

**Students at Work:  
A Portfolio from the  
Annenberg Challenge**

April 2000

## Preface

**C**ollectively, 2,500 Annenberg schools – the beneficiaries of Walter H. Annenberg’s \$500 million “Challenge” gift – demonstrate that school reform works. In 18 unique projects created to fit local needs, the Annenberg Challenge is mobilizing communities on behalf of children, improving education policies, gaining partners for schools, strengthening teaching, and – most important of all – advancing student learning. Building sustained alliances for change undergirds every aspect of the program.

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The Challenge has renewed  
momentum for reform  
while embracing risk.

By any measure, the Challenge has set an ambitious agenda, not the least of which is using private funds to gain traction in public education systems that spend \$250 *billion* annually. The Challenge has given renewed momentum to

promising pre-existing reforms, but it also has embraced risk. While some Annenberg schools had achieved exceptional prior success, the vast majority entered with undistinguished or poor track records. Nudging a single or small number of schools – successful or lagging – toward better performance is hard enough; attempting this task on a grand scale, as most projects have, is an entirely different matter. With large scale come large hurdles, including staying focused amid political turbulence, moving entrenched bureaucracies, and making organizational change on many fronts at once.

The children in Challenge schools unquestionably need these herculean efforts. While defying easy generalization, they come predominantly from poor and minority households – more than 80 percent in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia are both. Many are bilingual. Few may be surprised that students in South Florida schools speak over 100 languages, but the 77 different languages of Salt Lake City’s classrooms underscore the changed face of urban schools. Finally, many students in Challenge schools are mobile.

Half of the students in Los Angeles County change schools within a year – with many moving more than once.

Is the Challenge making a difference for these students? Answering this question lies at the core of the evaluation and research efforts linked to each project. As the following report demonstrates, the independent researchers tracking the Challenge – over 100 in all, from 20 of the nation’s top universities and research centers – are accumulating substantial evidence of student gains, including examples of student accomplishment not easily captured in a test score. They are documenting the distinctive strategies Challenge projects have brought into play to support and sustain good schools. They report a story of determination, innovation, and considerable progress.

Students doing challenging work, guided by adults who know them well and who themselves are honing new skills – these are the hopes we all hold for our public schools. In this time of rising standards and high-stakes tests, each day’s teaching and curriculum must provide the inspiration students need to reach the ambitious expectations set by adults. The Annenberg Challenge helps schools do just that, as they meet students where they are, engage them intellectually, tap their curiosity, support their perseverance, uncover their talents, bolster their hopes, and honor their achievements.

*Barbara Cervone*

Barbara Cervone  
National Coordinator

## I. Charting Student Progress

**H**ow do we know the Challenge is benefiting the 1.5 million students it serves? Most would agree there are many ways to gauge the impact of schools on their students – and that good schools strengthen motivation and character along with academics. Given the enormous currency of standardized test scores in today’s drive to improve student performance, test results are the starting point for measuring student benefit in most Annenberg Challenge communities. But they do not stand alone.

Attendance, dropout, and graduation rates are other indicators. Analyses, for example, of the number of students gaining proficiency in English or taking advanced courses yield additional evidence. Examining the daily work of students offers yet another tool. Disaggregating any of these measures by class or race deepens our understanding further. It tells us, importantly, how different students within a school or district are faring and what

progress we have made with those least prepared, or least predicted to achieve, academically.

The summaries that follow present currently available student results in the seven longest-standing Chal-

lenge projects. In these projects, schools have worked with Challenge funds for three years and have gathered two, if not three, years of consistent data on student learning – enough implementation and enough results to speak of a trend. These remain, however, interim results. The majority of Challenge projects extend to December 2001, with most continuing beyond the life of their Annenberg funds.

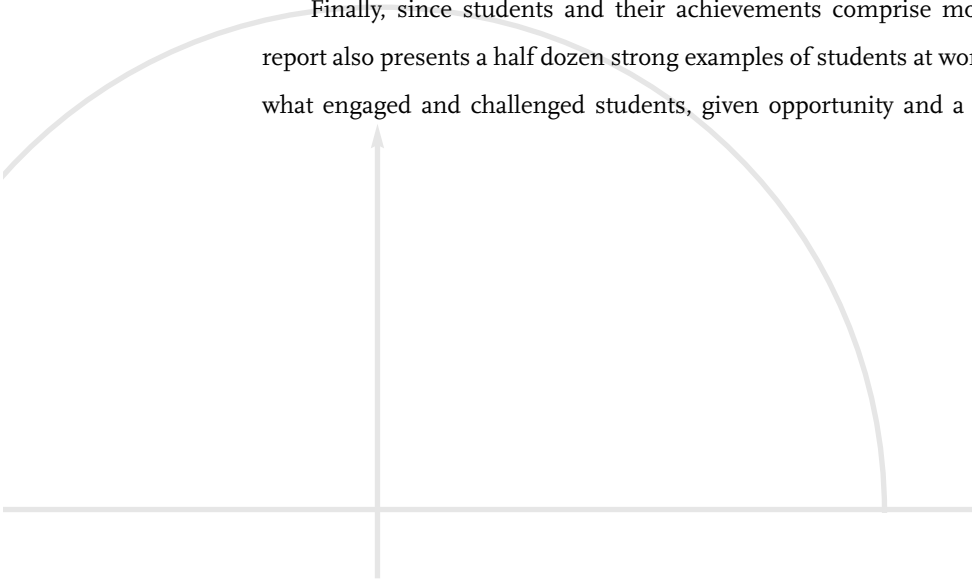
The data, themselves, are decidedly diverse. First, they reflect variations among districts and states in assessing student achievement. The past five years have produced an explosion of local measures and testing options, and the Challenge has worked within

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these local preferences. Second, they reflect differing strategies among Challenge projects about how and what to measure. The result is a robust mix from Philadelphia’s “Performance Responsibility Index” to Tennessee’s “value-added” formula to locally designed measures of student engagement in the Rural School and Community Trust. Accessing and synthesizing these data, we might add, has sometimes been a challenge in itself. From the research teams linked to each project, local district administrators have learned about better organizing and sharing existing student data; yet much work remains on this score.

Taken together, the following summaries suggest a pattern of improvement that extends beyond the extraordinary schools that catch everyone’s eye to schools whose progress is more modest but no less hard won. And because each Challenge project is closely monitored by external evaluators, the uneven or negligible progress in some schools yields practical lessons about the steps that most reliably make a difference in school reform, whether it be in a single school or in schools throughout a district.

Finally, since students and their achievements comprise more than numbers, this report also presents a half dozen strong examples of students at work. They show, we hope, what engaged and challenged students, given opportunity and a spark, can accomplish.



## Holding each other accountable, San Francisco Challenge schools boost student performance

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**S**panning 60 school districts, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) is a membership organization for over 200 schools that have demonstrated their seriousness about reform. The 86 Leadership Schools selected for funding were chosen because they put together strong application portfolios describing their commitment to the kind of change process that BASRC espouses. Using a “cycle of inquiry,” a methodical, data-driven approach to investigating problems in student achievement, each Leadership School has detailed a “focused effort” that addresses a key aspect of teaching and learning.

BASRC expects its Leadership Schools to show progress in student achievement by their third year of funding. In spring 2000, 56 schools funded during each of BASRC’s first two years of work (Cohorts 1 and 2) faced this expectation. Looking at standardized test results, Stanford University researchers evaluating BASRC found that 38 of 56 Cohort 1 and 2 schools, or 68 percent, had showed improved student performance. Additionally, 23 schools in Cohort 3, schools that were not due to show

achievement gains until the next year, met this goal a year ahead of BASRC’s expectations.

Standardized test scores also hint at progress relative to other public schools. California adopted the SAT-9 (Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition) as the state-wide achievement test for all grades quite recently, in 1998. Accordingly, analysis of these scores are based on only two years of testing and must be considered tentative. Nonetheless, a comparative analysis of 1998 and 1999 SAT-9 results shows that BASRC’s Leadership Schools have generally made greater gains than Bay Area and California schools overall.

One of BASRC’s central goals is to narrow the achievement gap between students who traditionally succeed academically and those who do not. Reflecting national trends, the gap is wide between high-poverty and more affluent schools at the regional and state level. Although the gulf widened in 1999, Stanford evaluators report brighter news for BASRC’s high-poverty Leadership Schools, which lost significantly less ground than their Bay Area counterparts.

To help close gaps *within* individual schools, BASRC pushes its grantees to disaggregate student achievement data by ethnic background, language, race,

and economic status. BASRC schools have begun to focus on this problem during the past two years, with some early signs of progress. For example, in 1997 at Lomita Park Elementary in San Bruno, 44 percent of limited-English third graders read above grade level compared to 80 percent of English-fluent students. In 1999, these percentages improved for both groups, to 73 and 97 percent, respectively, narrowing the gap between them by 12 points.

Increased student achievement is just one of several different criteria by which BASRC evaluates the overall progress of its funded Leadership Schools. Using a

their eligibility for continued funding. As with standardized tests, BASRC's 86 Leadership schools have shown considerable progress when gauged by this measure; 71 percent of all Leadership Schools were judged at standard on the spring 2000 Review of Progress.

## Leadership Schools made greater gains than Bay Area and California schools overall.

rigorous peer-review process called the Review of Progress, BASRC measures annual progress in five key areas: high standards and closing the achievement gap, substantial changes in curriculum and instruction, school-wide impact, shared leadership, and coherence and focus. Because BASRC has a developmental view of change, it measures progress in these five criteria along a continuum, holding schools to higher standards the longer they have participated in the Collaborative. Passing the Review of Progress is keenly important to BASRC schools, since it determines

