

CIVIC CAPACITY -- WHAT, WHY, AND WHENCE

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"The expansion of cooperation and the development of the individual are mutually dependent realities, and ... a due proportion of balance between them is a necessary condition of human welfare." (Chester Barnard)

Some observers think of civic capacity as level of voting, volunteering, and participation in public hearings. In this chapter, I put forward a somewhat different view, that of civic capacity as concerted effort to address a major community problem. By "concerted" I mean special actions to involve multiple sectors of a locality, including both governmental and non-governmental. The label "civic" refers to actions built around the idea of furthering the well-being of the whole community, not just that of a particular segment or group.

Bringing a locality's civic capacity into play represents a deliberate attempt to move beyond business as usual because the community faces an out-of-the-ordinary challenge. Civic capacity thus involves an approach to problem-solving that relies on a great deal more than routine governmental action. As a concept, civic capacity rests on the assumption that government and civil society are not discrete spheres of activity. They connect and merge in myriad ways. It follows, then, that what we call public policy is de facto the joint product of governmental and non-governmental efforts. Put another way, the character and effectiveness of governmental activity depends substantially on how it combines with related non-governmental activity. The relationship is particularly important in public education.

Later I present four cases in which localities have engaged in extraordinary efforts to turn school performance around. First, however, let us consider the nature of the education problem.

Public School Performance as a Problem

Disappointing academic achievement is found primarily in areas where low-income populations are concentrated. For decades now we have known that the performances of schools are greatly influenced by the family background and community environment of their students. The education problem is thus closely linked to poverty. When the community is affluent and the parents themselves are well-educated, there is an easy fit between what public schools do routinely and the population served.

The education problem is class-based for several reasons. In the first place, better educated parents provide their children with greater readiness for conventional academic learning. Moreover, affluent parents provide home advantages and auxiliary resources for the schools their children attend. Children of the affluent middle class exist in an environment of high expectations, reinforced by abundant examples of realized opportunities. Support, encouragement and aspirations are not missing from households of low and modest means, but they are harder to come by, more difficult to sustain, and face more barriers.

Schools themselves play a huge role in shaping expectations. As social critic Charles Silberman observed decades ago: "There is ample evidence that the learning difficulties from which lower-class and minority children suffer have their origins in school as well as the home" (1970, p. 79). Even earlier psychologist Kenneth Clark in his famous book, *Dark Ghetto*, had identified a pattern of low regard for students, lax standards, and an undemanding curriculum (1965). In that same era, anthropologist Eleanor Leacock found that in lower-class schools, educators expect unruliness and apathy (1969). As carefully argued in these important -- but for years largely neglected -- works, there is a pattern of low expectations feeding low achievement and thereby reinforcing low expectations. Because many lower-income students live in "a system of nested inequalities" (Hochschild and Scovronick 2003, p. 22), even mixed signals from a school may fail to build a "sense of confidence and self-efficacy" needed for academic achievement (O'Connor 2000, p. 108).

Failures to educate the poor come from following the path of least resistance. When middle-class educators interact with lower-class students, the situation is rife with possibilities for misunderstanding all around and for teachers to develop low expectations. Thus, social critic Silberman argues, rather than focus on the challenge of how to cultivate student achievement and thereby widen opportunity, schools have been engaged heavily in sorting and certifying students as to their place in society and economy. For years, schools showed little innate inclination to take on the responsibility for meeting the challenge of educating students of varied backgrounds and adjusting their practices accordingly. Instead of making special efforts, Silberman reported, teachers in low-income schools taught less, evaluated their students less frequently, and, when they did evaluate, gave them overwhelmingly negative comments (1970, p. 89). A Haryou (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited) report of the 1960s took educators to task for treating differences in student background as "a permanent barrier to learning" (quoted in Clark 1965, p. 139).

Educator expectations and performance along with student responses do not occur in a vacuum. They take shape in a total environment of school-community relations, with social, political, and economic dimensions (Metz 1990). Except for efforts by the occasional community-based organization like Haryou, for long years most schools faced little pressure to change their approach. Many educators simply became fatalistic and went through the established motions.

Contrast the experience of schools serving the poor with an account of school-

community relations in a setting of affluence. A former school board member from Houston, Texas, says this of the parents in his middle-class district: Most volunteered some time in their neighborhood school. Some, the school activists, were exceptional. I called them the PTO mothers. They were usually wives of professional men with excellent incomes. Some had professional degrees themselves. They had put their concerns on hold to be full-time homemakers. And as their children grew older, some became practically full-time, unpaid school employees.

The PTO mothers volunteered time to chaperone students on field trips, assisted teachers in the classroom, worked in the office, and managed events like fall concerts, show choirs, carnivals, auctions, Christmas programs, and fundraising walkathons. Some programs attracted nearly 1,000 parents. These PTO mothers (and sometimes fathers) helped raise \$30,000, sometimes up to \$100,000, per year for teaching materials, computers, stage curtains, or whatever the school needed. And they didn't just serve their own children. If a field trip -- for example, a visit to a museum -- required money from each student, they raised the necessary money to pay for the children, usually minority children, who otherwise could not go.

These PTO mothers made schools successful. They demanded effective teaching, high academic standards, and strong leadership. They were towers of strength to effective principals. But if principals were ineffective or the bureaucracy did not respond to programmatic or facilities needs, they took action. They called their [school board member], took him out to lunch, organized letter-writing campaigns or circulated petitions. They knew how the system worked, and they got results (McAdams 2000, pp. 60-61).

Weigh what is reported. Parents volunteered and raised money privately for extras, thereby enhancing the resources for schools. They not only had the time and inclination to be involved, they also made demands on the schools directly and through the school board. And in some matters they were allies of principals and the school board. Thus in several concrete and direct ways, schools and community formed an integrated system. Figure in also what is implied in this account. Parents possessed a high sense of political efficacy on school matters to go along with the fact that they were organized and had resources and connections. Almost certainly students in these schools came from households in which academic achievement was expected and college attendance was the norm. Parent engagement was a powerful signal to their children about the great importance of education. Family and friendship connections provided concrete reinforcement for aspirations that linked academic achievement with personal career goals and the promise of a satisfying life. These connections also provide detailed information about to pursue paths of educational advancement. As psychiatrist and education reformer James Comer would argue, school and community outlook and expectations were aligned around academic achievement. What Comer calls "the hand of hopelessness" (1993, p. viii), which grips many urban schools, posed little threat to this affluent corner of Houston.

Consider now the contrasting situation in many schools serving lower-income neighborhoods. Parents have limited material resources to draw on, and they may stay away from school and perhaps even feel unwelcome should they decide to approach an institution in which they themselves had little success (Fine 1991, p. 162). As pointed out above, teacher expectations often run low, and parents, without necessarily being aware of it, may give inconstant signals about the worthiness of schools as institutions and even the value of education. The abstract idea that schooling is important receives nearly universal approval, but concrete behaviors may offer a different message. Disappointments may cumulate, and relations of anger and mutual blame may be widespread. In schools serving the poor, teacher burn-out is a long-running problem.

Drawing on his initial experience with school reform in New Haven, James Comer reports that in an "unrewarding and negative environment people often lash out at one another" (Comer 1993, p. 29), and attempts to reform easily go awry. One study finds that distrust is pervasive in low-performing schools -- "the basic web of social relationships is likely to be severely damaged" (Payne 2001, p. 243). Instead of home and school reinforcing one another, they maybe in conflict, and teacher-parent tension may run at a high level. In such circumstances, Comer argues, students have unfulfilled needs and become negative about their school experience. He observes: "The power of all involved is amorphous, fragmented, and tenuous. Thus nobody is able to address the school mission in a cooperative, systematic, sustained way.... Administrators, teachers, and parents are paralyzed" (Comer 1993, p. 30). Instead of promoting an effective collaboration between school and neighborhood, community conditions and household vulnerabilities conspire to promote disappointment and defensiveness. The point is not that educators are by nature uncaring, but in some circumstances they are ineffective. As Silberman puts it: "Schools fail ... less because of maliciousness than because of mindlessness" (1970, p. 81). Anthony Bryk and colleagues report on "Alexander," one of the Chicago schools they observed:

The malaise, isolation, and alienation that pervades Alexander's neighborhood is mirrored inside the school. Teachers have few external resources to support their work, and many are no longer motivated to change. Some parents work hard for the school, but their numbers are few. The principal is a tragic-heroine who tries to care for all of them – students, parents, and teachers – but whose maternal leadership ironically stifles initiative and disables others' capacity to grow (Bryk et al 1998, p. 57).

By no means do all schools in lower-income neighborhoods perform weakly, and some educators, unlike the principal at the Alexander School, are quite skillful in mobilizing resources from the larger community and enlisting constructively the support of parents. Still, the pattern is clear; schools in poverty neighborhoods face greater challenges -- parents have fewer material resources, they tend to be less strongly organized, external assistance is often scarce, central offices are commonly not very supportive, union officials may be unhelpful, turnover in administrative leadership can be devastating, and the struggle to combat low expectations is unending.

