Scaling Up Success for All:
Lessons for Policy and Practice

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The comprehensive school reform (CSR) movement, which began in the 1980's but reached its full flowering in the late 1990's, has introduced to American education a radically new pathway to widespread reform. Comprehensive reform models affect all aspects of school functioning, and provide substantial amounts of professional development to all school staff. Ideally, CSR models are developed, piloted, extensively evaluated, and then scaled up to serve ever-increasing numbers of schools, supported by self-sustaining (usually non-profit) organizations capable of continuing growth, development, and evaluation.

Among all comprehensive school reform models, Success for All has most closely followed this progression. The program, which mostly serves high-poverty elementary schools, was first piloted in a Baltimore elementary school in 1987. It was evaluated in longitudinal studies from the beginning, and up to the present has been studied in more than 50 experiments involving experimental-control comparisons in districts throughout the U.S. and in four other countries (Slavin & Madden, 2001). Throughout the 1990's, the program expanded rapidly, with the network growing from 30-100% each year. In the 2001-2002 school year, Success for All is used in about 1600 U.S. schools. The program began within Johns Hopkins University, but in 1998 spun off into the non-profit Success for All Foundation (SFAF). Table 1 summarizes the main elements of Success for All.

Design for Replication

The first principle of scale-up, in our experience, is to design a program that does not depend on conditions that are unlikely to exist on a broad scale. In the case of Success for All, we made conscious efforts to design a program that could be successfully used in any school, with a broad range of teachers, principals, district situations, and so on. This is one reason that the program is so well-structured, with very clear guidelines for every staff member and every program component. We do not want to inhibit a creative school staff, but at the same time we do not want to depend on an unusually charismatic principal, extraordinary staff, unattainable financial or staff resources, or other hard-to-replicate conditions. We provide student materials, teachers' manuals, assessments, extensive training and followup, feedback on student, teacher, and school performance, and other supports to maximize the probability of high-quality implementation and positive outcomes.

Build an Effective Training Corps

Almost all education reforms involve extensive training. The quality and professionalism of these trainers determine the ultimate impact of the innovation.

The best trainers, in general, are educators who have taught your program. However, it is not a good idea to steal staff from your best schools. It is critical to make it known that you have training positions open, but not to actively recruit within your own pilot schools. We also try not to take more than one staff member from a particular school in a particular year.

Table 1: Major Elements of Success for All

Success for All is a schoolwide program for students in grades pre-K to five which organizes resources to attempt to ensure that virtually every student will reach the third grade on time with adequate basic skills and build on this basis throughout the elementary grades, that no student will be allowed to "fall between the cracks." The main elements of the program are as follows:

Tutors. In grades 1-3, specially trained certified teachers and paraprofessionals work one-to-one with any students who are failing to keep up with their classmates in reading. Tutorial instruction is closely coordinated with regular classroom instruction. It takes place 20 minutes daily during times other than reading periods.

A Schoolwide Curriculum. During reading periods, students are regrouped across age lines so that each reading class contains students all at one reading level. Use of tutors as reading teachers during reading time reduces the size of most reading classes to about 20. The reading program in grades K-1 emphasizes language and comprehension skills, phonics, sound blending, and use of shared stories that students read to one another in pairs. The shared stories combine teacher-read material with phonetically regular student material to teach decoding and comprehension in the context of meaningful, engaging stories. In grades 2-6, students use novels or basals but not workbooks. This program emphasizes cooperative learning activities built around partner reading, identification of characters, settings, problems, and problem solutions in narratives, story summarization, writing, and direct instruction in reading comprehension skills. At all levels, students are required to read books of their own choice for twenty minutes at home each evening. Classroom libraries of trade books are provided for this

purpose. Beginning in the second year of implementation, cooperative learning programs in writing/language arts are introduced in grades K-6. Programs in mathematics (MathWings) and social studies/science (WorldLab) are also available.

Preschool and Kindergarten. The preschool and kindergarten programs in Success for All emphasize language development, readiness, and self-concept. Preschools and kindergartens use thematic units, a language development program, and a program called Story Telling and Retelling (STaR).

Eight-Week Assessments. Students in grades K-6 are assessed every eight weeks to determine whether they are making adequate progress in reading. This information is used to suggest alternate teaching strategies in the regular classroom, changes in reading group placement, provision of tutoring services, or other means of meeting students' needs.

Family Support Team. A family support team works in each school to help support parents in ensuring the success of their children, focusing on parent education, parent involvement, attendance, and student behavior. This team is composed of existing or additional staff such as parent liaisons, social workers, counselors, and vice principals.

Facilitator. A program facilitator works with teachers to help them implement the reading program, manages the eight-week assessments, assists the family support team, makes sure that all staff are communicating with each other, and helps the staff as a whole make certain that every child is making adequate progress.