# Push to meet county-wide standards lifts Chattanooga above the state and nation

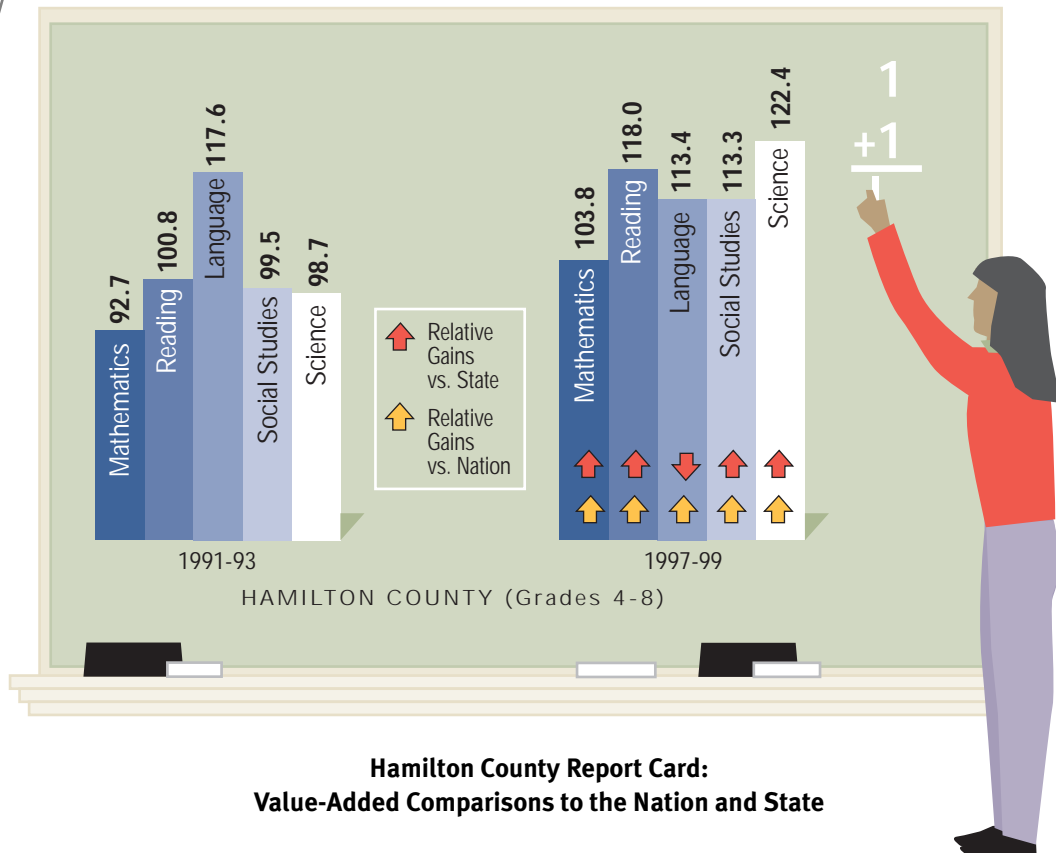
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In 1994, voters in Chattanooga, Tennessee created a new school system that combined Hamilton County's formerly separate urban and suburban districts along with the county's rural schools. In 1996, with Challenge funds, the city's Public Education Foundation helped launch a new, standards-based curriculum for all 80 schools.

The state's most recent annual report card on schools shows marked progress in Hamilton County. The report card uses a value-added calculation devel-

oped by Dr. William Sanders of the University of Tennessee to measure whether or not students in grades 3 through 8 achieve the proper amount of academic growth each year. A value-added score of 100 percent indicates that a student achieved the expected academic progress for a school year. A score of less than 100 percent shows less than the expected advance; a score over 100 percent shows more.

For the first time since the merger, students exceeded the required level of improvement in all five subject areas,



**Hamilton County Report Card:  
Value-Added Comparisons to the Nation and State**

using Tennessee's standardized test choice, TerraNova. In addition, Hamilton County schools exceeded the national gains in all subject areas,

fourth graders scored competent or above on the state-wide writing assessment; four years later, 61 percent did. At the eleventh grade, percentages rose from 32 to 65. Concurrently, scores in all areas of the ACT college entrance exam rose while the state average did not show improvements. Attendance figures for the county were up across the board.

## Student writing skills showed particularly dramatic improvement.

and they outpaced the state's gains in four of the five subject areas based on the three-year average. (See chart on previous page).

When the scores of the city and county schools on the TerraNova are weighed against state median percentages (as opposed to a value-added formula), they are at or above the 50 percent mark in 17 categories (for example, third-grade reading or sixth-grade math) and below in 13. One area shows particularly dramatic improvement: writing. In 1994-95, before the merger and accompanying reforms, 22 percent of Hamilton County

# Improving Reading Through History and Imagination

**H**arriet Tubman wields an influence in Marquita Pruitt's life as real as any teacher's at Suder School, in the low-income neighborhood where this Chicago student attends eighth grade. "When she said she was going to make a difference, she did," Marquita writes of the nineteenth-century abolitionist who helped hundreds like herself escape slavery via the Underground Railroad. "She stuck to her beliefs of freedom and risked her life to make a difference. She was a determined Black woman with faith." As she herself grows up, Marquita adds, she intends to follow Tubman's example: "I am determined to be a lawyer or a psychiatrist, so I can free people from mental distress or legal issues."

Marquita first encountered Harriet Tubman through an actor's presentation at the Chicago Historical Society, which works with the Suder School in an unusual Annenberg-sponsored partnership called the Urban Imagination Network. Using a curricular

## Students in seven schools work with museums on arts, history, science, and technology.

approach developed by DePaul University, teachers ask classes a focused question—in this case, "What caused the Civil War?" Then students explore the rich resources of Chicago's museums, actively collecting evidence that builds understanding. Finally, students use graphic organizing techniques to report back on their knowledge and connect it to their own lives.

"As they imagine, understand, and create, history comes to life and becomes personal for the children," says Barbara Radner, who directs the Center for Urban Education at DePaul. "At the same time they learn about a topic that matters to them, they are developing essential reading comprehension skills. And they focus not just on fiction as most elementary schools do, but on primary source materials that real scholars use."

Six museums and seven elementary and high schools take part in the network, working in curricular



Marquita Pruitt

areas from history and the arts to science and technology. In a previous year, for example, Suder paired with the Chicago Botanic Garden, where students explored the essential elements of woodlands and prairies, transforming the school with their exhibits.

Although Suder School began its Annenberg partnership as a school on probation, three years later its reading scores have risen significantly, with far fewer children testing in the bottom quartile as the new initiative took hold.

A new sense of professional excitement also pervades the school. "These teachers have liberated themselves from instructional approaches that limit them and established a climate of inquiry that leads to meaningful reading," says Professor Radner. "They are helping their students connect across generations and cultures."

One of Marquita's eighth-grade classmates put it another way as she wrote about the legendary "Night John," the term for former slaves who secretly taught children to read and write in "ditch schools" held in camouflaged holes in the ground. "If there weren't people like Night John," Adelaide Holloway wrote, "black people might still be slaves, unequal and definitely uneducated. Without him, slaves may have been freed, but they wouldn't know how to read or write, participate in politics, or be successful in life." Taking that legacy to its rightful place in American education, Suder School's imaginative approach appears right on target.



## Networks of Chicago's Annenberg schools gain more than city average

**A**t the core of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge stand networks of 3 to 15 schools linked to an external partner – a community group, nonprofit organization, cultural institution, or university. Together they tackle a range of key issues affecting teaching and learning, from professional development to improving the daily quality of classroom assignments and student work. Forty percent of the city's schools – about 200 schools – are involved in one of 48 Challenge-supported networks.

Researchers studying the Chicago Annenberg Challenge have tracked the test score gains of participating and non-

From 1995 to 1999, Chicago test scores increased at most grade levels and among most age groups of students. Nonetheless, researchers found that following two to three years' involvement in one of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge's school networks, Annenberg schools made small but consistently greater gains on the ITBS than their non-Annenberg counterparts. (*See chart next page*).

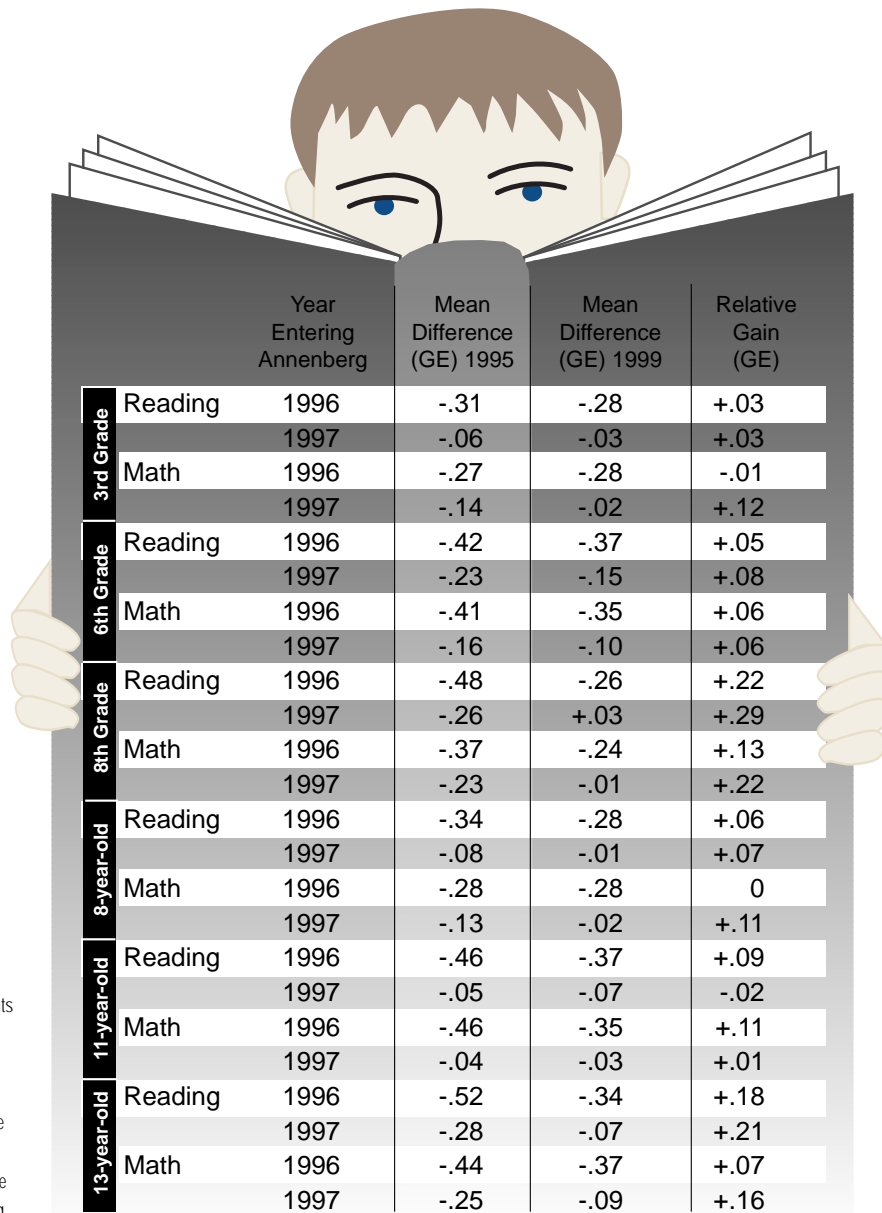
These gains are noteworthy given that students in Challenge-supported schools are relatively poorer and more academically disadvantaged than their counterparts in other Chicago schools. Indeed, for schools that joined the Challenge in its first year, the average poverty rate was 90.1 percent, compared to a city-wide average of 83.7 percent; in grade-equivalent terms, their achievement generally averaged between one-third and one-half a grade level behind that of non-participating schools. Schools joining the Challenge in 1997 also lagged behind other schools in initial achievement.

Interestingly, counter to prevailing wisdom that middle and upper grades remain the hardest reform nut to crack, researchers in Chicago find that students in higher grades appear to have fared best in Annenberg Challenge schools, relative to other schools. Between 1995 and 1999, the greatest

### The greatest achievement gains occurred in eighth-grade reading.

participating schools since 1995 (one year before the first group of schools joined the Challenge). The test used is the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), with results reported in Grade Equivalents (GE) in reading and mathematics. To assess the progress of the Annenberg Challenge schools, researchers examined achievement at grades 3, 6, and 8; they also examined results for students aged 8, 11, and 13 in order to take into consideration the effects of grade retention. The average achievement for all Challenge schools was combined into a group mean.

