Public Education Leadership Project
at Harvard University

A JOINT INITIATIVE OF
THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
AND HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

PEL-081
MARCH 1, 2017

MARK H. MOORE
ANDRÉS A. ALONSO

Creating Public Value: School Superintendents as Strategic Managers of Public Schools

Introduction: Managers and *Public* Managers

The complex structure of the U.S. K---12 Educational Sector creates many different institutional positions and platforms that individuals can use to exercise leadership in improving the capacity of that system to produce public value. Among those positions, one of the most important is the position of Public School Superintendent. There are approximately 16,025 public school districts[1] all across the nation in which the majority are led by Superintendents, from the nation's largest cities into the smallest towns. Together, these local school districts account for over $600 billion in spending, and by far the lion's share of educational spending in the United States. Close to 50 million students attend the schools managed by Public School Superintendents, and it is in these schools – particularly in urban areas – we find some of the greatest challenges to creating an equitable, high performing educational system.

What All Managers and Leaders Have in Common

To describe Public School Superintendents as leaders and managers of an organization is to put them in a class of professionals among many others – including, in particular, not only those who lead other government agencies, but also those who lead and manage voluntary, nonprofit organizations, and commercial profit---seeking firms. Individuals in these executive positions have many tasks in common. They all have to learn certain kinds of discipline and self---mastery that protect them from doing unwitting harm, or self---destructing long before their valuable purposes can be achieved. They have to learn how to form and work with teams on many different kinds of projects. They have to learn how to diagnose the environments in which they are operating. That environment includes not only understanding how they will be called to account for their performance, but also knowing what opportunities and challenges are present in economic, social and political conditions that can affect their operational performance. They have to think about how to position their organizations in that environment to take advantage of the opportunities and ward off the threats. They have to learn how to analyze their organizations and production processes, and figure out how to make innovations that can improve operational performance – ideally, to create organizations that

[1] Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) survey, "Local Education Agency Universe Survey," 2003-04.

Professors Mark H. Moore and Andrés A. Alonso prepared this note as the basis for class discussion.

can learn on their own without them having to be the only source of value---creating innovative ideas. They have to be able to find and mobilize the resources they need to make the investments they have to make to sustain the organization's value-creating activities in the future. This is what it means to be a leader and manager of an established producing organization in any sector.

Public School Superintendents belong in this club because they are granted significant executive powers. As the chief executive of the local school district, Public School Superintendents' responsibilities include:

- **defining and articulating the main purposes** (public value) and priorities of the educational system;
- **creating the structures and processes** through which the mid---level managers and leaders in the system will be delegated authority and called to account for their performance;
- **encouraging the development and deciding on what curriculum and pedagogy** that will be used to educate students within the system;
- **recruiting, developing, evaluating and retaining** principals and teachers for the district;
- **allocating financial resources** across the varied activities and purposes of the school;
- **establishing the disciplinary processes** that will govern student conduct;
- **developing and using performance measurement systems** that capture the degree to which the district is achieving its valued purposes;
- **creating internal culture and core values** to animate and guide the work of the district;
- **building legitimacy and support in the external political environment** to ensure a flow of financial resources necessary to sustain an excellent educational program, and to mobilize operational support from parents and community in the difficult task of educating students;

It is these executive functions, concentrated in the Office of Superintendent, that enable Public School Superintendents to exercise significant influence over the conduct and performance of the local public schools. It is changes and innovations in these systems designed to improve performance that will be the mark of the Superintendent's leadership.

*Public School Superintendents as **Public** Managers*

One can and should see Public School Superintendents as one of a class of leaders and managers, and therefore draw on the general literature on leadership and management for guidance in how best to do the job. But it is very important to keep in mind that Public School Superintendents belong to a special subset of all leaders and managers: They are *public* managers and leaders using collectively owned assets to achieve publicly defined goals. This does not change everything about being a leader and a manager, but it does change many things.

We will develop the concept of what it means to be a public manager more fully below. For now, it is enough to point to three critical features of their institutional position that make their job different from other kinds of executives (particularly executives of commercial firms):

- First, they use publicly owned assets (specifically, the power of the state, and tax dollars) to achieve their goals.

- Second, they seek to achieve goals set by a public that defines collectively valued outcomes.
- Third, they are accountable to the public and their elected representatives through the messy processes of democratic governance.

The important implications of this for the way that they have to do their work include the following:

- Because they are using collectively owned assets granted to them by the community as a whole, the important arbiter of the value they produce is the community that gives them the money and authority they need to operate – not so much the clients who benefit from the enterprise.
- Because the community wants to produce social outcomes which are not easily measured in terms of revenues earned by the sale of products and services to willing customers, they cannot rely as much on financial measures to evaluate their performance (though they will be evaluated and called to account for staying within authorized spending limits).
- Because they use the authority of the state to raise and spend tax money, to obligate children to attend school, and to decide who should be provided with special assistance and how or who is allowed to stay in school, they are responsible for using the assets entrusted to them fairly and justly as well as efficiently and effectively.
- Because many stakeholders think they have the right to call them to account for performance on particular dimensions of value of concern to them, they face a relatively anarchic rather than a coherent system of accountability. This requires them to deal with demands for accountability that come at them from many different directions with no clear priority among the competing accountability agents, or the interests and values that are the foci of their concerns.

To understand fully the strategic potential of these key positions in the K---12 educational system, we will look more closely at:

- The public assets they can deploy;
- The public purposes and values they can seek to achieve;
- The sources of legitimacy and financial support they can mobilize and tap;
- The operational capacities they can develop and deploy.

We begin our review with the assets given to School Superintendents to educate children in their communities.

Public Assets Deployed by Public Managers

As a formal matter, the Public School Superintendent controls the public assets that are committed to delivering educational services to children, parents, taxpayers and citizens in a given political jurisdiction/ community. Those assets are of four different types.

Public Funds

The most obvious asset is money that comes to the Public School Superintendent to be spent for educational purposes. This money comes mostly in the form of state and local taxes, as well as

federal grants. The amount of money available to the Public School Superintendent to spend varies as a function of general economic conditions, but also as a matter of state and local political choice about taxation in general, or increases and decreases in specific educational taxes, or the allocations of public funds to school activities. The amount of money available to schools, as well as its distribution among schools, is also shaped by state constitutions that make access to high quality educational services for all children a right as well as an obligation. One of the frustrating features of being a Public School Superintendent is that the amount of money provided to schools does not necessarily relate to the performance of the schools. The fact that money can be spent for poor as well as for excellent performance tends to reduce the incentives for sustained excellent performance, and to provide less funding for the pursuit of excellence.

Public Authority

The second, much less obvious but very important asset controlled by Public School Superintendents is the authority of the state. Indeed, one could reasonably say that this is the most fundamental asset used by Public School Superintendents for without the use of public authority, there would be no money to spend. As noted above, most of the money used by Public School Superintendents is tax dollars raised through the power of the state and the local authority to tax its citizens to accomplish public purposes. But school systems public authority in at least three other ways as well.

First, as a matter of law, all children are required to attend school, and all parents are required to provide for the education of their children. This obligation usually aligns so naturally with a parent's natural desire to provide care for their children, and the convenience and value of sending their children to a publicly supported school, that we do not have to exercise this authority very much. Most parents (but perhaps fewer children) will happily and enthusiastically do their duty without being forced to do so. But in some cases it does prove necessary to insist on this public duty as well as take advantage of a natural private desire. The most notable example here is in the enforcement of truancy laws.

Second, authority can be used to maintain order in the schools – not only to ensure the safety of children (and teachers), but also to ensure an environment in which all students can learn. Again, schools and the teachers who staff them can take advantage of the efforts that parents make to teach their children right conduct, and they learn methods of "classroom management" that enable order to be maintained with a light touch and lots of voluntary compliance. But it is important to note that real authority lies behind their efforts to exploit and develop norms of orderly conduct in the classroom. Concerns about police in classrooms or disciplinary procedures that create a "school to prison pipeline" represent unusual but important public concerns about how public authority is being used in schools.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, authority can be used to ration access to the public schools. While public schools are open to all, children can be suspended, or transferred to new schools, or put into special programs if they behave in ways that impede the safety or learning of other students. Public schools may also be closed if there are financial or performance reasons to do so. Zoning regulations and rules of choice also serve to ration access to public schools.

It is somewhat painful to talk about the use of authority in public school systems since we would like to think of education as a valued service rather an onerous duty, and to hope that everyone will enter into the educational process with a great deal of enthusiasm and hope. And, for the most part that is the case. So, we might just decide to forget about the use of authority by the school system.

But there is at least one important reason to keep in mind that public authority is being used in the schools as well as public money. It is simply this: in a liberal democracy, as a moral, legal, and political matter, the authority of the state cannot be used legitimately unless its use advances the general welfare of the society, and is consistent with a broad set of individual rights. Obligations cannot be imposed willy-nilly. They have to meet the test of public benefit as well as protection or advancement of individual rights and liberty.

An important consequence of the use of authority by the schools (as well as the use of dollars raised by taxation) is that public schools have to act fairly and justly, and to advance an idea of justice in the wider society as well as simply be efficient and effective in the use of dollars entrusted to them. In effect, the use of public authority introduces a different philosophical/normative framework to be used in both the guidance and evaluation of public educational activity. That activity is not only charged with imposing duties on children and parents to participate in educational activities, but also to protect rights to high quality education for all, and to work towards just educational outcomes as well as the equitable delivery of high quality educational services.

So, while the use of authority imposes some burdens on parents and students, it also imposes burdens on the society as a whole to provide for the education of its children. The law protects the rights of children to education, as well as imposes burdens on others to provide it.

Human Capital and Tacit Knowledge of the Workforce

A third asset available to Public School Superintendents is the quality of the staff currently employed by the public school system, and the tacit and explicit knowledge embedded in this group about how to produce educational results. As a practical matter, most Public School Superintendents would think of this asset first, since it is that critical asset which they will have to rely upon to produce whatever results they are going to achieve. It is third on this list for an analytic reason that may be more theoretically than practically important.

As a theoretical matter, both money and authority are more fungible. One can move money from one purpose to another with the stroke of a budget adjustment. One can move authority from one purpose to another with a shift in the policy manual.

