

# Organizing Schools for Improvement

The work reported here is a collaborative endeavor among Elaine Allensworth, Anthony Bryk, John Easton, Stuart Luppescu and Penny Sebring.

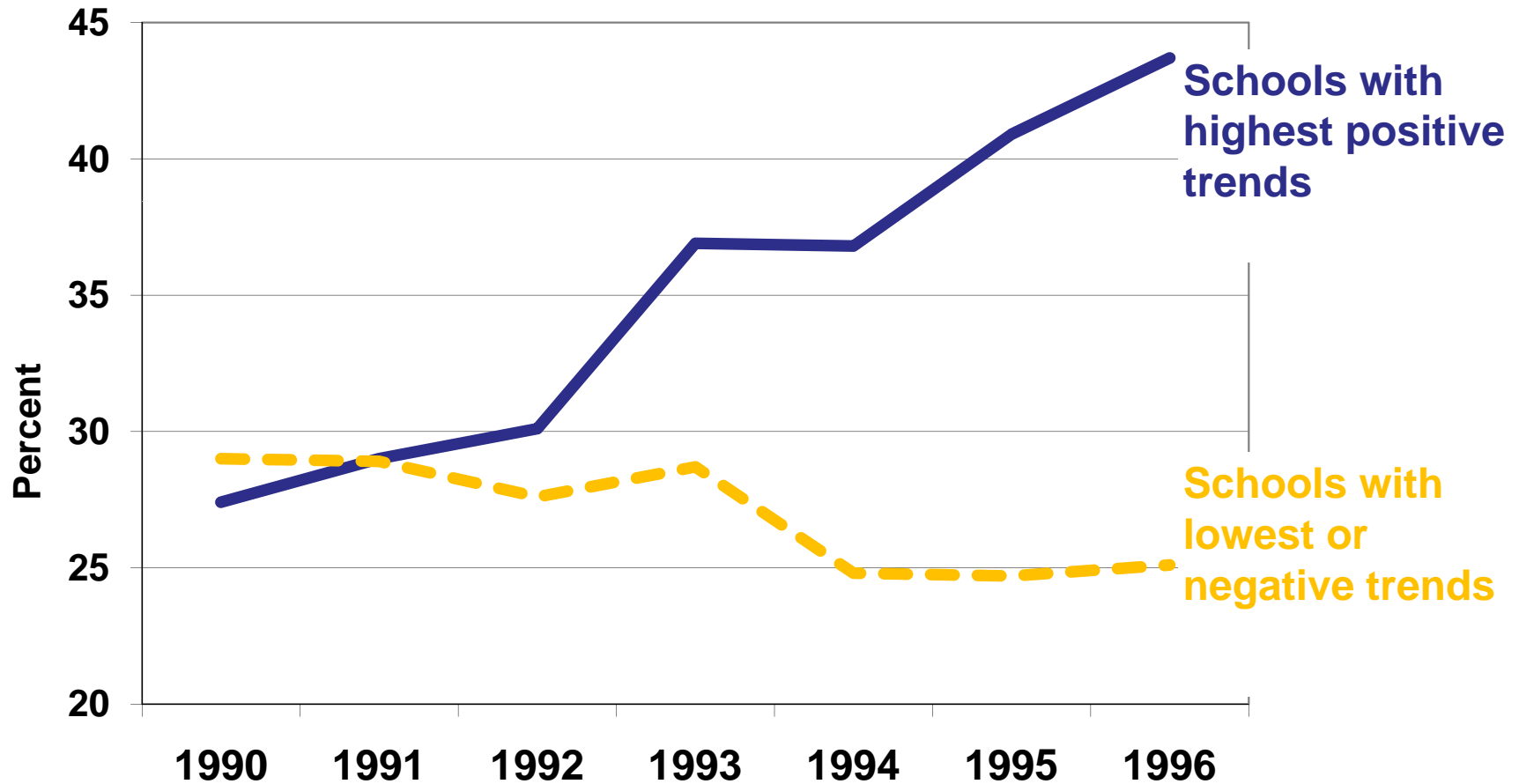
THE CONSORTIUM ON CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO / URBAN EDUCATION INSTITUTE


# A Tale of Two Schools: Hancock and Alexander

- Similar in many ways as reform began
  - Located in same area of the city, less than 2 miles apart
  - 100% African American enrollment and 100% low income
  - Both among 100 worst schools in reading and math in 1989
- One moves dramatically forward over the next seven years (Hancock) but the other does not (Alexander)

# Hancock and Alexander were not unique

Percent of Students Scoring At or Above National Norms in Math, 1990 to 1996





How did Hancock beat the odds?  
Why did Alexander fail to do so?



Anthony S. Bryk,  
Penny Bender Sebring,  
Elaine Allensworth,  
Stuart Luppescu,  
and John Q. Easton