When schools are predominantly middle class and affluent, public and private efforts often mesh with minimal friction and without extraordinary mobilization. Though substantial and multi-faceted, the private (that is, the nongovernmental) contribution to a joint effort is not always seen by the casual observer. Yet the closer one looks, the more the non-governmental part stands out, and the private infusions include intangible matters of outlook and aspiration as well as tangible forms of assistance. In non-affluent schools, especially those with concentrated poverty, unusual leadership, special funding, and uncommon acts of cooperation are frequently the needed ingredients. School and community can come together, but the pull of centrifugal forces is strong, and good intentions are hard to sustain.

The mesh between school and community depends on both what the households of students bring to the engagement and what schools provide. Under terms of strong fiscal constraints, traditionally public schools provide a set of standardized education practices. These are adjusted to the particular situation of the community they serve, and the adjustment becomes easier as the affluence of the community rises. Schools have a much more difficult time responding effectively to the situation of students from backgrounds scarce in privileges and opportunities. In a predominantly middle-class society, educators have no built-in propensity to reach out to and meet the needs of families at the poverty level. To do so likely means additional effort and resources. The challenge begins early, including what one study calls "inequality at the starting gate" (Lee and Burkham 2002). "Learning readiness" provides an example. (The terminology is noteworthy.) Children come to school with significant differences in vocabulary and other language skills. Recent testing of beginning kindergarteners by the State of Maryland shows that there are large variations in learning readiness by jurisdiction (www.msde.state.md.us). For example, in the City of Baltimore 25 percent of students beginning kindergarten placed as "fully ready" on language and literacy. In an outer suburb, Howard County, the proportion was twice as high at 49 percent. The math discrepancy was even greater, at nearly three to one.

The school-community relationship thus rests on the stubborn fact that much of society's investment in children and youth occurs through the household, and some households are able to invest a great deal more than others. Much of this investment is intangible and multi-generational. Some of it is very tangible and measurable. For example, in a 2001 Census Bureau survey, 63 percent of the children from families with an annual income of \$75,000 or more had internet access at home. For children from families under \$15,000 in annual income only 14 percent had internet access. Differences in opportunity are partly traceable to the greater ability of middle-class parents to bend systems to their demands. For example, affluent households -- those making \$100,000 or more per year -- are much more able to arrange special accommodations for their children to take SATs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These households provide only 13 percent of the students taking SATs but account for more than twice that number, 27 percent, who receive "special accommodations" (Hochschild and Scovronick 2003, p. 140). In regular classrooms, middle-class parents also press for placements and pace of progression that they believe fits their children, with little worry about others (Metz 1990).

Context for Building Civic Capacity.

What do the particulars add up to? Why are gaps in performance sharper in the United States than in other advanced industrial societies? There is no simple explanation, but consider how public education took shape in twentieth-century America. With a rhetoric of equal opportunity, public schools provided mass education, widely available and infused with an idea of individual achievement. There was little recognition that positive reinforcement and debilitating handicaps were unevenly distributed, or that they made much difference. It was up to the individual to run the obstacle course of inequalities, and many did with success. Yet individual success was often under girded by a strong family, key mentors, a supportive social network, or a school operating with a sense of a special mission.

The main adjustment that public schools made to differences was tracking, which probably did more to reinforce inequality than to mitigate it. The "shopping mall" high school also made its appearance, with its flaccid curriculum –thereby perpetuating inequality in its peculiar way (Powell, Farrar, and Cohen 1985). Low expectations compounded by vague ones took a heavy toll. Access to an academically demanding curriculum was heavily skewed by race and class. Significantly, civil rights hero Robert Moses founded the Algebra Project to reach black children, many of whom had been kept on the margins of a full-scale modern education. Moses views math and science literacy as necessary for genuine citizenship in today's world and inattention to algebra in schools serving African Americans as a barrier every bit as serious as absence of voting rights was in the Deep South of the past (Moses and Cobb 2001).

In "the American dream," schools are supposed to be the great equalizers, the institutions that assure wide opportunity (Hochschild and Scovronick 2003). In reality the history of public education shows that a widespread response to inequality is accommodation to the status quo -- going through the motions, meeting the formal requirements, and, as one observer put it, "trying just to survive" (quoted in Moses and Cobb 2001, p. xii). Without a larger sense of direction and purpose, people tend to make what they can of the immediate situation. When schools and the populations they serve fit badly because the short end of inequality is severe, academic achievement lacks a firm footing.

Thus, education history shows us that when numbers of students came to school less prepared for formal academic training, the easy response was to lower expectations, track them, and expose them to a standardized but soft curriculum. And, when results were disappointing, that became a matter, not for searching self-examination, but for closer adherence to conventional practice. Those who questioned were told not to challenge but go along. They were asked, in the words of one student, to conform to "the way it spozed to be" (used as a book title by Herndon 1965). Meanwhile, high schools in particular became more impersonal and bureaucratic institutions, with both teachers and students less engaged in school life.

When the conventional viewpoint is that performance is a matter of individual effort, there is little inclination to look widely for systemic causes or cures. And, as the first tentative steps were being made toward a larger look at school failure, one observer discovered an "unconscious assumption that the school is fixed and immutable, and the solution is to change the child to fit the school" (Silberman 1970, p. 81). The impetus for big-picture reform seldom comes from professionals on the inside, operating as insiders. It almost always involves the entry of a new and more wide-ranging set of actors. Once education became a national concern, reform and re-examination of schools became matters of widening public debate. With a national movement under way, communities were in a better position to breach the political insulation of schools from external scrutiny and establish education as problem that could be tackled as a local issue of wide civic importance. Reform-minded educators could search for allies, and civic and political leaders could put forward their concerns without being rebuffed by claims that they were intruding into matters best left to educators. Contemporary local efforts thus operate under an umbrella of a national movement that has made it easier to identify education as a problem for community-wide action. In short, building civic capacity does not occur in a vacuum. Diffuse as the national movement for education reform is, it nonetheless provides a climate in which local action is easier to launch.

Turning the situation around involves an intentional and concerted effort to move beyond the usual state of affairs and create a new set of conditions. At the local level, it means making moves to bring a community's civic capacity into operation. The national climate is important, but in itself amounts to little without local communities taking concrete action. Let us turn now to the local process of building civic capacity around school reform.

Four Cases

Kent County, Maryland

Kent County is a small, non-metropolitan jurisdiction on Maryland's Eastern Shore. It is a place of neither great affluence nor high poverty. Of the County's 2,795 students, 38 percent are eligible for federally assisted meals, and the racial breakdown is 30 percent African American and 70 percent white.

When the state's education department first put into operation its Performance Assessment program, Kent students scored quite low. Reflecting community concern, the elected school board moved immediately to address the problem by hiring a new school superintendent and looking for someone to be a strong instructional leader. They decided on Dr. Lorraine Costella, who had previously served as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction for the state. Costella had a reputation as an innovator, and by hiring her, this rural county showed its willingness to pursue a new path to school reform. Urgency to move beyond business as usual came from the disappointing scores on the state test.

The new superintendent immediately laid the groundwork for a cross-sector coalition. Including key stakeholders from the very beginning, she started by holding an

all-day strategic planning forum that included teachers, principals, school board members, and community leaders. The forum refined the school system's goals into a list of five, headed by academic achievement. The main activities were aligning the curriculum with state standards, emphasizing content, and tying these aims in closely with professional development. In their study of local school reform, Cuban and Usdan observed that "constructing an inviting institutional infrastructure for principals and teachers is tough organizational work" (2003, p.160). Superintendent Costella tackled that work by devising multiple ways to involve principals and teachers, relying particularly heavily on principals rather than central office staff to implement reforms. She followed through on the strategic planning forum by turning to a school board member for guidance in adopting a special management process designed for education – the Baldrige in Education approach. This process was initiated by creating a Baldrige Leadership Team to begin the planning and to oversee its implementation. This team included members from the school board, the union, principals, teachers, parents, and the community. The approach involved a year's training, and led to a classroom compact, through which teachers could "engage students more deeply in establishing visions for their learning, setting performance targets, and charting their progress toward the targets" (Togneri and Lazarus 2003, p.7). As part of the Baldrige process, there were also site teams in each school.

What is striking about the Kent County experience is that the initial engagement of multiple stakeholders was followed by an extensive form of continuing engagement. The superintendent also adopted the practice of meeting regularly with the union president, and those meetings yielded concrete results such as decentralizing professional development to the school level and shifting responsibility for it to the faculty. Organizationally Dr. Costella created a Professional Development Council, again made up on multiple stakeholders. Professional development included sending teachers and principals to other school districts to observe their practices and also putting them into special summer training programs. These extraordinary measures cost money, and the superintendent used her expertise in proposal writing to bring external funds into the district from the state, federal government, and private sources. That too became a collective enterprise as the superintendent trained staff at all levels in grant-seeking. Professional development also served to create networks of teachers to support professional growth and to link new teachers with mentors. Collaboration occurred at the top as well. The superintendent met regularly with the board chair and distributed a weekly newsletter to board members. Relationship building thus included the superintendent's high accessibility to school board members, as she sought to keep all elements closely involved.

