

Readings

Local efforts, global results

The closing months of 2005 brought a raft of thoughtful reports from education organizations and policy groups. Two in particular stood out:

Similar Students, Different Results

Why Do Some Schools Do Better?

EdSource, www.edsource.org

What, specifically, sets high-performing high-poverty elementary schools apart from their less successful peers?

To find some answers, researchers from Stanford University, the University of California, Berkeley, and the American Institutes for Research joined with the independent, nonprofit group EdSource to survey hundreds of California teachers and principals.

Looking at high-, medium-, and low-scoring schools whose students mostly come from low-income families, the researchers found four practices that are common in the most successful schools:

1. Putting a high priority on student achievement by, for example, having a well-defined plan for improving instruction.

2. Using a coherent, standards-based curriculum and instructional program that is consistent from class to class within a grade and aligned from grade to grade.

3. Using assessment data from various sources to improve student achievement and instruction.

4. Ensuring the availability of instructional resources—not just materials, but also well-qualified, highly experienced teachers.

These characteristics were bolstered in the most successful schools by leadership, accountability, and support at the district level. That includes providing schools with achievement data and evaluating principals and teachers on the basis of that data. It also includes having clear expectations for student perfor-

mance aligned with the district's adopted curriculum.

Educating Leaders for a Global Society

The Goldman Sachs Foundation and The Asia Society, www.internationale.org

Perhaps if more schools shared the characteristics highlighted in the EdSource study, there would be less concern about U.S. students falling behind their peers in other nations.

But that's where we're headed unless our schools adopt the "critical skills needed to compete in the global marketplace," says this report from the Goldman Sachs

Foundation and the Asia Society.

Chief among those skills:

- **Global knowledge.** All students should study world history, geography, and international economics.

- **Languages.** Learning a second language gives students key cognitive and academic skills.

- **Global perspectives.** Students "must have an underlying respect for different perspectives" if they are to relate effectively to people in other cultures.

How can schools "put the world in world-class education" without losing sight of the close-to-home realities of state standards and federal requirements? The report provides a handful of successful models. Your job, as district leaders, is to communicate the importance of instilling global perspectives—and then to devise programs to meet that objective.

Governance

The civil school board

Phillip Boyle, a professor at the University of North Carolina's School of Government, also is a consultant who works with municipal and state agencies to resolve problems and disputes. Boyle, who has contributed several articles on school governance to *ASBJ*, has a list of ground rules to encourage civil discourse among school boards.

At a recent meeting of the Council of Urban Boards of Education, he shared these rules to live by:

- **Share information equally.** Trust is eroded when board members believe information is withheld—even temporarily. Everyone should receive the same information at the same time.

- **Focus on interests.** Look for common ground by learning what's important to your colleagues. Help colleagues achieve their goals for the board.

- **Explain yourselves.** Opposing views are easier to accept when col-

leagues can make a connection to your experiences or reasoning.

- **Don't take cheap shots.** There are better ways to express one's frustration, and a zinger aimed at a colleague can undo months of work building trust—and close minds to your arguments.

- **Disagree openly.** Responsible discourse requires board members to voice their disagreements and allow colleagues an opportunity to address these concerns.

- **Seek consensus.** It is not always easy—or possible—but "if you can get there, it's almost always worth it."

- **Invite feedback.** Talk about the performance of the board at its last meeting. Was the meeting successful? Was an emotional statement hurtful? Do board members feel they are being heard?

- **Seek a shared purpose.** Focusing on common goals leads to action—and eases discord when disagreements arise over strategies.

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