Discussion Guide

With Excerpts from the PBS Broadcast
Welcome to MAKING SCHOOLS WORK

This discussion guide is drawn from the PBS prime-time special, MAKING SCHOOLS WORK with Hedrick Smith. In that documentary, we showed models of successful educational reform from elementary through high school. All are widely used across the U.S. or throughout entire school districts. In all, two million students were reached by these reforms.

We have designed this guide to stimulate public discussion of effective techniques and crucial issues of educational reform. It is intended for teachers, parents, principals, administrators and anyone interested in improving public schools.

How to Use This Guide

This guide can be used either with a DVD of the two-hour documentary, MAKING SCHOOLS WORK, or with the special DVD of program excerpts.

The guide is broken into several sections. On page 1 is a description of the major elements of the program. The next section, pages 2-19, includes nine topics for discussion, selected to highlight important issues in education today – for example, testing, power sharing, prescriptive curriculums, improving the quality of teaching, and high school dropouts. Each topic is accompanied by a two-page summary and suggested questions. A matching video segment illustrates the issue.

Select a topic and read the summary. Watch the matching segment on the DVD of excerpts. If you have a DVD of the full program, you can find the appropriate section for each topic and watch it. The show has seven segments, each about 15 minutes in length, that focus on different approaches to school reform. The discussion topics in this guide are presented in the same sequence as the seven segments of the program. There is one topic for each program segment, except the fourth segment (on high schools) has two topics; so does the sixth segment (Charlotte, NC).

After viewing the segment, read and discuss the related questions with your group. We hope the discussion and this program generate new ideas for effective schooling in your home area or profession.

Hedrick Smith

Making Schools Work, a two-hour nationwide PBS broadcast on Oct. 5, 2005, set out to determine whether public schools can deliver results, especially for the large mass of disadvantaged kids and struggling learners. We wanted to know if there was evidence of success not just in a few schools but in hundreds of them or entire districts, taking thousands of students to higher levels of performance so that America’s next generation could compete in the new global economy.

The answer, we found, is yes. But finding success stories took several months of talking to education specialists who had spent years tracking and studying educational results, trying to determine objectively what works.

Among the successful districts and individual school reform strategies with excellent results and diversity of approach are Success for All, the Comer Process – also referred to as the School Development Program, KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program), and High Schools That Work.

Success for All, a comprehensive reform model developed by Johns Hopkins University scholar Robert Slavin and now adopted by 1,300 schools with 650,000 students nationwide, uses a fast-paced, highly scripted reading curriculum as its engine for improvement from kindergarten onward.

More than 300 Comer Process schools work from a team-oriented, power sharing school management program developed by child psychiatrist James Comer of Yale University. They develop a school culture that nourishes holistic child development. Many Comer schools like Jordan Community School in North Chicago report solid, steady academic gains. (cont. page 20)
Nancy Raschko joined the faculty of Centennial Elementary in Mount Vernon, Washington in 1989. Back then, Raschko taught first graders according to her training and personal creativity. Her classroom was her domain. But all that changed six years ago when her school adopted a highly scripted reading curriculum called Success for All. She likens the experience to “going back and being a student teacher again.”

Raschko’s difficulties with Success for All are not uncommon. Experienced teachers from Maine to California are bridling against the current trend toward prescriptive curriculums that provide detailed, minute-by-minute daily lesson plans.

Like many schools across the country, Centennial Elementary and the other schools in the Mount Vernon district adopted Success for All in response to falling test scores. Shifting demographics in the area meant that immigrant children from Mexico were coming to school lacking literacy in English, and the schools needed a new teaching strategy.

Success for All requires teacher buy-in with an 80% majority vote. The teachers at Centennial had mixed feelings, but knew they needed to do something different.

Designed by Johns Hopkins University educator Bob Slavin in the mid-1980s, Success for All requires 90 minutes of reading instruction every day, with a heavy emphasis in first grade on phonics drills. As the students advance, the lesson plans become more complex, focusing on comprehension, story analysis and examining text for deeper meaning.

“One of the things that’s most characteristic of Success for All is that we try not to leave very much to chance,” says Slavin. “We want every minute of the school day used for productive activities that we know from research to be the most effective things we can provide.”

