Every Child, Every School: Lessons from Chicago's Partnership for Instructional Leadership

A report on a three-year project of Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, Chicago Public Schools, and Targeted Leadership Consulting, to help schools build Pre-K–8 success from within.

Business and Professional People
for the Public Interest

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Acknowledgments

Foreword

In the nation's current introspection about its public education system, much attention is rightly paid to the question of scale. Will a proposed reform, however effective it may be in a single school, work "at scale"— that is, for a group of schools or an entire district?

In this report, Business and Professional People for the Public Interest recounts an experience that is promising in this regard. A group of Chicago neighborhood schools explored a path that schools rarely undertake—working together. They didn't happen upon a magic pedagogical or curricular bullet. Neither were they visited by Superman, or favored with a massive philanthropic infusion. Instead they looked within.

Their key resource turned out to be themselves—existing faculty and staff— intellectually powered, however, with a new idea.

The idea was a "Framework"—a multifaceted, multi-year approach to school reform, unified by a single focus, developed by a national education consulting organization, Targeted Leadership Consulting—that has shown much promise elsewhere, including in an entire district in California. (The TLC Framework bears a strong resemblance to the principles employed in what is perhaps the most hopeful story in American public education today—the near-miraculous achievements of the country's 16th largest school district, Montgomery County, Maryland.)

The keystone of the TLC Framework is cultural change—developing a collaborative culture of shared leadership. Upon the keystone it is then possible to lay other stones, such as improving instruction, using data effectively, partnering with parents and community, and the like.

The mortar that holds the stones together is a selected area of instructional focus, for example, reading comprehension, to which all else is related and upon which all Framework activities for several years—training, collaborative discussion, data gathering, and so on—are connected. Teaching children to read, progressively better and better, from Pre-K through eighth grade, becomes the mantra of the school, the lodestar guiding all Framework activities, and the goal a unified faculty and staff holds itself collectively responsible for reaching.

The Partnership for Instructional Leadership, as the group of participating schools calls itself, is very much a work in progress. Triumphant notes from the orchestra pit are premature. Yet for those who are frustrated by the state of public education in Chicago, and despair of finding a practical, doable way to do something about it for all—not just a select few—schools, these pages offer promising food for thought.

BPI invites you to read on.

E. Hoy McConnell, II
Executive Director

Executive Summary

The Partnership for Instructional Leadership

Too many students in Chicago Public Schools are performing below—often far below—grade level. Ideally, all students should be increasing their subject matter knowledge and critical thinking skills over time. In September 2008 a three-year initiative, the Partnership for Instructional Leadership, was created to help a group of neighborhood elementary schools in Chicago Public Schools Area 4, on the city's Northwest Side, build the internal capacity to improve school achievement for all students at all grade levels, including Pre-K and English Language Learners.

Drawing upon educational research and its own experience, Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI) formed the Partnership. In addition to BPI, partners included principals, teachers, and parents from the participating schools as well as an educational consultant and CPS Area 4. Each participating school adopted a common "Framework"—a multifaceted, multi-year approach to school improvement, unified by a single curricular focus. Originally developed by Targeted Leadership Consulting, a national education consulting organization, the Framework has shown much promise in a number of school districts across the country.

In implementing the Framework, all instructional activities at all grade levels—training, collaborative discussion, data gathering, and so on—are connected over a period of several years to the chosen curricular focus. Schools received special coaching to help them become "learning organizations," equipping faculty and staff to ask difficult questions, while providing mutual support and holding each other collectively accountable for improved student learning. Each school worked to build its own capacity for professional learning, collaboration, and shared, accountable leadership, with students, parents, and the larger community playing important roles.

Premise

The premise of the Partnership is that when faculty and staff of a school are united by a shared goal with a coherent instructional focus, and are engaged with the parental and larger communities, student learning will increase and be sustained.

Learnings

Over the course of three years, the Partnership was implemented in 11 elementary schools—six for the full three years with five more schools joining in the third year. Significant outcomes and learnings emerge from the Partnership experience:

- **The Partnership framework provides a system schools can employ to respond to the pressure to increase student learning in every classroom.**
Participating schools made significant progress across a number of domains. Their focus on students grew and deepened. They began using data much more effectively. There was a considerable increase in curricular coherence and teaching consistency. Schools strengthened their professional cultures and showed progress toward their goals. Teachers and other partners noted a difference in their schools' work and in their students.

- **With support, the Partnership Framework can be effectively integrated into school processes and over time become self-sustaining.**
The Partnership is designed to be manageable and well-paced, moving schools into action promptly, with full implementation unfolding over three years. Over time the schools took increased ownership for their own improvement and needed less external support.

- **Selecting a single area of instructional focus for multiple years of work helps deepen learning and accelerate school-wide change.**
In practice this meant that leadership meetings, accountability expectations, and content coaching all supported the schools' work on their focus. When the Area adopted the focus for all its schools, this assured that schools received both support and pressure from the Area to continuously implement the Framework as well as to share their learning with other schools.

- **The development of quality practice around student assessments is critical to identifying student needs.**
Without regularly assessing students on an instructional focus across all grade levels, teachers could not effectively monitor students' progress. In progressive steps, the Area required all schools to adopt a set of targeted, robust assessments for all students.

- **Having teachers drive the process in concert with school leadership generates school-wide support and impact, while facilitating sustainability.**
Through the work of the Instructional Leadership Teams, teachers were able to lead critical fact-finding and decision-making about the needs of all students in the school and methods for instructional improvement. Their buy-in, openness, and willingness to try new practices in their classrooms, with the support of their principals, were the drivers of the improvements in the schools.

- **The integration of Pre-K, while challenging, is doable and valuable, especially with system-level support.**
In the face of barriers that make integrating Pre-K a challenge, the Partnership offers a model for how Pre-K can become an equal participant in the work of an entire school. Including Pre-K teachers in leadership team work helps strengthen the connection among teachers and ensures that they truly address the needs of all students. Using the Framework, schools can begin to create consistency between Pre-K and K-12 classrooms.

