Changing School ***Systems***

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The civic leaders every city and region must confront a stark fact: getting better results from schools is the only way to assure that their communities will succeed as places people will want to live and work. In more and more places around the country, leaders are concluding that this challenge is not just another civic project, but a serious condition that may require fundamental changes in the way the "system" works.

Why is this conclusion emerging? Twenty years after America's wake-up call on quality with the report, ***A Nation at Risk,*** many young people emerge from the education "system" very well prepared. But far too many do not.

A widening skills-and-knowledge divide poses a serious threat to the nation's economy and its social stability. It is a divide already reshaping the urban landscape. In 2002, author Richard Florida, with his book ***The Rise of the Creative Class,*** popularized the notion that the most talented minds in the nation were congregating in relatively few places, thus producing new lists of winner cities and loser cities.

Shortly thereafter, statistician Robert Cushing, in an analysis done for the Austin American-Statesman, confirmed this migratory pattern using income as a proxy for the "creatives." Cushing pointed to pairs of cities, such as Kansas City and Austin, in which

migratory exchanges in the 1990s resulted in a Kansas City characterized by lower incomes, while Austin ended the period with a larger proportion of higher-income people. Of course Austin still has lower-income families, who've seen the arrival of the affluents drive up the cost of living. But the cold reality remains: cities without a substantial population of knowledge workers cannot aspire to meet the competitive demands of the twenty-first century.

No one understands this complex trend better than mayors of cities. And no mayor talks about it more directly than Richard M. Daley of Chicago. In a presentation to the fall 2003 national gathering of CEOs for Cities, Daley cited business successes in the city, upgraded neighborhoods, and a veritable explosion of new infill housing adding more choices for new residents. But, Daley added quickly, "While everybody tells me how great it is to live in the city, their first question is where can I send my child to school?"

At that same meeting, pollster Celinda Lake of Lake Snell Perry and Associates reported recent poll results that voters believe public schools "are a net negative" reason to live in a city. Civic leaders from across the country registered little surprise. It has now been eight years since Daley assumed responsibility for the governance of Chicago's public school system. To be sure, there have been gains, but listening to Mayor Daley in 2003 is to hear a major leader now convinced that he should invest his energy in creating new educational opportunities as well.

That conviction, in city after city, is the context for an emerging "open sector" in American education.

Paul Grogan, president and CEO of the Boston Foundation and a cofounder of CEOs for Cities, is also the co-author of a book, Comeback Cities, in which he argued: "The key to running an effective public education program is not changing the size or shape of the monopoly, but ending—or at least profoundly challenging—the monopoly."

In the fall meeting, Grogan described how The Boston Foundation invested substantial funds to create a collection of "pilot" schools among the Boston public schools, to allow innovations to spring from within the system itself. At the time Timothy Knowles, now the executive director of the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago, was deputy superintendent of schools for Boston. Knowles was responsible for overseeing the creation and development of these pilot schools, where among other things, the district could test whether there were talented teachers willing to work harder and longer hours if they were freed of the work-rule saturated district environment.

Knowles told CEOs at the fall meeting that the pilot schools generally lived up to expectations. They worked better because they had five key flexibilities:

- They could recruit teachers who wanted to be there, dismiss those who did not.

- They could use money in whatever ways they believed would pay off in results.
- They could make decisions as a school, not merely conform to district policy.
- They could set the length of the school day and school year.
- They could customize the curriculum to the school's needs.

In spite of this better performance, it seems clear that these "pilot" or new schools "chartered" within the district depended largely on external support. They failed to win the hearts and minds of most teachers and administrators.

Grogan, looking back on this experiment, shakes his head over the reaction of most teachers, at least as expressed by their union representatives. "This was a chance to keep their jobs, get more money, and not lose the kids who are otherwise disappearing for other choices." Teachers put up stiff resistance, yet in the end, lost the battle to thwart pilot schools in Boston.

Still, lists such as the one Knowles offered often appear as the right things to try, not just for new schools, but also for those that are underperforming. Educators report, however, that these tools of flexibility are still resisted by most administrators and are slow to win the enthusiasm of most teachers. Often the solution menu is a list of "whats"—things to do. Advocates of an "open sector" argue that the critical question is not "what" but "how"—how to induce different behavior within the system of education.

