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## **Research or “Cheerleading”? Scholarship on Community School District 2, New York City**

**Lois Weiner  
New Jersey City University**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines data on student achievement and school demographics not explored by the researchers who have promoted Community School District 2 (CSD 2) as a model of urban school reform that should be replicated elsewhere. Data on achievement indicate a remarkable degree of social and racial stratification among CSD 2's schools and levels of achievement that closely correlate with race, ethnicity, and poverty. In addition, when CSD 2's scores on state and city tests of mathematics are compared with results from CSD 25 in Queens, a school district that serves a population demographically similar, the superiority of its functioning becomes questionable. The article explains why the design of research on CSD 2 illustrates the perils to both

research and policy when university-based researchers assume the role of “cheerleader” (Cuban, 1988), promoting reforms they have aided in implementing and assessing.

The direct assistance that university-based researchers provide to school systems involved in reform is generally accepted as positive, strengthening the relationship between theory and practice and in the process improving both. However, as Cuban (1988) notes in his “word to the wise” about researchers advising policymakers, “the legacy of disappointment with researchers who have been cheerleaders for this or that approach to be used in classrooms is not one to be envied” (p. 293). In this study I explain how reform in Community School District 2 in Manhattan and researchers’ roles in advising, assessing, and promoting the reform model adopted by CSD 2 and teacher union officials illustrate the perils to education and research when researchers become “cheerleaders” for reforms. (Note 1)

## **Background and Significance of the Study**

In debates about how to improve student achievement in urban school districts, Community School District 2's (CSD 2) strategy of using professional development to implement national standards has been put forward as exemplary, an illustration of public education's viability in the nation's cities (Elmore, 1999-2000; Elmore & Burney, 1997a; Elmore & Burney, 1997b; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Elmore & Burney, February 1999). Research reports have heralded CSD 2's focus on a centralized system of professional development linked to national standards as being the key to improving achievement in urban schools (Fink & Resnick, 1999; Resnick & Harwell, 2000; Stein, D'Amico & Johnstone, April 1999). CSD 2's model is described by its most recent Superintendent as “delivering a world class education for every student through a redesigned labor management system that supports high performance learning communities utilizing the New Standards ‘performance standards’ along with city and state assessments” (Harwayne, 2000). Typical of the commendation of CSD 2 produced by researchers who have aided the district is this description:

Over an eleven-year period, Community School District Two in New York City has amassed a strong record of successful school improvement in a very diverse urban school setting. Not only have test scores risen, but there is also a remarkable professional spirit among the teachers, principals, and central staff members of the district, which has 22,000 students in 45 schools (Fink & Resnick, 1999, p 3).

Publications ranging from the *The Wall Street Journal* to the monthly magazine of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have praised the model. In this article I scrutinize evidence for the claims that the model has been successful and that it can and should be replicated in other urban school systems. Scholarship on CSD 2 that promotes its success identifies the district and key personnel by name; my discussion adopts the same protocol. My rationale for naming the district and researchers is that commendations of the model have linked it explicitly to CSD 2 officials and have created a legitimacy, among politicians and in the media. The model has attracted attention even beyond urban school districts. One high-ranking state education official in Vermont pressed for CSD 2's curricular practices and

professional development model to be adopted there (personal communication with Vermont college administrator, April 2001).

### **Sources of the Data for the Study**

I examine reports of researchers who have worked with CSD 2 officials to design, implement, and assess the district's reforms. I also draw on publicly available data on school achievement and demographics published in *The New York Times*, and on the New York State Department of Education and New York City Board of Education websites. To my knowledge although these data are easily accessible, they have not been used heretofore to compare student achievement in CSD 2 with achievement in other districts with comparable demographics. Other data sources I use are personal correspondence with CSD 2 teachers, copies of memos sent to faculty by school administrators in CSD 2, an unpublished report on CSD 2's math curriculum produced by a group of parents and mathematics professors at New York University, and field notes following conversations with principals, teachers union officials and teachers in CSD 2 schools.

All teachers and school administrators employed in CSD 2 who spoke and corresponded with me were informed beforehand that I might use the information they provided in a published study. In each case the people I interviewed or who provided me with memos did so on the condition that they remain anonymous as the source of information. All cited fear of reprisals from supervisors as the reason for confidentiality. I gathered information from four administrators (in three schools), ten teachers (in three schools), and four people holding elected positions in the teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT).

