

MAKING SCHOOLS WORK

A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children the Education They Need

by William G. Ouchi

“The good news in this book is that you don’t have to change the teachers or the students — you only have to change the way that your schools are managed, and that is entirely within the realm of the possible.”

— From Part One, “What Makes a School Great?”

Bestselling author and education consultant William Ouchi presents a powerful new argument in the fierce debate over public education: that schools can be improved rapidly if talented principals are given control over budgets and personnel. In **MAKING SCHOOLS WORK: A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children the Education They Need** (Simon & Schuster; September 2, 2003; \$25.00), Dr. Ouchi draws on a groundbreaking study of 223 schools in six cities to contend that management and accountability are at the heart of the educational crisis — not class size, teacher training, or funding. Furthermore, Ouchi identifies seven keys to successful schools revealed by the study, and shows how they work in schools of all sizes and types across the country. Equally Perhaps even more important, he gives parents clear, practical, step-by-step advice on how to implement the seven keys to success in their own school districts, so that their children can get the education they deserve.

The study and its results

In his study, Ouchi and his team of researchers examined four different types of school systems, revealing the results for the first time in **MAKING SCHOOLS WORK**. First, he selected the three largest and most centralized districts in the United States: New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago, with a total of more than 2 million students. Next, he chose three lesser-known but very successful school districts: Edmonton, Canada; Seattle, Washington; and Houston, Texas, with a total of more than 300,000 students. The third set of schools consisted of the three largest Catholic school districts in the United States — Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles — with a total of nearly 350,000 students. Finally, Ouchi selected a group of six independent schools — one in each of the six cities — with the ultimate in freedom to rise or fall on their own decisions.

Ouchi found that successful school districts are the ones that have learned how to keep several important elements in balance. He also found that it is impossible to do this in a traditional, old-fashioned school district — which unfortunately means most school districts. “To build a really top-flight school district,” Ouchi writes, “you have to embrace dramatic changes in how things are run. What is called for, and what the successful districts have done, is to uproot the existing top-down ways of doing things and replace it with huge, revolutionary change.”

The Seven Keys to Success

Ouchi analyzes in detail the components that distinguish excellent schools and school districts:

- 1. Every principal is an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is the opposite of a bureaucrat. Bureaucrats know the rules backwards and forwards and always follow them. Principals who are entrepreneurs take control over every aspect of their schools — including class length, class size, daily and weekly schedules, staffing levels, hiring and evaluation of teachers, textbooks, math and reading programs, and other course offerings. Principals who are entrepreneurs have the freedom to respond immediately and effectively to the needs of their customers — the students and their parents.**
- 2. Every school controls its own budget. It’s now politically expedient to be in favor of local neighborhood control of schools. Most districts pay it lip service in one form or other. Usually, though, principals control only a shockingly small share of their budgets. “Ignore everything that you hear about local control except how much money is subject to local control,” Ouchi says. “Follow the money — that’s where the control lies.”**
- 3. Everyone is accountable for student performance and for budgets. “Accountability” has become one of the most overused words in all of education. Unfortunately, it has often become code for unjustified teacher-bashing, and it misses the point. Accountability should mean openness, so that everyone from parents to teachers to the community at large gets regular, understandable, and credible reports of what is going on in the schools. Three categories of report matter most: student performance, budget performance, and customer satisfaction. Budgets are the key inputs to schools and student performance is their key output.**
- 4. Everyone delegates authority to those below. The very best private schools are remarkable for the extensive autonomy that they give to their teachers. Great public schools are much the same. They take great care in selecting and training each teacher and each principal because they delegate so much power to those people.**
- 5. There is a burning focus on student achievement. It is not enough to focus only on decentralization. “Having a burning, monomaniacal commitment to student**

achievement takes more than oratory,” Ouchi writes. “It takes hard, hard work. It also requires an underlying belief that every student can learn and that, if the school does its job correctly, every student will learn.”

