

# Creating Schools That Make A Difference:

Factors influencing achievement and how we can  
move students from risk to resilience

Pedro A. Noguera, Ph.D.

New York University

# I. Distinguishing Between Symptoms and Causes

- High dropout rates and low achievement patterns are a symptom of larger systemic problems
- Many school reforms are not implemented with a clear focus on how they will solve the problems schools face
- Must understand why and how failure has become normalized
- Must recognize that poverty and external conditions have an impact on schools and student achievement

## II. We need to change how schools respond to student needs

- Challenge assumptions within schools about why certain students are likely to fail
  - Normalization of failure
  - Address the lack of a coherent strategy in struggling schools
- Develop greater clarity among policy makers about why certain schools and districts experience chronic failure and what might be done to change them
  - Shutting down schools cannot be the only solutions
- Need to devise strategies that build the capacity of schools to respond to student needs

# Building school capacity requires an understanding of how to:

- Build partnerships between schools and CBOs in response to health and social needs of children
  - Well developed service plan that is aligned to the academic plan
  - PS 28 Brooklyn, NY; Edison Elementary School in Portchester, NY
- Design professional development for teachers based on student needs – ELL, adolescent literacy, etc. – MS 324 Bronx
- Intervene early and effectively in response to academic and social needs – PS 188
- Personalize the learning environment –
  - Use of data systems to monitor performance
  - Implement interventions to meet student needs
- Engage parents in effective partnerships that reinforce child development and learning – McCormick Middle School, Boston, MA

### III. What must be done to improve student achievement and reduce the dropout rate:

- Improve teaching - Move away from excessive reliance on lecture and test prep
  - Interactive strategies - project-based learning, Socratic seminars, experiential learning, simulations, presentations
  - Collaborative planning, team teaching
  - Make class time work time – utilize active learning strategies, reduce reliance on homework,
  - Ongoing assessment - teachers must look for evidence of learning

# Strategies for raising achievement and reducing dropout rates

- Make curriculum more relevant to the lives of students
  - Career Academies - marketable skills that don't limit options
  - Socio-cultural relevance - build connections between what is learned and what is happening in their lives
    - Show how what is learned in school can help students to address real problems in their lives

# Develop systems to respond to student needs

- Help students to develop concrete plans for the future early
  - Involve students in counseling about college early
  - Engage parents in advising
- Build stronger ties between adults and students
  - Effective use of extracurricular activities
  - Develop small learning communities
  - Pro-active mentoring
  - Utilize every teacher as an advisor
- Design systems to identify at-risk students and to intervene early
  - Target at-risk youth with mentors, jobs, and services
  - Utilize after-school and intensive summer school programs