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Exhibit 1.1 Big Ideas for Whole-System Reform

1. All children can learn
2. A small number of key priorities
3. Resolute leadership/stay on message
4. Collective capacity
5. Strategies with precision
6. Intelligent accountability
7. All means all

Of course, many say that all children can learn, failure is not an option (except that evidently it is), and so on. The big idea in this book is that they really can learn, and all systems go proves that it can be done. All children (95%), except the severely disabled, can learn to a high level of critical reasoning and problem solving. And those who are seriously disadvantaged (physically or mentally) can lead effective lives through inclusionary developmentally based programs typical of all-systems-go reforms.

Second, every successful organization pursues a small number of core priorities (that have leverage power) and does them exceedingly well. We include literacy and numeracy—not the narrow testing of No Child Left Behind, but also higher-order thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills—and we link them to whole-child development, emotional well-being, music, dance, and the arts. And we pursue high-quality literacy and numeracy into high schools and related higher education and career choices.

Third, we are beginning to appreciate that successful schools, districts, and larger systems have “resolute leadership” that stays with the focus, especially during rough periods, and these leaders cause others around them to be resolute. It is so easy to go off message, and if you do, you lose whole-system-reform possibilities. This is hard, persistent work but it is not overly complex. Resolute leadership is critical near the beginning when new ideas encounter serious difficulty, but it is also required to sustain and build on success.

Fourth, another big idea that is not new but is very much underappreciated is that *collective capacity* is the hidden resource we fail to understand and cultivate. As Morten Hansen (2009) says, collaboration is not an end in itself. The question is what is the

CHAPTER TWO

Deceptive Inadequacies

There are three critical clarifications to make before we launch into this and subsequent chapters: (1) the nature of the core skills required, (2) a conceptualization of the term *resources*, and (3) the components of successful whole-school reform.

First, the emphasis needs to be on *higher order skills* for everyone in the system. People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that reading the words on the page is literacy or that being able to add and subtract is numeracy. And others rightly criticize the folly of just focusing on narrow testing (Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder, 2008). Rather than throwing out literacy and numeracy, it is better to recast them (as we have done) into their more fundamental and lateral-leverage role in fostering whole-child development. The whole-system reform goals that we are considering in this book are more than the basics. They also evolve easily into the 21st-century skills, and have the virtue of forcing greater specificity relative to 21st-century–skills assessment and corresponding instruction.

The Ontario assessment system, for example, focuses on reading, writing, and mathematics. It considers reasoning, problem solving, critical analysis, and so forth. OECD’s PISA assessments do not just focus on what students have learned but also on “how well they can extrapolate what they have learned and apply their knowledge and skills in novel settings.” (Schleicher, 2009a, p. 2). OECD is moving towards assessing collaborative problem solving and digital literacy,

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and integrate a plan of action. The specificity and precision (two of our new watchwords of success) of what the school is doing is amazing. Here is a partial list:

- Job-embedded professional learning, based on student needs, has increased the consistency of practice within and among classrooms. Teachers are modeling lessons in one another's classrooms on a monthly basis.
- Professional learning is active in each division. The identified focus is assessment-based instruction with teacher moderation of student work.
- Teachers are using a variety of assessment tools and instructional strategies to meet the learning styles, interests, and needs of every student.
- Teachers are building class and student profiles and attending case-management sessions to identify high-yield strategies.
- Teachers and students can clearly articulate what the learning targets are and what success criteria are needed in order to achieve the targets as evidenced by daily-literacy walks.
- Two groups (of five teachers each) are engaged in action research and meet bimonthly to review their data and actions.
- The majority of staff, 98%, have volunteered to participate in a biweekly professional book club and bring supporting student evidence to the discussions.
- An increase in the usage and frequency of centralized resources has been observed.
- Student needs are at the forefront when making budget decisions.
- Attendance at family and community schools events has increased by 200%. (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, p. 87–88)

As far as the bottom line is concerned, the school has zeroed in on the students at risk (those at level two or below on a four-point scale). Staff at given grade levels know these students by name and by targeted learning action. Amazingly, in *one year*, the number of students at risk has been reduced from 378 to 233, and this has occurred in each of the nine grade levels, K–8. More impressive are the achievement results in literacy and numeracy.

Exhibit 5.1 Incentives That Work for Teachers

- Good salaries
- Decent surroundings
- Positive climate
- Strong induction
- Extensive professional learning
- Opportunity to work with and learn from others (job embedded and otherwise)
- Supportive, and even assertive, leadership about the agenda
- Getting helpful feedback
- Reasonable class size
- Long-term collective agreements (4 years)
- Realizable moral purpose

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These incentives leverage all teachers, and they make it increasingly uncomfortable for those who do not improve. Realizable moral purpose is especially effective in reenergizing disheartened teachers. We have found that it is not moral exhortation or evidence that motivates such teachers but rather helping them achieve dramatic success with students that they did not think could learn. The actual experience of success is the turn on that was missing. We can still take action against terribly incompetent and abusive teachers, but it is the middle 40% that must be reached if we are going to get system change. To act this way is a bit more complicated than legislating merit pay, but not all that complex. And the rewards will be powerful and have a self-generating momentum of their own.

POLICY AND STRATEGY

To return to policy and the top-performing system in the world, recall that Barber and Mourshed (2007) found that policies and strategies must focus on three critical components: (1) getting the right people to become teachers, (2) developing effective instructors (including leaders who can do this), and (3) ensuring every student performs well.

For the teaching profession, my central conclusion is captured in Exhibit 5.2: