

CHAPTER ONE

The Idea and Importance of Whole-System Reform

In this chapter, I sketch the idea of what whole-system reform looks like and then take up the question of why it is so vital to the future of societies. More detail comes in later chapters. *All systems go* means that every vital part of the whole system—school, community, district, and government contributes individually and in concert to forward movement and success. When it works, and I am talking practically, amazing things get accomplished with less effort; or more accurately, wasted effort gives way to energizing action. Above all, this book is focused on what realistically can be done.

There is nothing in the proposed solutions that we and others have not already done in practice. It is true that politicians tend to go for superficial bullets. The actual solutions, however, are not that much more complicated, but they do require relentless focus on a small number of key interrelated policies and strategies. My purpose in *All Systems Go* is to capture the set of interrelated strategies that work.

There are some “big ideas” in this book and I should highlight them in advance (see Exhibit 1.1).

Exhibit 1.1 Big Ideas for Whole-System Reform

1. All children can learn
2. A small number of key priorities
3. Resolute leadership/stay on message
4. Collective capacity
5. Strategies with precision
6. Intelligent accountability
7. All means all

Of course, many say that all children can learn, failure is not an option (except that evidently it is), and so on. The big idea in this book is that they really can learn, and all systems go proves that it can be done. All children (95%), except the severely disabled, can learn to a high level of critical reasoning and problem solving. And those who are seriously disadvantaged (physically or mentally) can lead effective lives through inclusionary developmentally based programs typical of all-systems-go reforms.

Second, every successful organization pursues a small number of core priorities (that have leverage power) and does them exceedingly well. We include literacy and numeracy—not the narrow testing of No Child Left Behind, but also higher-order thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills—and we link them to whole-child development, emotional well-being, music, dance, and the arts. And we pursue high-quality literacy and numeracy into high schools and related higher education and career choices.

Third, we are beginning to appreciate that successful schools, districts, and larger systems have “resolute leadership” that stays with the focus, especially during rough periods, and these leaders cause others around them to be resolute. It is so easy to go off message, and if you do, you lose whole-system-reform possibilities. This is hard, persistent work but it is not overly complex. Resolute leadership is critical near the beginning when new ideas encounter serious difficulty, but it is also required to sustain and build on success.

Fourth, another big idea that is not new but is very much underappreciated is that *collective capacity* is the hidden resource we fail to understand and cultivate. As Morten Hansen (2009) says, collaboration is not an end in itself. The question is what is the

difference between good and bad collaboration, and when are certain kinds of collaboration worse than no collaboration. Hansen calls for “disciplined collaboration,” which my term covers in the use of the word *capacity*. We will return to Hansen in Chapter 2. In the meantime, you cannot get whole-system reform without counting on collective (as distinct from individual) capacity, and this book is full of concrete examples of this in action. Incidentally, as I will explain later, we have discovered the intriguing phenomenon of “collaborative competition” whereby you simultaneously benefit from both collaboration and competition (Boyle, 2009).

Strategies with precision is another core idea of *All Systems Go*. I will furnish numerous examples of specificity and precision in particular strategies. When you have precision, as I will show, the *speed of quality change* can be greatly accelerated. Incredible and convincing transformations can be accomplished in schools in one short year through precision strategies.

Sixth, the failure to get accountability right plagues all reform efforts. All systems go has figured it out through the concept of *intelligent accountability*. Andy Hargreaves unlocked this door when he observed that “accountability is the remainder that is left when . . . responsibility has been subtracted” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 102). Intelligent accountability involves a set of policies and practices that actually increases individual, and especially collective, capacity to the transparent point that shared responsibility carries most of the freight of effective accountability; that makes internal and external accountability almost seamless; and that leaves external accountability to do its remaining, more-manageable task of necessary intervention.

Finally, *all* really does mean *all*. You can’t solve the problem of whole-system reform through piecemeal efforts that try to get parts of the system improving in order to show the way. System reform does not, cannot work that way—a critique I take up in Chapter 2.

THE IDEA OF WHOLE-SYSTEM REFORM

The School and the Community

Grade-2 teacher Irina Fedra just finished a shared reading exercise with a small group that included two Somali boys and a girl who had arrived at the school 6 months earlier not speaking a

6 THE SYSTEM

word of English. They can actually read, thought Irina. By next year at the end of Grade 3, they will probably meet the province's high standard assessment in reading and writing.

Of her 15 years of teaching, Irina has learned more about quality instruction in the past 3 years than in the previous 12 years combined. Quality instruction requires getting a small number of practices right. These practices involve knowing clearly and specifically what each student can or cannot do, followed by tailored intervention that engages students in the particular learning in question, and then doing the assessment-instruction-correction process on a continuous basis. This is decidedly not drill and test. In our work in literacy and numeracy in Ontario, the instruction goals include higher-order reasoning, problem solving, and expression, with the associated practices becoming more and more specific and precise.

In systems that go, strategies focus on and drill down to effective instructional practices so that *all* teachers, individually and collectively, become better at what they are doing while they continue to seek even better methods. This is the domain of expertise that John Hattie (2009) is getting at in his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses of teaching practices related to student engagement and achievement. High-impact strategies such as structured feedback to students, reciprocal teaching (teaching students to learn cognitive strategies to facilitate their own learning), and observation and feedback on ones' own teaching all had high impact on student learning. Hattie tells us that the critical change agents are

- Knowledge and skills
- A plan of action
- Strategies to overcome setbacks
- A high sense of confidence
- Monitoring progress
- A commitment to achieve
- Social and environment support
- Freedom, control, or choice

Irina is learning to become a professional exactly along the lines that Hattie is talking about—engaging in specific, precise, evidence-based, high-yield instructional practices. She is learning

this because she is part of a comprehensive *collective-capacity* enterprise. Within the school, she learns from other teachers, the literacy coach, and the principal (and contributes to their learning). They have “data walls” for their use only, where she sees the individual progress for each of her 20 students, and that of the other 40 students in the other two Grade-2 classes. She meets with the team, including the principal who participates as a learner and leader in assessing samples of student work, in order to identify corrective action.

Irina gets a chance to practice new instructional methods with feedback from the literacy coach. She is a member of the school-leadership team that participates in capacity-building sessions with other schools in the district. The school has access to instructional materials, short video clips demonstrating specific instructional techniques, and cross visitations to other schools farther down the track.

Irina is also part of a buddy-day strategy in her school that the district and her principal introduced. Although it started on a small scale, buddy days are now once a month. Every grade-level primary teacher (Grades 1–3) is buddied with a teacher at the junior level (Grades 4–6). The two buddied teachers plan the buddy-day monthly activities together. This allows the teachers to plan a two-day activity. One day, the junior teacher would be supervising the whole group; the next day the primary teacher would be overseeing the group as they complete the activity. Older children have the opportunity to explain and lead the activity with their younger buddies. The buddy days focus on literacy and math. The activities developed are kept in a binder for wider sharing and reference about hands-on teaching with mixed age groupings. All activities are assessed in terms of their impact on student engagement and learning. The principal participates as a learner in all sessions, as part of working with teachers in a collaborative way in order to focus the school on high-yield strategies. The we-we commitment that gets generated among the children and the teachers is enormous. The sense of allegiance to one’s peers and to the school as a whole that gets generated by these purposeful collaborations is palpable. Collective pride and desire to do better is evident everywhere.

All of this works. Irina’s school has gone from 33% of its students scoring high proficiency on the province’s annual assessment of literacy to 82% in three years! As the principal and teachers

8 THE SYSTEM

experienced initial success (one could say as they began to know what they were doing), they began to involve parents and the community. She is involved in the school's multifaceted efforts that include parent/family town hall sessions, street festivals, heritage and English language classes, food nights, extensive use of the school facilities including the library. Irina and her colleagues also have a keen interest in participating in the province's new "early-learning initiative," which includes health, nutrition, and other care for preschoolers (nine months to three years of age), full-day service for all four- and five-year-olds, and extended day for all children preschool to eight-years-old.

