

# Transforming American Education:

The Right People, Measures,  
Practices and Messages



**Battelle** *for* **Kids**  
Bringing clarity to school improvement



## Making the Case for Change

Investing in the transformation of American education is the greatest investment in our future. No matter what children want to do with their lives, they need a high-quality and relevant education to do it. The knowledge, lessons and skills we prepare our children to possess will determine whether America can meet our greatest challenges in the future—to sustain our economic vitality and national security. The better job we do of accelerating student progress and achievement, the better we can guarantee that ALL students will be READY. Ready to:

- Seize opportunities in a changing economic environment;
- Be personally responsible for themselves;
- Possess creative problem-solving skills; and
- Participate in and understand the world in which they live.

Imagine an education system that ensures these readiness standards... that graduates students who are informed and socially-responsible individuals who have the will and leadership skills to effectively engage in economic interactions with foreign countries... and have the cognitive skills to develop policies, practices and products that ensure our national security.

For those who say it can't be done—especially during these economic times—the research is compelling:

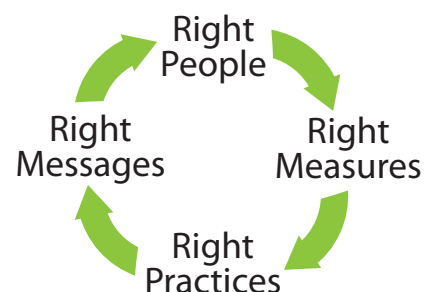
- “The aggregate growth numbers suggest that the annual growth dividend from an effective [education] reform plan would cover most conceivable program costs over a relatively short period... In other words, the increased Gross Domestic Product through improved student achievement would almost immediately cover current teacher salaries and benefits fully—suggesting considerable room to pay for better teachers and to compensate for the higher risk of entering teaching” (Hanushek, 2009).
- “Faster [educational] reforms will have larger impacts on the economy, simply because the better workers become a dominant part of the workforce sooner... But even a 20- or 30-year reform plan begun in 2005 has a powerful impact. For example, a 20-year plan would yield a GDP 5% greater in 2037 (compared with an economy with no increase in educational quality)... Over a 75-year horizon, a 20-year reform yields a real GDP 36% higher than without a change in educational quality... The accumulated evidence from analyses of economic outcomes is that the quality of education—measured on an outcome basis of cognitive skills—has powerful economic effects. Economic growth is strongly affected by the skills of workers. What people know matters” (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2008, p. 10).

Developing and implementing a truly effective educational system requires extraordinary leadership and a commitment to work together toward success. First, we must attract, develop and retain the best principals and teachers and provide them with the resources and support they need to be successful. Then, we need to hold them accountable for their results. We also need to engage the entire community in this effort—students, families, business and community leaders, unions, school boards, senior citizens, foundations and others. We have an obligation to collaborate about ways we each can contribute to addressing this national imperative.

**This paper provides an overview of four overarching strategies that will transform our education system to ensure that all children are college- and career-ready:**

1. Recruit, develop and retain the right people;
2. Identify and provide them with access to the right measures;
3. Ensure they can use that information to improve and implement the right, proven practices; and
4. Strategically communicate with and continually engage all stakeholders using the right messages.

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# The Right People

As we learn in Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*, "the old adage people are your most important asset turns out to be wrong. People are not your most important asset. The right people are" (Collins, 2001). In an education system that has historically relied on proxies of measures of talent, assumptions around effective practices and egalitarian systems of compensation, we believe that clarity, hope, direction and real transformation in education come through focusing on human capital development that starts with attracting and retaining the right people. Human capital development refers to the practice of increasing employees' value to their organization and themselves through education, training, feedback and experience.

The research and data are clear—effective teaching really matters. We need to learn from our highly effective teachers.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan says highly effective teachers are, "passionate about the work. They believe in their heart that every single child can be successful. They have the highest of expectations. They have great content knowledge. They're not just teaching a subject, they're teaching children. They're lifelong learners, they're constantly challenging themselves to get better... Great teachers make other teachers around them better, help make the school climate and culture better."

Research also tells us that effective teachers are not randomly distributed across schools, making it unlikely that students in many schools will learn what they need to be prepared for college and work. Peske and Haycock reported the "...painful truth: Poor and minority children don't underachieve in school just because they often enter behind, but also because the schools that are supposed to serve them actually shortchange them in the one resource they most need to reach their potential—high-quality teachers" (2006).