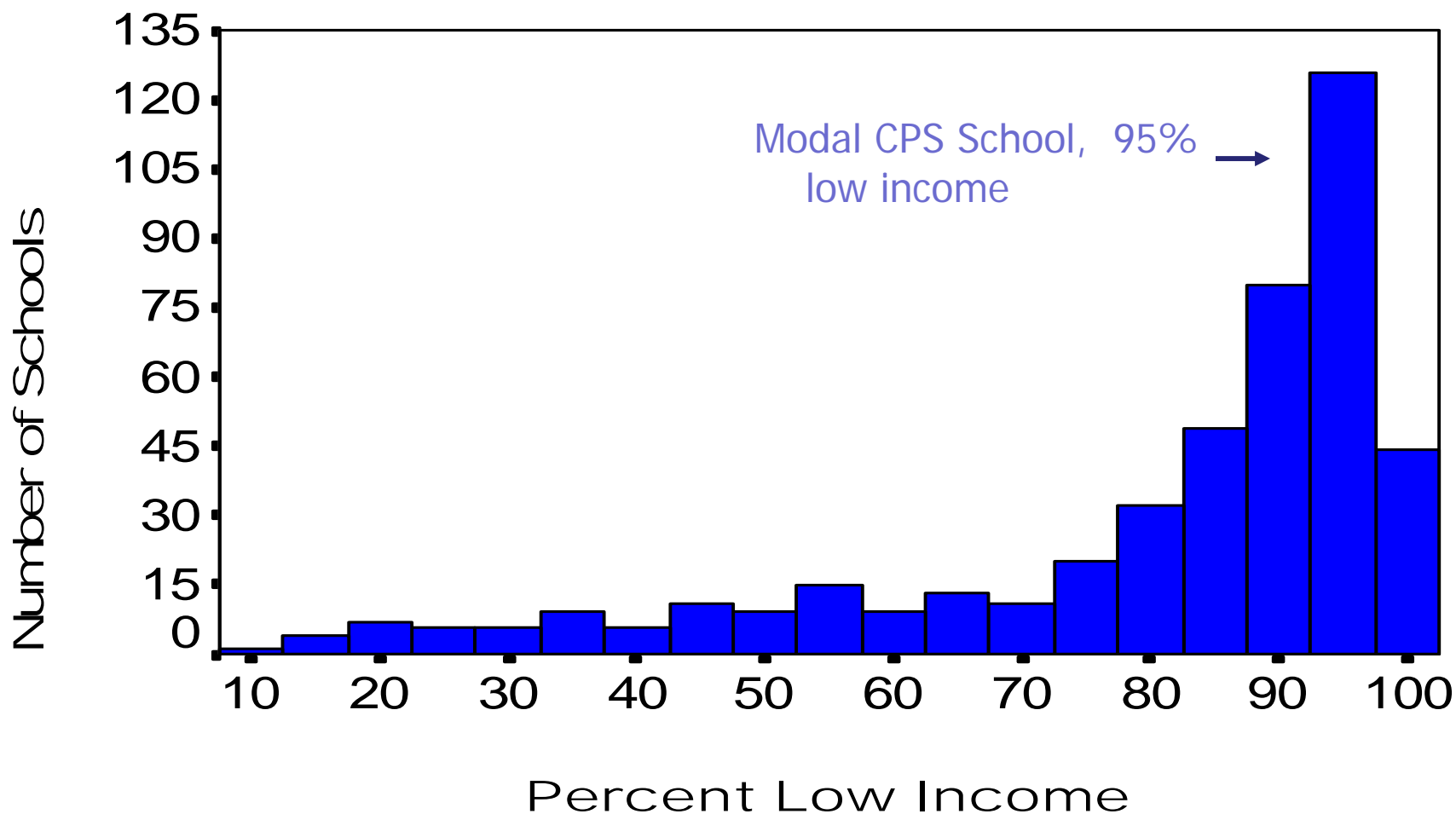
**Organizing Schools  
for Improvement**  
Lessons from Chicago

# Context for our Research: An Unprecedented Reform

- 1989-1996, Chicago's democratic localism
- A large scale natural experiment in school change
- Low stakes vis-a-vis key outcomes
- A wonderful opportunity to learn:
  - How base resources in school communities condition capacity for change
  - How changes in key organizational features link to improvements in student learning.

# The Context: A Very Disadvantaged School System

Figure 1.1: Percent of Low-Income Students  
Chicago Public Elementary Schools 1994



# Data Resources for Our Study

- Student test scores, from 1987-1996
- Surveys of teachers, students, and principals in 260 Chicago elementary schools
- Study of Chicago neighborhoods by University of Chicago and Harvard sociologists
- Crime statistics
- Percentage of abused and neglected children in Chicago elementary schools

# Indicators of School Improvement

- Engagement
  - adjusted attendance trends
- Schools' value-added to student learning (reading and mathematics)
  - learning gains index

How much are children learning during the period in which they are enrolled at that school?

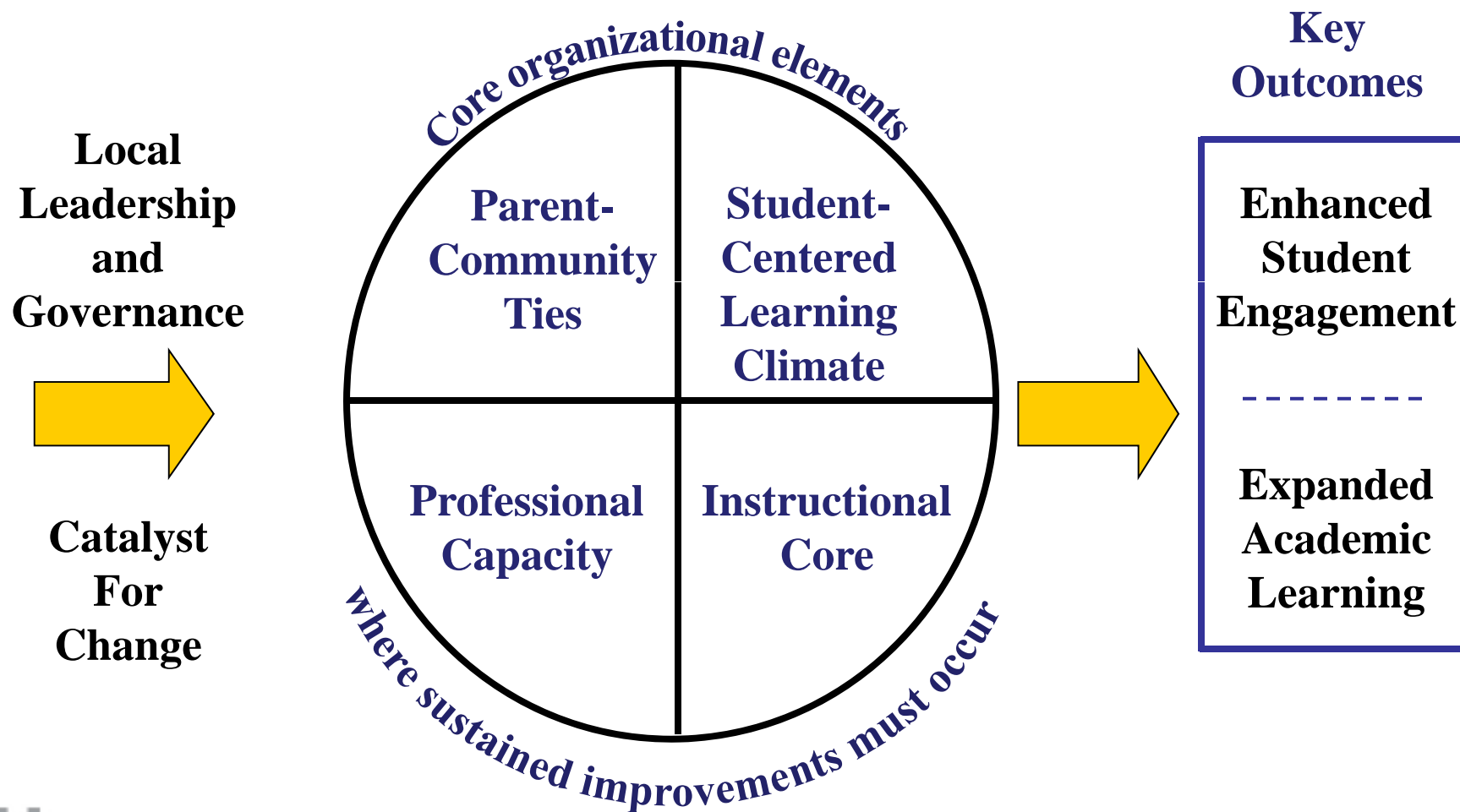
Are these learning gains improving over time?

