Published on *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education* (https://urbanedjournal.gse.upenn.edu)

AMERICAN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL REFORM: TALENT DEVELOPMENT - THE PHILADELPHIA STORY

Wesley C. Pugh

Introduction

America's urban public schools' success or failure will ultimately reflect the will and commitment of educators and policy makers to address historical injustices and educational segregation that mirrors that of society. Urban public schools are a microcosm of American society, which is validated by research, observations, or/and participation in the process of educating twenty-first century urban youth at all levels of schooling. As both an extension and complement to the perspectives on urban education presented in an earlier issue of this journal by Fuhrman (2002), one can posit that large, comprehensive urban public high schools present an extraordinary set of unique challenges to achieving a measure of success in America's educational system.

The Philadelphia-based Talent Development High School Model [1] is a promising research- based initiative that addresses the malaises of urban public high schools (Legters, et al., 2002; see also, http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/index.htm). The focus of the Talent Development Model's implementation is both process and structural changes in the educational milieu. The Model's success is based on innovative approaches to curriculum and instruction utilizing academic coaches. Concurrently, the comprehensive high school's organizational structures involving students, teachers, and school leadership are dramatically altered to produce a personalized learning environment. Small schools within the large comprehensive high school are formed and serve as a conduit for the delivery of instruction to students, while simultaneously promoting positive changes throughout the school that ultimately enhance the educational climate.

One of the most insightful research-based observations/findings on big city school systems may be the dictum, "So much reform, so little change" (Payne, 2002). Efforts in the new millennium to address the problems of urban high schools in particular have spawned an eerily similar insight, which is "A great deal of activity but little change" (Hess, 1998; Payne, 2003).

National attention to urban public school issues has historical precedence and is well documented (see e.g., Kliebard, 1995; Tyack, 1974), including one of the defining moments in America's recent past, the study *A Nation At Risk* (NCEE, 1983). Twenty years ago, a series of national reports and research were published that complemented *A Nation At Risk* and identified deficiencies in America's urban schools. Little change in action can be seen from that time until the present, when we can see educational reform discourse at a crescent level. Similar deficiencies and issues in the field of education are the cornerstone of the national government report No Child Left Behind (Gingerich, 2003). At all organizational levels in urban public schools, pre-K through high school, and the challenges are immense and seem insurmountable. Some significant reforms, including Brown v. Board of Education have taken place, little has been done to call into question the following pronouncement: "Our system of education will not be assessed on how well we do in rural or suburban areas. Unless we deepen our commitment to the urban schools, the crisis in education will increase, and we will be left in this country with a kind of education Third World" (Haberman, 1987).

Urban school reform is a challenging enterprise; in America's current educational environment, it is becoming an oxymoron for any urban high school educational reform model to make a claim of positive and sustainable impact on urban youth. Urban public high schools seemingly experience far too many barriers and obstacles to overcome. As a result, an action research-based truism has emerged that holds, "Even under ideal conditions, educational change is difficult to introduce and hard to sustain. Unless all parts of the system into which it is introduced are geared toward welcoming and nurturing it, the reform will continue to prove elusive" (Raywid & Schmerler, 2003, p.99).

The Talent Development High School Model is discussed herein by an action-researcher, who is simultaneously a reflective practitioner, working collaboratively with the program implementers and administrators, supported by data-driven perspectives from the field, as well as external evaluators and "think tank" academic researchers. The Talent Development Model is faced with the proverbial "David and Goliath" metaphor with respect to the challenging urban public school issues described above. This preliminary assessment of the Talent Model suggests that either the prospects for success may materialize based on educational stakeholders understanding of the lessons learned to date, or the harsh reality of transforming urban schools may continue to elude reformers.

National Urban High School Data

Comprehensive high schools are conventionally defined as grades 9-12 with students attending who are not subject to special admission criteria as in magnet or academically selective schools. Roderick (2002) examined statistical evidence on nationwide dropout rates in such schools, and found that 60% of males compared to only 20 percent of females in a Chicago pilot study dropped out. Emerging findings in urban high school data also indicate that African American and Latino males in urban school districts are failing at significantly higher rates to further widen the achievement gap (Pugh, 2003). School District of Philadelphia data findings affirm this perspective (Nichols-Solomon, 2003).