My access to informants in CSD 2 was facilitated by contacts I made in the course of my participation as a parent-activist in the John Melser Charrette School, or as it is more commonly called, PS 3 (Weiner, 2002). PS 3 is an arts-based, alternative school started by parents, with a unique history that makes it simultaneously a "school of choice" and a regular zoned school for the neighborhood, Greenwich Village (Zuckerman, 2001). PS 3 is probably one of the "off the screen" schools that CSD 2 officials identify as "not working within the District #2 framework. While student achievement in some cases is fairly strong, the district leadership has concerns about the quality of instruction and or leadership in these schools" (D'Amico, van den Heuvel, & Harwell, 2000, p. 6). My initial examination of research on achievement in CSD 2 stemmed from my interest in understanding if PS 3 was considered "off the screen" and if so, why. According to published test scores, PS 3 maintained the same level of achievement as the other school serving Greenwich Village, and I wanted to know the source of CSD 2 officials' concerns about its instruction or leadership.

However, the focus and scope of my inquiry changed after my preliminary look at data on achievement in other schools in CSD 2 and New York City. The overwhelming presence of racial and social segregation in CSD 2 schools and the correlations between segregation and low achievement levels prompted me to examine the design and conduct of research about the district's success in boosting student achievement. Both investigations are discussed in this article. The first section deals with the context in which reforms and research were formulated and the reasons critical questions were ignored; the second segment examines

data (presented in tables 1-5) that suggest why the CSD 2 model may not be as successful as it has been promoted as being, as well as reasons that it may not be replicable in most cities.

### **Insular, Self-referential Research Design**

From the start, critical perspectives on CSD 2 were omitted from research on its system of professional development, as this description indicates:

We were trying to figure out which people in the district should be interviewed and observed in order to understand how the district functioned. Someone started to diagram the way in which teachers were expected to learn from principals and professional developers and each other within their school, while at the same time principals were expected to learn from the Superintendent and Deputy and from each other how to be better at their instructional leadership job. Someone else said, "It's like those nesting dolls people like to bring back from their travels"—and the name was born. The image seems to work because the dolls are each independent, free-standing "people," yet they share a common form—and you can't decide which is the most "important" doll, the tiny one in the middle that establishes the shape for them all or the big one on the outside that encloses them all (Fink & Resnick, 1999: p. 6).

The study design supports an analogy (of nesting dolls) that seems not to be seen as simultaneously hierarchical and exclusively self-referential. The analogy is also remarkable for being static and decontextualized; relationships among the "dolls" are unaffected by "outside" influences such as parent feedback or critical perspectives that might be provided by teachers or principals who disagree with the superintendent and by other researchers, people who do not fit into the nest. Resnick observes that the doll in the middle is "tiny" and "the big one on the outside...encloses them all." One way to view the nested dolls as Resnick suggests is that they share a common form so it is not clear where the power to shape the relationship resides. But another view is certainly possible, that the outer doll shapes the configuration, and size and power diminish as one moves to the inside of the "nest." Support for this latter interpretation comes from Resnick's description of hierarchical power relations in CSD 2, that principals learn from the Superintendent and Deputy, and teachers from principals and professional developers and peers. (The addition of "peers" in this description is interesting because it does not fit the "nesting doll" analogy.) However, the research design did not address the possibility that differences in power and status among the nesting dolls corresponded to historically derived bureaucratic relations in urban school systems (Tyack, 1974) that have been identified by a considerable amount of research, for instance Freedman (1987) and Knapp (1995), as engendering teacher dissatisfaction and "burnout."

One result of the self-referential nature of the research design, clear from the "nesting doll" analogy that was adopted, was lack of attention to the controversies that have roiled in CSD 2, especially centering on the math curriculum that is mandated in every school. An unpublished report of a group of parents and professors organized to oppose the District's math curriculum, written by a

mathematics professor at New York University, noted that parent and teacher dissatisfaction with the curriculum and its inflexible implementation were significant. My interviews with teachers confirmed the NYU report's finding that there was widespread fear that teachers would be disciplined if they supplemented the mandated curriculum with other materials to prepare students for city-wide tests. District officials refused to approve any orders for math workbooks to be used as supplements to the official materials. In some schools, teachers resorted to photocopying entire books for their classes, with tacit support of principals who turned a blind eye to the practice. (Note 2)

Despite its reputation as a powerful political force, the United Federation of Teachers had not positioned itself as an advocate for teachers, who expressed fears of being disciplined for not "toeing the line" with regard to CSD 2 curricular and instructional mandates. On the contrary, the UFT's parent organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) promoted CSD 2's policies in the union's national magazine (*American Educator*, 1999-2000). Two "chapter chairs," (personal communication, May 2000), teachers who are elected to be the union representatives in the building, who hear teachers' problems and begin the grievance process, noted that they viewed the UFT leadership as reluctant to pursue teachers' complaints, formally or informally.