Difference in Grade Equivalents (GE) between Annenberg and non-Annenberg schools on the ITBS. (A negative number means the Annenberg average was lower than the non-Annenberg average. A positive number means the Annenberg average was higher than the non-Annenberg average).



		Year Entering Annenberg	Mean Difference (GE) 1995	Mean Difference (GE) 1999	Relative Gain (GE)
3rd Grade	Reading	1996	-.31	-.28	+.03
		1997	-.06	-.03	+.03
	Math	1996	-.27	-.28	-.01
		1997	-.14	-.02	+.12
6th Grade	Reading	1996	-.42	-.37	+.05
		1997	-.23	-.15	+.08
	Math	1996	-.41	-.35	+.06
		1997	-.16	-.10	+.06
8th Grade	Reading	1996	-.48	-.26	+.22
		1997	-.26	+.03	+.29
	Math	1996	-.37	-.24	+.13
		1997	-.23	-.01	+.22
8-year-old	Reading	1996	-.34	-.28	+.06
		1997	-.08	-.01	+.07
	Math	1996	-.28	-.28	0
		1997	-.13	-.02	+.11
11-year-old	Reading	1996	-.46	-.37	+.09
		1997	-.05	-.07	-.02
	Math	1996	-.46	-.35	+.11
		1997	-.04	-.03	+.01
13-year-old	Reading	1996	-.52	-.34	+.18
		1997	-.28	-.07	+.21
	Math	1996	-.44	-.37	+.07
		1997	-.25	-.09	+.16

### Differences of Mean Annenberg ITBS Achievement Scores from Non-Annenberg Scores

achievement gains in Annenberg schools, relative to non-Annenberg gains, occurred in eighth-grade reading; the comparative advantage in gains among Annenberg schools was about one-fourth of a grade equivalent (.22 GE for schools entering the Challenge in 1996, and .29 GE for those entering in 1997).

As part of their evaluation, Chicago researchers are paying particular atten-

tion to the progress of students in the project's 30 small schools. Early evidence suggests these students may be out-gaining their peers, further confirming the benefits of small schools – along with school networks. Future analyses of test scores for both Challenge and non-Challenge schools will control for demographic factors, student mobility, and changing test forms.

## Linked in K - 12 ‘School Families,’ L A. Challenge schools do well on new state index

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**T**he Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP) is founded on the assumption that high student mobility and teacher turnover are major problems facing children and schools in Los Angeles County. To address this problem, LAAMP created “School Families” made up of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. By connecting all the schools in a given community, LAAMP hopes to provide students a more coherent and seamless education from pre-school through high school. Currently, LAAMP works with 28 School Families, including approximately 215,000 students in 251 schools across 14 districts.

Student achievement within this diverse, large group of schools – and School Families – is assessed in a variety of ways. By one measure, the California Department of Education’s recently released Academic Performance Index (API), the news for LAAMP schools is almost all positive. For now, the state has based this index solely on results on the SAT-9. Every school receives a score from 200 to 1,000 calculated according to a seven-step formula. These scores are then ranked state-wide in 10 groups of equal size from 1, the lowest performing, to 10, the highest. Schools are separated by type – elementary, middle, and high

schools – and ranked within those categories. A second ranking of 1 to 10 compares each school’s 1999 API to those of 100 schools with similar socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics. These comparison rankings are important because many LAAMP School Families serve students from poor and non-English speaking homes.\*

The data show that 25 of LAAMP’s 28 School Families outpaced schools with similar demographics and socioeconomic conditions. The average rank of schools in these 25 Families was 5 or higher, placing them above average compared to similar schools. Five School Families averaged 7 or higher on this overall state-wide ranking. This first year of the API provides a benchmark to assess future progress and suggests areas for further evaluation of LAAMP’s impact on student learning.

At the same time, local university-based researchers studying LAAMP have

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*\* As this report went to press, the California State Department of Education announced that the similar-schools rankings needed to be re-calculated because of errors. The Education Department expects to issue new figures for the rankings in April.*

## ‘School is Part of Becoming Who I Want to Be’

**F**resh from Mexico, speaking no English, young Luz Ruiz had a hard time in the Los Angeles public schools. “I went to two elementary schools, and the girls used to hit me. In the second school I started fighting back. In middle school I developed an attitude – I used to not do anything in school. When my parents said ‘Don’t,’ it meant ‘Do’ to me.”

As her classmates prepared to move on to North Hollywood High School, Luz couldn’t muster the grades to graduate from middle school. As a last recourse, her teachers proposed the new Bridging program, an intensive summer session supported by the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project, that targets students at risk before they enter middle or high school.

During those critical summer weeks in 1999, the small classes and personal attention transformed Luz’s entire attitude toward school. “We had to design our dream house,” she recalls. “Mine was five rooms, like the one where I live with my family and our rela-

### In small ‘dens,’ teachers coach students towards academic excellence.

tives – but it had an office in it, and a garden, and a big library because I love to read.” That summer, reading interested Luz as never before, with *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, striking a special chord. Though writing in English had never been her favorite subject, “I read and write letters home for my mother in Spanish.” During the summer classes, she learned how to better organize her thoughts on paper in English.

“I felt really close to the Bridging teachers,” Luz says. “If you have a problem, or if they think something is wrong, you can talk to them.” Buoyed by her new confidence, she began to get “A”s in school for the first time. “If you want to be someone you have to study,” she asserts. “Without it, I wouldn’t even be



DAVID ALBANESE

Luz Ruiz

talking to you in English!”

With 3,500 students, North Hollywood High School is like a small city. Enrolled as a freshman, Luz misses the personal atmosphere of the summer Bridging program. Indeed, for her and her schoolmates – 70 percent of whom are Latino, with about a third in a bilingual program – the odds of making it here are only about even. Of a thousand entering ninth graders every year, historically 50 percent have not graduated.

To reverse this situation, North Hollywood ninth-grade teachers are attempting to capture the personalization of the Bridging program in an initiative that serves all their students, not just a few. They have created “dens” in which each teacher takes special responsibility for 20 students, coaching them once a week toward success in school. Assisted by another adult – a community volunteer, a coach, or another teacher – they try “anything it takes,” one assistant principal declares, from helping with reading and writing to advising teens on personal challenges.

For Luz Ruiz, such steps are exactly what it did take to replace her “attitude” with aspirations. On Saturdays, she helps her mother clean the offices of a small law firm and has begun filing for its partners as well. She talks about the possibility – once but no longer unimaginable – of a legal career. “School is part of becoming who I want to be.”

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developed their own comprehensive indicator system for assessing correlations between LAAMP's action principles and student outcomes. This system includes

## Dropout rates and absenteeism improved.

“early” and “trailing” outcomes. Early outcomes are specific changes in student learning, attitudes, or behavior mostly likely to show up in the first years of innovation: for example, quality of student work, attendance rates, the mainstreaming of English-language learners. Trailing outcomes are those affected last by the innovation. Scores on standardized tests fall into this second category.

Using this indicator system, local researchers evaluating LAAMP School Families report a number of upward trends, some modest and others more substantial. Dropout rates have declined from 1996 to 1998, with the greatest decline – 6.6 percent to 4.0 – among LAAMP schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that have worked with Challenge funds the longest. These same schools also show an increase in the percent of limited English speaking students achieving proficiency, which rose from 9.9 to 11.8 percent. Excessive absenteeism (defined as more than 20 days absent) has dropped

2 percentage points – from an average of 25.2 percent to 23.2 – in School Families within LAUSD. And the percentage of students completing a set of more advanced courses that make them eligible to apply to the University of California system is rising. Here again the biggest increase – from 44.4 percent in 1996 to 50.1 percent in 1998 – occurred in those School Families that have been part of LAAMP the longest. When LAAMP schools are compared with similar non-LAAMP schools on these early outcomes, they are gaining more slowly in English proficiency and excessive absenteeism, roughly equally in dropout decline, and most in advanced course completion.

In addition to analyzing these early outcomes and SAT-9 scores, LAAMP researchers are also studying four School Families in much greater detail, looking especially for those factors that seem to contribute most to improved student learning. Preliminary findings point to the importance of professional development for teachers, high expectations for students, parent involvement, and a coherent curriculum.

# With more autonomy, New York's small schools improve student outcomes

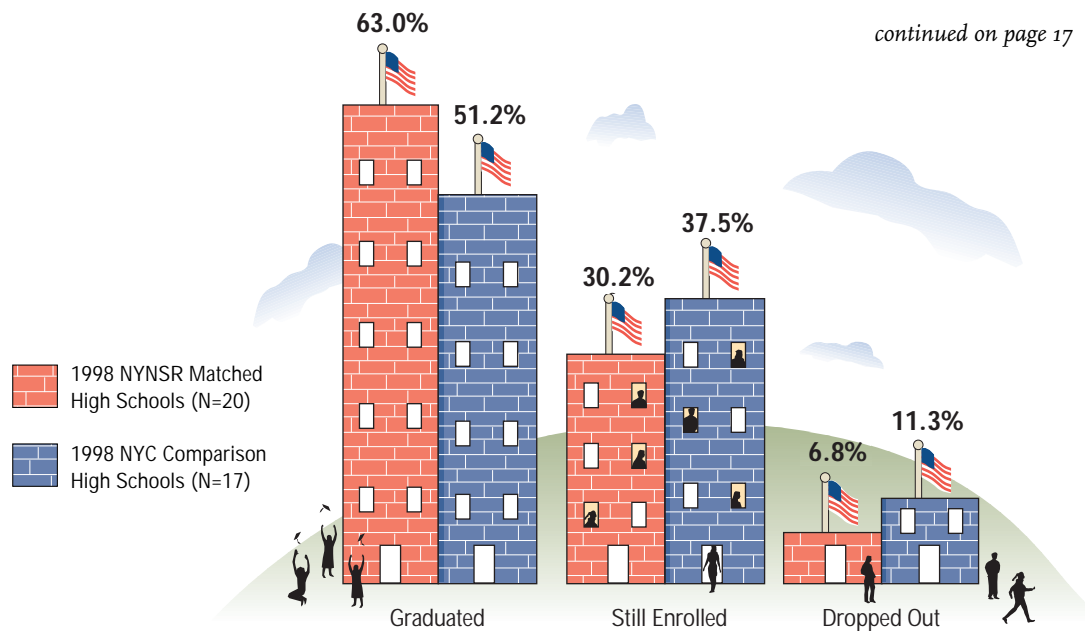
In New York City, where the Challenge supports the 140 small schools in the New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR), the benefits for students are accumulating. Standardized test results are one measure. The evidence shows improvements in those schools' student performance from spring 1996 to spring 1998, and in both reading and mathematics they outscored students in a comparison group of similar New York City schools. Students in grades 3-6 took the CTB Reading Test, a standardized, multiple-choice test that provides national norms for student performance.

