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MOVING FROM SUCCESSFUL LOCAL PRACTICE TO EFFECTIVE STATE POLICY

LESSONS FROM UNION CITY

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Successful reforms at the district level are being scaled up for statewide implementation in New Jersey.

GIVEN THE IMPORTANCE of local context, relevance, and ownership in achieving success in education initiatives, how do lessons from a local success get translated into policy that spreads the success to schools in more widespread jurisdictions? How can that policy be implemented so that fidelity of outcome is not sacrificed to fidelity of program? This chapter looks at two levels of scaling up—within a district and within a state—to examine emerging practices and strategies aimed at maintaining the integrity of an initiative as it expands to meet statewide objectives and outcomes. Our analysis is grounded in three broad assumptions:

- There is limited understanding of how to take a successful local education model and convert it into state-level policy that achieves similar results throughout the state.
- Coherence and support across state, district, and school levels are essential to an effective scaling-up process.

- Ultimate success is anchored in the opportunity schools and districts have to localize practices while maintaining high levels of coherence and consistency concerning the goals and principles of a given policy.

This chapter grows out of more than a decade of successful school reform work in Union City, New Jersey. Because of school reform efforts in this Latino, urban district—which in 1989 ranked second lowest in the state—more than 80 percent of Union City students meet state standards, the number of students attending first-tier and second-tier colleges and universities has increased dramatically, and the number of students opting out of school has seen a remarkable decline. Much of the district's reform efforts can be credited to the leadership of Fred Carrigg, Union City's executive director of academic programs for more than twelve years. In 2002, Carrigg accepted a new position in the New Jersey Department of Education. As special assistant to the commissioner for urban literacy, he is entrusted with finding ways to replicate Union City's accomplishments in the poorest districts in the state. Using Carrigg's own reflections and the observations of the researchers who worked with him, this chapter follows his efforts from program development and implementation at the district level through the translation into state policy and the first steps toward statewide implementation.

Getting Beyond Idiosyncrasy

The world of public schools seems to foster a deep-seated belief in idiosyncrasy, the notion that every classroom, school, or district is unique. In our view, this way of thinking reflects a belief in local control and autonomy rather than a devotion to quirkiness. On the good side, this belief allows everyone to feel special and each organization to make decisions based on local preferences; on the bad side, the belief stands as a barrier to the replication of good ideas and practices. It is all too common to hear educators at all levels speak admiringly of a program that is successful somewhere else but cannot possibly work in their local situation. This culture of idiosyncrasy presents an obstacle to efforts to take good programs to scale. It also reveals a much deeper challenge: the basic nature of the educational infrastructure in what we call a system of public schools is so powerfully lacking in alignment that it is difficult for improvement efforts to move in any direction.

These realities are especially confounding to policymakers at the state level, where ultimate responsibility for school quality resides, and at the

local level, where teaching and learning take place. Not only do state administrators have trouble getting all their districts to adopt promising models or implement policy in a consistent and coherent way, but district superintendents also have trouble scaling up good practice among their schools. Even a principal may run into resistance when trying, for example, to get a good model into all third-grade classrooms or across all sections of ninth-grade English in her school. The challenge increases exponentially when a goal requires full-school integration among all teachers in a school, district, or state.

Another internal barrier to scaling up is resistance. Public school teachers, if they have been in the system for any time at all, are well accustomed to wave after wave of new ideas being thrown in their path. Whether the ideas come from a principal or a superintendent or from the chief state school officer via the state legislature or federal government, most teachers have learned that if they avoid the idea long enough, it will be replaced by the next equally ephemeral one. Such avoidance is especially easy to pull off in high-need and urban districts where leadership turnover is rapid and the interests of many different external forces tend to ebb and flow. Understanding the nature of the system is critical; simply having a good model to replicate—either by volition or compulsion—is not enough. The task must be imagined in the fullest possible context, including incentives, time lines, feedback loops, potential areas of compromise, deployment of personnel and resources, and changes to the environment; dedicated effort is needed to ensure that avoidance or turning back is not possible.

Policy Can Prime the Pump for Scaling Up

Scale is a relative term. A teacher might pilot some new approach in one class and then, based on its success, implement the same approach in all her classes. A principal might support introducing a program into the early grades of an elementary school and later try to spread it to all grades in that school. A district might introduce a science program in all of its schools, while a state might target all of its districts or a cluster of districts facing a similar need with a comprehensive literacy initiative. All of these efforts involve scaling up, and with each move to a level that encompasses more people, institutions, and physical facilities, the complexities increase by a quantum leap. This chapter describes a case of scaling up within the schools of Union City, New Jersey, and efforts to achieve similar results statewide through policy derived from this experience. We start with a close look at a districtwide reform effort and the implementation strategies and policies that appear to be associated with its success.

Later, we will look at a bold effort to translate the specific policies that worked in Union City into state policies targeted at twenty-nine disadvantaged districts and all Title I schools in New Jersey.

A Research Context

One of the most comprehensive studies concerning the impact of state policy on local instruction and learning practices is described in *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works,* by David Cohen and Heather Hill (2001). Their research presents findings from a decade-long study of a large-scale reform effort in California that was designed to improve the teaching of mathematics. The authors explore that reform effort in order to understand (1) the relationship between policy and practice, (2) the transferability of those lessons to other similar initiatives, and (3) how the resulting evidence can be used to improve policy and the nature of educational reform. The findings are based on research into the professional development available to California teachers and on surveys of nearly six hundred teachers who were involved.

