

DRIVING SCHOOLS TOWARD EXCELLENCE

My Approach Toward School Reform

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SCHOOLS RIGHTLY OCCUPY A VAUNTED PLACE IN OUR SOCIETY; without overstatement, they play a pivotal role in shaping our shared future. Yet, considering their mission is to shepherd the advancement of the next generation, too many educators and school leaders fall sway to the force of inertia, neglecting to hold themselves to the expectation that, like their students' learning, their own professional growth should be continuous and meaningful.

I have devoted my career to describing and amplifying the core idea that if they are to live up to the lofty expectations we hold, schools must stand as temples of learning—not just for the students, but for all the professionals who, individually and collectively, are responsible for pursuing educational excellence and cultivating the growth of all students. Toward this end, I have partnered with dozens of public and private schools—administrators, teachers, and specialists—to undertake a complicated process that promotes deep and lasting school reform, charting a path forward to higher-quality education for all.

Throughout this work, I emphasize two core principles that should animate educators' vital (and rarely straightforward) journey:

- **School reform is possible.** Research shows that many schools have significantly advanced their capacity to educate students to high standards, and, done right, any school holds this potential.
- **School reform takes time.** We should not expect any complex institution like schools to change quickly; it takes time to build the trust, perspective and habits that serve as the foundation to good practice for effective teaching and learning.

I also emphasize to educators that to succeed in breaking the grip of inertia, they must embrace three key beliefs, as individuals and as a unified community of professionals, and that these beliefs must then serve as the foundation to any substantive plan for continuous improvement:

- **Educators must continually seek growth.** Teachers must be expected (and expect of themselves) to engage purposefully in activities and conversations that aim to strengthen their practice. In turn, leaders must establish structures where reflection, experimentation, and practice are embedded in teachers' everyday work.
- **All students can and should succeed.** Teachers must continually search for ways to tailor educational experiences to the specific needs of each child, striving to understand the learning contexts that are better for each of their students and then organizing classrooms in ways that furnish such learning contexts.
- **Improvement goals should be set and progress methodically tracked.** Successful schools rely heavily on many sources of data to provide evidence of growth (and lack thereof) in both their students and themselves. Improvement only happens when it can be and is measured.