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Session Discussion

Session Title:
Strategic Interventions in School Reform:
Lessons from Schools that Are Closing the Racial Achievement Gap
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Once again the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative is leading the way for the nation in teaching, learning and schooling.

You have received four very rich reports this afternoon. There is a lot of information to absorb. I want to focus on just one common theme: the intelligent [and xx ((can't read))] use of data to drive decision-making.

I've been asked to comment from the philanthropic perspective. I'm pleased to say that this kind of focus on student work, assessment and collaborative teacher-based research is exactly the direction that school reform needs to move toward, and that my reading of the philanthropic community is that it is prepared to support efforts like this.

But what is "data" as a concept?

One of the first landmark cases using quantitative data was the Jim Coleman Report. He studied 600,000 children at 4,000 schools. Still, Coleman got it all wrong. And Jencks got it only partly right.

Both relied on data. But the data they had was limited. Coleman used census data. They did not have the sophisticated data linked to individual student per individual teachers. So they missed the headline buried in their data sets. In fact, only on pp. 22-24 of Coleman's voluminous work does he write: "...The quality of the teacher has a significant correlation with student performance gains." So issues emerge from the data seen.

The renewed emphasis on teacher quality arose directly from increasingly sophisticated use of data as we move from Coleman and Jencks to Sanders and others.

In the 1980's and 1990's, education ski-rocketed to the top of the political agenda. There was the classic Tennessee value-added assessment study of Bill Sanders. Sanders' piece was the first to point up that *the quality of the teacher is the single most important factor in student achievement.*

This finding highlighted the need to look at student work. The problem with teacher quality research has often been that it was largely based on anecdotal evidence in which teachers were not involved. A different picture emerges where the evidence is actual student performance linked to individual teachers. We need now to determine what is going on in the classrooms of effective teachers and around collaborative work, which we know is key.

What we already know: When teachers get to work with student performance data, they respond positively. E.g. in the survey among teachers conducted by BASRC, in response to the open ended question, 60% of teachers cited use of data as the most important way to close achievement gaps. They continually referred to use of “diagnostic assessments” or “multiple measures of assessment.”

Collective work, based on data

There is consistent evidence that, when teachers are given common planning time focused on using measures of student performance, student performance improves. We need more of this. We need more systematic work in this area. We need more detailed work. What are high performing schools and teachers doing? e.g., how did schools achieve a common metric? What data do they use? How do they look at student achievement gains? What did it take for them to develop a common reliable system of measuring?

In one of our Schools for a New Society sites, it took more than a year to determine within the same system whether all of the schools were using the same measure for which students were completing middle school and going on to high school.

Or consider high school drop out rates....no one really knows what the rates are, or how to compare them.

Let me give you a simple question: How many U.S. citizens complete a high school education by age 20? How many U.S citizens are high school graduates?

These may be complex questions to answer, but they are not impossible. Yet right now we've not answered them.

There is pay off in programs that are sophisticated in their data use. By helping schools do this work you help schools learn important characteristics of the schools themselves.

Summary

I want to have time for questions, so let me summarize. You've heard, making good use of data, especially focusing on student performance, is a reliable way to improve school performance, increase the quality of teaching, and help the school community learn important characteristics about itself that can help it *lead* toward a better future.

Such developments are timely. The research community and philanthropies will be responding positively.

Right here in this convention city, the University of California San Diego has instituted a new doctoral program in teaching and learning. It is aimed at preparing leaders to work analytically and intelligently with the use of data in the schools.

- The Joyce Foundation focuses on teacher quality;
- The Lumina Foundation is involved in access of underrepresented groups to higher education;
- Spencer has decided to focus on Research aimed at understanding teacher quality and school improvement; Ford, Annenberg and Rockefeller are doing similarly;
- Carnegie Corporation of New York with its Teachers for a New Era program focuses its support on valued-added assessment and evidence-based decision making.

Thanks to the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative for its valuable contribution.

Addendum:

Two comments from Dr. Fallon in discussion:

- Foundations aim to be incubators rather than oxygen tanks.
- We are trying to make all the dollars green.