In Baltimore, the data about comprehensive high school attrition rates emerged as a result of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funding supporting the development of small schools; this study found, "While the system as a whole loses about 45 percent of its students between 9th and 12th grades, there is a 71 percent attrition rate in the neighborhood, i.e., comprehensive, schools" (Russo, 2001, p.5). Similarly, Philadelphia's comprehensive high schools follow the trend of large urban districts throughout America. Dismal data findings on school climate- related variables such as urban high school students' suspensions, attendance, arrests, and post-secondary preparation based on percent of students passing college prep courses, e.g., Mathematics and English, are consistent across urban districts within a national context (see e.g., The Education Trust, 1999; 2001).

The School District of Philadelphia high school data summarized below are consistent with national data profiles, and provide a contextual understanding as well as an appreciation of the Talent Development Model's preliminary findings to be discussed. The Philadelphia data summaries derive from a recently completed landmark study, The *High School Audit* (Nichols-Solomon, 2003). Some key findings from the study relevant to the Talent Development model are:

- Of the school district's 45 high schools with a total enrollment of approximately 56,000, 77% of the students attend 22 comprehensive high schools; 14% attend eight magnet high schools; and 9% attend five vocational high schools;
- During the1988 - 1989 school year, Philadelphia's large comprehensive high schools were restructured into learning communities, each with fewer than 400 students;
- In 2002, 9.5% of the District's approximately 56,000 high school students were listed as enrolled in special education; 91 % of special education students attend the comprehensive high schools;
- In nearly all of the comprehensive high schools there are more than twice as many 9th grade students as there are 12th grade students;
- The highest poverty high schools, with more than 80% low-income students, have the fewest certified teachers, and experience the lowest teacher retention rates;
- High schools with a large percentage of minority students are more likely to have uncertified teachers;
- The number of students graduating on time (4 years) in 2002 was 54%. Only 47% of males compared to 61% of females graduated on time in 2002;
- Philadelphia's high schools test scores (11th graders) on the state's assessment measure showed yearly improvements (2000-2001) from 1160 to 1190 in math and 1130 to 1180 in reading;
- The highest poverty high schools affiliated with a whole school reform model showed greater increases on a number of indicators than schools with a lower poverty index.2

The Philadelphia High School Audit Study (Nichols-Solomon, 2003) is of paramount significance, in part because it provides a contextual backdrop for understanding the promise of reform in urban comprehensive high schools that have embraced the Talent Development Model. The preliminary data results to follow, along with the continual experiential "hard-work" by action-researchers associated with the Talent Development model indicate that low-achieving urban comprehensive secondary schools, comprised of students considered "at-risk," can turn-around to achieve successes.

The Philadelphia-based Talent Development Model

The Talent Development model was initiated in 1994 by a partnership with Howard University and Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR). It has received national recognition from the American Federation of Teachers, and is an approved design in the comprehensive school demonstration federal legislation. In 1998, the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), an independent non-profit organization that aims to improve the quality of education for under-served children, joined with Johns Hopkins University to assist the School District of Philadelphia in developing the academic talents of urban high school students. The Talent Development High School Model with its emphasis on small schools, called career academies, is a comprehensive reform model for large high schools that face serious issues with poor attendance, discipline problems, low achievement scores, and high dropout rates. PEF serves in the unique role of liaison between Johns Hopkins University and the School District of Philadelphia by facilitating implementation of the model and being responsible for the Philadelphia-based program's staffing, budget, supervision, and all aspects of the Talent Model's operations. PEF also serves in an ongoing partnership/consultation process with Johns Hopkins University program developers at

CRESPAR.

Over the past four years, the Talent Development Model has been adopted by agreement of teachers and administrators at eight comprehensive high schools in Philadelphia. A critical ingredient in the success of this model, as with any school improvement initiative, is the firm belief that students can succeed when the appropriate mixture of positive educational circumstances are established for them in the school and in the community. Within the aforementioned context, the Talent Development Model consists of:

- specific changes in school organization and management;
- a strong, positive school climate for learning; and
- curriculum and instructional innovations to transition all students into rigorous high school work especially in English and Mathematics.