We can all be reasonably skeptical about the power of those strokes of the pen to actually change much in how much and what kinds of services are actually delivered in classrooms and other educational settings in a given community. It is one thing to invest in a new set of technologies to support teaching, or a new classroom or building, or even some new training processes or new faculty. It is quite another to engage existing faculty and principles in a process that causes them to change their practices. It is one thing to write new job descriptions and new procedures to be used in classrooms. It is quite another to persuade experienced principals and teachers to change the practices that they have relied upon to help them survive, accomplish their goals, and give meaning to their lives. So, while in principle it might be possible to shift uses of money and authority in new policy decisions, in practice ensuring that these changes in policy actually produce any change or improvement at the classroom level, or across all the classrooms of a jurisdiction, is a much chancier idea.

The simple fact is that every Public School Superintendent inherits a faculty that he or she depends on to produce the desired results. That staff usually represents more than 75% of the costs of the operation, and its performance is absolutely essential to the success of the school system. If the inherited stock of human capital is highly skilled in teaching, powerfully motivated to get the most from each child, resourceful and energetic in innovating and adapting their methods of instruction to

meet new demands, the faculty can be an enormous asset – leveraging the use of money and authority into valuable educational outcomes. If, however, the staff is unqualified, or burnt out, or set in their ways, then the existing staff can become a drag on future performance. Whatever the situation in the present, much of the variance in performance in the future will depend critically on how quickly the capability, motivation, and culture of the teaching staff can be improved. Yet, changing the current cultures often run up against legal, political, and moral obligations to existing staff that make rapid change very difficult.

Public Spirit: Public, Community, and Parental Support for Education

The least visible but potentially the greatest asset that Public School Superintendents have to work with is the enthusiasm that the citizens, residents, taxpayers, and parents in their communities have for the educational enterprise, and how much they are prepared to do to support that effort financially, politically and operationally. It is often hard to know how much public spirit resides in a community, and how important educational results are to the individuals within that community until there is some kind of crisis that causes individuals to pay attention to education and take a position. This can happen when a community proposes to take out a bond to support school financing, or when violence erupts in a school, or even when a school asks parents to attend school meetings to discuss different matters. But the amount of such social and political enthusiasm and support for educational purposes can be decisive in terms of the Public School Superintendent's ability to do his or her job, and therefore an important object of managerial concern.

In assessing the amount and kind of public support a Public School Superintendent has available for the doing of his or her job, it is important to recognize that, broadly speaking, there are two different kinds of support required, and that these kinds of support are found in overlapping, but somewhat different groups. On one hand, Public School Superintendents need *political* support to ensure a continuing flow of money and authority to the schools they are managing. They may also need this kind of support to be able to engage and gain some influence over the employees of the Public School System. This kind of support tends to come from elected officials, interest groups, the media, and individuals in their roles as citizens, voters and taxpayers.

On the other hand, they need *operational* support in the day to day efforts to educate students. Public School Superintendents know only too well that the educational processes that produce learning and academic achievement among students don't start or stop at the schoolhouse door. Students come to school with many different educational endowments, and the work within the schools will be supported or undermined by influence that adults and peers in the community exercise during off---school hours. This support comes principally from individuals in their role as parents and caretakers of the students who can support or undermine the educational effort being made in the schools. But it can also come from other parts of the community such as youth groups, or community merchants who might support field activities or internship programs that helped students understand the relevance of their education, and from the strength of the community of which they are a part.

The external operational support for the education of children can also come from other local government agencies. The local public libraries and parks and recreation departments can take some of the burden of engaging children in productive activities in after school hours. The local health department can play a valuable or problematic role both in providing care to students, and in promoting good health and nutritional practices among the students. The local police can play a valuable or problematic role in creating safety, security, and discipline within the schools, to say nothing of managing the traffic problems that arise at the beginning and end of the school day, or insuring safe passage to schools. And so on. It has become a cliché to say that it takes a village to raise a child; in another, more prosaic parlance, one might rightly say that it takes a network of capacity and

social capital, including both parents and other local government agencies to advance the education of a community's children.

As in the case of the staff, Superintendents can be fortunate or not with respect to the initial level of public support that greets them when they take office. In some circumstances, the high level of community political support and parental operational support will virtually guarantee that the school will have enough resources to provide a quality education, and that the efforts of the teachers will be leveraged by the efforts of parents. In other circumstances, the Public School Superintendent can encounter a community that struggles to provide capacity to support the educational process or has lost confidence in public schools as a way to provide education for their children.

In neither case are Public School Superintendents powerless to advance their cause. In the case that the Superintendents inherit strong public support for education, the challenge is both to maintain that public support, and channel this energy into strong, innovative performance. In the case that Superintendents inherit less public support, they will need to do more political and social engagement work to mobilize the support they need. In such cases, there is nearly always an untapped potential somewhere in the community that a skilled Superintendent may find a way to tap, creating a kind of "force multiplier" for whatever he or she is able to accomplish with the schools that he or she directly runs or indirectly supervises. It is these managerial efforts that transform the "luck" he or she had in their initial appointment into the skill and capacity they demonstrate as public leaders of an important public enterprise.

Public School Superintendents astute enough to recognize that they are depending on contributions from parents and other government agencies to achieve their educational objectives and are therefore committed to doing what they can to support these partnerships, will soon find that their "partners" often want something in exchange for their cooperation. That something will often be the support of the educational system in helping them produce what they are trying to achieve. In the case of parents, this may include such things as convenience, access to schools and teachers, special programs in arts or athletics, concerns about bullying that need to be allayed, and so on. In the case of other government agencies, these aims may include the school's help in achieving goals that were assigned to them: e.g. reductions in criminal offending, improved health, and vital public spaces in which individuals can congregate in social and civic activities. This interest in these different objectives may or may not demand significant changes in the school's ordinary activities. Even when schools are rigorously pursuing their specific educational objectives, they are often producing effects that can register favorably on the goals that other agencies are pursuing.

It is in this sense that schools might usefully see themselves as community institutions, engaging many citizens and agencies in the production of many valuable public purposes, not just education. If Public School Superintendents make the strategic choice to see district schools in this wider frame of community and other public organizations and if they act to pursue the opportunities they then perceive, then it should be clear that an additional political role is added to their job description. They have to act outside the boundaries of their formal authority over district schools, to embrace partnerships with parents and with other government agencies. Because they are acting outside the boundary of formal authority, they will be particularly reliant on their capacities for forms of political leadership that focus on shared values and cooperative agreements about how such values should be pursued. The networks created and engaged through these efforts are social and political rather than hierarchical and bureaucratic, and they have to be managed as such.

Public Purposes and Public Value

The fundamental task of any executive or manager who has been entrusted with a stock of public assets is to do what he or she can to maximize the public value that can be produced from the skillful utilization of those assets. That is what it means to be a manager: to have the fiduciary responsibility to employ assets entrusted to you to create value. A key question, of course, is what constitutes the values that a manager seeks to produce.

A Bottom Line for Public School Superintendents?

In the case of for profit managers, the fiduciary responsibility is to deploy resources to maximize long term shareholder wealth. That goal is accomplished by continuously adapting the products and processes of service and producing organizations to fit the market environments in which they are operating, and produce a stream of profits from one year to the next. They generate profits partly by generating increased revenues through the increased sale of products and services, but also by reducing the costs of production.

Public School Superintendents, too, are expected to find ways to deploy their assets to maximize the long run return for their shareholders in the form of a future stream of valued results that more than cover the costs of production. But because they are *public* managers using the collectively owned assets of the state, much changes in the way they have to think about their purposes.

- For one thing, their shareholders are not private investors, free to sell of their share in an enterprise if they don't like what is being done in their name. They are, instead, citizens, residents, and taxpayers who are bound together in a government from which they can escape only by moving to another jurisdiction.
- Moreover, their purposes – the way that they have to think about the net and gross value of the enterprise they lead – are quite different: they are interested in achieving desired social outcomes – often represented as their mission – rather than generating revenues from paying customers above and beyond the costs of production.
- Finally, because they use public authority, and money raised by the use of public authority to produce desired results, they have to be concerned about the fair and just use of the assets entrusted to them, and the degree to which they can produce some collective idea of social justice as well as individual welfare.

These general observations have important implications for the ways that Public School Superintendents have to think about their "bottom line."

Non-Financial Measures

First, their success in creating value for citizens, residents, taxpayers, parents, and students won't necessarily be denominated in financial terms. The main reason for this is there are no fee-paying customers who decide to purchase the services of public schools using their own money to do so. There are individuals who *benefit* from the provision of the services (parents and students), but they do not pay directly for the services as customers who cannot have access to the service if they do not pay. There are others who authorize and pay for the public schools, (citizens and taxpayers), but they do not necessarily consume the particular services, and may be after some kind of value that is not fully captured by the satisfaction of those individuals who do end up using the service. They often want something more and different than the mere satisfaction of individuals who use the schools: they want

total costs to be kept low, to achieve desired educational outcomes, and to live up to the promise to provide quality education to all.

Because there is no revenue stream earned from sales to individual customers, the public schools lack a relatively precise, objective measure of the financial value attached to the services they supply. Public School Superintendents know their economic costs, of course. They can capture the costs of their activities as easily as managers of commercial enterprises, and they recognize whether total costs are over budget and rising or falling. But what they do not have is a revenue number linked to voluntary purchases that can be set against the costs incurred in the production of their services.

Instead of that revenue measure, they have to describe the value of what they produce in terms of a set of socially valued effects that occur in the lives of individuals and the community as a whole as a result of their productive activities. The value produced by a public school will show up in the short run as gains in the academic and social development of children and in the longer run in the life trajectories of the students who attend the schools. It will also show up in our collective capacity to secure the kind of justice that is associated with equality of opportunity and in improvements in the overall economic prosperity, civic capacity, and justice of the polity in which we live.

Social Outcomes beyond Individual Client Satisfaction

Second, value won't lie solely in the satisfaction of the parents and students. The society has aims it is trying to achieve through the provision of a public education. That is often described as the "mission" of the public schools, or the "social outcomes" that society as a whole seeks to produce. Ideally, the mission and desired social outcomes will align fairly closely with what parents want for their children. But the collective public aspirations of citizens and taxpayers, and the individual private desires of parents and school children will almost certainly not align perfectly. Taxpayers, for example, might wish to pay less for education than parents would like. More significantly, public aims for education will likely attach to long term aggregate social conditions including overall economic prosperity, a civil society, and some conception of social justice linked to equality of opportunity. When public dollars and public authority are being deployed, the proper arbiter of the value produced by the public school system is the community as a whole acting through politics – not individuals who receive or benefit from services.