A process of setting goals and measuring progress on those goals can be unsettling to members of an organization. Superintendent Costella's strategy for coping with that possibility was to create structures and informal practices to encourage collaboration and innovation. One teacher explained: "Assessment training has empowered the teachers to feel that you can look at the assessment and control the results in your room. You are not at the mercy of a mysterious force" (Togneri and Lazarus 2003, p.12). These efforts worked, and, three years after Dr. Costella became

superintendent, Kent County moved to the top in performance on the state's tests. How did such a quick turnaround happen? Togneri and Lazarus explain: "Only by building internal leadership capacity at the school level were district leaders able to infuse improvement throughout the district" (2003, p.28).

Kent County provides an example of reform based on clear goals with detailed attention to creating a sense of inclusion and collaboration in planning and implementation. Partnership and pursuit of shared understanding were not confined to an initial exercise, but very much a continuing part of the reform process. The superintendent took little for granted and made Kent County into a clear case of a locality that "worked on working together" (the quoted phrase is from Togneri and Anderson 2003, p. 32).

A superficial observer might take Kent County as evidence that school systems only need to try harder. Togneri and Lazarus, however, point out that the multifaceted approach pursued in Kent required substantial external funds. It was not done in the confines of the ordinary budget. They also point out that Dr. Costella developed the professionalization of her staff in such a way that they put in long hours and extra effort. They did so because they felt valued and saw themselves as an integral part of the decision process, as valued members of a team (Togneri and Lazarus 2003, p.14). Teachers and principals also found themselves under an "intense workload" (Togneri and Lazarus 2003, p.26). The superintendent's approach was to distribute leadership throughout the district, but not without making changes. During her eight years as superintendent, she replaced a majority of the school principals as she reshaped the system into one in which principals are instructional leaders.

As a small school district, Kent County is administratively simpler than large urban districts. But small rural districts are not known for being especially open to change. The superintendent managed the feat of shaping a highly innovative system by clear direction from the top, legitimized by extensive consultation not just with the school board and community leadership but also with the professional staff through multiple channels of interaction. She balanced direction from the top by dispersing leadership responsibility throughout the system. And by combining careful orchestration inside the system with added resources from outside, she engendered an ethos of professional pride that nurtured a willingness to make extra efforts.

El Paso, Texas.

El Paso is a border city, with a population over a half million. In Texas, school districts do not match city or county boundaries. The city is served by three districts, two of which spill outside the city limits. The three urban districts in combination contain 163 schools and enroll 135,000 students, of whom 85 percent are Hispanic, two-thirds low income, and about half begin school with limited proficiency in English. Whereas Kent County is small enough for most exchanges to occur between individuals personally connected, El Paso's route to school reform involved significant interaction among people possessing important institutional bases. And whereas reform in Kent County took place primarily in a single small school system, reformers in El Paso

established an education intermediary, the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence, housed on the campus of and supported by the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Formally launched in 1992, the Collaborative had its origins in discussions around education and a changing economy.

As a border city with a low-wage economy, El Paso is highly vulnerable to the forces of globalization. With such industries as textiles moving away, questions about the future of the city's economy became urgent. Against that background, a conversation opened up between the chamber of commerce and Sister Maribeth Larkin, lead organizer for EPISO (El Paso Interdenominational Sponsoring Organization) -- a community-based organization and the local affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation. The recently inaugurated President of UTEP, Dr. Diana Natalicio, joined the discussions as someone interested in seeing the University take a larger role in the community. President Natalicio also brought into the discussions Dr. Susana Navarro. A native of El Paso, Navarro had just returned to the city after experience in civil rights work and a leadership role in education reform through the Achievement Council in California. With her background, Navarro had a clear vision of the need to combine standards reform with the aim of closing the achievement gap. Through her experience, Navarro not only perceived the goal to be followed, but also had a well developed idea of how to pursue it. President Natalicio agreed to base an initiative at UTEP, and Navarro was named executive director. The Collaborative thus became an autonomous unit on the UTEP campus, headed by a broadly representative board with President Natalicio as chair. Joining her on the board were Sister Maribeth Larkin as lead organizer of EPISO, representatives of the business sector (the presidents of the Greater El Paso and El Paso Hispanic chambers of commerce), major local-government officials (the mayor and the county chief executive), and key education figures (the three school superintendents, the executive director of the regional service center of the Texas Education Agency, and the president of the community college).

Navarro brought to her position as Executive Director of the Collaborative extensive experience and know-how in school reform. Sister Mary Beth Larkin joined Navarro and Natalicio as an inner core of actors with a close harmony of vision and complementary roles to play. As a highly regarded university president, Natalicio could bring key people to the table. Larkin provided an important community base of support, and Navarro gave the initiative a concrete form that had strong appeal to the three school superintendents. In bringing to fruition the Collaborative, its architects made use of a network of existing organizations and specially created task forces. Taking a cue from an approach Navarro had developed in her work at the Achievement Council, they used education data to highlight the problem of weak academic performance, especially its equity dimension. Newly launched state testing added urgency to the picture.

The Collaborative represented a response to the concerns of educators, the community, and the business sector. It also provided common ground as the city's past of Anglo domination gave way to a more diverse pattern of leadership. The Collaborative thus was launched at a time when there was a recognized need for a more inclusive form of cooperation.

Heading an organization with a distinct and appealing mission, Navarro recruited a dedicated and focused staff. She also made good use of her connections to the foundation world. Though a small operation at first, the Collaborative was able to get off to a fast start and, with the backing of the superintendents, establish momentum early on. The approach of the Collaborative closely resembles the reform agenda that Kent County also followed. It includes close attention to curriculum and course requirements, the use of data at key points to focus on and further standards, and the involvement of parents and other members of the community to foster understanding of and support for standards-based schooling. The central activity, however, is training for teachers and professional development for administrators, teachers, and staff.

Like Kent County's superintendent-led initiative, the Collaborative aimed for systemic reform. The launching of the Collaborative coincided with a state mandate for site-based management, and the initial effort of the Collaborative was to encourage teachers, administrators, and parents work together at the school level to develop a team approach. Thus a Teams Leadership Institute held a central place in the work of the Collaborative from early on, and professional development for principals enjoyed high priority. Principals provide a vital link to parents and community, and they have been a key to building and maintaining school-level support for standards-based reform. With teacher quality a critical concern, the Collaborative worked closely with University's College of Education to align teacher preparation with school reform. UTEP became a member of John Goodlad's National Network for Educational Renewal, and the College restructured its teacher preparation to a field-based program, working more closely with and in the area's public schools. In recognizing school reform as a K-16 task, the Collaborative has also undertaken a Mathematics Alignment Initiative to integrate curriculum, assessment and instruction on an area-wide basis. This initiative brings together math, science, and engineering faculty from UTEP with instructors from the Community College and public school teachers to develop and put into practice a common framework of instruction. Collaboration is by no means restricted to matters of curriculum. The University's Center for Civic Engagement seeks to help area schools foster parent involvement.

In working with the three urban school districts (and in recently extending some of its activities to the smaller districts in the county), the Collaborative wants the schools to be active partners. The Collaborative conducts several kinds of professional development and, again parallel to Kent County, uses as one approach the development of a small cadre of teacher leaders who go back to work with their colleagues in their home schools but also maintain a wider network within the area. The Collaborative is a manifold force, serving as an ongoing fount of ideas, offering technical assistance in various forms, providing tangible resources through its success in grant seeking, and constituting a communication link to various elements of the wider community. The Collaborative also operates a series of year-long seminars and offers follow-through sessions as part of a Parent Engagement Network. The meetings of the Collaborative's board also provide a way to disseminate ideas and lay groundwork for high profile work. Because the Board meets on a regular basis and deliberates about priorities, it also serves as means for socializing newcomers, whether they be school

superintendents, the Lead Organizer for EPISO, chamber of commerce presidents, or a new head for the community college.

The Collaborative and its goal of systemic reform have been backed by major centers of institutional power in the community. Its board members are top officials in various organizations and institutions, and in February of 2000, the executive director of the Collaborative and a leading business figure co-chaired an Education Summit to bring together more than 300 participants – educators, parents, business people, government officials, and community representatives – to discuss ongoing challenges and consider steps for the future. Several task forces were created to pursue specific aims identified in Summit discussions. With the Collaborative as a continuing source of ideas, activities, and outreach, educational achievement remains a focal concern in the community, and the Collaborative is able to foster such initiatives as a recent effort, encompassing EPISO, UTEP, and the business sector, to increase the level of college enrollment in the community.

In a large and diverse community like El Paso, achieving and sustaining a shared understanding is no easy matter. For action to take place, someone needed to identify a crisis and frame it as a specific problem in need of urgent action. The convergent concerns of Natalicio, Navarro, and Larkin provided that framework, and data on student performance, dropouts, and low college enrollment made the problem specific and concrete. With Navarro's prior experience to draw on, the Collaborative provided a proven solution to fit the problem. As in the case of Kent County, state actions provided important context. Skillful framing is thus one important step -- identifying a problem broad enough to address concerns of a wide cross section of civic and other community actors, while being specific and detailed enough to show that action could make a difference.