Additional key ingredients of the Talent Development Model are parent and community involvement activities to encourage students' career and college development. Professional development systems of support are used in all areas of the model. The major components of the Talent Development High School Model are:

- Ninth Grade Success Academy: a self-contained school within a school that provides incoming ninth graders with a "double-dose" curriculum in English and Math to ensure a smooth social and successful academic transition into high school
- Career Academies for upper grades with four period days (80-90 minute block scheduled periods)
- Innovative Curriculum Instruction and Teacher Support: an academic "catch-up" process occurs to provide students with the learning opportunities, motivation, and supports they need to overcome poor prior preparation and successfully complete a core college prep curriculum as mandated by the School District of Philadelphia
- Teacher Support: on-site, year-round professional development both in the classroom as well as in specifically designed, small group, content area workshops
- Extra Help for Students: Summer School, Saturday School, After-hours Credit School, and a late afternoon, after-school alternative program -Twilight School-offering small classes and extensive services provided by guidance and support staff

Talent Development Schools' Data Profiles

Two Talent Development comprehensive high schools had, by 2002-2003 completed four years of implementation and practice using the model. At these two Philadelphia High Schools: Strawberry Mansion (predominately African American population) and Edison (comprised of a majority Latino and African American student population), the first entering class of ninth graders who had experienced four years of the Talent Development Model graduated in June 2003.3

While reams of statistical studies of the model are ongoing, and the data profiles to follow provide quantitative insights, the human face behind and in front of the numbers emerges, as one becomes familiar with the many stories behind the statistics. At Strawberry Mansion, the school's instructional leader, the principal, tells of a school practice that occurred at graduation exercises. Administration and commencement program preparers would list all the scholarships students received, and all the colleges/universities graduating seniors applied and were accepted into were detailed. Additional efforts to fill the pages of the Commencement Program would require extensive extras to "disguise" or detract from the low graduation rate. In June 2003, Strawberry Mansion High School abandoned the practice of adding fillers to the commencement program pages. For the first time in the institutional memory of many of the educators, names of the members of the graduating class of 2003 filled the pages. In 2003, Strawberry Mansion, an urban comprehensive high school, graduated 100 students more than it did in the previous year. 80% of the number of ninth graders who entered the school in 1999-2000 (the first implementation year of the Talent Model) - graduated four years later compared to 33% the previous year (see Table 1).4 Edison High School also showed improvement in its first Talent Development 12th grade graduating class. The percentage of students graduating in June 2003 was 36% compared to 30% the previous year (see Table 1).

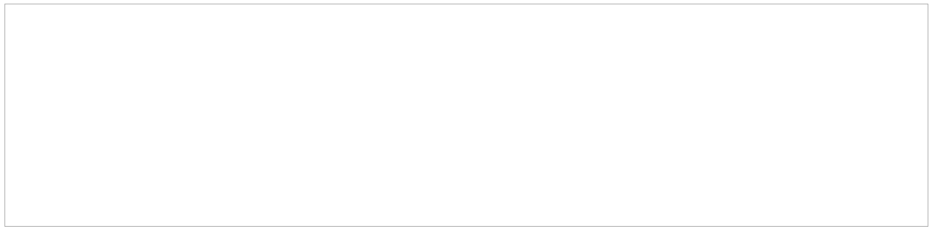
In educational research there is always a need to be cautious when attributing outcomes to "any one factor." Along with the Talent Development Model's implementation has occurred dynamic principal leadership at both high schools; stable faculty with demonstrated commitment to students' success; and, support for the schools' changes from parents, and most importantly, the students. In addition, the District's central office has accommodated the block rosters by providing additional teachers, and financial support to assist PEF 's management of the Model. The Talent Development Model with its multifaceted focus on all aspects of the high school milieu has been a constant feature at these two comprehensive high schools over the past four years.

The improvement of standardized tests scores and the increase in the percentage of students passing college prep courses in Math and English at Strawberry Mansion and Edison high schools illustrate the positive impact of a variety of influences taking-hold (see Tables 2 and 4). Results from a study soon to be released by an external evaluator, Manpower Demonstration

Research Corporation (MDRC), analyzed the Talent Development schools in comparison to a similar cohort of control sites. MDRC's analysis of climate variables indicates a significant positive impact of the Talent Model. As the data profiles of school climate variables indicate, student attendance at Talent Development schools shows an overall improvement. Student suspensions have been reduced, as well as students' arrests (see Table 3).

Though not presented in the current data profiles, false fire alarms at Talent Development schools that were once commonplace are minimal. The Talent Development Model's structural changes encompass reorganization of students into small schools, and the establishment of team leaders, also known as Academy Principals, who assist the school principal in the instructional leadership process. The result is a positive school climate due to a personalized educational experience for students and adults - teachers, parents, and school visitors.

Table 1 *Number of Graduates from Strawberry Mansion HS and Edison HS*
Before and After Talent Development Implementation



* 1998-99 was a planning year for Talent Development at both schools. Full implementation at the ninth grade level began in the Fall of 1999.