# A Theory of Essential Supports and Contextual Resources

Emerged out of:

- extended local stakeholder consultations surrounding “State of School Reform,” 1993
- reviews of research on effective schools and core studies of school restructuring
- direct experiences in these processes as external change agents through the Center for School Improvement

# A Theory of Essential Supports



# A Dynamic, Interactive Process of School Improvement

- Not a lockstep plan
- Start in different places, numerous viable paths
- Even so, sustained work must eventually emerge on each of the essential supports.

# Instructional Guidance

- Curriculum organization – the “what” of instruction
  - Pacing
- Academic goals – the “how” of instruction:
  - Acquisition of strong skills, basic knowledge
  - Ability to apply knowledge to novel situations
  - Pedagogy (interactive vs. didactic)

# Student-Centered Learning Climate

- Safe and orderly environment
- Press for academic achievement
- Social support, relationships with adults

# Professional Capacity

- Quality of faculty, staff recruited to school
- Quality of ongoing professional development
- Faculty and staff beliefs about responsibility for change
- Professional community focused on improving teaching, learning

# Parent-Community Ties

- Teachers know student culture, local community
- Staff reach out to parents, community
- Schools draw on community organizations to expand services

# School Leadership

- Strategic
- Focused on instruction
- Inclusive
- Effective as manager

# Local Leadership and Governance

## Concept Principal Leadership

### Measure

**Inclusive Leadership**  
1994, 1997  
3 items

### Examples

The principal is strongly committed to shared decision making?

The principal promotes parent community involvement?

### Measure

**Instructional Leadership**  
1994, 1997  
7 items

### Examples

The principal carefully tracks student progress?

Presses teachers to implement what they learned from professional development?

## Concept Faculty/Parent/Community Influence

### Measure

**Teacher Influence**  
1994, 1997  
18 items

### Examples

Influence teachers have in determining books, materials?

Influence teachers have over how school funds used?

### Measure

**LSC Contribution**  
1994  
8 items

### Examples

Has the LSC been a positive addition to the school?

Has your LSC made a contribution to improving parent involvement?

## Concept Strategic Orientation

### Measure

**Program Coherence**  
1994, 1997  
4 - 9 items

### Examples

Many special programs come and go?

Once we start a new program, we make sure that it's working?

### Measure

**SIP Implementation**  
1994  
7 items

### Examples

The SIP has led to changes in my teaching practices?

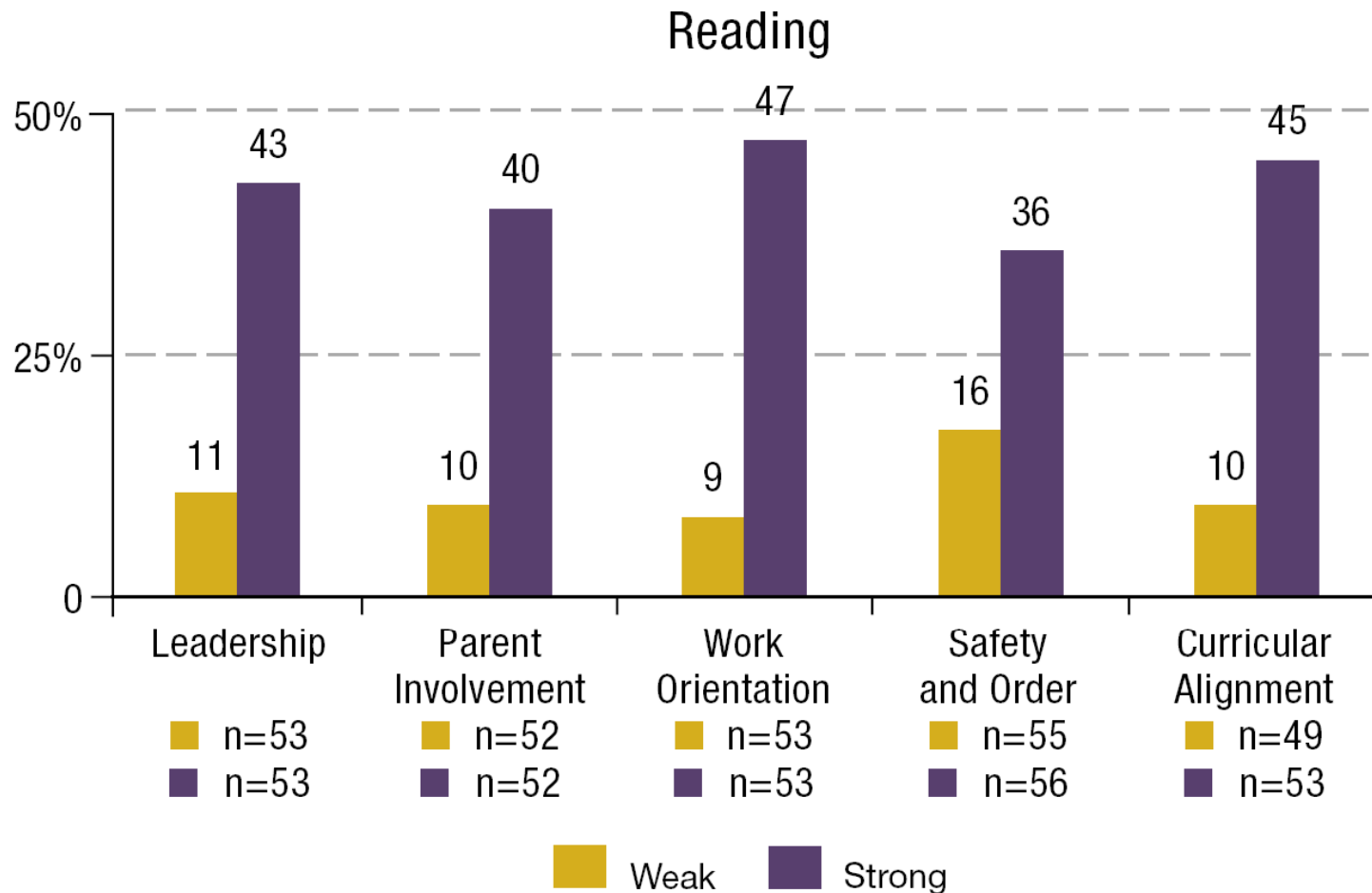
I helped develop the SIP for my school?