Second, the initiating actors had high civic standing. It made a difference that the President of UTEP was not only head of a major institution in the city, but also someone of stature, widely recognized for her leadership and accomplishments. That the governing board of the newly formed Collaborative was both broadly representative and composed of important figures in the locality reinforced the credibility of the initiative. Credibility is also linked to another important factor, resources. Significantly, the El Paso Collaborative has enjoyed substantial corporate and foundation support that enables it to employ full-time professionals and, offer high-quality and focused professional development. Local nonprofits dealing with education and other issues of children and youth are often shoe-string operations in which the staff is caught in a squeeze of needing to cut corners and raise funds just to meet the payroll (McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman 1994). By contrast, the Collaborative operated from the beginning in a secure position with ample backing. Furthermore, being housed on a university campus not only provided important support, it also highlighted the Collaborative's professionalism and expertise. Following through on initial support from Coca Cola and Pew Charitable Trusts, funding from, among others, the National Science Foundation has provided money and additional credentialing.

With high success in obtaining grants, the Collaborative brings substantial resources into El Paso's three school districts. Moreover, from the beginning, the Collaborative has relied heavily on professional development, operating from a stance of working with teachers and administrators who face complex and demanding responsibilities. As in Kent County, professional pride is evoked. Developing civic capacity is not a matter of simply bringing key factors into alignment. It is a dynamic process that, at any given time, can go break down. Increasingly scarce resources, the allure of new and different calls for action, personal misunderstandings, the coming and going of central figures, or simply the erosion over time of important connections among people or between organizations – all are ways in which an initiative could lose force. It is important, therefore, to display continuing momentum. The Collaborative benefited greatly from the fact that its first program effort was fully embraced by one of the area's school superintendents, who committed his entire system to taking part from the beginning. That contributed to early drive, and substantial NSF funding along with such events as the Education Summit sustained momentum to give the Collaborative a now recognized place in the community.

Boston, Massachusetts

In the same population category as El Paso, Boston is another city with over a half million residents. Like El Paso, Boston has a sizable poverty population among its school children, with 71 percent eligible for federally assisted meals. But that figure derives partly from the fact that one quarter of the school-age children in Boston attend private schools or schools in the suburbs. Whereas El Paso is overwhelmingly Hispanic, Boston has a diverse school population, and runs programs for a total of seven language groups. Boston also has a white-majority electorate combined with its school population made up mainly of children of color.

For much of the latter half of the 20th century, Boston, with its changing student demography, provides an example of low civic capacity around education. In the post World War II era, Boston schools were noted first for their isolation from the community they served (Schrag 1967; see also Kozol 1967). The school system next went through a prolonged battle over school desegregation and busing, and, as a result, a federal judge assumed control (Lukas 1986; Formisano 1991). Racial and ethnic conflict, patronage and scandal, demagoguery by members of the city's elected school committee, and an inwardly focused school administration helped keep business at a distance and academic achievement levels in the background.

A mix of racial discord and public cynicism gave Boston's school system an unpromising heritage to overcome. Yet several factors converged to turn around school politics and make possible the building of civic capacity. First of all, when Judge W. Arthur Garrity took charge in a crisis time, he did not operate in isolation. As noted by one trio of authors, he "established a number of community support structures for the public schools" (Portz, Stein, and Jones 1999, p.86). These included a Citywide Coordinating Council to monitor compliance with the desegregation order, but also district advisory councils, racial-ethnic parent councils for each school, and an extensive

set of school-college and school-business partnerships.

A second significant turn was that Boston's business sector "recognized its growing need to have a literate and reliable workforce in an emerging high-tech economy" (Usdan and Cuban 2003, p.39). Business needed a comfortable platform for its involvement, and that came through its participation in job-training. The Boston business group, the Vault, had no infrastructure of staff and programs. But its involvement in the Private Industry Council (PIC) created under the federal Job Training Partnership Act "provided an independent umbrella for the development of business-school programs" (Portz, Stein, and Jones 1999, p.88). The PIC did possess staff, and became the entity for creating and housing the Boston Compact, initially an agreement between the school system and the business sector involving a pledge by business to provide summer jobs and hire graduates in exchange for a promise by the school district to bring about educational improvement. Though the Compact has had a somewhat rocky history over the years, it has focused attention on academic achievement and enlisted a growing number of partners – higher education, labor organizations (initially the building and trade unions and later the teachers union), the local public education fund, the Boston Human Services Coalition, and the Boston Cultural Partnerships. From early on, the goals of the Compact included that of increasing college enrollment among public school students.

Business funding, notably by the Bank of Boston, helped initiate the public education fund – the Boston Plan (short for the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools) – as a spin-off of the Compact. Among other activities, it was initially home to a scholarship and mentor program to boost college attendance among high school students, and that program – ACCESS – has itself now been spun-off as an autonomous operation.

It is not clear how much business involvement would have taken place anyway, but Judge Garrity played a key role, not only in bringing about a desegregation plan and ending that impasse, but he also helped spur the process of building civic capacity by pressuring "businesses, higher education institutions, community organizations, and parent to become more involved" (Portz, Stein, and Jones 1999, p. 89). Regardless of the initial motivation, business proved to be a willing participant for a crucial period and helped fill a vacuum as the judge diminished the federal presence.

However, even with an expansive business role, the enlistment of other partners, and the growth of the local education fund into one of the premier intermediaries in the nation, Boston's education politics still had to overcome a difficult history. Conflict centered in the elected school committee and frequent turnover in the office of superintendent perpetuated a pattern of "incessant political controversies" (Usdan and Cuban 2003, p.40). In reaction, business, seeing accountability as the central issue, came to play a major role in the move to replace the elected body with one appointed by the mayor. Thus realignment of governance proved to be a third crucial step. The move to an appointed school committee began with Mayor Raymond Flynn and was pushed forward eagerly by his successor, Thomas Menino.

Clearly mayoral leadership has become a keystone in sustaining and enlarging the move to reform public education in Boston. Still, as one author points out, the change in governance structure to one centered on the mayor's office was not the product of a single choice made at one point in time: "Far from being a quick process, the change that occurred in Boston was the result of a series of demands, responses, and changes that occurred over a 25-year period" (Yee 2003, p. 101).

The initial impetus for change came from an effort to give black students greater educational opportunity. Judge Garrity was concerned not only with desegregation, but also with school performance. Only later did business come to play a substantial role, and that may have receded somewhat in the past few years. With changes in pattern of ownership and management, business has become a more fragmented force in Boston, as in many other places. Yet the Compact survives, and it has gained in breadth of support. Although the emergence of mayoral leadership is the most visible change to occur in recent Boston, it should be seen in the context of a series of moves to replace an older system of provincial politics centered in the city's Irish Catholic population. Thus in Yee's account, the turn to strong, professionally minded superintendents is a key factor in the transition from an older body of arrangements (2003, p. 101). The creation of the Boston Plan as reform intermediary was a parallel move. It too has given focus to reform, as business supporters shifted their efforts from promoting innovation by funding individual classroom projects to support for systemic change. The Boston Plan's leadership and the superintendent's office, backed by a sizeable Annenberg grant, thus give the city a scope of professional capacity and vision, without which the mayor's leadership would amount to little. Mayoral leadership therefore needs to be seen as a factor in tandem with other factors. Menino's recruitment of Thomas Payzant in 1995 ended the revolving door for the office of superintendent, an action that was an important part of the reform realignment. From previous service as U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education and before that Superintendent of San Diego schools, Payzant had a reputation as a premiere education administrator, and his professional standing has also contributed to the reform alignment.

With the mayor's office as a pivot around which change has been accomplished, it is significant that the appointed school committee was affirmed by a 1996 referendum, with a 70-30 margin of approval (not counting abstentions). Nevertheless there is criticism that the school committee is not as attuned as it should be to the city's grassroots groups and to the African American community particularly. Be that as it may, the mayor provides political protection for the school committee and the superintendent. The mayor puts his leadership our front, saying in a state-of-the-city address: "I want to be judged as your mayor by what happens now in the Boston public schools" (quoted in Portz, Stein, and Jones 1999, p.100).

Still the legacy of the past has by no means disappeared and "the underlying infrastructure of collaboration in the city" remains less than rock solid (Portz, Stein, and Jones 1999, p.105). But the elements of mayoral leadership, business support, a top-notch education fund, and varied forms of parent and community involvement along with

a respected superintendent and the teachers union as an ally for school reform represent a substantial feat in building civic capacity.

However, in Boston, as in Kent County and El Paso, time is a very scarce commodity. A high level of commitment to raising academic achievement puts large demands on staff, and one pair of authors observes that “there persists the feeling that the school system is ‘drowning’ with all it has to do to improve instruction and student achievement” (Usdan and Cuban 2003, p.46).

