

Recent Chicago-based research says that improved student achievement is tied to strong academic “press” or expectation for student success combined with increased emphasis on building trusting relationships within a school community.

Successful Schools have Common Practices

An October 1997 study by Designs for Change identified schools which had improved the most in reading achievement since 1990. They then looked for the common factors in these schools, a “distinctive set of practices” which seem to have a substantial impact on improved student achievement. These practices include:

- ✓ active and effective Local School Councils
- ✓ effective school principals who involve others in decision making
- ✓ more teacher involvement in decision making
- ✓ more teacher outreach to parents
- ✓ students who feel safe in their schools
- ✓ teacher collaboration and information sharing
- ✓ teachers who trust one another
- ✓ teachers who are encouraged to innovate
- ✓ an overriding focus on improved student achievement.

Cooperative Adult Effort Raises Academic Achievement

The Designs for Change study looked at the level of Cooperation among adults in schools and determined that “schools that were low-achieving in 1990, but then substantially improved reading achievement, scored significantly higher on ‘Adult Cooperative Effort’ compared with schools that did not improve reading achievement.”* On the other hand, elementary schools on probation and most Chicago high schools show severe deficits in these areas of cooperation and collaboration.

Social Support Motivates Students to Learn

An October 1999 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research analyzed how successful schools combine high expectations for all students with the support students need for school success. Social support gives students a sense of trust, confidence, and psychological safety.

“We found that the amount of social support that students experienced is strongly related to one-year gains in both reading and math achievement. Clearly, students who experience strong support from teachers, parents, peers, and members of their communities also learn more.”**

*“Chicago Elementary Schools with a Seven-Year Trend of Improved Reading Achievement: What Makes these Schools Stand Out?” (1997) Designs for Change.

**“Improving Chicago’s Schools: Social Support, Academic Press, and Student Achievement: A View from the Middle Grades in Chicago” (1999) Consortium on Chicago School Research, a report of the Chicago Annenberg Research Project.