Socially Valued Processes as Well as Outcomes

Third, while many of the important values produced by a public school are defined in terms of desired social outcomes, some of the important dimensions of value used to evaluate and garner support for public school systems attach to *the way that students are treated in schools as well as the outcomes that are achieved*. For example, value is often attached to the fairness and decency with which children are treated in schools on a day to day basis. We want children to be safe on the way to school as well as in school. We want them to be in physical environments that are well maintained, clean, bright and cheerful. We want them to have nutritious food. We want them to be treated courteously by staff and other students. These processes can be seen as *instrumentally* valuable in achieving individual and social outcomes such as enhanced academic achievement. But they can also be seen as *intrinsically* valuable to citizens and clients alike. The capacity to provide public services justly and fairly is a value in itself – both for individuals, and for the society as a whole.

Socially Valued Results beyond the Specific Mission of the Public Schools

Fourth, a public school system produces many potentially valuable effects beyond its specific educational mission. Some of these effects are generated through the day to day process of instructing

students. In doing so, public schools make it possible for parents to work at tasks other than rearing their children. They create a responsibility for keeping the children safe, well nourished, and healthy. The school can provide a convenient location for making contact with and providing services to the children who attend school such as immunization against disease, or the detection of child abuse and neglect. It can also provide a rallying point, a forum for conversation, and a place where relations among parents can develop and create a kind of "social capital" in the local area that can be used for many purposes other than educational purposes.

Measures of these effects would not be included in any financial statement for the school. Nor would they necessarily be included in any set of measures that sought to define the mission of the public school, or the importance of trying to capture the degree to which schools treated students fairly, or helped to achieve greater equality and justice in the wider society. Yet, these effects might be important in both the short and the long run in improving the quality of individual and collective lives in the communities in which public schools were operating.

Philosophical Theories of the Good and the Just

The dimensions of public value outlined above are merely suggestions about the range of public values that a society might want to see produced by and reflected in the operations of its public school system. To some degree, these different concepts of value can be derived from philosophical inquiry rooted in two different normative theories, utilitarianism and deontology. Roughly speaking, utilitarianism is a normative theory that focuses on the good as both individuals and social collectives might define it. That tradition would focus on the particular dimensions of value that would be valued by individual clients such as individual academic achievement, or employment prospects for graduates, or safety and convenience in attending school. It would also focus on particular aggregate results that the society as a whole thought would benefit the society as a whole such as preparing students to be economically resourceful , or to act as good neighbors and citizens.

Deontological normative theories, in contrast, focus on the right and the just rather than good. They are concerned with what we are entitled to as a matter of right, and what we owe to one another as a matter of justice. At the individual level, those theories would focus on the *rights* of individuals to be treated fairly by private and public institutions, to have their rights protected by the state, to receive public benefits to which they are entitled, and so on. But they would also focus on the *obligations* that can reasonably be imposed on individuals living in a world where each is to some degree and in some ways, his brother's keeper. In the case of public schools, deontological values would attach to the question of whether individuals got the schooling to which they were entitled as a matter of justice, and whether parents, students, and taxpayers would accept and act in compliance with their duty to advance collectively defined educational objectives. At the collective level, those theories focus on the degree to which right relationships are successfully established in society, and ideas of justice such as equal opportunity, or racial tolerance, or the diminution of intergenerational inequality is achieved. Those theories can generate ideas of public value to be pursued by a public school system.

Table 1 presents some examples of values that would be associated with utilitarian and deontological ideas valued at both the individual and aggregate levels of society.

Table 1: Evaluating Public Production Systems in Democratic Societies

	Valued at the Individual Level	**Valued at the Aggregate, Collective Level**
Utilitarian Theories: Theories of the Good	Satisfaction of Individual Desires for Material Goods and Well--being	Achievement of Collectively Desired Social Outcomes Such as Economic Prosperity
Deontological Theories: Theories of the Right	Vindication of Particular Individual Rights	Achievement of a Collectively Desired Ideal of Justice and Right Relationships

Recognizing Public Value in the Public School System

In *Recognizing Public Value*, Moore tried to develop the concept of a *Public Value Account* that could be used to define and measure the public value being produced by public enterprises that took account (literally!) of the special character of public enterprises that used public money for public purposes. The basic idea was to set out a set of concepts that could define dimensions of value – both costs and benefits, reckoned at individual and collective levels, recognizing uses of authority as a cost. It also set out to define valuing results in terms of justice and fairness as well as in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in the satisfaction of individual desires.

There was no expectation that this framework could be immediately populated with a powerful set of measures that reliably captured a public's view of what was valuable to accomplish. But it was intended as a challenge and a prod that would encourage leaders and managers in the public sector to begin filling out this scheme with concepts, and with measures. It was also intended to help us, in doing so, become more articulate about what we could like to produce together, and begin to measure our performance so that we can see what is now possible, and how we can improve.

Table 2 presents a "sacrificial proposal" to create a Public Value Account for a public educational system. Our goal is to use this sacrificial proposal to stimulate others to improve upon the measures, and even the concepts – though we are more committed to the concepts than to the particular measures.

Table 2: A Proposed Public Value Account for Public Schools

Public Assets Being Used	*Public Value Being Created*
Financial Costs Tax Dollars: Federal State Local Grants: Government Charitable Special Fees	*Mission Accomplishment* Academic Achievement of Students: Narrow Academic Achievement of Students: Broader Social Development of Students *Client Satisfaction* *Maintenance of School Environment* Safety and Health Maintained in Good Repair *Ancillary Benefits* Improved Health and Nutrition Enriched Quality of Life Public Support to Working Parents
Public Authority Truancy Enforcement Disciplinary Actions (Bullying, etc.) Surveillance (Guns in Schools, etc.) Contracts with Parents	*Justice at Individual Level* Protection/Vindication of Students Rights Fair Treatment of Individual Students *Justice at Social Level* Elimination of Discrimination Equal Access to Quality Education Increased Equality in Educational Outcomes Increased Socio/Economic Equality Increased Intergenerational Mobility
Public Spirit (Parents, Others) Voluntary Contributions of Labor Participation in School Governance	*Schools as a Source of Social Capital*

Many would like to believe that the construction of this measurement system is an objective, technical task. Indeed, many of the philosophers working in the traditions we defined above are working very hard to establish such normative principles and their applications to concrete circumstances as objectively required. It is also true that many individuals choose to embrace one or more of the values articulated in this scheme as absolute values to which they are firmly and irrevocably committed.

But as both a normative and practical matter, a democratic polity is forced to work in a space where these values contend with one another for pre-eminence. In that world, both philosophers and individuals must loosen their absolutism (but not their commitment to ethical thought and action). For many morally committed individuals, this is a painful task. But for those who take on the burden of

occupying a public office in which public assets are being deployed, their commitment has to shift from simply insisting on the goodness or rightness of their ideas, to one that is decently respectful of the views of others, and seeks to find common ground through deliberation. That is the special burden of using public assets.

There are important utilitarian and deontological theories that defend democracy as either the best or most just system of governance of human societies. And full knowledge of those could soften the blow that one might have to make room for the ethical views of others as well as one's own. But for our purposes, we hope we can simply accept the practical fact that we live in a democratic system of government, and that that system of governance has established the basic structure of the public school system as we now know it and use it. In that system, thousands of local jurisdictions decide in some collective processes what particular values they are prepared to tax and regulate themselves to achieve through the operations of their public schools.

Building Legitimacy and Support for the Public Purposes of the Public School System

Public School Superintendents in the United States are office holders in a democratic political system. As both a practical and ethical matter, that means that even though the society is depending on them for some kind of leadership in defining and pursuing the purposes of the public school system, they cannot simply decide on their own what should be done. Indeed, their actions are constrained by law, and closely superintended by those in positions that allow them to call the Public School Superintendent to account. In defining the important purposes of the public education system in prioritizing those values (explicitly or implicitly), in mobilizing assets to achieve those values, and in deploying and in using those assets in specific concrete ways to change the material conditions of their local world, Public School Superintendents decide and act in the midst of pressures emerging from what we will describe as their "authorizing environment."

The Authorizing Environment of the Public School Superintendent

Public School Superintendents are continuously accountable to their local publics and those who won the right to represent them (either in school boards, or mayors' offices, or city councils). They are accountable both *prospectively* as they set out plans, and *retrospectively* as their performance is revealed through observed results. These discussions and reviews can be more or less frequent, more or less widely distributed, and more or less formal. Some demands for accountability are relatively stable and predictable, but many are not. The variety, volatility, and intensity of the oversight structure can make Public School Superintendents feel they are under siege. Making executive decisions in this context can challenge even the most determined and confident public manager. It often feels like an impossible job, and among those brave enough to undertake it, few manage to stay in the job long enough to shepherd through real changes.

Embracing Accountability to Build Public Legitimacy and Support

While the burden of close, continuing, public scrutiny of their decisions and actions often seems to stymie leadership from Public School Superintendents, the fact of the matter is that skillful, strategic Public School Superintendents sometimes find the means to work within these constraints. They even turn the demands for public accountability into an occasion for mobilizing a public to understand and assist them in their efforts to educate the community's children. It is the process of public accountability that creates the occasion for much of the collective discussion about what local communities want to accomplish through their public schools, and how they think those goals might best be achieved.

Consequently, insofar as Public School Superintendents use their positions to participate in or lead those public discussions, they end up acting not only as *managers* of the school system, but also as *political and community leaders,* when engaged in public discussions about the desired ends and means of education, the resources needed to produce desired results, and the character of the results they have actually produced. They become quasi---political leaders—not in the sense that they run for office but in the sense that they play an important role in calling a public into existence that can deliberate about the public values that they would like to see achieved by, and reflected in, the operations of the public school system that citizens and taxpayers support.

It is for these reasons that even though the Public School Superintendent's job is viewed as administrative, doing the job well requires a great deal of *political astuteness*, and no small amount of *political work* as well. Indeed, one can say that the vigor of a Public School Superintendent's management—the degree to which the Public School Superintendent is able to introduce and manage value-creating change processes—depends critically on how well the Superintendent manages four important political aspects of his or her job:

- The way he or she negotiates the terms of her accountability to the school board or mayor;
- The way he or she manages relationships with powerful organized constituencies (including unions, and the local business community);
- The way he or she manages relations with the media; and
- The way he or she mobilizes broad support from the community as a whole including parents in particular, but other taxpayers and citizens with an interest in education as well.