Over two years, the percent of stable students (that is, students who remained in NYNSR schools for both years) who scored at or above the national norm rose from 34 percent to 44 percent. In the group of similar comparison schools, the stable students' scores rose from 30 percent to 37 percent. In mathematics (where the nationally normed test was the California Achievement Test), stable NYNSR students' gains were also noteworthy: the percent of NYNSR students at or above the norm rose from 49 to 53 percent, while the comparison group of stable students rose from 46 to 51 percent.

Increases in NYNSR students' scores cut across all achievement levels. In 1996, 34 percent of NYNSR students were scoring in the bottom quartile of their grade nationally; the following year, that percentage was down to 28.

## NYNSR schools outdo the city's graduation and dropout rates.

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## ‘Everything We Do Here Is for a Purpose, and We Get Something Out of It’

**A**t eight a.m., half an hour before school starts, Rosa Perez is working Landmark High School’s front desk, answering the phone and directing visitors to the principal’s office. She has dressed up today in a long-skirted ensemble, her hair pinned in a sleek knot. But she is clearly nervous. “I have Graduation Committee today,” she discloses. Before a panel of teachers for 45 minutes this afternoon, this twelfth grader must present and defend a thick portfolio of her work in mathematics – including a “user’s guide” to an important algebraic concept, a project in which she determines the profitability of a start-up store selling music CDs, and a demonstration of how mathematical representations have influenced public opinion on the new millennium.

Started in 1993 as part of the breakup of two large New York City high schools into 11 smaller schools, Landmark embodies the idea that such genuine discourse – about important subjects, among young people and adults who know each other well – can provide the powerful education, safe environment, and emotional well-being that every student needs.

With a heterogeneous enrollment of some 300 New York City students – many from northern Manhattan’s Washington Heights neighborhood, where incomes are low and immigrants from the Dominican Republic predominate – the school first builds trust and teamwork among them. Students then experience the resources of their city, visiting specialized libraries, serving as aides in offices and cultural institutions. At the same time, Landmark upholds a set of simple but rigorous curricular demands, developing “habits of mind” and “habits of work” that apply no matter what the academic or workplace task.

Providing a focus for student activities both inside the classroom and out are the Graduation Committees – one of which Rosa will experience this afternoon – that are held over a two-day period and repeated four times yearly. In ninth and tenth grade, students begin writing up their academic work for



Rosa Perez

inclusion in one of the eight Graduation Portfolios they will eventually present before their Committee panels. New students learn the ropes from juniors and seniors who visit their advisory groups to explain the Graduation Committee process. And starting in the eleventh grade, students spend up to nine hours of school time each week preparing and revising their work, readying themselves for intense conversations with their future juries.

With such continuous support and focused attention, students are achieving impressive results not only before their Committee panels but on standardized tests and college acceptance rates as well. In 1998, for example, 82 Landmark tenth graders took New York’s Regents Competency Tests; 86.6 percent passed in math, 92.7 in reading, and 81.7 in writing. In 1999, 67 students took them in math alone, with 91.7 percent passing. Just as promising are the numbers regarding college acceptance. Of the 53-member class of 1999, 74 percent went on to four-year institutions (an increase of 10 percent over the previous year), with 24 percent headed to New York’s state or city universities and half attending private colleges, including some of the area’s most selective. Haverford, Antioch, Vassar, Sarah Lawrence, Bard, Hamil-

ton, Fordham, Hunter, and Baruch all count recent Landmark graduates among their students.

Once in college, Landmark's former students continue to thrive. Each year, Landmark alumni return en masse to the school to lead illuminating workshops about their college experience, describing everything from dormitory life to academic challenges. Graduates report that a Landmark education

## Students achieve impressive results on standardized tests and college acceptance.

gives them the tools they need to succeed in college. "The research and writing, the revision, the presentations, class participation, the portfolio system – you carry it all with you when you go to college," said a 1999 Landmark graduate now attending Bard College. "Our preparation is excellent compared to that of a lot of the other students."

Many elements contribute to Landmark's enviable record, but one factor above all others appears critical: connectedness. Landmark's curriculum, pedagogy, and other school structures and processes all aim to forge the personal connections among students, teachers, and families that will show students they matter here. Its prime location in midtown Manhattan helps students connect their learning to the city's resources through service and research projects. Finally, from ninth grade through twelfth, every teacher in every class connects what students are doing with the evidence they must gather and present for the Graduation Committees. Reinforced again and again, the connections begin to take hold. "Everything we do here is for a purpose," one student declared to a visitor, "and we get something out of it."

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Similarly, the percentage scoring in the highest quartile rose from 16 to 18 percent. Researchers also examined the performance of students in particular ethnic groups and found the greatest gains for Hispanic students, followed by Asian-American and African-American students.

Another measure of student benefit is graduation and dropout rates. In 1998, the 27 academic high schools in the New York Networks had a four-year graduation rate comparable to that of all high schools in the city (59 percent versus 58 percent), even though Network schools enroll somewhat poorer and less academically prepared students. And they had a dramatically lower dropout rate – 40 percent lower – making them among the most productive of all the city's schools in terms of cost per graduate.

Undoubtedly, the benefits the NYNSR provides its students derive in part from size. However, the favorable comparison of NYNSR schools with other New York City schools matched for size (and other characteristics) suggests that the project supports its 140 schools in additional and substantial ways, with opportunities for teacher development and collaboration topping the list. Over the next two years, researchers will deepen their analysis of the links among costs, school practices, and student achievement in NYNSR small schools.

# Drive for standards and focus raises achievement in Philadelphia schools

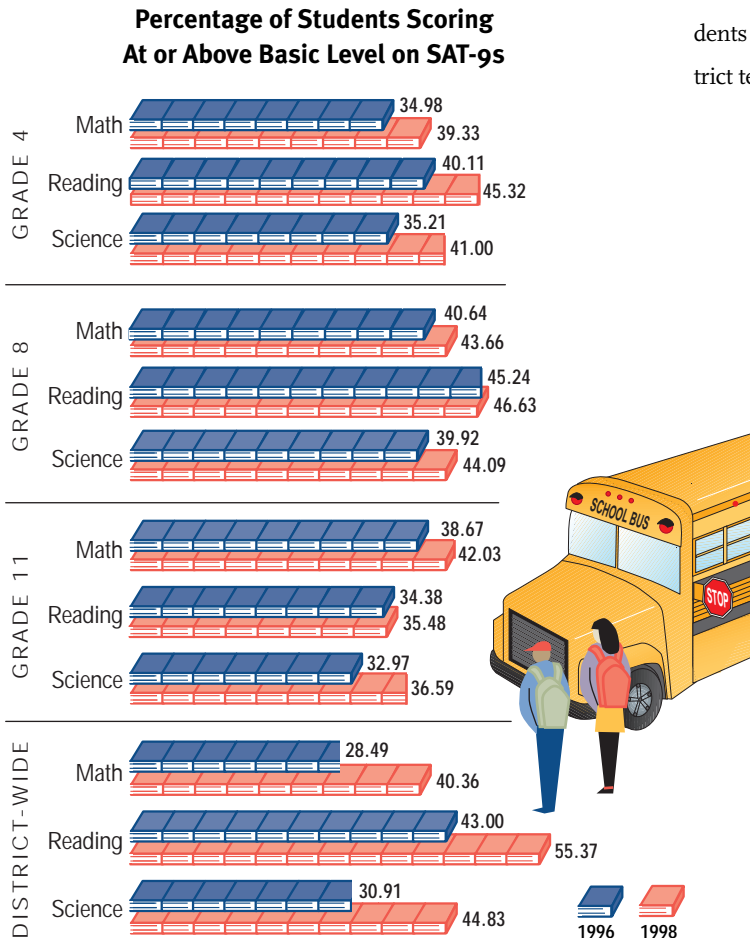
In Philadelphia, the Challenge gave an important boost to the reform effort of Superintendent David Hornbeck. That reform, called Children Achieving, aims to improve every school in the country's fifth largest school district, and it is uncompromising in its focus on measurable performance gains for all students.

Under the district's newly developed accountability system, Philadelphia schools must meet target scores on the Performance Responsibility Index (PRI), a two-part measure that bundles together

a number of indicators. One part of the index gives a 60 percent weighting to student test scores, 10 percent each to student and staff attendance, and 20 percent to rates of student promotion or on-time graduation. The other part of the index requires a reduction of 10 percentage points over two years in the number of students who score below the "basic" level or do not take the district's standardized test, the SAT-9. This incremental component of the PRI aims to meet the district's goal of having 95 percent of students perform at "proficient" level on district tests within 12 years (a full cycle from kindergarten to twelfth grade).

Results released by the school district in September 1999 show that over the previous three years, two-thirds of the city's 249 schools met their targets on the PRI. Many had surged forward in the first two years, with 145 schools surpassing their goals on both parts of the index. As expected, progress was slower but still visible in the third year, with 64 schools exceeding their one-year incremental goals on both parts.

Other important variables included in the performance index also showed improvement from 1996 to



1998. Staff attendance grew significantly from about 70 percent of teachers attending 93 percent or more school days in 1996 to 79 percent in 1998. Student attendance also increased significantly, by about five percentage points.

As noted above, Philadelphia's accountability system relies heavily on student proficiency levels on the SAT-9: for a particular subject, student performance is measured as advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic for their grade, according to cut-off scores established by panels of teachers who worked with the test publisher. Raising the percentage of students who reach at least the basic level

basic remained the same. This seeming paradox – after all, the number of students scoring above that mark has increased – occurs because 13 percent more Philadelphia students were tested in 1998 than in 1996. Predictably, many of these previously untested students were low achievers. To its credit, Philadelphia's leadership has insisted on a valid benchmark by which to chart future progress for all students. The district is sending a clear message that schools must stand accountable for all their children and not give up on low-achieving students.

As part of their analysis, Philadelphia researchers also examined closely a small group of elementary schools with achievement gains from 1996 to 1998 distinctly higher than those of schools with comparable baseline scores and levels of student poverty. Evaluators found that three important factors accounted for the better performance. One is strong preparation for the SAT-9s. Another is the presence of “instructional focus”: firm consensus about what and how to teach, as well as clear priorities bolstered by relevant professional development. Finally, the teachers in these high-achieving schools collaborate more frequently than their peers, gaining greater knowledge and respect for one another's work.

Future analyses will examine the relationship between specific components of the Children Achieving reform and student achievement, controlling for poverty, school level, climate, and professional community.

## Teachers collaborated more in high-achieving schools.

can signal progress on the way to bringing all students to the proficient level.

City-wide, the percentage of students scoring at or above the basic level rose significantly from 1996 to 1998 in all subjects tested. (*See chart on previous page*). In reading, for example, the percentage rose from 43 to 55 across all tested grades; in mathematics it rose from 28 to 40. Gains were especially impressive in the fourth grade, but even eleventh graders posted significant gains in mathematics and science. In the context of Philadelphia's 12-year time frame for improving student achievement, these gains are on target.

