management organizations] that continue to add value.” While this inward-facing work is critical, both McGriff and Vander Ark stressed that such organization-building must be addressed in parallel with work to resolve more systemic issues like governance.

“It does take a superhuman leader to run a great school, because they have everyone and everything working against them. We have to create great systems of schools where mere mortals can run good schools.”

Tom Vander Ark,  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation



“We’re not going to sell the world on our theory until we prove it, and the way we prove it is by having tons of great charter schools and CMOs [charter management organizations].”

Reed Hastings,  
Netflix

As entrepreneurs work to create high-quality organizations and to tackle the structural impediments to change, they must also take into account how their work fits in with the broader entrepreneurial movement. “We all say to ourselves that we don’t believe in one best system, or that there is no silver bullet, but we all act as though we believe that,” emphasized McGriff. Ultimately, panelists seemed to believe that the way forward might be summed up by the Stockdale Paradox: a willingness to confront the brutal facts of the current reality, while also maintaining optimism that the work of entrepreneurs can and will make a difference. With a realistic sense of the systemic barriers, and an unwavering focus on achieving high-quality results in spite of those challenges, entrepreneurs should continue to drive toward dramatically improving the public education system for *all* students.



## PANEL: TURNING AROUND UNDERPERFORMING SCHOOLS—CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS FOR SUCCESS

*Clear control and cultural alignment needed to create dramatic change in chronically failing schools*

Driven by the mandates of state and federal accountability—including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—an increasing number of public schools require dramatic restructuring in order to improve student outcomes. The changes necessary in schools that need this sort of improvement go far beyond incremental improvement, requiring a full-scale “turnaround” in a short period of time (usually less than two years). Such work can seem overwhelming, but as panelist Andrew Calkins of Mass Insight noted, “the schools that are in the most chronically underperforming categories represent a real opportunity to do something in a fundamentally different way,” and indeed “they could be a wedge to help lead the way for a lot of the more fundamental reform.” To make the most of this complex opportunity, districts are increasingly opting to work with outside school management providers. This panel session explored various models for this significant change process, the conditions necessary to ensure success, and the ways in which turnaround leaders can lay the groundwork for long-term improvement.

Delving into a discussion of the change process, discussants noted that responses to NCLB’s restructuring mandate have varied significantly, with several options open to states and districts that are required to turn around chronically failing schools. In some cases, school management organizations are provided with an existing district building in which to create a new charter school; in other cases, the school is “reconstituted” by replacing school staff or leadership (or both) while maintaining the same student body. Across these different approaches, positive outcomes tend to have some components in common, explained Calkins, whose organization recently studied turnaround efforts across the country. According to Calkins, those overseeing turnarounds must bring new capacity and new resources to the table, and any new providers brought in must be armed with control of key assets and the right incentives. Merely asking “which reform program is most effective?” fails to acknowledge the complexities and variables associated with a given turnaround effort, he added.

Panelists emphasized that school leaders need the flexibility to make real change happen, as well as a clear understanding of what resources they will control. However, clarifying accountability in this way is often easier said than done, because in many turnaround efforts it is difficult to determine who is truly in charge. What’s more, turnaround leaders need a great deal of information from the district to make their work successful, such as projected student attendance. It is also important to be clear about the district’s desired “exit strategy,” or what will happen once the turnaround is complete. Who will run the school? What will it look like? Will the student population change? The answers to these questions play an important role in the outcome of a turnaround effort. Where clarity and flexibility does not exist, “don’t go there—politely refuse,” urged Calkins. “Turn around and walk away.” Having studied a variety of such efforts, he believes that turnaround leaders are “doomed to failure” when the conditions are not right.

### Speakers:

**Vince Matthews**  
Educator-in-Residence, NewSchools  
Venture Fund (moderator)

**Andrew Calkins**  
Executive Director, Mass Insight  
Education

**Matthew Malone**  
Superintendent, Swampscott  
Public Schools

**Laverne White**  
Regional Vice President, Edison  
Schools

**Kevin Wooldridge**  
Founder and Chief Executive  
Officer, Education for Change

### Key Questions

- How does school turnaround differ from school improvement?
- What are the environmental conditions necessary to implement a turnaround process?
- What are key challenges facing turnaround leaders? How can those challenges be overcome to ensure the long-term success of turnarounds?



Edison Schools, which has engaged in turning around more than 100 schools across the country, is an organization that has effectively altered control over assets and conditions by changing the leadership involved at the school level. Reflecting upon Edison’s successes, Laverne White of Edison Schools noted another common characteristic: a culture focused on the students, which draws in people who can stand behind Edison’s student-centered operational philosophy. “Every stakeholder needs to be interested in this issue of our children—children first,” she explained. It is important not to underestimate how crucial cultural change is to this work—nor how difficult it can be, especially when a school has underperformed for a number of years. One way to overturn this culture of defeatism is to reopen schools with a brand-new design so it is clear to students that things will be different, according to Matthew Malone of Swampscott Public Schools, who was formerly part of a large-scale turnaround effort in San Diego.

“In turnaround, there is blood on the streets because what we’re talking about is changing belief systems.”

Matthew Malone,  
Swampscott Public Schools

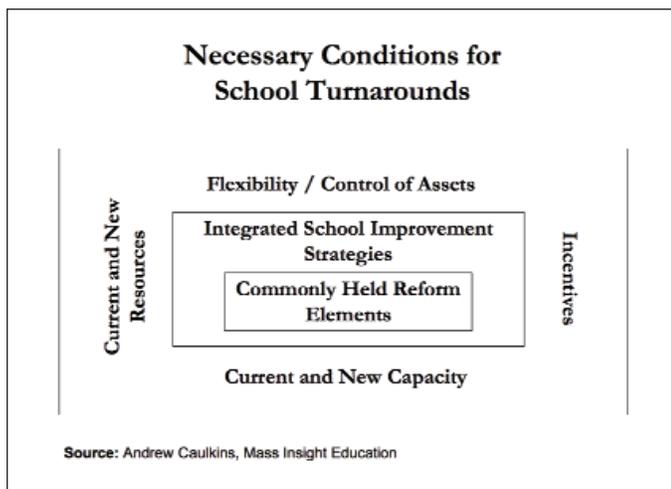
Kevin Wooldridge, whose organization Education For Change (EFC) is engaged in turnaround efforts in Oakland, underscored the importance of having an aligned team. He believes that extensive screening of employees should be used to ensure that all believe in the vision and have high expectations that the changes underway will produce a dramatic improvement in student achievement. This screening is supplemented by intensive professional development at EFC: teachers work from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and are required to attend group- or grade-level professional development sessions three days a week. Finally, EFC also weaves the use of data into the culture, as a way of defining areas of need for student and faculty development. “When our results aren’t showing what we want them to show, the question is, what are we not doing?” said Wooldridge.