Defining the Authorizing Environment: Direct Political Accountability

We can define the authorizing environment of Public School Superintendents as consisting of all those social actors who have the formal authority to provide public assets to the Public School Superintendent to use in his or her work. Generally speaking, that means the local school board – an independent, local body elected by citizens to provide democratic oversight of the operations of the public schools. They are the ones who can formally authorize the Public School Superintendent to deploy publicly owned assets to pursue publicly established purposes, either through explicit direction, or mutual agreement, or tacit acceptance of the Superintendent's decisions. And they are the ones who can hire or fire Public School Superintendents based on their views of his or her performance.

In some cases, local school boards have been displaced by mayors who want to have more direct authority over the operations of local schools. Mostly this has occurred when a public case can be made that the local board has been ineffective in managing the public school system for performance: it has lost money, neglected the physical plant, and failed to set high standards for students, hired unqualified individuals and so on. These circumstances have also created occasions where states have intervened to assume the governance of local public schools. Given that a significant amount of the money that supports local school boards comes from state level taxes, it perhaps should not be surprising that when local public schools fail that states would feel entitled or even obligated to intervene.

So, it is not strictly true that all Public School Superintendents (or those performing that executive function) report directly to local school boards. Some report to mayors, or special state oversight commissions. But what remains true everywhere is that Public School Superintendents are directly accountable up a bureaucratic chain of command to someone who has direct political authority over them.

Under ideal circumstances, this direct political accountability is not a problem for the Public School Superintendent. His or her purposes and judgments about how to pursue public goals are sufficiently aligned with those of the political overseers, and they have worked long enough together to have generated a high degree of trust that enlarges the scope of discretion that a Public School Superintendent can rely on in leading the public school system. But that is not always the case. Often, local school boards have different factions with different ideas about the ends and means of education in general, or more particular issues.

Then, the problem for the Public School Superintendent is to see what he or she can do, with the help of the chairperson, to reconcile the factions and move ahead with the maximum degree of support. In the worst case, a Public School Superintendent will find him or herself at odds with the local political authorities. In that case, the only course is to see if he or she can rally support from the board, or change his or her own mind about what is good and right to do in the contested area, or seek employment elsewhere. There are very few, maybe none, Public School Superintendents that can survive a fight with a local board united against them.

Defining the Authorizing Environment: A Wider Scope of Accountability

While it is crucially important to start with the part of the authorizing environment that has the formal authority to approve decisions by the Public School Superintendent (as well as to hire and fire that august personage), it is important that we look beyond the boundary of direct political accountability. The method is to try to identify not only those actors with direct, formal authority over school operations, but also *all those social actors in a position to influence those with formal authority of the local school board.* That extension in the definition of the authorizing environment changes our picture of the authorizing environment dramatically. Suddenly, the stage is crowded with many different social actors, with many different purposes, pushing and shoving to move the operations of the public school system in one direction or another.

- If the local school board is formally in charge of the local schools, they might well be challenged or influenced by *locally elected chief executives such as mayors or locally elected legislative bodies such as city councils.*

- *Interest groups* of various kinds will pursue them and those who have authority and influence over them. Those *interest groups* might include teachers, administrators and operational workers' unions; associations of parents; organized taxpayers; cultural and religious groups; and neighborhood associations determined to keep their neighborhood school open, and get at least its fair share of funding, among many other groups.

- *Media* will focus public attention on particular issues, thus monitoring and influencing the interplay of these different groups with the local school board and the Public School Superintendent. In the past, media attention was limited to print, radio, and TV (and that was quite enough!). Now, the "traditional media" has been supplemented by the vast expansion of "social media." That has the potential to take many small events and make them public issues, and do so in an instant.

- One can also note that the efforts to increase the accountability of local school principals to local school communities through the establishment of *local school councils*, and to increase accountability of both principals and teachers to individual parents through *increased transparency* in school operations has also widened the authorizing environment of Public School Superintendents. In today's media world, it does not take much for a local or individual issue to become a system level policy issue.

- It is also true that the politics of education have reached up from local levels *to state and national levels of government*. The consequence is that the federal and state governments have enacted public policies that can have important direct and indirect impact on the opportunities and constraints that local school boards face. Consequently, both federal and state officials, and the constituencies they represent, have become an important part of the authorizing environment of local school boards and Public School Superintendents.

The theory of democracy and public administration undergirding districts imagines a tidy world – a world in which a local school board, representing the citizens, taxpayers and parents deliberates on the ends and means of the public school system, creates a clear, consistent, and stable mandate that can authorize and guide action by the Public School Superintendent. The reality is that Public School Superintendents face a cacophony of self---appointed "accountability agents," each having an interest in shaping the conduct and performance of the public schools, and believing they have a legal and moral right to demand accountability to them and their purpose as a member of the public.

Defining the Authorizing Environment: Other Environmental Factors Shaping the Local Mandate for Public Schools

In that swirl of political demands for accountability, it is hard for both local school boards and Public School Superintendents to get their bearings. Yet, there are some things in the authorizing environment that provide some stability (if not coherence!) to the explicit and implicit mandate for public education. The first is the *status quo* itself. The status quo has emerged from past accommodations of these demands. It is one possible solution to the chaos. We know it has worked for some constellation of forces because it exists. Because it exists, it has some legitimacy that comes from honoring a past experience. It has also accumulated many individuals who have stakes in the preservation of the status quo. While the heterogeneity and dynamism of the authorizing environment provides some pressure and some opportunities for change, those urgent new demands and tantalizing opportunities often crash against the rocks of an established status quo.

Closely related to the power of the status quo is the fact that the operations of the local system are guided by *laws* enacted in the past as well as by contemporary policy guidance that emerges from the swirl of political debate and policy deliberation. As noted above, these laws can emerge at many different levels of government: national legislatures and presidents can enact important laws; state legislatures and governors can also enact laws. But these are statutes. The law can also be invoked (and sometimes changed) by federal, state, and even local courts responding to suits from citizens. The law can be a dynamic force transforming the mandates for local school boards and Public School Superintendents. Politically animated legislatures act to change the laws governing the system. State legislatures act to conform to federal mandates, and state departments of education act to implement those new mandates through regulations. And legal advocates use test cases to extend or shrink the rights and obligations of those who pay for or use the public school system. But the laws also can lock the public school system in political agreements or understandings of rights that come from the past.

Finally, if one participates in the swirl of political and policy debate about education, one cannot help but be impressed by the influence of what could be described as "*governing public ideas*" or the "*conventional wisdom*" that holds sway in the debate, and seems to organize the public, political discussion, and the passage and interpretation of laws. For example, the idea of the "one best system" that consisted of a system of local, publicly financed and publicly managed schools each trying to provide the same kind of education and the same results was dominant in the U.S. through much of the 20th century. That idea is now being challenged by the idea of a public school system that enables parents to choose schools for their students and encourages schools to differentiate themselves and to compete for students on the basis of their difference from other schools. Exactly where such ideas come

from and how they make progress in the social and political firmament remains a bit unclear. To no small degree, they seem to be the product of the profession itself: the accumulation of ideas held among professional educators about what constitutes good practice in education. Ideally, these ideas would emerge from real scientific knowledge built on the development and testing of educational ideas. In practice, however, the ideas seem to depend only partly on a strong science base, and are also importantly influenced by economic and professional interests, and by political ideologies that select some ideas over others without much professional experience or scientific evidence. Wherever they come from, the ideas are influential. And, as in the case of the law, the ideas can be supportive of the status quo, or a force that begins to undermine the status quo. Public School Superintendents will ignore the power of these ideas only at their peril. Alignment with emerging ideas can be their friend in making change, and ideally, improvements.

Summary: Diagnosing the Authorizing Environment and What it May Support

In sum, the authorizing environment of local Public School Superintendents includes many different actors and elements. **Table 3** provides a list for easy recall, and subsequent analysis.

Table 3: Key Elements of the Authorizing Environment of Public Schools

I. Political Actors and Forces

- A. Local School Boards
- B. Mayors and City Councils and Public Agencies
- C. Interest Groups
- D. Media
- E. Citizens, Voters, Taxpayers
- F. Parents and Students as an Interest Group and a Co-Producer
- G. Foundations and Other Brokers and Providers
- H. State Legislatures and Departments of Education

II. Other Environmental Factors

- A. The Power of the Status Quo
- B. Laws: Statutory and Constitutional
- C. Governing Public Ideas

The complexity of the authorizing environment implies that there are many different factors pushing towards the production of many different values. One can, in principle, map the relationship between particular actors in the authorizing environment and the dimensions of public value that

interests them. Author Mark Moore did that work to analyze the character of the authorizing environment for the NYC Police Department (NYCPD). The results are shown here as **Figure 1.**

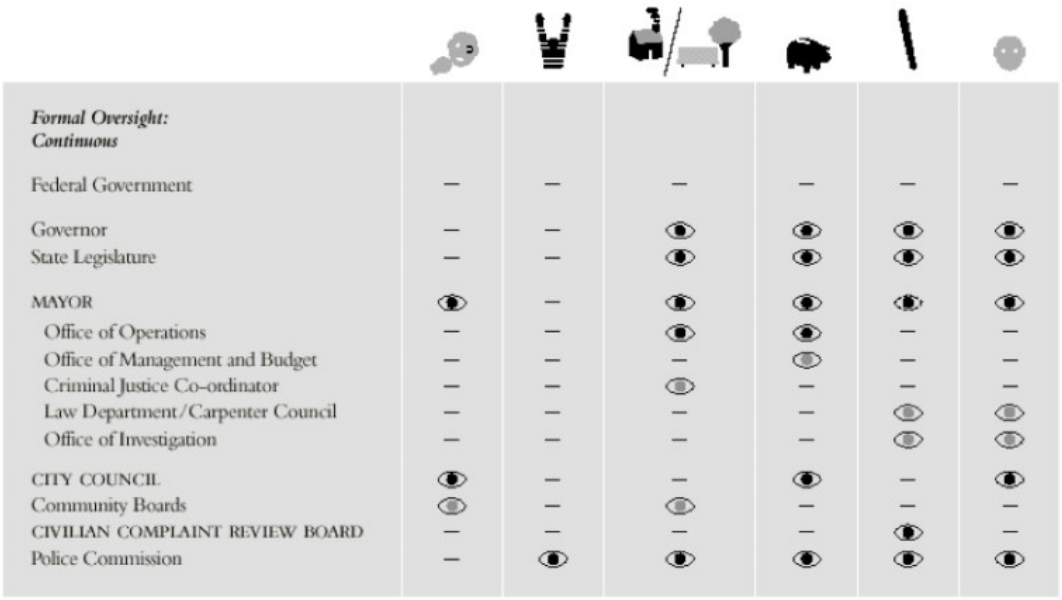

Figure 1: Intensity and Continuity of Authorizer Focus by Dimension of Value

The columns of this matrix defined some of the important public values that the NYCPD might be expected to pursue as ends, or have reflected in the evaluation of the means they use in achieving their goals. These included: reduce crime, call offenders to account, reduce fear in public and private spaces, use public dollars economically and fairly, use force and authority economically and fairly, and provide services to citizens calling 911. The rows of this matrix describe the actors present in the authorizing environment of the NYCPD: the mayor, the city council, etc. In the cells of this matrix are "eyes" that are meant to show what particular dimensions of value attract the attention and concern from each overseer. The degree of their attention is indicated by the darkness of the eye: the more intense their interest, the darker the eye. We have also tried to recognize that the degree of interest is determined partly by the intensity of the interest, but also by whether that interest is constant over time, or intermittent. Eyelashes suggest that quality of blinking, intermittent interest, rather than a hot steady gaze, in the matrix.

