Preface

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The goal of this book is to show how schools and districts can produce large improvements in student academic achievement in some grade levels and in some content areas with the resources already in the education system. By "large improvements" we mean a literal doubling of student performance as measured by state tests. The book provides many examples of schools and districts that have literally doubled performance and references other district and school cases, published in other research, that have accomplished the same goal. In addition, the book identifies the processes and strategies the schools and districts have used to accomplish these extraordinary goals; surprisingly, we and others have found that, though the specifics differ, the general strategies schools and districts have used to produce large, measurable gains in student performance are quite similar, regardless of school size, location, or sociodemographic characteristics. Finally, the book identifies the specific resources needed for the key strategies used and shows how these resources were provided via resource reallocation in many instances. The book ends with a discussion that links the resources needed to double performance with an approach to school finance adequacy that would provide those resources to all schools and districts.

AUDIENCE

The primary audience for this book is principals, teacher leaders, and superintendents, as well as college and university classes that address effective use of resources at the school level. The book also could be used by professional learning communities in districts and schools working to determine how to improve student performance and how best to allocate resources. School board members, legislators, and legislative staff, as well as education policy analysts, also should be interested in this book. In addition, the book can be used as a supplement to a school finance text when teaching the school finance class needed for administrative certification in most states, so another audience is college and university school finance classes.

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, the United States has been engaged in ambitious and far-reaching education reforms. The rationales cited for reform include reasons of international economic competitiveness and enhanced civic and family opportunities for individuals, as well as the moral imperative of an equal and adequate public education as a stepping stone to civic progress and economic growth. The goal is to educate the vast majority of all children to rigorous student performance levels. This goal includes high levels of attainment for low-income and minority children, as well as for all girls and boys. The aspiration is to have children learn to "world class" performance standards—to be able to know, think, problem solve, and communicate at high proficiency levels in all major subjects—mathematics, science, reading/English/language arts, history, and geography.

The education system will need to implement enormous changes for the country to attain these lofty goals. Change will be required in school and classroom organization, curriculum programs, instructional practices, professional development, use of computer and information technologies, and the way the system recruits, develops, and manages its most important talent—teachers and principals.

Just as important, the education system will need to use its resources more effectively. To be sure, more resources might be required. But the traditional arguments that what is needed is just more money are not working any more; in state after state where we have worked, the educator arguments that schools are implementing best practices and that more performance will require more money have little if any persuasive power today.

As private sector organizations have had to improve performance—many times dramatically, usually without new resources and most often with fewer resources—more and more policymakers are looking first for the education system to use current resources more effectively. Although many if not most policymakers remain open to the need to provide the education system additional resources, they first want to see the education system use current resources more effectively—in ways that produce more student achievement.

Thus, we would argue that on the finance front, the initial imperative for schools and districts is to show the country, its citizens, taxpayers, and policymakers that schools and districts can use current resources better—that they can produce higher levels of student performance with the money currently in the system. This imperative is particularly salient in the country's highest-spending schools, districts, and states, particularly for those places that have concentrations of low-income, minority, and low-performing students. For example, since the late 1990s, schools in New Jersey's "Abbott" districts have been provided the same level of resources as the average of its highest spending suburbs, which are among the highest spending in the country; today's accountability systems demand that these districts show that their $13,000+ per pupil in just state and local funds can be used to significantly boost student achievement. Washington, D.C., has a similar level of dollar resources and is also under pressure to use those funds in powerful and productive ways.

Again, many districts, including the Abbott districts in New Jersey and even Washington, D.C., might need more resources to educate the vast majority of their students—most of whom come from families in poverty and who are ethnic minorities—to world-class performance standards. Only time will tell. But the first imperative for these and nearly all districts around the country is to use extant resources more effectively, that is in ways that produce a higher level of student academic achievement.

To accomplish this goal, these districts will need to identify and implement new and more powerful educational strategies and better instructional practices, not just do what they have been doing. And if those types of changes were made, the districts could show that they could use resources better and, if still needed, could then make arguments for needing more money with specifics for how they would use those additional resources—for elements of their new vision that they could not fund with extant dollars. This could constitute a new and different, and we argue more credible, plea for more money.

There are several ironies in the traditional and nearly universal call of the education system for more money. First, these calls emanate from districts at all levels of funding. Regardless of the level of spending, it seems districts always think they need more money. Thus, even if districts in the bottom half of spending were provided more money, we predict that they would then behave like the districts in the top half and say they needed even more money. Indeed, this has been the prime response in many states that inject large amounts of new dollars into the school system after a school finance reform. Second, from assessing the research on the education system's use of new resources over time, Odden and Picus (2008) concluded that the education system has used the bulk of new resources for programs outside the core instructional program—not the best strategy if the goal is to dramatically improve student performance in core subjects.

Third, from recent studies of use of funds after an adequacy-oriented school finance reform (Mangan, 2007; Mangan, Odden, & Picus, 2007; Odden, Picus, Aportela, Mangan, & Goetz, 2008), it also seems schools and districts do not use new resources for strategies that we have concluded will have the largest impact on improvements in student learning—such as ongoing professional development with instructional coaches, tutoring for struggling students, and extended learning time. This leads to the conclusion that providing more money might not be the most effective and certainly not the most efficient first step to producing higher levels of student achievement. We argue that this is true also for the calls to "fully fund" the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law.