As in Kent County and El Paso, state testing is an important feature of the context. Perhaps not surprisingly, the program of reform in Boston also resembles that in Kent County and El Paso. Academic achievement is a clearly recognized priority, and superintendent Payzant uses his Focus on Children initiative to push for comprehensive reform, with a special concentration on literacy, home-reading, math, and measurable gains. Professional development (largely school-based) around standards-based reform and improved classroom instruction is a central activity. Parent and community engagement are recognized goals and the system makes use of part-time liaisons in an effort to build a network of parents (Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools 2003, p. 20). Extra resources have come through a \$10 million Annenberg Grant matched by \$12 million from the private sector and a \$10 million commitment from the public sector. A thriving economy in the 1990s enabled the state to increase its education funding and add momentum to school reform. (A prolonged downturn in the national economy, has, however, now begun to take a toll.)

More than most places, Boston has made use of mayoral leadership to link the schools with health, youth development, and other social services (Usdan and Cuban 2003; Kirst and Bulkley 2003). The schools work with city’s Public Health Commission to offer services through school-based and community health clinics. The mayor has made after-school programs a major initiative, and the city has also assisted community-based organizations to expand pre-K programs. Community-based providers work with student-support coordinators to provide family-counseling and related services. Although the particulars of Boston differ greatly from Kent County and El Paso, some consistencies are present. The unified vision has been a factor in all three, with Boston going through the most turbulent process to reach a shared understanding. A school principal voiced the view that for school reform to take place “all the planets have to be lined up.” And a business leader expressed satisfaction that: “For the first time we have a mayor, a superintendent and a school committee singing from the same sheet of music” (both quoted in Portz, Stein, and Jones, p.98). Second, the shared understanding was felt with some urgency, in part provided by the state move to performance standards. In both in El Paso and Boston, business concern about an educated workforce contributed to urgency.

Extra resources also play an important part in all three places. In the case of Boston, the Annenberg grant provided a substantial boost, and it was accompanied by increased state and city funding. It should be noted, however, that resources by themselves can amount to little if they are not used in a focused manner. In Boston,

business contributions moved from scattered initiatives, from “projectitis,” to investment in an overall program of reform directed by the superintendent but also bolstered by the Boston Plan (Usdan and Cuban 2003, p.43). The superintendent in Kent County also provided central guidance both in raising money and in allocating it around the program of comprehensive reform. El Paso faced the challenge of multiple school districts, but the Collaborative has also played a central role in raising external funds and devoting them to systemic reform.

Finally, one can see that in all three cases multiple sectors take part in school reform. Pressure for change originated outside of the school systems, but in all three instances much of the reform effort is expended on enlisting front-line educators in a challenging but professionally rewarding endeavor and providing them with the capacity and techniques to respond to the learning needs of all children. This is a task that cannot be done as a matter of routine, and by all accounts cannot be done by teachers who work in isolation from one another. Thus coaching, mentoring, and collaboration were widespread practices, part of what the Kent County superintendent saw as “a deliberate strategy to build dynamic relationships” (Togneri and Lazarus 2003, p.20). All of this imposes extra time demands and can be sustained only if educators find their work professionally fulfilling. Professional satisfaction seems to be enhanced by taking part in an overall plan, one that involves a detailed program of action so that a shared aim is not simply a general and distant goal but something concrete and immediate in the work to be done on a daily basis.

Civic Derailment: A Philadelphia Story.

Though its population has declined to a million and a half, Philadelphia remains one of the nation's largest cities. As in El Paso and Boston, the school population is preponderantly children of color and poor. Like Boston, Philadelphia received an Annenberg grant, and also launched school reform with backing from the business sector. From there the similarity breaks down. Whereas Boston eventually worked its way through inter-group conflict and public cynicism to get on track, Philadelphia’s reform initiative derailed. The damage may not be permanent, as a reform effort continues to be mounted, but the civic disrepair was serious.

The context is important. Since 1950, Philadelphia has lost about one-third of its population and four-fifths of its manufacturing jobs. The city also has a high tax burden and receives a low level of assistance from the state, Pennsylvania being one of the weakest states in the nation in effort to equalize expenditure on education. Suburbs around Philadelphia offer higher salaries to teachers than the city does and spend considerably more per pupil. A recent study found that average starting salaries in the suburbs were \$3,500 higher than starting salaries in the city and average maximum salaries more than \$9,000 higher. Per pupil expenditures in the city were more than \$5,000 below some of the surrounding suburbs – cited in (Foley 2001, pp. 26-27).

The teacher’s union is strong and not averse to strikes, and the school bureaucracy and union displayed strong resistance to a major reform initiated under Constance

Clayton, superintendent from 1980 to 1992. That reform was also backed by business, it received a \$13million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts as well.

In 1994, a newspaper series highlighted a dismal performance by the school system. Mutual blame was commonplace. Business saw a weak school system as a major cause of the city's economic decline, but some community-based leaders "resented what they perceived as unrealistic expectations for public education" and "were angry that school bore the blame for deep-seated social ills" (Christman and Rhodes 2002, p. 15). A foundation study characterized the city's civic leadership as "disengaged" and caught up in a "pervasive defeatist mentality" (Cited in Christman and Rhodes 2002, p.14).

Yet the story is not entirely one sided. Under Mayor Ed Rendell (1992-2000) the city experienced a modest economic resurgence, and business and philanthropy established an important education intermediary, the Philadelphia Education Fund. Numerous other education and youth-related organizations populate the civic landscape, and business leaders have long been concerned about school performance. In this mix of forces came the appointment of David Hornbeck as superintendent in 1994. That event came very shortly after a 1993 state legislative decision to freeze the funding formula for local school districts. Adjusted for inflation, state assistance to Philadelphia schools declined by 5.9 percent over the next five years, one study found (Christman and Rhodes 2002, p. 11). In the fall of 1994, Thomas Ridge was elected governor, and he put his energy behind promoting a statewide program of vouchers, viewing the city school system as a hopeless cause.

Hornbeck was not a professional educator by background, but he had served as Education Commissioner in Maryland and was a principle architect of the elements of the widely touted Kentucky Education Reform Act. Drawing on his experience in Kentucky, Hornbeck initiated his reform plan, Children Achieving, in February 1995, and Philadelphia received a \$50 million Annenberg Challenge grant for a five-year period. The Annenberg grant was matched by \$100 million from Philadelphia businesses and foundations and from federal grants.

Children Achieving was a comprehensive approach aimed at reforming the system around the twin aims of achievement and equity, very much in line with the aims identified in Kent County, El Paso, and Boston. It was standards based, including the principle that all children can achieve at a high level with appropriate learning opportunities. Ongoing assessment and accountability, professional development, and, at least in rhetoric, parent and community engagement were important elements, again closely similar to the three communities described above. However, a close examination of parent engagement in Philadelphia showed that pursuit of parent and community involvement was quite limited, with the Superintendent preoccupied with mobilizing support behind his effort to obtain greater funding from the state. Staff development was a part of the Action Design of the initiative, but, in the circumstance of scarce resources, it also failed to get full attention.

Corporate and other civic leaders saw Hornbeck's initiative as an important vehicle for improving schools, and they provided not only matching funds for the

Annenberg Grant but also a business-created entity, Greater Philadelphia First, served as the home for the administration of the grant. Initial corporate enthusiasm was high, and Philadelphia moved quickly to raise the matching funds.

Early enthusiasm, however, did not last. Five years after the launching of Children Achieving, as the Annenberg Grant period was coming to a close, Superintendent Hornbeck resigned when he faced the prospect of his initiative being dismantled. How did reform get off track? An important fact is that school performance did improve initially in that five year period. Test scores went up, and there was greater public attention to education. In the aftermath, some observers complained that test scores did not go up fast enough and far enough. Yet, an analysis of test results showed that Philadelphia's performance not only went up, but also made more progress than other districts. On the face of it, Philadelphia's performance was stronger than Boston's in test-score improvement.

Philadelphia shows that a business/philanthropy/school superintendent coalition is not a sufficient base from which to launch and sustain comprehensive school reform. Two sources of conflict weakened even this base. One major conflict involved the city and the state. In Kentucky, where Hornbeck had promoted comprehensive reform with considerable success, the state made major increases in state funding. In Pennsylvania, Governor Ridge proved totally unresponsive to city pleas for more money. A board member of the Greater Philadelphia Fund recounted his conversation with the governor, in which he asked Ridge how they could "link arms" in reforming Philadelphia's schools. The response was that the governor saw the existing system as something that could not be fixed and that energy should go into "building an alternative system" (quoted in Boyd and Christman 2003, p.111). Ridge twice introduced but failed to get enacted statewide voucher plans. The funding impasse held throughout Ridge's tenure as governor. Teachers and principals also failed to join the reform coalition and widely resisted the accountability aspect of the reform. Some observers fault Hornbeck's approach. His version of systemic reform was to avoid incrementalism totally and go after everything at once. Even though this approach put everyone under pressure, a sustained effort to bring teachers and principals along did not materialize. In the view of some observers, the architects of change "often criticized teachers rather than attempting to win their support for reforms" (Christman, Corcoran, Foley, and Luhm 2003, p. 42). For their part, school officials saw the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers as adversarial and intransigent, often either unwilling to take part in meetings or obstructionist in those they did attend. (Foley 2001, p. 30). In turn, PFT saw Children Achieving as a threat and strongly objected to its accountability provision among others. A researcher reported that during "four years of meetings with and interviewing central office staff and PFT representatives, we did not hear a single positive comment from either group about the other" (Foley 2001, p. 31). When Hornbeck attempted to reconstitute two poorly performing high schools, school staff challenged the move and an external arbitrator found the process faulty because "the District failed to engage in the necessary consultation with the PFT" (Foley 2001, p. 30).