Albert Quah is a student success teacher (SST) in a diversely populated high school of 1,300 students. His job is to help kids who might be on the verge of failing or dropping out to reengage in their education, and to connect to those who recently left to see if he can get them back in school. He knows the literature that says that often the difference between staying or going for many borderline students is whether they have a meaningful relationship with one or more caring adults. He also knows that it is not just a matter of caring, but whether these students, many of them bright, have something meaningful at school that interests them. Thus, Albert must care, but he also must help to make program innovations.

Albert and his colleagues have done the following things. The province has a Grade-10 mandatory literacy test called the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), which students must pass to graduate from high school. He and the instructionally oriented principal and leadership team lead the blitzing of OSSLT preparation. The whole school is involved in after-school programs for small groups of students who need help; within-school small classes for certain groups, and the highly successful PLANT (peer literacy and numeracy tutoring) initiative in which Grade-11 and -12 students are trained to work with Grade-9 and -10 students. The program is a huge success in which both tutors and tutees learn (to the point where several of the tutors get so turned on that they plan to become future teachers).

Albert and his colleagues also run "rescue and recovery" courses for students who are letting certain courses sink. Students must earn a certain number of credits in order to receive a high school diploma. If they get behind in credits in Grades 9 and 10, most never catch up. Through analyzing the data on individual student

profiles, the school discovered that as many as 25% of the students were falling behind. Knowing which students in which subjects were failing, Albert's job as SST is to work specifically on helping students do something about it. They use two innovations—"credit rescue" and "credit recovery." Credit rescue comes into play before the student has actually failed the course. Working with the particular teachers, faltering students are identified partway through the course and interventions are made that increase the student's chance of passing the course—activities such as help with personal problems, tutoring, classroom assistance, e-learning, and so on.

Credit recovery takes place after a student has failed a course. The credit recovery team, chaired by one of the most respected science teachers, approves each case. In many cases, students who failed did well on 40% or so of the material. Once a student is approved, a course is designed that has the student working on only those course requirements in which he or she has been unsuccessful. The course is designed specifically for the individual student and must meet the rigor of all other courses. The evaluation process includes course work and a culminating activity.

Albert and his student-success coordinator at the district office have taken the credit accumulation question one step further. Why wait until a student is in need of rescue or recovery? Instead, they have begun to identify those students, by name, coming from their feeder schools into Grade 9, who might be at risk. They know these names in August, before the school year has begun, and they provide targeted support related to both personal and schooling issues where needed. They don't even have a name for this initiative (credit anticipation?). They know what all successful systems know—intervene early and as often as necessary.

Another more radical and highly successful program innovation is called the high skills major (HSM). New specialties are created for students who find the abstract academic program not to their liking. They have little interest in and are not good at abstract thinking just for the sake of it. Normally, such students get increasingly alienated, drop out, or get streamed to dead-end technical courses. HSM is not just for nonacademic students; many "academic students" are also in the program. This is what sets HSM apart from traditional (and dead-end) vocational programs. The idea is to combine intellectual and practical work in various ways for all students. (As an aside, many so-called academic courses are not all

that theoretical or intellectual anyway; good theory must be grounded in practice, and vice-versa).

The HSM programs allows schools and districts to work with employers and community groups to create packages of courses leading to employment and further learning. Albert knows that HSMs have been created in other schools in areas such as mining, tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing, which include links to colleges for further postsecondary learning and credentials. Albert, given the interests of some of his students, proposes and gets approval to offer an HSM in transportation. One of the girls, alienated from most of her courses, becomes interested. It turns out that she and her father race cars on the weekend, and she knows a great deal about engines. Early in the course, she asks her teacher if it would be okay if her father brought their racecar to school. Two weeks later, a flatbed truck pulls into the parking lot with a gleaming racecar that looks like it has been plucked from the Formula 1 Grand Prix circuit. That girl is now reengaged! And doing well in her other courses to boot.