- **School instructional learning initiatives are more effective and sustainable when done in concert with a school district.**
In addition to providing coaching and data analysis, Area 4 support enabled schools to implement the Framework with confidence that their focus would align with—and would not be undermined by—other district initiatives.

Establishing the Partnership

Impetus: To Increase Learning for All Students in Every Classroom

Midst a national debate over student achievement and school improvement—can schools be improved solely by addressing "school-related factors" such as teacher performance and parental engagement, or must "non-school factors" such as family income and neighborhood dysfunction be addressed first?[1]— Business and Professional People for the Public Interest offers an encouraging story. It is a story of a three-year initiative, catalyzed by BPI but involving Chicago Public Schools, principals, teachers, parents, and an educational consultant, to help a group of Chicago neighborhood schools (Pre-K through 8th grade, with high percentages of English Language Learners and children from low-income families) build the internal capacity to improve.

Too many students in Chicago Public Schools are performing below— often far below—grade level.

Ideally, all students should be attaining subject matter knowledge and critical thinking skills, progressively growing their understanding and abilities over time. Yet, in the school year prior to the launch of the Partnership for Instructional Leadership (2007), an unacceptably high percentage of CPS students tested below grade level in reading.[2] That percentage—importing tragically limited life trajectories—has since remained depressingly large.[3]

Schools, principals, and teachers are under tremendous pressure to raise achievement levels quickly.

Schools must reach specified achievement benchmarks or be subjected to corrective actions such as probation, turnaround, even closing. Soon all schools will be adapting to new, strong, internationally benchmarked Common Core Standards. All schools are expected to produce results with all students, regardless of background, income, race, or challenges (the latter including English Language Learners[4] and special education students).

Research has consistently shown that effective schools are strong on multiple fronts.
The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research identified five essential supports for school improvement: strong leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity of faculty and staff, a student-centered learning climate, and ambitious instruction.[5] The Consortium found that elementary schools strong in most of the five essentials were at least ten times more likely than schools weak in most of them to show substantial gains in reading and math.[6]

New best practices are emerging for schools that include development of a coherent learning continuum that stresses the transition from grade to grade, beginning in Pre-K.
When a school has consistent expectations across classrooms, and skills are built from grade to grade, teachers can spend more time deepening students' understanding of content.

Schools have also been found to perform more effectively when they have strong internal accountability predicated on a high level of agreement on norms, values, and expectations.[7]
Absent such agreement, teachers are likely to act in isolation and to respond to challenges in shallow ways, complying with demands without efficacy or responsibility. In these circumstances, students are unlikely to take risks, collaborate, and learn higher-order thinking skills.[8] School improvement thus requires that the school function as a team that includes faculty and staff, students, parents, and the larger community, and that teachers constantly reflect upon and seek to improve their own practice while collectively grappling with what is and is not working for students.

What follows is the story of eleven Chicago Public Schools in one administrative area (Area 4—a mini-district within CPS) that chose to respond thoughtfully to the pressures for increased student learning for all students at all grade levels, including Pre-K and English Language Learners.
In September 2008, together with Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI) and CPS Area 4 leadership, the schools launched the Partnership for Instructional Leadership. All partner schools began to implement a multifaceted Framework for school improvement that was, however, unified by a single focus. Schools were coached to become "learning organizations" by equipping faculty and staff to ask difficult questions, while providing mutual support and holding each other accountable for improved student learning.[9] Each school worked to build its own capacity for professional learning, collaboration, and shared, accountable leadership— with students, parents, and the larger community playing important roles.[10]

The premise of the Partnership is that when faculty and staff of a school are united by a shared goal with a coherent instructional focus and are engaged with the parental and larger communities, student learning will increase and be sustained.

Activating the Partnership

Partners

In mid-2008, BPI, a group of Chicago Public Schools Area 4 elementary schools with high concentrations of Latino students (many of whom were English Language Learners), and Area 4 staff agreed to form the Partnership for Instructional Leadership, recognizing that by joining together and combining resources each partner would be able to achieve more than it could acting in isolation.

As indicated in the chart below, all participating schools in the Chicago Partnership were elementary schools assigned to CPS Area 4 and were located in the Logan Square, Hermosa, and Belmont Cragin neighborhoods of Chicago's Northwest Side. In 2008, at the commencement of the Partnership, six schools joined and continued through all three years. Five additional schools joined in September 2010 (Year 3).

Participating Schools (As of 2010-2011 school year) [15]

School	Neighborhood	Pre-K Enrollment	Total Enrollment	% Latino	% ELL	% IEP (Students with Disabilities)	% Low Income (Free and Reduced Lunch)	Mobility	2011 ISAT Reading % Meet or Exceed
Cohort 1: Started 2008/09									
Funston	Hermosa	73	615	84	29	13	95	13	55.8
Goethe	Logan Square	119	755	81	21	11	62	11	76.5
Lloyd	Belmont Cragin	190	1307	96	64	8	99	20	53.7
Lowell	Humboldt Park	127	623	75	27	16	96	22	63.5
McAuliffe	Hermosa	79	801	91	37	12	99	23	60.1
Nobel	Humboldt Park	80	815	81	38	13	99	13	58.2
Cohort 2: Started 2010/11									
Chase	Logan Square	80	534	92	40	18	96	10	76.4
Nixon	Hermosa	81	1060	96	41	7	99	24	58.3
Prieto	Belmont Cragin	47	962	95	33	13	99	13	59.7
Schubert	Belmont Cragin	119	995	91	55	8	99	15	52.7
Von Humboldt	West Town	67	449	82	12	16	99	20	56.7

Chicago Public Schools Area 4

Initially, the role of Chicago Public Schools Area 4 was to endorse the Partnership Framework approach for participating schools, dedicate two Area staff to serve as coaches (alongside BPI coaches) for the initial group of six schools, and participate in school trainings. Over the three-year period, the Area became increasingly supportive and in Year 3 encouraged a second cohort of schools to join the Partnership.

