



What's a world class school district?

...thoughts from Get to Great, a program for school districts that seek the highest levels of success.

Strategic thinking and design are known to be based on a clear view of a compelling destination that cannot be achieved by continuous improvement or redoubling of efforts. In education we are far better at defining good than we are at defining great. Good means test scores well above any notations of failure, passing of budgets, no major turmoil, many kids getting into good colleges. And so on. Good is often defined by what goes in rather than what comes out. Good class sizes, good resources per student, good credentials of teachers, good building conditions.

Much of this goodness is defined as meeting or exceeding standards set. The problem with compliance with standards—even when called “quality standards” is that they may or may not be powerful predictors of learning success for students. For example, the expectations and energy level of teachers has more to do with student outcomes than whether these teachers have a masters or doctoral degree.

To get to great, you need a focus on what comes out—the actual achievement that results from what goes in. Here is our take on what constitutes a world class school district.

All students are successful. No gaps between Caucasian students and persons of color or of low income families exist. Under 1% of students drop out before graduation.

Academic achievement is measured by much more than test scores. Success metrics for creativity, innovation, analysis and problem solving are also included.

All participants learn—meaning improvement in what they do to perform at higher levels. This includes teachers, administrative staff, and support staff. Learning is not just for children and adolescents.

Part of learning is innovation. At all times, a restive spirit to keep getting better is expressed as innovation, both informal and formal, to test the ability of new approaches to outperform present practices.

Learning includes not just academic achievement but exemplary character, a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement by students.

All graduates experience success in the first years after graduation, whether in a job with mobility or in additional education.

Virtually all behavior by everyone in the system is intentional to the results of academic achievement and social responsibility.

The buildings have strong positive energy that attracts people and engages them. This is energy you can feel when you walk in the door.

Great ideas and innovations come from all directions: from teachers, support staff, students, community members, administrators, and the school board. Everyone is a part of this results culture.

To be great takes this level of energy, expectations, and outcomes. Get to Great is committed to supporting school districts as they move toward becoming world class.