Albert is reminded of a book he just read, *Shop Class as Soul Craft* (Crawford, 2009). The author shows that hands-on technical work is every bit as cognitive as any academic endeavor. Crawford has a PhD in philosophy, and a love for motorcycles, especially fixing them. The motorcycles win out as a career choice. Albert has some of Crawford's observations on his office wall—"I often find manual work more engaging *intellectually*"; "Creativity is a by-product of the mastery of the sort that is cultivated through long practice"; and "The truth does not reveal itself to idle spectators." Had Albert read more widely, he would have found kindred spirits in Henry Mintzberg (2004), who argues that abstract thinking is not even good thinking, and makes you a dangerous doer; or how about the Hopper brothers (2009), who lay the blame for the deterioration of business and industry on the shift from applied to abstract management starting around 1970—almost the same period, as we saw earlier, wherein America commenced its educational decline. The right kind of doing is grounded intellectualism and that is the business that Albert and his colleagues are in.

HSM is one of those elegant innovations that does not require major structural change and does not cost very much, as it draws on the collective resources of partners that already exist. The program began only in 2006/2007 with 600 students. Now in its

fourth year, more than 20,000 students are enrolled in 740 HSM programs in 430 schools involving 70 of the 72 school districts in Ontario. These programs are connected to 16 industrial sectors. This is truly an example of spontaneous collective-capacity development that hardly cost the system anything.

Back to Albert. In addition to the HSM program at his school that serves students in Grades 11 and 12, Albert is monitoring the progress of Grade-9 and -10 students, especially with respect to literacy. The targeted efforts are getting results. The percentage of students passing the OSSLT—the province’s mandatory literacy assessment—has gone from 65 to 81. The high school graduation rate has also moved upward, beating the provincial average that is itself climbing.

Like Irina, Albert’s work is successful because it is nested in school, district, and state strategies that are interrelated for this purpose. There are 972 student success teachers in the province (one per school and a coordinating SST for each district). Paid for by the state but employed by the district, SSTs focus on direct student advocacy and mentoring and school-wide staff development. The SSTs communicate with staff and parents and work with subject-specific teachers in meeting the needs of students who are struggling.

The SSTs work in their schools and districts, and they also learn from each other. The SST coordinator at the district level selects, trains, and networks the 14 SSTs (there are 14 high schools in Albert’s district). The coordinators also arrange for cross-site visits to other districts in their region. And the head of the program at the state level’s Ministry of Education conducts regional and once-a-year provincewide sessions of SSTs to exchange ideas and address issues as well as keeps in touch throughout the year.

It seems to be working in that the high school graduation rate in the province has steadily increased from 68% to 77% in its 900 schools over the past four years. Albert knows that 14,000 more students are graduating from high school each year in the province compared to four years ago, and that he is contributing to that number. And Albert knows that most of the better, more-focused innovations have not yet had a chance to have their full impact. This interrelated set of high school innovations has plenty of yield left in it. Albert is pretty confident that the initial provincial target of 85% high school graduation will be met within the next three years.

12 THE SYSTEM

In brief, Irina and Albert are great teachers and change agents. But what makes them most effective is that they are not alone—connection, coherence, and collective-capacity building characterize the entire system from classroom to school to district to state.

District Level

Irina's and Albert's schools are successful because they are nested in a district that is running on a focused, coherent all-systems-go mode (see Chapter 3 for a fuller characterization). District leadership has its act together. No silos of standards, curriculum and instruction, personnel, finance, and so on. No we-they mentality between the districts and the schools or across schools but rather vibrant two-way and multiway partnerships zeroing in on instruction and results. In Chapter 2, we will see specific examples of named districts operating in this mode in Canada, England, and the United States.