Clear evidence of teacher dissatisfaction with the UFT's stance towards CSD 2 surfaced in the Spring 2000 election for the UFT's district representative. Since creation of the community school districts in New York City as a response to the call for community control, the UFT has had a parallel organizational structure. Each community school district in New York has a union representative, a "district rep" who negotiates issues of local concern with the district administration. The "district rep" is elected by chapter chairs, but elections are almost always *pro forma* because of the UFT leadership's control of the union apparatus (Weiner, 1998). However, CSD 2 chapter chairs elected a teacher running against the "heir apparent" of the UFT leadership (personal communication, chapter chair in CSD 2, May 2000). The UFT's position was that though CSD 2's administration often had trouble "hearing what teachers had to say," nevertheless CSD 2 officials had to be supported; their model of reform was not only superior to others, it was the only one that could convince the public that city schools could be salvaged (private conversation with UFT President, Randi Weingarten, Oct. 2000). The vote for the CSD 2 "district rep" demonstrated that chapter chairs rejected the UFT leadership's stance toward CSD 2 officials. Their dissatisfaction certainly raises questions about the extent to which the CSD 2's strategy for labor-management relations will be supported by teachers elsewhere. Yet opposition among CSD 2 teachers to district policies and the UFT's support of them is absent in research on CSD 2.

Problems arising from the insularity of the researchers and of the design of the research itself appear in what was perhaps the key study. As Harwell, D'Amico, Stein, and Gatti (2000) note "A shortcoming shared by previous research done on the effectiveness of District #2's professional development system...was that the units of analysis used in these studies were schools. As a result, variation among students' performance and teachers' experiences within schools was ignored"(p.7). Hence their study attempts to correlate achievement on tests with teachers' professional development by examining test scores of individual students taught by teachers who described their professional development experiences in

questionnaires. However, the questionnaire required teachers to provide their New York City Board of Education ID or “file” numbers (often used in lieu of names to locate personnel in official records) and their schools.

Readers of HPLC’s research reports will not know this fact. The consent form included in the appendix (Harwell, D’Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000) is not a duplicate of the form distributed to teachers, with which I was provided by teachers in two different schools. (Note 3) A cover letter from Deputy Superintendent Bea Johnstone (2000), also omitted from the appendix (Harwell, D’Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000), an appendix cited in the subsequent study (D’Amico, Harwell, Stein, van den Heuvel, April 2001) refers to this request for teachers’ file numbers. The letter states “The survey asks for your name and your teacher folder number, so that the information gained from it can be linked to other data collected in the course of the HPLC study” but that “individual responses will *not* [emphasis in the original] be seen by other members of the District #2 community.” Another startling error in the formulation of the questionnaire, also absent from the appendix, is the consent form’s listing of Anthony Alvarado, CSD 2’s former Superintendent, as a Principal Investigator, with his institutional affiliation given as CSD 2’s office ( “Consent to act as a participant in a research study” University of Pittsburgh IRB# 980136). Alvarado was not Superintendent when the questionnaire was distributed. Rather, Elaine Fink, a CSD 2 deputy superintendent with whom he continued to collaborate professionally, had replaced him (New York City Board of Education, 2000). It seems apparent that Johnstone’s letter to CSD 2 teachers was designed to address teacher apprehensions about the confidentiality of the questionnaire. (Note 4) CSD 2 chapter chairs communicated informally about what they should tell teachers who feared that completed questionnaires would not be confidential (personal communication with two chapter leaders). The poor return rate and the subsequent offer of \$500 to any school with a high return rate seem strong evidence that the two chapter chairs who told me that they had informally advised teachers to avoid filling out the questionnaire were not alone.