After several months, Nancy Raschko saw her struggling readers doing much better and admits that she, herself, changed: “I am different as a teacher.” Reading scores jumped up significantly in all six district elementary schools in Mount Vernon.

A majority of the 1300 Success for All schools are located in America’s inner cities where children come from violent neighborhoods and high poverty backgrounds. A recent study that examined 38 schools using Success for All found that students read better after two years in the program and outpace students in regular classrooms by up to half a school year.

Steve Fleischman of the American Institutes for Research explains the program’s success: “Although it’s not popular to say, one of the likely reasons why Success for All is as successful as it is, is its level of standardization.”

Questions:

1. What are the benefits of a prescriptive approach for teaching, or for district or statewide administration? What are the downsides?

2. There is an ongoing debate about the best way to teach reading. Success for All uses a more phonics-based, repetitive, scripted approach. In what schools or districts would this strategy be most effective and why?

3. How important is teacher buy-in for a prescriptive curriculum to succeed? What other conditions are necessary?

4. What are the benefits of a whole district adopting a common reading curriculum? What evidence is there that a curriculum picked by each teacher or each school works better for all children?

5. What is the difference between a uniform curriculum and a prescriptive curriculum? If a district has a uniform curriculum, does it have to be prescriptive like Success for All? What are the pros and cons of both strategies?
The Comer Process, a comprehensive school reform model developed by Yale University child psychiatrist, James Comer, puts the responsibility on schools – their principals, administrators, teachers and parents – to come together to agree on an action plan for the school, with both social and academic components. Decisions are made collaboratively, in the best interests of the students.

In 1993 when Principal Maurice Harvey opened the Jordan Community School in a violent, high poverty neighborhood of Chicago, he adopted the Comer Process. Although he was attracted by the model’s strategy of involving parents and teachers in school management, Harvey did not fully understand its implications for him personally. Neither did the teachers.

With the Comer Process, decision-making is shared among management teams such as the Student Staff Support Team (SSST) and the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT). Power sharing solicits buy-in from the key stakeholders, and without buy-in reform faces failure.

But Harvey, trained as a dictatorial principal, struggled against the requirement to let go of some power. “It’s very difficult to relinquish power,” Harvey explains. “As Dr. Comer says, ‘consensus, no fault, collaboration’. Those are very easy words to say… but very hard to do."

In fact, third grade teacher Judy Owens remembers that Harvey “wanted to rule with an iron fist.” But as Harvey relinquished some power, Owens also recalls disbelief and discomfort among the teachers who suddenly had more clout. She remembers thinking about Harvey, “You really care about what we think? Your suggestions are worthwhile? You are listening? It was… unbelievable.”

“Improving the performance of high poverty schools, whether urban or rural, is a huge challenge and it involves more than getting the academics and the curriculum right,” says Steve Fleischman, from the American Institutes for Research. “It involves getting social relationships right, creating a supportive environment, making better connections between the school and the community.”

QUESTIONS:

1. How can power sharing help school reform? How can it hinder it?

2. Consider the present educational system, locally or nationally. What power do parents have? Teachers? Principals? Students? School administrators? State leaders? The federal government? How is this power structure effective? How is it ineffective?

3. James Comer says that power is a big problem because it “limits the growth and development of everybody”. How does power limit growth and development?

4. Why is it hard to give up power? Why can it be difficult to take on power? Discuss ways to facilitate power sharing.

5. No strategy will work for every school or district. What circumstances, environments, and personalities might benefit from the power sharing model? Why and how would they benefit? In what situations would a more directive, top-down approach be beneficial?
KIPP uses no pie-in-the-sky formula. They believe all kids can and will learn, and they act on that belief with a demanding curriculum, an extra long school day (7:30 to 5 p.m.), lots of homework, and classes on Saturdays. KIPP students spend 67% more time in class than regular public school students.

Their “no exceptions, no excuses” philosophy is buttressed with tremendous academic support from teachers who make themselves reachable by phone until 9:00 p.m. to field questions when students get stuck on evening homework. Commitment is essential – from teachers, students and parents.