Eventually, Area 4 adopted the Partnership Framework for the entire Area, selected reading comprehension as the Area-wide focus, and aligned coaching and professional development for all Area 4 teachers, principals, and schools to the Partnership Framework.

Targeted Leadership Consulting (TLC)

TLC is the national education consulting organization that originally developed the Framework for use in the Boston school system. In Chicago TLC provided periodic training for Partnership schools and Area 4 staff throughout the three-year period.

Business and Professional People for the Public Interest (BPI)

BPI convened the partners, helped fund the effort, provided management and on-site coaching for individual schools, and offered the fresh perspective of an "outside" (non-CPS) organization.

Framework

The explicit goal of the Partnership for Instructional Leadership is to improve learning for students at all grade levels, including Pre-K and English Language Learners, by implementing a Framework that enables each participating school to build its own capacity for effective professional learning and collaboration, with a strong instructional focus and accountable leadership.

The Framework was developed by Targeted Leadership Consulting (TLC), a national education consulting organization. TLC was already working successfully with some Chicago high schools, and its Framework was in use in other school districts across the country, notably in Chula Vista, California, once a very low-performing district, whose achievement scores rose steadily after it adopted the TLC Framework.[11] Today the district ranks first in the state for English Language Learners and students with disabilities, and overall is among the state's top performing districts.[12]

Success with the TLC Framework: Chula Vista Elementary Schools [13]

Located in San Diego County, Chula Vista Elementary School District is the largest K-6 elementary school district in the state of California, serving 27,000 students in 45 schools. It is a largely Latino school district with a high percentage (35%) of English Language Learners.

TLC began work with Chula Vista in 2001 with a cohort of five schools. In subsequent years, cohorts were added so that by 2007 all schools were participating in instructional leadership building with TLC's help. After TLC completed its direct training and support to the district and schools, the district continued to carry out the TLC Framework on its own.

Chula Vista schools have seen dramatic growth in student achievement, as measured by California's Academic Performance Index (API), which rates schools and districts. The API ranges from 200 to 1000, with the state standard set at 800. In 2002, Chula Vista's overall API was 653. By 2009, the district's API had reached 833, and 31 out of 44 schools had API scores above 800. Since then, its API scores have continued to grow. In 2011, the district made a 13-point gain, moving from an overall API of 848 to 861. For English Language Learners and students with disabilities, Chula Vista has the highest API in the state.

The Framework for school improvement implemented by the Partnership incorporates the following six steps: [14]

1
Build Collaboration
Develop shared leadership to build a school-wide culture of collaboration.

2
Set Instructional Target
Target an area of instructional focus designed to improve learning for all students.

3
Examine Data
Guide instructional practices and professional learning by continuous examination of student work and other data.

4
Review/Select Powerful Practices
Build instructional expertise in the use of effective, research-based practices.

5
Engage Parents and Community
Partner with parents and community.

6
Align Resources to Support Plan
Align resources to support each of these steps.

Process

Once a school decides to use the Framework, what happens?

The first step in implementing the Partnership Framework was for each school to establish an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), one of the primary purposes of which is to develop shared leadership and a culture of collaboration.

What is an ILT and what does it do?

The size and composition of an ILT are up to each school, but it is intended to include teachers from each grade level, including Pre-K, lead literacy and bilingual teachers, and members of the administrative staff, including, of course, the principal. Each working group in a school, such as grade level, bilingual, or subject matter teams, should be "connected" to at least one ILT member. Though not responsible for day-to-day school operations, the ILT is the engine for organizing and building momentum for a school-wide effort to improve teaching and learning.

How does the ILT initiate change?

On behalf of its school, each ILT selects a single area of instructional focus, such as reading comprehension, writing, or math, around which to unify and organize a multifaceted, school-wide effort. The steps that follow include:

- **Choose a Targeted Instructional Area (TIA):** Selecting a school's singular focus is a key deliberative process, based not only upon the professional judgments of ILT members but also upon input from the entire faculty, and upon the examination of data, such as student work and test performances.

- **Establish SMARTe Goals:** Once a school has selected its TIA, the ILT sets realistic yet ambitious goals for student learning called **SMARTe goals**—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, **T**imely, for **e**very student. Since the goals apply to every student, they necessarily engage the school in considering the learning and achievement of all students at each grade level, including Pre-K. SMARTe goals also include the assessments that are to be used to measure student progress.

- **Select Powerful Practices:** Powerful Practices are research-proven practices that are the "how" and "what" of teaching and learning. An example of the former is the instructional/student learning strategy called "guided reading." Examples of the latter are state learning standards that describe what students should know or be able to do. The selected Practices should be implementable in age-specific ways at every grade level so that students will be able to build on their own learning as they progress through the grades.

How does change actually happen?

An important ILT task is to design and implement successive **Cycles of Professional Learning**, generally four per year, each lasting from six to eight weeks. Within each Cycle, teachers learn to master and use the selected Powerful Practices. A given Cycle should focus on only one or two manageable components of a Powerful Practice, in order not to diffuse its efforts. For instance, in guided reading most students work independently while the teacher works with a small group. A first Learning Cycle might therefore focus on techniques for instituting independent reading practices that engage students and build their interest in and stamina for reading books.

Well-designed Cycles of Professional Learning have clear teacher and student learning goals related to the Powerful Practice, thus making clear what change should be evident by the end of the Cycle. It is important for the ILTs to meet frequently (e.g., bi-weekly) to maintain momentum, fully implement and learn from the Cycle, and make adjustments as necessary.

Each Cycle includes the following elements:

- **Training/Input:** Teachers learn about one or two components of the selected Powerful Practice through participating in learning sessions at grade level meetings, staff meetings, or on professional development days, and by exploring the literature related to their selected TIA and Powerful Practices.

- **Opportunities for Practice:** Early in the Cycle, opportunities for "safe practice" are provided, permitting teachers to experiment with new classroom strategies without being evaluated.