One can argue with the accuracy of this representation of the authorizing environment of a particular agency in a particular city. We offer it here to show a method that can systematically investigate the authorizing environment that a particular Public School Superintendent faces, and to consider what strategic moves he or she might make to alter that environment. For example, the Public School Superintendent might note that there was very little support for a particular dimension of value that he or she thought was important. If that were true, they would have to find and develop some latent constituency for that value. Otherwise, their hopes for advancing that value would be limited. One tool they could consider using in building that constituency, for example, would be to create a performance

measure that the organization can use to report how well the enterprise is doing with respect to that dimension of value.

Purposes and Tools for Engaging the Authorizing Environment

In many ways, the authorizing environment is to Public School Superintendents what the market demand is to a private sector manager. It is the authorizing environment that defines what would be valuable for a public system to produce, and provides the resources necessary to produce the desired results. The key difference, of course, is that this choice about what to produce through the collectively owned assets of a democratic state emerges all together through the messy processes of democratic politics rather than one by one through individual market choices. However imperfect the democratic political process, as a practical and moral matter, it is the public purposes that emerge from that tumult that a Public School Superintendent is duty bound to pursue.

Appropriate Political Activities for Public School Superintendents

That does not mean, however, that a Public School Superintendent has no responsibility for trying to improve the quality of that political process. In fact, given that he or she will become the agent for enacting that public view, it might be particular important to the Public School Superintendent to understand and seek to improve the democratic process from which that public view emerges.

It used to be said that Public School Superintendents should play no role in politics; that their role should be that of a neutral expert capable of implementing whatever policies the political world embraces. As a principle that seeks to preserve the right of the people acting through elected officials to define both the ends and some of the means of a publicly financed enterprise using the authority of the state, that is a fine idea. But this principle has always ignored several important facts.

First, public officials such as Public School Superintendents have much to contribute to public policy debates about what can and even should be accomplished through public enterprises. They have expertise that comes from their professional knowledge that includes ideas not only about the substantive and administrative means that can be used to advance goals set by others, but also about the appropriate purposes of public education in a liberal democratic society. That professional expertise is enhanced and particularized by their experience operating an existing school system. In the course of that, they can feel the pressure of citizens organized in groups or simply acting as individuals in ways that elected officials who must concern themselves with many different issues cannot always feel. They can also see not only what is theoretically possible for schools but what is particularly possible in the particular concrete circumstances in which they are working. They can speak accurately about what communities and schools need, what is valuable, and what is doable.

Second, public officials such as Public School Superintendents can create public forums and processes of consultation that can add to the social and political legitimacy that elected officials earn by winning election. The mandate that comes from winning an election is an important legitimizing force. But it rarely goes far enough to legitimize all the particular choices that come before a local school board and its Superintendent. Public School Superintendents can supplement that legitimacy, determine public views on matters that were too small or too particular to become electoral issues, and be responsive to citizen views even helping mobilize support for specific decisions to be made. Public School Superintendents can often engage in a kind of micro issue politics that can strengthen the overall legitimacy of their administration and the elected officials to whom they are ultimately accountable.

Third, public officials such as Public School Superintendents often need to mobilize and sustain public support and commitment to policies that require citizens to offer concrete, particular support to

achieve their goals. If they need parents to read with their children or to engage with teachers and schools to support the learning of their children in other ways or to advocate as interest groups for greater resources for communities, they will have to use social and political mobilizing efforts to promote these practices. The methods for accomplishing these goals can be exercises in social and political organizing or public marketing.

Public School Superintendents must be usefully engaged in politics as well as in administration. The overall objective is not to defeat democratic accountability; the aim is to *enhance the legitimacy and support of all the actions taken by a public school system to understand and pursue conceptions of public value in education.* John Dewey had a very good way of describing this work. In *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey argued that an important task of all public officials in democratic systems was to "call into existence a public that can understand and act on its own interests." That is the political work of Public School Superintendents.

Specific Techniques for Political Engagement and Community Mobilization

To do that work, Public School Superintendents can and should become expert in the techniques set out below that are more fully described in Chapters 4 and 5 of *Creating Public Value*:

- *Entrepreneurial Advocacy:* Methods that can be used to advance policy purposes in a complex, conflicted authorizing environment.
- *Managing Processes of Policy Development:* Methods for organizing collective processes of decision---making designed to produce substantively strong decisions that have strong support of stakeholders behind them.
- *Negotiating Value---Creating Deals:* Methods for negotiating with others that can create public value as different parties to a negotiation define that value.
- *Orchestrating Processes of Public Deliberation and Learning:* Methods for promoting public deliberation and adaptive learning about issues that involve significant uncertainty and potential for loss.
- *Public Marketing:* Methods for engaging many individual citizens in efforts to improve public conditions through their own independent action.

Given the importance of building legitimacy and support within the authorizing environment and more broadly among all the individual citizens who might be mobilized to assist in producing desired social results, it is as important that Public School Superintendents develop skills in these areas as it is for them to develop competencies in the use of financial systems and budgets or in human resource management to improve the performance of particular organizations.

Building and Deploying Operational Capacity to Produce Valuable Results

So far, one could reasonably charge that we have said very little about the actual management of the public school system, and even less about the management of the individual public schools that are part of that system. We have been engaged in a philosophical and political discussion about the ends of public education and how support for those ends has to be legitimated and supported as a publicly valued enterprise. We have said little about the practical task of deploying assets available to Public School Superintendents to produce the public value they have been asked to achieve.

In this section we will remedy this defect. We will begin with a schematic representation of individual public schools, and the system of public schools as production processes that converts the public assets delivered to the public school system into publicly valuable results in both the short and

long run. We will then turn to the important questions of how the performance of those stems can be changed through innovations of one kind or another. We will conclude with an effort to define the character and location of some of the most important kinds of innovations being introduced into the public school system.

Public Schools and the Public School System as a Social Production System: The Public Value Chain

To produce valuable results that register on important dimensions of public value, and earn them sustained legitimacy and support from their local authorizing environment, Public School Superintendents face the managerial challenges of deploying the assets entrusted to them to achieve these goals. This is a very complex task because there are so many different places to improve and innovate, and it is hard to know exactly what effect the innovations will have on the ultimate objectives. It is useful to capture and contain the complexity through a simple concept and some simple diagrams.

- The simple concept is that we will view individual schools, and the set of public schools, as a production system that uses valuable public assets (public money, public authority, and public spirit) to produce valuable public results (satisfaction of parents and students; educational development of children; fair treatment of children; and the achievement of a good and just community in which to live).
- The simple diagram is what we will describe as a "value chain" that seeks to represent the transformation of assets into valued results along a causal chain that is, ideally, engineered to produce the most public value from the available public assets.

We will start with a simple view of a single public school operating in the context of the public school system, and see where value-creating innovations could take place in that single school. We will then move to an image that has a set of public schools operating in the context of a public school system, and again focus on where innovations could occur in that system.

A Public School as a Production System

Figure 2 presents an abstract image of a single public school operating in the context of a set of publicly financed, publicly managed public schools. That school receives inputs of money and authority in accord with local public values and support for public education, and deploys those assets through particular production processes to generate a series of organizational outputs. Those outputs are most importantly educational encounters with children, but they also include other activities of the school, including efforts to engage parents and community organizations in the education of the children, certain kinds of health interventions, and the care and feeding of the students as well.

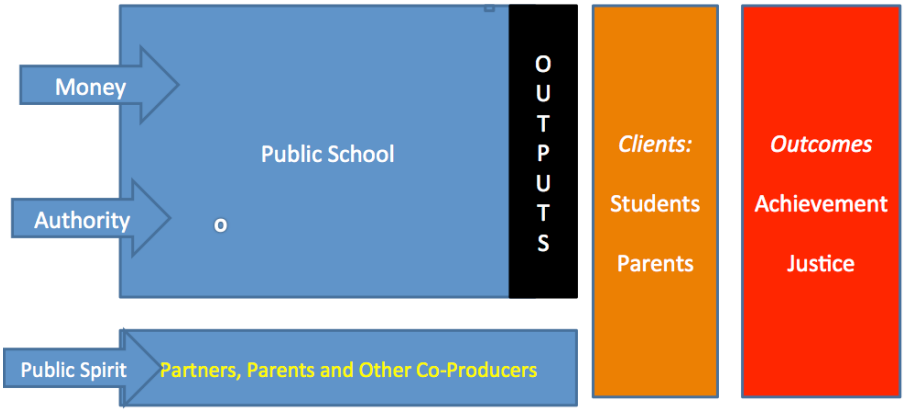

Figure 2: The Production Process/Value Chain for Public Schools

(We know, we know! A school is not a factory. It is not a production system. Its work is done by human beings with other human beings for other human beings. It is dangerous to see it as anything other than a community of adults and children engaged in the joint enterprise of learning. But please stay with this mechanical image for a bit just so we can orient ourselves to the important work we are trying to do in helping that community deliver better results than we are now getting.)

The services provided to (and obligations imposed on) students are evaluated by the students themselves (and their parents) as more or less satisfactory (and more or less just) according to their own ideas of what constitutes a good or bad, just or unjust, educational service. Their satisfaction with the services has value *intrinsically*. All other things being equal, the goal of the educational system should be to satisfy students and parents in the short and long run.

It also has value *instrumentally*. Providing educational services that satisfy students and parents may be a necessary condition for producing individual academic achievement, and for generating and sustain broad political support for the educational system.