Trainers require extensive training, mentoring, monitoring, and updating. The Success for All Foundation typically provides three weeks of initial training, and then assigns each trainer to an experienced mentor. They observe their mentor and other senior trainers in training, followup, and consultation roles, and gradually begin to participate more fully. Only when the mentor is convinced that the new trainer is ready to work independently do we begin to charge schools for their services. Even then, new trainers are rarely assigned as lead trainers in their first year, but instead play a secondary role in partnership with their mentor or other senior trainers in their region.

Initially, all of our trainers operated out of our Baltimore headquarters, but as the program's elements and procedures solidified we began setting up regional training groups. Today, we have 18 of these groups across the U.S. (and one in England). Each has a regional manager (our most experienced trainers), and is responsible for an average of 90 schools.

We have experimented with a number of alternative training arrangements. One is the use of part-time or "turnkey" trainers. This has not generally worked well; we put so much training investment into a trainer that it is not cost-effective to have them then work part time. The exception is trainers who were formerly full time but are now part time, who do work well.

Another arrangement we have tried is to contract with other organizations to provide training. A long-standing contract with the University of Memphis has worked out well, but other arrangements, with both non-profit and for-profit organizations, have all failed and been terminated. We find that it is best to have trainers whose only long-term affiliation and loyalty is to the program, not to a different university, laboratory, or company with overlapping but ultimately competing objectives and loyalties.

Build on Success

After the very earliest stages, growth of a school reform network depends on positive word of mouth among educators more than anything else. For this and many other reasons, it is important to establish successful, happy, and loyal adopters early on. Success for All attempts to do this by insisting on an unfettered vote in favor of program adoption of at least 80% of all teachers (a practice used by most reform models in some form), and by trying to introduce the program as quickly as possible after the adoption decision has been made, so that teachers and administrators can see the results of their reform efforts relatively soon.

Focus on the Outcomes that Educators Care About

To scale up a program beyond a small group of dedicated reformers, it is important to demonstrate in every way possible that the reform model is closely aligned with the school's goals. Most obviously, this means being prepared to demonstrate an alignment between state standards and (more importantly) assessments, and to hopefully be able to show research outcomes that indicate that students who participated in a reform program performed better on tests like those used in accountability programs than similar students in matched control schools. However, there are other objectives that educators have that may be quite different from standardized test scores. For example, in many schools, improving classroom management, reducing special education placements, increasing attendance, reducing dropouts, or making parents or teachers more supportive of the school may be of great importance. In particular, it is wise to achieve some high-priority objective (such as improved classroom management) early in the implementation, to buy time for the longer-term work necessary to improve standardized test scores and other outcomes. Similarly, incorporating curriculum-based assessments into the intervention and using them to (hopefully) show the school itself that it is

improving on a valued indicator of academic performance can build commitment to the intervention for the long haul, and a positive response to the innovation that will be communicated to other educators interested in adopting the program themselves.

Tie the Innovation to a Sustainable Funding Source for Schools

One of the greatest mistakes innovators often make is to create a program that depends on grants for school-by-school scale up. While grant support is crucial in the early stages for development, piloting, and evaluation, it is crucial in the scale-up phase to have clearly in mind how schools will find the funding to continue the program without difficult-to-obtain grants. An innovation that depends on grant funding for school will end up doing endless fundraising. Success for All was structured almost from the outset to fit within a school's Title I budget, not only in amounts of money but also in alignment with Title I priorities and regulations. SFAF does seek grant funding for curriculum development and research, but its dissemination to schools is completely self-supporting, depending only on payments from schools.

The advent of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) provides another widely available source for reform. CSRD gives grants of at least $50,000 per year for three years, but programs have to be "proven" (i.e., successful in comparison to control groups) and "comprehensive" (i.e., address all core components of school functioning). The Reading Excellence Act, recently superseded at a much higher funding level by Reading First, provides funding to help low-functioning schools improve reading instruction in grades K-3. While CSRD and Reading First involve competitive grants, they provide amounts of money capable of covering the initial costs of innovations over a significant time period, so that Title I or other hard-wired funding can cover long-term maintenance costs.

Find a Source of Capital

Reform programs are almost always begun in non-profit organizations (such as universities) and are usually maintained in the non-profit sector. There are many reasons why this is a good thing (see the following section), but the main down side is that because non-profits cannot have investors who expect a return, they are chronically undercapitalized. Even if a non-profit is paying all of its bills and has financials that balance, it is still doomed unless it can find operating capital. Capital to do initial development, piloting, and evaluation typically comes from government or foundation grants. However, capital to cover cyclical costs can be harder to find. For example, the Success for All Foundation, like most reform organizations, does a great deal of printing each spring, hires and trains trainers, and incurs many other costs. School districts then pay for these materials and services over the course of the fall. There is very little bad debt in working with school districts, but many (especially large urban ones) can be very slow to pay. As a result, each fall we have a cyclical debt that can reach more than $10 million.

In the early stages of development and scale up, reform organizations can usually deal with this problem by agreement with their home institutions (who may allow deficits for a few months each year) or shift grant funds around. However, at the point of serious

scale-up, the capitalization issue must be confronted. The problem is that banks will not make unsecured loans or lines of credit. If banks and investors are not options, how can this problem be solved?