- **Observing/Coaching/Feedback:** Later in the Cycle, as teachers gain experience with new strategies, they receive feedback from another teacher (peer coaching), a school-based literacy coach, or the principal.

- **Looking at Student Work and Data:** Using the annual SMARTe goals, ILTs and teacher teams regularly use protocols to consider student assessment data and examine student work. Grade level teams can then gauge whether students are on track to meet SMARTe goals for the year and make adjustments as indicated.

- **Monitoring and Measuring Implementation:** At the end of each Cycle (sometimes more frequently) each ILT conducts a Targeted Learning Walk to all classrooms, conversing with students, observing teachers, and examining classroom environments.[16] Results are reported to the entire school and are used to make decisions about the content of the next Cycle. Throughout Cycles, principals and other coaches also conduct informal learning walks to provide ongoing feedback and support to teachers.

- **Parent Connection:** At regular times in the Cycle, the school creates opportunities for parents to support their child's learning in the Targeted Instructional Area, for example, by learning how to choose books at their child's specific reading level.

How does change spread and deepen throughout the school?

All teachers, not just ILT members, play integral roles during each Cycle of Professional Learning. All faculty implement Powerful Practices in their classrooms, analyze student work and assessment data, participate collectively in grade level learning and problem-solving, and engage parents and the Local School Council in the school's focus area. In addition, all teachers participate in school-wide professional development, faculty meetings, and Learning Walks. Cycle success depends upon each teacher playing her or his part. Through the spirit of mutual accountability that the Framework fosters, all faculty become part of the school's change.

The Framework requires that multiple Cycles of Professional Learning be implemented, at least four per school year. Momentum develops with successive Cycles as teachers observe the progression in student engagement and learning. Schools are expected to adhere to their chosen area of focus until a substantial portion (80–90 percent) of students are at grade level in the Targeted Instructional Area. Generally, this takes place over three to five years.

Momentum for change within a school can be accelerated by reallocating resources to support the area of focus—for example, by rearranging schedules to provide more teacher collaboration time, purchasing more books for classroom libraries, or reprogramming the school day to enable all students to have 90 minutes of uninterrupted time for literacy instruction.

What external supports go into the process?

- **Training**
  Regular team training sessions for all ILT members from all member schools drive the Framework's implementation. Trainings are provided on specific topics (for example, planning a Cycle or protocols for examining student work and discussing data). Structured opportunities to learn from the other schools and planning time for individual ILTs are also key components of each training session.

- **Guided Learning Walks**
  Guided Learning Walks, held at a Partnership school, prepare ILT members to conduct such Walks at their own school.

- **Coaches**
  A Leadership Coach is assigned to work with the ILT to help implement the Framework between training sessions. The Leadership Coach is a guide, providing ideas and resources, examining evidence, and asking friendly yet hard questions.

Infusing the entire process are the fundamental principles that teachers and principals are designing and implementing their own change, and that they themselves are collectively accountable for results.

Integrating Pre-K: Creating a Continuum of Learning

Value of Pre-K

Strong evidence supports the merits of investing in high-quality early childhood education for all. Intervention from birth through three, as well as in Pre-K, produces considerable short- and long-term benefits such as improved cognitive and language development, less in-grade retention, higher rates of high school completion, attendance at four-year colleges, and fewer special education needs.[17] For children from low-income backgrounds, early childhood educational experiences are particularly critical. Quality Pre-K experiences help children build vocabulary, use higher-order thinking skills, and evaluate their environment, and in turn build the cognitive skills that children need to be successful throughout the rest of their schooling.[18]

Preventing Fade-Out: Creation of a Continuum of Learning

Though early education creates numerous positive impacts, without proper follow-up support the cognitive gains of Pre-K are reduced or fade out as children move on to early elementary grades.[19] Aligning Pre-K with kindergarten, and kindergarten with early elementary grades, is a critical tool for fighting this fade-out.[20] The approach includes aligning standards, curricula, and assessments for students Pre-K through third grade, as well as coordination of leadership to establish a shared vision and common goals among principals and teachers across these early grades.[21] A learning continuum from Pre-K into elementary grades also can include collaborative planning among teachers to achieve greater continuity in learning and accountability to parents and community.[22]

Montgomery County: A Powerful Example of Creating Consistency Across All Grades

Montgomery County, Maryland, which successfully aligned Pre-K to 12th grade, stands out as a powerful example of the benefits of a learning continuum across all grades.[23]

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland raised the achievement levels of all students by intentionally connecting early learning and K-12 education. As a result of MCPS's efforts, by 2010, nearly 90% of kindergarteners entered first grade ready to learn, 88% of third graders read proficiently, almost 90% of 12th graders graduated from high school, and 77% of graduating seniors enrolled in college. Elements of the MCPS strategy included:

Establishing a District-Wide Goal that Linked to Early Learning

The district goal called for 100% of students to graduate and 80% of students to be college-ready by 2014. This goal helped overcome philosophical differences between teachers about what was taught in kindergarten and Pre-K. Teachers instead focused on the concrete steps they needed to take to help students meet the goal.

Developing a Common Assessment System

In conjunction with its Pre-K–12 Curriculum Framework, MCPS set a new standard for literacy in kindergarten by developing its own diagnostic assessment program for use in Pre-K through 2nd grade that was also aligned to benchmarks used in later grades. The assessment provided a link to what students needed to know before entering kindergarten to meet benchmarks in later grades. The assessment also provided teachers with a common language to use across grade levels when discussing student progress.

Providing a Common System of Support

All teachers attended common professional development and were held to the same expectations. The trainings included a special early learning portion for Pre-K and kindergarten teachers.

Fostering Shared Accountability

Schools held weekly meetings where Pre-K through 4th grade teachers discussed data, instructional methods, and the needs of specific students. Teachers reported that these meetings instilled a sense of shared responsibility for all students within a school.

