

# Leadership Challenges to Achieving Education Goals

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# Standards-Based Reform as a Theory of Change

- Why Change?
  - **Student performance was determined to be too low** (new futures for students).
  - **Student performance was determined to be inequitable** (low income students, students of color, students with disabilities, English language learners, and others did not have equal opportunities or outcomes).
  - We changed our minds about the capacity of all students to learn to high levels—the new mantra: ***All Children Can Learn.***

# Standards-Based Reform as a Theory of Change

- We need to change the system to get different outcomes:
  - First, we need to not measure inputs but focus on outcomes.
  - To do this, we need to
    - define clearly what we expect students to know and be able to do,
    - assess whether students know and can do those things, and
    - prepare educators capable of getting students from where they are to where we want them to be

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**Standards-Based Reform**

# The Vision is Attainable

- We know the vision is attainable because there are schools who have achieved the goals set out by reformers.
  - "Dispelling the Myth," [www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org), The Education Trust
  - "Portraits of Six Benchmark Schools," ERS
  - "90/90/90 Schools," Center for Performance Assessment
  - High Tech High, San Diego, California

# The Vision is Attainable

- We know the vision is attainable because there are districts who have achieved the goals set out by reformers.
  - “Islands of Excellence,” Learning First Alliance
  - “Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City,” Elmore and Burney
  - *School Districts and Instructional Renewal*, Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin

# Has Standards-Based Reform Led to Change?

- Yes, but....
  - Student performance overall over the past 15 years has risen slowly and been episodic.
  - Disparities in student performance persist—by race, by income, by English proficiency.
  - Resource disparities persist—distribution of highly qualified teachers, per pupil expenditures, course taking and availability.
  - Gaps in student experiences persist, even in the same school.

# Has Standards-Based Reform Led to Change?

- Yes, but...
  - It is not clear that we understand—and it is pretty clear that we are *not* organized to teach—21<sup>st</sup> century skills.
  - Since the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, claims are that we now too often:
    - Teach to the middle
    - Narrow the curriculum
    - Lower standards

# Why has reform been hard to achieve large-scale?

- **A few key elements of standards-based reform strategies mattered significantly.**
  - *The focus has been on outcomes, not inputs (unfortunately that meant we could ignore opportunity to learn standards).*
  - *Standards became discipline-based, not skills-based (mathematics, English language arts, social studies, and science; not problem solving, critical thinking, combining knowledge to solve novel problems, etc.).*

# Why has reform been hard to achieve large-scale?

- A few key elements of standards-based reform strategies mattered significantly.
  - *Equity* was at the core, but our ability and willingness to *keep* equity at the core has been spotty.
  - We miscalculated the *capacity needs* of the system.
  - **We miscalculated the *leadership challenge*.**

# Miscalculating the Leadership Challenge

1. Ronald Heifetz asserts that people do not resist change, they resist:
  - Loss (of competence, reputation, identity, security, time, etc.)
  - Disloyalty

The challenge consists of a gap between aspirations and reality that demands responses outside the repertoire.

# Miscalculating the Challenge

Many reforms required loss or disloyalty in their implementation. Think of what teachers/principals/superintendents face when told to change.

- Why did I join this profession? What is my most significant responsibility?
- What do I value about this work?
- What am I prepared to do? In what ways am I competent?
- What about the professional culture in my workplace do I most value?

# For example: Patterns of Teacher Responses to Contemporary Students and Reforms

- Maintain traditional standards
- Lower expectations for coverage and achievement
- Adapt practices and pedagogy

– Little and McGlaughlin, 1993  
*Teachers Work: Individuals, Colleagues, and Contexts*

“The critical point to stress here is that teachers *within the same school or even within the same department developed different responses to similar students depending upon the character of their collegial environment.* Which response a teacher chose was a product of his or her conception of task as framed and supported by a particular school or department community.”

– Little and McGlaughlin

- See also, *Professional Communities and the Work of High School Teaching*
  - Milbrey W. McLaughlin & Joan E. Talbert, 2001

- What are the expectations held by teachers, principals, and superintendents for themselves and for their students?
- How do their expectations relate to the expectations of standards-based reform?
- What about the culture of teaching in our schools supports reform? What about the way instruction is organized supports reform? What about the way “good” teaching is recognized and rewarded supports reform?

- See samples of standards-based instruction on the Rhode Island Department of Education website
- <http://www.ride.ri.gov/>

- In what ways do teachers/ principals/superintendents face loss and disloyalty?
- How do we change values, beliefs, norms, and cultures in our systems?
- How do we support educators through change?