Size of the 2003 Graduating Classes as a Percentage of Their Ninth Grade Class
Strawberry Mansion HS and Edison HS

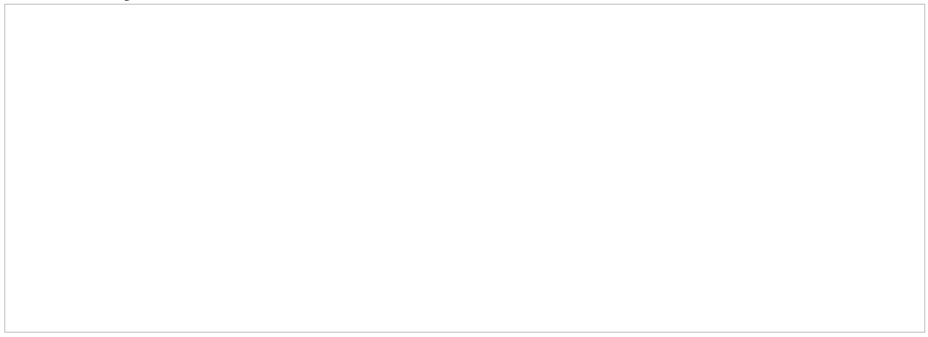
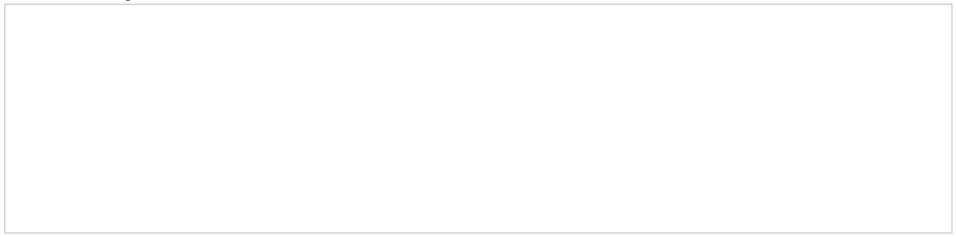
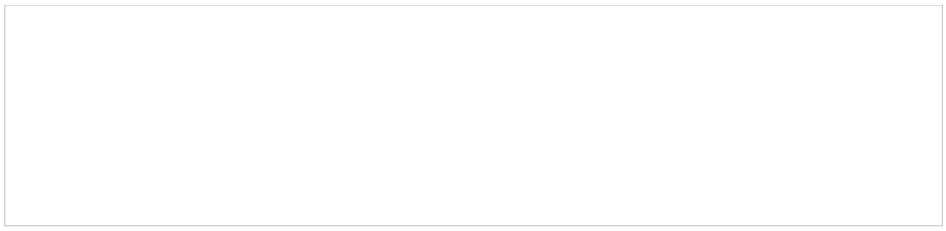


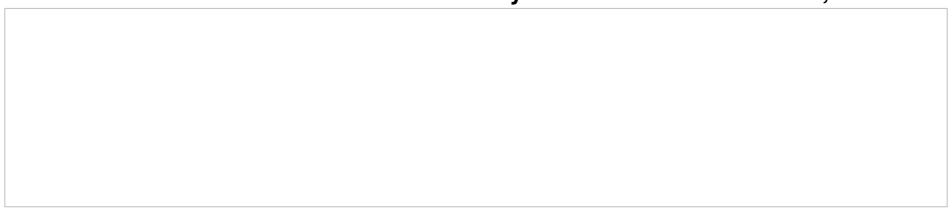
Table 2 ***2002-03 Terranova Standardized Test Scores***
Strawberry Mansion HS, 9th Grade National Percentile Rank



