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IMPROVING LATINO EDUCATION

ROLES AND CHALLENGES FOR SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARDS

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MISSION STATEMENT

The UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center supports interdisciplinary, collaborative, and policy-oriented research on issues critical to the Chicano community. The center's press disseminates books, working papers, and the peer-reviewed *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*.

The American education system is failing Latina/o students. Despite their significant representation in the student population, Latina/o students struggle in overcrowded, under-resourced schools and are too often limited to vocational curricula instead of college-bound options. About half of Latina/o students complete their K-12 education, and less than 10 percent graduate from college.

In this report we survey research that explores how school boards and school superintendents can contribute to efforts to improve education for Latina/o students. The first part of the report looks at the challenges that educators face in large urban school districts and examines the implications for Latino communities. Next is an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the governance team and the issues that superintendents and school boards confront, with a focused look on school governance in Latino communities. This is followed by a discussion of recent events affecting the governance of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the district with the nation's highest percentage of Latino students—71 percent. Finally, we take a look at best practices for district governance in Latino communities and offer recommendations on how school boards and superintendents can raise the achievement of Latina/o students.

INTRODUCTION

The roles and responsibilities of school boards and superintendents have changed dramatically as public school education has evolved, from the nineteenth century, when educational priorities were shaped by the religious character of public education, to the present, when reform movements focus almost exclusively on mandated testing and accountability measures.

The competency of public school administrators received widespread scrutiny in 1983, when *A Nation at Risk* was published.[1] In addition to listing recommendations for curricula, instruction, and academic expectations, the report advised enhancing the role of leadership at the school level (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983). Some scholars believe that, as a result, research on district leaders and school district governance was overshadowed (Thomas 2001) and that education research suffered: "The failure to come up with satisfactory answers to questions about the impact of senior administrators is the source of so much of our inability to understand school effects" (Musella 1995, 223). Reform movements in the 1990s centered on decision-making authority, parental choice of schools, and the influence of the market on reform efforts such as site-based management and the founding of charter schools.

In 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law, refocusing attention on standards-based accountability. Under the act, measuring student performance became the guiding principle for all school-related operations. Today, testing is an annual event, states must define adequate yearly progress, and schools that do not meet the standard face serious consequences (Anthes 2002).

The impact of education reforms—particularly those springing from No Child Left Behind—on the school governance team has been profound. School boards have decreased authority and must operate under increased state control; in addition, they must deal with the greater influence of teachers' organizations, special interests, and the court. Superintendents must have an in-depth understanding of instructional strategies, and they must collect and analyze relevant data to make decisions that will raise student achievement (Anthes 2002).

The challenges that have resulted from these reforms are felt particularly by the governance teams of urban districts, which must also deal with circumstances that are unique to large, multicultural districts.

GOVERNING URBAN SCHOOLS

Urban school districts operate the largest systems of transportation, food service, and building facilities in their communities, and they are responsible for decisions about policies, practices, textbooks, school boundaries, and student-teacher ratios. In the late 1990s they managed the schooling of 12 million children with expenditures of nearly $70 billion. At the same time, urban districts deal with poverty, racism, crime, violence, unstable family structures, and limited community resources, all of which undermine student achievement and efforts to improve it. Attempts to increase academic performance are additionally limited by the high turnover of teaching and administrative personnel and limited resources in urban schools (National School Boards Foundation 1999).

Academic performance in urban school districts falls far behind performance in most suburban districts, according to a survey conducted in 1998 (National School Boards Foundation 1999). McAdams (2002) reported that the 100 largest U.S. school districts found that fewer than half of high school freshman graduated four years later, and more than half were not reading or solving mathematics problems at

grade level. Learning is hampered by overcrowding and poor maintenance of school facilities. In addition, urban schools have difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, which has resulted in a teacher shortage that is twice the national average (Figure 1) (National School Boards Foundation 1999).

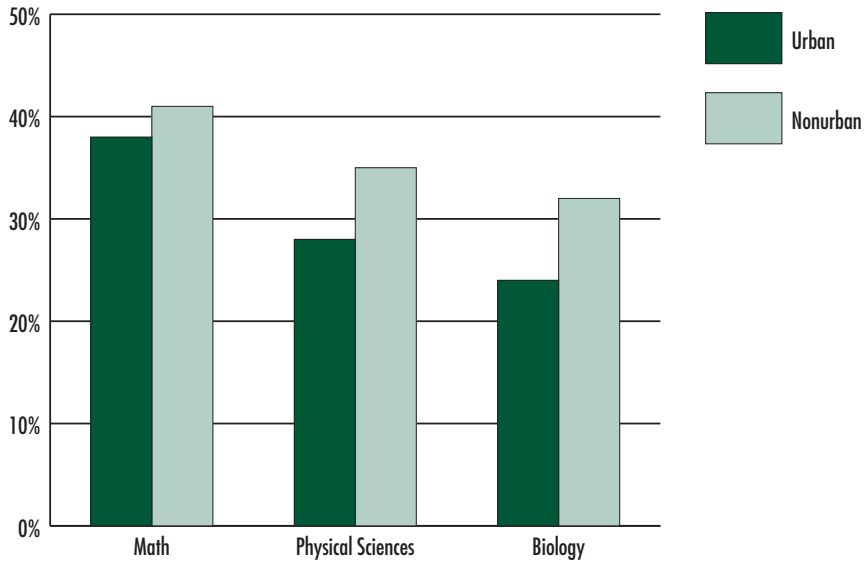
Although urban students usually have greater needs, they typically receive fewer resources than their suburban counterparts do (Figure 2) (National School Boards Foundation 1999). In the 1950s and 1960s education was funded primarily at the local level through property taxes, and the federal government supported special programs. State aid for education began to increase in the 1970s in response to a nationwide initiative to reduce inequities between property-rich and property-poor districts. By 1984 states generally funded more than 50 percent of nonfederal school costs. Despite these increases, state funding has not been able to equalize financing across districts (Ascher 1989).

State aid is generally calculated by Average Daily Attendance data, calculations that tend to discriminate against urban school districts with high absentee rates. Moreover, states often channel extra dollars into "excellence" projects, not provisions for disadvantaged urban students. State education budgets have neither kept up with rising costs nor compensated for the loss of federal money, and increased state control over district budgets undermines the ability of district-level administrators to secure funding and determine how it will be spent (Ascher 1989).

Coupled with this is the decline in urban capacity for school support. The limited development of new housing in urban areas limits property-based school taxes, and raising taxes for schools in these areas is difficult. City councils often attempt to attract commercial development by offering tax abatements and exemptions. Low-income urban populations do support their schools, but they have limited financial resources (Ascher 1989).

