



Rowland Unified School District and The Ball Foundation Collaborate To Increase Student Literacy Achievement

Rex Babiera, The Ball Foundation

In September, 2008, the Board of Education of Rowland Unified School District (RUSD) and the Board of Directors of the Ball Foundation approved an agreement regarding the RUSD-Ball Partnership. The agreement represents a commitment between RUSD and the Ball Foundation to collaborate to increase student achievement in literacy over the next three years (2008-2011). The district and the foundation are eager to build on the excellent work that has been done in the first two years of partnership: a district-wide assessment of assets and aspirations related to student literacy and the development of RUSD's new strategic plan.

What Is the Work?

During the 2008-2009 school year, the district and the foundation will do the following:

- Begin to build the capacity of RUSD staff and other stakeholders to fully implement the Rowland Literacy Initiative;
- Begin to build the capacity of RUSD staff and other stakeholders to fully implement the District's Strategic Plan adopted in July 2008;
- Connect the work of the Rowland Literacy Initiative and the Strategic Plan in a coherent way so that together these two major bodies of work begin to become the way the district fulfills its mission.

Furthermore, the Ball Foundation will incorporate, teach and model a set of seven interconnected design principles as it collaborates with RUSD to accomplish the above goals. The design principles are listed and described on p. 3. For more about RUSD's new strategic plan, see story on p. 4.

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RUSD-Ball Foundation Literacy Collaboration

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Over the life of the mutual work of the district and the foundation, major cornerstones of practice and adult learning will emerge. Every action step should reflect the presence of one or more of these cornerstones. The list of partnership cornerstones includes the following:

- Engage every staff member as a learner.
- Build common understanding and agreements about literacy.
- Increase awareness and understanding of RUSD as a complex system.
- Engage parents as full partners in their students' learning journey.
- Ensure rich and diverse professional learning for all staff.
- Create a leaderful environment where each person holds himself/herself accountable.
- Use inquiry to develop common understanding and agreements about practice.
- Create networks of staff to bridge the knowing-doing gap.
- Use a new social architecture for engaging RUSD staff and stakeholders.
- Develop and use feedback loops for all staff in information-rich environments.

Engaging All Staff

All RUSD staff will be invited to participate in the work of the Rowland Literacy Initiative and the implementation of the RUSD Strategic Plan. All staff members will engage at one of the following levels:

Information and knowledge exchange level: Maintain awareness,

support colleagues through two-way communication and feedback.

Network engagement level: Serve as a member of one or more learning networks with the goal of developing communities of practice.

Leaderful level: Serve as a member of a learning network and serve as a member of a Partnership Team in order to assure coherence among all networks and levels of engagement. The Partnership Team will be comprised of district and foundation representatives. It will be empowered to establish and guide the strategic direction of the collaboration between RUSD and the Ball Foundation, to construct and review the associated budget, to communicate with all stakeholders, and to make decisions about the mutual work.

About Networks

The district, with the foundation's support, will create learning networks that hold the potential to develop into communities of practice. A learning network is simply a group of people that come together to find others engaged in similar work; it connects educators with shared interests or shared roles together to learn and deepen their understanding about literacy teaching and learning.

The intent is for networks eventually to mature into and/or spin-off multiple communities of practice. A community of practice is a group of people who make a commitment to one another to refine and develop shared practices and deepen their col-

Ball Foundation Design Principles for Organizational Learning

Build shared purpose	Bring people together to discover what they really care about, to determine their highest aspirations for students, and invite them into something larger than themselves.
Create adaptive solutions	Co-create with partners ways to acquire, share and use information that generate new relationships and connections to solve problems.
Use inquiry to guide practice	Bring people together in dialogue, in learning and reflection where they ask questions that matter, seek relevant information and data, and plan and implement actions with ongoing feedback.
Build on assets	Identify and build on strengths, values, traditions, practices and accomplishments.
Access the capacity of stakeholders	Engage staff, students, parents and community members in learning about the district, sharing what is important and making choices about what is best for the school district.
Work in systemic ways	Engage people in ways that help them gain access to each other and to information and see interconnections among grade levels, subject areas, schools, families, neighborhoods, processes and relationships.
Attend to content and process	Create learning processes that make meaning and find connections among ideas, people and situations.

lective expertise in a specific area.

