

OUR FAILING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM — THE SCORE SHEET

Facts from *MAKING SCHOOLS WORK* by William G. Ouchi

Reports from the front lines in the education wars:

In New York City, only 29.5 percent of public school eighth graders passed the state English test in 2002. Students in the upstate cities of Rochester, Syracuse, and Buffalo are doing even worse. [p. 7]

In Philadelphia, more than half the students cannot pass basic reading and math tests. Governor Mark S. Schweiker has assumed control of the Philadelphia school district and hired several private firms to manage the system. [p. 7]

Our nation has a persistent gap in educational attainment among races. While 93 percent of white students graduate from high school, only 63 percent of Hispanics and 87 percent of blacks do so. [pp. 7-8]

On average, school districts across the nation report that 88 percent of first graders eventually graduate from high school. However, for large urban districts, the figure is typically a good deal lower. For example, the graduation rates are 66.4 percent in Seattle, 63 percent in Edmonton, 55.5 percent in New York City, 51.8 percent in Los Angeles, 44.8 percent in Houston, and 41.3 percent in Chicago. [p. 42]

According to the U.S. Education Department in 2002, 8,652 public schools — 9 percent of the total — failed to meet required learning standards. Under the No Child Left Behind Law established that year, students at the failing schools were entitled to transfer to other public schools of their choice, with the district paying for their transportation. Many school districts were scrambling to comply and place all the students who wished to transfer. [p. 181]

It isn't just a matter of money:

Los Angeles:

In the Los Angeles United School District, the total annual budget per student for 2001-2002 was \$13,074. [p. 10]

By comparison, the 298 Catholic schools in L.A. — whose students get higher test scores and graduate at higher rates than students in the public schools — spend an average of \$2,500 per student in elementary schools and \$5,100 per student in high school. [p. 10]

New York City:

In the New York City public school system, the total annual budget per student is \$14,292. [p. 10]

Independent schools:

The average tuition for independent schools across the country is \$11,246. [p 10]

SCHOOLS THAT WORK BY USING THE SEVEN KEYS TO SUCCESS

from *MAKING SCHOOLS WORK* by William G. Ouchi

William Ouchi and his team of researchers intensively investigated 223 schools across the United States and in Edmonton, Canada. The schools varied widely. Most were public, some were independent and some were Catholic. Some served mainly low-income students, while others served primarily middle-class and wealthy students. Their budgets ranged from minimal to lavish.

What Ouchi found, however, was that educational success had little to do with any of these factors. Rather, success came about when talented principals were given maximum control over their schools — including budgets, hiring, and educational programs — and held accountable for the results. Following are examples of outstanding schools of all types that exemplify Ouchi's Seven Keys to Success.

Key #1: Every Principal Is an Entrepreneur

Mabel Wesley Elementary School, Houston. Mabel Wesley has 816 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 5. [p. 52] They are predominantly from low-income families, with 82 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches. Yet Mabel Wesley is a Texas State Exemplary School, with 99 percent of third and fourth graders and 100 percent of fifth graders getting passing scores on the TAAS state test in 2001 in both reading and math. Out of 182 Houston elementary schools, Wesley ranks twelfth on the standardized Stanford 9 reading test. [p. 55]

Principal Sandra Cornelius achieves these stellar results on a modest budget of \$3,800 per student per year, but she controls 90 percent of it. She and her teachers decide how to staff the school, what materials to buy, and what schedules to arrange. Dr. Cornelius listens and leads. She sets high expectations for teachers, students, and families. Above all, she does what's best for her children, not what the rules saw she's allowed to do. [p. 55]

Key #2: Every School Controls Its Own Budget

John Hay Elementary School, Seattle. Located in a prosperous residential neighborhood, John Hay serves low-income to upper-middle-class students. Fourth-grade math scores have rocketed from the 36th percentile in 1998 to the 61st percent in 2001 on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASH) test. [p. 82]

The school's ability to achieve excellence for all its students is based on an innovation called Weighted Student Formula, which was pioneered in Edmonton, Canada. In this program, every student is assigned a basic allocation of funds. Students are assigned additional "weights" for supplementary categories such as poverty, limited English proficiency, and special need. The funds follow the student to the school she attends.