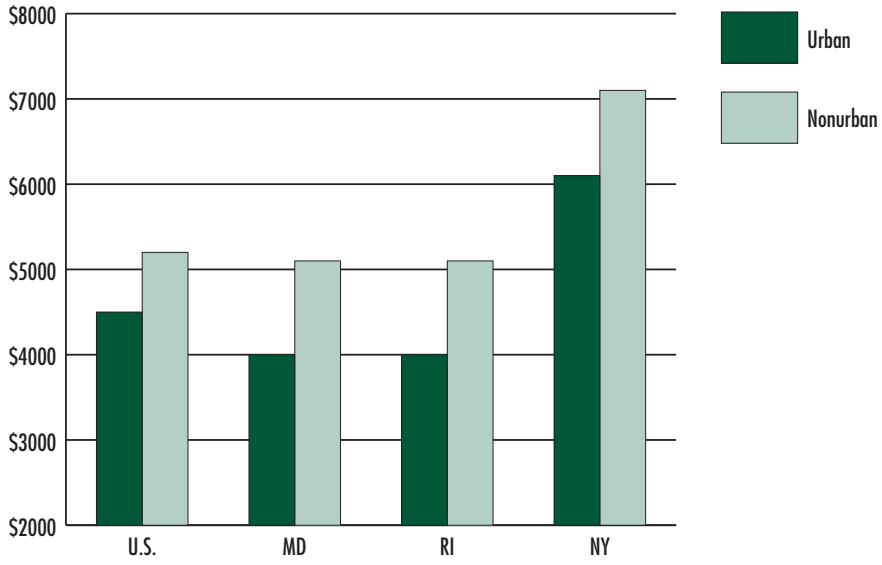
Another reason for fiscal strain is the extra cost of educating urban students. Urban enrollments are characterized by increasing diversity and growing numbers of disadvantaged students. A 2006 survey by the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) of fifty-nine of its member districts revealed that urban schools served 15 percent of the nation's K-12 students, but some 30 percent of students of color, low-income students, and English language learners (Council of the Great City Schools 2006). These students often require

Figure 1. Percentage of Schools with Teaching Vacancies in Urban and Nonurban Schools



Source: National School Boards Association 1999.

Figure 2. Average Spent per Pupil in Urban and Nonurban Schools



Source: National School Boards Association 1999.

special services such as compensatory and remedial programs, special education, language education programs, bilingual education, and vocational education. Teachers in urban areas tend to be more experienced than suburban teachers; therefore they are at the higher end of the pay scale. Schools' operating costs—land, materials, and labor for the construction and maintenance of facilities—are also higher in urban areas (Ascher 1989).

These inequities affect Latino communities in particular, because Latina/o students comprise a significant portion of the urban school population.

LATINO COMMUNITIES AND THEIR STUDENTS

In 2002 Latina/os made up 17 percent of the K-12 student population in the United States; by 2025 that figure is predicted to reach 25 percent.[2] In 2004 more than four in ten Latina/o students were English language learners, and 45 percent attended schools in high-poverty areas (American Federation of Teachers 2004). Graduation statistics are staggering: out of every 100 Latina/o elementary school students, 54 will eventually graduate from high school, 11 will graduate from college, 4 will obtain a graduate or professional degree, and less than 1 will receive a doctorate (Ornelas and Solorzano 2004; Rivas et al. 2007). This represents the highest dropout rate of any major ethnic group in the United States: American-born Latina/os drop out more frequently than whites or African Americans (American Federation of Teachers 2004).

For many Latina/o students, intervention in high school is too late. Latina/os tend to drop out earlier than their peers from other student populations do—between eighth and tenth grades (American Federation of Teachers 2004). Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 show that almost half of Latino males dropped out of school before they completed their first year of high school (Rumberger 1995). Failure during elementary and middle school, when a student's self-perception of academic ability is shaped, leads to "a declining spiral of events" that results in "low academic self-esteem, frustration, truancy, delinquency, and dropout" (Fashola et al. 1996, 3). The factors that contribute to this high dropout rate are not only institutional (for example, a shortage of fully qualified teachers, limited access to rigorous college-preparatory coursework, a lack of resources at the school level) but also familial (for example, having a home language other than English, limited family access to and involvement with the school) (American Federation of Teachers 2004).

When parents become more involved with school instruction, policy, and practice, their concern about the quality of their children's education increases and their children's academic achievement improves (Olivos 2006). Unfortunately, protocols and procedures regulate access to the school system, and issues of language, culture, and class erect obstacles that hinder, and often prevent, the involvement of Latina/o parents. Olivos (2006) points out that "parents who do not speak English or possess the political and economic clout to be heard often get discouraged by institutional barriers" (96).[3]

Most of the studies on the involvement of bicultural parents show that teachers and school personnel are inclined to attach value to a family's "social, economic, and cultural capital" and that they act more favorably toward students and families who are middle- and upper-class whites (Olivos 2006, 37). In addition, administrators appear to be more loyal to the school system than to parents and the community. Low-income bicultural parents are "challenged and rebuffed when they have a concern." Their questions and complaints are all too often "neutralized" by the "superior status" of teachers and administrators (37).

For recent Latina/o immigrants, academic success is limited by a lack of bilingual instruction. Studies have demonstrated that students who read well in Spanish will read well in English, and researchers have concluded that ESL instruction and integration into competent English language instruction is essential for English language learners (Fashola et al. 1996). Yet skepticism and budget cuts continue to undermine bilingual programs.

Improving schooling for Latina/o students requires reforms that touch every facet of the education system, but the governance of Latino-populated school districts is, perhaps, the most critical. Research-based policies and thoughtfully structured initiatives that are developed at the district level can help schools provide the education that Latina/o students need to succeed and to have access to a range of career opportunities.[4] Superintendents and school boards also must work closely together to delegate authority to school-level leaders and teachers, to conduct regular evaluations, and to encourage Latina/o communities to participate in school activities and district affairs.

THE GOVERNANCE TEAM

A smoothly functioning relationship between superintendent and school board is vital for effective governance: it affects the district's ability to meet local expectations and federal and state regulations.

The School Board's Roles and Responsibilities

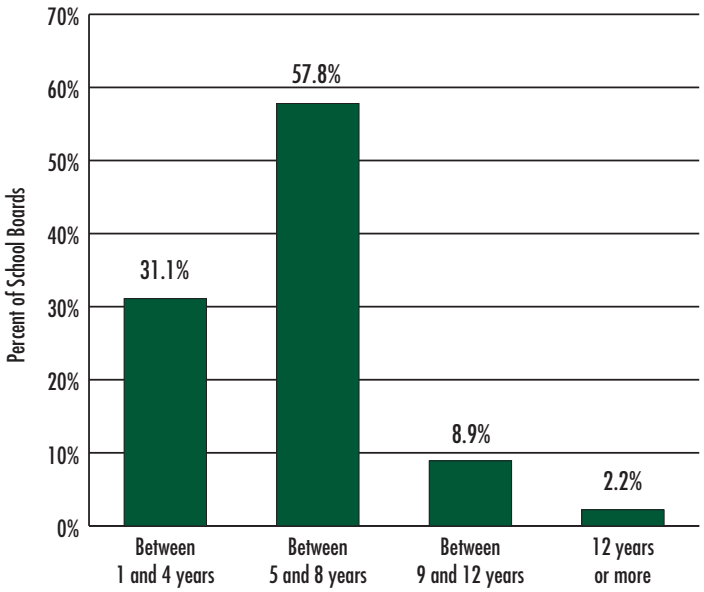
School boards "provide the crucial link between public values and professional expertise" (Resnick 1999, 6). The board is expected to build community support by pursuing a broad base of involvement, communicate clearly with all school district stakeholders, adopt policies to support district initiatives,

approve comprehensive plans developed by the superintendent, allocate adequate funding and align resources, and monitor progress toward the achievement of district goals (Gemberling, Smith, and Villani 2000). The school board is responsible for negotiations with labor unions, managing service contracts for transportation, food, technology, and facilities maintenance, and generating revenue through capital campaigns, bond measures, and tax levies (Land 2002). The school board also plays an important role in improving academic achievement by tracking evaluations of academic progress and staying informed of the district's academic performance (Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman 1997).