Since the policy was successful for some teachers and students but not for others, as measured by performance improvement on the California Learning Assessment System tests, the authors analyzed the data further to shed light on possible explanations. Cohen and Hill conclude that the policy established by the California Department of Education improved the teaching and learning of mathematics only when teachers had sustained and significant opportunities to make sense of the reform initiative in their local context. While this finding strongly suggests that professional development was the key to success, by looking more deeply at the data, the authors further establish that it was among "teachers whose learning was focused around study of students' work on the new state assessments" that the greatest gains were found (Cohen and Hill, 2001, p. 3). In other words, it is not enough for policy to promote a particular curriculum by exposing teachers to it; effective professional development helps teachers gain a deep understanding of that curriculum as it appears in student work.

Policies that aim to improve teaching and learning depend on complex chains of causation. Making the policies work depends on defining and connecting the links in those chains. One crucial element in many of those links is instructional content: policies that offer professionals suitable chances to learn and coherent guidance for teaching and learning increase the opportunities to connect policy and practice (Cohen and Hill, 2001, p. 8).

Also linked to successful outcomes is the degree of coherence in both curriculum and the accompanying professional development. Cohen and Hill's study identifies the three key areas in which coherence is needed among as well as within the elements: (1) the primary elements of the curriculum, (2) assessment, and (3) learning opportunities for teachers. The rarity of such coherence and the difficulty of achieving it can be seen in the fact that only 10 percent of teachers in California elementary schools reported that they were experiencing it.

Cohen and Hill posit that this lack of cohesion at least in part reflects the many layers of governance and responsibility that exist within education and how poorly they are connected. As policy travels from a state department of education across these layers, en route to the teachers who have ultimate responsibility for its implementation, its integrity is threatened. Cohen and Hill report, "For most California teachers, reform was substantially less coherent in their school than it was in Sacramento" (2001, p. 9).

How professional development is delivered to teachers also affects implementation, because current practice both localizes the delivery (thereby increasing the variation in how curricular content is delivered and received) and often assigns the work to contract providers who have less of a stake in the outcomes than professionals within the schools and districts. Cohen and Hill, as well as other researchers, have found that most professional development providers deliver programs that are grounded in training paradigms, focus on teachers as individuals, and tend to be short-term, with little follow-up (Little, 1981, 1993; Miller, Lord, and Dorney, 1994; Spillane, 2002).

In addition, a lack of quality curricular resources proved problematic in the California initiative (Cohen and Hill, 2001, p. 23). Although the state offered replacement units as transitional instructional tools until more effective curricular materials were developed, most districts purchased curricula from a handful of large, well-established commercial publishing firms. Other research confirms that textbooks structure approximately 75 to 90 percent of classroom instruction (Grouws and Cebulla, 2000; Woodward and Elliot, 1990). Traditional commercial textbooks dominate the instructional landscape; two-thirds of teachers report that they use them every day (Clements, 2002; Grouws and Cebulla, 2000). The large publishing companies, concerned with meeting state adoption requirements, often attempt to meet every objective of every state, resulting in an incoherent mix of instructional strategies that do little more than give the appearance of meeting state and national standards (Clements, 2002; Ginsburg, Klein, and Starkey, 1998).

A final factor that emerged as a powerful determinant of failed state policy in Cohen and Hill's study is the culture of professional individualism that governs the instructional work of the majority of teachers in most schools. On measures of instructional practice, teachers working in the same schools were only slightly more likely to resemble colleagues in their own buildings than they were to resemble teachers they did not know working in buildings hundreds of miles away (p. 176). In striking contrast, Cohen and Hill found that this individualism did not pervade all aspects of teachers' professional life. When asked about school conditions such as the state of parent involvement or student attrition, teachers were much more likely to agree with their building colleagues than with teachers they did not know. On technical and affective points, then, teachers had much more of a shared understanding. Still, Cohen and Hill suggest that for teachers in the United States, professionalism is synonymous with instructional individualism.

Cohen and Hill conclude by suggesting that policy is most likely to succeed in producing the desired outcomes under the following conditions:

- Policy is understood as separate from the instruments used in deploying the policy (curriculum, assessment, and learning opportunities for teachers).
- Teachers' knowledge goes beyond the framework of the reform effort.
- Teachers and students have access to curricular materials.
- Assessments enable students to demonstrate their learning.
- Teachers have access to professional development that is grounded in student work.
- Policy instruments are marked by consistency and coherence.
- Safeguards ensure the integrity of the policy and its implementation as it moves from its source to those who must use it in the service of student achievement.

These recommendations are consistent with the findings of other policy researchers, as well as those who have studied large-scale education reform efforts (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, and Easton, 1998; Elmore, 1995; Fullan and Pomfret, 1977; Fullan, 1991, 1994; 1999; McLaughlin, 1987, 1990; Pogrow, 2001). They provide a compelling context in which to discuss the policies of Union City and the proposed state policies derived from them.

Going to Scale at the District Level: Union City

In 1989, the Union City school district was the second-worst-performing district in New Jersey. It had failed forty-four of fifty-two indicators that the state uses to determine the efficacy of school systems; in fact, the state had threatened to take over governance unless radical and successful restructuring was implemented within five years. Such poor performance results are not surprising for a school district located in arguably the most densely populated U.S. city, which the Brookings Institute classifies among the ninety-two most impoverished communities in the nation. The student population, numbering approximately 11,600, has the following demographic profile:

- 93 percent Latino
- 75 percent living in homes where English is not spoken
- 86 percent receiving free or reduced-price lunches
- Nearly 30 percent living below the poverty line
- 14 percent have been residents of the United States for less than three years

Thus, the transformation in academic achievement that the district experienced during the 1990s and has sustained into the current decade constitutes a surprising success story. By 1995, Union City's average scores on the state's eighth-grade readiness test surpassed those of its urban counterparts by as much as 20 percentage points. In one seven-year period, the percentage of students who received passing eighth-grade test scores jumped from 33 percent to 83 percent in reading, from 42 percent to 65 percent in writing, and from 50 percent to 84 percent in mathematics. By 2000, 80 percent of the high school students passed New Jersey's High School Proficiency Test. By 2002, Union City's test scores ranked highest among New Jersey cities with populations of 50,000 or more.