Bill Gates suggests that, "If the entire U.S. for two years had top quartile teachers, the entire difference between us and Asia would go away and within four years we would be blowing everyone in the world away... We should reward those people...we should retain those people...we should find out what those people are doing and transfer those skills to other people... Education is the most important thing to get right for the country to have as strong of a future as it should have" (TED speech, February 2009).

Transforming America's education system demands that every school has a principal who is empowered with the skills, knowledge and information to lead effectively, and every classroom has a competent and caring teacher. **Principals** must be learning leaders who effectively provide the vision, expectations, motivation, formative feedback and support needed to foster school transformation and a positive culture of continuous improvement. **Teachers** provide the ways and means of carrying out school transformation. They need to be full partners in education reform. Real transformation in the academic success of all students in a district can be directly linked to the influence of highly effective principals and teachers working together. When principals and teachers act on timely, relevant and reliable information to make decisions, rapid improvements can be made in accelerating student progress and achievement. There is no substitute for the right people empowered with statistically-reliable information and the knowledge of proven practices to make confident, informed decisions for improvement.

As the U.S. Department of Education and many other key education stakeholders, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are increasingly focusing on human capital development, we have a unique opportunity in the history of education to dramatically change even the most entrenched educational processes to ensure the highest quality and most relevant educational opportunities for all students. Together, we must arm schools with strategies and resources to identify, recruit, retain, develop, distribute and reward talent in schools and to build accountability systems that increase expectations and results.

## Human capital development strategies that will transform our schools include:

- Improving hiring processes and career-ladder decisions
- Designing selection processes that are reliable predictors of success for teachers
- Creating programs to onboard and mentor new teachers in their first three years
- Strategically placing teachers in classrooms to align with students' diverse learning needs
- Developing focused professional development plans that target employees' specific needs
- Training principals on how to effectively guide their teams through data-driven, differentiated planning processes and foster a culture of professional learning
- Developing strategic compensation and innovative reward programs that help to attract and retain talent and further organizational goals
- Uncovering the sources of high-potential candidates by reviewing information about current successful employees
- Fostering innovation to leverage the practices of highly effective principals and teachers
- Developing comprehensive evaluation systems using multiple data sources to measure and gather feedback on individual or group performance
- Extensively reviewing current processes to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and reduce error in the system

# The Right Measures

We can guess what causes students to drop out of school. However, using data allows us to separate what we think is happening from what is actually happening and establish a baseline of performance. A data-based approach to improvement also allows us to identify and understand relationships that might help explain variation between effective and ineffective practices.

In recent years, the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as moves by states to adopt new evaluation and compensation systems and student growth measures through Race to the Top, have begun to provide us with a robust set of data from which to begin mining reliable measures. To provide a personalized approach to teaching, educators must be able to produce, access, navigate and interpret multiple data sources. In particular, educators need access to:

- Value-added analysis at the building-, grade- and classroom-levels;
- Student projections of future achievement; and
- Formative instruction data.

Student achievement is significantly impacted by educators' ability to use this data effectively and efficiently. Schools need access to summative value-added and achievement information and formative instruction information to gauge the impact of their current educational practices, classroom curricula and professional development on student progress over time. Value-added analysis brings a new and critically important kind of diagnostic information to allow districts to be strategic and focused in their instructional decision-making. Both progress and achievement data are essential to provide a comprehensive picture of school and teacher effectiveness and to allow educators to focus assessment, analysis, planning and implementation activities on the aspect of the schooling experience with which they have the most direct influence, responsibility and control. By measuring and connecting student progress and formative instruction data to other data sources and engaging educators in focused planning and differentiated professional development, teachers will accelerate their students' progress rates.

Research also shows that, "Where sound assessment *for* learning practices were implemented, students performed on average 30 percentile points more than places not using the strategies. The largest gain was for the low-achieving students" (Black & Wiliam, 1998). However, assessment training and support are virtually absent in pre-service and in-service professional development programs. One of the most critical times to use assessment is during instruction. This practice helps teachers affirm students' understanding of intended teaching objectives and reveal misconceptions, not just label achievement status.

Substantially altering classroom practices, by changing the instructional interaction between teachers and students, also demands strong support systems. To date, a limited number of educators are using value-added and student projection measures along with high-quality formative instruction to create a more personalized learning environment for their students. States are increasingly recognizing that they need to link student progress and teacher performance in an attempt to identify and reward teacher effectiveness. School districts that do use these measures and processes are achieving strong results. We need to make sure that all school districts have access to such data to inform their practices.