Challenges to Creating the Continuum

Though developing a continuum of learning seems like common sense, creating coherence is a challenge.[24] The task is particularly daunting due to structural issues that separate Pre-K from elementary classrooms, even when the Pre-K program is officially part of the school.[25]

- Because of funding source stipulations, Pre-K has different requirements for length of day, teacher qualifications, parent involvement, eligibility, curricula, and assessments, which contribute to its separation from the rest of the school.

- Many Pre-Ks, even those formally connected to an elementary school, are located in separate off-site facilities, making for less interaction among students, parents, and teachers in the Pre-K and elementary programs.

- CPS Pre-Ks are open to families city-wide, while the adjoining neighborhood elementary school may have an attendance boundary. Some Pre-K students may thus not be assigned to the adjoining elementary school for kindergarten. As a result, schools may not feel a need to build strong connections between their Pre-K and elementary school classrooms.

- Finding time for teacher collaboration is always difficult, but finding time for Pre-K teachers to collaborate with the rest of the school is even more difficult because Pre-K schedules are typically different from those of the elementary grades.

How The Partnership Worked to Integrate Pre-K

To better understand how Partnership schools responded to the challenge of integrating Pre-K, Pre-K–3 teachers in the 11 participating schools provided feedback regarding their views via an electronic survey. (See Sources of Information on page 36 for survey description.) These responses formed the basis for the observations identified below:

1. Schools included Pre-K teachers on their Instructional Leadership Teams.

In the initial stages of the Partnership, the notion of including Pre-K teachers in the ILTs was a novel, even controversial idea. One skeptical principal asked, "Why would I want to do that?" Eventually, most schools either included Pre-K teachers on their ILTs or ensured that they were represented, for example, by the literacy coach.

Most ILT members (80%) felt that integrating Pre-K into the rest of the school was a "very important" goal for the success of students. "Pre-K teachers contribute a vital perspective. They have deeper knowledge of early childhood development." "We want to achieve consistency and continuity of instruction throughout the whole school, and Pre-K is an important part of that."

2. Schools selected a Targeted Instructional Area (TIA) that would apply to Pre-K.

All schools eventually selected reading comprehension as their TIA, an important choice for Pre-K and K-2 students. Too often work in reading comprehension does not begin in earnest until 3rd grade when it is evaluated by standardized tests. Research indicates, however, that teachers should begin reading comprehension strategies in Pre-K, for example, learning how to use language to express ideas, raising questions, and retelling parts of a story.[26]

3. Schools included Pre-K students in their school-wide SMARTe goals.

Including Pre-K students in the school-wide SMARTe goal process proved to be a challenge for almost every school, because Pre-K teachers use different assessments than the rest of the school and are concerned with "pushing" students too far beyond their developmental abilities.

One school paved the way for an inclusive approach. It used its existing assessments, but calibrated them to the rigorous Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS), which includes an early literacy assessment appropriate for Pre-K students. As a result, in whole-school data analyses grade level teams were able to detect how students at different reading levels were distributed across grades. This school eventually decided to officially convert to the Fountas and Pinnell BAS, and by the end of the third year of the Partnership, Area 4 had begun to train all Area schools to do likewise.

4. Pre-K teachers and students became familiar with their schools' Cycles of Professional Learning.

Nearly all Pre-K–3 grade teachers surveyed reported being involved in their schools' Cycles of Learning. They received copies of the Cycles and related professional readings, participated in Cycle-related teacher team meetings and professional development, visited each others' classrooms, and opened their classrooms for Learning Walks.

5. CPS Area 4 supported Pre-K implementation with special classes.

Area 4 staff determined that Pre-K and kindergarten teachers needed additional support in order to participate fully in their schools' Cycles of Professional Learning. As an initial step, in the spring of 2011, the Area offered professional development classes on guided reading that were tailored to Pre-K and kindergarten teachers. Approximately 40 Pre-K and kindergarten teachers attended.

These Area 4 classes instructed Pre-K and kindergarten teachers how to teach reading comprehension in an early childhood setting, integrate reading comprehension into their daily instruction, and to appreciate the role that Pre-K can play in connecting the two grades.

The classes also examined both Pre-K and kindergarten assessments, learning the value of each and how to overcome the practical difficulties of using different assessments in different grades.

6. The Partnership increased understanding between early education teachers and the rest of the school.

As compared to before the Partnership, most early education teachers (Pre-K–3) believed that their schools' new focus helped bring a greater sense of purpose and direction to their classroom teaching (78%). Many (61%) felt that administrators and elementary teachers alike understood and appreciated the importance of early childhood education better than before the Partnership.

This shift in attitude on the part of both Pre-K and elementary teachers is an important first step in developing a common understanding of how children learn. When Pre-K is an equal participant in the school, best practices and key theories from Pre-K classrooms can be applied to elementary classrooms, while core instructional techniques from elementary classrooms can be applied to the school's youngest learners—leading all students to benefit from the exchange of ideas.

Assessing the Partnership

Outcomes

Over the long term, the primary criterion for measuring school improvement is clear: Have substantial student learning gains occurred? Yet the fact remains that it is challenging to measure the short-term impacts of school improvement efforts. As the Chicago Consortium observes, "Judging the short-term efficacy of major institutional change efforts…is…complicated. These are not simple programs from which we should expect direct and immediate effects on students. In fact, student outcomes might actually look worse in the short term as established routines are discarded, and exper-imentation with new, untested practices emerges."[27]

The Partnership has been in place for only three school years in Cohort 1, and just a single year in Cohort 2. Scores on standardized tests cannot reasonably be expected to improve significantly in these time frames.

Given these circumstances we have sought to capture the impact of the Partnership upon the participating schools through surveys of teachers and principals and from analyses generated by the Partnership. (See Sources of Information on page 36 for survey description.) The significant outcomes of the Partnership fall into three areas: implementation of the Framework, strengthening school cultures, and systems changes.

Implementation of the Framework

Partnership Schools Became Fully Engaged in Implementing Multiple Aspects of the Framework.