The high schools also substantially increased the number of students enrolled in advanced placement (AP) courses. In 1994, 25 students were enrolled in AP classes and 20 percent passed. In 2000, the number increased to 146, with 38 percent passing. In addition, from 1996 to 2002, the district witnessed a fivefold increase in the number of students gaining acceptance to first-tier and second-tier colleges and universities. Of the 1,613 Union City public high school students who graduated in the years 1999–2001, 763 (47 percent) went on to four-year institutions, and another 283 (18 percent) to two-year institutions. Data on college major

choices for 110 of the top-ranked graduates across those years reveal substantial inroads into areas in which Latinos are particularly underrepresented (Georges, 1996). Sixty students (55 percent) were pursuing a science, math, or technology major, and twenty-eight students (25 percent) elected to attend an engineering school. Female students are strongly represented in these numbers; sixty-three women (57 percent) went on to college, and of that group, twenty-nine (46 percent) pursued a science, math, technology, or engineering major (Union City Board of Education, 2001).

How did this remarkable transformation take place? Faced with the possibility of a state takeover, the school board authorized district leadership to revamp the entire educational system. It turned to supervisors whose departments had not been cited for violations: Tom Highton, principal of the Gifted and Talented School, and Fred Carrigg, supervisor of bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) education. They were promoted, respectively, to superintendent and executive director for academic programs. Before accepting the new positions, however, Highton and Carrigg negotiated unprecedented power over budget lines, appointments, curriculum, schedules, and more. A native English speaker who speaks Spanish fluently, Carrigg brought much-needed strengths to the challenges that lay before Union City. Prior to assuming oversight for academic programs, he had been the supervisor of bilingual and ESL education for twelve years. In addition, Carrigg could build on a substantial base of teacher support; a third of the city's teachers had previously worked under his direction.

The district decided that the first focus of the reform efforts should be literacy. All areas of the curriculum were initially viewed as an opportunity to teach language and reading. Working within the five-year time frame imposed by the state, leaders of the initiative developed a long-range strategy that phased in the reforms gradually. During the first year, they conducted research and made plans for implementation. In year two, they focused on new curriculum for grades K–3; in year three, for grades 4–6; in year four, for grades 7–8. In the fifth year, they began planning for change at the high school level. It took ten years to implement the plans that would transform the district. The phase-in strategy meant that no student schooled with the new methods would enter a new grade only to face old-style instruction. Further, lessons learned from each successive implementation could ease the transition in subsequent years. Although Union City's reforms have been extended successfully to all grade levels and subject areas, in this chapter we describe only the policies effecting literacy in prekindergarten through third grade, because these accomplishments are the ones being considered in creating state policy for the same grades and content area.

Carrigg, the leader of the reform effort, understood that true learning takes place between the teacher and the student. To be successful, reform ideas would have to originate with teachers and be supported by a broad consensus. Carrigg also believed that nothing new needed to be invented in Union City; enough was already known about effective education. Rather, all stakeholders needed to build on both the district's prior success (particularly in bilingual and ESL education) and what could be gleaned from the research literature about effective early literacy instruction. In general, five principles guided the district's work:

- There must be broad consensus that all students can learn.
- The design of successful programs should be tailored to local conditions.
- Reform requires a long-term process with commitment to annual review and revision.
- Continual communication between policymakers and implementers is essential.
- Effective implementation requires ongoing support for teachers.

Carrigg's first step was to convene an elementary literacy committee heavily weighted with teachers. The committee began its work by examining the specific circumstances of Union City. Besides the previously mentioned demographic composition, the district had aging buildings and no extra space for new facilities, and the student mobility rate was 44 percent, meaning that only about half the students attending a class in June had been there the previous September.

Union City's curriculum, built around a basal reader series published by a major textbook company, had been developed for students with stable places of residence, family support, and consistent attendance at the same neighborhood school year after year. This traditional model of cumulative subskill acquisition assumes that students have mastered the material in the previous year's reader, so it need not be reintroduced in the subsequent year—an assumption clearly not valid in the case of Union City students.

Moreover, general academic, special education, bilingual/ESL, and Title I students had separate curricula with different guides for the scope and sequence of skills and assessment; this often worked against students. For example, when a student went from a bilingual to a monolingual program, the levels test in the new class focused on specific, prescribed vocabulary words, not the skill of reading; consequently, many bilingual students were held back when in fact they could read at a more advanced

level. In response, the committee decided to produce one inclusive guide that represented real diversity and did not single out any group.

The reform leaders went on to examine the way that American schools are traditionally organized around literacy instruction and found that education is based on the following general concepts:

- K–2 students work on decoding (literacy skills).
- Middle elementary students learn to read for meaning (for example, main idea, inferences, and author's intent).
- Upper elementary students (grades 6–8) learn to read for content (information).
- High school students read for new information and usable knowledge and to develop their own creativity and writing skills.

