

SUMMARY OF REMARKS

by Charles M. Payne

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- There is **no one bright idea** that will fix public education. One-concept solutions to perceived problems that have been tried and failed include: stressing family values (“Let’s teach these people to value education”); raising teacher expectations; a corporate, market solution (schools have no leadership skills); site-based management (bureaucracy is out of control); small schools; performance-based pay for teachers; a lot more money.
- The **problems are multidimensional**. *Everything* on the preceding list matters. There is a culture of failure (teachers in teachers’ lounges bragging about how bad their students are – failure is expected); an atmosphere of distrust (racial, etc.); unstable leadership; and the rest.
- Most reform efforts have **dramatically underestimated the social and political elements**. In New York City, after winning Broad prize for lowering the dropout rate, [senior education policy advisor to Chancellor Joel Klein] Michele Cahill said the hardest thing wasn’t instruction but getting people in the system to talk to each other and think collectively.
- **Teamwork and trust** are the best predictors of success in a failing school – between administrators and teachers, teachers and students. For example, a proactive principal who is an instructional leader; social supports for kids (one of most important ways); people saying they trust their colleagues (after three years, a school with high trust was three times more likely to succeed than a school with low trust); inability of adults to cooperate and work together is a big factor.
- Urban systems today have **more capacity than they did 15 years ago**. Achievement and graduation rates have improved. Fewer kids are below basic.
- Some schools are succeeding at making changes: How are they doing it? The most important factors are:
 - ✦ **Social connections**: Some schools that make technical and academic improvements but have no social connections between kids and adults end up with high suspension rates and teacher turnover. The best predictor of graduation is the answer to one question: “Is there an adult in the school you would go to with a personal problem?”
 - ✦ **Quality of instruction**: Sustained exposure to best vs. worst teachers made 50% difference in test scores in Tennessee and Texas. Quality of assignments: higher-order thinking, intellectual challenge.
 - ✦ **High expectations**: Teachers and administrators in successful schools do not expect intellectual deficiencies in Latino and African American students.
 - ✦ **Civic culture**: Many teachers in urban systems have weak skills, bad attitudes, but no distinction is made between good and bad teachers; there’s a culture of disrespect and contempt toward schools (“Let’s fire every teacher in the building and turn this school around”). We need to build an atmosphere where different sectors are cooperating, working together, treating each other with respect; we need a high quality of political understanding and ongoing cross-sector conversation (e.g., welfare mothers and professionals *can* talk to each other).

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NOTE: in panel discussion and discussion among participants, the concepts of civic culture and trust resonated deeply.