KIPP keeps kids so involved with school that they have limited time to get drawn into gangs, crime, and other illicit activities. KIPP creates a culture and community that blends the academic with the social; where students are taught to be disciplined and work hard; and where they learn what it means to be part of a team and to respect others.

“KIPP is creating a social world that thinks that academic effort is cool and that gets rewarded everywhere you turn,” says Lauren Resnick, Director of the Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh.

The effort at KIPP schools has paid off: achievement is up and more children head into high school aiming for college. KIPP students who took the Stanford 10 exam increased their scores by 29% in mathematics, 22% in reading, and 20% in language in just one year. In 2004, 85% of KIPP alumni who were seniors in high school were accepted to a university or college.

Says Mike Feinberg: “Everyone’s looking for the magic bullet, instead of just getting after it and realizing this is extremely hard work.”

Questions:

1. Some kids come to school much less prepared than others. Discuss the obstacles to academic learning and how schools, districts and states address them. What makes their strategies effective?

2. How does chanting multiplication tables help KIPP schools reach low-income middle school children and stimulate their learning?

3. Discuss examples of academic environments in which people’s actions show that they believe all kids can and will learn. How do these people take responsibility for whether students learn?

4. As a charter program, KIPP can extend the school day and year, pay teachers more, and permanently remove students if necessary. Regular public schools cannot do that so their challenges are even steeper. What are some KIPP strategies that might work in public schools?

5. Finish this statement: All children can learn if… Now finish this statement: All children will learn with….
How Do We Combat the Dropout Problem?

Wanda Kinsey, a freshman at Corbin High School in Kentucky, hopes to break the patterns of poverty and teen pregnancy that have persisted in her family for decades. She resides in a trailer with her 56-year-old grandmother who lives below the poverty line and never went beyond ninth grade.

Nationally, the dropout rate has risen alarmingly over the past two decades. Some estimates now put it at 30%, and studies show that many of those dropouts end up pregnant, unemployed, or in prison.

Surprisingly, the make-or-break year for about a third of high school students comes quickly—in their first year. Every fall, thousands of ninth graders walk into high school wholly unprepared for what they’ll face, academically and socially. They fail in extraordinary numbers.

“You have a whole host of youths coming to grade nine who are not ready for the higher academic standards that high schools now have,” says Gene Bottoms, founder of the reform model High Schools That Work.

Low-performing freshmen are sometimes held back so they don’t lower school scores on statewide tests as sophomores. This strategy actually increases the likelihood that they will drop out. “If you failed in ninth grade your chances of finishing high school is only about one out of two,” says Bottoms.

Like many freshmen, Wanda Kinsey struggled. “I was having a rough time with English and math, with everything,” she says. But with Bottoms’ reform model, High Schools That Work, Wanda’s school developed strategies to combat dropouts—special classes, extra tutoring, and retaking courses.

“The dropout problem in this country is scandalous,” says Kati Haycock of The Education Trust. “If you look at the number of kids who start ninth grade in a particular year and ask how many of those kids actually graduated with their classes four years later it looks like about 70% of all ninth graders graduate. But if you break that apart it’s 70-80% of white students; more like 50% of African American and Hispanic kids; and for low income kids of all races it’s quite low as well.”

Freshmen attend classes in a separate wing, so they get exposed to high school without being overwhelmed. A teaching team meets daily to review their performance. Bottoms recommends assigning students an advisor for all four years. One-on-one attention and extra help send the critical message to students that someone cares about them and how they do academically. With close support, students can be held to high expectations.

Through such strategies, Corbin teachers identified Wanda’s weaknesses quickly and put her in a special reading class with other low-performing students. Close guidance helped Wanda boost her near failing grades to A’s and B’s by year’s end. She excelled in extracurricular activities, too, chosen to lead the Jr. ROTC’s color guard, an honor usually won only by juniors and seniors.

“I didn’t at all think that I could do it,” admits Wanda. “Sometimes, I kind of gave up. But there’s things that showed me that I can be that person. That I can make it.”