**Factor Composite  
School Leadership**

# Testing the Theory of Essential Supports

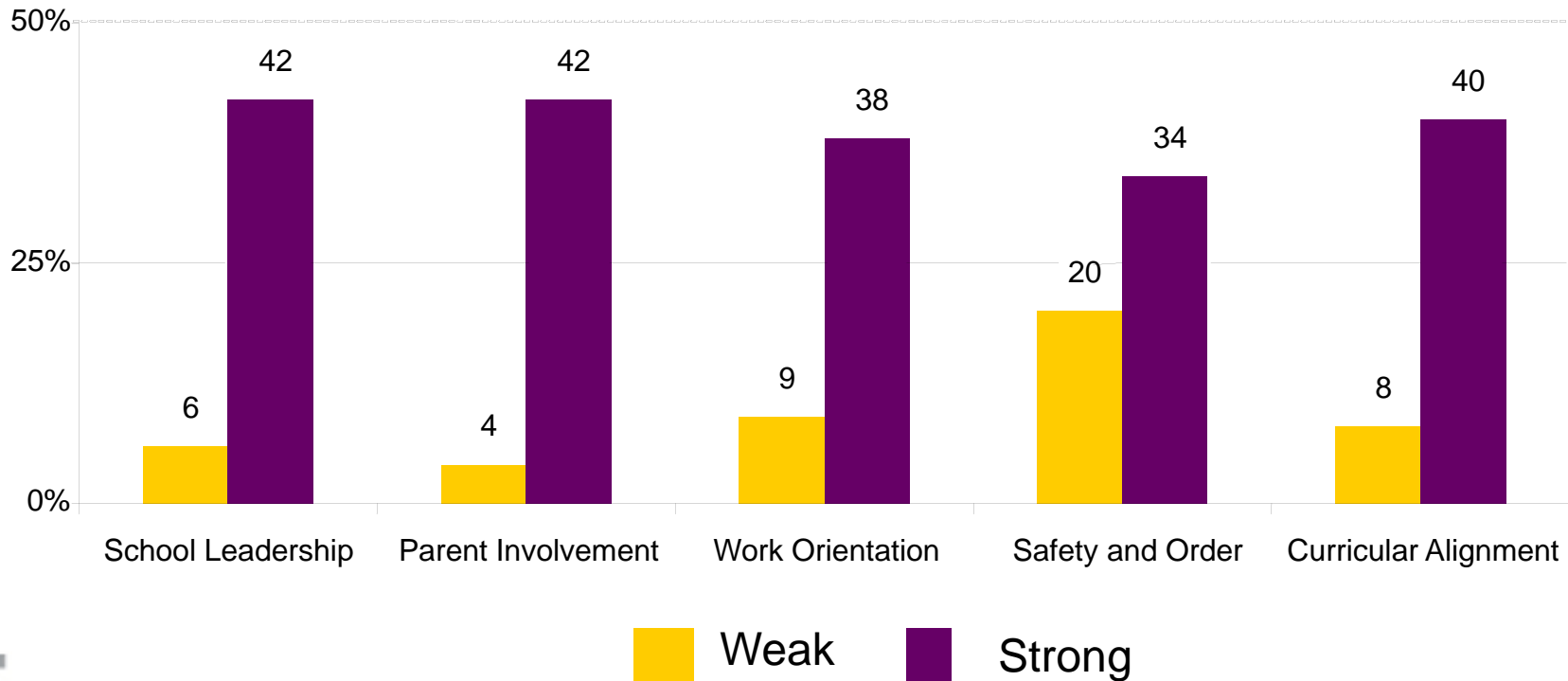
- A first look at the evidence: five key indicators
  - Leadership
  - Parent-community involvement
  - Work orientation
  - Safety and order
  - Curricular alignment