The most important responsibility of the school board, according to one study, is to establish a long-term vision for the district's schools. This vision, which reflects the consensus of the board and superintendent, identifies what students need to achieve their highest potential and which educational programs will be offered to reach that ideal (Campbell and Greene 1994). Effective board leadership mobilizes the community and creates a climate conducive to achieving excellence in the system, as Campbell and Green (1994) note: "By setting fair but rigorous standards of performance, establishing well-considered policies, and treating its own members and others with dignity and respect, the board … becomes a model for the entire school system" (393).

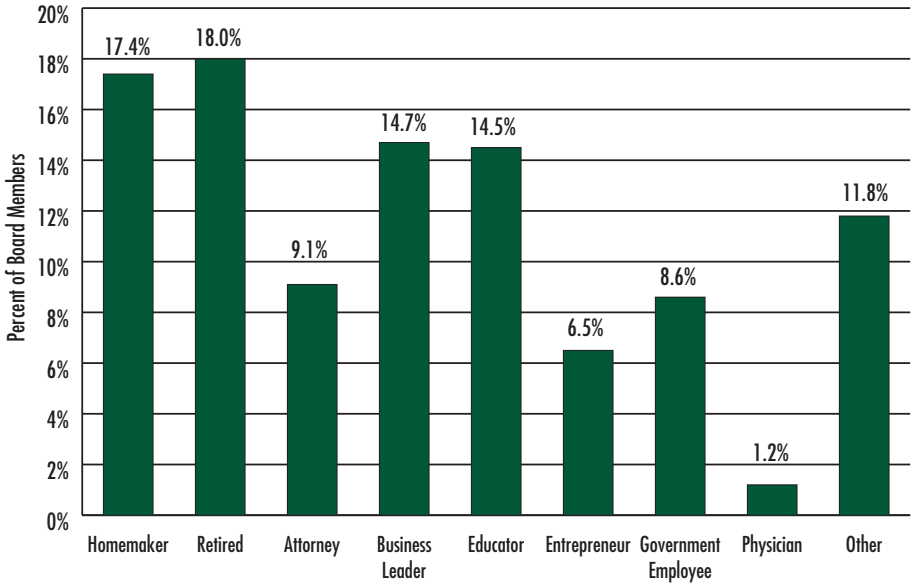
A survey of urban school boards, conducted by CGCS in 2005, revealed that the majority of members on urban school boards had served between five and eight years (Figure 3) and that the most prevalent occupations were "homemaker" and "retired" (Figure 4).[5] The study also revealed, however, that urban school districts do not mirror their student populations in terms of race/ethnicity or gender (Figure 5) (Council of the Great City Schools 2005).

Figure 3. Average Length of Service on CGCS School Boards



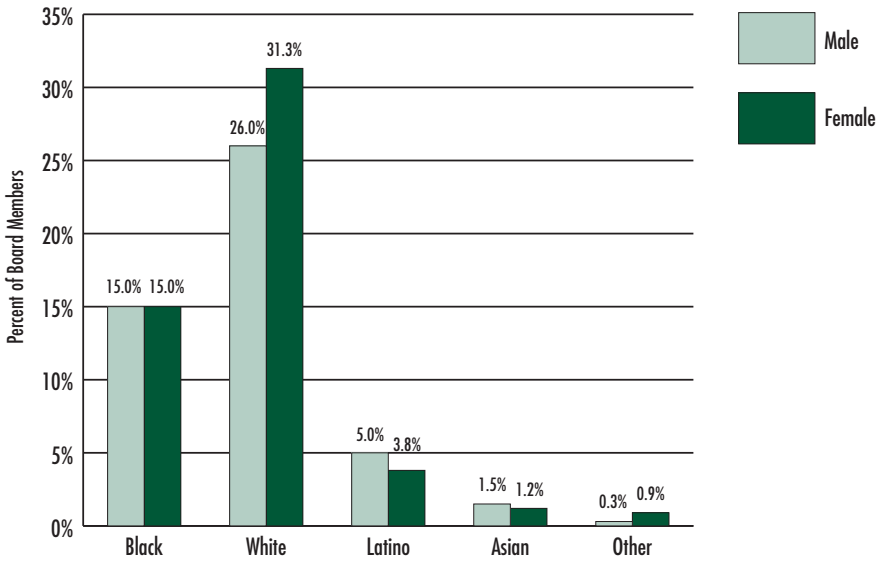
Source: Council of the Great City Schools 2005.
Note: n = 45.

Figure 4. Profession of CGCS School Board Members



Source: Council of the Great City Schools 2005.
Note: n = 339.

Figure 5. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of CGCS School Board Members



Source: Council of the Great City Schools 2005.
Note: n = 339.

Factors That Affect Success

The school board's success in meeting its responsibilities is affected by interboard relations, interagency collaboration, and interaction with local and state government.

The ability of board members to work together and reach consensus is essential if the board is to exercise its authority effectively. Traditionally, board members conceptualized their role as trustees and functioned as one body that represented the collective values and interests of the community. In the 1970s urban school boards began shifting from at-large to subdistrict elections in an effort to draw members who more closely represented the different ethnic, cultural, and political groups that made up the community. Since then school boards have become more politicized, and board members have increasingly operated as individuals representing specific groups of constituents, special interests, or single issues. The result has been frustration and growing conflict among board members (Land 2002).

One focus of the systemic, structural reforms of the 1990s was the promotion of collaborations between educational and social agencies and the integration of their services as a way to mitigate the circumstances brought about by child poverty, growing racial and ethnic minority populations, the increasing number of working mothers, and other social issues (Land 2002). Schools have not been generally cooperative in these efforts. Because a range of values and beliefs regarding parental, personal, and government responsibilities and rights are involved, any decision by the board about the appropriateness of the services provided to children and families may cause debate or conflict (Boyd 1996).

