

# Transforming Schools: The Limits and Possibilities of Reform

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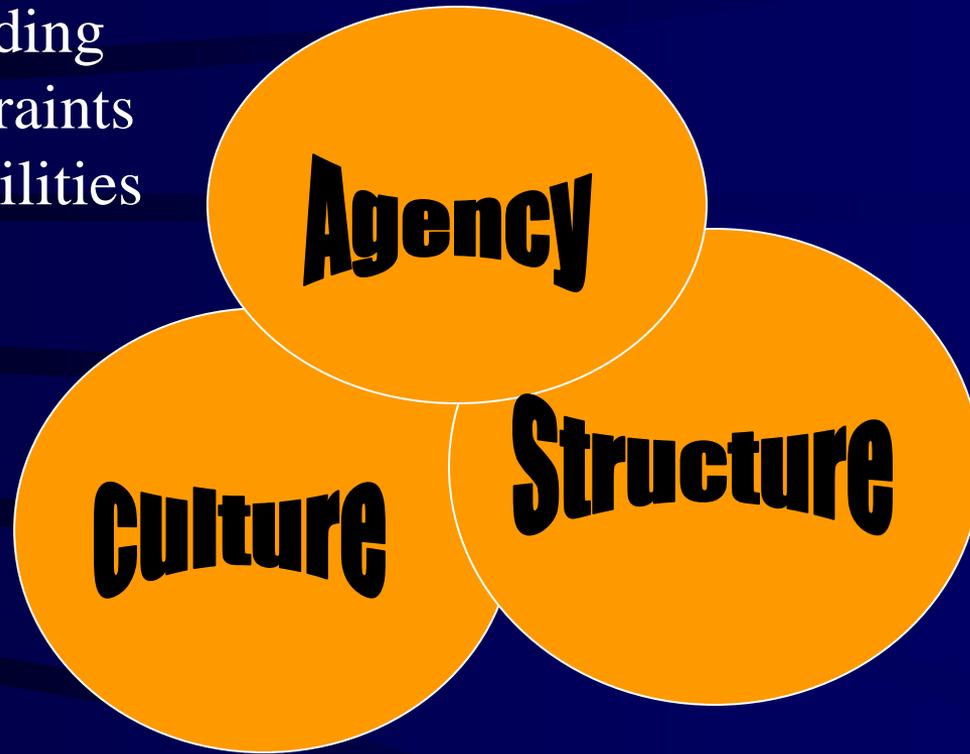
# I. A Generation of Reform: Lessons Learned?

- Reforms as fads – not enough alignment between remedy and need, not enough follow through or evaluation
- Too much focus on assessment, not enough on teaching and learning
- Too top down - insufficient “buy-in” and input from school staff
- Insufficient attention to school culture
- Insufficient attention to social needs of students
- Insufficient attention to real examples of success

# Schools are influenced by their environment

- Safety, health, culture, political economy of local community have an impact on schools
- Broader demographic and economic trends also influence schools – immigration, globalization
- Schools must devise strategies to *mitigate* harmful effects of the environment and must draw upon community resources for support
- Schools must be organized to meet student needs

Understanding  
The Constraints  
and possibilities



# Building Capacity Requires:

- Clear understanding of **student needs**
  - Academic and non-academic needs
- Ability to understand what your **staff needs** to be effective in meeting student needs
- Ability to **identify, access and utilize** resources to meet student needs
- A plan for creating a **culture** that is aligned to your school's goals
- A plan for engaging your **parents as partners** to reinforce educational goals

# Building School Capacity



# We are asking the wrong questions:

- Instead of “How do we raise achievement?”
  - How do we get students *excited about learning*?
- Instead of “How do we hold teachers accountable?” How do we hold *everyone accountable* – Governors, Presidents, superintendents, teachers, students and parents?
- Instead of “How do we close the achievement gap?”
  - How we expand and enrich learning opportunities?
  - How do we create schools where a child’s *race and class are not predictors* of outcomes?

## II. Five Essential Ingredients for School Improvement

- A coherent instructional guidance system
- Ongoing development of the professional capacity of staff
- Strong parent-community-school ties
- A student-centered learning climate
- Shared Leadership to drive change

# Learn from Effective Schools

- They have systems to monitor the academic performance of individual students and to respond to their needs – PS 28
  - Students and teachers are clear about performance standards
- They engage in constant assessment – School of Future, Success Academies
  - Real evidence of ability through performance assessment
  - Learn from and examine student work
- They have distributed leadership - shared and distributed, technical and adaptive – Brockton, HS
- They have a culture of high expectations for all – MS 323, Emerson
  - Rituals, norms and practices that reinforce core values

# Keys to Success

- Staff understands the external pressures students face and have devised ways to counter the pull of the streets – Eagle Academy
  - Gangs, teen pregnancy, pressure to work
  - Develop partnerships and strategies to meet student needs
  - Views the community as a resource – Edison Elementary
- **Balanced commitment to excellence and equity** – Henshaw Middle School
- Clear focus on life beyond school – Thurgood Marshall HS
  - Strategies for developing social capital and cultural capital
    - Internships, early college programs
  - Learning to code switch - Speech, dress, demeanor

# Empower Students by Demystifying Success

- Teach study skills
- Teach “codes of power”
- Provide samples of “good” work
- Provide students with opportunities to be involved in leadership and service activities
- Provide access to influential role models
- Discuss future plans early and expose students to options through internships and travel

# Agency vs. Grit

## Grit

- Individual attribute
- Ignores contextual barriers
- Hard to measure except after outcomes are achieved

## Agency

- Can be individual or collective in form
- Recognizes barriers and strategizes to confront
- Measureable through observation of actions and attitudes