# Likelihood of Improvement, Given Weak or Strong Supports



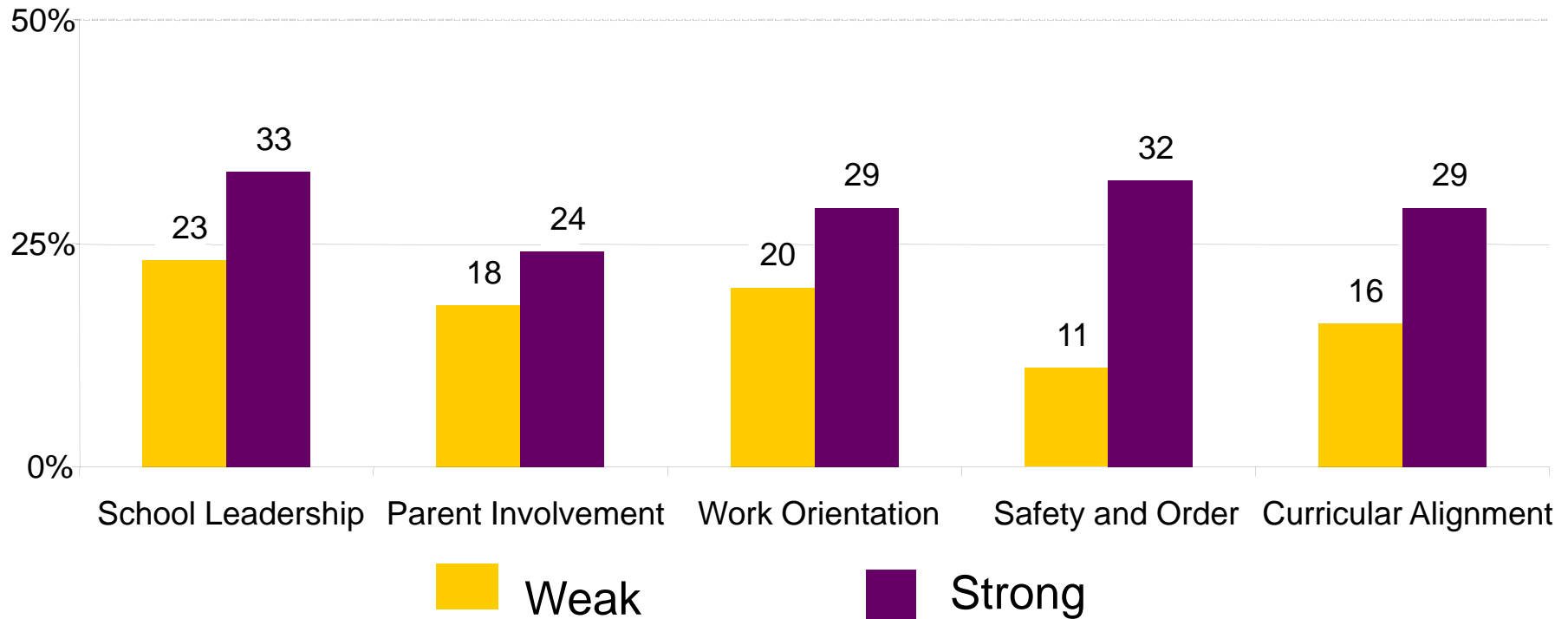
# Likelihood of Improvement, Given Weak or Strong Supports

## Mathematics



# Likelihood of Improvement, Given Weak or Strong Supports

## Attendance



# What pattern of evidence is necessary to sustain a claim of “essentiality?”

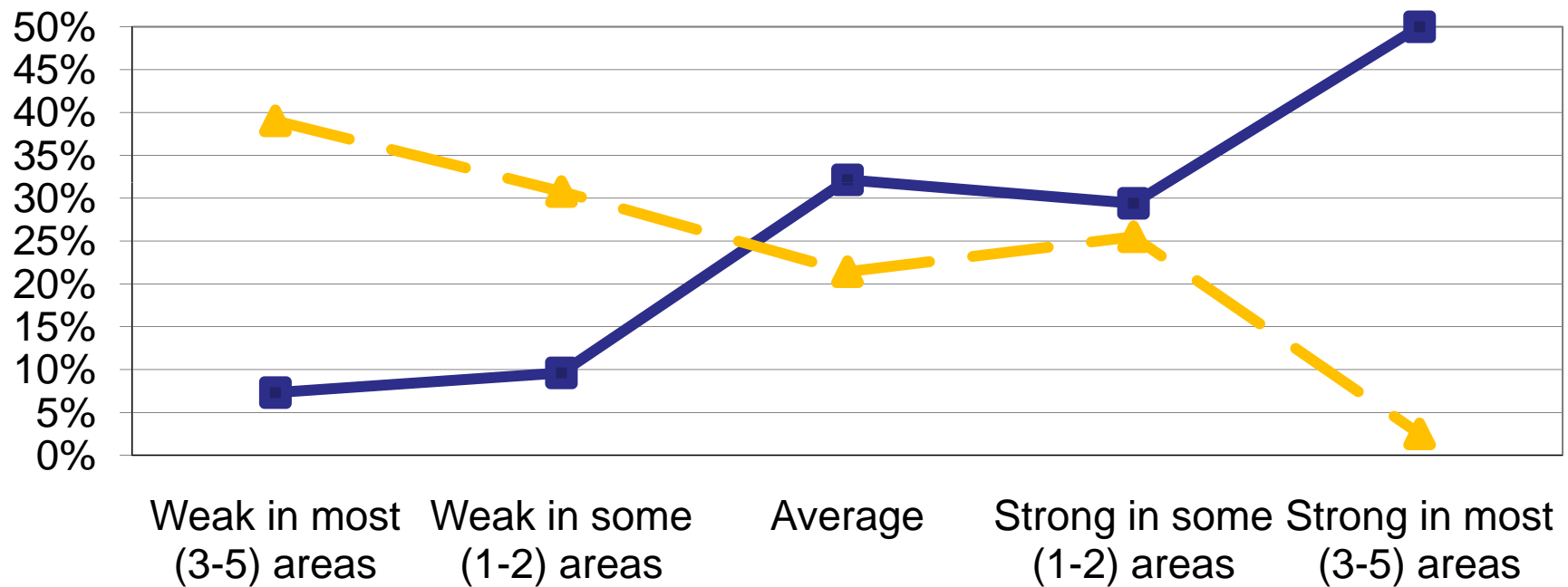
- Some schools weak in one essential support at one time point were able to improve
- **A stronger process test: examine chronic weaknesses**
  - For most of the indicator/outcome combinations the likelihood of improvement was 10 percent or less.