QUESTIONS:
1. Do you think the dropout rate is a significant issue? Why or why not? What impact does the dropout rate have on the nation and on you, personally?
2. Discuss the reasons that students drop out of school. What can you or your organization do to help address these issues?
3. What are some strategies to lowering the dropout rate that have been proven to be effective? Will they work for all high schools and all students?
4. What obstacles prevent effective strategies from successful implementation? How can these obstacles be overcome?
5. Discuss examples of successful high schools with predominantly high poverty students. What have they done that can be replicated? How did they overcome obstacles?
Education reformer Gene Bottoms says that high schools nationwide are putting many students on a dead-end path, setting them up for failure in today’s highly competitive global economy. When Bottoms toured the country, he saw students placed on one of three tracks: college prep, general or basic.

“Only about 30% of the kids were getting a real, solid academic program of studies,” he says. “About 40% of the kids were finishing the general track that was preparing them for nothing. And then the kids in the technical program were getting very low-level academics.”

Bottoms reached two conclusions that became central to his reform model called High Schools That Work. First, students in the bottom two tracks are often capable of accomplishing much more than many of their teachers or their parents demand of them. Second, you must connect academic courses to real life. That hooks students into learning, he says.

In the case of Jordy Davis at Corbin High School in eastern Kentucky, Bottoms was right. Jordy had lost interest in school and was at risk of dropping out. Then he signed up for computer drafting. He learned 3-D imaging and how to draw house plans. But what turned him around was a practical assignment – designing a fabric storage rack for a local company that makes uniforms for the military. With Jordy’s design, the company ordered 50 to be made in the high school shop.

As a former vocational teacher, Gene Bottoms knows the power of connecting academics to the real world. “Many youngsters have to see a reason to learning algebra and geometry and trig, chemistry and physics,” he says. “And the best way to do that for some students is to link that to experiences in their lives, to the community or to a career in which they have an interest.”

At Corbin High, teacher Linda Cupp has students repair the innards of computers. Botany students work in a greenhouse and do landscaping jobs. Other students take part in job shadowing and co-op programs, doing work at banks, hospitals and welding shops.

Other experts agree that finding a real-world hook motivates teenagers. “For high school kids, the question is, ‘Why does any of this matter?’” says Kati Haycock of The Education Trust, an advocacy group for disadvantaged children. “And what the High Schools That Work folks have been so good at…is connecting the requirements of today’s workplace with what’s going on in classrooms. And that connection has been very powerful.”

\[A \text{ MetLife survey found that only } 23\% \text{ of high school students describe their classes as challenging, although } 67\% \text{ of secondary school principals and } 48\% \text{ of teachers think the classes are a challenge.}\]
Most students at PS 126, an elementary school on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, live in low income housing and many are recent immigrants. They are surrounded by substance abuse and violence at home or in the neighborhood. When Daria Rigney became principal in 1998, only 20% could read at grade level and discipline problems were rampant.

Coming from families that do not engage in their education, these poor and immigrant children have short attention spans and little interest in learning. But instead of lowering expectations or blaming the parents, the district leaders said it is the school’s responsibility to improve instruction so that every child can succeed.

“Kids learn from teachers. If the kids need to learn more, and more powerfully, then the teachers need to know more, and their teaching has to be more powerful,” says Anthony Alvarado, former New York District 2 superintendent. “And the principal needs to know how to lead that school to have that improvement in teaching practice occur.”

Through a single-minded focus on radically improving the quality of instruction throughout District 2, Alvarado made change happen. He targeted principals first. Instead of managing the school building, Alvarado expected principals to be instructional leaders, playing a key role in educational improvement by working side-by-side with teachers. He held principals responsible for the academic performance of their students and for assessing and supporting teachers in the classroom.

At PS 126, Rigney knew what the teachers were doing wasn’t working so she capitalized on another district strategy: using education specialists to help retrain and support teachers. The district’s hallmark was its heavy use of coaching from specialists with expertise in literacy and math to work one-on-one with teachers on a weekly basis. Educational specialists, mentors and principals helped teachers develop purposeful lesson plans. They modeled instructional techniques to engage students as active learners.

Teachers were expected to evaluate the quality of each child’s work regularly and to address the needs of struggling students at weekly staff meetings with the principal. Each child’s reading progress was tracked monthly, with the results posted on the principal’s bulletin board. “I not only know each student’s name but I know what their reading level is,” laughs Rigney.