During this time period, however, the number of students who scored below

## Rural Trust students gain on tests, give to communities

One in four American public school students lives in rural areas, and like their urban counterparts, one-quarter of rural students are poor. Students in the Rural School and Community Trust, however, are even more disadvantaged than the national average; the percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch exceeds the state mean – substantially in most cases – in all but one of 35 states in which Rural Trust projects operate.

Rather than view its communities, small schools, and students as resource-

A quarter of rural students are poor, but the shared potential of rural schools and communities is rich.

poor, however, the Rural Trust believes their shared potential is rich. Communities and schools improve together, it holds, when rural public schools base their teaching on the economy, ecology, history, and culture of the communities they serve, and when they fully engage members of the community in the work of the school. In turn, Rural Trust sites ask students not only to meet high academic standards but also to make significant contributions to the people and places that surround them.

Harvard University researchers tracking the Rural Trust find that students in participating schools do measure up on standardized tests. Evaluators report test scores at or above the national norms in almost all its sites – roughly 750 schools – over the past three years. In the two Texas Rural Trust sites, for example, student performance on the state's Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) has risen considerably since 1996 when the project started.

(See chart on next page). In California's Mariposa County, one of two Rural Trust sites in that state, student scores on the SAT-9 have increased in 90 percent of the testing areas (grades 2-11 in six subjects) – gains that run, on average, four percentage points ahead of the average SAT-9 gains state-wide. A sample of Alabama elementary school sites showed that combined reading and math scores on the SAT-9s rose an average of 12 points from 1996 to 1999.

School persistence and college-going rates in Rural Trust schools also have increased, especially in the Appalachian and Southern states. In Alabama, for example, college-going and dropout rates in PACERS schools (a network of 28 small rural schools) were 47 percent and 4 percent, respectively, in 1996. As of 1999, they had improved to 53 percent

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## Rural Trust: Percentage of Students Passing the TAAS

### Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, Edcouch-Elsa, Texas

		1995	1996	1997	1998
<b>READING</b>	Grade 4 (N=304)	82.5	84.8	82.3	95.3
	Grade 5 (N=310)	88.4	86.7	77.0	90.8
	Grade 6 (N=316)	86.9	87.9	67.7	94.8
	Grade 7 (N=329)	78.6	84.2	86.0	90.0
	Grade 8 (N=319)	76.0	78.1	77.4	93.5
	Grade 10 (N=327)	76.2	76.4	93.8	98.4
		1995	1996	1997	1998
<b>MATHEMATICS</b>	Grade 4	76.3	83.7	80.0	93.5
	Grade 5	81.1	86.8	71.7	93.5
	Grade 6	73.4	87.3	66.7	97.5
	Grade 7	69.0	87.4	75.1	92.4
	Grade 8	52.0	67.8	72.8	95.0
	Grade 10	70.0	74.3	47.8	90.3

### Schleicher County, Texas

		1995	1996	1997	1998
<b>READING</b>	Grade 4 (N=57)	83.7	84.5	91.7	95.2
	Grade 5 (N=55)	80.0	86.9	89.4	100
	Grade 6 (N=60)	76.4	78.5	90.2	90.7
	Grade 7 (N=66)	69.7	69.2	98.1	88.7
	Grade 8 (N=56)	72.9	69.9	98.0	100
	Grade 10 (N=53)	59.8	66.7	82.5	97.4
		1995	1996	1997	1998
<b>MATHEMATICS</b>	Grade 4	75.1	84.2	100	95.6
	Grade 5	66.7	84.9	100	100
	Grade 6	65.3	82.3	100	97.7
	Grade 7	47.7	56.6	98.1	96.2
	Grade 8	53.3	67.1	95.9	100
	Grade 10	41.6	51.4	80.0	92.1

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and 3 percent. In Walden's Ridge, Tennessee, the percentages in 1996 were 28 percent and 6.5 percent and are now 31 percent and 2.7 percent.

For many rural communities, school consolidation – which uproots schools and students from their communities – is more threatening than failing test scores. As a result, the student impact Harvard researchers have studied most is the extent to which students' school work extends into the community and is enlarged by these connections.

In a recent national survey of Rural Trust sites, 30 percent of middle and secondary school students indicated they “regularly leave the classroom for learning activities in the community,” and roughly 40 percent reported that people from the community, other than parents, are regularly in their school working with them. This community-based work, the researchers find, has assumed a long-term quality, evolving from brief excursions to ambitious projects that are “complex and intellectually challenging.” In interviews, students, parents, teachers, and other adults report that as a result of their involvement in the Rural Trust students participate more often in the life of their school and their town, place higher value on their communities and their places in them, and feel pride in their accomplishments.

Though hard to quantify, these student accomplishments are concrete and substantial.

✦ Students at Alabama's PACERS schools not only succeeded on traditional measures but, reversing a decline in small-town journalism, launched 23 community newspapers with a current circulation of 22,000.

✦ For a business class at tiny Howard High School (enrollment under 200), students performed a cash-flow study and found that an increase in local retail sales of 10 percent would generate an additional \$7 million in revenues. The study convinced residents to do more shopping close to home, and sales in their South Dakota county jumped more than 25 percent.

✦ Hundreds of Rural Trust students provide valuable environmental services. Along Colorado's Yampa River, students collect data for state and federal environmental protection agencies; in Eastport, Maine, students map clam beds as part of their watershed monitoring studies; and Oregon students restock rivers with salmon raised in their own hatcheries.

# Keeping the Voices of Their Elders

**E**ight seventh-grade students on the Northern California coast have joined the ranks of oral historians by producing a book and compact disk that preserve the stories of their elders. Titled *Voices of the Valley*, the project connected these young people with the older citizens of Anderson Valley, giving them an important link to their community's past. Students designed and directed the Oral History Project from the very beginning, coached by Mitch Mendosa, the Anderson Valley Coordinator of the North Coast Rural Challenge Network.

"When students go out into their communities with the important task of collecting and preserving local history, it connects them with their neighbors in a meaningful way," observed Mendosa. "The students and I came away from each interview with a sense that something special had just occurred, that learning had taken on new meaning."

The students' interviews with elders focused on recent historical changes in Anderson Valley and the land and natural resources around them. The economic base has shifted, for example, from logging, sheep ranching, and apple farming to grape growing for wine production and a few small businesses. And

**'We came away with a sense that learning had taken on new meaning.'**

the number of community members who speak Spanish as a first language has greatly increased in the last 20 years. Spanish-speaking students now represent 50 percent of the student population in Anderson Valley schools.

Preserving the actual voices of the elders, not just transcribing them, was a priority. The compact disc includes interview excerpts linked by music from local performers, including a memorable rendition of one of the elders singing "If I Were a Rich Man" at the local variety show. Students recorded all their inter-



**Brittany Davis (left) with Sylvia and Austin Hulbert**

views on digital audiotape (DAT), and they mastered the skills necessary to record, edit, and mass produce the compact disc. They learned to scan, enhance, and insert the historical and contemporary photographs they had collected for inclusion in the book. They spent hours word processing and laying out 107 pages of text, then digitally transmitted it to the printer. And when navigating the country roads of Anderson Valley made meeting difficult, they conferred with each other by videoconference and e-mail.

Over the last year, three of the elders whom students had interviewed died, abruptly demonstrating to them the importance of their endeavor. At the funerals, "We were pretty much the only young people there who knew these older people," student Nicole Breit commented. Kelsy Harnist added, "The death of some of the people we interviewed made me realize that it's important for us to get to know older people outside of the project, because they won't be around for much longer and their incredible stories will be lost."

Volume II of *Voices of the Valley* is set for release in spring 2000. Students who worked on Volume I are serving as mentors to the new staff, instilling passion for the project and teaching the skills necessary to preserve more stories of this community's rich history.

## II. Strategies for Improving Student Learning

**E**ach Challenge project uses a variety of promising strategies as part of its overall reform plan. All invest substantially in high standards, in developing teachers' ability to teach well, and in meaningful accountability systems. All work hard to personalize school environments and strengthen community relationships. All link schools to outside partners and foster beneficial policies and structures. These commonsense strategies share a common goal: to provide the conditions and the capacities that support student learning.

In the pages that follow we highlight many of these strategies, along with examples of the distinctive ways Challenge projects have put them into practice. For the most part, these strategies are mutually reinforcing. Any thrust to develop high-quality teaching, for instance, must also improve curriculum; and to successfully distribute accountability among all interested parties, a school needs to bolster parental and community involvement. Just as each of the examples here roots itself in important, larger strategies for improving schools, each also shows the determination and ingenuity that characterize so much of the Challenge.

All efforts by schools to increase student learning, we must add, rest on several fundamental preconditions. One is adequate funding. Funding sets the floor for what can and does happen within a school's walls. It buys textbooks, computers, decent and safe facilities. Extra funding lifts the ceiling, allowing schools to invest in new instructional strategies, additional teacher training, expanded student and community services. Money is not *the* answer, but it's pivotal.

A second precondition is appreciating the abilities and promise of students. Instead of decrying their academic (or moral) decline, we must work diligently to help students demonstrate strengths and make contributions. If all we see is their problems, we risk ignoring the unique potential they show us every day.

A third precondition is adult learning. Adults who contribute, directly and indirectly, to student learning must be willing to take risks, practice new skills, and participate in different relationships and structures. As we adults grow and learn, so will students.

**Excellent teaching and student learning share the same breath. If teachers — new and veteran — are to help children meet ambitious standards, they need ongoing opportunities to sharpen their knowledge of both content and pedagogy. When schools anchor this professional development in daily life and promote a culture where teachers solve problems together, the benefits for students grow still greater.**

#### **Revamping Teacher Training and Development: Los Angeles' DELTA Project**

Not much from his teacher training program prepared a recent graduate for his first teaching assignment: a class of emotionally disturbed sixth to eighth graders at a Los Angeles middle school. Had it not been for the coaching and guidance of a teacher with nearly 30 years' experience, this rookie teacher predicts, "I would have left teaching within a year."

The coach came courtesy of DELTA (Design for Excellence: Linking Teaching and Achievement), the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project's innovative effort to redesign teacher preparation. Working with the California State University system — which trains 60 percent of the state's new teachers — it is also changing the ways school districts work with universities to improve professional development for new and veteran teachers alike.

DELTA links four Cal State campuses — Northridge, Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles, and Long Beach — with four LAAMP "School Families" (a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools) and their respective school districts. Three separate yet interwoven components help teachers in each stage of their careers: pre-service teacher preparation for individuals pursuing a teaching credential; one-on-one coaching for first- and second-year teachers; and ongoing staff development for experienced teachers. At professional development centers situated at participating schools, pre K-12 teachers, university professors, and coaches all work together — aided by resources and expertise from outside organizations — on developing professional development activities linked to the needs of students.

