Learning From Schools That Succeed

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Texas Education Agency
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The correlation between poverty and achievement sometimes seems so strong as to be unbreakable.
Is there something we can learn from those schools?
George Hall Elementary School
Mobile, Alabama
444 students in grades preK-5

- 99% African American
- 99% Low-Income

Source: Alabama Department of Education
Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

Source: Alabama Department of Education
Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

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Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

Source: Alabama Department of Education
Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

Nationally norm-referenced percentile rank

2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009

George Hall: Blue line
All Students in Alabama: Orange line
Black Students in Alabama: Brown line

Source: Alabama Department of Education
Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

Source: Alabama Department of Education
Grade 5 Math—SAT 10 results

Nationally norm-referenced percentile rank

George Hall
All Students in Alabama
Black Students in Alabama

Alabama Department of Education
Ed Trust and I have spent more than a decade helping to identify and learn from schools like George Hall Elementary School to find out what makes those schools—I call them **Unexpected Schools**—so special.
Briefly:
Unexpected schools share twenty-five characteristics, ranging from “They establish an atmosphere of respect” to “They are nice places to work.”
Briefly:

Unexpected Schools share five processes:
• They focus on what kids need to learn;
• They collaborate on how to teach it;
• They assess frequently;
• They study data to find patterns in instruction;
• They systematically build relationships.
At the end of HOW It’s Being Done I said that leadership seems to be important.
I was hardly original in this observation.
Leadership is necessary to improve schools.

Conclusion from a 6-year study in 9 states, 45 districts and 180 schools:

“To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership.”

The effect of leaders is second only to teachers.

The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a 1/4 of total school effects.

Leadership attracts and retains teachers.

Although a wide range of working conditions matter to teachers, principal leadership is most important.

Briefly:

Unexpected Schools all have leaders who believe deeply in the capacity of their students to achieve and are willing to do the work necessary to help them do so.
“Through my teaching experiences, I learned that my students were capable of learning just about anything I was capable of teaching.”

-Molly Bensinger-Lacy, former principal
Graham Road Elementary School
Fairfax County, Virginia
“It is so important to dispel the myth that these children can’t learn to high standards. There’s a belief system out there that they’re not as smart as white kids. We’re on a mission to conquer every myth and every test.”

--Von Sheppard, former principal
Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School
St. Paul, Minnesota
"Many people say all children can learn. Well, that's true. But a parakeet can learn, too. We look for people who believe that children can excel."

-- Jeffrey Litt, founding principal and superintendent of the Icahn Charter Schools in New York City
Ricardo Esparza, former principal, Granger High School, Granger, Washington
Bonnie Hess, principal, Chadwick Elementary, Baltimore County, Maryland
Dan St. Louis, principal, University Park Campus School, Worcester, Massachusetts
To sum up the beliefs of unexpected school leaders:

The kids can do it.

We can help them.

We **must** help them **now**.
But beliefs are not enough.
“Beliefs mean nothing if you don’t know how to build a master schedule.”

-- Conrad Lopes, former principal
Jack Britt High School
Fayetteville, North Carolina

(participant in Getting It Done study)
Unexpected schools have organized themselves in the service of their belief that all children can learn.
Grade 5 Reading—SAT 10 results

Source: Alabama Department of Education
“I knew achievement wouldn’t be a problem once the systems were in place.”

-- Terri Tomlinson, principal
George Hall Elementary School, 2004-2013
What kind of systems did she mean?

Systems to use time, money, and staff to support the learning of all students –

in other words, master schedules, budgets, hiring and professional development, and behavior development – or discipline – systems.

The same systems that all schools have – but that don’t always benefit all students.
Let’s see what that means through the lens of a high school in California.
Artesia High School
ABC Unified District, Los Angeles County, California
1,568 Students, Grades 9-12

- 72% Hispanic
- 9% African American
- 7% Filipino
- 4% White
- 77% Socioeconomically disadvantaged
- 16% Students with disabilities

Source: California Department of Education
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
“I can’t be at a school that perpetuates the idea that these kids will be poor the rest of their lives.”

– Sergio Garcia, principal, Artesia High School
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
Additional systems Garcia put in place:

- Systems to develop leadership
- Systems to improve instruction
- Systems to recognize achievement and improvement
- Systems to monitor and adjust – that is, to extend and expand things that work and change or jettison things that don’t
- Systems to help misbehaving students change their behavior and build relationships
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
Artesia High School

API Over Time

Source: California Department of Education
When I first called Sergio Garcia and asked what the school is doing now different from ten years ago, what do you think he said?

“You have no idea the smile on my face.”
“No one has ever asked me that before.”
I have focused closely on Artesia High School in this talk, but educators in all the Unexpected Schools I have been in share two things:

* an unwavering belief in all students’ capacity to learn

* the determination to organize themselves around that belief
The Education Trust has honored many such unexpected schools with its Dispelling the Myth award. To learn more about them go to edtrust.org/dispelling_the_myth

Or just Google “Dispelling the Myth”
You can also read about some of them in these books:
Unexpected School Leaders
Questions?
Bonus Slides
<p>| KL  | LM | NO | PQ | RS | TU | VW | X Y | Z AA | AB  | AC  | AD  | AE  | AF  | AG  | AH  | AI  | AJ  | AK  | AL  | AM  |
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