Research indicates that school boards do not routinely interact with local government unless they are fiscally dependent (Danzberger 1992). Boards that are fiscally dependent upon and in close contact with local government are often mired in conflict (Carol et al. 1986). Land (2002) points out, however, that many districts "believe that the potential benefits of closer affiliation with local government outweigh the possible dangers" (33) because local support for public education has declined, particularly in urban areas, as poverty has increased and the elderly population has grown. As school boards have become more culturally, ethnically, racially, and politically diverse, their informal ties to the traditional community power structure have eroded. Closer ties to local government can give boards "more political clout and community support" and "facilitate the coordination of education, health and social services for children and families" (33).

Besides the traditional challenges such as securing and allocating resources and recruiting and maintaining a professional staff, school boards have been facing increasingly restrictive state and federal laws and policies. School boards have lost authority to federal regulations, state oversight, the courts, teachers unions and organizations, and special interest groups—a trend that began in the 1980s (Land 2002).

Public apathy and a lack of confidence in public schools also have an impact on the school board's effectiveness. The public is largely uninvolved in school board elections; across the nation only 10 to 15 percent, on average, participates (Land 2002). Nonetheless, urban board members must maintain relationships, and sometimes manage conflict, with "all those in the city who think they must be consulted before any decision is made about public schools" (McAdams 2002, 42–43).

Lack of regular self-evaluation is also an issue. A survey of 216 school board chairpersons in 1985 showed that only about one-third of the boards conducted a regular evaluation of their proceedings. Other data revealed that nearly a third of the boards surveyed did not hold periodic goal setting and planning meetings (Carol et al. 1986).

Land (2002) states that school boards face a crisis of relevance and legitimacy. Many critics perceive boards as "incapable of producing academic achievement that can ensure the U.S.'s continued economic preeminence" (6).[6] Focusing

on financial, legal, and constituent issues has proven insufficient for today's school boards. They must generate high, or at least improved, academic achievement by developing policies and support programs explicitly designed to boost students' academic achievement. They must take responsibility for the implementation of these policies and programs and be accountable for subsequent student performance. Otherwise, school boards risk being judged ineffective (Land 2002).

Proposing that school boards concentrate on policy and leave administration to their superintendents is too simplistic; few studies suggest that a strict separation of roles is best for effective governance (Land 2002).[7] The roles of the school board and the superintendent are highly interdependent, making complete separation impractical, if not impossible.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Superintendents juggle three sometimes incompatible roles: an instructional role, in which they are ultimately responsible for student achievement; a managerial role, in which they ensure the efficient operation of their districts; and a political role, in which they negotiate with different stakeholders regarding program implementation and resource acquisition (Lashway 2002). Superintendents are expected to implement school board decisions; lead strategic planning initiatives; make recommendations to the board; develop, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness of programs; model support for district change initiatives; and ensure that initiatives are implemented (Gemberling, Smith, and Villani 2000). They are also increasingly responsible for student achievement. Ultimately, superintendents must be comfortable with the politics that define their relationship with the public and with state and local governments, and they must work effectively with the school board.

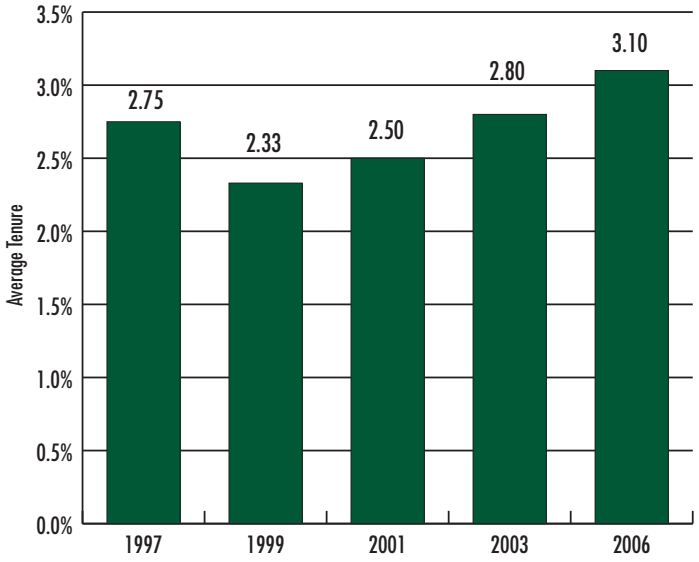
Previously, the process through which superintendents maintained credibility with and support from school boards was highly personal, based on their relationship with the board. The adequate yearly progress standard of No Child Left Behind is numbers-driven, however, and outcomes determine the fate of districts. The law forced school boards to alter the way they work with and evaluate their superintendents (Lashway 2002). The effects of the law are even more significant in urban districts, where superintendents are expected to make visible and rapid improvements in student achievement under increased public scrutiny, despite the difficult problems associated with large districts that serve highly diverse student populations (Council of the Great City Schools 2006).

The combination of vast numbers of students and high percentages of vulnerable children produces political pressures and conflicts—challenges "unrelated to teaching and learning"—that can detract from superintendents' efforts to focus on students (Council of the Great City Schools 2006, 1). The National School Boards Foundation (1999) observed that "these circumstances put urban children at risk of educational failure, schools at the center of interconnected social problems, and urban school board members on the front lines under extremely difficult conditions."

The demands of federal accountability measures, which have increased pressure on superintendents to improve academic performance (Lashway 2002), plus power struggles and the increasing politicization of the superintendent's role, have made turnover a major source of concern in recent years (Thomas 2001). A CGCS survey found that the tenure of CGCS superintendents in large urban districts increased only a little between 1997 and 2006, from a low in 1999 of 2.3 years to 3.1 years in 2006 (Figure 6).[8] The problem of turnover has been exacerbated by a shortage of applicants (Council of the Great City Schools 2006).

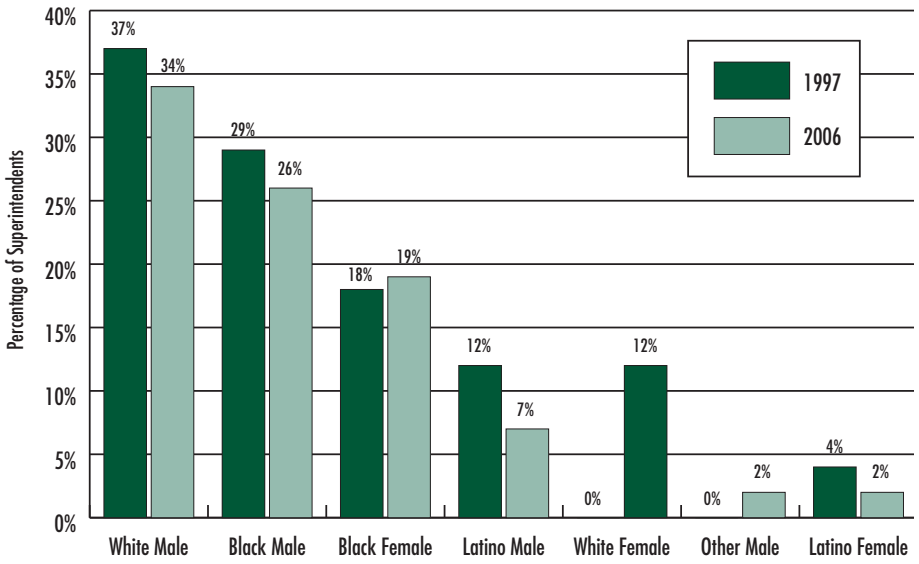
In the early 1990s, the shifting racial/ethnic composition of inner city districts (and some suburban districts as well)—notably the dramatic rise in African American and Latina/o populations—prompted a call for greater racial/ethnic representation in district management

Figure 6. Average Tenure of CGCS Superintendents



Source: Council of the Great City Schools 2006.