## **Second key consideration: A system of supports**

- These elements operate as an interactive system of organizational features

# Percentage of Schools that Improved or Stagnated by Strength in the Five Essential Supports

## Reading

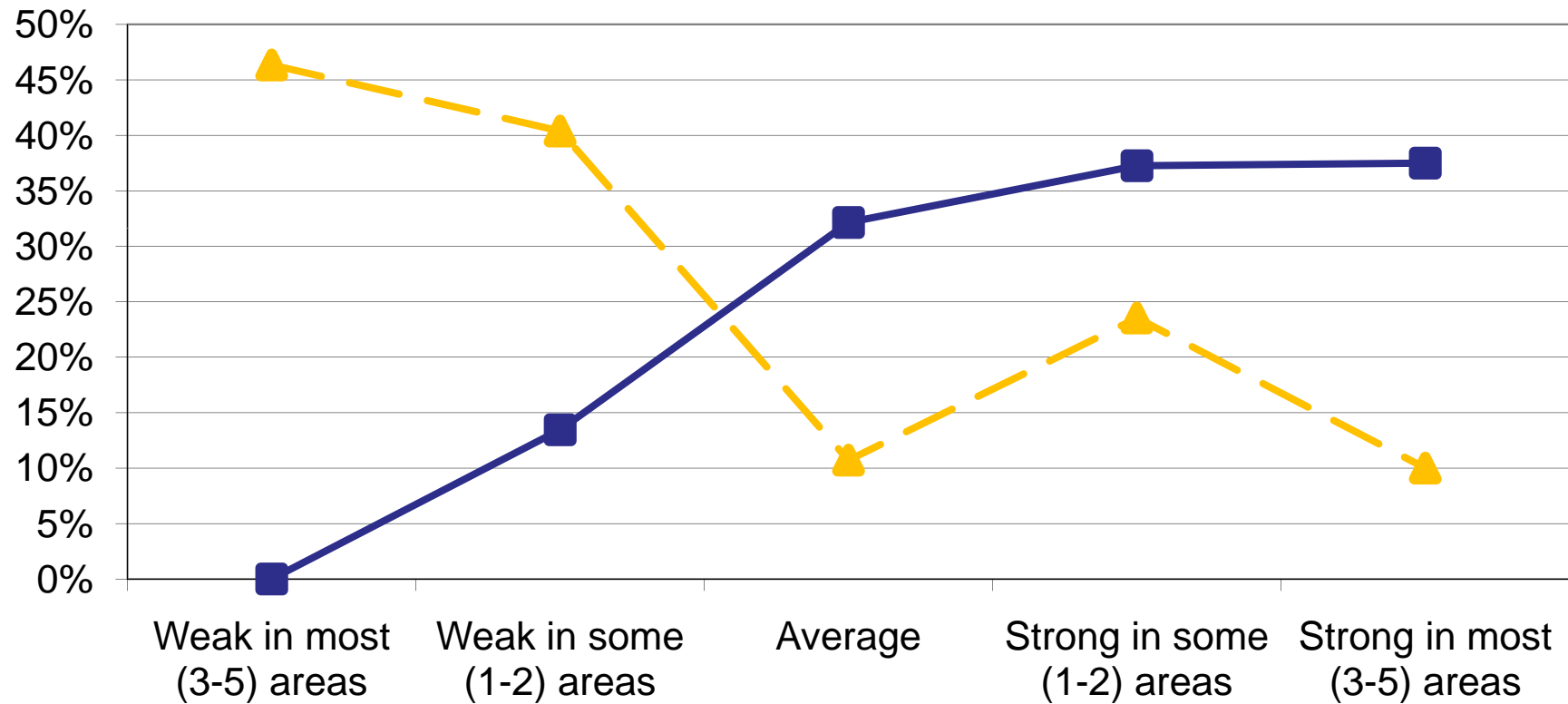


■ Percentage of Substantially Improving Schools

▲ Percentage of Stagnating Schools

# Percentage of Schools that Improved or Stagnated by Strength in the Five