## **CSD 2: Not a Typical Urban District**

Another key fact about CSD 2 that is not fully addressed in reports by researchers who promote it as a model is the district’s access to human and material resources that urban districts typically lack. The “variability” and variation among schools and neighborhoods--the term used to describe CSD 2’s demographics (Elmore & Burney, 1999a; Fink & Resnick, 1999)--fails to convey the numerous advantages afforded CSD 2 by the sizable numbers of economically comfortable families who send their children to public school. One study acknowledges that District #2 is “a fairly wealthy urban district... the fourth wealthiest community school district in New York City...and in the upper quartile for urban districts nationally” (Harwell, D’Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 9). Surprisingly the implications of this important characteristic are not explored. Reports mention that CSD 2 encompasses a broad swath of Manhattan’s wealthiest real estate and most of its prosperous neighborhoods. However, what the reports do not explore is the extent to which the district’s concentration of wealthy neighborhoods may spare its central office and many of its schools the psychological and fiscal demands present in most urban school systems, demands that might be summarized as “Keeping students in, gangs out, scores up, alienation down, and the copy machine in working order: Pressures that make urban schools in poverty different” (Metz, 1997).

Research does not explain that CSD 2's showcase, the elementary school touted as having the highest test scores in New York City, is PS 234, in the heart of Tribeca. A ZIP-code by ZIP-code analysis of the New York real estate market found that Tribeca "was the highest priced residential neighborhood in Manhattan last year" (Hevesi, 2002). A report on median sale prices for apartments in Manhattan (Hevesi, 2002) shows how affluent almost all of CSD 2's neighborhoods actually are. Chelsea registered the third highest average price (\$1,024,850) for apartments in Manhattan, due to loft conversions that have turned warehouses into art galleries. CSD 2 now contains only one large area inhabited primarily by families living in poverty, Chinatown, populated in great part by newly arrived immigrants. Poverty in the rest of CSD 2 occurs primarily where there are housing projects amid gentrification.

As Tables 1, 2, and 3 show, CSD 2 differs demographically from other New York City districts, especially those with low levels of student achievement. The largest minority population in CSD 2 schools is Asian, and the Asian and white population combined constitute 65% of the students served. In New York City schools, the combined Asian & white figure is 27% (New York City Board of Education, 2000). Data on the school report cards for each school in CSD 2 show that schools in Chinatown serve the highest proportions of students in CSD 2 who are English-language learners, the designation for students who have been in the US for three years or less. (Note 5) In many other districts in New York City, the immigrant population is primarily Spanish-speaking.

New York City designates elementary schools with a "need factor" from 1 to 12, based on the percentage of students categorized as English Language Learners, students identified as eligible for special education, and students eligible for free or reduced lunch. The higher the number, the greater the need of schools for services. As shown in Table 4, more than a third of CSD 2 schools have a "need factor" of only one, two, or three. The "need factor" in these schools indicates that they have a student composition that more closely approximates what teachers would find in the suburban school systems close to the city, where there is no teacher shortage (Institute for Education & Social Policy, 2001). Another important fact that research on CSD 2's professional development fails to address, suggested by scholarship about how teachers' social class influences their work (Metz 1990), is that many teachers attracted to and recently hired by CSD 2 may want to work with administrators, other teachers, and perhaps students, who share their social class origins, aspirations, and world-view. One veteran African-American teacher in a CSD 2 school suggested this possibility to me, noting that minority graduates of "City" (City College, of City University of New York) feel that it is highly unlikely they will be hired by CSD 2 officials. Another factor is that minority graduates of "City" don't want to teach in CSD 2 because they are committed to working in places they see as high need. (Note 6)

## **Student Achievement in CSD 2**

What are the implications of these demographic characteristics of CSD 2? In this section, I examine the extent of racial and economic segregation in CSD 2 schools and compare this to achievement on standardized math tests. I compare data on CSD 2 to equivalent data for the only other school district in all of New York City

and New York State to be roughly equivalent in its demographics, District 25 in Queens.

Data on test scores and family income in each school in New York City's public schools, published in *The New York Times* (Goodnough, 2000), reveal the extent to which CSD 2's demographics are *unrepresentative* of other districts in New York City and of urban school districts in New York State as well. Compare, for instance, test results published in October 2000 for CSD 2 in Manhattan and District 8 in the Bronx. Both were reported as enrolling approximately the same number of students, CSD 2 with 2,204, District 8 with 2,374. Yet CSD 2 had 12 elementary schools out of 26 with fewer than 50% of its students qualifying for free lunch, whereas District 8 had one out of 20 (Goodnough, 2000). To pursue the issue of District' 2s representativeness, which I propose as a key consideration in evaluating whether it can indeed be a model for urban school districts elsewhere, I examined demographic data for each county on the New York State Department of Education website ( Table 1).(<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov>).