To make matters worse, flawed implementation included awkward sequencing,

with the accountability mechanism put in place before curriculum and professional development were established as support. Indeed, even though the Philadelphia Education Fund persuaded the central office that a capacity-building role was needed, scarce resources "limited the School District's ability to provide time for teachers and other District personnel to receive professional development, to develop curriculum, and to work with colleagues" (Foley 2001, p. 27). Scarcities of classroom materials aggravated the situation further.

In a climate of friction and misunderstanding, many principals and other administrators resisted various parts of the initiative and held back support during Hornbeck's battle with the state over more funding. The teachers union, in particular, made relations with the state and the business sector more difficult by giving no ground on key changes sought, from a longer school day to pay for performance. Failing to gain such concessions, the School District saw its standing with the business sector nosedive. Instead of moving toward calibration, "the planets" of reform stayed in serious misalignment. As the Annenberg grant approached its close, Governor Ridge proved to be ideologically unbending and Hornbeck by all accounts was undiplomatic and confrontational. When Ridge yielded nothing as state education aid continued to decline, school and city officials along with community leaders filed a lawsuit against the state (a successful suit in Kentucky had been a precipitating event in that states' embrace of school reform). The case in Pennsylvania was dismissed by the state Supreme Court, which held that funding decisions must be made by the legislature. The next year, Hornbeck threatened to adopt an unbalanced budget unless the state provided more money, and he and city officials filed a federal civil rights suit against the state, contending that its funding practices discriminated against school districts with large numbers of non-white students. The state responded by passing a state takeover law aimed at Philadelphia.

Further adding to the isolation of city and school officials, business support for Children Achieving eroded badly. Partly as a result of changes in the structure of banking and other corporate arrangements and partly as a result of an unresponsive state government, the Greater Philadelphia First board changed – by 2000 only four of the founding 23 CEO's remained. The days of early enthusiasm for Hornbeck's initiative gave way to a new political era; in March of 1999 board members of Greater Philadelphia First publicly endorsed Governor Ridge's second attempt to enact a statewide voucher plan.

One observer offered this comment: "David believed you could make a social contract with the business community, but he looked up and they were gone. I don't think the corporate community is playing a healthy, visible constructive role in public education. But they carry tremendous weight. It's a combination of factors. So few businesses are local now. And there are some leaders who came through the Archdiocese system. They want to keep taxes down and have vouchers" (quoted in Boyd and Christman 2003, p.109).

A study of Philadelphia by the Consortium for Policy Research and Education

offered a mixed assessment of Hornbeck's superintendency. He brought significant strengths to his position: "David Hornbeck was an attractive candidate for Philadelphia's superintendency. He brought star power as a national educational reform figure, and a passionate commitment to improving both urban schools and the life chances of poor students of color. He also had a strong belief that his systemic approach to school reform could turn around a poorly performing urban school system." (Christman and Rhodes 2002, p.57). Yet the study also found contradictions in Hornbeck's approach, and the superintendent's effort to be truly comprehensive and move on all fronts at once meant that building broad support and achieving a shared understanding suffered. In particular, the enlistment of teachers and principals came up short. Even central office and other supporters were a bit overwhelmed by the scope of what was being attempted; "reform overload" was a problem (Foley 2001, p. 21).

Business proved to be an unreliable ally, expecting a quick and dramatic turnaround, reluctant to do battle for enhanced state funding (and perhaps unwilling to put pressure on a Republican governor), and easily attracted to market-sounding solutions like vouchers. Against a backdrop of the city's fiscal squeeze, the launching of something as ambitious as Children Achieving" was a calculated risk that the Annenberg Challenge grant could be used to improve performance, and that improved performance would generate the political will to obtain increased funding either through the city, the courts, or the legislature" (Foley 2001, p. 26). The gamble failed, even with early test score gains.

Though the presence of parochial schools may have weakened the support of the city's business leadership for sustained reform of the public school system, the Boston example shows that the presence of parochial schools is not a sufficient stumbling block to account for the failure of civic capacity to be sustained behind reform. No single factor stands out as the source of the demise of Hornbeck's initiative. The superintendent's political skill can be faulted, but there is also no doubt that sustaining a coalition around school reform is particularly difficult "in the harsh circumstances of inadequate funding" (Christman and Rhodes 2002, p.57).

Context is indeed important. Declining assistance from the state was a major obstacle, and that has to be understood against the background of the political isolation of the city. Hornbeck may have played that isolation badly, even worsening it, but the friction between Mayor Street (taking office in 2000) and Governor Schweiker (who succeeded Ridge in 2001) suggests that the problem was more than a clash of personalities. It had deep partisan roots in the state-city relationship between Pennsylvania and Philadelphia.

Still, the crucial consideration is how context is played. Kent County is a small, non-metropolitan location without natural links to the larger discourse about school reform, but the county's school board went after a superintendent well connected to the state and to cosmopolitan channels of professional exchange. The superintendent was skillful in introducing new ideas and exposing Kent County educators to a wider world of practice. She paid especially close attention to front-line educators.

Like Philadelphia, El Paso faced a declining economy, but the architects of the Collaborative used that fact to frame an action agenda and give it urgency. Both the Collaborative's board and the Education Summit in 2000 brought educators and business people together around the unifying theme of public education's contribution to economic development and equity. In planning for the summit, a continuing clear focus on standards reform kept vouchers off the agenda when the topic emerged (Rodriguez and Staudt n.d.). That the Collaborative has a concrete and evolving program of action around which resources are garnered and distributed enables it to focus the community's concerns.

In 1999, when running for mayor, John Street organized an education summit in Philadelphia. But that summit occurred in the midst of an ongoing battle with the state, whereas the El Paso summit was able to enlist the state commissioner of education, among others, as a speaker of the summit. Perhaps most important, the El Paso summit was linked directly to an institutional capacity to act on an agenda of reform. Boston has a legacy of civic conflict and public cynicism perhaps equal to that of Philadelphia, but Mayor Menino has been able to buffer education leaders from that conflict and use his position to link city schools to services for children and their families in a general program of neighborhood development. In Philadelphia, for his part Superintendent Hornbeck sought to create a Family Resource Network, and also to address early childhood needs, but only with mixed success. He was able to get all-day kindergartens system-wide, but his early childhood initiative went unfunded. For Philadelphia, the resignation of Superintendent Hornbeck brought an end to Children Achieving, but Hornbeck's tenure perhaps contributes to a legacy on which new initiatives can build. As one community activist said: "I think the ability to have a running conversation about achievement for all kids for 4 years running is a huge accomplishment. I think that people on the street have something to say about the education crisis we're facing because of David's efforts. It gives us something to build on, but we have to remember that it takes a long time" (Boyd and Christman 2003, p.114). Yet there is no avoiding the harsh reality that, even though Hornbeck brought powerful ideas to bear, they proved not to be enough to carry the day.

The eventual derailment of Hornbeck's Children Achieving is one Philadelphia story. The Boston experience tells us that setbacks in building civic capacity need not be the final story. A different Philadelphia experience is certainly possible. The immediate follow-through was a new round of conflict over privatization in school management. A memorandum of October 22, 2001, from Peter D. Hart Research Associates to ACORN, reported strong citizen support for change but opposition to bringing in private management; only 24 percent favored hiring a private firm, whereas 71 percent said that "the city should bring together parents, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders to develop a school improvement plan." With Rendell as governor, state/city politics are in line for change, but declining state and city revenues pose a new threat. The times are not always propitious for comprehensive and far-reaching plans of school improvement.

Discussion

Across the four jurisdictions examined here, significant actors set in motion an out-of-the ordinary process to tackle the problem of weak academic achievement. These local efforts took place in a national climate of concern and activity around school improvement. State testing also figured as a particular factor of importance. Yet in many places faced with the same national climate and state pressures to perform, people go about business as usual. They concern themselves with matters at hand and leave education to the educators, and, with a little tinkering here and there, educators pursue established patterns of action.

Why some localities and not others mobilize to launch a special effort to improve their schools is not an easy question. Structural conditions offer no ready answer. Human agency appears to be a large factor. Someone or some group defines the situation as urgent, setting the process in motion; and, because mobilizing efforts may be stretched over an extended time, others may enter the picture in important ways, giving the process a sustaining momentum.