In Seattle, parents are free to choose any public school. John Hay has proven its ability to compete in this environment by satisfying the needs of students, parents, and the community. It is attracting students from its own neighborhood who would formerly have gone to private schools, as well as students from other neighborhoods. [pp. 81-87]

Key #3: Everyone is Accountable for Student Performance and for Budgets

St. Mark's School, Chicago. Sister Betty Smigla gets hugs every morning as her kids arrive at school. Her big smile and hearty energy are irresistible, but no one misses the fact that she is tough — on herself, her teachers, and her students. St. Mark's is in gang territory — many of the parents are in gangs, in jail, or on probation. Yet in the eleven years that Sr. Betty has been principal, seventh grade reading scores have risen from the 45th percentile to the 68th.

Accountability, though, does not mean a harsh, punitive atmosphere. Accountability at St. Mark's takes many forms, from providing a safe, orderly environment for the students, to explaining test scores personally to all parents, to supporting teachers who make a considerable financial sacrifice to teach there. Everything is accomplished on student tuition of \$2,200 per year, total parent donations of \$15,000 per year, and an annual subsidy from the archdiocese of \$75,000 per year. [pp. 101-105]

Key #4: Everyone Delegates Authority to Those Below

Harvard-Westlake School, Los Angeles. Tom Hudnut is headmaster of Harvard-Westlake, arguably the top independent school in the Los Angeles area and one of the best schools in America. Out of last year's graduating class of 253 seniors, 122 were National Merit commended or higher. Out of 1,413 AP examinations last year, 95 percent received score of 3 or higher.

Hudnut is the kind of truly strong leader who lets teachers make the important decisions. That doesn't mean he's not informed. If he has an opinion on an issue, he'll discuss it with the deans and teachers. If it's a policy with broad implications across the school, he'll be deeply involved in the decisions. But for most of the decisions most of the time, Tom Hudnut — like the other great principals in Ouchi's study — leaves it to those who know the students best, and that's the teachers. Perhaps Hudnut trusts them because, like most other independent school heads, he teaches every year, too. [pp. 123-127]

Key #5: There is a Burning Focus on Student Achievement

Rideau Park School, Edmonton. Rideau Park is a solidly middle-class neighborhood of Edmonton. A large poster in the front hallway of the school displays test results on the Alberta Achievement Test for all to see. The poster shows that in the third-grade language test, 98 percent of all students scored "acceptable" and 32 percent were "excellent." In math, 100 percent were "acceptable" and 57 percent were "excellent."

Principal Liz Warman is a fan of standardized tests because they allow her to identify areas that need improvement. Mrs. Warman prepares a detailed analysis by grade level and subject matter.

She then gathers the teachers together and asks them, “What are you going to do about it in your grade?” The teachers form a team to come up with a one-page action plan with a clear strategy for addressing the need, the resources necessary, the measurements to be used for assessment, and a completion date. [pp. 146-149]

Key #6: Every School Is a Community of Learners

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, Chicago. Almost every expert who has studied successful schools describes them as learning communities where everyone is on the same page. The adults involved in the school — meaning the parents and the teachers — must share the same vision of what the school should be. Otherwise, there is no chance that the children will be integrated into a powerful, motivating flow that will help them to become outstanding students. The vision will be different for each school, but it will always focus on the welfare of the children.

Step One in creating a learning community is for the school to identify what the families of its community want and need. Step Two is for the school to organize itself, if necessary, into subunits that permit a face-to-face community to develop. Step Three is for the teachers to agree on what they want to teach and how they want to teach it, and then to develop ways to bring about a consistent approach that touches all teachers yet gives each the freedom to design his or her own classes.

The Lab Schools were founded by educational reformer John Dewey, who first made the case that a student learns best in a community of learners. Under Director Lucinda Lee Katz, there is no programmed teaching of reading in the lower grades. Instead, the teacher diagnoses the situation of each child and guides her to her own learning discoveries. Students work one-on-one with their teachers. Each teacher develops a classroom of students into an effective learning community, so that each child both learns from and teaches the others. Also, the students and teachers must together take on significant questions that are challenging to all of them. [pp. 157-160]

Key #7: Families Have Real Choice Among a Variety of Unique Schools

Edward R. Murrow High School, New York City. There are a number of ways to achieve the school choice now mandated by the No Child Left Behind Law, which requires public school systems to provide alternatives to students in failing schools. The possibilities include vouchers, charter schools, and choice within a public school district among magnet schools, alternative schools, test-in schools, and options schools.

