Focus on and support academics. Study findings suggest that students in the nine schools are improving because they were sent a clear message about the importance of academics, and they were provided with the supports they needed to reach the high standards expected of them. A common practice used to support academics is the provision of additional time. This can take many forms, such as an extended day, Saturday classes, or after school programs focused on academics.

Community partnerships. School partnerships with universities, businesses, and city institutions (such as museums, art centers, and libraries) appear to be powerful contributors to promoting student achievement and providing external resources that can promote professional communities and opportunities for teachers.

Size matters. The nine study schools vary tremendously in their size and scope. Yet all of them, even the two large comprehensive high schools, have created structures that foster personalization and allow small learning communities to flourish. These structures foster relationships between teachers, students and parents in myriad ways that contribute to student success.

Just how the study schools created the conditions for improvement and the extent to which their unique attributes may be a factor in their ability to make progress, are topics that warrant further consideration through a rigorously designed, comprehensive research study. Only in this way will we be able to systematically identify successful schools and isolate specific strategies that can be replicated and adapted in order to build on their success. Such a study would also inform policymakers about the need to support and target successful strategies and the importance of focusing on capacity building efforts among schools with the most complex needs.

While the research reported here is a good start, significant questions remain. Importantly, we need to develop a clear consensus about what exactly constitutes high performance, and what data and related indicators are available to determine if schools are meeting standards of high performance. This issue, as well as numerous others must be considered for future examination so that we can learn more about how to create successful learning conditions. Some topics for further policy research include:

- How can the state and school systems “scale up” success?
- What set of policies, design and incentives can be created to make high-performing high schools the norm rather than the exception?
- How do schools structure successful relationships with community agencies to support student achievement?
- How do we retain committed teachers and administrators?
- How do schools create cultures of collegiality and professional community?
- What happens to students after they leave nurturing high school environments?

In conclusion, we applaud the outstanding performance of University park Campus School. We commend the other eight schools cited for their promising performance, and we urge policymakers and education leaders to urgently turn their attention to urban high schools and their particular challenges.