# Miscalculating the Leadership Challenge

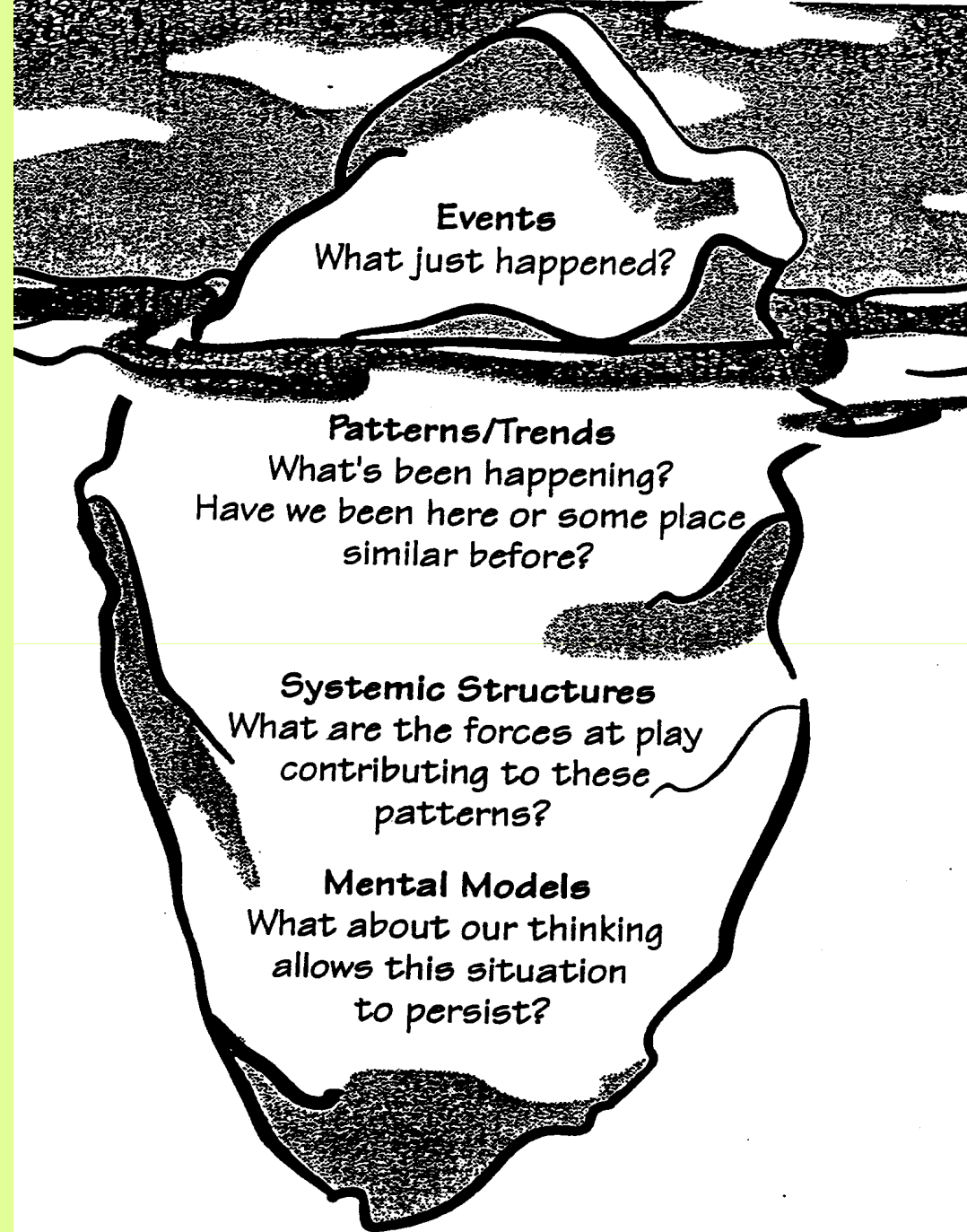
## 2. The resiliency of the system:

- The system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets (Deming).
- The stability of the system matters to those within it.
- People resist disequilibrium.
- People expect those in authority to provide direction, protection, and order (Heifetz).

# Systems Thinking

## The “Iceberg”

From *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook Project* –  
*Schools That Learn*



# Exercising Leadership

- Observing and interpreting; setting goals; defining the vision; reframing issues
  - What we look at tells us what we do.
  - Think about the achievement gap.

# Reflection

- What does the term “racial achievement gap” mean to you?

# Recent Responses from Superintendents and State Department Leaders

## Where is the gap?

- in Achievement
- in Performance
- in Learning (amount, level)
- in Outcomes
- in Growth
- in Success

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Only one person said  
the gap is in “access”  
and “opportunity.”

# Recent Responses

## How do we measure the gap?

- Standardized Tests
- Assessments
- Written, multiple choice tests
- Achievement tests
- Outcomes
- Gifted/AP Rates
- Graduation Rates
- Disciplinary Rates

# Recent Responses

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No one said we measure “resources.” No one said we measure “experiences of hostility and racism.”

# Reflection

- How is the world described in the way we talk about the achievement gap?
- What stories have we been telling about the patterns we describe? Where does the problem reside in our stories about the patterns?
- What are some alternate ways of looking at the patterns?

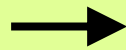
# What We Say/See Drives What We Do

Underachieving  
students



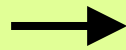
Remediation  
programs

Underserved  
students



Targeted  
resources

Systemic racial  
inequities



Anti-racist school  
leadership



# Defining Leadership

- To enact the kind of change necessary to reach the goals (increased student achievement, overcoming inequities, changes in instruction, etc.)
  - requires not only better policies and rules,
  - it requires leadership
- Reform leadership is about helping people to face loss and embrace change; it is about helping people through a clash of competing values and beliefs.
- Reform leadership requires systemic thinking.

# What is the exercise of leadership?

- Observing and interpreting before intervening
- Providing a vision; Infusing the work with meaning; Reframing issues
- Persisting in the work
- Giving the work back
- Orchestrating the conflict
- Addressing norms, cultures, beliefs, and values
- Conducting courageous conversations

- These are not skills that we by and large teach in our administrator or teacher preparation programs!
- These are not skills that have been by and large nurtured in the field of education.
- Bet these *are* skills that can be developed.

**Presented by Circe Stumbo, President**

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