There are signs that an "open sector" is emerging, but also speed bumps slowing its movement. Providence's new mayor, David Cicilline told CEOs for Cities members that his state still puts a cap on the number of new schools that can be chartered. How ironic that must seem, since Providence is the home of a start-up set of schools, called "The Met," that the Gates Foundation has called the most exciting new schools in America. Featuring individual attention and parent participation and direct connections to community, The Met model, the brainchild of The Big Picture Company in Providence (an education nonprofit company specializing in small schools and individual attention), is now spreading to other locations around the nation.

No system, even in a democratic society, changes easily or rapidly. Look at what has happened to companies associated with the once-simple concept of a telephone. Or witness the massive struggle to modify the business model of the airline industry. It is understandable that people working in any "system" look suspiciously on experts telling them to make fundamental change, even while they're providing service every day. They know they are on the spot. They often do not see how they could change.

Civic leaders today, while showing the respect due to educational professionals, are pointing to how high the stakes have become for urban regions. ***New York Times*** writer James Traub asked "how we've doubled per capita spending on the schools over the last thirty years without having any

noticeable effect on test scores." The largest 100 school districts now enroll one in four of all students. Superintendents in these cities are worried and frustrated over the persistent gap between the achievement levels of whites and Asians compared with blacks and Hispanics.

In the fall release of ***No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning,*** authors Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom point to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data (the closest thing to a report card for the nation) showing that the average black student graduates at a level of proficiency four academic years below the average for white graduates. This, the authors say, explains ongoing racial inequality, "America's great unfinished business." The Thernstroms, both senior fellows at the Manhattan Institute, dismiss funding as the critical factor, turning rather to a failure of culture, with both expectations and standards set too low. Since charter schools must be "chosen" by parents and have to perform to keep their students, they represent the best hope, the authors say.

The Thernstroms come from the conservative side of commentary. But the current crop of books also finds liberal author and radio commentator Matthew Miller saying in ***The Two-Percent Solution*** that it is time for a grand bargain: open the door for market driven solutions to the condition of American children trapped in failing schools, but spend a lot more on their educational opportunity. Miller would use more money to double teacher pay—but only for the most effective teachers.

What is the case for an "Open Sector?"

Advocates of an open sector do not argue against the dominant system of schools. They do argue that cities should not bet the future of their kids on just one standard way, on just one kind of school or just one way that schools can improve.

That standard way has been to get good school district leadership, to provide adequate financing and to urge the educators to do improvement, to 'fix' the schools that don't measure up. Our society has assumed, too, that this would be and could be done by the school districts and within the traditional arrangement of public education organized in a regulated, public utility model.

The nation has invested much time, much money and much effort on this strategy. There have been gains, but overall the results continue to fall short of the target. Change has proved hard and slow. We are now very conscious of how hard it is to improve existing schools solely by action of the districts that own and run them. This should not be surprising: We are asking these organizations to do something that has never been done.

Nowhere, ever, has public education educated all kids to high standards. That the nation should, appears to be the intent of current federal law. Of course not every student will achieve at a high level; and service jobs that pay decent wages do continue to

multiply. But those higher-wage, lower-skill factory jobs are gone, forever. The best incomes will belong mostly to the knowledge class, on whose achievements the nation will depend for leadership, innovation, and a healthy economy.

Public Agenda, a respected New York-based polling group, recently compiled a decade of survey results entitled "Where Are We Now?" Among the cumulative findings: 74 percent of employers (and college professors) say that the writing skills of public school graduates are only fair or poor; 64 percent say the same for math skills. When Public Agenda asked teachers why they quit the system, only 5 percent cite factors of pay or prestige; 81 percent blame bureaucracy and politics. The American Diploma Project issued an early 2004 report essentially saying that a high school diploma is insufficient. Intel CEO Craig Barrett said that business finds high school graduates operating at the eighth grade level at best.

To get a sense of where the nation is on student achievement, it's necessary to rely on NAEP, which conducts the only nation-wide tests that are compared with results from other nations. Recent tests, from cities and suburbs combined, show U.S. students at achievement levels somewhere between 24 and 31 percent of international standards. Students, on average, actually slide downward on the achievement scale between the fourth and tenth grades. The naive assumption made in many suburban areas—that beating the U.S. averages is success—is a problem in itself.