DELTA already has begun to see results. Los Angeles Unified School District and Cal State have agreed to fund three additional professional development centers modeled on the two developed by the DELTA School Families. Long Beach Unified also added another School Family and professional development center. Cal State Northridge has announced that its Accelerated Teacher Preparation Program — which significantly reduces the usual two-year training period by placing teacher candidates as aides to veteran teachers by day, with four hours of education coursework at night — will serve as a model for all its other teacher training.

## Needed: Effective Leadership.

**Successful schools demand good leaders – at every level of the system. Effective systems have strategies for developing capable leaders, deploying them wisely, and encouraging them to stay. School principals serve their students best when they share leadership and ownership of a school’s problems and successes.**

### **Redefining School Leadership: Chattanooga’s Leadership**

#### **Development Initiative**

Principals from 80 Hamilton County, Tennessee schools piled into cars and vans on a Friday night in January, trading their weekend to work together on ways to improve their job performance. Over the two-day session in Atlanta, the principals – aided by visiting administrators from Texas, Ohio, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Delaware – discussed essential strategies for effective school leadership. This second annual Winter Principals’ Retreat will be followed by a three-day summer institute in June that will involve more than 200 principals, assistant principals, teachers, and central office administrators.

Sponsored by Chattanooga’s Public Education Foundation, the retreats are one of several opportunities offered through the Leadership Development Initiative, a district-wide effort to recruit, train, and support effective school leaders. In addition to the annual Winter Retreat, principals and their school teams participate

in a national leadership program from the Mayerson Academy, broadcast twice monthly via satellite. A smaller group of 13 principals meets monthly with a national expert on managing change.

Because the initiative rests on a redefinition of leadership – as a quality of a community, not of a single individual guiding others – it also serves teachers, district administrators, and parents. In the Leadership Fellows Program, for example, 24 teachers from 24 different schools support one another’s efforts as emerging leaders, with assistance from consultants from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Programs such as Leadership in Inquiry, Data, and Accountability and Leadership in School Improvement Planning reach a wide range of school personnel – and in the process, help anchor the notion of leadership in the everyday work of schools.

## **Needed: Intensity of Effort.**

**If schools are to make a real difference in the lives of students, particularly the most disadvantaged, they must muster all possible resources. They must gather not only every available dollar but also every adult, engaging them as a matter of course in the daily teaching and guidance of students. They must doggedly safeguard instructional time and find ways to expand it. They must embrace persistence and a sense of moral purpose as intangible assets.**

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### **Enlisting Every Adult: West Baltimore's Compact for Learning**

Deep in Baltimore's inner city, two Annenberg schools participate in a development program intended to renew a neighborhood whose rates of drug use and murder are among the highest in the nation. The Compact Schools Project employs both a new curriculum (adapted from the Core Knowledge program) and a consistent instructional approach that enlists every available adult to create a safe haven for its elementary students.

"We refer to all the adults in our learning community as staff members," says director Sylvia Peters. "Certified and non-certified teachers, temporary substitutes, paraprofessionals, volunteers, and parents all participate in our learning and training." This permits small-group coaching in a structured program of reading, language, and reasoning that

has transformed the schools' climate as well as student outcomes. All children in these two schools are now "proficient and competent readers," says Peters. As kindergarten students entered first grade, she reports, they scored two months ahead of national norms on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

To prevent losses in reading skills over the summer, these students attend small summer classes (7:1 student-adult ratio), taught by the best of the professional staff along with aides, parents, and AmeriCorps volunteers. Parents take (or teach) classes in computer technology, parenting, and literacy; and teachers develop their curriculum and instruction skills. Recently, students in all grades posted learning gains in reading, with third graders recording 4.1 months' worth of skills in just over six weeks of instructional time.

In this community that at times seems "almost like a fourth world country," Peters credits these "amazing results" to the moral leadership of the adults. "They understand these children's cultural patterns, have high expectations of both themselves and students," she asserts, "and have the academic, social, and mental stamina required to teach in urban areas."

## Needed: Curriculum that engages and motivates students.

**High standards and high-stakes tests may motivate adults, but in and of themselves they are unlikely to rally students. If students are to reach the high expectations set by adults, the daily curriculum and teaching must provide the sparks by meeting students where they are, presenting them with challenges, tapping their curiosity, strengthening their perseverance, uncovering their talents, honoring their achievements.**

### **Infusing Arts into the Curriculum: Arts Partnerships in Minnesota and New York City**

“Drumming teaches me how to focus,” a Minneapolis second grader told his teacher, “and being focused teaches me how to read.” This seven-year old states clearly a central tenet of Minnesota’s Arts for Academic Achievement and The Center for Arts Education in New York City: that important student learning occurs in and through the arts.

At this young drummer’s school, Tuttle Elementary – where nearly one-third of the diverse and largely poor student population comes from Vietnamese immigrant families – a professional drummer helps first and second graders with a musical accompaniment to a folk tale they had created with a local storyteller. Using hand-held rhythm instruments like the clave, drum, and bell, they keep their rhythmic patterns going separately, then together, in a performance for parents. Every child is engaged – each a performer – and parents beam. Meanwhile, the process of learning to identify patterns and sequences, musical or otherwise, is building the skills these children need for reading and math.

At Manhattan’s Martin Luther King,

Jr. High School, located across the street from Lincoln Center, artists from the New York City Opera join tenth-grade classes for “residencies” of several weeks, in which they explore the operatic form through improvisation, coaching, analysis, and performance projects. For a *Madama Butterfly* residency, the teaching artist and English teacher compare the use of power in Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* to that of the opera. The social studies teacher links the opera’s musical and dramatic motifs to concepts of Western imperialism and cultural dissonance, issues under study in his Global Studies class. And in four-week internships, 20 King students spend their afternoons at the opera, learning the workings of production, arts administration, marketing, and arts education.

“The opera program has changed the way we deal with students and the way that they respond to us,” says one participating teacher. “Students are much more actively engaged now. And we demand a lot more of them, because we know how much they can do.”

When the arts not only are infused in the school day but connect to the community, the benefits reach in and outside classrooms.

## Joy in the Arts: A Key Ingredient of Academic Excellence



NEL ALEXANDER/SOUTHERN LIGHTS

Greek Symposium at Lusher Elementary

**O**n the lawn of the nation's oldest building currently used as a public school, Louisiana schoolchildren in togas, flanked by Corinthian columns, perform in a Greek symposium. Like fifth-century messengers they race to light the torch that launches the event; standing on pedestals they declaim Olympian feats and foibles; in choreographed symmetry they dance out their ideas and stories, along with those of Pythagorus and Homer.

Though these New Orleans public school children differ markedly in skin color, learning style, and pocket-money, they share during this classical festi-

### 'I'm so glad we have the arts on our side.'

val a pronounced joy—one made possible by placing the arts at the heart of all learning. "Just like reading and writing," explains Lusher Elementary School principal, Kathleen Riedlinger, "music, dance, visual art, and drama stand on their own here as core subjects. And just like reading and writing, we incorporate them into everything else children are learning."

An open-enrollment neighborhood school as well as a district magnet, Lusher doubled its size a few years back and now enrolls 1,100 students, K through 8. As a partner school in the Transforming Education through the Arts Challenge (TETAC), it has used its Annenberg grant for teacher professional

development and a variety of arts projects: helping middle school math classes explore symmetries through dance; using M. L. Escher's drawings to understand fractals; and appreciating the geometric subtleties of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture. Eighth graders are writing a play script that plumbs issues faced by young urban adolescents, from substance abuse to sexual hazards, and will soon take it on the road. "When I'm acting," says one young performer, "I feel that through the other person I'm learning more about who I am, myself—that this other character leaves a little impact on my life that will remain."

Infused into every classroom's curriculum, the arts level the playing field for students with different abilities and ways of learning. A fifth grader explains: "When we were learning about molecules of water, we danced it out—different people were oxygen and hydrogen, and then we mixed them together. I understood it a lot better than I would have with just a textbook." The school's commitment to the arts stretches Lusher's faculty, too, pushing them into unfamiliar areas and requiring them to build a shared vision of teaching and learning that promises to endure.

The arts also demand hard work and concentration. "There's a discipline that comes from art that definitely carries over into other fields of study," says Riedlinger. The school's impressive results back up its principal's observation. Though 40 percent of Lusher students come from households below the poverty line, the school's performance index (combining standardized test scores with other measures like attendance and dropout rates) puts it in the top 15 schools in Louisiana, and first in Orleans Parish.

Faced with the challenge of continuing to improve student achievement in a diverse urban school, this principal says, "I'm so glad we have the arts on our side."

## Needed: Schools where every child is known well by a caring adult.

**Relationships form the connective tissue in schools and classrooms – and affect student engagement and learning powerfully. Reduced class sizes can benefit students and teachers alike. Smaller learning communities within larger schools bring everyone closer: students, teachers, and parents. And smaller schools, the research shows repeatedly, mitigate the effects of poverty on student achievement.**

### **Personalizing Schools: Philadelphia's Small Learning Communities**

Students at Philadelphia's Northeast High School are preparing lesson plans, developing curriculum units, and working as interns in neighboring elementary and middle schools. These aspiring teachers also attend an after-school training program that encourages them to return to Philadelphia schools once they become certified professionals. "Money only lasts so long, but a 'thank you' lasts a lifetime," says one participating tenth grader. "We need to feel like we are doing something important for somebody else."

This emphasis on service is encouraged through a program offered by STAR (Students for Teaching, Advocacy and Restaurant arts), one of Northeast High School's small learning communities – heterogeneous groups of roughly 400 students that are making Philadelphia's large schools steadily more personal and effective. Each small community has its own teachers, meets in its own space, and is defined by a unique academic focus or theme. Depending on size, schools house as few as one or two such communities, as many as seven or eight. Altogether, 130 small learning communities have been formed in Philadelphia

high schools and over 600 in its elementary and middle schools as part of the district's reform effort.

At Clymer Elementary School, the first of the city's elementary schools to adopt small learning communities, the previously low-performing, high-poverty school has seen an impressive turnaround. Since Clymer reorganized into smaller units, the percentage of students reading at grade level has increased 55 points, to 65 percent. "Teachers know those students so well," notes the principal, "that children can move easily between classrooms to learn reading or math at the level that suits them best." And because students feel connected, she adds, they take on special responsibilities like running the recess program and tutoring younger students, becoming "leaders in their small community as they reach fourth and fifth grades."

## Needed: External Partners.

**It is the exceptional school that, on its own, can turn the rhetoric and mandates of school reform into changed practice. Improving schools need vision, focus, support, and pressure – a foursome that is hard to provide entirely or reliably from within. External “coaches” and other partners, knowledgeable in instruction and in shepherding change, can help schools turn ambitious plans into real gains.**

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### **Learning from Partners:**

#### **Boston’s Content-Area Coaches**

The students huddled over the assignment, discussing the draft essay before them. They were as intent as any youngster on “making the grade” – but these were middle school teachers, reviewing the work of one of the Boston seventh graders they teach.