**Table 1**

**Comparison of Student Demographics in urban school districts in New York State, Fall 1997\***

District	CSD 25, Queens	CSD 2, Manhattan	Yonkers
Total	24,127	22,212	23,968
White	28.2%	31.2%	23.3%
Black	9.1%	13.8%	30.4%
Hispanic	24.4%	21.1%	41.5%
Other	38.4%	33.8%	4.8%
Free/Reduced lunch	48.5%	51.3%	74.7%
Limited English	19.1%	16.9%	16.4%

\*Data from the NY State Education Department school district profiles, downloaded on Jan. 31,2002: [http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/ch655\\_99/D662300.html](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/ch655_99/D662300.html).

As Table 1 shows, the only district in New York State outside of those in New York City that enrolls about the same number of students as CSD 2 is Yonkers. In this comparison two factors that distinguish CSD 2 are its relatively (for an urban district) low percentage of students who qualify for free/reduced lunch and its racial and ethnic mix of students. Examining demographics for each of the community school districts in New York City, I found only *one*, CSD 25 in Queens, that closely resembles CSD 2 in the number of students served (between 20-24,000), the proportion of students reported as eligible to receive free/reduced lunch (between 50-60%), and the student body's ethnic/racial composition (around 10% Black, 30% Hispanic, 30% White, 35% Asian). Note also how the demographics of CSD 2 differ from the characteristics of the New York City school system as a whole: nearly 75%

of the children the city school system serves are eligible for free/reduced lunch; more than a third are Black; close to 40% are Hispanic; Asian students (identified as “other” on the school report cards) represent only a little over 10%.

I wish to caution that a complete analysis of the implications of the demographic differences would require close examination of data disaggregated by race and ethnicity that were not publicly available from New York State and New York City until 2002 (email communication, New York State Dept. of Education Data Analyst). The discussion that follows is, therefore, suggestive of the questions that the demographic differences ought to raise. I do not present my discussion as being other than suggestive. Asian students in CSD 2, the largest minority proportionally, would be categorized in John Ogbu’s typology (Ogbu, Sept. 1995; Ogbu, Dec. 1995) as “voluntary” (as opposed to “involuntary”) minorities.

Ogbu posits that minorities, who emigrate voluntarily, are more likely to experience racism in school and society as barriers to overcome. In contrast, because of their history of oppression by the dominant culture, involuntary minorities are more likely to see racism as a permanent impediment to achievement. Unlike most other districts in New York City and urban districts in New York State, CSD 2’s single largest minority population consists of voluntary minorities (Table 2). Both Ogbu’s typology and the categories used to report demographics in New York schools (Black, White, Hispanic, Other- Asian and Pacific Islander) obscure very important differences among these populations. As Cooper and Denner (1998) noted, a limitation in the analytical framework Ogbu employs is its lack of emphasis on variation and change within communities, especially upwardly mobile ethnic minority families and children. Gibson (1997) argued that Ogbu's typology fails to account for intragroup variability and is too “dichotomous, too deterministic, and in danger of contributing to stereotypical images...”(p. 322). She faults the theory for not taking into account generational and gender differences, as well as lacking explanatory power to account for the experience of groups such as Mexican Americans, who share elements of both categories. Moreover, she contends, the theory fails to take into account school effects and human agency. While acknowledging the limitations in Ogbu’s typology, I suggest that his theory helps illuminate why school and instructional practices that are successful with one group of students may not be equally effective with another, and thus his typology is germane to discussions of CSD 2’s achievements.

**Table 2**

**Comparison of Demographics of CSD 2 and CSD 25**

	<b>NYC</b>	<b>CSD 25, Queens</b>	<b>CSD 2, Manhattan</b>
Total enrollment	NA on report card	24,499	21,559
White	15.3%	26.3%	31.9%
Black	34.2%	8.4%	13.8%

Hispanic	38.9%	25.3%	20.1%
Other -Asian, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, Native Americans	11.5%	40.1%	34.2%
Free/Reduced lunch	74.1	50.4%	59.9
Recent immigrants	7.3%	12.3%	9.2%
Limited English	NA on report card	4557 students	2940 students

Another, thornier problem with applying Ogbu’s analysis is that New York City Board of Education’s demographic data do not parallel Ogbu’s categories. For example, the category “English Language Learners” describes recent immigrants both from Puerto Rico and Peru; “Hispanic” students are those with Spanish surnames; students from British Guayana, who are “voluntary” minorities might be labeled “Black,” placing them with African Americans, “involuntary” minorities. Although I group students categorized as “Hispanic” in with those categorized as “Black” in the analysis, I caution that some of these students may share the cultural framework of reference of “voluntary” and not “involuntary minorities.”