Edward R. Murrow High School, located in a residential neighborhood in Brooklyn, is an options school that admits half its students by application. Under the leadership of Principal Paul Bruckner, Murrow represents a compromise — it’s a school that focuses on college-bound students with a high-powered academic program, but it avoids the elite label by allocating half of its places by lottery.

Of the approximately 3,600 students, 49 percent are white, 23 percent are black, 16 percent are Asian, and 12 percent are Hispanic. It seems that the formula works: 60 percent of the graduates go to four-year colleges and 28 percent to two-year colleges. [pp. 201-202]

**WHAT'S HAPPENING WHERE:
SCHOOLS IN THE SIX CITIES STUDIED IN
MAKING SCHOOLS WORK by William G. Ouchi**

In 2001 and 2002, Dr. Ouchi supervised a landmark study of 223 schools in six cities, funded in part by the National Science Foundation. Dr. Ouchi and his team of researchers visited each of the schools and carried out a carefully designed study of their management systems. He found that some entire districts are succeeding wonderfully while others are failing. What separates the successes from the failures is not different teachers, students, or money — it's their approach to managing the schools.

Dr. Ouchi and his team found that the most successful schools also had the most decentralized management systems. Individual principals, rather than administrators in a central office, had control over school budgets and personnel. The principals were fully responsible and fully accountable for their schools' performance. They were given the freedom and flexibility to act as entrepreneurs who shape their educational programs, hire specialists as needed, and determine the direction of their schools.

Dr. Ouchi writes: "The picture is one that provokes in me a strong emotional reaction, because I now know that any school superintendent who follows certain management principles can create success — and that there is no excuse for not making every school a success. I have boiled down these lessons into an essence of seven key elements that distinguish successful schools and school districts, and in this book I pass them along to you so that you can help your school to be successful."

In vivid case studies, Ouchi shows how three of the school districts he studied are succeeding because they have implemented the Seven Keys to Success, while three others are still struggling because they have not yet embraced these key principles.

THREE SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT HAVE WON THE REVOLUTION BY IMPLEMENTING THE SEVEN KEYS TO SUCCESS:

Edmonton, Canada

More than any other school system, Edmonton, with 81,000 students [p. 12], has implemented the Seven Keys of Success. The result is a public school system that embodies excellence in every way, and that has become a shining example to educators throughout the world.

Two decades ago, the Edmonton public school system had a poor reputation. Today, 87 percent of first graders, 88 percent of seventh graders, and 92 percent of twelfth graders score at or above grade level on the Alberta Provincial standardized test. [p. 32]

The change of attitude toward public schools in Edmonton has been so great that they have been gaining market share in recent years from private and Catholic schools. In fact, Edmonton Public has taken over several private schools which have asked to join the public school district. [p. 32]

Reform in action: Jasper Place is a large comprehensive high school. Among the 2,140 students, about 50 percent are college-bound, about 35 percent are headed for work after graduation and are part of the Career and Technology Studies program, and about 13 percent are in special education programs.

Of the 17 high schools in the Edmonton public system, Jasper Place ranks 4th or 5th in average test scores on diploma examinations. This is an excellent record, because the top three schools are primarily for the college-bound, while Jasper is for everyone. [p. 24-25]

Seattle, Washington

From 1982 to 1990, the schools were so bad that public school enrollment fell from nearly 100,000 students to 39,087. Then a partnership among state and local government, the teachers' union, and the business community vowed to turn the schools around under the leadership of Superintendent John Stanford. Today, enrollment is on the way back up and stands at 47,000 [pp. 12, 36-37]

On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Seattle students in 2002 averaged in the 59th percentile in reading and the 65th percentile in math. [p. 37]

Elementary students gained 6 points in reading and 8 points in math scores from 1996 to 2001. [p. 37]

Seattle does far better than either the Chicago public system (38th percentile in reading and 43rd percentile in math), or the New York City Catholic schools (51st percentile in reading and 51st percentile in math). [p. 37]

