

Public Education Leadership Project
June 16, 2008

U.S. Public Education

➤ Sector

- 15,000 districts; 100,000 schools; 50 million students
- Over \$450 billion annual expenditures; 100% increase in per pupil spending over 30 years, but performance is flat

➤ Performance

- 4th grade students among top in math and science, but finish high school near bottom of industrialized countries
- U.S. 10th among 30 OECD countries in percentage of students completing high school; 25th in mathematics
- Low income and minority students 3 grades behind by age 9
- Low income students 7 times less likely to graduate from college than middle class and affluent students

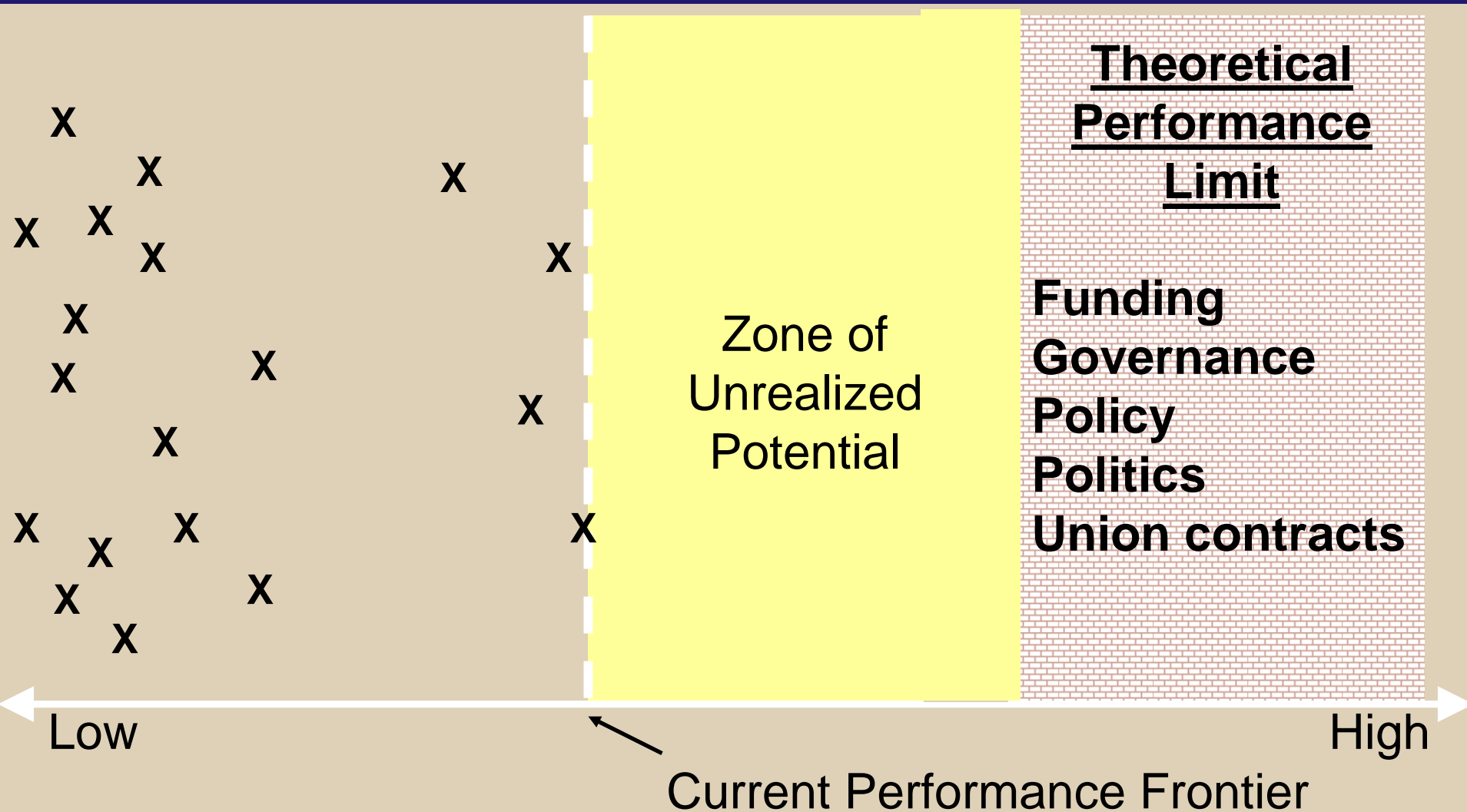
District Performance

- **No high performing urban district in America today**
- **Excellent schools exist in struggling districts**
- **Outstanding classrooms exist in underperforming schools**

Key Project Questions

- **How does a district achieve excellent performance in every school and every classroom?**
- **How does a school district make best practice into common practice?**

Challenging Conventional Wisdom



Performance of Urban School Districts

Research Process

➤ **Created three-year partnership among HBS, HGSE and nine urban school districts: 1.25 million students, 200,000 employees, \$16 billion combined operating budgets**

- Anne Arundel County Public Schools
- Boston Public Schools
- Charleston County Public Schools
- Chicago Public Schools
- Harrisburg School District
- Memphis City Schools
- Montgomery County Public Schools
- San Diego City Schools
- San Francisco Unified School District

Research Process

➤ **Course development approach to knowledge generation:**

- Visit districts to identify and understand challenges
- Develop theory
- Produce conceptual notes and cases
- Teach material on campus to test theory and provide learning opportunity for faculty
- Modify theory
- Repeat cycle

