



A More Demanding Option for Comprehensive School Improvement

THE SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS MODEL

While Congress continues to debate the details of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) this fall, hundreds of thousands of students across the country have headed back to schools that lack critical resources and support to provide them with a challenging college and career-ready education.

In the face of this stalemate in Congress, Education Secretary Arne Duncan is considering options for administrative policy changes to promote school improvement under the Act. A key focus of this effort should be the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. SIG funds some of the nation's lowest performing schools to implement one of four intervention models aimed at improving student outcomes.

While these models may be effective in a number of situations, Communities for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS), a coalition of 35 community-based organizations in low-income communities of color across the country, believes that many districts and low-performing schools would benefit from a more demanding and comprehensive option for school reform that create the structures and accountability mechanisms needed to close the achievement gap. We have developed such a model—the *Sustainable Success Model*.

The *Sustainable Success Model* requires school districts to: 1) undertake a comprehensive needs assessment—done in partnership with parents, educators, students and community members—so that local solutions are tailored to local problems, 2) implement research-based instructional and educational reforms, 3) address essential social, emotional and physical needs of students, and 4) recognize parent, student, and community leadership as *key* to sustainable student success. CEPS is calling on the Secretary to issue regulations that create the *Sustainable Success Model* as a fifth option under SIG. We believe that our *Sustainable Success Model* offers the promise of more comprehensive and lasting improvement.

In many cases the current intervention models are simply not adequate to produce the dramatic improvements needed to close achievement gaps and graduate all students prepared for college and a meaningful career.

Three Steps Towards *Sustainable Success*

1. The foundation of the *Sustainable Success* model is a collaborative and inclusive process that creates public accountability by engaging parents, students, educators, and communities in designing and implementing reforms.

A growing body of research shows that parent and community buy-in and support are essential to *sustainable* school transformation.

Regulatory language for *Sustainable Success* would include the following:

- Timely and meaningful notification of parents that their school has been designated or identified for transformation, and a school site meeting to inform parents of options;
- Local “School Transformation Teams” made up of parents, students, community members and school staff with the power to design and implement a reform plan with the support of state and district resources;
- A comprehensive, full-year process of assessment and planning so that reforms are tailored to the specific needs of the school;
- A requirement that ongoing parent and community engagement be part of the reform plan.

2. Sustainable Success requires a focus on research-based strategies within the school, including a strong focus on instruction, college and career-ready curriculum for all students, a collaborative environment for high quality teaching, and a positive school climate for student learning.

In order to close the achievement gaps that exist in our schools, school improvement must be comprehensive and research-based. In addition, schools must allow, support and model a collaborative work environment focused on optimal teaching and learning conditions.

Regulatory language for *Sustainable Success* would include the following:

- A well-rounded, culturally relevant and enriched college and career-preparatory curriculum available to *all* students;
- The use of research-based strategies for instruction, school organization and student support;
- Staffing structures that facilitate collaboration and the development of a professional learning community;
- The development of a comprehensive system for evaluation of teachers and principals that is closely tied to professional development and based on multiple measures. The evaluation system should be developed with input from educators, parents and students;
- The use of data to inform and differentiate instruction;
- The ability for schools to implement a range of strategies and activities to meet their challenges;
- Development of a strategic plan for parent engagement focused on the role of parents as partners to improve student achievement.

3. Sustainable Success is only possible when students are provided wrap-around supports that ensure they are healthy, nurtured and ready to learn and thrive.

As critical as good teachers are to improving student achievement, students cannot learn to their full potential when they are hungry, exhausted or ill; when their parents cannot support them at home, or when they feel unsafe or disrespected in school. *Sustainable Success* requires a full range of supports available to students and their families.

Regulatory language for *Sustainable Success* would require:

- An assessment process to identify students’ non-academic needs, and asset mapping to determine possible providers and partners in service delivery;
- Schools to provide students with sufficient access to college and career counselors to ensure they are supported in developing post-graduation plans;
- Collaboration and partnerships with community and corporate providers to ensure that students’ health and emotional needs are met;
- Extended school days and years, to provide students with additional academic supports, and to provide teachers with (and fully compensate them for) more time for planning and collaboration.

Successful intervention in a struggling school is a challenging undertaking. It requires a plan that addresses the specific needs of the school community. It requires the implementation of tried and true, research-based strategies. It requires highly skilled educators who work collaboratively and are supported by thoughtful and appropriate professional development. It requires that a range of student needs are met—academic needs as well as social, emotional and physical needs. And most of all it requires that all stakeholders in the school community—teachers, parents, students and school leaders—be fully invested in the plan. Communities for Excellent Public Schools believes that many districts and schools are up to this challenge.

We call on Secretary Duncan to issue regulatory language calling for our more demanding, *Sustainable Success Model* as an option under the School Improvement Grants program.

Communities for Excellent Public Schools (CEPS) is a coalition of community-based organizations from around the country that represent parents and students in low-income communities. CEPS is organized to make sure that parents, students and communities have a voice in the public debate on the reauthorization of ESEA and on federal policies that affect our children and schools. In conjunction with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, CEPS recently released a national report, “Our Communities Left Behind: An Analysis of the Administration’s School Turnaround Policies,” and a proposal for Sustainable School Transformation. Download at www.ceps-ourschools.org.