Essential Supports

## Math

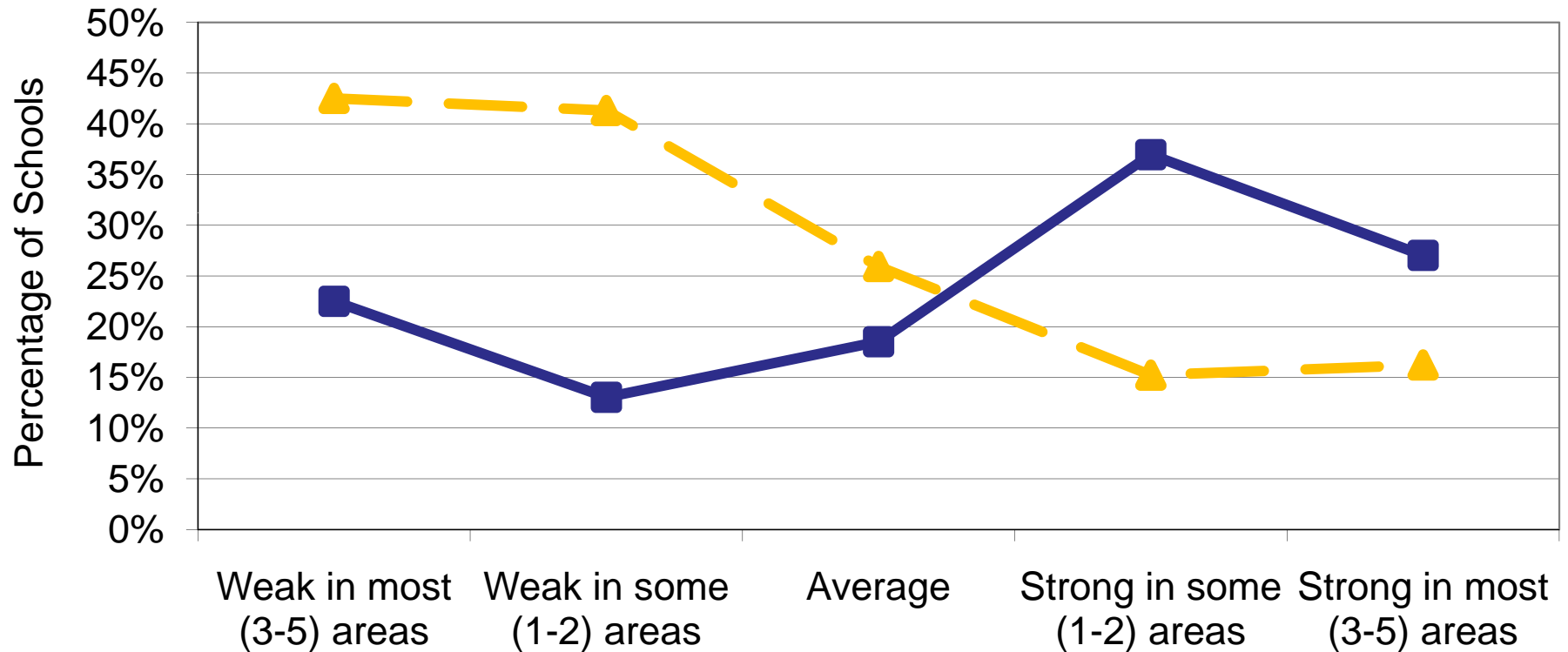


■ Substantially Improving Schools

▲ Stagnant Schools

# Percentage of Schools that Improved or Stagnated by Strength in the Five Essential Supports

## Attendance



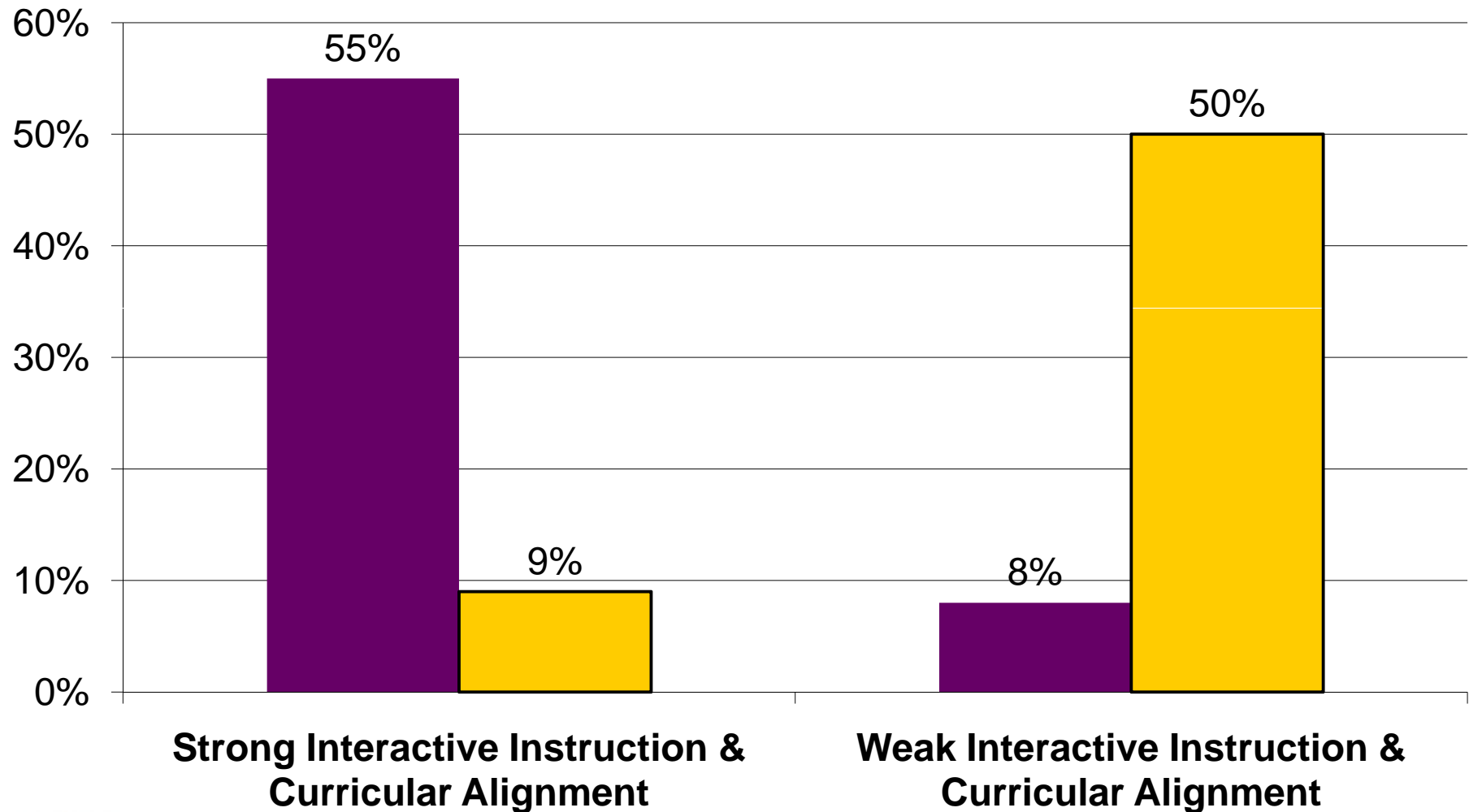
# Probing Deeper

- More indicators (5 → 13)
- Exploring different mechanisms for different outcomes
- Role of school governance and leadership on organizational change