Reform in action: James A. Garfield High School, in the historically African-American section of town, shows both the need for change and the difficulty of change. After hitting bottom in 1996, the school's enrollment bounced back from 800 students to 1,720 — 47 percent white, 34 percent black, 12 percent Asian, and 7 percent Hispanic. [pp. 38-39]

Reconfigured as a magnet school to attract gifted students, Garfield now has a huge array of AP courses and more National Merit semifinalists than any other school in the state of Washington. However, a huge achievement gap remains between the races. Principal Susan Derse is making dramatic change happen quickly in an attempt to correct the problem. [pp. 38-39]

Houston, Texas — the best school district in America?

At 209,000 students, the Houston Independent School District is the largest in Texas and sixth largest in the United States. 90 percent of the students are minorities, and 86 percent of the elementary school students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunches. [p. 40]

In 2002, 85 percent of Houston's tenth graders passed the Texas state exit examination, up from only 50 percent in 1994. [p. 40]

Houston students also take the Stanford 9 standardized text, which is also taken by students in both public and Catholic schools in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Catholic students did best with an average reading score in the 53rd percentile in 2001. The Houston public schoolers at the 42nd percentile beat their Los Angeles counterparts in the 33rd percentile by a wide margin. [p. 40]

Houston still has a race gap — white and Asian students have higher test scores than black and Hispanic students. However, the gap is getting smaller: in the past three years, it has closed by 4 points in reading and by 6 points in math. Meanwhile, the reading and math gaps in Los Angeles are exactly the same over the past four years. In Seattle, the reading gap is unchanged in the past three years, and the math gap has actually gotten worse by 2 points. [p. 43]

Reform in action: The Michael E. DeBakey High School for Health Professions prepares students for medical school, nursing school, and other health-related professions. The school exemplifies Houston's goal for its school system: not "normal" schools, but supernormal schools, each one designed to achieve a specialized task for its special group of students.

DeBakey chooses its 688 students selectively. 40 percent are African-American, 26 percent are Hispanic, 23 percent are Asian, and 13 percent are white. In a typical year, 98 percent go to college. The 170 graduating seniors in the class of 2000 were awarded a total of \$8 million in college scholarships — an average of \$47,059 per student. [pp. 44-45]

THE STRUGGLING SCHOOL SYSTEMS

New York City: the biggest and best — and worst

The New York City Department of Education has 1.1 million students in nearly 1,200 schools. As of 2002, there were 74,162 teachers, 12,774 school-site administrators, and 19,202 paraprofessionals such as teachers' aides. [p. 67]

Students in New York City schools are 40 percent Hispanic, 33 percent African-American, 15 percent white, and 13 percent Asian or other. [p. 71]

Under Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, the New York City schools adopted a new structure in late 2002. The 32 local community districts and the 10 special purpose and high school districts were replaced by 10 regional districts. Whether this change will have any effect on the degree of autonomy of each school is not yet clear. [p. 66]

Reform in action: With just over half of its students graduating from high school, and a large percentage of students failing to pass state exams, the system is nowhere near as good as its students deserve. However, there are real bright spots, like District 2, which covers much of Manhattan.

Principals in District 2 have nearly as much freedom as principals in Edmonton. Schools like the East Side Middle School, the Manhattan New School, the Lower Lab, the Upper Lab and several others are counted among the great schools of New York, the equal of the best independent schools. District 2 should serve as a model not only for the rest of New York City, but for other public school systems. [p. 69]

Los Angeles: where top-down management hit bottom, but things are looking up

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest in the nation, with 733,000 students and 75,000 employees, of whom 36,000 are classroom teachers. [p. 75] Superintendent Roy Romer, a former governor of Colorado and chairman of the Democratic National Committee, oversees perhaps the most troubled school district in America.[p. 74]

Los Angeles is in a titanic battle for control over the school board. The major players include political leaders like former Mayor Richard Riordan and businessman-philanthropist Eli Broad, as well as the teachers' union. In Los Angeles, as in many cities, that's where the ultimate power over education decisions lies. [p. 78]

90 percent of the students in L.A. are minorities and 82 percent of elementary students qualify for free lunches.