Learning opportunities for these networks will be based upon recognition and support of the belief that the district already possesses collective wisdom and expertise. Learning networks will be designed and supported so that participants will ask and answer four questions with one another:

- **What are we doing?** (shared understanding of goals and outcomes)
- **How are we doing it?** (understanding of and deepening expertise around shared practices)
- **How will we know we are doing it?** (understanding of and deepening expertise around ways to gather evidence for decision-making, including artifacts of student

learning)

- **Who else needs to be in the conversation?** (understanding and honoring the wisdom that resides in the system)

The Ball Foundation and RUSD look forward to an exciting and challenging three years. We believe that learning is the pathway to change. Our collaboration will connect district stakeholders to each other and to the information generated in their mutual work in order to ensure a culture in which instructional, leadership, and organizational practices change in fundamental ways in and across all levels of the system in order to support high literacy achievement for all students.■

For more information about networks and communities of practice:

Wheatley, M. and Frieze, D., *Using emergence to take social innovation to scale*, available on-line at www.margaretwheatley.com

Transforming a School District Through Strategic Planning

Chris Ericson, Rowland Unified School District

Transforming a good school district into a great one is an inspiring and daunting undertaking. The Rowland Unified School District in Southern California is currently engaged in this effort. In the 2007-2008 school year, the district began a strategic planning process to transform itself into an outstanding district that prepares students for success in the global society they live in.

The significance of the work resulted in relationships that will transcend this specific time together.

In October 2007, the district began working with Dr. Bill Cook of the Cambridge Group. According to Dr. Cook, strategic planning concentrates all efforts on "re-creation to achieve extraordinary purpose." To this end, a core planning team, including broad representation of district and community members, developed a strategic plan including a mission, beliefs, objectives, parameters and eight strategies for accomplishing the mission. Action teams, again comprised of broad representation, were then formed for each of the eight strategies listed below:

1. We will ensure that each student's individual learning plan actualizes his/her multi-dimensional po-

- tential.
2. We will transform teaching and learning to ensure the actualization of each student's unique potential.
3. We will ensure optimal learning environments that nurture the actualization of each student's potential.
4. We will provide all students with an array of learning experiences in a global context.
5. We will ensure superior classified and certificated staff.
6. We will engage all families as active participants in student learning.
7. We will ensure the district has a reciprocal relationship with the community.
8. We will ensure a coherent, constantly emerging system.

These teams spent the following five months developing action plans to realize the strategy in support of the mission. The Board of Education approved the strategic plan in July 2008, and the district is now working on defining a five-year implementation plan.

There is a great deal to be learned from the work ahead but several insights have already emerged. First, the power of collaboration, both for the betterment of the work as well as relationship building, was reaffirmed. The action plans, when fully implemented, will transform teaching and learning and positively impact the district's organizational design. In addition, many action team members have become true colleagues after

having been mere acquaintances. The significance of the work resulted in relationships that will transcend this specific time together.

Second, the district has the talent and knowledge in its staff and community to achieve our mission. The plans developed reflect an understanding of the work that needs to be done and confidence that it will be accomplished. Members of the organization and our community partners need to recognize their importance and responsibility to accomplishing the mission. Everyone must feel connected and know that their talents and skills are valued.

Third, while there is power in the process, strategic planning is a commitment to achieve measurable results. Objectives have been defined and action steps developed, but the question, "How will we know that we

have achieved our desired results?" is still to be answered. This is a critical element, as the success of the plan will be determined by the results it produces.

The Ball Foundation has played an integral role in strategic planning. In addition to providing financial support, the foundation staff were active participants in the core and action team work, stimulating thought through inquiry, providing outside expertise and resources, and serving as critical friends. The district values the partnership with the Ball Foundation and looks forward to our future work together.

There is much excitement and curiosity surrounding the strategic plan. It is with eagerness and confidence that Rowland moves forward and take the next steps in the journey from good to great.■

Rowland Unified School District Mission Statement

The mission of Rowland Unified School District, the progressive international community united in learning, is to empower students so that each actualizes his or her unique potential and responsibly contributes to a global society, through a system distinguished by rigorous academics, innovative use of technology, creative exploration, and nurturing learning experiences.

Commitment to Family Engagement Endures in Springfield

Rex Babiera

The Ball Foundation completed a multi-year partnerships with Springfield (IL) Public School District 186 in 2007. To help understand what impact the partnership continues to have, evaluators from Phillips Wyatt Knowlton, Inc. conducted a sustainability study during the 2007-2008 school year. Results from this study were presented to the foundation in July.

