



Literacy = Skills = Inclusion = Just Growth

BY CHRISTOPHER J. WEBB

Let's try my title in "reverse." How can you have just growth without inclusion, without skills and without the ability to read? And, importantly, if our next generation of children cannot read, where will those in need here in Michigan find the next generation of successful graduates from our law schools to be the attorneys and judges for the delivery of the best legal services possible?

Today many of our children in Michigan will never be able to participate and thrive in creating an inclusive and just economy because they will never be able to read and importantly will never have the confidence that comes with literacy. They will be shut out without an individual voice. While more than 3 out of 5 prisoners in our federal penal system are illiterate, 85% of our juvenile offenders suffer from illiteracy. So what is the solution?

Let me offer a "compass" that may help guide the future of our public education system and in turn the future of generations today and to come:

- ❖ **First**, the International Risk Governance Council finds that there are four kinds of risk: Simple, Complex, Uncertain and Ambiguous. A simple risk is usually loaded with data like actuarial information and can be addressed from the top down. As you move through the remaining risks, however, data is present but emotion is everywhere. When you arrive at a high level of emotion, top down is resisted and can only be effectively solved from the bottom up, joining in collaboration with the top.
- ❖ **Second**, the Stanford Model of Social Innovation has taught that, in addressing a systemic problem,

it is critical that you engage in a collective impact approach with the key stakeholders. In its view, we have today many well-intended "isolated impacts" that offer "silos" to promote change but lack the necessary integration to achieve sustainable betterment resulting in positive systemic change.

- ❖ **Third**, no system can thrive unless it engages in continuous improvement based upon a problem-solving process that is inclusive, empowered, accountable, and transparent to those within and outside the system. The continuum has four stages: Development, Execution, Operations/Maintenance & Continuous Improvement.
- ❖ **Fourth**, unless the stakeholders of a system place trust as the priority for advancement, most systems fall away and lose their initial vigor and vision.

So, how can our "compass" be applied to an educational delivery system?

Today's education is filled with emotion that wears "data" clothing. To continue to treat it from the top down will only result in marginal or, worse, negative returns. Without appreciating the complicated parts and participants of the system, we will not achieve a collective impact benefiting our children and their futures. And, importantly, by not allowing the stakeholders with boots on the ground to have a meaningful voice in the continuum process, we will see little success.

Any continuous improvement system that works effectively listens to those "on the line" responsible for the outcome of any quality product or service. In education, our teachers are the ones on the front line. Importantly, their voice is needed (1) to set the

targets of literacy that they believe can be achieved, (2) to identify the tools and resources that they believe will work and (3) to receive the funding they believe is critical to success. And if the targets are not achieved, they would then be ready to engage in the needed continuous improvement steps based upon root cause analysis used successfully in other delivery systems that can turn things around without the waste of finding fault or blaming uncontrollable factors. In short, trust stays in the room.

So using our "compass," let's build from the bottom up an optimized public education delivery system that can then serve as a model throughout Michigan and the U.S. Much more information is available, and I look forward to being of assistance to those committed to making our educational system the best for ALL children.

References

1. See <https://observer.com/2017/07/prison-illiteracy-criminal-justice-reform/>
2. See for example https://www.irgc.org/IMG/pdf/An_introduction_to_the_IRGC_Risk_Governance_Framework.pdf
3. For additional background, please see the link at https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact.
4. The method of continuous improvement is based upon the GM Business Plan Deployment PDCA System including in particular its application of countermeasures for success. References available at Google search "GM Business Plan Deployment."
5. See, for example, <http://www.webbadr.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-Engineering-Society-of-Detroit-Institute-Portfolio-2008-2013.pdf> regarding the application of the continuum applied from early childhood education to employment.



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