Although changing the culture within schools is hard work, it is even more challenging for turnaround leaders to influence external conditions, which are often beyond their direct control. Of these, community-building was cited as the most critical. Malone observed that the local community must buy into school turnaround plans in order for them to be truly successful, and to do that, communities must be educated on what needs to change and how it will change. But “when the community is behind you, you cannot lose,” he added. At the same time, Malone noted that the fast pace required by turnaround efforts can be painful. “In turnaround, there is blood on the streets because what

we’re talking about is changing belief systems,” Malone added. According to White, Edison addresses this need to develop community buy-in by creating a local “Board of Friends,” a group of community leaders who provide input but also serve as ambassadors to share the work being done its results with the broader community.

As NCLB continues to take hold, it is certain that there will be an increase in mandated school turnarounds; as such, it is crucial to learn what it takes to do it right. Panelists called for an increase in research on effective turnaround models, particularly at the high school level, which has seen limited success outside of those using conversion models. Building a clearinghouse for best practices in school turnarounds was also suggested, which would allow leaders to share what works and

avoid common pitfalls. In the meantime, panelists urged that those involved in a restructuring efforts to implement and utilize as many known conditions for success as possible. However, though these components may be relatively self-evident, execution remains a challenge; as Calkins put it, “The problem lies not in knowing what to do; it lies in activating that knowledge.”



## PANEL: DISTRICT PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT—CHARTER SCHOOLS AS PARTNERS

*Navigating new partnership strategies yields both opportunities and challenges for districts and school managers*

As public school systems wrestle with how best to structure and manage schools in an era of increasing accountability, many have found that a “portfolio management” strategy holds promise. In this approach, rather than directly managing all schools, districts instead oversee a diverse “portfolio” of public schools; the district continues to run some schools, while others are created anew within district facilities, and still others are managed under contract with independent operators such as regional charter management organizations (CMOs) or national education service providers. This allows the district to leverage additional capacity and offer a more diverse supply of schools to meet student needs, while still ensuring that these schools are ultimately accountable to the district. Through the perspectives of charter school providers and district leaders, this session examined various approaches to portfolio management across the country, delving into the opportunities and challenges for both parties in this emerging strategy.

The unique structure of the Chicago Charter School Foundation (CCSF), run by Elizabeth Delaney Purvis, served as an example of what is possible with portfolio management. CCSF could best be described as a hybrid, between a charter management organization that owns and operates charter schools and a portfolio-managed district that works with multiple providers. CCSF oversees a system of nine schools that are managed by one of three school providers. Purvis describes CCSF’s core function as taking care of everything “from the walls out” (essentially everything outside of instruction), while at the same time overseeing strong academic achievement by establishing a rigorous accountability system. CCSF does not believe that strong student achievement requires a standard curriculum or one set school model, but instead works with a small number of operators, developing performance-based contracts with each that it can terminate if student achievement does not meet expectations.

According to Purvis, working with multiple operators diversifies risk and allows CCSF to remain objective when evaluating its schools and providers. “We are great partners but in the end, they work for us to provide high-quality education to our students,” she said.

As the panel discussion unfolded, panelists brought up other key factors in contemplating a successful portfolio management strategy, including the need for flexibility and operational control. In Philadelphia, for example, Mastery Charter Schools is a CMO that was asked to open up its second school in a district building that became available when CEO Paul Vallas closed a large school for chronic low performance and wanted to provide a new opportunity for those students. In order to serve students well, Mastery CEO Scott Gordon asked for autonomy and flexibility in his operations. His organization received a long-term lease, as well as the authority to serve as project manager in renovating the dilapidated district school facility, allowing Mastery to use public funds but also save the district money. Gordon believes this approach fit his organization’s needs because it allowed Mastery to manage growth, ensure school quality, and still receive access to a facility provided by the district—though it was not without its challenges. “What we had to give up was riding the wave of uncertainty,” said Gordon, recalling moments of hesitation and significant financial outlays that Mastery had to make on the path to finalizing the agreement.

### Speakers:

[Jordan Meranus](#)  
Principal, NewSchools Venture Fund  
(moderator)

[Judy Ivie Burton](#)  
President and Chief Executive  
Officer, Alliance for College-Ready  
Public Schools

[Scott Gordon](#)  
Chief Executive Officer, Mastery  
Charter Schools

[Hosanna Mahaley Johnson](#)  
Chief of Staff, Chicago Public  
Schools

[Elizabeth Delaney Purvis](#)  
Executive Director, Chicago Charter  
School Foundation

### Key Questions

- What types of configurations and partnerships can exist between charter school management organizations (CMOs) and districts?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for districts in partnering with CMOs? What are the opportunities and challenges for CMOs in partnering with districts?
- What are the trade-offs? What conditions must be met in order to make these partnerships successful?

“We were dangling by a string, and could have potentially faced financial ruin, as well as a lot of disappointed people.” Ultimately, Gordon feels that creating charter schools in collaboration with the district in this way—while maintaining complete control of school management—has been worthwhile and can potentially spark positive changes at the district level.

One case in which decision-making authority and flexibility was not granted was highlighted by Judy Ivie Burton, head of Alliance for College-Ready Schools, a CMO based in Los Angeles. Burton recounted how her organization had been approached by the superintendent about working with another school in the district to manage a new high school within an existing district building. Though the offer was initially appealing, given that fully developed school facilities are expensive and rare, Alliance ultimately walked away from the deal. Burton explained that she has developed certain non-negotiables when opening a new school, including a fundamental belief that new school cultures are built one grade level at a time. In this case, the district needed Alliance to take on all grades at once, as well as to assume a different school calendar and change certain elements of their instructional model. These demands would have diminished Alliance’s authority and flexibility, and thus became deal-breakers. Although the project did not come to fruition, Burton believes the negotiation process was still a useful way to share Alliance’s strategies for success with the district. “It doesn’t serve a purpose for us to be islands unto ourselves, getting successful outcomes, unless we impact the larger system,” she said.

Some districts have found that letting go of some control has been to their advantage in finding new solutions for serving their students. As Hosanna Mahaley Johnson of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) explained, her district has leaned on charter school organizations to provide additional capacity by opening new schools, particularly in the city’s most underserved neighborhoods. As such, she expects that nearly 20 percent of all students will be served by charter schools by 2010. This aggressive addition of charter schools is largely due to Mayor Richard Daley’s belief that charter schools can serve as vehicles for the development of new ideas and quickly increase the number of strong public schools. Johnson explained that the district employs a

rigorous screening process on the front end, to ensure that the new schools opened in Chicago are opened and run by high-quality organization. CPS issues requests for proposals that fill specific community needs—such as the opening of a college preparation high school in a neighborhood with particularly low graduation rates—in order to find the best fit for its diverse student population. Once the charter operator is selected, the district provides start-up support to get them off on the right foot and then “we basically leave them alone unless they ask for help,” she noted. According to Johnson, this philosophy—rigorous initial criteria and hands-off management within the context of strong accountability—has paid off. “Our charters are getting the work done,” she said, adding that many city charter schools are ranked among the highest-performing schools in the district.