While the committee felt that this approach was sound, they decided to dig further by looking at the state-mandated lists of skills and achievement levels and surveying the Union City teachers on what they considered necessary skills for students and when to teach them. The committee then combined these two lists and opened up ways of achieving the desired results. Traditional literacy instruction stipulated mastering initial consonants, then final consonants, and then medial vowels in first grade. Instead of working from the phonetic sound system built for students with an English language background and covering the alphabet by starting with "A" and ending with "Z," the committee suggested that elementary-level teachers work from authentic stories that featured particular initial consonants. For example, they selected Eric Carle's *Very Hungry Caterpillar* to teach the initial *h* sound, which in Spanish is silent and therefore particularly difficult for Spanish speakers to master. Similarly, *The Three Little Pigs* can be used to teach the initial *p* sound through its repetition of words. By reading these stories, children practice listening and speaking, repeat phrases, see how letters are used, and enjoy a story that captures their imagination.

In addition, the committee suggested using a personal alphabet (same letters but in a different order and with different examples). Teachers were asked to keep records to ensure that they eventually worked through the entire alphabet in a way that built on students' familiarity with various sounds. These activities build knowledge of core English phonemes through repetition of key vocabulary and transmittal of Anglo-American cultural values that native English speakers usually bring to school. Thus, the committee localized the curriculum to fit its population, basing the transition to English proficiency on a process more likely to achieve success than the sequence of sounds most easily learned by native English speakers. In

essence, the committee's focus on comparative linguistics helped them view Spanish-speaking students as advantaged rather than deficient.

Next, the committee conducted an in-depth examination of all the textbooks and materials available that claimed to teach state-mandated skills. They asked publishers to deliver K–3 materials, spent three months analyzing the content and methods, and discovered little congruency between the desired skill outcomes and the actual materials. A similar inventory of textbooks already in use in Union City led to the decision that existing texts should be demoted from core materials to supplemental ones. Furthermore, the committee noted a dearth of children of color in the illustrations, making the textbooks poorly suited to a district with 95 percent minority children.

The committee also decided to abandon rote learning, whole-group lecture teaching, and basal readers, moving to a balanced approach to early literacy instruction modeled on the already successful bilingual and ESL curriculum that had been used since the mid-1980s. The new curriculum immersed students in print-rich environments with literature-based instruction taught through thematic units that connected subject areas, freeing teachers from the problematic cumulative subskills model and allowing them to address individual students in their individual areas of need. To address the problem of mobility, the committee instituted the reforms districtwide. They also recognized that teachers needed training to successfully negotiate the transition from basal readers to literature-based instruction.

Based on their research and the experience of the bilingual and ESL teachers, the committee conducted pilot tests involving 20 percent of a grade level, providing an opportunity for teachers and administrators to experiment and refine their strategies. Average test scores doubled within a year in kindergarten and first grade, and the population that piloted the reform accounted for virtually all of the improvement.

Thus, the district moved from a formalized rote learning of English to a natural approach, building up oral language by reading good stories to students and starting English conversation slowly, using topics close to students' lives. This change in philosophy opened the door to a wave of other changes, ranging from selection of materials to block scheduling to teacher mentoring.

The focus on literacy led to the recognition that multiple simultaneous changes were needed in time management and structure, learning methodology, use of pull-out programs, assessment, professional development, physical environment, and instructional technology. More details can be found at the Union City Web site: http://www.union-city.k12.nj.us/curr/k12curr/escurr/1-4humanities/index.html.

Time Management and Structure

The first major change was in the use of time. Since literacy skills would be taught through a variety of activities, it was evident that that the old bell schedule would be inadequate; reading, writing, and communicating needed to be pulled together to reinforce learning from different perspectives. The restructuring produced a 111-minute block of time known as the communications period. Within this block, teachers were told what to accomplish but not how to do it. The single guideline stated that instruction should take place in small, goal-centered groups, avoiding whole-group instruction except when clearly appropriate for organizational and management activities. Teachers were to organize the time as they saw fit. For the first time, they were asked to provide instruction in accord with individual student needs.

Learning Methodology

Every year, 20 percent or more of Union City students are new entrants into the school system. Since acquiring skills in a linear format is virtually impossible under such conditions, the committee decided that it made more sense to help students learn how to learn rather than focus on skill acquisition. Such a shift meant that students would learn to understand, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate. (This approach is known as Bloom's taxonomy.) These skills were taught within the context of thematic units. Themes were broad enough to allow variation, but all teachers at a particular grade level were teaching the same themes at the same time.

Within a given theme, teachers could identify materials to provide multiple points of entry for students with varying levels of skill and background knowledge. In early elementary classrooms, for example, this meant creating classroom libraries with materials that supported themes through pictures, words, and multimedia resources. An additional benefit of the thematic approach is that students go home with broad ideas to talk about with their parents (for example, "I learned about animals today"), inviting parents into children's school life in a way that subskill strategies in basal readers never do.

The End of Pull-Out Programs

Prior to the reforms, approximately 80 percent of first-grade students in Union City participated in pull-out programs. It was not unusual to find classrooms populated by only five students at a time, making it difficult

to keep track of students' progress in learning. In addition, the committee believed that children need to feel accepted as part of the group, and pull-out programs lead them to believe that something is wrong with them and must be fixed, an attitude that impedes their progress. The committee eliminated all pull-out programs, eliminated the word *remedial* from district vocabulary, and instituted coteaching (team teaching), whereby resource and support teachers went to the K–3 classrooms to provide the classroom teacher and the students with extra help.