Figure 7. Race/Ethnicity and Gender of CGCS Superintendents



Source: Council of the Great City Schools 2006.

(Jackson and Cibulka 1992). The CGCS's district survey showed that the percentage of black women who were superintendents in CGCS school districts increased slightly between 1997 and 2006 (Figure 7); percentages for black males and Latinos and Latinas fell. In 2006, Latinos made up less than 10 percent of CGCS superintendents.

Despite district efforts to increase the diversity of its leaders, the legitimacy of the local school governance team is often challenged regardless of the racial/ethnic profile of the superintendent: white superintendents may be challenged regarding insensitivity toward racial/ethnic issues, while superintendents of color who lead districts with entrenched problems may be challenged for not making progress in student achievement (Thomas 2001).

Factors That Affect Success

The authority of the superintendent has eroded considerably in the last several decades. State and federal policy makers have imposed major mandates on districts, and a variety of special-interest groups have been actively advancing their agendas through the schools. Parents and teachers have grown more demanding about their participation in the decision-making process (Lashway 2002). All these factors can influence a superintendent's effectiveness, but superintendents have identified their relations with the school board as a primary barrier to effectively carrying out their responsibilities (Glass 1992).

Despite the fact that the division of labor between superintendent and school board is delineated, the boundaries can be impractical and unhelpful. The assignment of authority is frequently ambiguous, leading to power struggles. Although boards accept most of the policies recommended by superintendents, superintendents have to work hard to frame issues in a way that will gain majority support. Conflicts between the superintendent and the board often result in the removal of the superintendent from office (Thomas 2001). Research on the experiences of school board members revealed similar findings: board members also acknowledged relations with the superintendent as a key factor in the board's ability to fulfill its duties (Grady and Bryant 1991).

Poor communication, role confusion, and different leadership styles are factors that often cause tension at the governance level and undermine successful policy making and execution, as a number of studies demonstrate.

Poor communication prevents the school governance team from building a successful partnership (Thomas 2001). The *Study of the American School Superintendency, 2000,* found that of 2,262 superintendents across the nation, 62 percent reported three hours or less per week in direct communication with their board members (Glass, Bjork, and Brunner 2000). Another study reported that board members complained that, with the exception of board meetings, they had no direct contact with superintendents (Glass 1992). In some instances, communication problems were caused by the leadership style of superintendents who "manage in an autonomous fashion, leaving board members feeling alienated and disregarded" and who did not inform board members of "what's going on in the district" (Thomas 2001, 9).

Some scholars have noticed that in high-functioning school districts roles are clearly delineated, resulting in a stable relationship between board members and the district administration (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement 2006). Conversely, role confusion between school board members and the superintendent is one of two elements of low-quality governance that characterize districts with low student achievement. The other element is micromanagement—the encroachment of school boards into the daily administration of their districts (Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman 1997). Micromanagement is the most commonly reported criticism of school boards in the literature, and most reform proposals refocus the role of school boards on policy making and oversight and restrict their administrative management (Twentieth Century Fund 1992).

Leadership styles can also produce problems. Land (2002) reported that organizational scholars believe that if superintendents are not a good fit for the culture and decision-making style of board members, the working relationship will be strained. Whereas a superintendent is an educational professional, board members rarely have educational expertise. Board members who not only disagree with the superintendent's recommendations but also override decisions and implement strategies of their own are certain to cause tension. Land (2002) recommends that boards and their superintendent apportion the policy making and administrative responsibilities as best suits them and continually reassess the arrangement.

Improving School Governance

Effective school governance is the product of a collaborative, mutually supportive relationship between school board and superintendent. The research on school governance identifies models and practices that can improve the effectiveness of the governance team.

School boards, particularly those in urban areas, have been blamed for their inability to collaborate with their superintendents (Danzberger 1992). How might a school board be organized to best meet its obligations to the district and to the community? In some large districts the governance structure adheres to a corporate model, in which the relationship between school board and superintendent is patterned after that of a corporate board of directors with a CEO: the district is overseen by a small board that concentrates on policy making (for example, designing the district's overall educational strategy) and relies on a professional superintendent for management. The board answers to its shareholders—the community (Brown, Peterkin, and Finkelstein 1991; Land 2002).[9]

In the accountability model, extensive data analyses provide specific school-level information with contextual data to board members. Reeves (2000) points out that this model provides a framework within which "all initiatives, programs, evaluations, plans, and other educational policy matters facing the district can be accessible to and considered by the administrators" (208). District operations benefit from the accountability model because administrators have access to the same information.

A third model, the learning communities model, encourages the board and other members of the school community to work and learn together for the benefit of the school district. This model requires the board and the district to offer to the public as much information as possible, which can prompt discussions on the observable data and promote conversations within the community (Senge et al. 2000).

Generally, school boards can foster better governance by focusing on student achievement and policy, avoiding micromanagement, and striving for effective communication among members of the governance team and with the community. Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997) offer a series of recommendations: The board should adopt a budget that provides needed resources, plan retreats for evaluation and goal setting purposes, and hold monthly school board meetings for which the superintendent drafts the agenda. Evaluation of the superintendent should follow procedures that are mutually agreed upon. Long-term service from board members and superintendents will also improve the overall effectiveness of the governance team.

Superintendents serve their communities best when they do not attempt to micromanage classrooms; instead, they should provide resources, buffering staff from outside meddling (Glass 2001).[10] Effective instructional leadership requires a clear instructional vision. Superintendents depend on principals and teachers to carry out their vision, and they are most successful when they can elicit commitment from the staff (Johnson 1996).

A recent meta-analysis of data by Mid-continent Research for Educational and Learning (McREL) looked at superintendents' leadership practices, using twenty-seven studies that were conducted between 1970 and 2005. The data represented 2,817 districts and the achievement scores of an estimated 3.4 million students. Researchers identified district-level leadership characteristics and initiatives that had a statistically significant correlation with improved student academic achievement. These characteristics and initiatives are presented in order of their statistical significance.