The experiences of these organizations make clear that the strategy of portfolio management can meet the needs of districts in multiple ways, but no strategy is without challenges. As such, opportunities for district-charter partnerships must be considered carefully so that they maximize the chances for success and minimize risk for both sides. In some cases, this may mean that the best deal is no deal at all, such as when this type of partnership does not meet the goals and requirements of each side. But where alignment is possible, district-charter partnerships can prove to be a win-win for both districts, who gain school diversity, capacity, and quality, as well as for charters, as it may alleviate financing and facilities challenges. Ultimately, this collaboration can go a long way toward catalyzing the transformation of public school districts through choice and accountability so that they provide high-quality education for all students.

“It doesn’t serve a purpose for us to be islands unto ourselves, getting successful outcomes, unless we impact the larger system.”

Judy Ivie Burton  
Alliance for College-Ready  
Public Schools

City	Los Angeles	Boston	New York	Philly	Chicago
<i>Activity</i>	Grassroots, not district-driven; 100+ charter schools	Limited portfolio mgmt	Autonomy Zone & 100 new charters	Diverse provider model	Renaissance 2010: 100 new schools & use of R/P process
<i>School Types</i>	Charter, magnet, academy	Exam, pilot, small schools (Gates)	Charter, exam, small schools (Gates), New Visions, Replications Inc.	Charter, contract (includes for-profits), magnet	Charter, contract, small schools (Gates), Autonomous Management Performance Schools (AMPS)

## PANEL: THE FUTURE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

*Developing high-quality teachers requires significant practical training as well as ongoing support*

There is increasing awareness that teacher quality is one of the most important factors in a student's learning experience; this recognition, coupled with No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) mandate for highly qualified teachers, has placed new emphasis and responsibility on teacher preparation programs. However, even as the public and policymakers demand better teachers, the definition of "highly qualified" remains elusive. What are the characteristics of effective teacher preparation programs? How do they produce highly qualified teachers? Introducing an interactive panel session that took on these questions, moderator Eugene Garcia of Arizona State University challenged panelists and session attendees to open up their thinking about teacher preparation programs "in an era when new venues have been created to provide a quality education for all students." Throughout this session, a diverse array of discussants from across the education reform landscape—including the dean of an education school, a charter school leader, a high school principal and a public policy expert—debated issues surrounding what constitutes preparation of a truly qualified teacher, highlighting what needs to change to ensure that all new teachers are adequately prepared to raise student achievement across all demographics.

In general, panelists agreed that new teachers should enter the classroom with a knowledge base consisting of deep content knowledge, sound pedagogy and significant practical experience; they should leave targeted preparation programs ready to enter supportive schools that allow time for reflection and personal growth. However, they believe this ideal rarely exists today. According to Brian Sims, principal of Chicago Academy High School, most new teachers lack in-depth practical experience. "If a new teacher doesn't come into the room having experienced success and failure over time in the classroom, we are doomed," Sims said, stressing the necessity of arming teachers with authentic learning experiences within the relatively safe structure of a teacher preparation program. Larry Rosenstock, who created the San Diego-based High Tech High system of charter schools, added that many traditional teacher education programs put too little emphasis on deep content knowledge, which he views as essential for effective teaching. Others pointed out that traditional preparation programs may teach principles without the necessary context to make learning relevant to new teachers, particularly when it comes to technology integration or the application of assessments. "The refusal of schools of education to train teachers in particular curricula is a great disservice to the school districts that have to hire them," noted Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, adding that few traditional certification programs adequately prepare teachers for working with students who live in high-poverty areas or those with limited knowledge of English—a critical need in low-income public schools.

With these criticisms as context, some discussants shared experiences that shifted away from the one-size-fits-all, generic approach usually offered by traditional institutions of higher education. These models focus on more practice-oriented roads to teacher preparation. One approach has been the development of alternative credentialing

### Speakers:

#### Eugene Garcia

Dean of the College of Education and Vice President of University-School Partnerships, Arizona State University (moderator)

#### Larry Rosenstock

Chief Executive Officer, High Tech High Communities

#### Brian Sims

Principal, Chicago Academy High School

#### Kate Walsh

President, National Council on Teacher Quality

### Key Questions

- What does effective teacher preparation and development look like?
- What is an "alternative path" to teacher credentialing? What are some examples?
- What policies hold back improvement in teacher preparation? What needs to change at the policy level for new approaches to be viable?

“If a new teacher doesn’t come into the room having experienced success and failure over time in the classroom, we are doomed.”

Brian Sims,  
Chicago Academy High School

programs. Such programs address specific needs, often dictated by geography or school model. In Chicago, the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) offers a one-year program that pairs mentor teachers with resident teachers who concurrently teach and complete coursework towards a masters degree in education with a partner university. Resident teachers gain a year of practical classroom experience as well as the chance to reflect on effective teaching practice in scheduled daily debriefing sessions with mentor teachers. Through this model, “issues that are so easy to sit around and talk about in a traditional education program are brought to light in a very real way,” said Sims, whose school employs AUSL resident teachers.



Likewise, High Tech High has developed its own program to credential teachers in order to get around the “barriers” posed by NCLB. The High Tech High program goes above and beyond what is required by law. “Preparing and supporting teachers is core to what we do,” said CEO Larry Rosenstock. According to Rosenstock, teachers are hired for their deep content knowledge—many teachers hold PhD degrees in their core subjects—which is supplemented with pedagogy through daily staff meetings and collegial coaching. “Professional development in a traditional school occurs a few times a year in the afternoon when everyone is tired,” Rosenstock pointed out. “Here, it happens every day—first thing in the morning when people are fresh. We make it a priority.” In both examples, Sims and Rosenstock cited that their teachers-in-training spend approximately 80 percent of their time in the classroom and 20 percent doing coursework, an inversion of the traditional teacher preparation program model. Such reconfigurations challenge the characterization of “alternative” certification programs as low-quality, back-door avenues into teaching. In these cases, as Sims said, “it’s alternative in that it is different, and by different, we mean actually more rigorous and more thorough.”

The larger question is, of course, how to create wide-scale change in teacher education in order to emphasize more practical experience and more specialized curriculum. As audience member Kim Smith—who co-founded NewSchools Venture Fund—wondered, “What about money?” She observed that it takes money to make substantial change, and suggested that current funding directed to unsuccessful teacher preparation programs

should be re-routed to those that have a proven impact, including alternative programs. Panelist Walsh agreed that states must “dramatically restructure” the way they fund, approve and oversee teacher education programs. Ultimately, discussants and panelists were optimistic that these sorts of dramatic changes could happen in the next decade; a majority of hands were raised in response to an informal poll initiated by Gloria Lee, chief operating officer of charter management organization Aspire Public Schools, who asked whether participants thought these substantial changes were possible within the next ten years. However, as Lee added, the unanswered question still looms: “What is the path to that change?”