Irina and Albert's districts use one of the most powerful strategies we know of in order to get whole-district reform, namely *lateral capacity building*. Schools are in small clusters with a coordinating supervisor. They learn from each other in an ongoing, purposeful way. Beyond the clusters, schools learn from other schools in the district. They celebrate results and identify what's working or not. They develop a fierce sense of pride and "collaborative competition" (see Boyle, 2009, and Fullan, 2010) in what they learn from each other as they try to outdo one another—for the challenge of it, for the good of the higher moral purpose (raise the bar and close the gap for all).

In the partnership, the district presses forward; it is responsive to schools; it fosters transparency of results and of practice; it provides good and timely data on how schools are faring; it intervenes in a nonpunitive manner in schools that are struggling. Irina and Albert's district also integrate individual and collective capacity. With respect to the former, personnel policies and practices are aligned with the instructional focus in the hiring and development of teachers, selection and cultivation of leaders (literacy and numeracy coaches, student-success teachers—part of the high school strategy), potential future school leaders, beginning and continuing assistant principals, and principals.

Their district, or rather the whole set of schools in the district, also enjoys success (not all smooth or linear) as literacy and numeracy increases across the board, Grade-9 math and literacy get better, and high school graduation dramatically rises.

State Level

The district too is nested in a larger system of districts that make up the public school system of Ontario. There are 13 million people in Ontario, 2 million students, 4,000 elementary and 900 secondary schools in 72 districts (see Chapter 4).

The same phenomenon of collective-capacity development that occurs within Irina's and Albert's schools, and within their districts' schools, is at work in the public school system as a whole. The change principles are identical, albeit at a more complex level.

First, the government had to get its act together, especially in relation to its ministry of education (state department). They did three things: (1) focused on a small number of ambitious instructional goals; (2) created an instructional capacity capability (which they did not initially have) to help lead the field in partnership—this involved a 100-person Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, and a smaller student success (SS) group to work with high schools (the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and the SS group are now integrated); (3) worked on changing the culture of the ministry so that it had greater internal coherence and a commitment to work in a two-way partnership with the 4,900 schools and the 72 districts.

Some districts were ahead of the government when the new strategies began in 2003 (making for a great resource for others), but many were not being successful. The strategy in question is an all-systems-go proposition, and thus the goal is to engage *the whole system* in a coherent focused effort.

There is no getting around it. For the entire system to be on the move, you need relentless, resolute leadership from the top—leadership that focuses on the right things and that above all promotes collective capacity and ownership. The top needs to do a small number of critical things well: establish high expectations and ambitious but achievable targets, for example, in literacy, numeracy, and high school graduation rates—targets that are negotiable within the subunits of districts and schools; form a partnership

with the field (the education sector); increase its capacity to contribute to the partnership; invest in capacity building by helping to identify and spread good practice; intervene in a nonpunitive manner in situations that need improvement; engage in constant, transparent communication about results and next steps; and buttress the central-focused strategies with mid- to long-term reinforcements such as early learning for preschool children; teacher recruitment and development; and school and district leadership cultivation, support, and development. And the top needs to attend carefully to all core relationships—the public, parents, teacher unions, and senior elements of the education sector itself.

Some examples: Ontario has a turnaround schools strategy called OFIP (Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership) that addresses those schools and districts that are low performing or coasting (average but flat-lined in performance). It is an expansive program involving some 1,000 of the 4,000 elementary schools in total. Nonpunitive but explicit in nature, OFIP provides direct capacity-building experiences relative to literacy and numeracy using a precise “critical learning pathways” model suited to the school. In most cases, positive results occur within two months, to be built on by the district and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat together. OFIP schools gain on the average 10% more in student achievement than do other schools (see Chapter 4).

Another example is the “Schools on the Move” strategy in which some 150 schools have been identified on the basis of having achieved significant improvement for three straight years on at least four of the six main measures (Grade-3 reading, writing, and math, and Grade-6 reading, writing, and math). These schools are profiled publicly with respect to their demographics, achievement scores, and strategies used. They are given money so that other schools can learn from them, not as in “why can’t you be more like your brother,” but rather in the spirit that this is hard work, some are making more progress than others, what can we learn from them?