- All 11 participating schools ultimately chose reading comprehension as their focus or Targeted Instructional Area.[28]

- All 11 ILTs were representative of school staff. (All 11 included principals, 10 included bilingual teachers, and 5 included a Pre-K teacher; none of the schools had ILTs prior to the establishment of the Partnership.)

- Schools chose different Powerful Practices and professional readings, based on their own research with guidance from coaches and the Area.

- Schools developed SMARTe goals, selected assessments, created regular Learning Cycles, and engaged in Learning Walks.

- Schools began to engage parents, using Powerful Practices and reading assessments to help them understand how their child was (or was not) progressing, and providing guidance about what parents could do that would directly complement student learning in the classroom during the school's Cycle of Professional Learning. Some schools offered special workshops in which parents visited classrooms to see the Powerful Practices in action. Others used regular parent events, such as report card pick-up or literacy nights, to emphasize the Practices.

Teachers and Staff Found Value in ILT Participation.
According to teachers and staff, ILTs were valuable because:

- ILTs strengthened instruction and consistency across the school. (77%)

- Our students' performance needed to accelerate. (56%)

- ILTs provided an opportunity to learn new things and build expertise. (52%)

Schools Effectively Employed Data to Drive Decision-Making.
Schools began to use data not only as an evaluative tool, but also as a learning tool. At the outset of the Partnership, while schools were concerned about reading comprehension, almost none regularly assessed student reading comprehension levels across all grades and therefore could not effectively monitor student progress. The Partnership Framework enabled schools to institute new data-driven assessment practices for measuring reading comprehension.

Key Benefits of the Partnership Identified by Virtually All Surveyed Included:

- Creating "expectations" that all teachers would learn and grow. (99%)

- Ensuring adherence to the Targeted Instructional Area until the goal was reached. (97%)

- Building a shared culture of professional inquiry and accountability. (96%)

- Establishing multiple, fully-developed Cycles of Professional Learning. (94%)

- Applying the TIA to all students at all grade levels. (93%)

Strengthening School Cultures

Significant Progress Was Made in Engaging School Cultures Necessary to Improve Achievement.
Teachers and principals reported that to a greater extent than prior to the Partnership:

Schools placed an increased focus on students.

- We measure success by what students learn. (69%)

- We make decisions about allocating time and resources based on the students' best interests. (66%)

- We believe that all students can and will learn at high levels. (63%)

Important gains were made in coherence and consistency.

- We understand why consistency across classrooms is important for students. (80%)

- We have developed a common language around learning for teachers and students. (80%)

- We deliberate and use our professional judgment about what practices should be consistent across classrooms. (78%)

Teachers and principals became more committed to using data for identifying needs and setting goals.

- Data (including student work) has helped us understand students' needs. (77%)

- We know where every individual student is performing. (75%)

- Pre-K and elementary teachers discuss data with each other to guide discussions on classroom instruction. (59%)

Schools developed a professional culture within and across grade levels.

- Seeing other classrooms is a purposeful professional activity. (77%)

- Grade level meetings are productive and are focused on teaching and learning. (64%)

- Teachers from different grade levels talk to each other productively about how to meet students' needs. (62%)

Systems Change

Area 4 Embraced the Framework, and Became a Strong Partner from the Outset of the Partnership.
Area 4 provided coaches and organizers as well as data support and instructional specialists. In addition, it encouraged a second cohort of five schools to join the Partnership. In progressive steps it eventually led all other Area schools to adopt and implement the Framework, and provided suitable training. These steps included:

- **Facilitating the adoption of reading comprehension as the schools' Framework focus for all Area schools.**

- **Providing teacher, principal, and staff professional learning linked to the focus, with an emphasis on the Powerful Practice of guided reading.**
  During Year 3, five Area coaches taught three eight-week classes on guided reading for 650 teachers. Area staff also organized a three-day institute at the close of the school year that was attended by 300 teachers. Teams of teachers facilitated workshops for their peers. Area work with principals, assistant principals, literacy, and bilingual coaches was organized around the reading comprehension focus.

- **Leading Learning Walks as tools for school-based coaching.**
  Regular Learning Walks were led by Area staff at all Area 4 schools and included Pre-K classrooms.

- **Instituting quality practices for reading assessment.**
  Initially, the Area led all schools to measure reading comprehension for all students, including Pre-K, supplementing their existing assessments and reporting their results to the Area three times per year. Subsequently, the Area required that all its schools adopt a set of robust diagnostic reading assessments that encompassed Pre-K.

- **Sponsoring two trips to Chula Vista, California, for 75 teachers, principals, and Area 4 coaches, including the Chief Area Officer.**
  Teams from Partnership schools visited three comparable high-performing schools that had implemented the Framework and Learning Cycles for almost a decade.[29]

- **Exploring more deeply the connections between Pre-K and K-8.**
  In addition to emphasizing the crucial importance of including Pre-K in all aspects of the Framework (ILTs, Powerful Practices, etc.), Area staff explored how Pre-K could be linked more securely with the Area-wide focus by investigating Pre-K curricula, assessments, and teaching practices, and consulting with their CPS Pre-K counterparts. Special guided reading classes were held for Pre-K and kindergarten teachers, helping teachers grasp how they could indeed work together.

- **Increasing the priority for bilingual education for English Language Learners**.
  The Chula Vista trip and growing Area expertise fueled interest in examining the complex issues facing bilingual learners. Aided by TLC, a "Bilingual Conversation" helped schools learn about comprehensive approaches to bilingual program models that include explicit English Language Development for ELLs. By the end of Year 3, all Area 4 schools had structured new 30-40 minute English Language Development periods for bilingual students and attended special professional development sessions. Additionally, an Area 4 Bilingual Advisory Committee was established to determine a comprehensive Bilingual Program model suited to Area 4 schools.