Viewed through the prism of single disciplines, the story seems the same. To take just one small example, Alexander Murphy, president of the Association of American Geographers, claims that the "United States is the only major power where it is possible to go from kindergarten through higher education without a single course in geography." On its face, Murphy's comment seems extreme. But his point is complex. He does not mean reading maps, but effective education for the political, economic, and cultural experiences around the globe that inform public opinion and policy making. We rely on wars to teach geography to Americans, he laments.

In the popular culture, one needs only to tune in to NBC's ***Tonight Show,*** where a regular feature finds Jay Leno stopping well-heeled, usually young adults in Los Angeles and stumping them with public-affairs questions at the level a sixth-grader might have aced a generation ago. That's show business of course, and meant to be humorous. Yet national surveys using statistically significant samples demonstrate a remarkably similar dumbing-down of general knowledge among Americans.

Some critics claim that schools are not as good as they once were. Many educators insist that schools are actually better. They have a point. Indeed, in nearly any region of the country, people can tell you about a handful of really good schools, the ones that stand

out. In Citistates interviews conducted over the last fifteen years, it has become predictable that these schools will be pointed out. They are all the more remarkable when found in low-income neighborhoods or serving a population not expected to do well. For example, take the J.S. Chick School in Kansas City, which belongs to one of the worst performing school districts in America. It operates in a low-income section of town and is virtually all African- American; in fact, the school's curriculum is Afro-centric, a controversial approach in itself. These students do significantly better than would be expected on Missouri's achievement tests. And the atmosphere inside the school radiates high expectations. Concentrated effort, it appears, trumps concentrated poverty.

How is this possible? Actually, the same attributes (remarkably like Knowles's list) seem to show up in every school that succeeds against the odds:

- A principal more inclined to break rules if that gets better results, rather than conform to central office dictates
- A respect for parents and a realistic strategy for involving them academically, not just in the PTA
- Teachers there because they really want to be
- Expectations that every student can learn and participate fully
- A school small enough that everyone is known—no anonymity allowed.

High Tech High, a charter school conceived by business leaders in San Diego in 1998 and opened in the fall of 2000 to 400 students and a waiting list, plays by the same rules. It's diverse by virtue of a lottery. But the same formula seems to work.

MassINC, a Boston think-tank, released in late fall (2003) a study – Head of the Class – that analyzed attendance, achievement scores, and college-going results of high schools in the Bay State. Only one public high school ranked as "high performing", University Park School in Worcester, where most of the students are on free school lunches in a neighborhood that until recently was in serious decline by every measure. Reading MassINC's explanation, one finds the same principles in play – high expectations, a culture of personalization, small learning communities, and strong partnerships in the community. This is the sort of school the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation executives point to when they say they want to help create 10,000 new high schools.

So there are good schools. And good teachers. Many good teachers, in fact, even in schools that do not do well. But again the argument from advocates of creating an open sector rests on seeing so many good professionals appear trapped in a system that does not show the capacity for changing itself, for taking best practices to scale. And one percent or even five percent of schools tagged as great hardly fulfills the promise of equal opportunity American society makes to its children.

Everyone says good teachers are the key. Interviews with teachers in urban schools often turn into discussions of a stifling bureaucratic work environment and classrooms where the major challenge is just maintaining control. To hear many teachers talk, the chaotic classroom is the norm, especially in urban middle schools. Students who are serious about academics get labeled geeks, teased or shunned. Teachers tell stories of timid kids berated by bullies. Author Elinor Burkett spent a year in the late 1990s inside a typical American suburban high school, and then wrote ***Another Planet.*** She describes an environment in constant struggle for control.

Whatever the truth is about whether schools are better than before, one condition is beyond denial: the world has changed. The challenge is different. The economy has transformed the definition of a qualified worker. And we are not keeping up.

The question that haunts leaders is ***how*** to do better.

Our public policy seems increasingly confused over the nation's commitment to public education and protection of the dominant delivery system. Even insiders, such as Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, admit "the church is not the faith."

Raw and polarized politics over schools are also part of the problem. The nation seems paralyzed by calls on the left suggesting that the answer lies in more money, and on the right, by the claim that only full privatization can get better results. Meanwhile, elected leaders consistently call for change and hope it comes. Even though no one believes that hoping for improvement is a strategy.