Implementing this philosophy was a major struggle because both specialists and traditional classroom teachers had to learn new skills in working together to determine which instructional practices would best meet the needs of individual students. On the other hand, the ESL and bilingual teachers had cotaught for years and knew that the approach would work.

Assessment

Union City tested various methods of assessment, ultimately choosing to employ a variety of formal and informal methods that monitor students' growth and achievement over a period of time. The goal was to enable teachers to focus on students as individuals and to assess students based on their abilities and learning styles. The district uses a mix of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. In the early years of reform, teachers were not to be penalized if their students' test scores declined while they worked out new practices. This strategy encouraged experimentation, freeing teachers to try out new methods and materials, and in fact produced good results. Test scores did not decline; rather, they improved markedly.

Professional Development

The committee understood that professional development is a process and not an event. Professional development opportunities increased from fewer than eight hours a year to a high of forty hours a year, with many more offerings available for voluntary staff development (twenty-four hours were mandatory). The training included counseling on differences in teaching styles, so that teachers would understand and respect what others were doing with the new curriculum. The district used a five-stage model to support teachers as they worked toward proficiency in the new educational paradigms: awareness, practice, sharing, peer coaching, and mentoring.

AWARENESS. In this stage, broad or new core concepts are introduced to large groups of faculty. Orientations on balanced literacy (an approach that combines whole language and phonics methodologies) and cooperative

learning (techniques in which students work in groups that are expected to assume responsibility for what the group produces, as opposed to working individually) are presented through awareness workshops, and hundreds of teachers attend training sessions sponsored by professional groups outside of the district and at state and national conferences.

PRACTICE. During the second stage, specific basic strategies and techniques are introduced and practiced. One technique is Wall Story, a single story made up by an entire class over time. The completed result is produced by the entire class; each student feels a part of it; and the lesson communicates that many small contributions can add up to one unified whole.

SHARING. In workshops, practitioners of new approaches discuss their experiences, both successful and not so successful. At least two half-day sessions are conducted every year, run by local school improvement teams, which include a principal, teachers, parents, and, at the high school level, students. Periodically the district gathers team members from several schools to participate in more advanced workshops.

PEER COACHING. In response to the need for extensive training for the new system of teaching, Union City developed peer coaching for new teachers. A new teacher is paired with an experienced colleague who teaches the same grade. They spend two to five days going over the curriculum guide and meet periodically for consultations during the school year. At the beginning of the year, the pair team-teaches in class. The peer coach observes and provides suggestions and ideas on successful practices. This system of one-on-one individualized support proved so effective that Union City now has five full-time coaches.

MENTORING. As an extension of peer coaching and as required by the state, Union City has a system of mentors, with at least one mentor per building. New teachers can consult these mentors on a one-to-one basis about any bureaucratic issue on the classroom, school, or district level. Each mentor is assigned no more than three protégés for a marking period or a full school year.

Physical Environment

The district insisted that every classroom in grades K–3 should have a reading center. Rather than mandate that teachers redesign their entire

classroom, the district awarded new furniture to those who were willing to embrace the new curriculum. Teachers who agreed to try the reform approach were allowed to purchase cooperative-learning tables, classroom libraries, and often computers. They also got furniture for a second center for listening (to tapes), computers, science, math, or art. Over the years, these classrooms slowly added one center at a time, and now most elementary and middle school classrooms have five to seven centers. Classroom centers are also becoming increasingly common in the high schools.

Instructional Technology

Beginning in 1992, the district made a concerted effort to integrate computers into classroom instruction. The reforms had reached a plateau, and teachers were complaining about massive paperwork and record keeping. Process writing—a key element of the district's balanced literacy approach—was faltering. In response, the district decided to provide computers for all classroom teachers. In addition, the district wanted the educational experience of Union City students to be competitive with that of their suburban counterparts, and technology seemed to promise comparable advantages, providing access to information generally denied to the inner-city poor and developing skills that would help students study and find jobs.

Union City invested substantially in technology resources, which was possible because of the redistribution of state funds. Local administrators had had some limited experience with computers and knew enough to recognize the power of technology and to ask for help. The district also benefited from a variety of partners who provided assistance. New Jersey's Quality in Education Act made possible significant investment in new technology, Bell Atlantic and the National Science Foundation provided funding and expertise, and Education Development Center's Center for Children and Technology helped design technology to achieve the district's goals. The partners arrived at a sophisticated, multipurpose objective for technology in the Union City schools. The most important basic decision was to network the multiple groups that constitute the school system—students, teachers, school and district administrators, and parents. Nearly all of the four thousand instructional computers became part of a districtwide network connecting eleven schools, two public libraries, city hall, and the local day care center through T-1 lines linked to the central office servers. With a ratio of four students per computer, Union City is one of the most wired urban school districts in the United States.

Going to Scale at the State Level: District Policy Informs State Policy

Bringing a single school district to a level of measurable, sizable, and unquestionable success is an accomplishment that has been elusive on the American landscape, especially in urban areas where the majority of children are poor and do not speak English. Taking such a successful model to scale statewide, with special focus on districts with similar demographics, may be a rational dream of educators and policymakers, but no one would ever underestimate the challenge. The fact that there is virtually no precedent for such scaling speaks of the difficulty. Yet that is the effort that educators launched in the fall of 2002 in New Jersey, using Union City as the model.

State policy is established according to rules and practices that vary in detail from state to state but follow largely similar paths. Given the complexity of state laws and regulations, it is not unusual for several policies targeted at the same challenge to compete, create redundancies, and even contradict one another. These policies come from different federal and state agencies; administrations and personnel frequently change; and communication among those in charge is not always effective. The system, for all its good intentions, often leaves schools and districts overwhelmed with the task of following policies.