## PANEL: CREATING A NEW PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM—ENTREPRENEURS IN NEW ORLEANS

*Charter school leaders take advantage of opportunity to create new, better schools for students post-Katrina*

Few school districts will ever face the magnitude of difficulties New Orleans is now forced to overcome—an entire school system wiped out by Hurricane Katrina, students displaced across the United States with little idea of when they can return to New Orleans, when schools will reopen, or if they will reopen at all. Yet in the wake of one of the greatest natural disasters of our time, New Orleans has done something unique: it has risen to the challenge of rebuilding a broken district by creating a system largely composed of new charter schools. The hope is that these schools will ultimately serve New Orleans students far better than the pre-Katrina schools, where three-quarters of the city’s eighth-grade students scored below basic in language arts on the state standardized test. “We have a clean slate,” noted panelist Sarah Newell Usdin of New Schools New Orleans, a startup designed to provide infrastructure support to these new schools and school systems. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for the city not to merely reopen schools in their former image, but instead to try something different, by creating a large-scale system of charter schools. Three entrepreneurial leaders from New Orleans shared their views on what moderator Greg Richmond of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers described as the space between the “dysfunctional” district that existed before and an emerging “city of charters”—including what other school systems might learn from this experience.

Richmond—whose organization is helping with the authorization of new charter schools in Louisiana—explained that New Orleans has called upon education entrepreneurs to open charter schools quickly within the devastated district. One of the biggest issues these entrepreneurs face, however, is familiar to schools around the country: attracting high-quality teachers and leaders. This is a task made even more difficult by the lack of services in New Orleans today, with a dearth of adequate housing, gas stations and grocery stores in the city’s hardest-hit neighborhoods. As Brian Reidlinger of the Algiers Charter School Association—an organization that runs several charter schools in the area—pointed out, these conditions make it not only difficult to attract new talent but also to entice native New Orleans teachers and administrators to return, especially given that districts in other states pay more than New Orleans can afford.

Further, new school operators are faced with the daunting task of screening applications from teachers and administrators who had worked in the previously ineffective New Orleans school system; those who now may not understand, buy into, or fit into the philosophy of charter schools. “It is absolutely essential that we not restaff our classrooms with every single teacher we had before,” said Usdin. “We were totally dysfunctional in every sense of the word, and we didn’t offer a decent education to our kids, so we cannot start over with those same teachers.” Some operators have found that it is crucial to spend some energy and resources training these native educators, however. “Most are doing

### Speakers:

[Greg Richmond](#)  
President, National Association of Charter School Authorizers  
(moderator)

[Brian Reidlinger](#)  
Chief Executive Officer, Algiers Charter Schools Association

[Gary Robichaux](#)  
Principal, New Orleans West College Prep

[Sarah Newell Usdin](#)  
Founder, New Schools New Orleans

### Key Questions

- How has New Orleans approached rebuilding its public education system in the wake of Hurricane Katrina?
- What are the key challenges that education entrepreneurs face in creating new schools and school systems in New Orleans? What opportunities presently exist for others to play a role?
- What can other districts learn from the New Orleans approach to education?

“People are looking for the public school system and there is no public school system.”

Brian Reidlinger,  
Algiers Charter Schools Association

exactly what they are trained to do,” observed Reidlinger. “We just need to train them to do something else.” He added that this strategy has paid off: when a student in one of his schools was asked what is different about her new school, she answered, “All my teachers now teach every day.”

Ensuring school quality is another significant issue in the rebuilding of New Orleans schools. As Reidlinger explained, schools have been forced to open very quickly, some within twenty days of their charter approval, which makes it difficult to establish the policies and procedures necessary to make day-to-day operations run smoothly, not to mention effectively. Gary Robichaux, principal of New Orleans West College Prep (a school affiliated with the Knowledge Is Power Program or KIPP) asked, “Have we taken some schools and called them charter schools without sufficient preparation, without sufficient buy-in?” He added that this is an important question to consider because New Orleans cannot afford to close down ineffective schools right now, given the need for capacity. This adds significant importance to the quality of the initial authorization process.

New Orleans entrepreneurs have also found that the local community needs more information about charter schools and how these new schools are different than what they had before. In most cities, charter schools are an alternative that parents may choose over traditional public schools, but as Reidlinger pointed out, in New Orleans, public charter schools are often the only choice. “People are looking for the public school system and there is no public school system,” he said. “If we don’t do it, there aren’t schools,” added Usdin.



### New Orleans Public Schools: Before and After the Storm

Pre-Katrina (Fall 2005)	Post-Katrina (as of May 2006)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60,000 students in 117 public schools               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 schools managed by state's Recovery School District (designed to address failing schools)</li> </ul> </li> <li>New Orleans Public Schools (NOPS) widely recognized as troubled system               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly 75% of schools labeled as under "Academic Warning" or "Academically Unacceptable" in 2004</li> <li>Corporate turnaround firm Alvarez &amp; Marsal brought in to address operational and fiscal issues</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approximately 12,000 students in 25 public schools</li> <li>11 schools under control of Orleans Parish School Board (NOPS)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 operated by board</li> <li>7 authorized as charter schools</li> </ul> </li> <li>14 schools under control of state's Recovery School District               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 operated by district</li> <li>11 authorized as charter schools</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Sources: Greg Richmond, National Association of Charter School Authorizers; NewSchools Venture Fund analysis

New Orleans has faced and will continue to face an arduous task in rebuilding its educational system. However, panelists agreed that there is hope and opportunity in creating better educational experiences for those students in public schools. While New Orleans may be particularly hard-pressed for the time and resources to make substantial change happen, Richmond prompted audience members to consider how different the New Orleans situation is from the dire state of public education in other cities, asking, “should you be any less urgent with your work?” Although it is unlikely that other cities will face similar circumstances, they can learn from the courage and spirit of New Orleans entrepreneurs that school change is possible even in the wake of disaster.

## LUNCHTIME SESSION: PUTTING STUDENTS FRONT AND CENTER— VOICES OF THE FUTURE

*Local charter school students highlight individual attention, teacher quality as successful elements of their schools*

Because students are at the heart of the work done to transform public education, it is important to hear directly from them about what they need, in order to better understand how charter and other public schools can best address those needs. In a conversation with Alan Bersin, California’s state secretary of education, three students who attend public charter high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area reflected on their experiences there. Charter schools—like the ones these students attend—are “essential in many ways to the reform of California’s public schools,” according to Bersin.

For these ambitious students, charter schools have offered them options that are a better fit with their needs. Derin Coleman said the traditional public school he attended before coming to Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy simply “didn’t have the individual attention that I needed.” This desire for a more intimate, focused atmosphere was echoed by Tomas Marquez, who has attended Aspire schools since eighth grade. “The schools around East Oakland aren’t terrible but some are poorer than others, and I didn’t see myself in any one of them,” said Tomas, adding that at Lionel Wilson, “there are no distractions besides getting your work done.”