Few people dispute that having adequate funding makes a difference, or that hiring good educators makes a difference. But arrangements – the way the system is organized – also make a difference. And this is the core argument open sector advocates make. In nearly every other endeavor, people recognize that arrangements saddled with bad incentives, however unintentional, often override the best efforts of good people with good financing. We have all seen how organizations tend to behave the way they are structured and rewarded to behave; the people in them do what they have reasons to do and opportunities to do. If we want them to behave in some different way, it follows that changing the structure of opportunity and reward, the incentive structure of the system, may be necessary. Somehow key IBM executives recognized the potential for a personal computer and realized that this innovation would not emerge from the incentives environment at their headquarters in Armonk, New York. A few engineers were dispatched to Boca Raton, Fla., and allowed to ignore bureaucracy and create a completely new product. That product of course rapidly undermined the dominant system of mainframe computers. Advocates for an open sector would say that most school districts are in the Armonk position. If educators play it safe, and do the same thing year after

year and that is rewarded (with continued funding regardless of results), why would anyone venture a new approach?

Look around the country and it's clear: most civic leadership efforts to get better education results have been pushes to add resources and get strong leadership for the district.

These efforts are of course worthwhile, at times even heroic. But, as open sector advocates point out, it may be folly to bet the future on this one standard way, trying to get the system as it stands to perform differently. Hence their call for leadership to focus on strategies that lie outside this traditional arrangement—outside the traditional assumption that schools must be owned by the district and administered by its superintendent, that all the teachers must be employees, and that there can be only a single organization offering public education in a community no matter how large.

Strategies that break away from the traditional assumptions do appear to be taking root, albeit in small steps, around the country. Some school districts are delegating the responsibility to run schools to outside organizations. Others consciously create new school organizations, trying as best they can to offer more choices and experiment with more promising methods. But most far-reaching of efforts to accelerate improvement is the push to create new "organizational space," characterized by increasing choice of provider and an atmosphere that invites innovation.

In the examples that follow, it is now possible to see a rather clear progression of three approaches, from (1) strategies of delegation for running schools to (2) decisions to diversify the delivery system, and finally to (3) decisions to dispense with the monopoly nature of the system.

Delegate

The first strategy breaks away from the notion that a school board must own and its superintendent must run all the schools it has. It opens to the idea that schools might be managed more autonomously and that the board can make contracts with other organizations to run some schools.

This strategy gives schools, by district policy or by contract, real autonomy to decide how the job of education is done and how the money is spent. It holds the schools accountable not for process but for performance.

Over the past couple of decades, a number of states authorized district boards to go into what is usually called 'school-based management'. For years the most important case was in Edmonton, Canada. Overseas, Britain enacted 'local management' in the mid- 1980s. In the U.S., this strategy was most visible in the reform enacted in 1988 when Harold Washington was mayor of Chicago. Among the most significant changes, parents were given a greater role in school management. The Chicago experience was immensely controversial from the start, and many today consider the 1988 reforms ineffectual.

What lesson emerges from this push for decentralization? The weight of national evidence suggests that, absent

some change in the system, real school autonomy is always at odds, always trapped in tension, in a district where schools are controlled by a central administration.

Writing for ***Education Week*** last fall just after the release of his book, ***Making Schools Work,*** UCLA professor William Ouchi says the nation's large urban districts are mired in intractable problems because of a "system that centralizes all of the important decisions at headquarters." If a principal cannot select the teaching staff or decide how to use the school day or spend the budget, what's the point of being in charge?

As a reaction to centralization, some states now prefer a strategy that converts existing schools to "chartered" status. The Education Commission of the States (a Denver-based organization that serves legislatures and governors with policy analysis and research) is working on the design of what it calls a "charter district," in which all schools are converted to this more autonomous but also more accountable relationship, with the board as a policy board then focusing on objectives, resources, assessment and consequences.

Seattle high schools may today be the best laboratory in the nation for this form of "chartering" within the district. Rather than focus on creating new capacity and choices, civic leaders in Seattle say they believe that, with enough outside help, including a substantial grant from the Gates Foundation, these schools can be effectively rebuilt from the inside out. Claims of success are so far modest; both business leaders and school officials say it will take time.