There are other similar strategies making the system go through mechanisms of learning from each other and firm but nonpunitive accountability. All in all, you have just seen a snapshot of what whole-system reform looks like. It is based on a true story, in this case in Ontario. Not that the province has arrived, but everything I described above exists (except for the names of Irina Fedra and Albert Quah). Ubiquitous increases in instructional capacity

are required—in every classroom, every school, and every district. Yes, individual capacity is part of the development, but at the end of the day *only collective capacity counts*, if you want whole-system reform. The pressure and support of two-way partnerships across and within each of the three levels of schools and communities, districts, and states are required. Coordination, focus, easy access to best ideas, the press of collaborative competition and ultimately win-win outcomes are the drivers. There is simply and flatly no other way to get whole-system reform. We are not talking about a few good schools here and there. All 4,900 schools are engaged in the reform.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WHOLE-SYSTEM REFORM

The Big Picture

Of course, an increase in the average level of educational achievement in a society is important, but light years better is whether the gap between high and low achievers decreases as the overall average rises. Closing the gap has profound multiple benefits for both individuals and for society as a whole. Large gaps spell doom. The facts are impressive and scary.

Andreas Schleicher (2009a) is the head of the Indicators and Analysis division of OECD. He runs PISA. In the 1960s, the United States was number one in the world in terms of the percentage of adults with high school qualifications (87%); by the 1990s, they were 13th. In 1995, the United States was number one in post-secondary graduation rates and they spent the most money per student. By 2005, they still spent the most money per student, but by that time they were surpassed by Australia and 12 other countries.

The PISA assessments themselves are based on large samples of 15-year-olds who are tested in literacy, math, and science not on a narrow base of knowledge but rather “looking ahead to how well they can extrapolate from what they have learned and apply their knowledge and skills in novel settings” (Schleicher, 2009a). For example, in science, PISA measures knowledge (knowledge of and about science), and science competencies (ability to identify, explain, and use scientific evidence).

The more telling result is whether a country is able to get both high average test scores (in science, math, and literacy) and have low income-based inequality (what PISA calls “social equity” [Schleicher, 2009a; 2009b], relative to other countries. To use the United States as reference point, there are 18 countries that have surpassed them in literacy, math, and science over the last 30 years (Finland, Canada, Sweden, Australia, South Korea, etc., etc.).

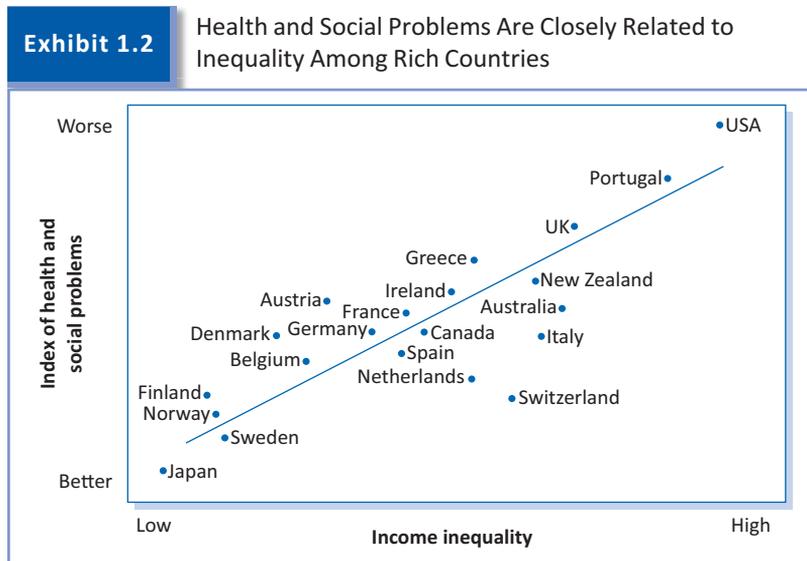
In further analysis of the economic impact of the achievement gap, Michael Barber and his colleagues at McKinsey (McKinsey & Co., 2009) conclude that “these education gaps impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a *permanent national recession*” (p. 5, emphasis in original). McKinsey & Co. calculates that, had the United States closed the education achievement gap to levels comparable to Finland and Korea, the impact on GDP would be 1.3 to 2.3 trillion higher (a 9%–16% increase); if the gap between black and Latino student performance and white student performance was similarly narrowed, the GDP would have been 310 to 525 billion higher; if the gap between low-income and high-income students were narrowed, the contribution to the GDP would be 400 to 670 billion higher. And so on.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2008) draws a similar conclusion in their report “Dropouts, Diplomas, and Dollars.” As the Alliance reports, for every 100 ninth-grade students, only 40 enroll in college, only 27 are still enrolled in their sophomore year, and only 18 graduate from college or university. The figures are worse for Hispanics and Blacks. The costs to individuals and society are enormous. The dropouts themselves suffer the most direct impact. Society also suffers. If the students who dropped out in 2008 had actually graduated, the nation would have benefited from an additional \$319 billion in income over their lifetimes, not to mention savings in health costs, prisons, and the like (p. 2).