I divided CSD 2's 25 elementary schools into two categories: those serving a population more than 50% combined Black and Hispanic students with a “need” factor of 7 or greater, and those with fewer than 50% Black and Hispanic students and a “need” factor less than 7. In CSD 2 there are 11 schools with a “need” factor over 7. Five of these 11 schools are high-poverty schools in Chinatown. Table 3 shows the breakdown of schools in both districts, according to these criteria. I have eliminated the schools in Chinatown from this comparison to look at achievement of majority Black and Hispanic schools in both districts.

Elmore and Burney (1999b) note that 18 schools in CSD 2 have populations more than two-thirds African-American, Hispanic, and Asian, while four have populations that are more than two-thirds white . As noted earlier, the implications of this finding of “variability” are not explored further, in particular the extent to which achievement in CSD 2 schools correlates with their racial and social stratification. As is evident from Table 3, only one elementary school, PS 11, has a student population that mirrors the district’s demographics. In CSD 2, 5 of the 11 schools with a “need” factor 7 and above are in Chinatown and have a population that is more than 70% Asian. For instance PS 42, with a “need” factor of 10 (94.2% of its students receive free/reduced lunch and 18.9% are ELL) enrolls 88% Asian students. What is not evident in statistical analyses is that PS 11 also has a very large “gifted and talented” program in which almost all of its White students are enrolled (personal communication, CSD 2 administrator). Hence, the one elementary school that is demographically representative of the district’s enrollment houses two different schools, one serving White students in its “gifted and talented” students, the other Black and Hispanic students. The school’s scores are reported in the aggregate.

**Table 3**

**Elementary Schools Serving a Population More Than 50% Combined Black**

**and Hispanic Students with a “Need” Factor of 7 or Greater**

School	“Need”	% Hispanic	% Black
CSD 25: PS 201	10	29%	40%
School	“Need”	% Hispanic	% Black
CSD 2: PS 11	7	31%	26%
CSD 2: PS 33	10	52	27
CSD 2: PS 51	10	61	18
CSD 2: PS 111	9	66	16
CSD 2: PS 126	7	43	30
CSD 2: PS 151	10	43	30
CSD 2: PS 198	8	52	26

Note: Data from NYCBOE website, <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/Mrr/districts>.

What is consistently referred to as “variability” or “variation” in school demographics in CSD 2 is actually a euphemism for a familiar phenomenon in US schools: racial segregation (Orfield & Eaton, 2003). The high degree of racial and social stratification is especially noteworthy in light of comparison to CSD 25. With approximately the same demographics as CSD 2, CSD 25 has only *one* school that is as racially segregated as *eleven* schools in CSD 2.

“Student Need” is a ranking of elementary schools into one of 12 categories based on the percent of students eligible for free lunch, percent of tested students who are in full-time and part-time special education programs, and the percent of tested students who are English Language Learners (ELL). The higher the numbers of students in these categories, the higher the school’s “need” factor. To understand the significance of “need,” two schools (in CSD 25 ) designated as having “need” factors of “3” and “10” are compared in Table 4. Most schools in CSD 25 have a “need” factor within the range of 3-7 (17 of 23 schools fall within this range; 6 schools are outliers). CSD 2 has only 9 of 24 that fall within this range. Seventeen of its schools fall outside this range. The comparison indicates that CSD 2’s schools are far more stratified than those in CSD 25, a district with a student enrollment that is equivalent in terms of the demographic categories used by the state.

**Table 4**

**Examples from CSD 25 of “Student Need” Categories 3 and 10 for Two Elementary Schools**

School’s need	% students receiving free/reduced	% special	%
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<b>factor</b>	<b>lunch</b>	<b>ed.</b>	<b>ELL</b>
CSD 25 School A "Need" of "3"	40%	4%	8%
CSD 25 School B "Need" of "10"	73%	36%	5%

Comparing achievement between schools in both districts, I used scores on the New York State fourth grade math test in 2000, reported in the *New York Times* (Goodnough, 2000). I compared scores of only those schools serving a majority of Black and Hispanic students. In the New York State tests, scores of level 1 and 2 indicate that the student is "not meeting standards." The results of this comparison are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

**Scores on the NYS Fourth-Grade Math Test Only in 2000  
(Elementary schools serving a population more than 50% combined Black and Hispanic students with a "need" factor of 7 or greater)**