The small size of these students’ schools has fostered a “family” atmosphere that makes students feel supported. “The fact that they [Leadership Public Schools] are going into a traditionally underserved area, giving children who would regularly be neglected a quality education, and making sure they go on to college—that’s a powerful statement,” noted

Amanda Wyatt, a student at Leadership Public Schools-Richmond. Derin observed that the family metaphor extends to the school building itself: the cafeteria at Lionel Wilson is called the “family room.”

The students pointed out that the result of this close-knit school culture is that it allows teachers to focus on ensuring that each student has the resources and support they need to learn effectively. Tomas estimated that there are roughly 50 seniors in his class at Lionel Wilson, which enables teachers to develop a caring relationship with each student and to deeply understand their unique instructional needs. “They know your strengths and they know your deficiencies,” he said. This emphasis on teaching carried over to students’ passionate advice for school reformers in the audience. “Allow teachers to be more innovative, because that lets students interact more and



Speakers:

**Alan Bersin**  
Secretary of Education, State of California (moderator)

**Derin Coleman**  
10<sup>th</sup> grade student, Aspire Public Schools’ Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy

**Tomas Marquez**  
12<sup>th</sup> grade student, Aspire Public Schools’ Lionel Wilson College Preparatory Academy

**Amanda Wyatt**  
11<sup>th</sup> grade student, Leadership Public Schools-Richmond

“The schools around East Oakland aren’t terrible but some are poorer than others, and I didn’t see myself in any one of them.”

Tomas Marquez,  
Lionel Wilson College  
Preparatory Academy

“Allow teachers to be more innovative, because that lets students interact more and be more interested in the subject matter.”

Derin Coleman,  
Lionel Wilson College  
Preparatory Academy

“No matter what organization you’re a part of, include students . . . not just in planning school dances but also in important decisions.”

Amanda Wyatt,  
Leadership Public Schools-Richmond

be more interested in the subject matter,” implored Derin. “Let them come with their own teaching style.” At the same time, Tomas urged charter school leaders to “be a little more selective when hiring teachers.” He added that Lionel Wilson often involves students in the hiring process by having prospective teachers teach lessons and then asking students how they felt about the quality of instruction. Amanda underscored the importance of involving students in selecting new teachers, but added that “no matter what organization you’re a part of, include students at the board level . . . not just in planning school dances but also in important decisions.”

Listening to the voices of these students served as a powerful reminder to participants of the significance of their collective work: to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed.



## PANEL: CHARTER SCHOOL PERFORMANCE—WHAT ARE THE MEASURES OF SUCCESS?

*Researchers explore shortcomings of current charter school research, suggest alternative approaches*

With more than 3000 charter schools serving more than a million students across the country, there is a growing interest in understanding the quality of charter schools, particularly in terms of their effect on student achievement. Although a number of research studies in recent years have sought to answer that question, the evidence has thus far been inconclusive. This has surprised even those researchers familiar with the charter school landscape, like Paul Hill of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, who expected “that charter schools would be so dramatically better than any other kind of school that you wouldn’t have to do anything more than eyeball the difference.” This session sought to unravel some of the complexities of charter school research in order to reset expectations about evaluating charter school performance and to address the need for more meaningful research on the charter school movement.

Panel moderator Anthony Bryk—a longtime charter school researcher who is now a professor at Stanford University—reminded the audience to regard charter school studies with a certain degree of skepticism because “evidence is always suspect.” For example, Hill pointed out that it is difficult to determine whether students learn more as a result of attending a charter school because they cannot be exposed simultaneously to charter school and traditional district school experiences. Hill and fellow panelist Thomas J. Kane of Harvard University also noted that charter school data are often inconsistent in both ideology and methodology, explaining that most researchers bring to bear a pre-existing bias and often use unsophisticated research methods. Further, “the presumption of guilt or innocence will have a huge impact on the outcome of the evidence wars,” said Kane. Kane also observed that in most cases, the studies’ sample sizes have been too small to justify the grand claims about the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of charter schools—let alone the movement overall.

In many ways, these criticisms may be applied to much education research, although charter schooling tends to be particularly polarizing. However, panelists concurred that one of the most critical shortcomings of charter school research has been the tendency to focus on average performance, both within schools and across them. At the school level, Hill believes that effective studies must measure the “value added” by a particular charter school and its instructors to a student’s learning, which would account for the fact that many charter school students have been underserved in traditional district schools and so arrive in charter schools performing below grade level. Seeking to measure average improvement in student achievement across the broad landscape of charter schools may miss the point, Bryk observed, as charter schools are not intended to be a treatment for problems in traditional schools, but rather to produce choice through alternative offerings. As such, he posited that it is only natural for charter schools to yield varied results. This dramatically complicates issues of cross-comparisons on any kind of broad scale.

Speakers:

**Anthony Bryk**

Spencer Professor of Education, Stanford University School of Education, and Professor of Organizational Behavior, Stanford University Graduate School of Business (moderator)

**Paul Hill**

Director, Center on Reinventing Public Education; Chair, National Charter School Research Project at the University of Washington

**Thomas J. Kane**

Professor of Education and Economics, Harvard Graduate School of Education

### Key Questions

- What do we know about the effects of charter schools?
- How do we make sense of disparate findings in existing research?
- What can be done in the research community to generate actionable knowledge about how to improve charter schools?

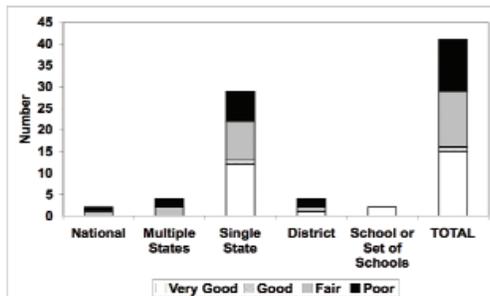
In order to improve research and evaluation about the performance of charter schools, Hill advised that the first step is to accept that there will never be a single conclusive study on charter school performance. He stressed the importance of smaller, controlled, rigorous studies that reflect the diversity of charter schools themselves; such studies can produce meaningful data if conducted according to effective research methodologies, such as

controlling for variables that may affect the outcome. In order to carry greater weight in the field, new studies should be concerned with both internal validity—described in the case of charter school research as “results that can be attributed only to students’ attendance at a charter school”—as well as external validity. In addition, Hill recommended that more school-specific studies be conducted and carried out over longer periods of time, with the resulting longitudinal data shared through state-run databases. This would establish broader benchmarks by which to gauge meaningful and actionable information about the performance of charter schools.

By increasing the specificity, variety and rigor of charter school research, panelists agreed, we may be better able to understand whether charter schools are producing better

learning outcomes for students; in turn, this may surface lessons about what it takes to create a diverse supply of successful schools for underserved children.