Sometimes the "delegation" to other institutions is for specific tasks. In another example of cross-sector partnership, Richmond business leader Jim Ukrop described for fellow CEOs how the local business community responded to the challenge to recruit a better crop of teachers. "We go after the best teachers like others recruit athletes," said Ukrop. After screening, prospects are brought to town for a few days and the best ones, "the ones with sparks in their eyes," are hired. Noting that the highest rate of teacher loss occurs in the first five years, Ukrop said, "We started this four years ago, and we've still got 87 percent of those teachers."

Another effort to improve inside with outside help, sponsored by Siemens Building Technologies, Inc., is both a delegation of some responsibility by the schools and an increasingly ambitious outreach by a corporation. Siemens is starting with a struggling Chicago high school, with a strategy of intense employee involvement in mentoring and tutoring students. Daryl Dulaney, president of Siemens' Building Automation Division, points to the huge stake the city – and employers – have in getting young people ready for the real world of work. "If this pays off, we've got 70,000 U.S. employees we could call on, all over the country," he said at the CEOs for Cities meeting.

In late fall, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley announced a major overhaul of twenty-five schools in the challenged

State Street corridor between 31st and 47th streets near downtown and Lake Michigan. Daley's strategy to affect the inside from outside is enriched by partnerships with other institutions—the Chicago Housing Authority, foundations such as MacArthur and the Chicago Community Trust, and major universities including the University of Chicago, DePaul University, and the Illinois Institute of Technology. The idea is to spread ownership of the challenge among more public and private institutions.

Daley, along with Washington mayor Anthony Williams, Indianapolis mayor Bart Peterson and Providence mayor David Cicilline, has embraced the "community schools" concept, which brings into the school facilities health clinics, after-school programs, libraries and recreational opportunities. Even where mayors have no direct responsibility for schools, they can use their leadership to push for broader, more diverse strategies.

Diversify

A second strategy sees the school board and its leadership moving beyond existing schools—getting better schools by creating ***new*** schools.

Whereas the first strategy gets beyond running all schools centrally, here boards begin to make new schools a part of the local program of public education through both charter and contract.

Since about 1970, districts across the country have supported a surprisingly large number of so-called "alternative schools," usually as a way to deal with kids who "did not work out" in regular classrooms. These schools are sometimes district owned and operated, but often run by nonprofits or even for-profits on contract to the local board.

A major turning point for the capacity to create new schools came in 1991. After years of debate, Minnesota enacted the nation's first statute authorizing groups other than school boards to create new schools—by "charter." The first such school started soon thereafter in St. Paul.

These "chartered" schools are also public; they operate on public funds, though often less than the average allocation. Their sponsors are sometimes the school board; more often the sponsor is another institution such as a university, a United Way, or groups of parents and teachers. The signature characteristic of a charter school is flexibility; it is set up to be deliberately free of the layers of constraints that have accumulated around traditional public schools. They have to make and hold their own markets, because no child is "sent" to one of these schools. They must meet standards of financial management and educational achievement, or they close. They operate by results not by right. Forty states now have chartering laws. All but Massachusetts and New Jersey give local boards the opportunity to use these laws to create new schools. Chicago is a prime example of a city using the state chartering law to create new schools, under the supervision of the district leadership but organized in a new sector of the district. By 1995 Mayor Richard Daley had this tool, and also full

responsibility for the city schools. The mayor has recently persuaded the state to increase the number of new schools Chicago may charter, though the total it can create is still limited by Illinois law. Under Daley's leadership, Chicago stands out as a city in which a strong effort to improve existing schools goes hand-in-hand with a vigorous push for new schools.

New York City, building on its success in converting a behemoth high school at the Julia Richmond Education Complex into a multiplex of small schools, may create 200 new schools under that state's chartering law. The Gates Foundation recently announced it will underwrite sixty-seven new small schools there. So far, Gates resources are directed at helping districts create new, always-smaller schools, through intermediary organizations.

The Los Angeles school board and superintendent (a former Colorado governor) were a couple of years ago in support of a group that would create many new schools, a sort of shadow district. Neighborhood surveys showed wide support for more choices. But schools board elections came, those dedicated to protecting the system as it stands won, and the initiative withered.

Recently a Detroit businessman, Robert Thompson, pledged $200 million to underwrite building fifteem new charter schools, but under criticism from the Detroit public school establishment, rescinded the offer. He has since indicated a willingness to renew the pledge, but it is unclear whether the legislature will approve more charter schools. In 2001, the Miami Dade School Board authorized the United Teachers of Dade to create nine new charter schools, in partnership with Edison, the nation's largest for-profit school management firm. While this initiative seemed to show a constituency within the teachers union for taking a nontraditional road, the partnership failed before any schools could be opened.