Is policy derived from models of good practice, or does policy create them? Typically, people think that policy drives practice: policymakers know or determine what needs to be done and how to do it; teachers and building-level and district-level administrators receive that knowledge and implement it; and improvement occurs. That pattern can work under some circumstances, but it is not the only pattern. Writing in the early 1980s, Gene Hall and Susan Loucks suggested that effective policy should "emanate from the realities of life in schools" (1982, p. 135) but that "there is a fundamental gap between policy initiatives and the realities of life in schools. Neither policy makers nor practitioners have sufficient cognizance of the other's . . . worlds" (p. 134). A dynamic relationship should exist between practitioners and policymakers in an environment that encourages and supports local innovation so that it might become a model for best practice that then gets fed back into the larger system.

The context for scaling up presented here includes all of these factors. The work exists at the confluence of Reading First, a federal literacy program administered through the states, and the Abbott Implementation Regulations for Improving Standards-Driven Instruction and Literacy (Intensive Early Literacy), a state program designed to govern the way

economically disadvantaged districts administer early literacy programs in prekindergarten through third grade. New Jersey thereby must attend to early literacy challenges on two separate fronts: first, the state, court-ordered mandate that governs the thirty Abbott districts (New Jersey Department of Education, 2003), which have a special relationship to the state department of education and function according to the Abbott rules and regulations, and second, the federal requirements associated with Reading First and the federally approved administration of that program at the state level through New Jersey Reading First (K–3). That program is voluntary, but for the schools applying for and receiving funds to support it, the requirements are prescriptive. Because a strong overlap exists between the goals of the New Jersey Reading First program and the goals of Intensive Early Literacy, the program being designed for the Abbott districts, the policies governing both also have a strong overlap. The Abbott policies must be cognizant of the standards of New Jersey Reading First, but it is possible for the state to create Abbott policies that are both more prescriptive and more far-ranging than the Reading First regulations. Also, the Intensive Early Literacy policies are being phased in over a period of several years.

Knowing that New Jersey would be facing a complex challenge in implementing statewide early literacy reform and knowing of Union City's success, Assistant Commissioner for Education Gordon MacInnes recruited Fred Carrigg as director of New Jersey Reading First and special assistant to the commissioner for urban literacy. His assignment is to establish and manage both literacy programs. In other words, he is to take the successful Union City model to scale statewide. The decision to recruit Carrigg was driven by measurable gains in Union City's student achievement data and sets the stage for achieving the kind of coherence within and across policies that is a key to success. (Such intentional actions are not always associated with state bureaucracies.) It models the kind of behavior that should be much more central to the way education, especially at the state level, operates, and the way policy is imagined, written, and implemented.

The policies being designed for both of these programs are only in their beginning stages. No claims are being made about their current or eventual effectiveness. What makes this particular moment interesting, however, is the process for scaling up that is being tested. Given how little is known about successful scaling efforts in education, especially in matters of such consequence, we believe that the more that people can study and share their observations about the work, even work in progress, the greater the potential benefit will be.

Charting the Transfer of Successful Policy from District to State

At the time this chapter was being written, the statewide reform effort was focused solely on Intensive Early Literacy (prekindergarten through third grade) rather than the full K–12 program currently in place in Union City. This effort is being mounted, however, with the expectation that, if successful, the reform will be expanded to all grades. In this section, we describe the connections between the salient parts of the Union City early literacy model and the process used to transfer those local policies into state policies in the hope of eventually achieving similar results in Title I schools funded through the New Jersey Reading First program and in the thirty Abbott districts through the Intensive Early Literacy program (IEL).

Policy 1: Philosophy and Principles

The Union City reform effort began with an exploration of literacy as the foundation of all academic achievement. Decisions were based on research in the areas of language acquisition, development of English proficiency among Spanish speakers, cooperative learning, and the use of learning centers. Both New Jersey Reading First and IEL adhere to standards of scientifically based research on reading and the U.S. Department of Education's list of five literacy essentials: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. New Jersey has added a sixth essential, motivation and background knowledge—defined as an understanding that children read for meaning, message, and communication—which was a central part of the Union City literacy initiative and led to a focus on authentic literature. Background knowledge consists of oral, topical, and personal knowledge of phonemes and vocabulary essential for success in reading in English. This change to the federal mandate—allowable because it adds to rather than supplants federal expectations—is an excellent example of how experience from a successful local model can improve state policy.

Policy 2: Structure of Time and Space

Union City began with a block of 111 minutes of uninterrupted time for reading every day. The federal requirement for Reading First is 90 minutes. IEL also stipulates 90 minutes, but another feature of the program (addressed later under compensatory and supplemental services) allows for an additional 30 minutes to be appended to either end of the 90-minute block for students needing more work, resulting in a 120-minute block.

A central feature of the Union City reform was the physical restructuring of classrooms to include a library, a technology center, a writing center, and other centers for science, math, art, and so on. Although the physical structure of a classroom may be less important than teacher knowledge and skill and the quality of curriculum, the designers of the Union City reform found that this change of physical structure actually facilitated the new pedagogies. Primarily, it helped differentiate instruction, encouraged children to be more responsible for their own learning, helped achieve the goals of pull-out programs while keeping students in the same classroom, created a climate in which educators could work as partners, and helped everyone become more grounded in students' work. Though early adopters who piloted the reform measures got new classroom furnishings and equipment, eventually, of course, the district made similar resources available to all classrooms. In fact, New Jersey Reading First requires a classroom library and recommends literacy centers, while IEL requires classroom libraries and reading, technology, and writing centers.