Edison HS, 9th Grade National Percentile Rank



PSSA 11th Grade Math Scores: Strawberry Mansion and Edison HS, 2000-2002



PSSA 11th Grade Reading Scores: Strawberry Mansion and Edison HS, 2000-2002

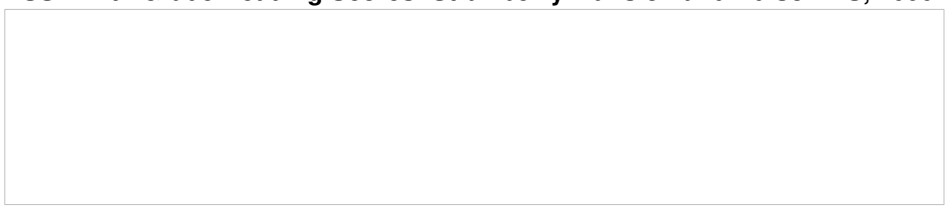
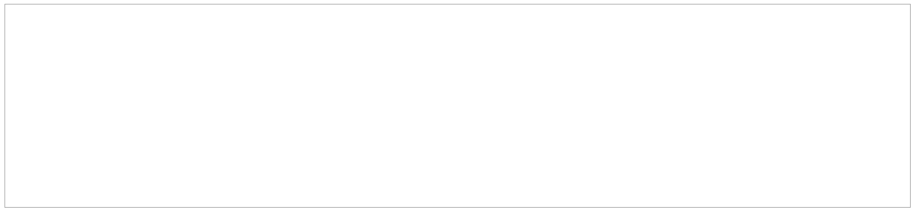


Table 3 ***School Climate-related Profile Data***

Number of Arrests



Suspensions (Per 100 Students)

Attendance

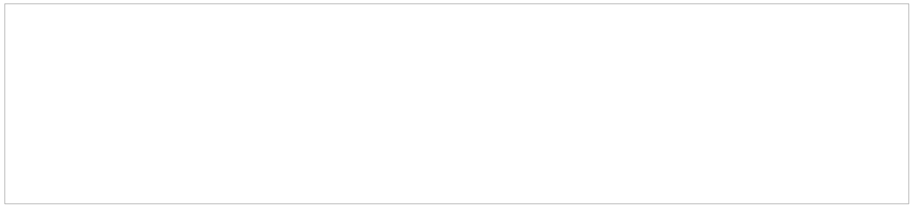
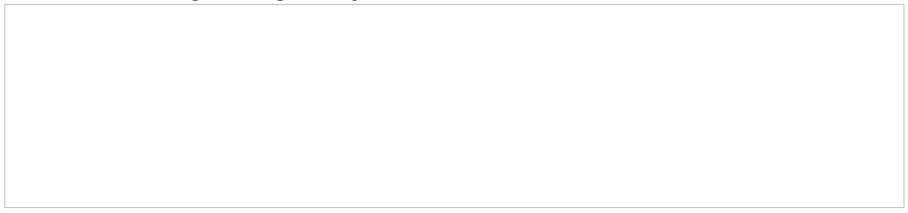
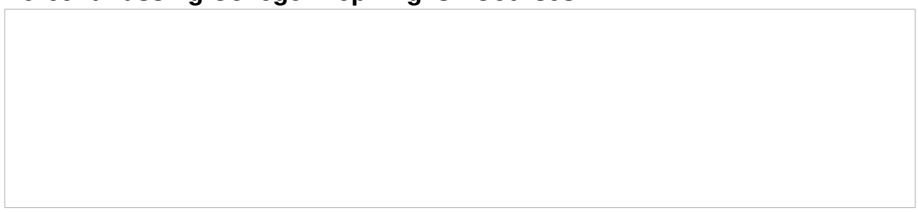


Table 4 ***College Prep Courses***

Percent Passing College Prep Math Courses



Percent Passing College Prep English Courses



Strawberry Mansion was second among Philadelphia Comprehensive High Schools in their Percentage of Graduating Seniors Completing a Minimum College Preparatory Sequence of Courses in 2001-02 (Nichols-Solomon, 2003).

Based on the above data profiles, successes to date suggest that comprehensive secondary school improvement is possible. Embedded in the data findings on the Talent Development experience in Philadelphia is affirmation that the continuous improvement of America's urban public schools, at all levels, requires a commitment of human and financial resources. Through implementation of the Talent Model, it has become clear that a key ingredient to implementation success is respectful human interactions (see, e.g., Levine, 2002; Lightfoot, 1999). Every aspect of the research-based components of the Talent Development Model relies upon quality human interactions as a foundation for initiating and building upon successful best practices.

Discussion: Data Implications and the Talent Development Model

The 9-12 dropout rate in urban public schools, especially comprehensive high schools, is well documented to range from 40 - 60% to as high as 80%. The overwhelming body of research indicates that the 9th grade transition period of high school is the major source of both academic and personal difficulty for students (see, e.g., Russo, 2001; Nichols- Solomon, 2003; Roderick, 2000).One of the key components of the Talent Development Model is its small school focus, with particular attention to personalizing the learning process. Adults' attention to "nagging and nurturing" begin with the entering 9th graders who enter a separate school-within-a-school, a success academy housed in an area of the building separate from the upper grades academies.