The final years of the Ball Foundation's work in Springfield focused on family engagement to support student literacy achievement. Focus groups and interviews were conducted to tease out answers to three broad questions: What endures from the Ball Foundation partnership? What was the impact of the partnership work? How is the work continuing now and into the future?

The sustainability study found significant effects on district culture, organizational conditions, and family engagement knowledge and skills. First, there was evidence of **an enduring district culture characterized by shared understanding and stronger engagement**. For example, there is a new mindset: parents are seen and treated as partners. Springfield's educators also reported increased sensitivity to bring out "all the voices in the room," less blaming, more mutual accountability, and fewer barriers to discuss cultural issues.

Second, the study found that the district's **approach to family engage-**

ment was integrated, adaptive, and intentional. A strong emphasis on collaborative planning among interdisciplinary teams has resulted in less segmentation and duplication of family engagement practices at the district level. At the school level, parent educators now serve on school instructional leadership teams and triads of schools are regularly meeting. In addition, teachers report that professional development in family engagement practices is dramatically different, "more professional."

Third, the family engagement **content introduced during the partnership continues to be relevant and useful**. The study found that there is common terminology and language around family engagement. Furthermore, there is a shared, research-based list of promising practices and a common understanding of the Joyce Epstein model for school, family, and community partnerships. District administrators and school principals are also continuing to engage in some communities of practice around specific topics in family engagement. The study also found that this content knowledge is being supported by stronger facilitation skills, improved meeting design, more structured interactions, and proactive use of data and protocols.

However, the district faces both opportunities and challenges in sustaining this work. Springfield educators reported both facilitators and barriers (see Table 1) to building on the momentum created through the Ball Foundation partnership.

Table 1: Some Facilitators and Barriers to Sustaining Family Engagement Work

Facilitators:

- Stronger, clearer ties between family engagement and literacy goals
- Planning time built into training sessions
- Trusting relationships that have been built over the years
- Better vertical articulation for the central office

Barriers:

- Focus on family engagement is not yet as prominent in middle and high schools as in elementary schools
- District family engagement structures may not reach all families
- Several competing views of family engagement remain
- District-wide evaluation plan for family engagement is needed

Nonetheless, the district is optimistic about the future of family engagement. There is a vision for more adults to be in the lives of Springfield’s children. Those interviewed spoke of the potential for growth (whole-city partnerships and resource centers, for example) and for the work to translate into better community perception and support for schools. In summary, the study found a high level of commitment to continue to deepen the family engagement work across the district. ■

The Ball Foundation Family Literacy Symposium and Workshop

The Ball Foundation sponsored two related events in the area of family literacy to support academic research and school district practices that effectively harness the literate culture of the home in service to school-based learning:

Family Literacy Symposium, October 2-3, 2008

Experts in the field of family literacy were invited to present their research and participate in a conversation intended to create new paradigms for family literacy research and practice. Key representatives from Ball Foundation district partners as well as educational organizations were also invited to engage in this discussion. Participants will be engaged in a deep conversation around the topic, **“The Family Literacy Research We Have; The Family Literacy Research That We Need.”** At press time, presenters included the following:

Patricia Edwards	Lesley Mandel Morrow
Geneva Gay	Luis Moll
Shirley Brice Heath	Jeanne Paratore
Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey	Flora Rodriguez-Brown
Gay Ivey	Cathy Roller
Gloria Ladsen-Billings	Nancy Roser
Diane Lapp	Denny Taylor

A book to be published by the International Reading Association will include chapters written by the invited experts, revised according to the insights and issues raised by the symposium participants.

Family Literacy Workshop, October 3-4, 2008

The purpose of this workshop was to assist school districts in refining goals and developing plans for creating effective family literacy initiatives. The focus, **“Creating Home-like Schools,”** was intended to allow teachers, administrators, and support personnel to learn about the cultural practices, home-based and out-of-school literate discourses, and community competencies that can serve as a resource for students’ in-school academic literacies. Participants came from districts and schools affiliated with the Ball Foundation.

The Ball Foundation is a family-funded operating foundation based in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Established in 1975 by G. Carl Ball and Vivian Elledge Ball, it conducts programs in two areas: Career Vision and Education Initiatives. *Review*, the newsletter of Education Initiatives, is published three times a year. If you have any questions or comments please call 630.469.6270 or e-mail Rex Babiera, *Review* Editor, at rbabiera@ballfoundation.org.

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