<b>School</b>	<b>perf level 1</b>	<b>perf level 2</b>	<b>perf levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	<b>"Need" factor</b>	<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>% Black</b>
CSD 25: PS 201	17%	41%	43%	10	29	40
<b>School</b>	<b>perf level 1</b>	<b>perf level 2</b>	<b>perf levels 3 &amp; 4</b>	<b>"Need" factor</b>	<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>% Black</b>
CSD 2: PS 11	16%	16%	68%	7	31	26
CSD 2: PS 33	26%	41%	33%	10	52	27
CSD 2: PS 51	19%	59%	27%	10	61	18
CSD 2: PS 111	26%	47%	27%	9	66	16
CSD 2: PS 126	9%	45%	45%	7	39	20
CSD 2: PS 151	15%	58%	28%	10	43	30
CSD 2: PS 198	4%	20%	76%	8	52	26

Source: Reported in the *NY Times*, 15 Oct. 2000, (City section, pp. 14-16)

In Table 6, I continue the comparison of school-wide test scores, using data from the school report cards published on the New York City Board of Education website and including the number of students tested. These test scores, unlike the others I have analyzed, are for math scores in grades 3-8. Two of the schools in CSD 2 are K-8 schools, PS/IS 33 and PS/IS 111. With the exception of PS 11, which has a large “gifted and talented program” of mainly white students, *only one school in CSD 2 has a significantly higher proportion of students “meeting standards” in math than in the school with similar demographics in CSD 25.* Indeed, several CSD 2 schools *do not perform as well as PS 201 in CSD 25.*

**Table 6**

**Percentages of Students “Meeting the Standard” (i.e., Perf. Levels 3 and 4) on City-wide Math Tests in Grades 3,5,6,7 and State Math Tests in Grades 4 and 8 (including students taking the test in translation)**

<b>School</b>	<b>Meeting standard</b>	<b>“Need” factor</b>	<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>% Black</b>
CSD 25: PS 201	<b>31.5%</b> <b>(235 tested)</b>	10	29%	40%
<b>School</b>	<b>Meeting standard</b>	<b>“Need” factor</b>	<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>% Black</b>
CSD 2: PS 11 (34% white; 8% Other)	<b>50.6%</b> <b>(233 tested)</b>	7	31%	26%
CSD 2: PS/IS 33 (White 4%; Asian 37%)	<b>17.3%</b> <b>(191 tested)</b>	10	52	27
CSD 2: PS 51	<b>22.5%</b> <b>(145 tested)</b>	10	61	18
CSD 2: PS/IS 111	<b>22.5%</b> <b>(516 tested)</b>	9	66	16
CSD 2: PS 126	<b>32.6%</b> <b>(285 tested)</b>	7	43	30
CSD 2: PS 151	<b>25%</b> <b>(115 tested)</b>	10	43	30
CSD 2: PS 198	<b>53.4%</b> <b>(131 tested)</b>	8	52	26

Several questions are posed by this comparison with CSD 25, one of the most critical being what data disaggregated by race and ethnicity reveal about achievement. With the exception of the studies based on the questionnaire

requiring teachers to self-identify with file numbers (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000), reports by researchers promoting CSD 2 as exemplary do not address this question. (Note 7) But in the one study that does attempt to use data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, the investigators state their primary research question as this: "Are teachers with strong professional development participation patterns more likely to have closed achievement gaps?" (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 19). The answer: "In summary, engagement in professional development, as measured by this questionnaire and reported by the 62 respondents, does not appear to have significant influence on student achievement in either literacy or mathematics" (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000, p. 22).

## Conclusions

In spite of statements by researchers looking for evidence that CSD 2's policies have indeed boosted achievement, there are no data to support such claims (Harwell, D'Amico, Stein & Gatti, 2000). Indeed, no data support even the more modest claim of the "generally positive picture" of systemic reform in CSD 2 (Elmore & Burney, 1999a, p. 3). How then could researchers promote CSD 2's instructional development practices as unusually successful or its investment in staff development tied to national standards as a model to be emulated?