Recognizing the significance of extending human interactive academic and personal care toward young people, all teachers, para-professionals, and administrators in the separated grade academies, or small learning communities (SLC's) learn the students' names. The principals at Talent Development schools are noted for greeting students each day at the start of school. Each year a new class of entering 9th graders are exposed to the beginnings of a four year "Nagging and Nurturing" routine, which can include admonishments ("Get to Class!" "Take off that hat!" "Don't be late for class"), greetings ("How are you today!" "Good Morning!" "Good to see you. Have a great day!"), and questions ("We missed you yesterday - Where were you?" "Where are your books? You can't come here without books!")

To begin to experience successes in changing urban comprehensive high schools, three critical components are essential as shown by the research literature: (1) structural reforms; (2) curriculum and instructional reforms; and, (3) professional development (Jordan, et al., 2000). The Talent Development Model encompasses each of the aforementioned and includes efforts aimed at teacher quality. In this way, TDM fits with Darling-Hammond's (2000) assertion that "A school reform that would improve the achievement of students of color would be one that assures them access to high quality teaching within the context of a rich and challenging curriculum supported by personalized schools and classes" (p.277).

The Talent Development Model's ongoing implementation challenge is working with central office administrators to convince, persuade, and, at times, "plead" for support in the forms of: funding, increased teacher allotments to fill vacancies, the block schedule, and a stable teacher population at the schools. The role of the Talent Development principal is critical to this process

of negotiation with School District of Philadelphia administration. Also, informal networking and meeting with policy makers is a tireless ongoing effort undertaken by Talent Development and PEF administrators in conjunction with school-based leaders (see, Raywid & Schmerler, 2003, for an insightful discussion of informal networking and its role in school reform).

The Talent Development Model has no magic elixir for teacher quality. It does utilize Academic Coaches as a key ingredient to changing teaching practices, in an effort to impact teachers' attitudes and expectations and bridge the disconnect that often exists between teachers and urban youth. The academic coaching model has recently emerged in the education literature as an important professional development process (Richard, 2003).

There is overwhelming evidence of the historical and current achievement gap that exists at all levels in urban public schools (see, e.g., NAEP, 2000; NCES, 2000; College Board Data Reports, 2000). Narrowing the achievement gap in urban high schools will require high academic standards, a challenging curriculum, and quality teachers (Haycock, 2003). Teacher quality (see, e.g., Neild & Spiridakis, 2003; Useem, 2003) and "extra help" (Dunbar, 1999) are ideas central to narrowing that gap. As part of the "extra help" process, a key ancillary component of the Talent Development Model is Twilight School, introduced into the Talent Development comprehensive high schools after successful implementation in 1995 at a Baltimore City Talent Development school. In the Talent Development High Schools' ninth grade Success Academies after school program, known as Junior Twilight, students, especially repeating ninth graders, earn course credits to go back into the day program, or at times into tenth grade. Twilight students must be able to demonstrate the social and academic skills necessary to be successful in the day program (for more details, see: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/index.htm).

Preliminary results of the Junior Twilight Talent Development component are promising. Anecdotal evidence indicates Junior Twilight is a successful strategy for addressing discipline problems, including over-age students' embarrassment to attend classes, returns from incarceration, and students who for varied reasons (pregnancy, child care, family responsibility) who were unable to regularly attend the traditional comprehensive high school. As an alternative school concept, the underlying premise in the Talent Development Junior Twilight feature is a research-based perspective that goes beyond the traditional urban "alternative school" in which students are discarded. As Dunbar (1999) argues, "Alternative schools are for those students whose behavior is deemed inappropriate for mainstream schools…Students should not simply remain in alternative schools until they decide to drop out or are pushed out" (p.245).

Preliminary statistical data verifies "extra help" as a significant factor in urban high school dropout prevention. The Talent Development "extra help" concept inherent in the block schedule "double-dose" curriculum conjoins with academic coaching for teachers, ongoing principal support in the role of instructional leader, and empowerment of instructional staff as academy principals/leaders in SLCs. Students in Talent Development schools who are assigned to an alternative learning environment remain at the school and are given after-school academic supports to earn credits toward graduation, and return to the classroom.

