

Ten Principles for School Improvement

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1. Poor children and youth need and deserve educational quality, including routine access to qualified teachers; acceptable class sizes; high standards and expectations; good school facilities; up-to-date equipment; and health-enhancing school environments.

Policy Need: *Public School finance in New York State needs to be reconstructed so that a more equitable means of distributing financial resources to schools can be developed, including special incentives and rewards for highly qualified educators and school-linked, social-health service providers.*

2. Race, ethnicity, gender, and cultural heritage matter in the education and lives of poor children and youth, and they are vital assets for curriculum, instruction, and parent involvement.

Policy Need: *Racial, gender, and cultural heritage studies should be made part of the core curriculum of K-12 schools. The information should be infused throughout the curriculum and emphasized continuously in reading, writing, and social studies lessons and courses. Funds should be made available to strengthen these offerings and to promote programs that celebrate the heritage of various racial groups and the experiences of women.*

3. Poor children need and deserve a fair and even start, including family supports at birth and early childhood development and enrichment programs.

Policy Need: *Develop a policy initiative to establish Early Childhood Development Centers in every distressed community; and, to ensure systemic screening of children entering kindergarten to facilitate early intervention and prevention strategies. The programs would be flexible and designed to fit the specific needs of the community. They would deliver direct services to children and families in both formal and informal settings. The programs would focus on varied services to children and provide educational and training services for parents and teachers.*

4. Student transience and, in turn, high turnover among teachers, principals, and other staff limit academic achievement and school improvement; and therefore, school leaders must implement proven methods for supporting and stabilizing families and engaging parents in the life of schools.

Policy Need: *Establishing, effective models for family-supportive community schools, which are tailored to the needs and assets of distressed neighborhoods, should become a top policy priority. These specially designed public schools will serve as learning-rich and health-enhancing environments for children, youth, and families, anchoring and stabilizing the school and its neighborhood community. Schools and school districts should have the option to replicate successful Beacon schools in New York City—schools that serve children and adults “24-7.” Policy incentives should include governance structures that are inclusive of parents and resident leaders; and supports for after school an evening programs that meet the needs of children, youth, and adults, especially needs for pathways into higher education.*

5. Family and community resources for learning, healthy development, and improved academic achievement are vital to school improvement; and therefore, school leaders must form

mutually beneficial partnerships with families, social and health service agencies, neighborhood organizations, faith-based communities, and local businesses.

Policy Need: *School development zones should be established in concert with empowerment and enterprise zones. Broad-based community coalitions consisting of businesses, institutions, organizations, faith-based institutions and other groups that would assist schools to acquire the resources needed to bolster their development and to benefit from linkages with organizations that serve children and their families. Various incentives should be developed that would encourage the participation of these entities in these coalitions, including incentives that support linkage agents who connect schools and other organizations serving children and families.*

6. Poor children and youth need after school and summer enrichment programs, including job development and school-to-work opportunities and special initiatives fostered by faith communities, colleges, and universities.

Policy Needs: *Policies in support of universal after school and summer enrichment programs in both school and non-school settings are essential, including special learning and development supports for children and youth who are suspended and expelled; and who have dropped out of school.*

7. Post-secondary education is vital for employment in the new economy and for effective citizenship, and poor children and youth need pathways to success, including resources and supports that enable access to higher education, while discouraging dropping out of school.

Policy Needs: *Initiatives should be established that provide incentives and long term supports for community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities to engage in long term partnerships with distressed neighborhood communities and their schools. These learning-focused partnerships will emphasize transitional supports and easy articulations spanning preschools through the community college and baccalaureate degrees. The core idea is create communities where knowledge and learning were viewed as vital cultural components designed to help people obtain control over their lives and communities, with higher education institutions serving as vital resources to these people, their schools, and community organizations. Model programs would be developed and then replicated in other communities.*

8. Access to computer technologies is vital to the school improvement, effective citizenship, and neighborhood development; and therefore, school leaders must work with community leaders to bridge “the digital divide.”

Policy Needs: *Students not only need to learn how to use computers, but also to develop systems that enable advanced technology help attack neighborhood problems. Community technology centers should be established in schools located in distressed neighborhoods. Such centers should be designed to provide neighborhoods with a variety of services. Children learning how to use the system should be engaged as teachers who will help train neighborhood residents on their use. Special tax incentives should be provided for local companies that will adopt schools and help them establish technology centers. Banks participating in the New York State School Construction project should be required to use the interest made off state deposits to invest in these technology centers.*

9. Health-enhancing, safe schools depend fundamentally on the safety, security, and vitality of local neighborhood communities; and therefore, school improvement must proceed in concert with neighborhood revitalization and community development

Policy Needs: *Programs must be developed that link community revitalization to school reform. One place to start is with leadership development initiatives for superintendents, principals, planners, social workers, and community developers—who need competencies to develop these links. Another is to provide incentives that encourage municipalities must work in concert with neighborhood groups and schools to develop neighborhood redevelopment programs that are linked to school reform. Both the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development should be encouraged to initiate demonstration projects that create model programs linking community development to school reform.*

10. Where poor communities are concerned, school improvement is inseparable from other challenges involving health, economic development, housing, family support, and crime prevention; and therefore, policies and funding streams must support new problem solving strategies, including approaches that address several problems simultaneously

Policy Needs: *Initiatives need to be established to foster cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among institutions needed to bolster school improvement. Legislation should be enacted that encourages, facilitates, and rewards such interaction among institutions and organization critical to school improvement.*