**The Geographic Scope of Studies and Quality Rankings for the Research Methods Adopted in Research Produced Between 2001 and 2005**



Source: National Charter School Research Project at the Center on Reinventing Public Education

“The presumption of guilt or innocence will have a huge impact on the outcome of the evidence wars.”

Thomas J. Kane,  
Harvard Graduate School of Education



## PANEL: RETHINKING TEACHER UNIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

*Relationship between unions and district management shifts as both sides seek improved outcomes for students*

The collective bargaining agreements that teacher unions negotiate with public school districts are extraordinarily influential in the operations of schools across the country. By determining how teachers are compensated, promoted, supported, and placed, these agreements have an enormous impact on the structure of classrooms and schools. Within this context, this session explored how teacher unions have responded to the evolving needs of schools in the 21st century, and considered the complicated issue of how to address the interests of union leaders and members while also considering the impact of staffing policies on student achievement.

Though the relationship between districts and unions can be adversarial when it comes to creating the conditions for reform, panelists agreed that both sides must work together to come up with creative solutions for furthering student achievement in this era of increased accountability. The current provisions of many collective bargaining agreements often frame how this collaboration happens, explained moderator Michelle Rhee of The New Teacher Project (TNTP). A recent report from her organization, “Unintended Consequences: The Case for Reforming the Staffing Rules in Urban Teachers Union Contracts,” highlights the impact that collective bargaining agreements—binding legal documents that govern teacher placement and compensation—have had on the ability of districts to staff their classrooms effectively. For example, Rhee explained that in many districts, veteran teachers have the option of moving to other schools with openings, regardless of the teacher’s ability or ideological fit with the school. To avoid potential teacher-school mismatches, principals often resort to practices like masking vacancies until the transfer period ends.

Hiring the right teachers is a challenge, but so is removing those who aren’t performing. TNTP’s research has found that firing an ineffective teacher can take 10 to 15 percent of a principal’s time over a two-year period. She explained that such extensive grievance procedures often drive principals to find loopholes in the system such as eliminating the teacher’s position, only to open it up again after the teacher has left. “The fact that principals would take teachers who they knew were not doing right by kids, and essentially send them to the school down the street, in our view was just unconscionable,” said Rhee. Ultimately, she suggested that current collective bargaining policies unintentionally create a complex hiring game, which detracts energy from instructional matters. “We are in no way saying that unions are solely to blame here,” Rhee added, pointing out that both sides sign the final agreement and bear equal responsibility in making sure these agreements serve students.

However, panelists noted that policies such as No Child Left Behind—which creates additional pressure for improved student achievement—have begun to have a dramatic impact on the relationship between school districts and unions, encouraging them to work together in new ways. For example, Brad Jupp of Denver Public Schools shared that in his prior position as a leader of the local teacher’s union, a traditional adversarial collective bargaining relationship had been in place until the district approached the union with a thoughtful proposal for teacher merit pay

### Speakers:

#### Michelle Rhee

Chief Executive Officer and President, The New Teacher Project (moderator)

#### Roger Erskine

Policy Director, League of Education Voters; former president, Seattle Education Association

#### Brad Jupp

Senior Academic Policy Advisor, Denver Public Schools; former Teacher/Coordinator, ProComp Initiative

#### Dan Weisberg

Executive Director, Labor Policy, New York City Department of Education

### Key Questions

- What role do teacher unions play in public school systems?
- What impact do collective bargaining agreements have on the staffing of public schools?
- How does the process of collective bargaining between labor and management work, and what are some of the different approaches taken?
- In what ways have teacher unions responded to the changing needs of public schools? How should they continue to change?

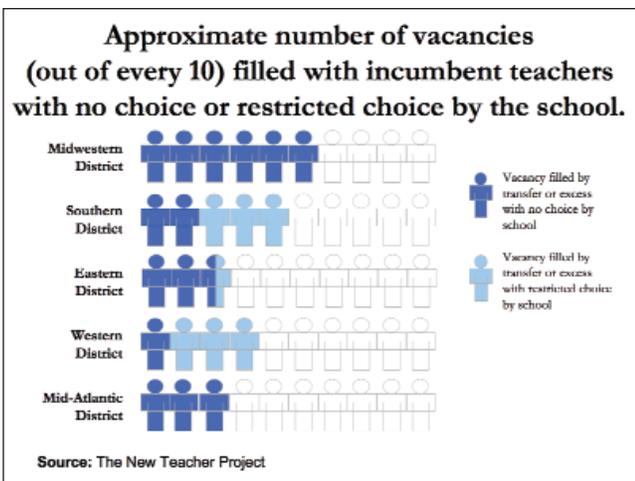
during the 2003-2004 school year. Jupp explained that this proposal took into account student achievement goals—set on a teacher-by-teacher basis, rather than across the board—as one of several key elements that would determine teacher bonuses. The union, convinced that this pay-for-performance scheme (dubbed ProComp) was fair to its member teachers, worked with the district to develop it. “We decided that rather than go through this kind of technical brain damage, we would do what educators do best, which is to see whether or not it could work at the schoolhouse,” said Jupp. After an extensive pilot program operated in sixteen schools of varying demographics across the district, ProComp now has been adopted district-wide, with an impressive first-year enrollment of roughly 30 percent of instructional staff.



“I don’t think it matters whether you collaborate or use traditional adversarial bargaining one bit. I think what matters most is the outcome you get through the work that you do.”

Brad Jupp,  
Denver Public Schools

Other situations have called for different approaches to secure a workable balance between teachers’ interests and student needs. In New York City, data from The New Teacher Project was used to rally community support for changing teacher contracts, explained Dan Weisberg, chief labor negotiator for the New York City Department of Education. “The problem we had—and still have to some extent in New York—is there are too many excuses,” remarked Weisberg. In the end, the union and the school district struck an agreement that was a win for both teachers and students, raising teacher compensation by 15 percent while also improving hiring practices. Some of the key components revolved around giving principals more authority to run their schools as they see fit—such as designating how preparation periods are used, and streamlining discipline and grievance procedures—while others emphasized teachers’ career paths, such as the creation of new “lead teacher” positions. Perhaps the biggest and most important change that accompanied the latest agreement, however, was granting principals hiring authority for their schools. “The power of being able to select your own staff is enormous,” noted Weisberg.



Regardless of whether the tactical approach is collaborative or competitive, “labor relations has to become a partnership,” advised long-time union leader Roger Erskine, who has observed many different negotiations as a former leader within the National Education Association, a co-founder of the progressive Teachers Union Reform Network, and a local union chief in Seattle. “To the degree that we don’t do that, we pay a price,” he added. Erskine explained that collective bargaining in Seattle shifted toward a more collaborative approach in the mid-1990s, with extensive changes to the teacher evaluation process. With this shift, said Erskine, the attitude evolved from “gotcha” to “help ya,” as structures and outlets were provided to assist teachers in educating their students.