One solution that is becoming increasingly available is to apply to a private foundation for a loan. In the foundation world, a loan is called a Program-Related Investment, or PRI. Historically, PRI's have been made for projects such as low-income housing or business development in high-poverty or third-world areas. However, foundations are becoming aware that educational innovations also need capital to scale up beyond a certain point. One institution that exists solely for this purpose is an Education Entrepreneurs Fund, which is associated with the New American Schools reform organization but available to any proven comprehensive reform model (see www.newamericanschools.org). Other national foundations, such as Ford, MacArthur, and New Schools Venture Fund, also make PRI's to non-profit educational reform organizations.

Ideally, foundations can make *subordinated* loans. If a borrower defaults, all other loans must be paid off before the subordinated loan. Banks consider a subordinated loan as an asset, which is security for their loan. For this reason, a loan from a charitable lender can be multiplied many times if it is used as an asset for a line of credit from a bank. This is essentially the strategy we used to capitalize the Success for All Foundation when we spun off from Johns Hopkins University in 1998.

Any lender, be it a foundation or a bank, will want to see a well-prepared business plan showing a positive balance sheet and/or a solid reason to believe that your organization will ultimately be self-supporting.

Stay Non-Profit, If Possible
As noted above, non-profit education reform organizations can have trouble obtaining capital. Program developers may not have the expertise or the interest to go from R&D into serious scale up. For these and other reasons, even reformers who are genuinely committed to helping children, not to making money, sometimes contract with for-profit organizations, or become for-profits themselves. A particularly common form of this is contracting with a publisher to distribute educational materials.

In our experience, contracting with for profit organizations should almost always be seen as a last resort. There are exceptions, but no matter how virtuous for-profits are, they must ultimately answer to investors, who are interested in the bottom line. When the needs of children or program integrity run up against the interests of investors, the investors, of course, win every time. For example, it is our experience that no one can make much money on training, yet it's relatively easy to make money on materials. Publishers or other for-profits that start out with the very best of intentions are likely to cut back on training when faced with deficits, and for-profits without the very best of intentions may cut back on training just to boost profits. In particular, venture capitalists invest in many promising ventures, but lose interest in those that fail to produce many multiples of their investment. They may walk away from a reform organization that is

financially healthy but producing modest returns. Becoming a for-profit, or contracting with one, makes educators and reform-oriented funders suspicious about your motives, and less likely to support your efforts. The Success for All Foundation has experimented with a few contracts with for-profit companies, and with few exceptions these arrangements have had poor to disastrous outcomes.

Consider Creating a Separate Non-Profit to Disseminate Your Program

In the early stages of scale-up, most innovators find it best to keep the program within their home institution (university, R&D organization, etc.), which typically provides a relatively safe "nursery" for development, research, and initial growth. Over time, however, the bureaucratic nature of large organizations can inhibit the further growth of a reform network. For the Success for All Foundation, this moment came in 1998, when it became apparent that Johns Hopkins University could no longer house a program that was growing so fast. The university was slow in hiring, paid too poorly for us to be able to attract trainers and senior managers, and had many layers of bureaucracy that made it difficult to operate flexibly. At the same time, our reform activity was occupying vast amounts of university staff time, on hiring, legal services, contracts, procurement, space, and so on. We negotiated a friendly separation, with at least one seat on our board for a Johns Hopkins representative. Johns Hopkins has supported SFAF with a significant loan, and SFAF staff work closely with Johns Hopkins staff on common research and development activities. Research universities are increasingly supportive of various arrangements to spin off the results of university R&D, and can even be investors in enterprises that they believe to be potentially profitable and/or socially beneficial.

If full spin-off is not possible, many reformers create a unit within their home institution with its own budget, identity, space, and culture. This unit may operate under rules or conditions specially crafted to its own requirements.

Conclusion

The experience of the Success for All Foundation provides one model of how a research-based reform model can be scaled up over time to serve very large numbers of schools and children with a high degree of quality and integrity. Our experience may be particular to the nature of our program, and other programs may have learned very different lessons. For example, other programs have found ways to replicate themselves by fostering creation of regional training organizations in universities, a strategy that we have only once found to be effective. Still, we hope that our hard-won experience in the scaling up of one reform model will give other reformers ideas for issues to attend to, even if they do not provide a template for others to imitate.

The comprehensive school reform movement has created a number of models for school change, which are collectively serving as many as 9,000 schools throughout the U.S. The ideas that widespread, fundamental change is impossible, or that each school staff must develop its own path to reform, have been resoundingly disproven. However, now that we know that large-scale replication of research-based reform is possible, an

enormous task lies ahead. We must have many more programs known to be able to significantly enhance student achievement, and we must learn how these programs can be scaled up without losing the components and the spirit that made them effective in the first place. This paper shares craft knowledge from one program in hopes that others may profit from our experience and avoid our mistakes.

References

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