Research on CSD 2 exemplifies the problems that arise when researchers fail to maintain the independence and critique that Bourdieu (1998) demanded of intellectuals. The inter-dependence of district leaders and researchers, combined with the exclusion of dissenting perspectives, obscured key questions about CSD 2 practices that need to be explored before they can or should be replicated. From the formulation of research design, to data collection, to presentation of findings, research on CSD 2 appears to have shown a marked disregard for alternative perspectives and local knowledge. As a result, insights that might have contributed to district officials' and researchers' learning have been ignored. Researchers have published reports that have reinforced the belief among CSD 2 officials that their work is a model for the entire New York City system because it is "leading New York City in implementing Standards" (Harwayne, 1999). But comparison of existing data for CSD 25, knowledge of the social-contextual factors such as CSD 2's access to human and material resources other districts in the city lack, and the inattention to disaggregation of individual achievement according to race and ethnicity, indicate that the representation of CSD 2's practices as exemplary by researchers is unsubstantiated. The "labor-management" strategy that resulted from close relationships and consensus between high level union officials and district administrators caused significant turmoil that was not reported in the research. The consensus may not be replicable elsewhere, indeed, was probably disrupted in CSD 2 with the election of a new "district rep." The rise in achievement levels since 1989 may be due to changes in the district's demographics and not to a focus on instruction or professional development linked to national standards. Research that has attempted to link achievement to professional development has failed to find evidence of correlation, let alone establish causation.

It may be that CSD 25 is, in fact, just as promising a model of school improvement as CSD 2's. Its elementary schools are far less segregated and stratified by income than are CSD 2's. Its test scores are equivalent to those in CSD 2. It is interesting to note that the statement of its Superintendent in the 1999-2000 suggests a stance

towards students, parents, and community sharply different from that promulgated by CSD 2:

... We teach "children not merely subjects." To support this goal, the District and the Community School Board work closely to provide an integrated, holistic, comprehensive educational program which motivates and engages all students, and provides the optimum opportunity for every child to achieve state and city academic standards... . Staff are supported by professional development activities designed to help them hone their instructional skills. Parents and community members are actively involved in all schools and are recognized as valuable resources.

It may be that CSD 2 has pioneered practices that should be replicated, as the researchers who have promoted it have concluded. However, the opposite conclusion is equally plausible. It was the task of research to explore both possibilities, but the role of cheerleader seems to have over-ridden the demands of scholarship.

## Notes

1. As of 2003, the NYC Board of Education has been renamed the "Department of Education" and control over the city schools given to Mayor Bloomberg. He and his appointed Chancellor have submitted a proposal to the state legislature to merge the 32 community school districts into 10. CSD 2's present superintendent has been selected to head one of the 10 new districts.

2. Information about the group publishing the report on the math curriculum is available from Elizabeth Carson, [ecarson@nyc.rr.com](mailto:ecarson@nyc.rr.com).

3. I informed Richard Elmore and Lauren Resnick about the concerns raised to me by CSD 2 teachers about the use of file numbers and Alvarado's presence as a PI. Lauren Resnick responded (letter, 17 July 2000), and Stein and Resnick met with me in April 2001. According to notes I took after our meeting, the objections I raised to the conduct of research, namely that it deepened a climate of fear, were dismissed. Resnick acknowledged the possibility of "bad design." Stein noted that their findings actually contradicted claims being made about CSD 2's success. However both Stein and Resnick rejected my proposal to clarify publicly that HPLC's latest research told a different story about CSD 2 from the one that had been widely publicized in earlier work. Resnick explained that their role had ended with the study's completion.

4. Another item omitted from the Appendix and not mentioned in the reports was a notice distributed to teachers, signed "The HPLC Research Team" with the HPLC address, phone, fax, and website. It announced a reward of \$500 to schools in which 90% of the teachers returned questionnaires. The notice also informs teachers that the extra consent form to serve as their personal copy, included in the original packet with Johnstone's cover letter, "is the wrong version" and should be discarded.

5. I examined the 1999-2000 report cards for all elementary schools in CSD 2.

They and the District report cards are available at <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa>.

6. Questionnaires returned to researchers show a preponderance of White, female, middle-class respondents (D'Amico, Harwell, Stein, Van den Heuvel, April 2001). Curiously, researchers on CSD 2 have never investigated the extent to which district hiring screens out teachers and principals whose professional beliefs differ from those of the district leadership, and the ways those beliefs correlate with social class or race.

7. The investigators secured achievement and demographic data for individual students in District #2 through the Division of Assessment and Accountability of the Office of the Deputy Chancellor of Instruction of the New York City Board of Education. Disaggregated data have heretofore been made available only to researchers working with the Division of Assessment and Accountability, as I learned when I attempted to secure it for this study (email message from data analyst at DAA).

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## About the Author

### Lois Weiner

Lois Weiner is a Professor of Elementary and Secondary Education at New Jersey City University, 2039 Kennedy Blvd., Jersey City, NJ 07305. Email correspondence should be addressed to [LWEINER@NJCU.EDU](mailto:LWEINER@NJCU.EDU).

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