Looking Ahead: Lessons Learned

What learnings may be gleaned from the Partnership experience? BPI offers three:

Schools working in concert with other schools are likely to accomplish more than schools working in isolation, and schools working together with their district are likely to accomplish more than either working separately.
In this respect, the Partnership experience is consistent with that of Chula Vista, CA, and Montgomery County, MD, where school improvement efforts have made noteworthy progress.

Although there may be more than one road to Rome, "working together" on the Partnership road means a particular kind of work and set of relationships. The work must be multifaceted yet focused.
Many challenges must be addressed, but—driven by a single infusing idea—coherently. The relationships within schools must be characterized by unity among faculty and staff, shared leadership, and collective accountability, all centered around the selected infusing idea. The relationship with the district must be supportive and likewise centered around the same idea.

With the focus and relationships set in place, the particulars of the TLC Framework collectively form a powerful set of multi-year actions that have the potential to bring about truly major improvements in teaching and learning for all students in all grades.

We may also ask, what are the keys to realizing that potential? BPI offers four keys to successful implementation of the TLC Framework:

Both School and School District Leadership Must be Fully Committed to the Partnership Model.
In the Chicago experience, each school principal and CPS Area 4 leadership were vital—engaged, determined, and supportive—to ensuring that the multiple interrelated facets of the Partnership model were rigorously and continuously implemented (i.e., ILTs, Targeted Instructional Area, Cycles of Learning, Powerful Practices, data analysis, Guided Learning Walks, etc.).

ILTs Must Be Truly Representative.
In order for ILTs to become the agents of change they are designed to be, they must include strong teachers representing all grade levels, including Pre-K, as well as the principal and assistant principal. They should also include other special interest teachers such as literacy coaches, bilingual and special education teachers, and members of subject matter teams. This broad representation is essential to creating the culture of shared leadership and collaboration that is fundamental to effective Framework implementation.

Parents Matter.
The Partnership is not only about students and teachers. The essential involvement of parents requires that school leadership proactively focus on the role of parents—for example, by creating special events to educate parents about Partnership goals and activities, and by providing parents with opportunities to learn what their child should be and is learning, how to measure progress, and what they can do to help.

The Integration of Pre-K Is Essential and, with Principal Leadership and System-Level Support, Doable.
In the face of differences in Pre-K schedules, physical locations, school days, curricula, and assessments, there are many barriers to creating a fully integrated Continuum of Learning from Pre-K through Grade 8. Special attention and efforts are necessary to overcome these obstacles. In the Chicago experience, the schools that were best able to successfully implement the Partnership Framework from Pre-K through 8 did so as a result of strong principal support and active participation by Area 4 leadership in special trainings focused on Pre-K.

*   *   *

Although the story is still a work in progress, the Partnership for Instructional Leadership experience described in this report illustrates a promising approach to badly needed school improvement.

Endnotes

1 The debate has moved from education journals into the general press. See, for example, Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee, et al., *How to Fix Our Schools: A Manifesto by Joel Klein, Michelle Rhee, and Other Education Leaders*, Washington Post, Oct. 10, 2010, at B01; Diane Ravitch, *Waiting for a School Miracle, N.Y. Times*, May 31, 2011; Richard Rothstein, *How to Fix Our Schools: It's More Complicated, and More Work, Than the Klein-Rhee "Manifesto" Wants You to Believe*, Economic Policy Institute Issue Brief #286, Oct. 14, 2010; Paul Tough, *No, Seriously: No Excuses, N.Y. Times*, July 7, 2011.

2 In 2007 nearly 40% of students did not meet standards in reading, as measured by the ISAT. ISAT data downloaded from https://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/citywide.html.

3 According to the 2011 ISAT results, approximately 30% of students did not meet standards in reading. ISAT data downloaded from http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/citywide.html. Note, however, that The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research has stated that due to changes in tests, scoring, standards, and test administration, among other factors, it is difficult to compare publicly reported data about test scores (such as ISAT scores) over time. By using various adjustment procedures that made it possible to compare scores from year to year, the Consortium found that elementary reading scores improved little between 1988 and 2009. Further, the Consortium's report states that simply meeting standards on the ISAT is not enough to be on-track to meet college-readiness benchmarks in high school. Rather, students must exceed standards. On the 2011 ISAT, only 15.5% of CPS students exceeded standards. Luppescu, Stuart, Elaine M. Allensworth, Paul Moore, Marisa de la Torre, James Murphy with Sanja Jagesic, *Trends in Chicago's Schools Across Three Eras of Reform*, The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, September 2011, 11, 24. ISAT data downloaded from http://research.cps.k12.il.us/cps/accountweb/Reports/citywide.html.

4 For schools with many English Language Learners the improvement challenge is magnified. English Language Learners must learn to read and master content while simultaneously learning a new language, and schools must grapple with creating a program model for serving such students that takes into account their varying language abilities.

5 Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Anthony S. Bryk, John Q. Easton, and Stuart Luppescu, *The Essential Supports for School Improvement*, The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, September 2006, 1-2.

6 *Id.*

7 Richard F. Elmore, *School Reform from the Inside Out: Policy, Practice, and Performance* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2004).

8 Elizabeth A. City, Richard F. Elmore, Sarah E. Fiarman and Lee Teitel, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Teaching and Learning* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2009).

9 Peter Senge defines learning organizations as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together." Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Doubleday, 1990). For more on Peter Senge, see http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm.

10 Funded by the Wallace Foundation, the *Learning from Leadership* report found a strong link between collective leadership and student learning. Completed in 2010, its findings are based on seven years of research. A central finding is that the highest performing schools operate by a "collective leadership" that involves many interested players— including parents and teachers—in decision-making. Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, Stephen E. Anderson et al., *Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning*, July 2010, available at http://www.wallacefoundation.org/pages/about-the-organizations-learning-from-leadership.aspx.

11 Correspondence with John Nelson, Executive Director, Instruction and Assessment, Chula Vista Elementary School District.

12 Conversation with John Nelson, Executive Director, Instruction and Assessment, Chula Vista Elementary School District.