1. *Non-negotiable goals for instruction and achievement*. Working collaboratively, the superintendent sets specific achievement targets and identifies research-based instructional strategies. Requires staff members to incorporate these goals into classroom instruction and school administration.
2. *Board support of district goals*. The superintendent assures that the school board is aligned with and supportive of the goals for instruction and achievement.
3. *Monitoring progress toward goals*. Superintendents continually monitor district progress and ensure that the goals for instruction and achievement remain the driving force behind the district's actions.
4. *Use of resources to support the goals*. The superintendent determines the resources (time, money, personnel, materials, and so on) necessary to accomplish the district's goals for instruction and achievement.
5. *Collaborative goal setting*. Superintendents include all relevant stakeholders, including central office staff, school-level administrators, and board members, in establishing the district's goals for instruction and achievement. (Waters and Marzano 2006)

School Governance in Latina/o Communities

The role of Latina/o administrators in the educational system is not well understood. Most studies focus on diversity within the administrative ranks, arguing that representation should be proportional—that is, the ratio of Latina/o administrators to other administrators should match the ratio of Latina/o students to other students—and that adequate representation will allow issues to be raised and resolved in favor of the Latina/o community.

Latino representation in district leadership is crucial. Superintendents have relatively more bureaucratic discretion than do administrators in other settings because seats on local school boards are rarely full-time positions. As Meier and Stewart (1991) note, "education is a policy area where administrative officials have been highly successful in defining a set of decisions as their own professional prerogative" (103). Bureaucratic discretion can either greatly facilitate or greatly impede the interaction between the school governance team and the community, between teachers and parents, and between teachers and administrators. Good relationships are essential for school operation, classroom instruction, and, ultimately, student achievement (Meier and Stewart 1991).

Latina/o representation on the school board is similarly important. Latina/o board members can support minority hiring and serve as a source of support not only for Latina/o administrators but also for Latina/o teachers who wish to challenge school district policies in the classroom. The presence of Latina/os on school boards has been found to be linked to the percentage of Latina/os in the community, how board members are elected, and the candidates' resources and social class. Even when the percentage of Latinos in a community is high, however, they are underrepresented on local school boards (Meier and Stewart 1991).

TRENDS IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Most of the education reforms in the 1990s focused on the state or the school level, bypassing or ignoring the school board and district office. Now many education experts think that a redefinition of the role of school boards, closer teamwork between board and superintendent, and new governance structures can indirectly stimulate an improvement in academic performance (Renchler 2000). For example, some states and local boards create basic standards, then give schools the freedom to devise their own ways to meet them. Schools that fail must adopt a set of educational "best practices." Schools must also compete for students; it is assumed that competition eliminates poorly performing schools. Continued failure to meet the standards results in school closure. Schools governed in this way become, in essence, entrepreneurial enterprises (Wang and Walberg 1999). Other districts adopt the corporate model, in which the school board functions as a board of directors and the superintendent takes on the role of CEO (Carver 2000).

When parties outside the district—the mayor, for example—perceive that schools have failed to make adequate progress on their own, the district governance team may lose management control. This has occurred mostly in districts located in urban areas, including Chicago, Boston, Detroit, and Cleveland (Kirst and Bulkley 2000). Experts have not found any conclusive evidence to show that mayors are more effective than locally elected school boards. Nevertheless, mayors or other local or state public officials now control between 10 and 15 percent of large urban districts. Advocates of mayoral control think that mayors can "act decisively and influence change by attracting resources, building coalitions, and recruiting talented teachers and managers to creatively address problems" (Augustine, Epstein, and Vuollo 2006, ix).

CASE STUDY: LAUSD

The LAUSD, which in 2004 had the nation's highest proportion—71 percent—of Latina/o students (American Federation of Teachers 2004), has been slower to embrace the kind of district-led initiatives that have been launched at the secondary school level in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia (Maxwell 2007a). For the past few years, the district has dealt with reform proposals from a number of sources: the mayor, the superintendent, and private organizations that promote charter schools.

Antonio Villaraigosa proposed that he should run the LAUSD during his campaign for mayor in 2005, and he continued to promote the idea after he was elected. Although he presented no specific plan, many commentators assumed that Villaraigosa was signaling the end of an elected board in favor of a board appointed by the mayor. The mayor's statements generated immediate opposition, particularly from the California Teacher's Association (CTA), and it was clear that such a takeover would face immediate legal obstacles because it would require amending the city charter (Bruck 2007; Wood 2005).

Villaraigosa decided on a different tack, and in April 2006 he announced a plan to legislate his takeover of the LAUSD. The CTA's reaction was immediate—and effective. Villaraigosa saw that, despite the support of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Speaker Fabian Núñez, he could not secure passage of a bill that would give him broad control of the district. A new version was fashioned with the help of the union. The revised bill—AB 1381—gave teachers more input on curriculum, but it also expanded the authority of the superintendent, diminished the authority of the school board, and created a Council of Mayors. It gave the mayor partial authority over three low-achieving high schools and the elementary and middle schools that feed them (Bruck 2007; Steinhauer 2006; Wood 2007).

The main provisions were:

1. The board would retain the power to hire and dismiss the superintendent, but a representative of the Council of Mayors would participate in selecting and evaluating candidates, and final ratification would need approval by a 90 percent weighted vote of the council.
2. The superintendent would gain greater control over budgeting, contracts, and the ongoing construction and building program. The council would review and comment on the budget; the board would have the final authority for approval. The council would also advise on facilities.
3. Teachers and principals would have more authority over selecting pedagogy, supplemental materials, and local enhancements.
4. The mayor would establish and lead a partnership with community leaders, parents, teachers, and school staff to oversee three clusters of schools (three high schools and their feeder schools).
5. The council and the district would jointly conduct a periodic comprehensive assessment of services (public safety) available to youth in each community served by the district. This assessment would be followed by a plan to address gaps in services. (Augustine, Epstein, and Vuollo 2006)

Key to these reforms was Villaraigosa's Council of Mayors, which would serve as the ultimate governing body of the LAUSD. The council would include one representative from each of the twenty-seven cities and multiple unincorporated areas within the district. Each member's vote would be weighted according to the number of students enrolled in the member's city or area. Villaraigosa would be the most powerful mayor on the council because around 80 percent of LAUSD students reside in the city of Los Angeles (Augustine, Epstein, and Vuollo 2006).

Villaraigosa's proposal contrasted directly with the 2005 recommendations from the President's Joint Commission on LAUSD Governance, a commission set up by the Los Angeles City Council and the superintendent, which conducted a year-long study on LAUSD governance. The commission recommended decentralizing the district, abolishing LAUSD's eight subdistricts, and establishing clusters of schools. Schools would be given more authority over structuring pedagogy, hiring personnel, and budgeting. The commission recommended maintaining the central governing school board as the primary governing body and increasing the capacity of the board by "reducing the scope of its responsibilities and elevating board membership to a full-time professional position" (Augustine, Epstein, and Vuollo 2006, xi).

Many parties objected to AB 1381, including the school board president and superintendent, the state and local teachers' unions, and leaders of outlying cities. Many district residents voiced loyalty to their school board members and defended the right of local representation. Outside of the city of Los Angeles, residents were quite vocal in their opposition to the mayor's intention. Six outlying city leaders formed a coalition to lobby officially against mayoral takeover (Augustine, Epstein, and Vuollo 2006). The bill was still championed by Schwarzenegger and Núñez, however, and now that the CTA was on board, support for AB 1381 was slightly stronger than the opposition. In August 2006 it was voted into law by a narrow margin (Bruck 2007).