Although district-union relationships can come into conflict, panelists agreed that school districts and teacher unions should ultimately look to student achievement as the guiding light in determining whether collective bargaining agreements are viable and whether changes are necessary. As Jupp put it, “I don’t think it matters whether you collaborate or use traditional adversarial bargaining one bit. I think what matters most is the outcome you get through the work that you do.”

## WORKING SESSION: DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING— HOW READY ARE YOU?

*Attention to time, resources, culture necessary in creating a cycle of instructional improvement*

Faced with growing dissatisfaction over low rates of student achievement and a growing body of research that supports data-driven practices as critical to improving instruction, public school systems have begun to shift from a focus on inputs—dollars spent, days of instruction, number of students per teacher—toward an emphasis on outcomes, in particular student performance. A significant piece of this transition is the use of data to guide instructional improvement within the classroom, across the school, and throughout the school system. As session moderator Joanne Weiss of NewSchools Venture Fund put it, “We have a fundamental belief that great schools are performance-driven, that they are in fact in the business of continuously improving instruction based on data about what students know and what they can do.” Both school districts and charter school organizations face challenges in doing this effectively; some are finding it difficult to gather relevant, timely student performance information, while others struggle to ensure that teachers and principals are making constructive use of the data they collect.

During this interactive working session, attendees had the opportunity to reflect on their own use of data by using a research-based self-assessment tool designed by NewSchools. The tool maps out the components of the cycle of school improvement—setting goals and aligning resources, gathering and sharing information, analyzing data, and acting upon that data—and was intended to facilitate dialogue about this systemic approach to data use, including the particular challenges and promising approaches that participants have discovered in their own efforts.

To underscore the importance of applying data to instructional decision-making processes, Dr. Amanda Datnow of the University of Southern California’s Rossier School of Education shared some of her early findings from a qualitative study commissioned by NewSchools for the purpose of learning about the implementation of effective data-driven instructional practices from four high-performing school systems (two charter school organizations and two public school districts). To uncover the practices in place in these schools, she has interviewed principals, teachers, and administrators; reviewed assessment data and action plans; and observed data conversations and team meetings. Although her work is still in progress and analysis is underway, Datnow shared emerging findings that these school systems go well beyond merely collecting student data—they put it to extensive use. “In performance-driven systems, teachers teach based on evidence, not instinct,” explained Datnow. She elaborated that good teachers persistently improve and adapt their classroom practices based on facts, looking for even deeper levels of data as they learn to refine and differentiate their teaching. Datnow also highlighted several other data practices that these schools engage in, which may account for some of their success. For example, most have established structured protocols for acquiring and using student data, and many have established grade-level meetings that focus on the analysis of student data and the development of action plans.

Moderators:

[Amanda Datnow](#)

Associate Professor, Rossier School of Education and Associate Director, Center on Educational Governance at University of Southern California

[Joanne Weiss](#)

Partner and Chief Operating Officer, NewSchools Venture Fund

### Key Questions

- What does it really look like to use data for instructional decision-making in a systemic way? What impact can this have on teaching and learning?
- What practices are school systems using to ensure that the use of data can guide instruction? Where are they finding success, and where are they struggling?
- How can instructional leaders facilitate dialogue around this topic and position their school systems to implement an effective cycle of instructional improvement?

“In performance-driven systems, teachers teach based on evidence, not instinct.”

Amanda Datnow,  
University of Southern California

Keeping these practices in mind, session attendees had the opportunity to try out the NewSchools self-assessment tool to determine how advanced their school system is on the spectrum of data-driven instructional practices (see Figure 1 for sample sections of the self-assessment tool used in the session). The group highlighted areas where they have found success and those where they continue to struggle as they seek to gather, analyze and act on data to improve instruction. One area of critical need is at the very beginning of the cycle of instructional improvement, when a school system develops high-level goals and concrete objectives for the year, which in turn guide the allocation of resources. Some attendees noted that here, finding or creating interim assessments that align with standards and curriculum is a particular challenge; this is especially difficult to find at the high school level, added Scott Gordon of Mastery Charter Schools, a charter management organization in Philadelphia. Many also remarked on the need to allocate time for re-teaching in the instructional calendar in order to make use of interim assessment results, as well as to adequately prepare students for annual state tests. “Time is the enemy for all of us,” agreed William Kurtz, principal at the Denver School of Science and Technology, a charter high school in Colorado. To combat some of the time pressures they face, Jennifer Niles, founding principal of the E.L. Haynes Public Charter School in Washington D.C., added that a local high school in her area includes “intensives” or re-teaching weeks at the end of each quarter so teachers have dedicated time to use data and re-teach.

Once data is gathered, attendees agreed that it is critical—but incredibly difficult—to take the next step of analyzing and acting upon the data. This might happen in conjunction with the principal, or, as Niles suggested, might involve subject-area specialists in the role of coach. Elise Darwish, chief academic officer at charter management organization Aspire Public Schools, emphasized how important it is to create a level of trust in and collaboration



with the teachers as they develop and execute action plans. “Ultimately, what you’re doing is testing a teacher’s ability to differentiate instruction,” agreed Emily Lawson, who heads D.C. Preparatory Academy, a charter school in Washington, D.C. Indeed, several other participants underscored the importance of developing systems that support teachers in tailoring instruction, with the understanding that this is a critical path toward ensuring that students learn effectively. The hope is that as teachers grow increasingly comfortable with using data, the practice will actually make their job easier by creating clear indicators of which students are struggling and in what specific areas.

Discussants agreed that the process for creating performance-driven schools pervades all levels of the system, from superintendent to principals to teachers, and intersects with many existing structures and processes. When implemented in a thoughtful and thorough way, the use of data can be a powerful tool in informing, refining and ultimately improving instruction such that all students receive the education they deserve.

Figure 1.

### Sample Sections From the Self-Assessment Tool

Set Goals and Align Resources		Early	Limited	Proficient	Advanced
<b>7</b>	Interim assessments are developed and aligned with essential learning expectations and with curriculum sequence/pacing	No interim assessments given	Interim assessments are given, but the content is developed individually by teachers so tests differ from class to class	System-designed interim assessments exist, and have SOME of the characteristics below	System-designed interim assessments exist, and have substantively ALL of the characteristics below
		Key Characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> High-quality tests with items correlated to learning expectations so results accurately measure level of proficiency achieved on each standard</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reflective of item formats used on state's standardized tests to ensure students can demonstrate their levels of proficiency in the way their state measures it</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cumulative, focusing on current period's learning expectations and sampling from prior periods'</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Same tests used across the system, so results are comparable and insights sharable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In use for all grade levels/courses (at a minimum: for K-8 in math, reading, and writing; for 9-12 in math, ELA, history, science)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Administered at least quarterly</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tests are thorough but not overwhelming in length (generally 3-4 items per standard)</li> </ul>			
Use/Act on Information					
<b>13</b>	Classroom-level action plans are implemented by teachers to address student learning needs	Teachers may or may not take action based on assessment results	Teachers required to implement action plans, but no practices in place for accountability or quality control	Time allocated for and teachers expected to reteach students who have not yet achieved mastery; instructional leaders actively follow-up and support teachers on implementation of action plans	Teachers implement and measure the effectiveness of differentiated action plans: some students have full interventions, some get reteaching, some receive reinforcement activities, others get enrichment; resources are marshaled across the system to support teachers and ensure student mastery