Popular Approaches to Scale

- **Just run it like a business**
- **Schools are not businesses, more different than similar:**
 - Capital flows
 - Labor markets
 - Customers
 - External forces
- **Much more complex enterprises, therefore much harder to manage**

Organizational Effectiveness Difficult to Achieve

- **Powerful forces opposite to market forces in business**
 - Multiple stakeholders with varied perception of success
 - Political entities exert conflicting pressures
 - Funding targeted at specific programs
 - Pressure to adopt latest “hot” ideas
 - Political decisions trump managerial decisions
 - Thirty month average urban superintendent tenure
- **Districts are often collection of programs unrelated to each other or strategy**
- **Challenges addressed individually leading to fragmentation of efforts**

Popular Approaches to Scale

➤ **School-based approaches**

- Find great principals
- Decentralize and push power to principals
- Establish small schools
- Create competitive markets--charters, vouchers, choice

➤ **Individually and collectively school-based solutions produce some results but have not achieved scale**

➤ **In response, district attempts to standardize and centralize practices across the district**

➤ **Performance across schools remains variable**

Achieving Excellence at Scale

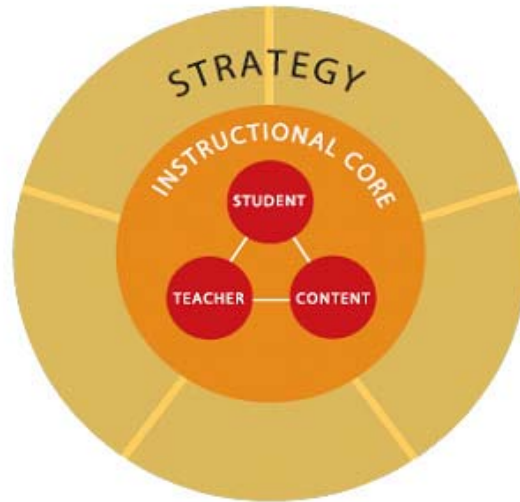
- **Create an integrated system that recognizes differences across schools while leveraging the power of the network as a whole:**
 - Set district-wide strategy for improvement
 - Build entire organization as integrated system—HR, resource allocation, performance measurement, etc.
 - Focus on continuous improvement
 - Give schools autonomy to solve their performance problems *and* provide system-level supports
 - Enlist multi-stakeholder coalitions in the new vision

PELP Coherence Framework

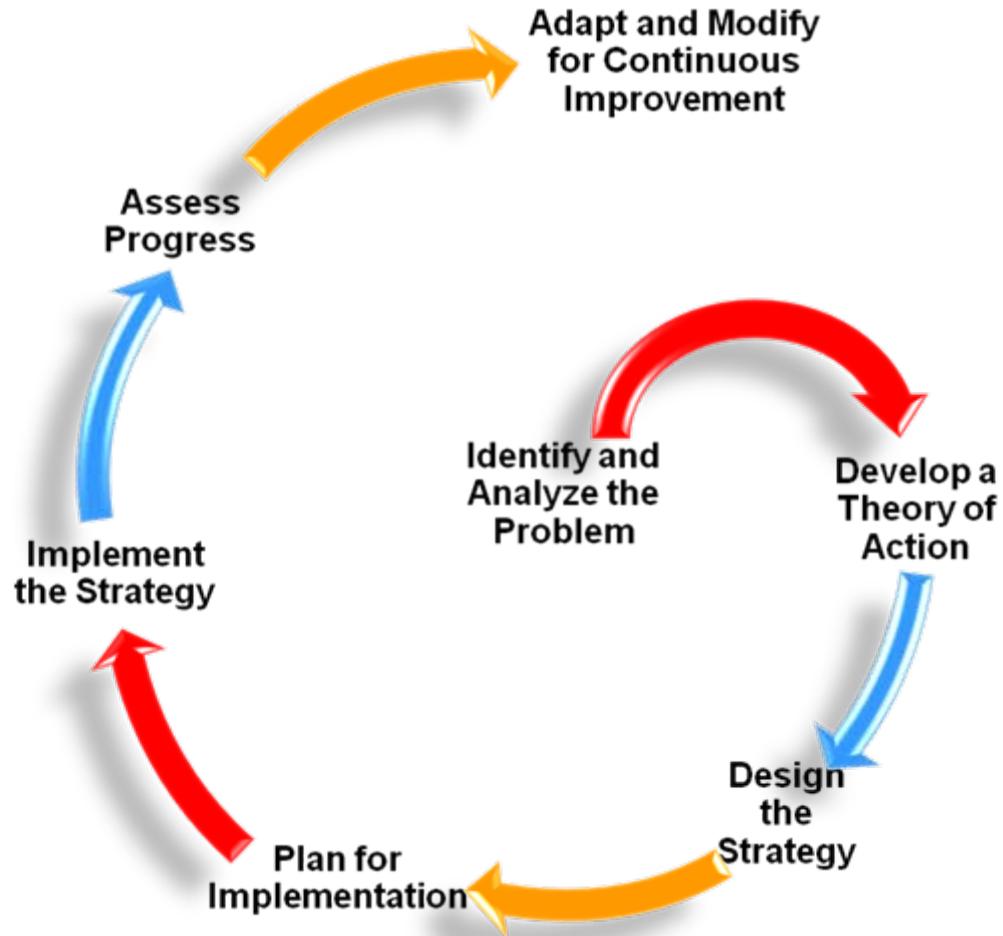


Adapted from the Congruence Model developed by Michael Tushman and Charles O'Reilly

PELP Coherence Framework



Problem-solving Approach to Strategy



PELP Coherence Framework



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