AB 1381 never took effect. The school board sued, and in April 2007 the California Court of Appeals declared the law unconstitutional. Instead of appealing the decision to the California Supreme Court, the mayor set his sights on school board elections in March. Villaraigosa had been promoting candidates who would support his plan to win partial authority over the district and his bid to play a role in operating one or more of Los Angeles's struggling high schools. Close results for two seats forced runoff elections in May. The mayor's candidates prevailed, forming a majority on the seven-member board (Bruck 2007; Maxwell 2007a).

Villaraigosa's quest for control has created serious conflicts with some current school board members, yet the mayor has stated that he wants to work with the board to raise student achievement and drive down the district's high dropout rate (Maxwell 2007b). In August 2007 he announced formation of the Partnership for L.A. Schools, a nonprofit organization that will "support and manage" schools with the help of private donations (Partnership for Los Angeles Schools 2007). The partnership will give school councils at participating schools "full control" over budget and curriculum; oversight will be within the purview of the organization, but will be "accountable" to the district and the school board (Blume and Helfand 2007). Villaraigosa appointed Ramon C. Cortines, his deputy mayor and education advisor since August 2006, to lead the partnership's new board of directors. Cortines had served six months as interim superintendent of LAUSD in 2000, and he had headed school districts in New York City, San Francisco, San Jose, and, closer to home, Pasadena (Blume 2008b; Helfand and Blume 2008).

At the time of this report, six middle and high schools had voted to join the mayor's partnership. The partnership will assume control of these schools on July 1, 2008, and Villaraigosa was preparing his leadership team to implement his agenda for reform (Blume 2008d; Orlov 2008).

The Partnership for L.A. Schools was introduced as a program that would work alongside the LAUSD's Innovation Division for Educational Achievement, which was unveiled in June 2007 by the

district's current superintendent, David L. Brewer. The division aims to improve low-performing schools by producing successful models that can be replicated throughout the district. The division seeks to develop innovative educational programs by promoting collaborative efforts between district governance, teachers and principals, parents, and outside collaborators. Schools in the division are required to meet the district's accountability standards (Blume and Helfand 2007; Los Angeles Unified School District 2007b; Maxwell 2007a; Maxwell 2007c; Partnership for L.A. Schools 2007; Rubin and Blume 2007).

In August 2007, the district announced that the board, the superintendent, and the mayor would work together, through the new division, to improve achievement at district schools. In January 2008, teachers and parents at two LAUSD high schools voted to join the division. A school leadership team at each site, composed of administrators, teachers, parents, older students, and community members, will have substantial budget and instructional control. The Urban League and the Bradley Foundation will help reform efforts at one school; Loyola Marymount University will assist at the other (Blume 2008d; Maxwell 2007a).

Many local educators and members of the public believe that the charter school offers the most reliable model for reform. Charter schools are not bound by the state's education code and, in general, operate without district oversight. They are overseen by the district, however, and every five years the district must either renew the charter or, if the schools are not successful, close them down. In early 2008 the LAUSD had 128 charter campuses—more than any other district in the United States. Recent grants from private sources—including $7.8 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and $23.3 million from Eli Broad—will fund the opening of new charter schools in the LAUSD within the next few years (Blume 2008a; Maxwell 2007a).

These ideas for reform are accompanied by many concerns. The governance of the LAUSD may become more fragmented as the consequences of multiple reforms—including greater transaction costs, inefficiencies, and opportunities for stalemate—become apparent. As political interests expand, the superintendent may have to devote more time to managing relationships with the school board and local government, which could undermine his leadership of the district. And citizens may have less say in how the district's schools are managed (Augustine et al. 2006).

In a move that may ease existing tensions, the LAUSD board hired Cortines in April 2008 to fill the district's number two position of senior deputy superintendent. Brewer had said that Cortines would be a "great asset," and board president Mónica García stated that Brewer wanted "an instructional leader with a track record who understands the needs of the children in Los Angeles" (quoted in Blume 2008b). The mayor also expressed approval, saying that the hiring of Cortines will "enhance the partnership between the city of Los Angeles and L.A. Unified and will accelerate the reforms and change we need now" (quoted in Blume 2008c).

Cortines said that he wants to focus on LAUSD's dropout rate, stating that increasing the graduation rate should be a higher priority than improving test scores. He also noted that students who drop out are often low achievers and that keeping these students in school could hamper efforts to increase scores. Cortines favors a bottom-up approach to reform, sharing the superintendent's desire to give more responsibility to regional and school-site administrators. Shrinking the district's bureaucracy, improving science and arts instruction, and increasing student access to college-prep classes are also on his agenda for reform. He plans to evaluate the impact of the district's current phonics-based reading program, which, he says, may not be the best approach for English language learners (Blume 2008c).

Support for Cortines appears to be strong. He drew "widespread praise" during his six-month appointment as interim superintendent and will likely have broad support from the community. Brewer, in turn, has been praised by board members and civic leaders for his willingness to hire Cortines (Blume 2008c). The *Los Angeles Times* (2008) stated that his appointment was "a good call," and the mayor notes that the timing "couldn't be better" (quoted in Blume 2008c).

BEST PRACTICES FOR EDUCATING LATINO STUDENTS

In school districts that have a majority of Latina/o students, the ultimate goal for the school board and superintendent should be to support teaching and model respect for diversity throughout the district. By directing all available resources to the schools and communities and setting policies that foster the success of Latina/o students, school boards and superintendents can provide the foundation that public schools need to realize their educational potential. The standard for measuring success should be that all K-12 students complete their secondary education and are prepared for the postsecondary level.

Programs initiated in four school districts from across the United States are representative of the ways in which public schools can serve the Latino community, and the larger community as well, in urban and suburban contexts.

Fenton High School District 100, Bensenville, Illinois

The district wished to close the achievement gap in state assessment between white and Hispanic students and engage Hispanic parents in school meetings and conferences. Social worker Peggy Mellenthin and ESL Counselor Lillian

Reed made sixty to seventy-five visits to Spanish-speaking families as part of the Spanish-speaking Parent Outreach Program, which was a joint effort of the school board and the superintendent. The board provided funding for home visits and training for administrators and staff that enabled them to better help district families. Frequent reports informed the board of progress (American School Board Journal 2008). The board learned that families in the district needed English language instruction and food, clothing, and medical care.

As a result of the outreach program, parental involvement in school activities and teacher conferences increased. More parents were made aware of the district's bilingual staff. Discussions with the parents led to the establishment of GED and ESL courses for community members; more than 300 people have participated in these courses (American School Board Journal 2008).