But as noted above, the ultimate public value of a public school system is not found only in the satisfaction of students and parents; *it is also found in the degree to which that publicly supported and publicly provided educational system achieves the social results that the public as a whole wanted to achieve through the operations of that system.* Citizens and taxpayers, as well as parents and children, have to be satisfied with the performance of the public school system. And while it is likely that citizens and taxpayers will want to see parents and children satisfied by the educational system, and the children reaching high levels of academic achievement, there is no guarantee that they will want nothing more than what students and parents want.

The fact that there is a *public* arbiter of the value of the school, and that those values include the achievement of social outcomes, puts the individuals with whom the school interacts directly (e.g. parents and students) in a somewhat odd position in the value chain. In the private sector, the value chain usually ends with the customer contact. When a purchase is made, revenue is earned, and the value of the good or service objectively established and denominated in money -- the producing organization tends to lose interest in what happens next. It is true that they have to be concerned about liabilities in the use of the product, and to live up to the warranties they make, they hope to create a relationship with the customer so that they will become a repeat customer. But from the point of view

of the private firm, most of the "value" they produce registers at the moment a cash register rings up the sale.

In the public sector, in contrast, the transaction (indeed, often the repeated transactions with the same person) is often just the beginning of the story. The public is after social outcomes. Those social outcomes are produced by changes in the behavior and condition of the clients. That is true when we are providing services such as education and health. It is even truer when government agencies are imposing obligations on individuals, and in doing so, hoping to induce compliance with the rules. And it is true when government provides something that looks like a mixture of a service and an obligation – which is the case in education.

If the public seeks to produce social outcomes, and if the transactions with clients are designed to produce changes in their behavior, then there is an important sense in which the clients become part of the production process in achieving social outcomes. If they respond to the services and obligations in the collectively (and perhaps individually) desired ways, then society will get a better (and less expensive in terms of both money and authority) outcome that would be true if the clients failed to respond to the state's efforts.

This is painful because we are accustomed to thinking of individuals and their desires as the ends to which all productive activity should be directed. Yet it seems clear that at least some of our public aspirations go beyond the satisfaction of individuals to the achievement of collectively desired results that sweep them up in the effort.

There is much to be considered in this observation. But the important point for our immediate purpose is to recognize that the clients of a public sector production system are also often *co-producers* of the desired results. This is true in many spheres other than education. In medicine for example, we cannot prevent disease, or sustain the quality of life for those with chronic diseases if we cannot find ways to enlist the patients, and their family and friends in efforts to protect and preserve their own health. In controlling pollution, we cannot succeed unless we can enlist polluters in efforts to reduce their pollution. In education it is clear that we cannot achieve our important educational objectives without successfully engaging students in their own education, and recruiting parents to help with the effort.

Thus, the production system of an individual public school in achieving its educational objectives includes the degree to which students can be motivated and equipped to pursue their own education, and the degree to which parents and other adults in the community might also be recruited to this cause.

Figure 3 shows a picture of a single public school producing educational results. It receives inputs of money and authority. It deploys that through a production system that authors like Walter Doyle, David C. Cohen and Richard Elmore have described as the instructional core, though there are schools of thought that define that production system more broadly. To support the work of the instructional core, the school (often as proxy for a larger system and implementing strategies shaped outside the school):

- Organizes itself in a particular structure that distributes responsibilities and accountability across individuals working in the system;
- Manages a human resource management system that recruits and develops teachers who are key to the instructional core;
- Allocates financial and human resources across the classrooms and students in the school and across the different specialized functions to be performed;

- Seeks to bring parents and other adults into the instructional core of the enterprise;
- Creates and uses information systems that can capture information about the activities and results produced by the system.

Valuable outcomes show up in the degree to which clients are satisfied with the quality of the services they receive, and the fairness with which obligations are imposed; and in the school's ability to enlist parents and students in producing high levels of individual academic achievement and social development.

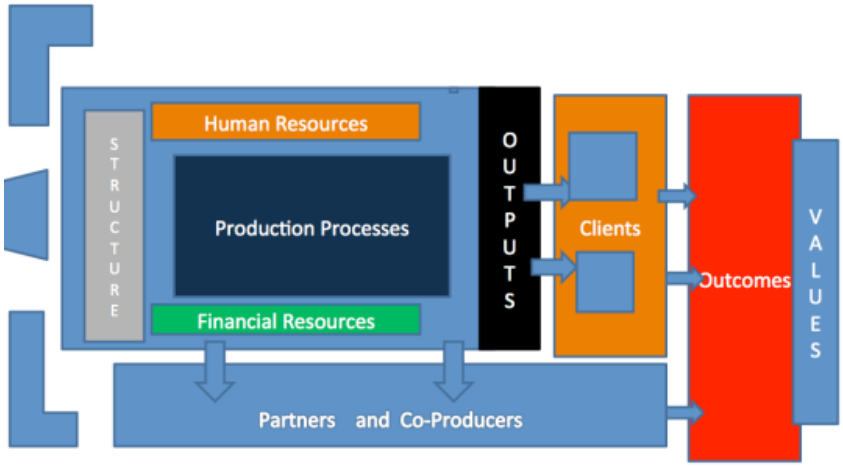

Figure 3: Production Processes (e.g. Instructional Core, etc.)/Value Chain: Individual School Level

The System of Public Schools as a Production System

So far, we have been looking at a production process/value chain that is operating at the level of an individual school. But a Public School Superintendent is often overseeing the operations of many individual public schools. These schools differ in level and in geographic location. It is obvious that the education of children will have to differ in content, pedagogy, and many other things as they gain maturity, and most school districts are large enough that they can support different schools for different aged students. It is also obvious that the schools have to be located in particular geographic locations.

In the past, we have often thought that having many smaller schools all focused on the same educational goals and methods was a better system than having a few large schools. Similarly, we have thought that having local systems of schools was preferable to having a system of schools that specialized in some way, and therefore would attract students from across many different geographic areas who were interested in that specialized form of education. The principle of many relatively small, undifferentiated schools was consistent with the goal of making it easy and convenient for children to get to school, and of creating a local community that could identify with, and invest in, the activities of the local school. That local connection could create a kind of transparency and accountability at local levels that could combine with bureaucratic supervision to produce high performance in the schools. It would also create a willingness and capacity of parents and other local stakeholders to support school

operations through engagement in the education of the children, volunteer labor (such as building playgrounds), and charitable contributions.

The value of having many small schools focused on general education often had to contend with other competing values. First, the more individual schools there were and the more they began to reflect the capacities and commitments of local communities, the more potential for inequity in the performance of the overall system. If our current economic, social, and political system created significant inequalities among individuals, and if individuals situated themselves in communities that were relatively homogenous rather than highly varied, then one could easily get local schools that reflected those differences. Some schools in some communities are lavishly supported; other schools, in other communities languish.

To avoid such inequalities in educational services from arising, many Public School Superintendents and local school boards, and increasingly states, have relied on bureaucratic processes to ensure some degree of standardization in expenditure, in pedagogic methods, or in observed results across the systems they lead. Local responsiveness was always good for the locals if they pushed hard for and supported strong local educational efforts; it was good for the public schools as a whole if all locals did this. But if only some locals stepped up, then an equal opportunity issue arose, and the burden of explaining why some parents and students had to stay within a local area that was less likely to support education than others still bedevils us.

Second, there are potential important economies of scale in the financing of public schools. A larger school could probably reduce many of its overhead costs in providing shelter, food, specialized facilities, and specialized staff and activities. A one-room school house was great for integrating students; it was much worse at providing specialized educational services to special needs children. And since there were not enough special needs kids in one geographic area to justify providing that special function everywhere, it seemed necessary to centralize these special services.

Third, it seemed obvious that a public school system that had a large school population that was very heterogeneous in its demands and expectations for education could take advantage of its large "catchment area" and create some specialized schools that could cater to special needs or capacities and in doing so increase the satisfaction of the parents and students. Such systems would do better at achieving some socially desired social outcomes than a system that insisted on all schools being about the same. This ran the risk of introducing a different kind of inequality in the system. An educational system, for example, could respond to differences among individuals in their specific desires for education by providing schools somewhere in the system that respond to these special or interest group needs and not to the needs of others -- even when some of these schools are available to students from all over the district regardless of their residence.

But where many saw danger in a potential for inequality in educational opportunity or outcome, others saw an opportunity to improve educational services and outcomes by responding more effectively to the special interests and needs of particular students and families. This seemed fine as long as the system remained capable of providing educational opportunities that individuals wanted and achieving a fair distribution of educational opportunity as well as a reasonably just set of educational outcomes. In many public school systems, however, these competing values (and social and political forces attached to these different values) have played out in different ways influenced to some degree by the views and positions of the particular Public School Superintendent and the local school board. Often, the pressures have been balanced differently across the different age levels of the school system. It seems that the demand for the convenience and sociability of neighborhood schools has held fairly firm for elementary schools where the potential for parental and community engagement seems particularly strong. On the other hand, the demands for economies of scale and for

specialization regardless of geographic location seem to have advanced more at the middle school, junior high school and high school levels. This reflects, we think, the recognition that middle school, junior high and high school students are more independent than elementary school students, and they are prepared for a more impersonal educational system. They also demand a wider set of activities and opportunities than elementary school students.

We make these observations about the principles for organizing the set of public schools to make two particular points. First, the specific production processes to be deployed in particular schools depends a great deal on what particular segment of the school aged population that a school is serving, and the aims that have been set for that school. This is not just the difference between an elementary school and a middle school or junior high school. It is also the difference between an elementary school that has 70% of its students eligible for school lunch programs in an unsafe neighborhood and one that has no students eligible for the school lunch in a neighborhood that has not had a gun shot fired in over a decade. It is also the difference between a high school that is struggling to keep its students safe, engaged, and prepared for a demanding economic market, on one hand, and one that is focusing on increasing the fraction of students that will go to elite colleges and universities, on the other. This may be particularly true if we determined to get equally good results from schools in these different circumstances. Given that students show up with different readiness and needs, it is almost certainly true that achieving equally satisfying results will not require the same educational processes and resources but something that differs. Providing exactly the same educational services to everyone will likely not necessarily reduce inequality in outcomes.

Second, the overall performance of the set of public schools, not only on individual academic achievement but on the aggregate shape of academic accomplishments of the population as a whole (e.g. the achievement gap), depends on how the set of public schools intersects with the diverse student populations it seeks to serve. That means that Public School Superintendents have to be worried about creating or allowing certain kinds of differentiation to show up in the educational system even, or perhaps especially, if they are interested in achieving more equal educational outcomes. In thinking about that, they might have to give special attention to issues about how the least well-off rather than the average or the relatively well-off are faring in the system.