In Union City, Fred Carrigg had visited all K–3 classrooms regularly to monitor how teachers were deploying these classroom resources and to use natural rewards or lack of rewards as additional incentives. He will attempt to replicate that level of presence in classrooms through a team of twelve people from the New Jersey Department of Education; they will conduct random site visits to make sure these structures exist and are being used appropriately. For such monitoring to be effective, of course, district-level people must share the responsibility and establish the same type of learning culture that Carrigg fostered in Union City.

Union City, because of crowded conditions and lack of funds, was not able to mandate maximum class sizes, but it compensated by structuring learning centers in classrooms and using small-group instruction. IEL mandates that prekindergarten classes not exceed fifteen students and K–3 classes not exceed twenty-one students. Both programs require small–group instruction. Union City also actively supported teachers in adopting cooperative-learning models, which are not currently part of New Jersey Reading First or IEL but could be introduced in the future.

Policy 3: Curriculum

The Union City model supports a strong and continual effort to align curriculum, materials, supplies, goals, strategies, and assessments. A similar expectation exists in New Jersey Reading First and IEL.

The Union City literacy curriculum used basal readers only as supplemental materials. Classrooms were required to have libraries with at least

two hundred books that were selected to meet the diverse needs of early learners, and a strategic effort was made to teach all skills through core books and novels. The New Jersey Reading First and IEL policies also go beyond commercial curriculum. The New Jersey Reading First regulations state that in order to receive funding, the local education agency "must also incorporate a sufficient quantity of leveled books at all grades, including Big Books and decodable books [that incorporate the phonics elements being learned] for grades K–1, to be fully integrated into their overall, comprehensive and core reading program. These books can be used effectively to comply with the five essentials of reading and the requirements of Reading First." That language, which also appears in similar form in the proposed Abbott regulations, is close to Union City's policy on early literacy curriculum.

Key to Union City's success was a dramatic shift in philosophy toward requiring differentiated materials that provide multiple entry points for different populations, including native language and ESL reading. These materials align closely with the center-oriented structure of classrooms and promote the kind of teaching and learning that was the primary goal of the program. The same policy now exists for New Jersey Reading First and IEL.

The successful and ubiquitous integration of technology was another key component of Union City's success, even in the early grades; WiggleWorks was chosen as the core software used to support the acquisition of early literacy skills. In the New Jersey Reading First regulations, it is clear that successful applicants must describe how students will use "technology-assisted resources to enhance their reading experiences," and WiggleWorks is listed among the state's approved reading programs. Abbott classrooms are required to have a technology center with appropriate district-approved supplemental computer software.

Preschool was always a part of the districtwide curriculum planning in Union City. Although there is no mention of preschool in New Jersey Reading First, IEL requires that Abbott districts demonstrate a seamless transition from preschool to kindergarten. And since New Jersey's preschool curriculum is defined entirely by early literacy skills, that piece of the alignment is solidly in place.

Union City teachers and administrators spent considerable time identifying and learning specific strategies, techniques, and activities for advancing their curricular goals. What once was a list of thirty agreed-on items has since grown to fifty. Both New Jersey Reading First and IEL name specific strategies, and while the list has fewer items than Union City's, there is complete overlap.

Policy 4: Assessment and Testing

Both New Jersey Reading First and IEL have similar levels of assessment, including screening, benchmarks, diagnostics, and annual testing using norm-referenced tests. Union City's assessment strategies also included Running Records, a recording procedure that helps assess students' reading behaviors quickly as students engage in the reading process, and an extensive use of portfolios. Portfolio work is introduced in New Jersey Reading First and IEL, but only as a part of benchmarking. The proposed Abbott regulations indicate that the "Chief School Administrator shall implement a clear assessment plan that includes: (1) home language screening and English language proficiency assessment; (2) screening in reading in grades K–3; (3) diagnostic assessment of students below reading level; (4) annual spring-to-spring assessment with a state-approved norm-referenced instrument in grades K–2 and NJASK 3 and 4, state-devised criterion-referenced instruments; (5) a locally devised system of assessment based on six- to ten-week thematic units to evaluate students' progress." This last item, which comes directly from Union City policy (along with aspects of the first four), ensures the district's commitment to thematic curriculum and aligns assessment with that curriculum.

Policy 5: Compensatory and Supplemental Services

Union City was adamant that pull-out programs not be permitted. The small-group, center-oriented structure in Union City classrooms supported differentiated instruction to meet the individual needs of children, and review of the research and their own experience convinced Union City teachers and administrators that the harm done to students by pulling them out of class exceeded the benefits. Therefore, special services were delivered to children within the classroom. Compensatory and supplemental services are required in the regulations for both New Jersey Reading First and IEL, and in accordance with federal policy, traditional pull-out programs are permitted. Because of the structure of classrooms in both New Jersey Reading First and IEL, districts are strongly encouraged to provide these services without pulling children out of class.

Policy 6: Professional Development

Of all the components of the reform effort in Union City, none is more important than the way the district imagined, designed, and delivered professional development for teachers and aligned it with specific strategies

and goals. As described earlier, Union City made a comprehensive commitment to professional development in order to strengthen content knowledge, philosophy of education, strategies, and techniques. Of particular note was the requirement that all nontenured teachers pursue six credits of college-accredited courses in ESL or bilingual education. Later, a similar commitment was made in regard to special needs and computer education.