The Even Bigger Picture

We have already seen that the United States spends much more per pupil on education than any other country, *and* they have one of the most unequal distributions of education attainment, with large gaps between high and low performers, *and* countries with lower gaps have better literacy, science, and math

scores. Let's cut quickly to the biggest picture. Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009)—just considering the richest countries in the world (i.e., the OECD group)—document in compelling detail “why more equal societies almost always do better.” We can just take one of over a dozen similar graphs presented by Wilkinson and Pickett. Exhibit 1.2 displays the relationship between income inequality and an index of health and social problems.



Source: Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p. 20.

Income inequality (remember the comparison involves only the richest countries in the world) is associated with lower levels of trust, more mental illness, lower life expectancy, obesity, children's educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates, and so on. It is true that the rich are better off than the poor in all societies, but by comparison across societies, whether rich or poor, you do worse in an unequal society. Wilkinson and Pickett show this to be the case for diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and lung and heart disease (p. 192). As one further illustration, the death rates in the lowest classes in Sweden (the more equal society) are lower than the death rates in the highest class in England and Wales (the less equal society).

Let's leave aside the moral argument that higher percentages of poor people in an unequal rich society live lives of misery and die earlier, and let's just consider the societal costs. Unequal rich societies face greater costs on just about every dimension that counts: health, delinquency, incarceration, death, violence, social cohesion, civic engagement (including voting), and of course economic losses in the billions. All of this is compounded in light of the fact that many other countries are on the move to greater equality and prosperity in a globally competitive world.

CONCLUSION

We saw a glimpse of whole-system reform in the first half of this chapter. It involves *all* schools in the system getting better, including reducing the gap between high and low performers. Whole-system reform produces higher levels of education performance on important cognitive and social learning goals, and it does so while reducing the gap toward a more equal public education system. I did not feature the United States in whole-system reform examples in this chapter because there are no examples of whole states achieving this level of coherence and focus. (There are isolated districts that have accomplished systemwide reform—these are taken up in Chapter 3—and Darling-Hammond [2010] has found that some states have been on the right track for short periods of time.)

We also saw why whole-system reform matters so much, both in direct terms and in almost all aspects of societal functioning. Of course, there is a tricky chicken-and-egg relationship between unequal income distribution and unequal education attainment in a society. Later on, I will acknowledge the need for non-school policies and strategies to address inequality, but this book is primarily about what the education sector can contribute to reducing inequality. The answer is that a great deal can be done, and we know how to do it. In fact, it is possible with focused effort that effective schools and systems can virtually eliminate the role of socioeconomic status (SES) in determining educational attainment. The correlation between SES and education success can at least be greatly reduced if not eliminated altogether. But first, we need to address what not to do—mainly because it wastes valuable resources while the clock continues to tick downward.