The source of leadership (agency) follows no obvious pattern. In Kent County, the school board was an important initiator. In El Paso, a community organizer joined by a university president and an experienced advocate of school reform had a central role. In Philadelphia, the business and philanthropic communities stand out as key actors. In Boston, the process started with a federal judge, was picked up at a crucial stage by business leaders, and also saw the mayor emerge as the capstone figure in a drawn-out process of bringing an effective coalition together.

Collectively the four cases tell us that bringing together a reform coalition involves much more than just an early, launching phase; it is an ongoing process. Movement toward a shared understanding is contingent. Early progress can be lost if not reinforced in various ways. In Philadelphia, for example, resistance among front-line educators hardened as reform unfolded. A change in partisan control of the state government left the city politically isolated, and once enthusiastic support from the business sector evaporated. However, it is also the case that a legacy of conflict can be overcome as in Boston. That, significantly, was not an abrupt about-face, but a shift that took years and involved a restructuring of the governance system for city schools. Sustaining a mobilization requires resources, lots of them and resources of various kinds. While needed resources come in multiple forms, financial resources always hold a prominent place. None of the four places could have sustained a reform effort without extra funding, and Philadelphia's fiscal squeeze was perhaps a controlling factor in the demise of its reform initiative. In Kent County, the superintendent brought proposal-writing experience to a place previously off the grant-seeking track, and the external funds brought in by the superintendent and those she trained in writing proposals were vital to the reform effort. In El Paso, the Collaborative is the major channel of external funds into that city, and the Collaborative's staff has a demonstrated proficiency in obtaining large foundation grants. Annenberg awards were significant factors in both Boston and Philadelphia.

Staff development is particularly dependent on special funding in order to occupy its important place in school reform. School districts can generate some flexibility in finances by reallocation, but not a great deal – not enough to provide the scope of professional development and released time for collaboration needed to carry on an effective reform initiative.

Mobilization of a reform coalition merges into the other aspect of building civic capacity, in particular achieving a shared understanding of the issue being addressed. A shared understanding is a dynamic matter, with many levels. It involves first off defining the key issue in such a way that it can attract a supporting coalition. Members of a coalition are unlikely to have identical views, but their understandings need to be shared to the extent that members see themselves working on the same agenda – even if they attach varying priorities to different aspects of that agenda. Defining the issue is, then, crucial to mobilizing support. However, Philadelphia shows that, although big and appealing ideas are helpful to launch an initiative, they are not enough to sustain it. Thus an initial issue definition is only a beginning. To be sustained an issue needs to be linked to a program of action, and the program of action can be a means by which a shared understanding is either expanded, as in Kent County and El Paso, or dissipated as in Philadelphia. Because educators are themselves essential partners in a reform coalition, staff development occupies a vital place in the reform process. External relations are also critical, as illustrated in Superintendent Hornbeck's failure to make a vital connection to the state government.

It is not enough, however, to have a plan of action; it also has to be adapted and implemented so that it connects people in a productive way. Philadelphia suffered from significant implementation problems, whereas small Kent County's superintendent orchestrated that locality's reform initiative with great finesse. She was able to evoke a high level of professional pride among her staff, while in Philadelphia by contrast staff resentments seemed to multiply.

The capacity of a reform coalition depends on its membership and the resources they can bring to bear. In all four cases presented here, the focus of the initiative was to strengthen instruction. For that reason, front-line educators were essential members. In Philadelphia, where they were reluctant participants, the reform initiative faltered. Boston has had mixed, but perhaps increasing success in enlisting front-line educators. That the teachers union is a member of the Compact is a significant indicator. Kent County and El Paso's Collaborative have been centered on enlisting front-line educators. Various partners make different contributions. With the mayor as a central figure in Boston, that city has built significant ties between the schools and health, youth, and social service agencies.

Aside from being a source of extra financial support, business provides civic legitimacy. Its backing may serve to signal that an initiative addresses a matter of community-wide concern. Occasionally business plays an important role in elections. Boston business, for example, was the principal backer of the campaign to keep an

appointed school committee and not revert to an elected body. Business can also play a mediating role, as it did in Philadelphia when Mayor Street and Governor Schweiker were at loggerheads over a state takeover, in the aftermath of Hornbeck's superintendency. Yet, particularly under today's corporate structure, business commitment to reform is typically unsteady, and, without an intermediary organization as an anchor, cannot be counted on for the long term. Business executives expect quick results, and often have pet ideas like outsourcing that may have a tenuous connection at best to academic performance. From a Philadelphia community leader comes the observation that "business leaders' orientation made it difficult for them to be patient and persist in the face of serious social problems" (paraphrased in Christman and Rhodes 2002, p. 47). El Paso has had significant business engagement across a range of particular issues and a prominent business leader was co-chair of the Education Summit, but in Philadelphia, tellingly, business leaders interacted little with other stakeholders (Christman and Rhodes 2002, p. 47). Yet, when their support for Hornbeck eroded, his position became untenable.

As studies have found in many different localities, the weak link in civic engagement around school reform is parent participation. In five jurisdictions studied by the Learning First Alliance, "districts left parent engagement primarily to school-level staff. Schools included parents on leadership committees, distributed newsletters to parents, and conducted homework nights that included parents, children, and teachers. However, these efforts were generally not systematic, and districts had not developed significant policies and practices related to parent involvement" (Togneri and Anderson 2003, pp. 45-46). Yet in all four cases presented here, increased parent involvement was an aim on the reform agenda and, in most instances, some significant steps were taken to pursue that aim. In no case, however, was parent participation the central force behind school reform.

Some reformers assume that parents represent a form of democratic energy that needs only to be released. However, "release" turns out to be a complex process in which parent engagement may take shape only if nurtured along carefully. In this process, educators often have a determining part to fill and intermediaries and community organizations may also play a vital role. For those parents whose history has contained little experience in civic engagement, leadership development may be an essential step (Warren 2001).

Accountability measures may serve to complicate parent participation. In Philadelphia, Hornbeck's Performance Review Index served only to heighten anxiety about "outsiders." A Philadelphia study concluded: "most educators did not perceive parents as critical to raising test scores" (Gold et al 2001, p. 15). Quite the contrary, as educators find their performance under scrutiny, they may be reluctant to complicate their work by taking on active partnership with parents and others. The difficulty of constructing front-line partnerships is easily underestimated. In the instance of Philadelphia, the superintendent's reform blueprint "did not take account of how deeply unsettling shifting the power among schools, parents, and community would be to many principals and teachers" (Gold et al 2001, p. 12). The teachers union regarded even the

step of establishing school councils as a sign of the superintendent's "disregard for teachers and their professional integrity" (Gold et al 2001, p. 13).

For lower-income parents, often unaccustomed to asserting themselves with professionals in positions of authority, an unwelcoming manner by educators can end the process. Even aside from barriers of mutual mistrust and apprehension, school-parent relations have to overcome a tradition that defines "parent involvement as fundraising and volunteerism" (Gold et al 2001, p. 19).

A two-fold process may be needed -- one to orient parents toward participation in broader ways and the second to direct educators along the path toward embracing what Lisbeth Schorr calls "a new form of professional practice" (1997, p. 12). However, in Philadelphia, top school officials failed to incorporate into professional development the practice of working with parents and viewing them as assets in the education of children. In some cases intermediaries have at least partially filled that gap. El Paso's Collaborative, for example, has incorporated parent engagement into its agenda, and the Boston Plan also works on parent-educator collaboration. During the period of Children Achieving, Philadelphia had two intermediaries, AOP (the Alliance Organizing Project) and TAPAS (Teachers and Parents and Students)) working to establish new relationships between parents and schools, and they had some successes. But these rested on selective instances in which school-site educators were receptive and special external funding provided support for outreach and organizing.

A close examination of one such experience, that of the Watkins Elementary School, is nevertheless revealing. AOP provided a community organizer to work with the school as part of a broader strategy of strengthening lower-income neighborhoods. The school was performing relatively well, but the principal, after some initial reluctance, proved open to the idea that parents might provide him, as he put it, "with another level of support" (Gold et al 2001, p. 23). With the assistance from the school counselor, the organizer found a small group of parents as a starting base, and then she used one-on-one meetings to expand the circle of participants. When these parents identified concerns, safety emerged at the top of the list. And restoring some of the crossing guards cut in recent economy moves became the solution they settled on and around which they worked with parent groups at other schools. A few teachers joined the "public action" as well. With success on that matter, the parents moved on to the issue of an after-school program. Initially rebuffed by a no-resources response from the principal, they turned to the idea of a parent-run Homework Club in an after-school time. The aim was academic enrichment, and the principal consented to the use of school facilities. The Philadelphia Education Fund provided training and assistance in writing what proved to be a successful funding proposal. Some teachers began to cooperate by opening their classroom materials for use and by referring students with need for assistance, and soon a "small group of teachers and parents were working together in new ways" Gold et al 2001, p. 30). Parents gained skill and confidence working with the students, and teachers saw the parents in a new light.