In late October of 2003 the head of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, Randi Weingarten, told the New York Times that she'd love to run one of the new charter schools to be started with foundation funding. Weingarten praised the opportunity to "let teachers teach and do something that engages teachers as the professional people they should be."

Significantly though, leadership for creating new schools is finding cross-sector sources. Other institutions, such as universities, who see the creation of better schools as part of their community mission, are stepping up to the challenge. Consider the example of Clark University in Worcester, Mass. Clark University, as a part of a strategy to restore vitality to the neighborhood around it, sponsored a new high school. Nearly every student is from a low-income family, with forty new students admitted via a lottery each fall. Nearly every student is graduating and headed for college, with achievement scores ranking with the best of Massachusetts schools (and the only school rated "high performing" in the MassINC study). The valedictorian of the first graduating class has parents in prison

and had been in eleven different foster homes by the time he reached the seventh grade.

In contrast to what is typical, 98 percent of the students who enrolled the first day were still in school at the end of the year. Now, University Park High School is having an effect on real estate values in the community. Founding principal Donna Rodrigues says parents tell her they are buying fifteen homes in the area specifically on the prospect of getting their kids into University Park. "I can't guarantee that, but they are willing to take the chance," says Rodrigues.

Rodrigues says the key was recruiting teachers who were committed to the mission. Indeed, where new schools are created, teachers committed to changing the system are usually found. Some of them are asking why shouldn't teachers have the same opportunities for professional practice as doctors or lawyers? That's the proposition suggested by the small but potentially potent idea called "Teachers Professional Partnerships (TPP)."

TPP is emerging in a Milwaukee school system that is already the poster-city for choices, particularly for families of low income. One in four of kids now publicly funded attends a choice-school (using vouchers), an alternative-contract school, or a charter school. People cite the leadership of former mayor John Norquist who championed the cause of choices for low-income families. Norquist, responding to critics that the "choice" program heavily involves schools sponsored by churches, famously repeats his conviction that a poor education is more dangerous to a child than scripture. Harvard's Michael Porter also points to the Greater Milwaukee Committee, a business leadership organization, and the "collaborative structure" of community leaders as the key assets.

Now comes a group of Milwaukee teachers wanting to run a school themselves—a TPP. In 2000 they organized as a "cooperative" in an agreement that allows them to create a new school while retaining their employment rights and benefits with the district. Here is a breakthrough case of teachers and their union finding a creative way to innovate without walking away from the union contract. There are multiple teachers in each class but so far no principal. Cris Parr, a twenty-year veteran teacher, was the organizing force. She admits it's hard work and teachers stay at the school longer hours now, but "so do the students." Parr told a group at the Progressive Policy Institute last fall that now the students "actually like school. We often have to tell them it's 7 p.m., time to go home."

This idea—teachers forming partnerships just like other professionals—appeared first in 1994 in rural Minnesota's LeSueur County, southwest of the Twin Cities. The first school, chartered by the local school district, set itself up for project-based learning. It has no employees, no set curriculum, and no classes. Just good results and high student and parent satisfaction.

They set it up to be run by what is technically a workers' cooperative (organized under the laws governing cooperatives). Now EdVisions, the

name the teachers gave to this cooperative, runs more than a dozen schools. Teachers in effect have everything teachers anywhere ever asked for through collective bargaining but could not get. They determine the curriculum, the teaching methods, the materials used—and what they are paid. If they need any administration, they hire someone, just as a law firm or medical clinic would. Teachers work longer and harder, but report a high morale that beats anything in anyone's memory.

TPP, as a modification of the system, raises the issue of what it will take to attract highly qualified people to become teachers. High on the list of critical shortages in the supply of teachers cited by the American Association for Employment in Education are people qualified in mathematics, physics and chemistry—all fields mentioned frequently as critical to preparing the next generation. How much difference might it make in attracting people in those fields to teaching as professionals if teachers organized as a TPP to offer these courses, on contract?

Last spring Public Agenda polled America's schoolteachers. Amid the standard questions was a new one: "How interested would you be in working in a charter school run and managed by teachers?" Sixty-five percent of teachers with less than five years experience were very or somewhat interested. Fifty-eight percent of all teachers said the same. Even 50 percent of those with more than twenty years of experience felt the same way.