A study from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching project suggests that when students are asked certain questions about their teachers' effectiveness, their perceptions are very much aligned to their teachers' value-added results (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010). Districts have also adopted comprehensive performance management systems to align their goals, use data and develop all non-instructional employees' knowledge and skills to build a continuous culture of learning that results in improved student outcomes. This approach to using the right measures will inform staff recruitment, hiring and retention decisions and allow best practices to be uncovered and replicated across the organization.



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## Using multiple measures can guide schools in:

- Improving access to and quality of data to help education leaders target areas for improvement
- Leveraging formative instruction data to guide instruction in real time
- Adopting growth models to gauge educator effectiveness and increase student academic progress
- Implementing performance management systems to improve the efficiency of district processes and drive the growth of all employees and students in the district

# The Right Practices

Developing the right people and using the right measures also require a corresponding set of high-leverage, effective practices and methods that will allow schools to accelerate student academic progress. As the research confirms that effective teaching really matters, it is imperative that we understand what highly effective teachers do in the classroom.

We need to tap into the expertise of our highly effective educators who have helped students maximize their academic growth.

To continuously improve, we must find ways to tap into, mine and share the practices of highly effective educators. In the spring of 2008, Battelle for Kids began a study of highly effective teachers. The goal was to identify teachers with high classroom-level value-added results and work with them to understand what it was they did that made them so effective. In the four years since the project's inception, we have met with highly effective math, reading, science and social studies teachers in Ohio, Texas and Tennessee. The findings across these settings have been consistent.

Regardless of the grade level or subject area, highly effective teachers talk about their instruction in terms of the following themes:

- High expectations for the growth of all students;
- A child-centered focus that fosters relationships and is responsive—teaching to each student's needs;
- A consistent and predictable classroom environment that is positive, safe, organized and conducive to high-quality learning for all students; and
- Professional self-efficacy and continuous improvement through adaptation and creativity.

After the second year of this study, we discovered an alignment between our findings and an organizational effectiveness framework created by Robert Quinn in the 1980s (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983). Our adaptation of this framework allows teachers to assess, develop practices and ultimately integrate four critical elements associated with effective teaching: structure, creativity, relationships and achievement.

Through research reports, white papers, online courses and conversation protocols, the practices of highly effective teachers can be understood and used to transform the instruction of all teachers. Principals need to foster a culture of collaboration that supports idea-sharing so that proven practices can be taken to scale.



Through collaborative learning experiences, educators' collective energy, excitement and promise will give way to hope, encouragement and improved results.

Districts and states should also take an organizational approach to leadership. Focusing on the top-down leadership practices simultaneously with bottom-up teaching strategies creates a culture of professional learning that when implemented with fidelity will produce the largest student academic gains.

Another powerful and convenient way to invest in our schools is to provide educators with online, self-paced learning—accessible any place, any time—24 hours a day, seven days a week. Just as all students don't need the same content or have the same learning styles, adults need personalized learning experiences as well. New teacher and principal learning paths will ready individuals for success. And, personalized learning paths should be developed to align with educators' opportunities for growth throughout their careers. Online education provides a real-time service and assessment of the users' progress and learning. School leaders need to support and encourage the use of such resources as part of a blended approach to professional learning.

It is also critical that instructional practices are grounded in the Common Core State Standards. Educators should understand the common core vertical progression from kindergarten through grade 12 of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that each student needs to reach college- and career-readiness.

## Practices or programs that will transform our schools include:

- Supporting research to mine and leverage the practices of highly effective teachers and principals
- Promoting innovation from highly effective teachers and principals across the country
- Transforming preparation and professional development programs to focus on the practices of highly effective teachers and principals
- Providing a blended learning experience, including face-to-face, role-based learning paths, online courses, Professional Learning Communities and other opportunities for collaboration
- Using multiple measures of data to personalize curriculum and instruction for students
- Matching the needs of students to teachers or learning environments

# The Right Messages



The most well-intentioned education reform plans fail most often not because of an ineffective strategy, but because those plans lacked a thoughtful approach to execution—particularly in the areas of change management and communications. Introducing a new district or statewide education program or initiative requires clear, ongoing communications using the right messages—personalized to multiple audiences.