The example is a small and unrepresentative one in the large picture of

Philadelphia schools, but it shows that participation by parents can make substantive contributions to academic achievement, not just for their own children, but in shaping the climate for learning at the school level. In addition, parent engagement brings a wider set of concerns to bear, and can contribute needed "local knowledge." Moreover, "questions of societal inequities are often pushed to the surface" (Gold et al 2001, p. 47).

The scarce role for non-educators is thus not a matter that they have little to contribute, but rather that the transition from past to new practice requires mid-wifery, with substantial effort, skill, and resources. Parent engagement is itself a form of resource, but, as is often the case, it takes resources to generate resources. And it requires looking beyond the classroom.

Overall, it is important to remember that not all resources are of a material kind. The expertise of educators, the political skill of central figures, proficiency in specialized matters such as proposal writing, and legitimacy and credibility generated by the coalition membership are also part of the mix. Although inadequately tapped, the local effort and insight that parents can contribute and deepen the impact of school reform as well. The task of school reform is formidable; it involves changing expectations, increasing commitments, and expanding efforts.

The barriers to building civic capacity are those factors that stand in the way of developing a shared understanding, mobilizing cross-sector allies, and backing the process with sufficient resources. Inter-group distrust, cynicism about the value and viability of a community-minded effort, ideological and partisan dogma, protection of occupational turf, and reluctance to give up established routines stand out as barriers to be overcome. When they are overcome, it is not because they vanish from the scene but because well-positioned actors can focus attention on a major community challenge to be tackled and evoke variously a sense of civic responsibility, feelings of professional accomplishment, fulfillment through involvement in a worthy cause, and pride in being a good corporate citizens. Enlisting and retaining coalition members by bringing them to this point involves a combination of a big-picture vision, a detailed plan of action, material resources to underwrite new ways of doing things, and a combination of resources and actions sufficient to give an initiative believability as a process that will work. Part of the process may involve venues or channels of interaction that take people out of their routines in order to underscore the larger significance of what they are about. Although the four cases in the condensed versions provided here can give only brief illustrations of civic capacity at work, they do show something of what is possible and of the dynamics of the process. The frequency with which case studies refer to actors who talk about the planets being aligned (or similar metaphors) is an indication that building civic capacity is not about business as usual but about an uncommon convergence of actions. The encouraging fact is that convergences do occur.

Conclusion: Civic Capacity and Local Democracy

At an abstract level, key elements in building civic capacity may sound formulaic: a shared definition or understanding of a problem as an agenda for action, combined with cross-sector mobilization of a coalition, yielding a proper mix and amount of resources,

and executed through an appropriate and detailed plan. However, the process is more organic than this statement conveys. A community's problem-solving capacity has to do fundamentally with relationships – with who is included and on what terms. Moreover, for education particularly, a full capacity rests on what is in reality a democratic foundation, that is to say, a full capacity includes all stakeholders, parents and frontline educators among them. Thus building civic capacity may involve more than making use of existing relationships; it may mean shaping new ones.

Every community has central pillars of institutional power. The school system is one, and city or county government is another. Usually the business sector is another, operating partly through informal connections and associations, but also often organized through such bodies as the chamber of commerce or a downtown business group, like the Vault in Boston. In many instances, with its substantial resources, the business sector organizes special entities for particular projects or issue areas, for example, Greater Philadelphia First. Business executives also play a leading role in the nonprofit world through serving on various boards and heading fund drives. A leading sociologist directs attention to "one of the most complex issues in the study of American local government – the phenomenon of the businessmen and others who, without holding formal office, make up a civic elite that influences the government's actions" (Crain 1968, p. 356). Focused on the politics of school desegregation in an earlier era, this same study observed that "the question is not can the elite influence the desegregation decision, but does it want to do so" (Crain 1968, p. 319).

A similar observation can be made of the current move for school reform. Business often plays a central role, but may also be disengaged or move back and forth between higher and lower levels of engagement. A recent study of six major cities finds school reform backed by a coalition of city hall, top education officials, and business, but also notes that in some cities there is an ebb and flow of business involvement (Cuban and Usdan 2003).

Each institutional sector can possess a complex form. The school system is more than its central office leadership, and unions in particular may be an autonomous factor. The business community may have significant and lasting factions. Foundations or universities and hospitals can have an independent presence and be significant players on some matters. As in the case of Pennsylvania, state government may exercise its legal power to alter governing arrangements in the locality.

The connection between the local electorate and both city hall and school board can be complicated. In New Haven's much studied executive-centered coalition of an earlier era, Mayor Richard Lee created a parallel administrative structure to pursue urban development without the incursion of the city's patronage and ward-based politics (Dahl 1961; Wolfinger 1974). In contemporary Dallas, that city's racial and ethnic politics have generated a fractious form of education politics that makes direction of the school system difficult. And it was the conflict-ridden politics of Boston's selected school committee that led to mayoral control through an appointed committee.

Neighborhood centers of activity are diffuse, but sometimes center on schools and may link in effectively with the school board and school administrators, as in the Houston neighborhood mentioned early in the chapter. Citywide PTAs and related organizations tend to have a class skew because middle-class areas are more likely to have active chapters. The neighborhood role in city politics varies widely from place to place, and it may follow an intricate path. In Boston, the appointed school committee was reaffirmed decisively in a city referendum partly because Mayor Menino also had neighborhood-improvement and youth-oriented initiatives, including after-school programs. These initiatives linked city hall with church and other neighborhood leaders and provided the mayor with helpful allies. The ability of central figures to enlist support for a major initiative may thus depend on networks that can be brought into play. It is not enough to have, as was the case in Philadelphia, the backing of the school superintendent, city hall, the business sector, and a major philanthropy. No doubt these were necessary, but they were not sufficient.

It is also not enough to have the excitement of big ideas touted by a nationally prominent appointee, as again Philadelphia's experience shows. Ideas are important, but they have little staying power if they stand alone. Ideas are, of course, important when given concrete form as a purpose, as a problem to be addressed. How that purpose is framed has a major bearing on who takes part in a coalition. El Paso's Collaborative, both in its founding and in the subsequent Education Summit, maintains its dual concerns of responding to a changing economy and equity for the region's Hispanic and other minority populations. Hence big ideas are important, but they also need concrete expression in order to be sustained. They need as well constituencies who have connecting links. For that reason, the Collaborative operates a Parent Engagement seminar as a way of creating a network of involved parents.

The seminar connects parents with school staff and instructs parents in how to assess school performance and press for needed improvements for their children. The Collaborative, along with UTEP and EPISO, has also undertaken a campaign to increase college enrollment among students from households with limited education. The campaign involves providing information, including information about scholarships and financial assistance. But it is also directed at raising academic aspirations and connecting them to entry into the workforce of a changing economy. The aim is to bring academic achievement to the personal level and make it part of everyday life. That, however, may need more than an information campaign.

In Cuban and Usdan's work on school reform, they express concern about the "shallow roots" of many top-down reforms focused on standards and accountability. They note that improved performance for high schools has been a particularly difficult goal to attain. They worry especially about the adequacy of a "schools-alone" approach, and, in a general observation, they claim: "Evidence of substantial parent and teacher approval and shifts in classroom practice has yet to emerge" (Cuban and Usdan 2003, p. 160). Their position is that, powerful as the current reforms may be, their lasting impact on academic achievement is likely to be minimal unless they also enlist bottom-up partners. A mobilization of civic capacity that lacks the front-line participation of

teachers, parents, and others who shape the peer-group climate among students, especially those of high-school age, is certain to be an incomplete capacity. Without question, elite actors and the matters that occupy their attention are important, but they are not enough.

As community organizers would tell us, local democracy is not mere window dressing, but an essential element to make school reform effective. If we think about democracy, not in a narrow majoritarian way but in a broader sense, then the qualifying criteria include that of a process in which all segments of society are in a position to see that their concerns are addressed (Crick 1993; see also Fung 2003). The actions of civic elites and governmental institutions standing alone do not meet that criterion. The ballot box, important as it may be, does not meet it either. People of lesser-income need means to be connected to school reform as well as other matters close to home. The experience of the Watkins Elementary School in Philadelphia is instructive. The AOP effort created a circumstance for adult education and citizenship development:

"parents learned how to research an issue of concern; they were trained in classroom management, instruction, and curriculum; they learned to write funding proposals; they gained the confidence to interview public officials; they led public meetings; and they created a political campaign to focus attention on their children's needs. The AOP organizing process provided parents the opportunity to learn the skills of civic participation" (Gold et al 2001, p. 30)

A few years ago, Irene Sterling, the Executive Director of the Paterson (New Jersey) Education Fund, offered an observation about the evolution of school reform from her experience. She said the first stage was providing small grants to encourage innovation in the classroom. The next step was to promote school-wide changes in climate and culture. The then current aim was to bring about district reform. But, she added, the next move needed was to link school reform and community development. In other words, a schools-alone approach is insufficient to fully succeed in turning around academic performances.

Lower-income communities need to play an active part, and, as in the case of the Watkins Elementary School, become contributing partners. Until that happens, reform will be incomplete, local democracy will remain in a diminished state, and students in schools that serve marginalized communities will find the promise of democracy to be outside their experience.