Dispense with the Monopoly

The third strategy introduces the idea that, to assure that new and innovative schools will emerge, the state will make available some authorizing entity ***other than the local school board.***

In many communities the local board—for whatever reason—will not act to create new schools. Some boards refuse even to grant a reasonable measure of autonomy to their existing schools. In many districts —like Minneapolis where the acting superintendent David Jennings publicly labeled the district "a broken system"—the tendency is to regard charter schools the way United Airlines sees JetBlue—as a newcomer and a direct competitor. But Jennings also acknowledges that change "cannot be expected to come from within," and the system "protects the needs of adults, not children." Minnesota's governor has recently endorsed the idea of establishing a number of nonprofit organizations that would concentrate on creating by charter new high-quality schools. In some cities, when the school board will not act, the civic leadership – the city, the mayor, the CEOs of the leadership institutions—are asking their state governments to designate "somebody else who will."

The clearest case of this strategy is in Washington, D.C. There the civic leadership, enormously frustrated by an unresponsive school district and board, in 1995 went to "the legislature"—in its case, the Congress—and secured the creation of a second and independent entity to offer public education in the

city: the D.C. Public Charter Schools Board. David Perry of the Federal City Council, a group that lobbied vigorously for change, admits today that the "chartering" option was born "mostly out of frustration," rather than some carefully conceived system-change strategy. The D.C. board for charter schools has created new schools that today enroll about 15 percent of the students in the District of Columbia.

Josephine Baker, who had more than twenty years experience teaching in the district, was appointed chair of the board when it was authorized. She is now its executive director. Baker heard the D.C. charter law characterized at the CEOs for Cities meeting as the best in the country. "Well," she responded, "Congress didn't have a lot of information except for the failure of our children. So they just wrote a basic law and left a lot of flexibility." Baker went on to stress how rigorous the process is for creating a new school and what strict accountability applies. "Our focus is not the instant fix," she said.

D.C. mayor Anthony Williams knows there's no instant fix, but in public pronouncements lately he seems decidedly impatient. To support his effort to increase the district's population by 100,000 residents, he acknowledged to his fellow mayors last fall at a U.S. Conference of Mayors Education Summit, "I can't do it without improving education. And I can't be afraid to experiment." Williams wants more financial support for schools, expanded funding for charter schools, and, most controversial, a scholarship fund to send 2000 students to private and parochial schools.

In one city so far, Indianapolis, the mayor has direct, independent chartering authority from the state to create new schools, which clearly creates an avenue for alternatives. "Mayoral control seemed an impossible goal to achieve," Peterson told the mayors' meeting. "Vouchers meant war. Charter schools offer a third way. They give the mayor the authority to create a new system from the ground up," Peterson said.

The nightmare most urban mayors fear is unfolding day by day in Buffalo, where the school district is caught in a spiral of decline – fewer students, diminished resources, and disappearing credibility. The district is tied to the city, which is itself in receivership. Don Jacobs is both the associate dean of the School of Education at State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo and a well known national school management consultant. Jacobs told CEOs not to dismiss Buffalo as an unusual case. "Buffalo is more typical than most people realize," he said. "What's going on there is almost inevitable for most urban districts, if they cannot make radical changes."

The current Buffalo superintendent has concluded that radical change is indeed a necessity, and, along with a majority of board members, has asked Dr. Jacobs to work with the district to convert the entire operation into a system of charter schools. So far, most chartering has come from "somebody else," specifically the SUNY system or the New York Board of Regents.

Sometimes "getting somebody else" means getting completely outside of the public system. Julia Taylor of the Greater Milwaukee Committee told CEOs for Cities members that the "choice" schools (chosen with vouchers) remain popular with parents who seek them but still immensely controversial.

In Milwaukee, the effort to change the regular public schools showed little promise until vouchers—one version of "somebody else," and one with considerably more leverage now that the Supreme Court has ruled on the Zelman case coming out of Cleveland — offered wider choices. The 2002 Zelman decision essentially ruled that children from low-income families in failing schools could be assisted financially to attend private schools; and even though most in fact chose religiously-related schools, it was a matter of private choice and did not offend the establishment clause of the constitution. Milwaukee, Cleveland, and the state of Florida now offer some parents the choice of private and parochial schools, as well as public schools. In each of these communities, regardless of past history or current strategy, the system decision was to stop relying on just one way, on only one provider.