Third, even though public schools are serving the lion's share of school aged children across the nation's school communities, they are not a monopoly. They are always competing to some degree both for parental support for the public schools and for citizen and taxpayer support for the public schools. It is important for Public School Superintendents and local school boards to keep track of their "market share" among all parents and students and to keep track of how many and what kinds of parents and students are leaving the public system for the private system or other public systems. Indeed, one way to understand why Public School Superintendents are moving towards more "choice" for parents (and in doing so, undermining to some degree the idea of "neighborhood schools" as a social and political gathering points for local communities) is precisely because they feel they have to do this to compete for parental and public support for public schools. Figuring out how to accommodate the demand for parental and student choice while continuing to pursue the broader purposes of education in general, and public education in particular is one of their biggest challenges.

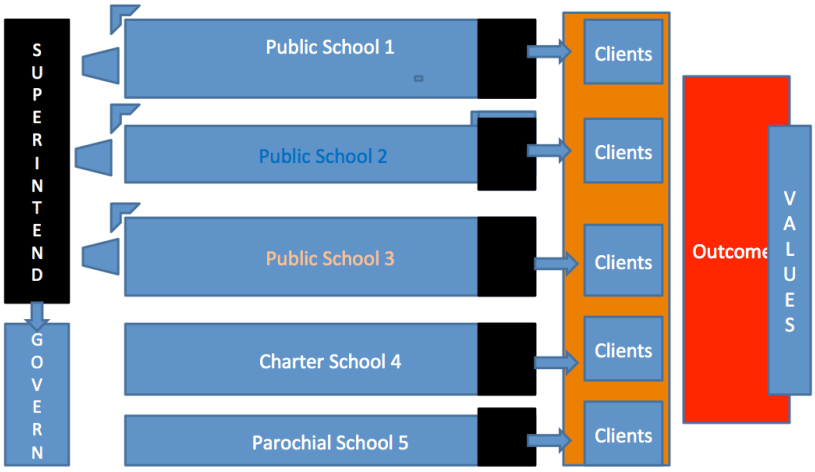

Figure 4: Production Process/Value Chain: Public School System

Figure 4 presents an abstract, graphic image of a Public School Superintendent managing a set of publicly financed, publicly managed public schools.

It is tempting to think that the Public School Superintendent's problem is to get all those particular schools performing at a high level. That is certainly part of his or her challenge. But as we have seen so much in the past decade, that neither means using their administrative powers to preserve all these schools nor to get them to behave all in the same way. They can use their administrative powers to try to drive certain consistent principles and methods throughout the system as a whole. But one of those important general principles might be (somewhat paradoxically) to insist on high levels of accomplishment with respect to educational goals and on the importance of being creative and adapting to both local conditions and different individual students as well as following one or more standardized curricula and pedagogic approaches. That, in turn, can result in very significant changes both in the population of public schools (with some of them being closed for poor performance) and in the ways that particular public schools decide to operate as well as how they position themselves in the parent and student market for enrollment in particular public schools.

One very important management implication flows from the fact that the set of public schools being managed by the Public School Superintendents and the way that they are slicing into the overall school aged population is changing significantly over time. In the old days when students were assigned to attend schools that were near to them and the schools serving those students remained the same, it was possible to observe whether the school was improving or worsening over time. One could count on the population being served by that school to be about the same from year to year.

Today, when students choose schools, and where some schools close and re-open as well as where the public school options have expanded to include publicly chartered schools, the connection between a particular school and a particular population has often been broken. This makes it harder to compare the performance of schools over time because the population the school is serving may have changed radically. The movement of the highest achieving 20% of students from a low performing school to a higher performing school can make it seem as though the old school's performance was deteriorating rapidly and the new school's performance was increasing dramatically when actually nothing much had changed in each school's ability to promote the academic development of their students.

This means that the more we move away from assigning students to neighborhood schools to allowing students to go to the schools they choose, the more we will have to shift our measures of the performance of both schools and the school system to *individual student records observed over time* -- as opposed to simply aggregate changes in the performance of school populations that have shown up in particular schools over time, as has been the practice. That may very well be an important improvement because it will focus attention on how each school, and the school system as a whole, advances the academic achievement of each individual in the school system.

Note that the collective desire to track improvements in the performance of each student in the system is a bit different than the individual parental desire to advance the performance of their particular children. What will come to the fore is the capacity of the system to serve both those who are well positioned in the society and those who are not – an important measure of the overall effectiveness and justice of the public school system.

The Strategic Role of Innovation in Improving Performance

The concepts and figures set out above present a simple, abstract account of the production process that converts valuable assets to valuable results. As such, they are templates that a Public School Superintendent could use to begin diagnosing the production processes that the schools in the system are currently using to produce results in individual schools and how that is accumulating to performance across the whole system. Perhaps, most importantly, they can outline the targets of efforts to improve the performance of the schools and the system: the process of reengineering that system for improved value production. The search for improved performance has to start with a key observation. As a practical matter, Public School Superintendents do not usually have the opportunity to design the public school system they manage from scratch. They inherit a system that has been built over the years.

The good news associated with this fact is there are many things that do not have to be built from the ground up. There are existing facilities. There is a trained staff. There are established routines that guide teachers and students through the school day, ensure their safety, and get them fed. There is often a specific curriculum and pedagogy and a counseling system. And so on.

The bad news is this: to the degree that the current operations and activities of the public schools are failing to deliver on their minimum goals, or (more ambitiously) to the degree that better methods exist for achieving desired educational outcomes than are now being used in the school system, then Public School Superintendents will have to find ways to alter the existing production system. This means that they have to (at least occasionally and to some degree) *engage in experimentation and innovation if they want to improve the performance of the system on any given dimension of public value.*

Public School Superintendents often find themselves caught in a bind. On one hand, they feel responsible for "superintending" the on-going operations of the schools they direct and control. That role seems to require them simply to support the continuing operation of a well-designed, high performing machine. All they have to do is run a certain amount of tension and accountability and a certain amount of support for behavior that is well known and reliable in producing desired results. The challenge is to keep the machine lubricated and running not to re-engineer it.

On the other hand, they are responsible for finding ways to improve the performance of the school system as a whole and the particular public schools within that system. As noted above, to improve performance, one has to make a change of some kind that could, with more or less uncertainty, be expected to improve performance on some dimension of public value to be produced by the public school system.

The fact that there is always some degree of uncertainty associated with instigating a change creates a serious problem for public managers. The public as a whole does not want its public managers to gamble with tax dollars, nor with the lives of those they are pledged to help. They would prefer certainty in the choices that are made. That is what they hoped they were getting when they hired educational experts to be their Public School Superintendents. They wanted someone who could see a path through to improved performance without any risk.

The Innovators Dilemma

The simple fact of the matter, however, is that all innovations require some degree of risk. That risk can be denominated in the good or harm that the change does to people affected by the change relative to what they could have had if the innovation had not been tried. (We can call this the *substantive* or *public value risk*, and it is ethically the most important risk to consider.) The risk can also be reckoned in terms of the impact of the innovation on the Public School Superintendent's personal reputation. (We can call this the *reputational risk*, and while it is not as important ethically as the public value risk, it will and should be closely calculated.) Finally, there is what could be described as the *risk of potential damage (or gain) to the credibility of the idea that is being essayed and the organization that is attempting it*. Often, the balance of these risks causes Public School Superintendents (and other public managers) to avoid undertaking innovations at all.

Of course, if Public School Superintendents chose not to innovate at all – if they chose instead to operate as caretaker managers of the public schools for which they were responsible – then there would be no chance that the schools they led could improve or that they would be able to help other schools find paths to improvement. So, most Public School Superintendents will introduce some innovations as marks of their leadership – something that can improve the performance of their school system and can bolster their reputations as imaginative and creative leaders.

But they will also usually find ways to reduce the risks. They will support pilot projects rather than commit themselves to a system wide innovation. They will wait for other school systems to do something so that they can use that success as a legitimating factor for "trying it here." In short, they will keep the total number and scale of the innovations they launch at a relatively low rate to keep from overwhelming the system or creating chaos. And for the most part, that is what the political authorizers and those who work in the school want. They would like a high performing status quo with a few innovative ideas to embellish the overall success of the system rather than innovations that disrupt that status quo in order to significantly improve its performance.

The Strategic Calculation of Risk

How much risk a Public School Superintendent can or should take on in the leadership of the public school system depends a bit on the individual skills and temperaments of those who occupy the office. There are individuals who will take on a great deal of risk even in situations where it is not well warranted. And there are others who will resist no matter how dire and urgent the need for innovation seems to be. And both will have a story about why their approach is best in the circumstances.

But the magnitude of the risk that could and should be undertaken properly depends more on the situations that the Public School Superintendents face rather than their personalities or temperaments. If the performance of the system is bad and deteriorating, then there might be no choice other than to try to dramatically increase the rate of innovation, hoping that that will cause performance to improve. If the local body politic believes that urgent action is required, then again, more rather than less innovation may be called for. On the other hand, if things are going well, it may be hard to gin up support for innovations even if they hold significant promise for improving performance. There is

wisdom in the ideas that necessity is the mother of invention and that good management often requires one to "make maximum use of a minimal crisis." From this point of view, what is important about managers is that they have good judgment in assessing how much need and opportunity exists in their local environment for innovations and which among the ones they could pursue will have the largest impact on their educational objectives.

Different Kinds of Innovations

Innovations can come in many different sizes and kinds. One could introduce an innovation in the math curriculum in the third grade. Or, one could introduce an innovation in how teachers would be compensated or evaluated. Or, one could introduce new measures of student achievement that captured improvements in capacities for problem solving or working effectively in groups as well as academic proficiency. Or, one could adopt a new policy or practice designed to increase the engagement of parents in the education of their children. Or one could introduce a new disciplinary or security system designed to maintain a safe and orderly environment within the schools. Or, one could introduce a new menu designed to reduce obesity. Or, most ambitiously of all, one might try to create a culture and a set of administrative systems inside the school that would support both highly individualized instruction for each student and an organization that was capable of continuous learning through experimentation and evaluation. The list is as varied as capacities for human imagination can make it.

To some, the sheer variety of possible innovations is a problem in itself. It is easy to get distracted by the many different possibilities. That is why authors like David C. Cohen and Richard Elmore emphasize and re-emphasize the importance of staying focused on what he describes as "the instructional core"- the interactions among teachers and students and content through academic tasks designed to promote student learning. Every problem of improvement, as Cohen has declared, encompasses as problem of instruction, and vice versa.