Union City, where well over 90 percent of the students were Latino, needed a critical mass of teachers with great facility in Spanish and an understanding of the needs of learners who lived in Spanish-speaking homes and whose education by definition included transferring skills from another native language in order to achieve English proficiency. Similarly, the district's commitment to technology required that all teachers have a certain level of proficiency in using technology and integrating it into instruction. It is not surprising, then, that both New Jersey Reading First and IEL have specific requirements for professional development, which are guided by similar principles. The New Jersey Reading First regulations state: "All professional development activities must specifically address teachers' needs as they relate to the five essentials of data-driven early reading instruction as well as student motivation. . . . Professional development should be planned to include both initial preparation and ongoing support for teachers who are implementing new strategies and programs." The regulations identify particular opportunities that should be provided for K–3 teachers, bilingual and ESL teachers, and K–12 special education teachers, stipulating that professional development be aligned with the state's plan as well as the expectations of those who provide the training. The proposed IEL regulations are similar, emphasizing the need to include early literacy, bilingual and ESL, and special education teachers and alignment with district strategies, curriculum, materials, and assessments.

Policy 7: Populations Served

In Union City, the districtwide reform effort began in the primary grades and extended to upper grades over a period of years. New Jersey Reading First and IEL are targeted at all K–3 students. (IEL includes prekindergarten.) Because New Jersey Reading First uses federal dollars, the program is now limited to K–3, with no particular expectation that it will be extended. There is active planning, however, in regard to how IEL can be extended to higher grades.

Policy 8: Additional Personnel

Union City established curriculum resource teachers to help implement their reform efforts, but those positions were phased out with the advent of whole school reform, which recognized that a school is a system made up of interlocking parts that affect each other and that understanding the parts and how they relate to one another is critical to achieving lasting change. New Jersey Reading First uses reading coordinators and literacy coaches to implement the program, and each school also is required to have a literacy team that includes the building principal as a working partner with the coordinator and coach and other identified school personnel (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002).

Conclusion

This chapter begins to tell a story that is not yet finished. Indeed, given that our topic is an exploration of how successful local programs are scaled up to reach a much larger audience and how that process is supported and encouraged through effective state-level policy, one could say that publication of this study is premature. We believe, however, that there is much to learn from the process itself. We also believe that there is much to suggest that the process being implemented in New Jersey can have a strong measure of success.

Improving schools by meeting the learning needs of all students is a complex goal. In the United States, we have spent decades of time and countless hundreds of billions of dollars trying to meet this goal. But despite this massive commitment of resources, success has been so elusive, especially for our poorest children, that the federal government recently enacted No Child Left Behind, legislation that is unprecedented in its scope, its demands, and the consequences for those who fail to meet its requirements. Those in the profession of education and in the policy arena must learn all they can about what it takes for all children to achieve at high levels. Educators and policymakers must also determine the most productive relationship between practice and policy, understand the reciprocal processes of transferring good practice into good policy and good policy into good practice, and ratchet up the reach of policies and practices to benefit equally the largest numbers of people—a tall order, to be sure.

We are encouraged, however, by the reform process that was put into place in Union City, a poor urban community. That process itself, although undertaken in a single district, was an important experience in

successful scaling up. It possessed all of the characteristics that Cohen and Hill associate with successful reform.

Moreover, we want to add two points. The first concerns time line and time frame. The Union City results emerged over a period of many years, in conjunction with logical steps of implementation. A year of planning was followed by a year of implementation, during which only the early grades were involved. With each subsequent block of years, additional grades were added until eventually the reform effort arrived at the high school exactly when the children (and their parents) who had experienced it in the earlier grades were also arriving there. Willingness to allow change to occur over time not only fits well with what is known about effective and sustainable change processes in adults but also gives people time to make the continual adjustments that are inevitably needed in a task of this complexity. Indeed, one could argue that this strategy helped build a system wherein experimentation and modification are second nature. Early positive results and continuity of staffing throughout the reform process also encouraged people to be patient as changes unfolded.

The second point relates to the stability of the people involved but goes beyond that. Although many policymakers like to imagine that programs and policies are independent from the good luck of having the right mix of personalities, it is unlikely that such independence will ever accompany anything as intimate and personal as a child's process of learning and development. Union City had the advantage of stable leadership at a number of levels, including the effective personal and professional traits of Fred Carrigg. No program ever succeeds as the result of the contribution of one person, yet it is just as true that success seldom happens without that one person. This statement should not discourage policymakers but rather serve as a reminder of how important it is to hire the right people.

The New Jersey Department of Education is now in the process of determining how the different strands of the Union City model can be woven into state policy, which in turn can be used by other districts in achieving the same, if not better, results. The question is clear: how can something that worked for 11,600 students in one part of the state meet with similar success for perhaps fifty times that number in the twenty-nine other Abbott districts and an array of Title I schools? From our perspective, the first two steps are promising. First, by choosing Union City as its model, the state used compelling data to drive an important decision. This district has sustained and increased its record of student achievement over ten years, working with a population of students whose profile is considered by many as a key reason for failure in schools: large numbers of poor, diverse children, many of whom do not speak English as their first language. Second,

the state recruited the person most responsible for designing and implementing the Union City model to take a leadership role in the statewide effort.

The policies established thus far for New Jersey Reading First and Intensive Early Literacy are encouraging. Putting in place the right people at the district and school levels and providing the support and the time to do what is needed will be crucial. Ultimately, these will be the safeguards that ensure the integrity of the policy and its implementation as it moves from the state department of education in Trenton to the districts.

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