Conclusions: The Case for System Change

These stories and the strategies they illustrate all rest on one simple, central idea: to succeed, the effort to improve public education will require a variety of approaches, and it is not sufficient to leave all the chips bet on the local district being able to change existing schools, or change them enough, or quickly enough.

The advocates of this strategic shift have a core message: We cannot get the schools we need only by fixing the ones we have.

This approach may seem to defy common sense. Indeed, its proponents say the most common reaction is: "Be realistic. All these experiments don't amount to a hill of beans. More than 90 percent of the kids are in the district schools." Professional educators tell them, "We're the ones who run the district schools. Work with us. This is where the job has got to be done. We believe we can do it. We just need more time, more resources, more support."

But advocates of an open sector then point out that this is the "strategy" the U.S. has pursued over the twenty years since ***A Nation at Risk***. To hang on to that strategy, they say, in the face of all the evidence of how difficult it is for school districts to do what is demanded, amounts to an abandonment of the public trust. And now that most states have in place a mechanism to create schools new, it is no longer necessary to run the risk that enough existing schools will somehow get better, soon enough.

Paul Grogan told the CEOs for Cities group that "giving the responsibility to the mayor is the key." This sentiment is growing. In Pittsburgh, over a year ago, all the area foundations publicly eliminated their grant support of the school district. Today, the debate rages over who should be in charge. Regardless of who's running

school districts, though, the constituency seems to be growing now to hedge the bet; to add to the effort to "fix" existing schools a new and parallel effort to create different and better schools new.

Open sector advocates, such as Ted Kolderie of Education|Evolving, insist, "If this agenda is to move forward, civic leadership will be necessary. It will be uphill, against the wind. It will have to overcome the belief many educators seem to hold that it is the kids who are the problem. And while people always want things to be better, they're usually against change." Joseph Graba, a former teacher, union official, legislator, and state education official in Minnesota—puts it perfectly: "Almost everybody wants the schools to be better, but almost nobody wants them to be different."

Why is this? Perhaps in part, it's because policy leaders themselves did well in school. So did their children. So schools must be OK. Let's just work harder, civic leaders tell each other. But different times—and different kids—may require different kinds of schools. And building new is certainly the way we change and improve in most areas of life. We see this all the time, certainly in private and nonprofit organizations. We do rebuild some old structures. But we also build new. Gradually over time new things replace old things.

The need to consider new strategies has not been removed by the recent national legislation promising to "Leave no child behind."

The law is essentially a command—to the districts and to the schools—to "do better." The command may not be sufficient. If any one of us suggested to a colleague, "You should swim across the English Channel this weekend," what good would it do? Ordering organizations to change does not assure that they can change. As presently arranged, public education seems unable to do what it is being ordered to do. This law is essentially an unfunded mandate to communities. Its demand for higher standards, more frequent testing, allowing transfers to better schools, and assuring that all teachers are highly qualified comes at exactly the same moment as the federal government is "devolving" all sorts of other financial obligations to states and local governments. In the case of Chicago, last year 270,000 students qualified for transfers based on school evaluations; there were 1,097 target slots, quickly filled from 19,000 requests for transfers.

Much faith is now placed in standards (despite considerable variation state to state), especially combined with testing. But testing itself is an evolving science. Perhaps the best work in the U.S. comes out of Kentucky, a system of "value-added" testing that may spread to larger states such as Pennsylvania. Value-added testing measures how much progress a child makes from the starting point. Regardless of the testing approach, the likelihood looms large that the Leave No Child Behind law may reap politically unacceptable rates of failure.

Failure, though, can itself be the best teacher, according to Harvard Business School systems guru Clayton Christensen. Christensen finds the abundance of evidence from the world of business showing that innovative change comes from small, disruptive innovations—nearly always from outside the dominant system. Failure to create some sort of open sector space within the system—something Christensen claims is nearly impossible to do—leaves the door open for innovation solutions from outside, from less constrained organizational space.

Open sector advocates see parallel conditions in the business of schools. They point out that we have not arranged or structured public education the way we have structured other institutions from which we expect high performance and excellence. The system is not designed and not run as a self-improving organization. It is not built to leave no child behind. ■