Source: NewSchools Venture Fund; for the full version of the self-assessment tool, see <http://www.newschools.org/viewpoints/self-assessment.pdf>

## TOWN HALL MEETING: ENTREPRENEURS' IDEAS FOR IMPROVING NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

### Moderators:

Chester E. Finn, Jr.  
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*Leaders call for changes to current requirements that hinder schools seeking to serve struggling students*

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has created both opportunities and challenges for education entrepreneurs, particularly those creating charter and other new schools. For example, charter schools may be an option for students under the law's public school choice provisions, help turn around low-performing schools under its restructuring mandates, or even provide supplemental services, explained session facilitator Chester Finn of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. On the flip side, he noted, NCLB also erects barriers that may make the work of education entrepreneurs more difficult. A charter school addressing students who have not been adequately taught by their traditional public school, for example, would automatically start far below proficiency targets. He also explained that "the notion that you can reconstitute a low-performing school as a charter school might simply mean that a low-performing school gets re-labeled as a charter school," which could diminish the overall quality of the charter school movement.

### Key Questions

- What are the opportunities and challenges that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act raises for those creating new schools and other entrepreneurial solutions?
- In what ways should NCLB be amended—especially the provisions around adequate yearly progress, restructuring, choice, supplemental education services, and highly-qualified teachers—so as to better meet the unique needs of education entrepreneurs, particularly those creating new schools?

In advance of the law's scheduled reauthorization next year, this session sought to gather input on how NCLB might better support the creation of new high-performing schools and the next generation of school systems. A diverse group of about 25 entrepreneurial participants—ranging from charter school operators to providers of other education services to leaders of advocacy organizations—offered suggestions related to the law's measurement of adequate yearly progress, its school choice and tutoring provisions, its approaches to restructuring, and its mandates for highly qualified teachers.

### ■ Measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Turning first to the question of how adequate yearly progress is measured, session participants observed that the law's current structure creates perverse incentives for those operators who choose to address high-need populations. In particular, noted Eric Premack of the Charter School Development Center in California, the various sub-components of AYP are difficult to manage for small, diverse schools. Many participants agreed that value-added or growth models—of the sort that the U.S. Department of Education is currently piloting in select states—should become the norm, and a few underscored the need for these measures to supplement proficiency targets rather than replacing them. "We can't lose sight of proficiency requirements, otherwise the achievement gap will continue to be perpetuated," insisted Aaron Tang of Our Education. Finally, former Virginia state school board member Kirk Schroder raised the issue that AYP serves as an accountability label that penalizes schools that many still perceive as high-quality, "much more so than rewarding the kind of behavior that we want in schools." He suggested that the federal law might determine how to reward schools for their gains rather than penalizing them for infractions.

- **Allowing Transfers and Tutoring.** Session participants also had a great deal to say about NCLB's choice and supplemental services provisions. Many seemed to believe these provisions are fundamentally flawed, due both to the problematic nature of requiring districts to provide information about alternatives and to the overall dearth of alternative

providers of education services. Many participants were adamant that districts be supplanted as providers or gatekeepers to these choice and tutoring provisions. “Something has to be done to get districts out of the position of being the one to tell parents that they have other options,” said Andy Smarick of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, who suggested that the law grant federal monies to public interest nonprofits that would take on the task of notifying parents about their options. On the supply side, Finn wondered whether the federal government might establish a fund to stimulate the development of more charter schools in areas with many students eligible for the choice provision. Several participants pointed out that the supply of supplemental services providers is also lacking, particularly in rural areas. “The whole idea that there is a great wealth of other providers in rural communities other than the district is just dreaming,” noted Merrill Vargo of Springboard Schools. “In places like that, you’ve got to create the incentive for the district to become a viable player.” Ultimately, a significant number of participants felt that the choice and supplemental services provisions should be reversed, such that tutoring would be available before school transfers. According to Chris Doherty of the U.S. Department of Education, the state of Virginia has a pilot program under way to test this approach, and it has seemed to dramatically increase the participation rate in supplemental services.

■ **Restructuring Chronically Failing Schools.**

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the restructuring options available to districts must be revised to ensure that school turnarounds happen in a meaningful way. One way of doing this, some suggested, would be to completely eliminate the “other” option, which allows districts to choose an approach that may not entail significant management or governance change. “I don’t think that any of the restructuring that’s any of the stuff they’ve done before should be allowed, like writing another school improvement plan or changing the curriculum,” said Deborah McGriff of Edison Schools. Some also believe that NCLB should allow districts or states to impose significant restructuring in phases (i.e. “triage”) if they have a large number of schools that require such sanctions. Finally, participants urged the clarification to the restructuring provisions to address the concern that “districts would take the easiest way out by slapping the charter label on failing schools,” as Smarick put it. Refining this provision might entail requiring states or districts to formally close schools in restructuring for at least one year before converting them into charter schools. Toward this end, Premack also stressed that the law should focus more on new school creation than on the restructuring of failing schools. “I think we’re probably best off really thinking about how do we just create new schools, either in the same building or in other parts of town,” he said.

■ **Ensuring Teachers Are Highly Qualified.** Finally, the highly-qualified teacher provision of NCLB seems to have added complexity to the work of charter school and other entrepreneurial providers. In fact, most participants were in agreement that this provision is more flawed than useful, and thus should be eliminated. Some emphasized that subject matter expertise requirements are unmanageable for many charter schools that emphasize small size and diverse offerings. Others noted the fact that this piece of the legislation is too focused on inputs, and could be more valuable if it incorporated student value-add metrics, which would make the provision more about “high-quality” than “highly qualified.”

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## ABOUT NEWSCHOOLS VENTURE FUND

NewSchools Venture Fund is a national nonprofit venture philanthropy firm that is working to transform public education so that all children have the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century. We do this by increasing the supply of high-quality public schools for underserved students and by supporting entrepreneurial solutions that enable traditional and charter school systems to become performance-driven in their practices.

Founded in 1998, NewSchools has invested more than \$60 million in 25 entrepreneurial organizations. In addition to the direct support we provide to entrepreneurs, NewSchools plays an important role in connecting their work to the broader landscape of public education reform.

For more information, please visit [www.newschools.org](http://www.newschools.org).

## About the NewSchools Summit

The NewSchools Summit is an invitation-only gathering of education, business, nonprofit, government and philanthropic leaders who are passionate about the power of entrepreneurs to transform public education for underserved children. NewSchools believes that creating dramatic change in K-12 public education requires a creative combination of expertise and resources from across education's many and varied stakeholders. The NewSchools Summit brings a select group of leaders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors together to share ideas, resources and connections.