The Talent Development middle school research-based model has informed the 9th grade high school practice (JHU-CRESPAR, 2001). Each year Talent Development staff routinely conduct diagnostic evaluations of 9th grade students. These assessments of entering 9th grade urban comprehensive high school students illustrate deeply inculcated academic deficiencies (see, e.g., Coleman, et al., 2002; Haycock, 2001; Nichols-Solomon, 2003; Roderick, 2000; Pugh, 2003). Philadelphia's central office administration, under the leadership of the Deputy Chief Academic Officer and the Executive Director for Instruction and Curriculum who are experts in the newly established Office of Secondary Education Movement (SEM), have brought experiences from Chicago to provide added perspectives to the issues. The District's Office of SEM has proposed, and seeks to implement system-wide, an ambitious array of initiatives that include: 9th grade high school academies - small learning communities; double-dose Math and English for 9th graders; extra-help (after-school tutorials); student mentoring and academic coaches for new and veteran teachers (SEM Highlights & Goals, 2003).

The Office of SEM has embarked upon an historical comprehensive high school transformation movement, as an outgrowth of collaborative meetings with Talent Development - PEF officials; community/parent groups; academics and other educational stakeholders. The District's systemwide scale-up of a Talent Development hybrid model will require resources, and a multi-level/multifaceted professional development approach to achieve a level of success. The Talent Development Model, currently in seven Philadelphia urban comprehensive high schools, is positioned as a beacon in the Philadelphia School District's Secondary Education Movement.

The Office of SEM has raised major concerns about students of color - particularly males - and their transition to high school. These students entering the 9th grade of high school experience a unique set of challenges that must be addressed (Pugh, 2003; Roderick, 2000). The Talent Development Model, the Philadelphia Secondary Education Movement, and urban public schools nationwide will eventually have to devise specific initiatives to address African American and Latino male underachievement. In addition, The Philadelphia High School Audit data documents a widening male-female achievement gap which will need to be addressed (Nichols-Solomon, 2003).

Lessons Learned - Transforming Urban High Schools Is Not Easy

Successful and full implementation of the Talent Development Model is not an easy process. As with any school-based educational change, "end-runs," political support, and an educational policy environment conducive to institutionalizing best practices are paramount (Raywid & Schmerler, 2003). A foundational tenet of Talent Development's successful implementation is that small schools are important to the success of any urban secondary school movement (see, Lee with Smith, 2001). A series of Bank Street College of Education debates provide rationales that cover the spectrum of support for "large schools v. small," and are inclusive of discussion on small schools and the issue of race (Gladden, 2000; Hampel, 2000; Powell, 2000). Successful practices attributed to large high schools are often found in non-urban environments. Practices that are often taken for granted in suburban schools are elusive in urban public schools (McGinley, 2000). These "lessons" learned from educational debates often point to new areas of interest. Within the matrix of the Talent Development Model's implementation, there have emerged lessons that policy-makers, practitioners, and observers of educational reform should be mindful of in understanding the realities of transforming America's urban comprehensive public high schools.

Lesson 1: Be cognizant of the political implication of the term "reform." On a political level, based on experience with the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Secondary Education, the term "reform" has been criticized and labeled as "overused". Thus, the District has adopted the dictum: Secondary Education Movement to label its initiatives. Fuhrman (2002) documents the questionable nature of the phrase "educational reform," and presents a well-reasoned perspective in understanding the urban high school change process as one of improvement versus reform. The Talent Development Model has sought a level of political correctness by de-emphasizing "reform." Its external evaluations have validated "improvements" as an appropriate reference to what is occurring at the Talent high schools.

Lesson 2: Recognize the significance of process in seeking to improve urban high schools. The Talent Development High School Model's success in curriculum and instructional changes relies upon double dose academic course offerings in Math and English within the context of block scheduling. The success of this component can be attributed to ongoing professional development provided to teachers by a cadre of well-trained academic coaches, who are also continuously afforded training in course content areas and coaching techniques. The process of implementing curriculum and instructional changes within a block roster is of paramount importance, yet not sufficient in and of itself.

Lesson 3: School-based structural changes must simultaneously occur while addressing the delivery of instruction. The Talent Model has addressed limitations associated with structural changes (Fuhrman, 2002) and large urban public school districts' central offices often struggle to redefine the delivery of supports to schools. Yet, the implementation of organizational changes at the school level, which include establishment of small schools, team leaders or Academy Principals, and an emphasis by administrators and teachers on "nurturing and nagging," serves to personalize the learning environment. Providing professional development related to instructional leadership and redefining the roles of staff are critical to making school-based structural changes effective. One poignant example of this is the Talent Model school counselor who has taken on the responsibility of arriving to school each morning at 7 AM. She relates the story of her interactions with students who come in early and enter the lunchroom area for the free breakfast that is served after going through the security metal detector. The intruding and numbing impact of exposure to the security check is lessened as she stands on the other side of the metal detector to greet them with a smile, a hello, and a warm touch or embrace. Students arrival at school is not totally dehumanized by the urban high school weapons check procedures.