Further, though our first book on resource reallocation (Odden & Archibald, 2001b), as well as subsequent research (Archibald & Gallagher, 2002; Gallagher, 2002; Odden & Archibald, 2001a) showed that resource reallocation in education is possible, many educators do not understand resource reallocation and do not know that there are ways to improve the efficiency of resource use in education by reallocating the resources currently in the system. Thus, our prediction is that if districts in the top half of spending received more funds, they would retain all or nearly all of their current programs and practices and potentially layer new initiatives on top—a strategy that would not result in dramatic improvements in student learning.

In other words, our conclusion is that the first step for the education system in producing a higher level of student achievement is to create a new and more powerful educational vision and begin to implement it via school restructuring and resource reallocation. Of course, this kind of action assumes that there is knowledge about what works in education and that district and school leaders know what those programs are.

Does such knowledge exist? There is a strident debate occurring within the ranks of those who study school finance and effective resource use, as well as among policymakers and practitioners. On the one side are those, especially economists, who argue that very little is known about what works in education. The recent multiple studies of school finance adequacy in California represent a good example of this perspective. In a synthesis paper summarizing the results of about $3 million worth of studies, Loeb, Bryk, and Hanushek (2007) concluded that, given the lack of knowledge about what works and the dysfunctional system of governing California's schools, the best strategy in the future was to gather more education data and conduct new research rather than provide the system with more money.

On the other side are those who believe we know a substantial amount about what works in education. We take this perspective, believing that there is considerable research on individual programs that work, such as comprehensive preschool for children age three and four, small classes in the early elementary grades, individual and small-group tutoring, curriculum-based professional development, and academic-focused summer school (for a review, see Odden & Picus, 2008, chap. 4). Further, there is increasing research from multiple sources on schools and districts that have dramatically improved student performance, with many districts and schools actually doubling student achievement (e.g., Blankstein, 2004; Chenoweth, 2007; Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2004; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002; Odden, Picus, Archibald, et al. 2007; Supovitz, 2006). To be sure, the education system probably does not have sufficient knowledge to educate all students to proficiency at world-class standards. But we argue and show in this book that there is sufficient knowledge to start now and make giant strides toward that goal. Our primary evidence derives from districts and schools that have restructured their school program and in many cases literally doubled student performance in the process, which paid for many of the changes through resource reallocation.

This book lays out in detail our perspective on school improvement and resource reallocation. It draws from studies we and others have conducted both on schools and districts that have dramatically improved student performance, which we label in this book as "doubling performance," and on schools and districts that have reallocated resources. We describe the process of doubling student performance, and we discuss in specificity what resources schools usually reallocate toward more powerful educational strategies.

Further, we connect both foci of this book—restructuring to double student performance and the most effective use of educational resources—to some emerging perspectives on school finance adequacy. We also set all courses of action with the process of large-scale organizational change, as both substantial school restructuring and resource reallocation represent large-scale change from an organizational perspective.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 1 describes, in general detail, examples of schools and districts that have, in our vernacular, "doubled" student performance, which we use as examples throughout the book of how to improve student achievement dramatically and use resources effectively.

One question we are often asked is what triggered the movement of these districts and schools to improve student performance so much? How did the process get started? Chapter 2 discusses multiple factors that stimulated several schools and districts to engage in the process of doubling student performance and reallocating resources. This chapter also summarizes the change process that school restructuring and resource reallocation represent.

Chapter 3 delves into more detail about the steps schools and districts go through when they produce dramatic improvements in student learning. We have distilled these processes into a series of ten steps to double student performance.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on how to reallocate resources for strategies that can lead to doubled performance. Chapter 4 analyzes how several schools and districts reallocated resources to lower class size, usually to 15 students in Grades K–3, though a few K–8 schools also had small class sizes as a goal of resource reallocation. Chapter 5 describes the professional development resources many places provided in their successful school restructuring efforts and the resources required, including more time during the school day for collaborative teacher work on the instructional program and the placement of subject area instructional coaches in schools to help teachers incorporate new instructional practices into their ongoing repertoire of instructional practices. Chapter 6 discusses the strategies schools used to fund multiple extended-instructional-time programs, including tutoring, extended days, and summer school.

Chapter 7 briefly sets the stories of doubling student performance and reallocating resources in the context of the evidence-based approach to school finance adequacy. This chapter shows how the strategies the schools and districts have implemented use resources in ways that are aligned with the recommendations included in the evidence-based approach to funding adequacy, which are detailed in Odden and Picus (2008), Chapter 4. In the context of what schools and districts do to double student performance, what new programs and strategies they put in place to do so, and how that represents new and more powerful ways to use school resources, this chapter ends by illustrating how this would position the education system to better argue for more money if it is needed.

Special Features of the Book

A list of resources includes all the Web sites mentioned in the text, including tools that can be used for resource reallocation analyses. Further, there is a chart at the end of Chapter 1 that summarizes the key features of each case described in that chapter; this chart can be used as a reference when reading subsequent chapters as each refers back to various aspects of the cases profiled in Chapter 1.