“If we have learned anything in the educational standard movement in the last decade, it is that policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration,” argues Douglas B. Reeves in his book, *Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results*.

In other words, you can’t create sustained, successful change in schools by simply passing laws and writing rules. Districts and states must develop and implement comprehensive change management and communications strategies designed to build awareness, understanding and engagement among all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, business leaders and other community groups, around their educational-improvement goals.

Successful school reformers seek out leaders from all constituencies, get their input, keep them informed and let them lead. Effective change occurs when leaders are engaged, believe in what they’re doing and model firsthand the behaviors they are expecting of other adults in the system. This also ensures that reforms remain institutionalized and are never about a single person. Or, as Harvard professor and author Rosabeth Moss Kanter explains, “top officials can declare a new policy or restructure by fiat, but they can’t change behavior without a campaign to win hearts and minds.”

What does a successful change management campaign look like? Professor John Kotter’s 8-Step Process for Leading Change provides some guidance for districts and states that are implementing reforms. His model says that organizations must first make the case for change by establishing a sense of urgency, engage and build the support of key stakeholders, and then develop and communicate a vision for change. A key theme throughout Kotter’s 8-Step Process and a critical part of managing any change campaign effectively is clear and consistent communications.

In school reform, communicating is much more than distributing flyers to the staff and community on the district’s new vision or mission statement. It’s about developing a comprehensive strategic plan using the right messages.

It’s about communicating, doing, redoing and communicating again and again. It’s about connecting staff substantively to a higher calling and showing them how their day-to-day activities contribute to reform and student growth. Most people will endure a change if they understand “the why.” And, “the how” really matters too. There must be a cohesive, aligned message about improvement, not judgment, that helps educators understand their students’ achievement and learning progress, while making them aware of the resources, data, training and support that are available to ensure college- and career-readiness for every child.

To transform American education, we must recruit, develop and retain the right people; identify and provide them with access to the right measures; and ensure they can use that information to implement the right practices. But, no matter how well these reforms are executed, they will be difficult to implement and sustain without an effective change management and strategic communications plan built around the right messages.

## Change management and communications practices essential for schools include:

- Engaging all stakeholders around a state or district’s educational-improvement vision to ensure lasting reforms
- Building champions for change internally and externally
- Connecting the dots by effectively communicating a cohesive and aligned message across all aspects of a district’s reform plan
- Personalizing communications so that people understand “what” you want to share and “why” it matters to them
- Making the message about improvement, not just about judgment
- Creating opportunities to recognize and share school, educator and student successes

# In Closing

This is the perfect moment to educate our children on how they can achieve the opportunities to thrive in college, in their careers and in making the world a better place. Many of the solutions and practices outlined in this paper are ready and available through different organizations that work to improve school performance in a focused and data-driven manner. By mining best practices—localized to each district's culture and greatest areas of concern—we will best leverage financial resources to establish and implement programs that lead to success for all students.

To prepare our children for success and protect our nation's economic vitality and security, we must ensure that our education system offers students the right principals and teachers who have the right measures and information they need to collaborate, share and implement the right practices. Through strategic partnerships, focused planning and funding, the possibilities for improvement are endless. This investment is not only an investment for children today, but for all Americans tomorrow. If we focus on these transformational efforts, we can be confident that when we peer into the classrooms of the future, we will see children ready to be the future leaders of and contributors to a brighter tomorrow.

**“Everyone has defining moments—moments of opportunity to make the world a better place. The moments arise. The question is having the character and the courage to act upon them” (Zacks, 2006).**

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To prepare our children for success and protect our nation's economic vitality and security, we must ensure that our education system offers students the right principals and teachers who have the right measures and information they need to collaborate, share and implement the right practices. And, our schools must communicate with and engage all stakeholders using the right messages to build understanding and support around their educational-improvement efforts.

## About Battelle for Kids

Battelle for Kids is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides strategic counsel and innovative solutions for today's complex educational-improvement challenges. Our mission-driven team of education, technology, communications and business professionals specializes in creating strategies that advance the development of human capital, the use of strategic measures, the implementation of effective practices in schools and communication with all stakeholders. We partner with state departments of education, school districts and education-focused organizations to advance these strategies with the shared goals of: improving teaching effectiveness and student progress; informing instructional practice in real time; recognizing and rewarding teaching excellence; and aligning goals and maximizing impact in schools.

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