Activity: Exploring "Organizing Schools for Improvement: The Research behind the *Framework for Great Schools*" (60 minutes)

A supporting resource for A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*
Step 1: As a community, develop a shared understanding of the *Framework for Great Schools.*

OVERVIEW
Through reading and discussion, this session will familiarize participants with the research that led to the development of the *Framework for Great Schools*. It will also provide an opportunity to discuss connections between the research findings and the work of their school community as well as implications for their work going forward.

OBJECTIVE
Participants will deepen understanding of the research behind the *Framework for Great Schools* and consider the connections to their work.

MATERIALS
- Research brief: *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*
- Graphic organizer (attached)

GUIDING QUESTIONS
- What are the research origins of the *Framework for Great Schools* and how does it help me understand the *Framework*?
- How can the perspective the research provides help clarify our current work, and how might it inform our work going forward?

FACILITATION NOTES
1. **Introduction and framing (2 minutes)**
   - Welcome participants and review the objective and guiding questions of the activity.
   - Explain that participants will explore the research brief by:
     - Analyzing the key findings of the research into school improvement.
     - Considering the implications these findings for our understanding of our past and current work.

2. **Reflecting on past work (7 minutes)**
   - Ask participants to reflect on their school's particular strengths and challenges using the questions on the graphic organizers:
     1. What are some of the ways in which your school is particularly strong?
     2. What are some factors that made these successes possible?
     3. What external resources have helped in these successes?
     4. What challenges does your school face?
     5. What are some factors that make these challenges difficult to overcome?

3. **Sharing the research brief (3 minutes)**
   - Introduce participants to the research brief, utilizing the following talking points:
     - We as educators understand that while instruction is the core of our work, it is not the only factor that influences student achievement. We also recognize that not all schools are identical, and improvement

efforts should fit a school's particular context. In order to guide NYC schools in their work to improve student achievement, we are always looking to research that provides clarity into *what* successful schools do to improve and *how* they do it. The following brief describes important research into these questions.

- The research we are going to read about today finds that there are six essential elements that enable schools to improve student achievement. The strength or weakness in these elements is highly predictive of whether or not schools improve over time.

4. **Part A: Reading and discussing the research brief (15 minutes)**
   o Ask participants to independently read the research brief, using the corresponding questions on their graphic organizers to guide their reading:
      1. What are the key findings of the research?
      2. What resonates with you?
   o After participants have finished reading and responding to the questions, invite participants to share out.

5. **Part B: Building upon school strengths with the research brief (10 minutes)**
   o Ask participants to work in pairs and, looking back at the reflection questions on their graphic organizers, discuss the following questions:
      1. How do your school's particular strengths and challenges fit within the essential elements?
      2. Where do the contributing factors you wrote down fit within the elements?
   o Return to the larger group and share out.
   o Ask participants to narrow the focus by identifying a specific practice that they, or the school community as a whole, do well, and think about which of the elements it best aligns to. In pairs, invite participants to use this practice to answer the following questions:
      1. How does the strong practice you identified strengthen the school as a whole? Has it contributed to any other areas described by the elements? What other elements made it possible?

6. **Part C: Understanding the interplay between the essential elements and using the *Framework* as a diagnostic tool (20 minutes)**
   o Ask participants to revisit the sections of the research brief that describe the interplay among the elements and trust. Briefly share thoughts about the reading with the whole group.
   o Ask for a volunteer to share a challenge that connects to multiple elements. Working with the whole group, ask participants to brainstorm as many potential connections to other elements as they can.
   o Ask participants to repeat the exercise in pairs, this time using a strength to connect to other elements. When they have identified several connections, encourage participants to discuss how trust fits into each connection.
   o Invite participants to briefly share out to the whole group.
   o Debrief as a whole group around the following questions:
      1. In what ways does the research clarify your thinking about the work schools need to do?
      2. Does the research expand your thinking about the ways a particular challenge can be approached? How so?
      3. How does using the *Framework* as a diagnostic tool to explore how strengths span multiple elements help you see how schools can address their needs through a small number of high-leverage priorities?
      4. As you think about how strong practice in one element might be used to leverage improvement in another, what role do you see trust playing in enabling improvement?

7. **Identifying next steps and available resources (3 minutes)**
   o Ask participants to identify and share one next step they will take connected to the elements of the *Framework for Great Schools* to support student success (in pairs, or in the whole group).
   o Remind participants of the supporting resources and activities available on the [Vision for School Improvement](#) website:
      1. [Exploring "A Vision for School Improvement: Applying the *Framework for Great Schools*"](#)
      2. [Research brief on the research behind "A Vision for School Improvement"](#)
      3. [Case studies and snapshots of current practice in NYC schools](#)
      4. [Exploring the *Framework for Great Schools*](#)

Graphic Organizer for Activity: Exploring "Organizing Schools for Improvement: The Research behind the *Framework for Great Schools*"

Pre-reading Reflection

What are some of the ways in which your school is particularly strong?

What are some factors that made these successes possible?

What external resources have helped in these successes?

What challenges does your school face?

What are some factors that make these challenges difficult to overcome?

Part A: Reading the Research Brief

What are the key findings of the research?

What resonated with you?

Part B: Building upon Your School's Strengths

How do your school's particular strengths and challenges fit within the essential elements?

Where do the contributing factors you wrote down fit within the elements?

Identify a specific practice that you, or the school community as a whole, do well, and think about which of the elements it best aligns to. How does the strong practice you identified strengthen the school as a whole? Has it contributed to any other areas described by the elements? What other elements made it possible?

Part C: Understanding the Interplay between the Essential Elements

Brainstorming connections task: school challenge

Brainstorming connections task: school strength

Questions for closing discussion:
1. In what ways does the research clarify your thinking about the work schools need to do?
2. Does the research expand your thinking about the ways a particular challenge can be approached? How so?
3. How does exploring how areas of strength span multiple elements help you see how schools can address their needs through a small number of high-leverage priorities?
4. As you think about how practice in one element might be used to leverage improvement in another, what role do you see trust playing in enabling improvement?