6. **Every school is a community of learners. Every good school is, first and foremost, a community of learners that includes students, teachers, principals, parents, and the broader community that it serves. In a school that is a community, there is a consistent set of beliefs about what the school should be in order for its children to succeed. In a school that is divided into conflicting cliques, children suffer because they are presented with inconsistent expectations and incompatible demands.**

7. **Families have real choices among a variety of unique schools. All of the successful school districts in Ouchi’s study, whatever their size, racial composition and location, permit families to choose whatever public school they feel is best for their children. This has nothing to do with vouchers. The best public systems have found a way to use the proven power of competition — but within the public school system. Schools that cannot compete are allowed to fail. But in places like Edmonton, the public schools are so good that they are actually pulling students away from private schools.**

Schools that succeed against all odds

Most people believe that it is differences in teachers, students, and money that separate successful schools from failing ones. Yet Ouchi presents vivid case studies from a wide variety of schools to demonstrate that this is simply not so. For example, the Goudy Elementary School in Chicago was identified in 1988 as the worst school in America. Goudy is located in a blue-collar, immigrant neighborhood where twenty-six languages are spoken. Under the leadership of Principal Patrick Durkin, Goudy has risen like a phoenix. On the standardized tests used in all Chicago schools, reading scores have risen from the 14.9th percentile to an astounding 56th — above the state and national averages. Math scores have also skyrocketed, from the 24.7th percentile to the 63rd. This has taken place in a school that is 98 percent low-income, 29 percent Hispanic, 28 percent Asian-Pacific, 22 percent white, and 21 percent black.

Ouchi shows how Patrick Durkin has produced this miracle by relying on the Seven Keys to Success. A true entrepreneur, Durkin moved quickly to take control of all the money that an innovative Illinois state law allowed him to use at his discretion. He and his teachers decided to place an intense focus on reading, with everyone spending ninety minutes on reading in small classes of no more than twenty, and he added a teaching aide to every class in grades 1 through 4. To help students whose first language is not English, he added two reading recovery teachers

who tutor each child one-on-one. Virtually all of the children are reading by the end of first grade, and nearly all the eighth-graders take the test to enter one of Chicago's elite public high schools.

How good is your school?: Eleven Key Indicators

In order to improve any school, parents have to diagnose what is going on there right now. Ouchi reviews in detail eleven key indicators that every parent should know:

- 1. Approaching the school — what is its general appearance and tone?**
- 2. What to notice when you first enter an elementary school classroom.**
- 3. Get a feel for what the students are doing.**
- 4. Is the teacher among the children or in front of the class?**
- 5. Does the classroom look as if it belongs to the students or the teacher?**
- 6. Master teachers are multi-taskers.**
- 7. Does the teacher give each student what she needs?**
- 8. How well organized is the teacher?**
- 9. Are the teachers connecting with the children and their families as people?**
- 10. In a high school, look for the interaction, not the classroom layout.**
- 11. Is the high school's program custom-designed or is it one-size-fits-all?**

What you can do to improve your school: The Seven Rules of Change

Ouchi also addresses the practical issues that parents will encounter as they set out to revolutionize their school and their school district. These are time-tested lessons that come from Ouchi's several decades of experience of changing schools, businesses, and other kinds of organizations all over the world:

Rule One: People don't fear change — unless they're kept in the dark.

Rule Two: Revolutionary change requires the perception that there's a crisis.

Rule Three: Structure must change before culture can change.

Rule Four: Change must be top-down.

Rule Five: Change must be bottom-up.

Rule Six: Follow the money!

Rule Seven: School reform isn't partly politics — it's *all* politics!

Finally, Ouchi writes: "If parents, teachers, and principals don't want to put in the time and effort to figure out for themselves what their school should become, we'll remain in our present quagmire. . . . Now you have the evidence that you need in order to be convinced and to convince others that your schools can be changed for the better. . . . You've heard the best advice from reformers and from successful schools and school districts all around the country. Now it's

up to you. Don't let your children down. There is no one to lead this change other than you. Go for it. Tell the bureaucrats that you're fed up, and you're not taking it any more. Revolution!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

William G. Ouchi is the Sanford and Betty Sigoloff Professor of corporate renewal at the Anderson Graduate School of Management at UCLA. Formerly on the faculty at Stanford and the University of Chicago, he is the author of three previous books, including the bestselling *Theory Z: How American Management Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*. He serves on the boards of several major nonprofit institutions, and is Chair of the Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now (LEARN), as well as Co-Chair of the Los Angeles County Alliance for Student Achievement. In addition, he served as chief of staff to Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan from 1993-1995. He lives in Santa Monica, California.