Fewer than 20 percent of the students in any grade score at or above the "proficient" level on the California English/Language Arts Standards Test.

Two out of three third graders are below national reading norms on the Stanford 9 (SAT9) text.

In math, only one in five students is "proficient" or better on the California Mathematics Standards Test.

Among high school students, on the SAT9 only 23 percent meet or exceed the national norm in reading and 34 percent do so in mathematics.

27 percent of LAUSD teachers are not fully credentialled.

Romer has produced steady gains in reading and math scores in the early grades. Fifth-grade scores have risen from the 24th to 34th percentile nationally in reading and from 28th to the 44th percentile in math over the last five years. In the upper grades, though, things have not improved. [pp.74- 76]

Reform in action: Where principals are given real autonomy, they show that their students and teachers can perform superbly. View Park Prep Charter School is 99 percent African-American and 1 percent Latino, in grades K-7. In the most recent Stanford 9 tests, its fifth graders scored on the average in the 77th percentile in language, the 78th percentile in spelling, and the 81st percentile in math — better than any of the four elementary schools in Beverly Hills. [p. 9]

Chicago: the city of "yes" and "no" in local empowerment

Chicago is the third largest school district in the country, with 435,470 students enrolled in 596 schools. The district is 52 percent African-American, 35 percent Hispanic, 9.6 percent white, and 3.2 percent Asian-Pacific Islander. 86 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. [pp. 70-71]

Shortly after U.S. Secretary of Education Bill Bennett declared in 1988 that Chicago had the worst schools in America, the city embarked on a major decentralization effort under a new Illinois state law. The next stage was a 1995 state law that produced a takeover of the schools by Mayor Richard Daley. [pp. 71-72]

Under Daley, the Chicago schools made progress in several important areas. The district has ended the practice of social promotion from eighth grade to high school. The school construction program is among the most effective in the nation, the anti-corruption program is impressive, and the administrative bureaucracy is relatively efficient. [p. 72]

The situation today is confusing, because although there remains a degree of local control, Daley tightened central control over the schools. As a result, many principals feel that they are officially told to act independently while simultaneously being told not to lift a finger without approval from the central office. [p. 72]

Reform in action: As in New York City and Los Angeles, when good principals have real control over their schools, there is rapid and dramatic improvement. Jose Clemente Orozco Community Academy has 718 students in grades 6-8, who are 97 percent Mexican and 1.9 percent Puerto Rican. More than 98 percent are classified as low-income and qualify for the free lunch program.

In seven years of relentless focus on student achievement under the leadership of Principal Rebeca de Los Reyes, the average standardized reading test score has risen from the 22.7th percentile to the 44.4th. The average mathematics score has risen over that period from the 30.7th percentile to the 57.5th. [pp. 18-19]

Questions for William G. Ouchi,

author of MAKING SCHOOLS WORK

1. We are constantly barraged with various statistics about education. Where do we stand today? Are our schools getting better, worse, or holding their own?
2. You conducted a very large, in-depth study of why schools do and don't work. Can you describe it briefly? What are the systems you focused on most intensively? Which performed the best and which performed worst?
3. You came up with some findings that will probably startle a lot of people. The problem is not with students, teachers, or funding, you say, but with the management of our schools. Specifically, you say that principals need to be given control over school budgets, hiring of teachers, and educational programs, and then held accountable for the results. How did you draw these conclusions?
4. Another finding that will probably startle a lot of people is that some of the schools with the best results have almost entirely minority, low-income student bodies. How do you explain this?
5. What is the Weighted Student Formula? How has it worked successfully in places like Edmonton, Seattle, and Houston?
6. Is highly centralized, bureaucratic decision-making found mainly in big-city systems, or does it plague suburban and small-town districts as well?
7. You've distilled your findings into what you call the Seven Keys to Success. What are they, and can you elaborate on them briefly?
8. What are some of the most exciting schools of various kinds that you found in your research?
9. Should middle-class parents be happy if their children and their district have good test scores, or should they expect more?
10. How can a parent tell if their child's school is doing a good job?
11. You offer parents some very concrete advice about how to improve their child's school and school system. What are some of the things they can do?
12. After so many failed proposals for reforming our schools, why do you think yours will succeed?