No doubt, there is great wisdom contained in that view. We have all seen way too many innovative efforts that took a huge amount of time and energy and either failed to change much in the instructional core or altered it in a negative way. If our principal goal is to improve educational outcomes for students (broadly or narrowly defined), it is both necessary and sufficient that proposed changes in individual public schools, classrooms, and teachers reach into the instructional core in a way that can improve performance. Therefore, all ideas about how to improve schools must eventually have a story about how the student experience of the instructional core will change.

But it does no disservice to this key point to suggest that there are innovations that can be made in the organization and operation of individual schools and school systems that could have important effects on the instructional core. In trying to locate and evaluate possible innovations in the operational capacity of individual schools or public school systems, let's start with the instructional core at the level of an individual public school. Then we will build out from that sharp focus to innovations that might widen our picture of what is happening in the instructional core as individual students engage in learning experiences and build up to some important innovations that can be considered at the level of the public school system as a whole. We will need to stay focused, however, on the important question of exactly how we imagine a particular innovation might improve educational outcomes and/or other important values in the operations of schools. And a key step in that process is locating particular innovations in school and system level production processes. **Table 4** sets out some common types of innovations considered in contemporary discussions about how best to improve the educational system.

Table 4: Innovations in Practices and Methods at the School Level

1. Establishing a Culture of High Expectations (Area 2)
2. Innovations in Content and Pedagogy (Area 1)
3. Technological Aids to Instruction Individualized Instruction (Area 1)
4. Supports to Teachers Trying to Make These Changes (Area 2)
5. Changing Processes and Measures for Teacher Evaluation (Area 2)
6. Adding New Tests and Assessments of Student Learning and Development (Area 5)
7. Adding Specialized Services for Students (Area 4)
8. Enriching Education with Arts and Physical Exercise (Area 3)
9. Strengthening Social Relationships Within the School (Area 2)
10. Engaging individual Parents and Community in Education of Students (Area 8)
11. Engaging Community Institutions in Out of School Instructional Experience (Area 8)
12. Creating Local School Governance Processes (Area 7)
13. Coaching and Preparing School Level Leadership (Area 6)

Each of these particular school level interventions could, of course, be managed at the level of the public school system as well as each individual school. But in practice there are some innovations that will be made at the system level as well as the school level. Indeed, one of the most important decisions made at the level of the public school system as a whole is how much autonomy will be granted to individual schools in exchange for a different kind of accountability than has been traditional in public bureaucratic systems. **Table 5** offers a set of innovations that many often describe as belonging as the level of the system:

Table 5: Innovations in Practices and Methods at the System Level

1. Articulating the values and prioritizing the goals and objects of the public schools (Area 1)
2. Helping articulate and define "the good" in practices and behaviors in the instructional core (Area 1)
3. Creating new measurement systems to recognize the public value being created (Area 1)
4. Offering new educational products and services (Area 2)

5. Delegating increased authority and responsibility to principals who lead individual schools (Area 4)

6. Providing support to principals who take on more responsibility of leading their schools (Area 4)

7. Creating mechanisms for teachers to share knowledge and innovations and capturing and helping make institutional such knowledge and innovation (Area 2)

8. Negotiating labor contracts embodying innovations in teacher evaluation and pay (Area 3)

9. Creating processes that use metrics for internal accountability and learning (Area 3)

10. Shifting the financing of schools to reflect differences in socio-economic status (Area 3)

11. Changing the system that distributes children across schools (Area 5)

12. Changing processes of external accountability and consultation to enhance legitimacy and support in the local polity (Area 7)

13. Mobilizing government agencies and community resources in support of coherent responses to student and school and community needs (Area 8)

Each of these innovations carries its own opportunities and risks. They require different levels and kinds of efforts from those leading schools or school systems. Some will take more time and money to carry to fruition and become a routinized part of the school or school system's activities. Some involve the creation of effective working relationships across boundaries of authority and accountability. Some require mobilization of effort from those whom school leaders do not directly control. Some produce relatively narrow and certain results while others have effects that spread across the system with large but unknown consequences. Some will force changes in other parts of the school or the system production system and those can be either positive or negative. Some will require leadership from the top and others more leadership from below or even outside the school or school system. A fundamental task of a Public School Superintendent is to decide how many of these little boats or great ships he or she will launch in a coordinated and purposeful effort to enhance the performance of the schools they lead on all dimensions of public value.

To see where these innovations might fit into the overall production system of schools and school systems and how they might be related to one another, we have located the different kinds of innovations in the figures below that represent the value chain at the school and system level.

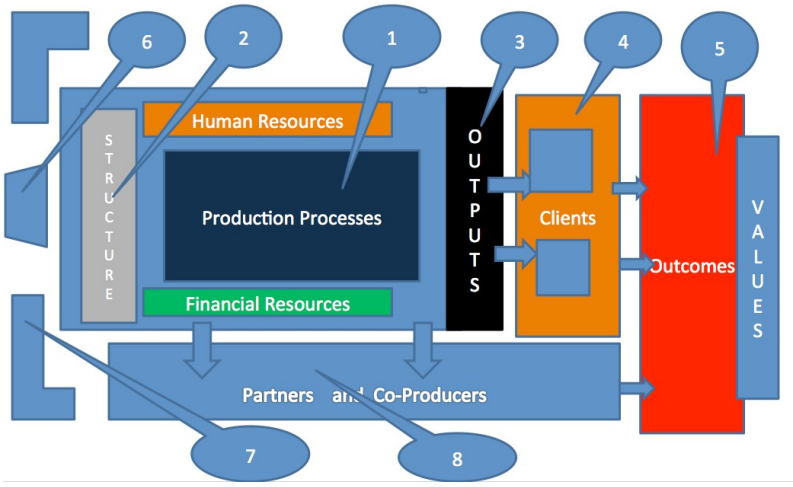

Figure 5: Innovations in Production Process: Individual School Level

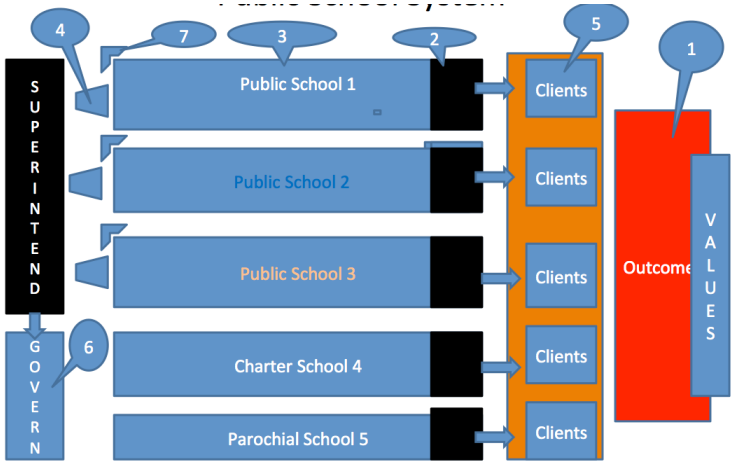

Figure 6: Innovations in Production Process: Public School System Level

Conclusion: The Practical Use of the Strategic Triangle

The Public School Superintendent has a great deal of latent potential to shape the performance of the nation's educational system. The degree to which that potential will be tapped depends on the values, motivations, skills, and practical judgment of those individuals who fill these posts. While these jobs might appear to be largely administrative/quasi political jobs encumbered by extensive, intense public scrutiny, they are, in fact, great platforms for what Harvard Professor Monica Higgins would describe as intrapreneurial efforts. But those who use these jobs for intrapreneurship face significant risks associated with innovation and change.

The purpose of this note has been to introduce you to a particular form of analysis designed to help leaders of public agencies create value from those positions. It is symbolized by what we call the Strategic Triangle, which is represented in **Figure 7**.

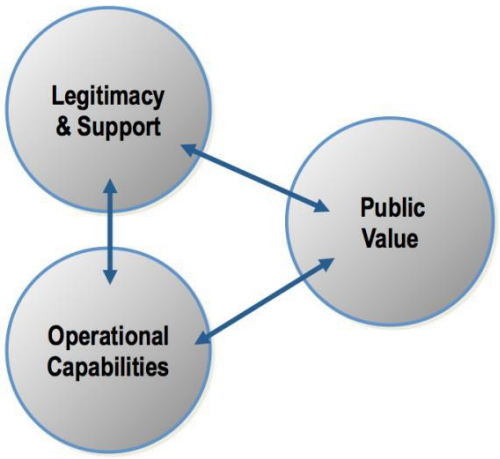

Figure 7: The Strategic Triangle

That form of analysis invites leaders to assess the particular environments in which they are operating with an eye to three important questions:

- What is the public value I am trying to create?
- What authorizes and supports my efforts to produce that value?
- What operational capacity must I build and deploy to produce the desired results?

The concept is in itself not very difficult. All it says is that in order for some initiative to be worth undertaking, it has to be valuable, authorizeable, and doable. Hardly rocket science! The tough challenge, however, is to line up all three of these elements for a particular initiative in a particular location. The challenge is to make sure one has touched all three bases, not just one or two. It does little good to have an important public value in mind with no way to build support or capacity to achieve it. It does little good to have support for doing something if it has no value. And it is awful to fail in producing a valuable and supportable goal because one could not figure out how to produce the desired result.

By providing a framework for interrogating the environment in which one is operating, imagining where improvements might be made, and testing those ideas for value and practical feasibility, the concept of strategic management – embodied in the Strategic Triangle – can help a person with a value-creating imagination find a relatively safe path towards improvement and toward innovation. The strategic triangle as a way of thinking can both show opportunities and constraints. But it will not do this automatically. It depends on developing the will and skill to use it in concrete circumstances.

Authors:

Mark H. Moore is the Hauser Professor of Nonprofit Organizations and was formerly the Faculty Chair of the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations. He was the Founding Chairman of the Harvard Kennedy School's Committee on Executive Programs, and served in that role for over a decade. His research interests are public management and leadership, civil society and community mobilization, and criminal justice policy and management. He was also a member of the faculty that initially established the Ed.L.D. program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Andrés A. Alonso is a Professor of Practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he received his doctorate as part of the Urban Superintendents Program (USP). Currently the co-chair of the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), he was formerly the CEO of Baltimore City Schools and Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning of the New York City Department of Education. During his tenure in Baltimore City Public Schools, he led multiple reform efforts with widespread political and grassroots support.