Lesson 4: Small is better, though similar to all the other lessons, it is not in and of itself sufficient. Teachers, administrators and all adult school staff require ongoing professional development in "nurturing and nagging." Active participation by a majority (if not all school personnel) in personalizing the students' daily educational experience is imperative.

Lesson 5: Finally, for any and all of the above lessons in urban high school improvement to have any level of successful replication requires individuals who are concerned, committed, and share a vision of a better America. The Talent Development staffs' mantra is "It's about the children."

Conclusion

Successful education reform is about people. Radical educational change is about the capacity of educators to implement "best practices" within a supportive policy environment (Raywid & Schmerler, 2003). Successful program implementation is at the crux of the promise of urban secondary schools' ability to be transformed (Gregogy, 2001; Olson, 1999). Smaller schools inclusive of smaller class size are a first step in the creation of the conditions for secondary schools' transformation (Fine & Summerville, 1998; Hample, 2002).

In the end just as at the onset, a cyclical process of assessment inclusive of data-driven practices tailored to each unique school setting and the acceptance of change by veteran educators must occur. The aforementioned premise supports the Talent Development Model's prerequisite of a year of planning before implementation, as well as an 80% or more approval vote by school staff prior to implementation. (For discussion of the Talent Development Model's success in Kansas City and Philadelphia; see, Clark, 2003; Springston, 2002).

Urban comprehensive school reform is not easy. Yet, recognizing the critical necessity of "respect" (Lightfoot, 1999) between and among students, teachers, administrators and all educational stakeholders will provide a foundation for success. The lessons learned, to date, from the Talent Model should serve as guideposts for other initiatives that seek to address the myriad issues associated with urban comprehensive public high schools. The Talent Development Model may be a mirage in the urban desert of secondary educational improvement, but to date, the Philadelphia experience illustrates that the Talent Development High School Model can also be seen as an oasis.

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Notes

1 The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent The Philadelphia Education Fund or Johns Hopkins University. Talent Development program data provided by the Philadelphia Education Fund: Kurt Spiridakis, Research Assistant; Betsey Useem, Senior Program Director for Research; and, Ruth Curran Neild, Assistant Professor, University of Pennsylvania School of Education. back

2 See Nichols-Solomon, 2003, *The High School Audit*, for extensive analyses and graphic depictions of the above findings as well as additional data profiles and discussions on key elements of current whole school reform models: Talent Development, High Schools That Work, Community for Learning. back

3 In partnership with Johns Hopkins University and the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF) produced yearly statistical studies of seven current Talent Development schools (see PEF website: www.philaedfund.org). Additionally, a recent study of the middle school Talent Development Model illustrated "exceptional" findings to support the model's effectiveness (Balfanz, et al., 2002; Hendrie, 2003). back

4 It should be noted that student mobility (transfers in and out of different schools) in Philadelphia's urban schools is a common activity; thus, not all 12th grade graduates began in the 9th grade. The fact that the Philadelphia School District's median 12th grade graduation rate is near 55%, juxtaposed with the graduation findings on Edison and Strawberry Mansion high schools, suggests that the Talent Development Model has promise. back

Wesley C. Pugh

Wesley C. Pugh is currently Senior Program Director with the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF). Wesley has major executive responsibility for the Talent Development Comprehensive High School Model in Philadelphia. Prior to joining PEF, Wesley served for two years as Interim Dean, School of Education and Graduate Studies, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. He has held the positions of Chair, Graduate School, Department of Educational Administration; Graduate Faculty member; and director of a statewide collaborative teacher- training program at Cheyney University. He currently serves on the National Board of Examiners of NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Educators).

Wesley is a career educator and researcher, who served in an administrative and program research/evaluation capacity for 19 years with the School District of Philadelphia. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College (B.A.); Harvard University School of Education (Ed. M.); and the University of Pennsylvania School of Education (Ph.D.). His current research and higher education teaching focus is urban education - encompassing school/principal leadership; high school reform; curriculum development; and the achievement gap in American education.