Led by their Annenberg-funded “content coach” in literacy, these teachers had been working all year to boost students’ writing skills in all classes. What they had learned thus far – using students’ work to pinpoint instructional needs, developing good assignments, designing a rubric to assess student writing – had helped, but not enough. Although students had improved on the mechanics of writing, their papers lacked style, voice, life.

“What kind of feedback are you giving?” the coach asked. “Which of it works best? How do you know?” She

suggested assigning a paper to one particular student, then giving her written comments. The group could then analyze her revision, looking for clues to how well their comments had worked.

Eventually, the initially general remarks – “nice ending” – became specific enough to really help the student revise: “Why would you eat the zebras and only chase the hyena?” Even teachers’ praise became more specific: “I love your descriptive details, like ‘dark’ and ‘clean.’”

Five revisions later, the first one-paragraph draft had become an A+ paper, loaded with detail and description and voice. To the group’s surprise, its author turned out to be a special needs student.

Recognizing that this kind of focused effort on teaching and learning would be difficult to effect without the guidance of an outside partner, the district is in the process of funding a content coach to spend one day a week in each of the city’s 132 schools. While most schools have chosen coaches with expertise in literacy, more recently, math specialists are joining the ranks of coaches who are helping Boston’s teachers to improve their craft.

## Needed: Strong community-school connections.

**Student achievement is co-produced. Schools, families, and communities need to “get better” together. When the adults in and outside schools measure each other by deficits, students lose. Schools that view parents and the community as valuable resources – and vice versa – provide fertile soil for student learning, growth, and development.**

### **Empowering Parents: Urban Atlanta Coalition Compact**

*Nobody hears us. — Parent*

In order to listen, a research team from Georgia State University spent months in the community center of an Atlanta housing project, hoping to uncover the voices of those previously silenced. As part of the Missing Voices Project, associated with the Challenge’s Urban Atlanta Coalition Compact, these professors and their colleagues sought to learn more about parents seemingly uninvolved with their children’s schools.

What did they learn? Parents feel the contributions they make at home go largely unrecognized by schools. Facing racism and poverty, they describe their primary role as one of advocates for their children. And far from letting go in adolescence, parents of children entering middle school detail their efforts – in the face of threats like gang membership – to redouble their monitoring of their children’s schoolwork and behavior.

These insights reinforce the Compact’s ongoing efforts to bolster family

involvement in new and more effective ways. It hosts periodic “Town Meetings” to connect with the community; it includes parents on each school’s reform team and in training sessions. Last November, a Family Enrichment Institute offered 90-minute sessions on African-American history and culture, the Internet, parenting skills, conflict resolution, and family literacy to 25 parents and their children. A Parent Empowerment Retreat – an overnight event that for some parents marked their first-ever hotel stay – yielded a prototype for ideal home-school interactions, with specific expectations for families and schools alike. These non-traditional gatherings often attract parents who once felt ignored by schools unless their child was a problem.

Parents are responding in kind. At one school, a newly organized Concerned Black Parents Collective serves as advocates for “invisible families,” mediating between them and school. Like the Missing Voices Project, they believe in going *to* parents, seeking them out at events, and beginning by listening hard.

## 'This Is Our Workplace': Sharing High-Tech Skills In and Out of School

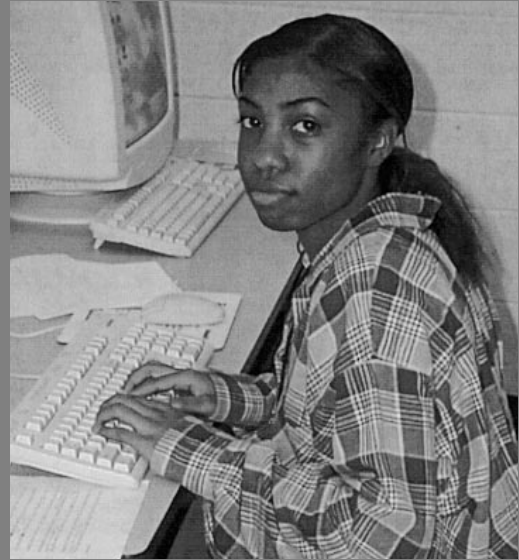
**A**t 15, Brandy Fonteneaux knows how hard it is to be an expert. Every day after school, along with some 20 other student "Lab Rats" who staff the new technology center at Houston's Eisenhower High School, she reaches for the best way to explain to novices just what these hot new computers can do.

Her client might be a fellow student eager to scan photographs into an end-of-course presentation. He could be a teacher just getting comfortable with the idea of using e-mail to connect with professional colleagues. She might be a parent writing up a resume or learning English with an interactive software program. Brandy and the other Lab Rats have helped them all.

"If they don't understand something, we teach them more slowly, or we try to work through the problems and help them out," she says. "We're there beside them, we demonstrate things – but we don't want to do it for them because then they won't learn."

Not long ago Brandy and her fellow Lab Rats were novices themselves. Before an Annenberg grant helped establish the Eisenhower After-School Technology (EAST) Center, few of Eisenhower's 2,200 students and 140 teachers had the chance to search out historical documents on the Internet, create and edit a multimedia presentation on screen, or use computers to probe the mysteries of outer space. The new technology boosted the quality of their studies considerably, these students say. From the Associated Press archive, one Lab Rat notes, "you can download all the pictures. You can find things about historical events or any photograph you need. You can't do things like that at home – or even in the library."

Since computers also proved the exception in most students' homes, a top priority was bringing the community in to use the 21 state-of-the-art machines. Equally important was helping busy teachers master the latest technology to boost their effectiveness with students. Twenty more computers went into a separate networked lab for faculty use – and here, too, the



**Brandy Fonteneaux**

Lab Rats stepped in to coach their elders.

"You learn how to work with others," Brandy observes. "Sometimes it's hard to tell people what they're doing is wrong – you have to kind of cope with

### Students search out historical documents on the Internet and probe mysteries of outer space.

it step by step and ask them questions rather than giving them the correct answer. It's a partnership; you can't have the attitude 'I'm better than you.' We're all here together, we all have to do this as a team."

Though the Lab Rats were not selected for their previous prowess in technology, their new responsibilities and training have ignited new ambitions in several of them. Brandy wants to become a computer technician and looks forward eagerly to pursuing her education in the field.

And the experience has transformed high school for her. "This is our workplace," she says of the EAST Center. "We share all our knowledge with each student and teacher, so they can share their knowledge with other people. And we become better students, a

## Needed: District support.

**At the hub of every school district stands a central office with power to aid or abet the progress of schools. A supportive district establishes clear priorities, responsive and distributed leadership, and beneficial policies and relationships. It values schools as collaborators and demonstrates the behaviors – beginning with accountability – that it seeks from schools.**

### **Reforming the Central Office: Change at the Top in Salt Lake City**

A second-grade teacher's class photographs from 1987 and 1997 tell the story. A sea of white faces gives way to a heterogeneous mix, as Salt Lake City's minority population grows from 22 to 37 percent, its poverty rate climbs from 26 to 47 percent, and 77 languages flood classrooms. "Such sweeping changes in a student body require equally sweeping changes at every level of the system," observes Salt Lake City's Superintendent Darline Robles. And, she continues, "we needed to start at the top."

In spring 1996, the school district, helped by a group called Insight Research, launched an unprecedented, six-month self-study. Fifteen thousand teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members completed surveys about the district's strengths, weaknesses, and needs. One hundred community leaders participated in face-to-face interviews.

Teams from each of the city's 36 schools and central office then sifted through the thousands of survey and interview responses, identifying issues of concern and areas for improvement – from

closing the achievement gap between low- and high-poverty schools to strengthening relations with parents to developing a common mission for the city's schools. District leaders agreed, in the words of one administrator, that "we had to model at the central office the new focus on instruction, collaboration, and advocacy we wanted to encourage in the schools."

Informed by the data it had collected, the district joined previously fragmented administrative departments under a single banner: supporting teaching and learning. It instituted structures to promote conversation and collaboration among central office personnel and with schools. It assigned each school an advocate: a single individual with direct access to the Superintendent, to whom schools could bring all their needs.

Salt Lake City's re-organizing efforts – what Darline Robles calls "re-culturing" – continue. They underscore in an effective school system the importance of relationships based on trust. They emphasize, too, that all players, from the central office to the classroom, must share a common stake. "My goal," explains Robles, "is to make sure we're a team. Our successes are their successes. Their failures are our failures. And if one school fails, all our schools fail."

The Superintendent's vision appears to be spreading. One of the city's elementary schools recently won an outside grant of \$10,000; it celebrated by sharing the windfall with several neighboring schools.

## Needed: Policies that accommodate differences among schools.

**While all schools should be held to high standards, schools differ in what they need to meet them. Some schools need an “arm around” approach, combining triage, treatment, and monitoring. Others need an “arms-length” approach that gives them autonomy, permission to blaze new trails, encouragement to develop their own accountability strategies. Many schools need a combination of the two. State and district policies should accommodate these differences among schools.**

### **Giving Schools Greater Autonomy: South Florida’s Deregulated Schools Initiative**

For the first time in her career as a public school principal, Judith Klinek, Principal, Loggers’ Run Middle School, can now take out a business credit card and pay for a major purchase she has decided her school needs. It’s a capability most other organizational leaders take for granted, but a welter of bureaucratic regulations hampered her and other Palm Beach County principals in their effectiveness and autonomy.

These days, when teachers and principals in five Palm Beach County schools have a good idea, they no longer fear that state and district regulations will nip it in the bud. With the help of the South Florida Annenberg Challenge, they are participating in a state-endorsed experiment in deregulation, giving them the freedom to alter their instructional programs, hire teachers, and spend money as they see fit. Provided by the Challenge, a consultant from Florida State University, Dr. John H. Hansen, helped the schools develop bold reform plans to address their unique problems. Already, these plans show a marked departure from business as usual.

U.B. Kinsey/Palmview Elementary,

for example, wants to reach children younger than five by providing instruction at neighborhood preschools and day-care centers – an activity previously off-limits. Over 80 percent of the school’s high-poverty student body scored above state minimums on standardized writing assessments.

Boca Raton High aims to narrow an achievement gap between white and minority students. It is giving at-risk students intensified instruction in core subjects and offering incentives for teachers and students alike.

Loggers’ Run Community Middle School initiated a program that will give financial incentives to teachers who notably increase their participation in students’ learning after hours, and whose students met goals for increased performance. Suggested by teachers, the voluntary practice bypasses tight union control over what teachers may do.

The early success of the deregulation project has already persuaded state officials that existing budget restrictions, intended to ensure the appropriate use of funds, have in fact tied schools’ hands. As district leaders learn more from the deregulated schools’ experience, they are giving more flexibility to *all* schools.