Within three years nearly half of the 500 students at PS 126 could read on grade level, up from 20 percent. Performance also increased district-wide: 73% percent of the students were reading at or above grade level in 1998, up from 56% a decade earlier; in math, 82% were at or above grade level, up from 66%. Good instruction, Alvarado believed, was the key to good education.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the expectations of teachers today? Why and how have these expectations changed in the past 20 years?

2. Why might some teachers, principals and administrators resist implementing effective methods to improve instruction? How can this resistance be overcome?

3. How should principals be involved in lifting the quality of teaching at their school? If principals are to take a more active role as instructional leaders, how can the district support them? Should it take on more administrative tasks?

4. Discuss the different ways a district can improve the quality of teaching in its schools. What contributes to the success of a district’s professional development strategy?

5. How well do existing teacher training programs and accreditation help to lift the quality of teaching and how can they be made stronger? Discuss the challenges of improving these programs, and how to surmount them.

6. What can be done at the state and federal level to improve teaching? How can you or your organization help facilitate the process?
Every nine weeks, students in Charlotte take a quarterly exam. It’s a lot of testing but what the district does with the data – and who is being graded – makes all the difference to student achievement.

Quarterly test results are compiled into reports for teachers, listing every child and his or her answers to each question. Teachers wait eagerly to find out how their students performed, how well they taught the material, and how they need to teach differently tomorrow. The reports indicate which items each student missed and their level of mastery on every task in the curriculum, so that teachers can identify weak spots.

Weak spots in scores reveal weak spots in teaching. “It allows me to see whether or not what I’m doing is working,” says Nicole Barrow, a fourth grade teacher at Highland Renaissance Academy.

“She gets a view of her classroom,” explains Susan Agruso, who oversees Charlotte’s testing system. “Do I have a group of students who are struggling with fractions? I need to work with this group. Do I have a child who doesn’t understand fractions? I have to figure out some ways to give him some extra help. Or is my whole class missing this concept? I have to build in some tutorial work for them so that they can do better on fractions.”

In every school, the team of teachers for each grade uses the reports to regroup students by their level of mastery. Children who need intense intervention receive one-on-one attention from the teacher who teaches that concept best. Students who have mastered the skill explore higher-level work.

Principals receive a similar report, broken down by classroom, giving them an instant read on how well each of their teachers is doing. Principals use this data to identify how to target the school’s limited resources.

At the district level, the test data is crunched in many ways. Regional superintendents and instructional specialists focus on reports that show how each school is doing. They see which schools need help and devise remedial plans. Curriculum experts examine the data to identify which objectives are giving teachers and students the most trouble and which lesson plans are not working. Then they revise the troubling ones.

In Charlotte testing is used to improve student success. Every nine weeks the test results indicate how well everyone in the system is performing: students, teachers, principals, and district leaders. And the data is used to make decisions about what kind of additional resources and support students, teachers, and schools need throughout the year instead of waiting until the end when it is too late.

“If you’re in business, you watch your quarterly results very closely to know whether your business strategies are paying off. If you’re a physician, you watch...to see whether you’re providing the right kind of treatment. In any successful field, people watch outcomes very, very closely. In education, we have to do the same.” Robert Slavin, co-founder of Success for All.

QUESTIONS:
1. Discuss the purpose of testing from the standpoint of a teacher, principal, district, state and the nation.
2. What are the primary reasons that people oppose tests? How are these arguments valid? What can be done to address these concerns?
3. Are tests a good assessment of the quality and effectiveness of instruction? Why or why not? Discuss ways that test results can help improve teaching.
4. How can test data be used more effectively by schools, districts, and statewide as well as at the national level to improve student performance, not just monitor it?
5. Discuss the reasons that tests are not always accurate or useful measures of student knowledge and skill. What are the qualities of a good test?
6. In addition to tests, what are some other effective methods of assessing the performance of students, teachers, principals, districts, and states?
7. What are some other ways that school and test data can be used to improve student success?
When Eric Smith became superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1995, he found very different expectations for low-income minority students in the inner city and affluent white students in the suburbs. He saw huge discrepancies in resources for each group and in student achievement: white students scored 40 percentage points higher than blacks in reading and math.

