

Sustaining math and science improvement

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Our future

- Performance-based accountability
- Increased demand for high-level curricula and pedagogy
- Decreased levels of grant funding, increased importance of fee-for-service
- Massive demand for professional development

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>Performance-based accountability is deeply-rooted in the political economy public education; the form may change, the basic idea of hold school accountable for student performance won't

>Accountability and school improvement are a developmental processes; what schools require, or demand, at any given stage of development is a function of their capacity; demand for high-level curricula and pedagogy-- which already exceeds capacity-- will increase as a function of the number of schools moving through higher stages of improvement

>Pressure for market solutions to the problem of how to fund external support for schools will intensify; grant support will decrease, and will move increasingly to the private philanthropic sector, where the funding objectives will be much narrower

>These factors will create a massive demand for professional development and curricular support at a time where the sector is ill-prepared to provide it-- weak infrastructure, weak district capacity, weak market-readiness on the part of existing development organizations

Sustainability as a problem of . . .

. . .Instructional capacity

What is the knowledge?

Where does it reside?

In what form?

With what accessibility?

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>The next phase of work for the development and support sector is essentially to form a professional services sector that delivers high levels of support at high levels of quality to schools and school systems that are at widely varying levels of performance, quality, and capacity

>Building and sustaining this sector requires identifying its “core competencies”--the most important of which is improving instructional capacity: the ability of teachers to learn increasing high levels of content and pedagogy in the workplace

>Challenge: Can you say what the knowledge is that corresponds to improving instructional capacity, where does it reside, what are the various forms it take, and how is it accessible to schools and school systems engaged in improvement?

Sustainability as a problem of . . .

. . .incentives

What rewards for additional skill and knowledge?

What business models for curriculum support?

What incentives for demand?

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>The existing human resource management practices of school systems, the career structures of the teaching profession, and the material incentives that operate on educators are completely at odds with the project of school improvement

>In order for school improvement to work, with the concomitant demand for school improvement support services, we will have to address the issue of incentives: increased compensation and responsibility for teachers who acquire higher levels of skill and knowledge and who can demonstrate competencies in instructional practice, increased emphasis on content and pedagogical knowledge of educators in administrative roles, a more differentiated career structure for teachers and administrators that allows for differentiated responsibility based on knowledge, skill, and demonstrated competence

>Experience DOES NOT equal expertise

>Along with changes inside the system, we will have to develop new business models for support to schools and school systems that accommodate to changing organization and management practices with the sector

>Right now there is an inverse relationship between demand for high level curriculum and professional development support and the “need” for such support; low-performing, low capacity schools and systems don’t know what they don’t know; this will require some public intervention to create incentives for demand where they are most needed

Sustainability as a problem of . . .

. . .organizational capacity

What source of leadership with instructional expertise?

What reallocation from base budget?

What knowledge and skill in curriculum specialists?

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>Who will lead sustained improvement processes? What will they have to know? Where will they get that knowledge?

>Leadership will certainly be more widely distributed, creating demand for different kinds of competencies in different parts of the organization; this means that providers will have to deliver more differentiated training and support than they are currently doing

>Movement to a more market-driven model of support will mean that school systems will have to exercise more control over their base budgets than they traditionally have in order to capture the resources necessary to fund improvement; the knowledge exists to do this; the pressure has to be intensified to get districts to do it. There is an opportunity for more providers of consulting services in this domain.

>A more differentiated set of support services will require clearer ways of communicating what curriculum support and professional development providers actually do and for whom they do what

Sustainability as a problem of . . .

. . .systemic capacity

What infrastructure to support cross-site work?

What sources of R&D for continuous improvement?

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>Who will take responsibility for the public infrastructure that will sustain the kind of support necessary to assure that schools have access to curriculum and professional development; this is a public goods problem-- the kind of problem that reform policy makers are particularly tone-deaf about

>Likewise, there is an R&D component to sustaining development and support-- studies of the effectiveness of various support models, development of new content and pedagogy, etc.-- that requires public investment. No clear evidence that public policymakers understand this dimension of the problem.

>This is essentially a political problem-- it requires educators to begin to operate more like professionals: focusing electoral incentives on key officials, and making it hurt when they don't acknowledge them

Sustainability as a problem of . . .

. . . accountability

What standards of quality and performance?

What instructional support for schools in improvement?

What level of adaptability in curriculum design?

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>Right now, our model of performance-based accountability is deficient in several fundamental respects; creating demand for support services requires that policymakers acknowledge that improvement occurs when simultaneous applications of pressure and support

>The current system is largely pressure with little or no formal acknowledgement of support; essentially policymakers are getting a free ride, apply pressure for performance, but defaulting on the investments in infrastructure and capacity that are necessary to meet the demands for performance

>Policymakers respond to political pressure

Sustainability as a problem ofpolitics

What is the political constituency for high-level instructional practice?

Who are our clients?

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>Politically, educators, broadly defined, are people to whom things happen, not people who make things happen; legacy of a culture that regards teaching as low-skill work, of a profession that has failed to develop a practice and to control entry based on the mastery of that practice

>Building and sustaining the support structure for improvement requires tackling this political problem head-on; forming a broader political constituency for high-level instruction and the support it requires; the constituency has to be composed of professionals, but it has also to involve lay-people and influentials

>Two starting points: (1) brand identity-- people have to have a clear picture and a range of associated images (use media) that capture what high-level instructional practice looks like and what it does for student learning; (2) exposure-- parents and lay audiences have to be exposed directly to what instructional practice looks like--routinely, frequently, wherever it happens.

>Good marketing practice requires a more sophisticated model of who the clients are: The end users, students and teachers are, for political purposes, NOT the key clients; for political purposes, the key clients are people who need to know, people whose point of view matters, and people who can be depended upon to use their influence. Educators have proven to be hopelessly inept at creating this sort of clientele, believing that virtue is its own reward. We are now in situation where our future depends on it.