13 Correspondence with John Nelson, Executive Director, Instruction and Assessment, Chula Vista Elementary School District. API scores from John Nelson and the California Department of Education, http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/API/APISearch-Name.asp?TheYear=&cTopic=API&cLevel=District&cName=3768023&cCounty=&cTime-Frame=S. For information about the Chula Vista Elementary School District, see http://www.cvesd.org/DISTRICT/Pages/welcome.aspx.

14 Framework from Targeted Leadership Consulting, http://www.targetedleadership.net.

15 During the Partnership, Funston and Goethe were designated as Autonomous Management and Performance Schools (AMPS). Originally, AMPS status was granted based on high academic and operational performance, but expanded to other schools that had a plan for using autonomy for increasing student achievement. For more information, see http://www.cps.edu/About_CPS/Departments/Pages/AutonomousManagementand-PerformanceSchools.aspx. The Cohort 1 schools listed in the chart are those that remained in the Partnership for all 3 years. During the first year of the Partnership, two schools left—one because of a change in principal and one because it chose to implement an intensive dual language project. In the Partnership's third year, another school left to pursue its ILT work outside of formal Partnership trainings, but with Area coaching and support. The three schools that left during the course of the Partnership are not included in the chart.

16 A Targeted Learning Walk is an organized visit through a school's classrooms and halls to collect evidence about how well school improvement efforts are being implemented school-wide and how the implementation of new practices is impacting student achievement. The walks are purposeful and engage the entire staff. Amalia Cudeiro and Jeff Nelsen, *Walkthroughs—The Next Generation*, Targeted Leadership Consulting On Target Report, September/October 2008.

17 See, e.g., Barnett, W. Steven, "Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Perry Preschool Program and Its Policy Implications," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 7(4) (1985): 335; Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A. Temple, Suh-Ruu Ou, Dylan L. Robertson, Joshua P. Mersky, James W. Topitzes and Michael D. Niles, "Effects of a School-Based, Early Childhood Intervention on Adult Health and Well-Being: A 19-year Follow-Up of Low-Income Families," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 161(8) (2007): 730-739; Ludwig, Jens and Douglas L. Miller, *Does Head Start Improve Children's Life Chances? Evidence From a Regression Discontinuity Design*, Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty (2005); Love, John M., Ellen Eliason Kisker, Christine Ross, Jill Constantine, Kimberly Boller, Rachel Chazan-Cohen, et al., "The Effectiveness of Early Head Start for 3-Year Old Children and Their Parents: Lessons for Policy and Programs," *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6) (2005): 885-901.

18 Susan B. Neuman, "N is for Nonsensical," *Educational Leadership*, October 2006: 28-31. Additionally, researchers have found that by age 3, the average child in a low-income family has been exposed to nearly 30 million fewer words than the average child in an upper-income family—a finding that has serious implications for young children's early literacy skills. See Hart, Betty and Todd Risley, "The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3,"27(1) *American Educator*, 22, (Spring 2003): 4-9.

19 Kristie Kauerz, *Ladders of Learning: Fighting Fade-out by Advancing PK-3 Alignment*. January 2006, New America Foundation Early Education Initiative, Issue Brief #20.

20 *Id.*

21 Bogard, Kimber and Ruby Takanishi, "PK-3: An Aligned and Coordinated Approach to Education for Children 3 to 8 Years Old," *Social Policy Report*, 19(3) (2005), 3-22; Bill Graves, *PK-3: What is It and How Do We Know It Works?*, 2006, Foundation for Child Development.

22 Brown, Brett V. and Kimber Bogard, "Pre-Kindergarten to 3rd Grade (PK-3) School-Based Resources and Third Grade Outcomes," Child Trends Data Bank, *Cross Currents*, 5 (2007): 1-7.

23 For information on the Pre-K–12 system created by Montgomery County Public Schools, see Geoff Marietta, *Lessons for Pre-K-3rd from Montgomery County Public Schools,* Foundation for Child Development (2010), and Geoff Marietta, *Lessons in Early Learning: Building an Integrated Pre-K–12 System in Montgomery County Public Schools*, Foundation for Child Development (2010). A full summary of Montgomery County's efforts can be found in these reports.

24 Marc Tucker, *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An American Agenda for Education Reform*, National Center on Education and the Economy (2011).

25 An overview of the different CPS program requirements and eligibility criteria can be found at http://www.cps.edu/Schools/Preschools/Pages/Preschoolprogramtypes.aspx.

26 Interview with Katie Welsh, former Area 4 coach. See also Gay Su Pinnell and Irene C. Fountas, *The Continuum of Literacy Learning* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011), and Susan B. Neuman, "N is for Nonsensical," *Educational Leadership*, October 2006: 28-31.

27 Anthony S. Bryk, Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

28 Two schools initially chose writing as their TIA, but later switched to reading comprehension.

29 The schools visited were Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School, Lauderbach Elementary School, and Otay Elementary School. Chula Vista Learning Community Charter School was named a California Distinguished Elementary School in 2010. Otay Elementary School was named a 2010 National Blue Ribbon School.

Sources of Information

Information in this report came from the following sources:

1. Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) implementation artifacts such as meeting agendas, data presentations, Cycles of Professional Learning, Targeted Learning Walk results, and ILT presentations on the School Improvement Plan for Advancing Academic Achievement (SIPAA) to Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Area 4 staff.

2. Survey of teachers, principals, and ILT members in the 11 schools participating in the Partnership for Instructional Leadership. The survey was administered electronically in August 2011 and 174 people responded, 95 of whom were ILT members. Over 100 respondents were Pre-K through third grade teachers (referred to in the report as "early education teachers"), and over 50 were bilingual teachers. Principals and special education teachers were also represented as were other stakeholders within the schools.

3. Assessment data and test scores provided by the Partnership schools, CPS Area 4, and through the CPS Office of Performance website.

4. Interviews with coaches.

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**Business and Professional People
for the Public Interest**

25 East Washington Street | Suite 1515
Chicago, Illinois 60602

312 641 5570

www.bpichicago.org