To close the gaps, Smith focused on delivering more equitable distribution of district resources. Children from poverty are usually behind when the starting gun goes off, he reasoned: “We had to find a way to compensate for that. That’s what we meant by equity.”

So Charlotte set up the Equity Plus Program to level the playing field. Schools in high poverty areas would have smaller classes, reduced teacher-student ratios, additional instructional materials, added incentives for teachers, summer enrichment programs, Saturday school and strong district support.

When some parents objected that this took funds from suburban schools, Smith checked the data. He found that even with additional resources invested in inner city schools, suburban schools were still costing taxpayers more money per student. The reason was higher salaries for more experienced teachers.

Smith also reoriented the district’s academic objectives to emphasize high expectations for all students. That meant insuring minority children had access to challenging courses, and extra help to prepare them. Smith used Advanced Placement courses, the International Baccalaureate (IB) and SAT tests as indicators of whether the district was succeeding.

“The success of a school isn’t dependent on the children we serve. We can compensate for any deficiencies or additional needs children bring to us,” says Eric Smith former superintendent in Charlotte. “Our job is to educate children to a comparable level, to a competitive level.”

“Equity wasn’t making sure that everyone had numerically the same number of test tubes in every chemistry lab,” Smith asserts. “We had to make sure that equity was more defined by the outcome.” Within seven years, the percentage of black students scoring at or above grade level in reading increased from 39% to 62%, and in math it increased from 42% to 70 percent. The achievement gap between minority students and white students closed substantially.

QUESTIONS:
1. Discuss the differences in the home environments of low-income and more affluent children and how it impacts their academic needs.
2. Discuss equity in education. How is “allocating resources on a differentiated basis” an equitable and fair practice? Why is there resistance to it? How can the resistance be overcome?
3. Why is it important to level the playing field at school for low-income children? Whose responsibility is it to provide support and resources to the schools they attend?
4. What do low-income children need to be competitive with their peers at the end of 12 years of education? What are districts, states, and the federal government doing to achieve this goal? What else can they do?
5. What is an effective way to organize and support districts with predominantly low-income children so they are not overburdened?
When former U.S. district attorney Alan Bersin became superintendent in San Diego in 1998, he invited Anthony Alvarado, the superintendent of District 2 in New York City, to become San Diego’s academic chancellor. Using Alvarado’s “blueprint” from District 2, their first priority was to boost student achievement by improving the quality of instruction. With an already-tested strategy, the Bersin-Alvarado team moved boldly. They reallocated $65 million to finance better and more centrally supervised training and mentoring for teachers and principals; established a common reading curriculum and three-hour teaching blocks for literacy; and created a leadership academy to train new principals in the Alvarado method.

But Bersin had been elected on a slim 3-2 majority of the school board, reflecting a city divided on school reform, and his rapid-fire, top-down strategy exacerbated the board split. It became an arena for constant battles over reform.

Key city stakeholders, including the Chamber of Commerce, threw their influence and funding into school board elections. Dissatisfied with San Diego’s schools, the business elite pushed a pro-reform agenda. Opposition came from board members backed by a strong teachers union, the San Diego Education Association (SDEA), which preferred the status quo.

At each step, reform initiatives became embroiled in the Bersin-Alvarado power struggle with the SDEA. The two sides argued over such issues as whether all schools would have to follow district policy, who would pick peer coaches to train teachers, and whether to hire outside consultants to run staff development for teachers. The union fought for site-based control at each school against the central command, arguing that teachers in individual schools could judge reform strategies better than so-called ‘outsiders’ like Bersin and Alvarado.

“My think the rearrangement of the power was a big sticking point,” Bersin conceded. “We couldn’t get any traction on finding the common ground, because everything was looked at as an issue of power.”

Bersin and Alvarado, hoping to bypass the resistance of union leaders and win the hearts and minds of teachers once they saw student improvement, responded by pushing reform faster and harder. Elementary and middle school test scores showed gains but political tensions poisoned the atmosphere. Without consensus and trust from key stakeholders, the reform effort struggled for momentum.