Fernbrock Elementary School, Randolph, New Jersey

In 2007 Randolph Township Schools hired Max R. Riley as its new superintendent. The district was struggling to meet targets for state-mandated testing and to engage immigrant students, especially Latina/os, and Riley had a record of improving the performance of minority students within a large Latina/o student population. Acting on his recommendation, the district, which was facing a $3 million budget shortfall, hired two new instructors for Fernbrock Elementary School: a teacher who spoke Spanish and a literacy coach to show teachers how to help students who were behind in reading. The district also created evening programs in Spanish to engage parents in school functions.

Riley asked the school board president to give the Fernbrock school principal support, freedom, and more resources. The school reduced its class size in kindergarten, first, and second grades to fifteen students when the district average was twenty-two students. The district retained computer laboratories when other schools eliminated them and hired a full-time social worker and a full-time reading specialist to serve Latina/o students. The school board president and the superintendent did not experience any immediate political repercussions. "As long as the scores stay high," school board president Christine Carey said, "we won't have any problems" (Fessenden 2007).

Lincoln Community Learning Centers, Lincoln, Nebraska

In 2001 the Lincoln Public Schools launched the Lincoln Community Learning Centers to address the achievement gap in the district's schools by emphasizing the role of the community in supporting student achievement. The program's leadership council comprises school board members, the superintendent, the city's major newspaper publisher, and other high-profile community and state participants, who are responsible for the continued growth of the learning centers and for securing funds through community partnerships. The neighborhood advisory committee at each participating site (generally a pair of schools) is made up of parents, students, neighborhood residents, educators, and representatives from community-based organizations and service providers. Working together, these stakeholders analyze the needs of the school and create a plan to address those needs (American School Board Journal 2006a).

San Jose Unified School District, San Jose, California

Another notable example is the two-step plan launched in 1996 by the San Jose Unified School District Board of Education in San Jose, California. The plan, which is called the Board of Education Driven Public Engagement Model, addresses the lack of trust and confidence in local schools as well as low student achievement. To increase parent and community participation and to foster an understanding of the district, the plan provides the school board with a set of data-gathering tools, including annual surveys, that allows it to conduct widespread, regular, and structured conversations with district constituents. As a result, the district reported high rates of satisfaction and increased student achievement. In 1997 the number of California Distinguished Schools increased from four to thirty and the number of National Blue Ribbon Schools grew from one to eleven. Recent board surveys indicated a 5 percent to 10 percent increase in parent, student, and staff satisfaction over the past decade, and district schools that ranked 4.3 on the 5-point survey scale experienced annual increases in student performance-based assessments (American School Board Journal 2006b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature reviewed, we recommend that the urban school governance team—the school board and the superintendent—take the following steps to improve the academic performance of Latina/o students and the participation of the Latina/o community in California's large urban school districts.

1. The governance team should be prepared to delegate authority to school-level leaders for organizational decisions, allowing them to share responsibility for school improvement.
2. The governance team should develop and communicate clear expectations for high academic achievement with all school stakeholders.
3. The governance team should develop systems that will hold teachers, principals, administrators, and other key players accountable for student progress. The team's decisions should be based on valid student performance data that is analyzed and disaggregated by school, class, gender, race,

income, and teacher.

4. The governance team should work to make the school environment conducive to student learning. It should improve discipline and safety by developing a code of behavior and clearly communicating the consequences of violating the code. Procedures should be established to gather and analyze data on school safety, dropouts and suspensions, attendance, and other school environment issues and to regularly monitor the school's progress in these areas.
5. The governance team should involve Latina/o parents and the community as important team members. Not only will the district benefit from the knowledge of the larger Latino community, that knowledge will also make the school governance process more democratic. Latina/o parents and others in the larger community should be engaged in all aspects of public school governance. One way to achieve this is to establish local school teams of teachers, students, and parents and to guarantee that they have the authority to implement change.
6. The governance team should educate and inform Latina/o parents and the public by disseminating accurate and detailed assessments of school performance, in Spanish as well as English, through direct communication and the media.
7. The governance team should promote policies in the business community that facilitate the involvement of Latino parents and the Latino community in public schools. One example is parental leave, which would allow families to participate in school activities and become more involved in their children's education.
8. The governance team should work toward attracting and hiring the best possible teachers and administrators, especially Latina/os, and provide them with the resources that are necessary to do their jobs. The governance team should clearly convey the values and standards of the school, offer competitive salaries, and demonstrate an understanding that teacher quality is key to student performance. In addition, it should offer opportunities for professional development during the school day, rather than after school.

NOTES

1. This report, which included local-, state- and national-level analyses, was regarded by many as a landmark document in the history of American education—the first to address the problem of American students' underachievement.

2. *Latino* is used to describe the Latina/o population. *Latina/o* refers to nonhomogenous persons of Latin American descent or origin who reside in the United States regardless of generation or immigration status. Some of the sources cited in this report uses *Hispanic* to denote the same population—that is, Latin American individuals and their descendants, regardless of race, who are living in the United States.

3. Olivos (2006) notes: "It appears that parents' social class determines the quality of their participation at their children's school, and this is more evident in the unequal treatment low-income parents receive, regardless of race, when they have school-related concerns or issues" (37).

4. One factor that certainly affects the education of Latina/o students is the heterogeneity of the Latina/o population, yet little data is available that considers the multiracial, multinational character of Latina/os or the diversity of their educational and socioeconomic backgrounds (American Federation of Teachers 2004). Research that examines this issue would help policy makers create solutions that better address the difficulties Latina/o students face.

5. The Council of the Great City Schools is a national organization with a current membership of sixty-six large urban districts. In fall 2004 it sent a survey to its member districts, which then totaled sixty-five. Respondents were asked to provide information on a range of topics, such as board governance and structure, demographics of board members including race/ethnicity, age, gender, educational background, and profession, as well as board members' salary, benefits, elections, and activities. Forty-five districts returned the survey, for a response rate of 69.2 percent (CGCS 2005).

6. School boards are also often perceived as obstacles to, rather than facilitators of, educational reforms especially when the restructuring/systematic reform movement in school boards emerges after the excellence reforms failed to achieve their expected outcomes (Danzberger 1992).

7. A variety of educational governance reforms have been implemented to address these rising challenges, including site-based management, charter schools, and state and mayoral takeovers, but the school board's role in these has not been well established (Land 2002).

8. The CGCS survey, which began in spring 2006, was returned by 59 of its member districts. Respondents were asked to provide information on the gender, race/ethnicity, salary, and benefits of their district superintendent (Council of the Great City Schools 2006).

9. One feature remains, which is school boards' flexibility in governance. Different district boards encounter differences in resources available and the size and special needs of the student population. Therefore they must respond to their particular economic, political, social, and religious contexts by tailoring their management, operation, and priorities to their communities (Land 2002).

10. Glass (2001) conducted a study that included the responses of 175 superintendents who were designated "outstanding" between 1995 and 2000. This group is comprised mostly of white males who have been superintendents for more than twelve years and have served their present suburban district (adjacent to a large city) for more than six years (Glass, 2001).

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