## Needed: Shared, reflective accountability.

**Effective systems of accountability distribute responsibility among *all* interested parties and demand their participation. Holding schools, alone, responsible for student achievement ignores whether taxpayers supply adequate resources for schools, whether policy makers help or hinder teachers, or whether families support their children. Accountability is best practiced as a shared, reflective *process* of improvement, where inquiry and subsequent analyses of data continually guide decision-making and action.**

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### **A Different Kind of School Accountability: the Bay Area's Review of Progress**

Around small conference tables in a San Francisco Bay Area hotel, teachers and principals from BASRC's 86 Leadership schools gather each year to scrutinize each school's evidence of improved student learning. Forthright and critical but also supportive, the discussions at this annual Review of Progress carry serious consequences: continued BASRC funding hangs in the balance.

As participants arrive for the intense, three-day session, they receive notebooks filled with charts, graphs, and other documentation of the year's work at each of the several schools they will review. After training that ensures shared understanding of the standards, "readers" from different schools in various districts convene in review teams. Once joined by presenting school teams,

they pore over the notebooks, clarifying details of how each school is changing, and probing deeper into concerns. They measure progress in five key areas: closing the achievement gap, the use of data in decision-making, the scope of a reform's impact, the school's success in developing shared leadership, and the effort's coherence and focus.

The reviewers – 125 at last spring's session – are school people themselves: teachers, principals, and the external partners who support them. They bring first-hand knowledge to their analysis of the evidence, offer ideas born of experience, and help the school teams make adjustments and set new goals. In the process, they build shared standards that span many schools and districts.

BASRC's Review of Progress sets a new standard for effective school accountability: critical review with serious stakes, conducted by peers, where presenters and reviewers alike learn together.

## Looking Ahead

**W**hen does the Challenge end? The simple answer is that it will wind down as it geared up: in stages. Although the Challenge officially began with Ambassador Annenberg's White House announcement in December 1993, the Challenge awarded its grants over a period of several years – to allow time to establish the public-private coalitions underlying each local project and so earlier efforts could inform those that came later. As a result, each Challenge project has its own timetable, with the first end date as early as June 2000, the latter ones stretching into 2002.

Over the next two years, Challenge projects will continue to track their impact on students. To make that assessment as complete as possible, the work of the evaluation teams linked to each project will outlive the Challenge initiatives themselves by six to twelve months. The evidence generated in these last years will be the most telling, providing a finer-grained examination of each project's impact on teaching and learning and increasing our collective understanding of what does and does not work in the world of school reform. The Annenberg Foundation also plans to issue a culminating report on Challenge program implementation in December 2001.

But another answer to the question is that the coalitions, structures, and programs initiated by the Challenge will not end when Annenberg funding does; they will continue with local resources. The Challenge never envisioned that its work would be “finished” in five, six, even ten years. Rather, it always intended to be a powerful additive: contributing much needed fuel to existing as well as new local reform efforts, then building sufficient momentum to outlast Annenberg resources. Already, several of the early Challenge projects have begun what is less an ending than a transition to the future – establishing successor organizations (as in Chicago and the Rural School and Community Trust) or securing new homes and renewed commitments (as in Los Angeles and the Bay Area) for the most promising aspects of the work.

From the start, the Challenge sought not only to build alliances and hone strategies for improving schools, but through such means, to benefit students. It continues to reach beyond program implementation to assess what those efforts mean in the lives of young people. In so doing, every Challenge project has found reinforcement of the simple yet fundamental beliefs that animate all their activities: schools and communities improve together; teaching and leadership matter; and finally, students *can*.

## BRIEF FACTS ABOUT THE ANNENBERG CHALLENGE

**The Annenberg Challenge is the largest private effort to reform public schools in our nation's history:**

Private and public dollars supporting the Challenge: **\$1 billion**

Challenge projects: **18**

U.S. states covered: **35**

Districts: **335**

Students benefiting directly: **1.44 million**

Teachers: **82,000**

Schools : **2,450**

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**When it ends, the Challenge program will have extended nine years:**

White House announcement of Ambassador Annenberg's \$500 million gift: **December 1993**

First Challenge matching grant awarded: **New York Networks for School Renewal, November 1994**

Last awarded: **Minnesota's Arts for Academic Achievement, July 1997**

First grant to end: **Chelsea, June 1999**

Last to end: **South Florida Annenberg Challenge, January 2003**

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**The students benefiting are largely poor, minority, and educationally disadvantaged:**

Children in Challenge-supported schools in Chicago, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and W. Baltimore who are below federal poverty guidelines: **80 percent**

Children in Challenge-supported schools in New York and Chicago that are minority: **90 percent**

Rural Trust grants that benefit Native American students: **20**

Different languages spoken in Los Angeles County: **90**

Ratio of ninth-grade students who graduate in Detroit: **3 of 10**

Students moving in and out of one Minneapolis kindergarten classroom of 19 children before Christmas: **35**

Students at Federal Hocking High School (in rural Athens, Ohio) whose families have no telephones: **30 percent**

**The schools supported through the Challenge include:**

Elementary schools: **1,570**

Secondary schools: **630**

Rural schools: **750**

Charter schools: **67**

Schools with enrollment under 600 (excluding Rural Trust): **605**

Schools with enrollments over 1,500 (excluding Rural Trust): **135**

Smallest school enrollment: **6 (Mariposa County, California, Rural Trust)**

Largest school enrollment: **4,358 (San Francisco Bay Area)**

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**Through their matching requirements, Challenge grants have generated broad and generous philanthropic support for public education. As of September 30, 1999:**

Private matching dollars raised: **\$351.1 M**

Contributors: **1,316**

Gifts over \$1 M: **68**

Over \$10 M: **7**

Contributors donating to 3 or more projects: **21**

Contributor donating to most projects: **IBM (7)**

Largest contribution: **\$35.1 M** from William R. Hewlett and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Smallest: **\$3**

Project with highest percentage of foundation contributions: **Salt Lake City**

Project with highest percentage of corporate contributions: **Atlanta**

Project with highest percentage of contributions from individuals: **Chattanooga**

Projects who have met their matching requirements: **8**

Projects raising their match ahead of schedule: **6**

Amount raised beyond match: **\$26 M**

## BRIEF FACTS ABOUT THE ANNENBERG CHALLENGE

### The Challenge has stimulated substantial voluntary contributions and parent involvement:

Business, foundation, university, and community leaders serving on project governing boards: **317**

New volunteers in Philadelphia schools: **15,000**

Local ministers, parents, and community leaders trained as school “ambassadors” by the Detroit Challenge: **110**

Parents completing eight-week training program on how to help their children in school, sponsored by the Los Angeles project: **60,000**

Parent volunteers trained in Chattanooga to give workshops to other parents on the school system’s new standards: **100**

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### The Challenge has set in motion new alliances for change:

Universities working with Challenge projects: **115**

Arts partners in 3 arts projects: **314**

Not-for-profit external partners working with school networks in Chicago: **48**

For-profit external partners in South Florida: **92**

Expanded funding for a new partnership between the Houston Challenge and Project Grad, the city’s second largest reform group: **\$9 million**

School districts belonging to the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative: **60**

Newsletters, fact sheets, leaflets, bumper stickers, and other information distributed to Detroit citizens during kick-off to grassroots campaign to support public schools: **70,000**

Parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community members returning completed education surveys to Salt Lake City School District: **15,000**

Families receiving home computers as a result of a partnership among the Dade Public Education Fund, the South Florida Annenberg Challenge, and the Citicorp Foundation: **1,000**

Amount committed by the Chicago Challenge, foundation partners, and the Chicago school board for an effort to strengthen leadership skills of school principals: **\$2.65 million**

Boston foundations participating in a collective effort to support school partnerships with non-profits: **7**

Parents of incoming kindergarten students visited by community liaisons in Los Angeles’ Monrovia School Family: **200**

Amount allocated over 3 years for arts education in New York City by Mayor Giuliani and the Board of Education: **\$150 million**

**Students and families, teachers and principals are benefiting from the Challenge:**

Small learning communities established in Philadelphia's elementary/middle schools: **600**

Hours read over the summer by 1,657 students in 5 Bay Area elementary schools: **109,207**

Percent of \$3.85 million in Challenge funding spent on teacher professional development in 76 Houston Annenberg schools during 1998-99: **41.5**

Adult-student ratio in West Baltimore summer program: **1:7**

Computers donated to Detroit Public Schools by local computer company CEO and DPS alumnus: **1,000**

AP tests administered to North Hollywood High School students in 1998-99: **1,278**

NYNSR students among the 21 recipients awarded college scholarships by *The New York Times*: **2**

Apprenticeships offered to eleventh and twelfth grade students by 350 Philadelphia employers: **3,500**

Professional learning communities known as Critical Friends Groups put in place in eight LAAMP School Families: **116**

Percent of Boston's principals attending seminars to help them improve the skills of their classroom teachers: **90**

Family members participating in the school district's program to boost literacy among Chelsea, Massachusetts' immigrant families: **3,000**

Teachers participating in Challenge-sponsored professional development activities during just one summer: **20,000**

Philadelphia students obtaining health insurance and primary care physicians through the district's Family Resource Network: **2,500**

## Who We Are: Challenge Matching Grants\*

LARGE URBAN GRANTS			
SITE	GRANT NAME	GRANT AWARD	DATE AWARDED
Bay Area (San Francisco)	Bay Area School Reform Collaborative	\$25 million	August 1995
Boston	Boston Annenberg Challenge	\$10 million	October 1996
Chicago	Chicago Annenberg Challenge	\$49.2 million	March 1995
Detroit	Schools of the 21st Century Initiative	\$20 million	October 1996
Houston	Houston Annenberg Challenge	\$20 million	January 1997
Los Angeles	Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project	\$53 million	December 1994
New York City	New York Networks for School Renewal	\$25 million	November 1994
Philadelphia	Children Achieving Challenge	\$50 million	April 1995
South Florida	South Florida Annenberg Challenge	\$33.4 million	January 1997

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SITE	GRANT NAME	GRANT AWARD	DATE AWARDED
(National)	Rural School and Community Trust	\$50 million	August 1995

ARTS EDUCATION GRANTS			
SITE	GRANT NAME	GRANT AWARD	DATE AWARDED
Minnesota	Arts for Academic Achievement	\$3.2 million	July 1997
(National)	Transforming Education Through the Arts Challenge	\$4.3 million	April 1996
New York City	Center for Arts Education	\$12 million	July 1996

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY GRANTS			
SITE	GRANT NAME	GRANT AWARD	DATE AWARDED
Atlanta	Urban Atlanta Coalition Compact	\$1.5 million	June 1997
Chattanooga	Success for All Students	\$2.5 million	May 1995
Chelsea, Mass.	The Boston University/Chelsea Partnership	\$2 million	July 1996
Salt Lake City	Eccles-Annenberg Challenge	\$4 million	December 1996
West Baltimore	Baltimore New Compact Schools	\$1 million	March 1996

\*In addition to the 18 matching grants listed above, the Annenberg Foundation awarded several outright grants to support school reform nationally, including those to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and New American Schools. The outright grants account for the remainder of Annenberg's \$500 million gift.

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