Alvarado, who had become a lightning rod of union discontent, felt the reform had become too watered down and quit in 2003. Bersin tried to stay on course but in 2005 he was forced out after elections overturned the pro-reform majority on the school board. The new board wasted little time in terminating Bersin’s contract and dismantling the reforms.

“Why Is Consensus so Important?”

“Heaven knows that you’ll never get complete consensus on anything in any city,” says Michael Casserly from Council of the Great City Schools. “But one thing we have learned over the years is that it is almost impossible to get academic improvement ... if the leadership of the school district is simply going to be squabbling and fighting.”

QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the key stakeholders in a school district? Why is their buy-in necessary to the success of school reform? How best can their support be won?

2. Discuss the role of politics in education. Once a school board has picked a superintendent and set a direction for reform, should the board continue to manage reform, or let the superintendent get the job done?

3. Many educators advocate district-wide reforms. What benefits does this strategy have? What risks are entailed?

4. How can a school district encourage public debate about reforms without letting dissenters sabotage well-tested reform models and educational leaders?

5. Complete consensus from all stakeholders is nearly impossible. How do successful districts deal with disagreements and still push reform forward.

6. Experts agree that academic improvement is unlikely if leaders and groups argue continuously. How can district, state and federal requirements help overcome this predicament? What can you or your organization do?
In the pre-teen years, when raging hormones pose special challenges, the main formula at KIPP is tough-love discipline for street kids, plus an extra-long school day and school year. That strong school culture has enabled 38 KIPP middle schools from Harlem to Houston to get inner city kids out of trouble and on track, headed toward top high schools and colleges.

To combat the national problem of dropouts and turned-off teens, a strategy developed by the Southern Regional Education Board, called High Schools That Work, uses special programs for ninth and tenth graders to keep them in school, and hands-on learning to motivate aimless juniors and seniors. It is producing strong results in over 1,000 high schools across 31 states.

Entire districts, such as the old District 2 on New York’s east side or the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system, have also developed strategies that have lifted academic performance for tens of thousands of students in elementary and middle schools, especially for students in poor neighborhoods.

In New York City’s District 2, Anthony Alvarado achieved strong gains with an intense and sustained campaign to improve the quality of teaching, with increased resources and mentoring by master teachers.

Charlotte’s superintendent, Eric Smith, and his successor, James Pughsley, delivered substantial progress over the past decade through a data-driven system that emphasized equity for all students by allocating resources to schools based on the particular needs and challenges of their students.

San Diego’s school system became a test of whether a reform strategy that had delivered success elsewhere could be replicated in a new setting with a larger student population, and a sharply divided adult community and school board.

Leading experts urge us to learn from all of these examples, and to continuously refine and improve on them. For even the best are not perfect. But they elicit some common themes and offer an escalator upward for most of America’s children. Borrowing from effective models of reform can rapidly bring educational improvement to a large scale and spare each of America’s 92,000 public schools from having to invent its own reform.

Website on the PBS Home Page: For further information about education reform and our program visit the MAKING SCHOOLS WORK website at http://www.pbs.org/makingschoolswork.

This discussion guide is available on the website and may be duplicated. Multiple resources are also available for web-users who want more information about education reform. Learn more about the reform models and district strategies highlighted in the broadcast, read about “lessons learned,” and find links to education reform resources. A full documentary transcript is provided along with the video web-cast of an education symposium at the National Press Club.

Purchase MAKING SCHOOLS WORK: To obtain a DVD or VHS copy of the two hour program MAKING SCHOOLS WORK with Hedrick Smith contact Films Media Group, PO Box 2053, Princeton, N.J., 08543-2053; Toll Free: 1 (800) 257-5126.

Also available from Films Media Group are DVD and VHS copies of interviews with education experts Robert Slavin, James Comer, Mike Feinberg, Gene Bottoms, Anthony Alvarado, Eric Smith, Michael Casserly and Kati Haycock.
This discussion guide and DVD are drawn from the two-hour PBS prime-time special, MAKING SCHOOLS WORK with Hedrick Smith, which shows concrete models of successful educational reform at a large scale, from elementary through high school. This discussion kit highlights crucial issues of educational reform, providing vital material for educators, administrators, parents and anyone interested in better public education. Each issue is illustrated with a video clip accompanied by an essay and discussion questions.

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