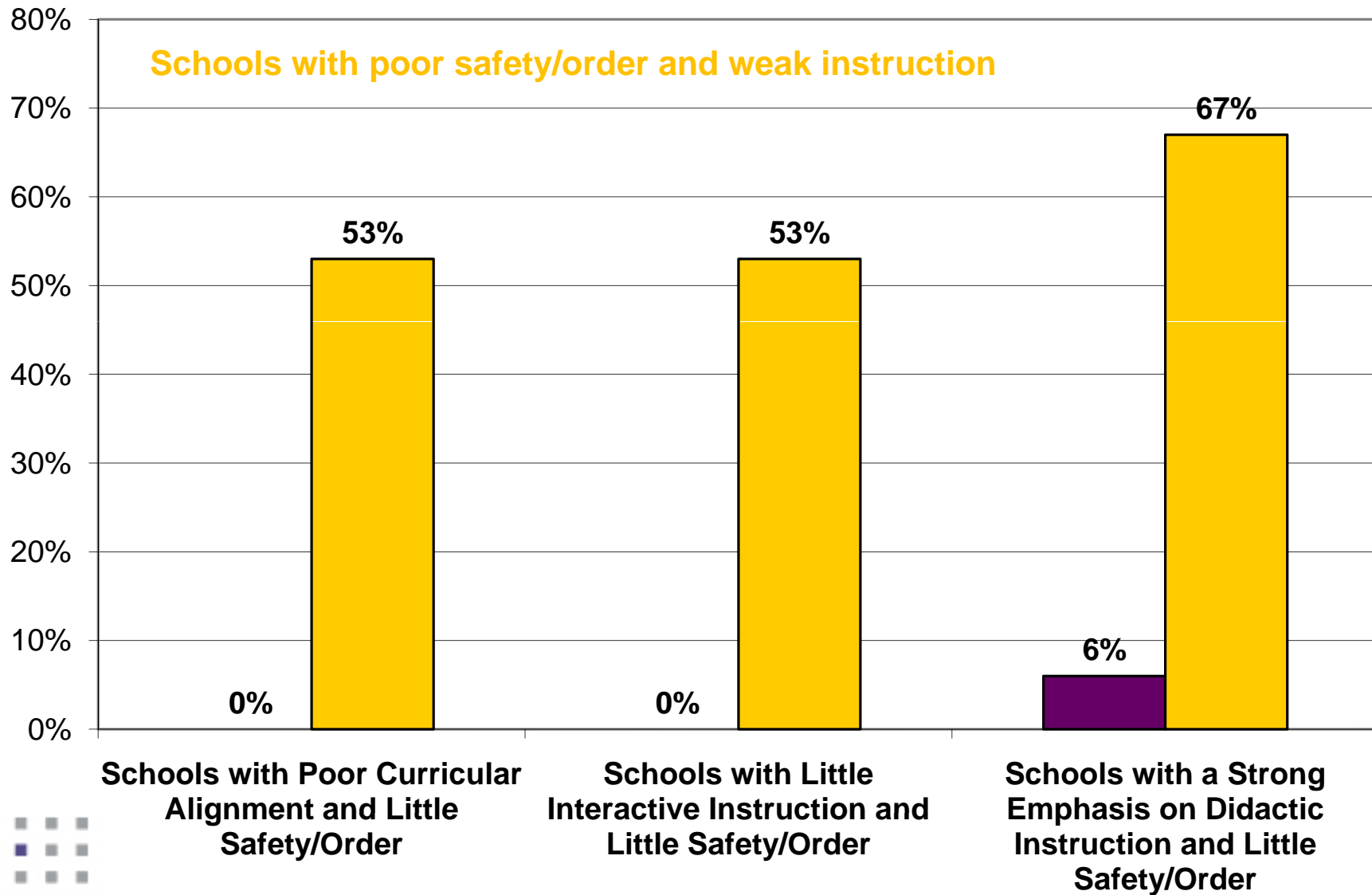
# Attendance Improvement

- Safety and order – a basic need
- Advanced by “interesting instruction”
  - active student learning in an aligned curriculum (new challenges)
- Supported by sustained, high quality professional development

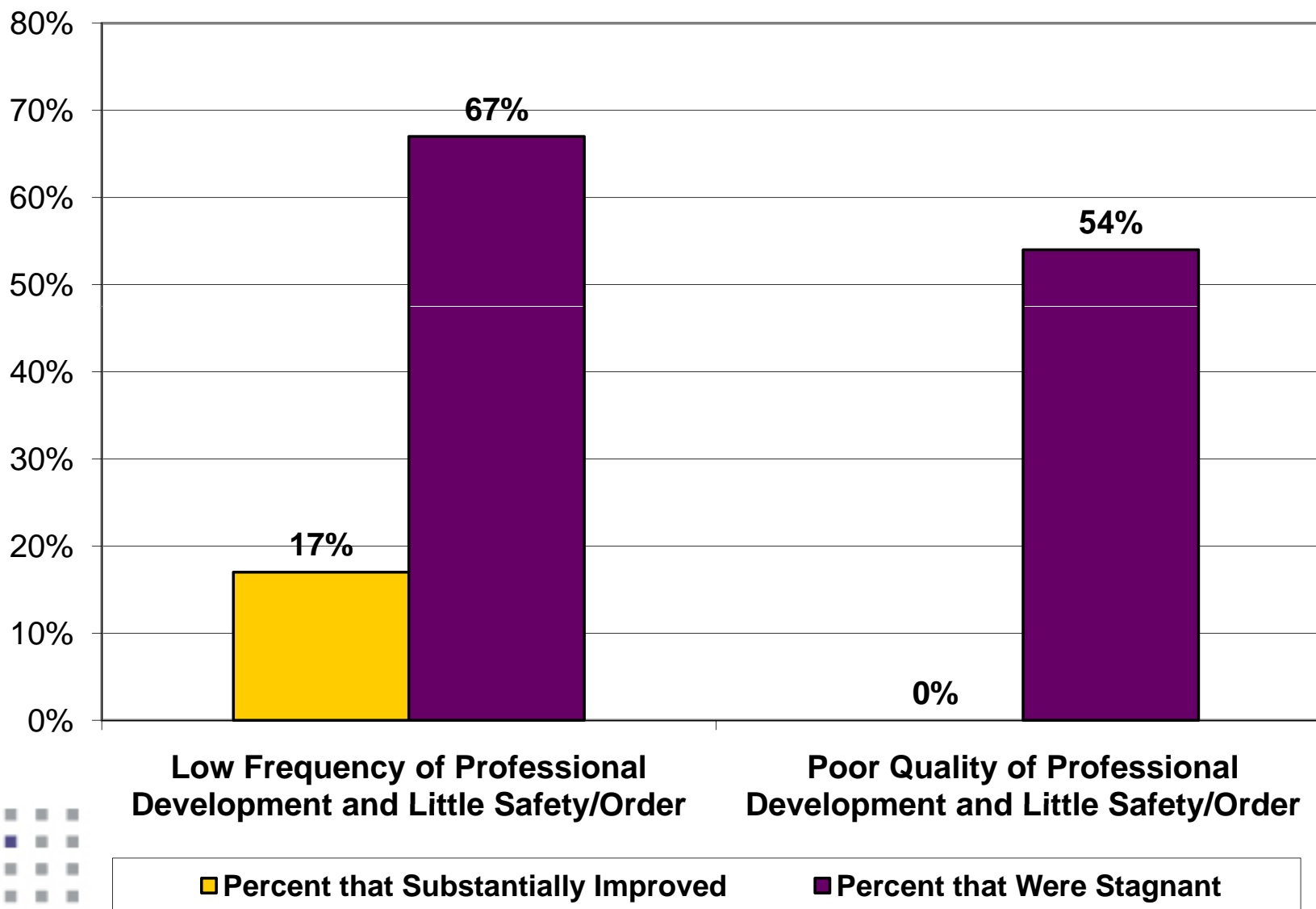
## Well-paced, interactive instruction was important for improvement in attendance



## Schools did not improve attendance if their learning climate was unsafe/disorderly and instruction was weak



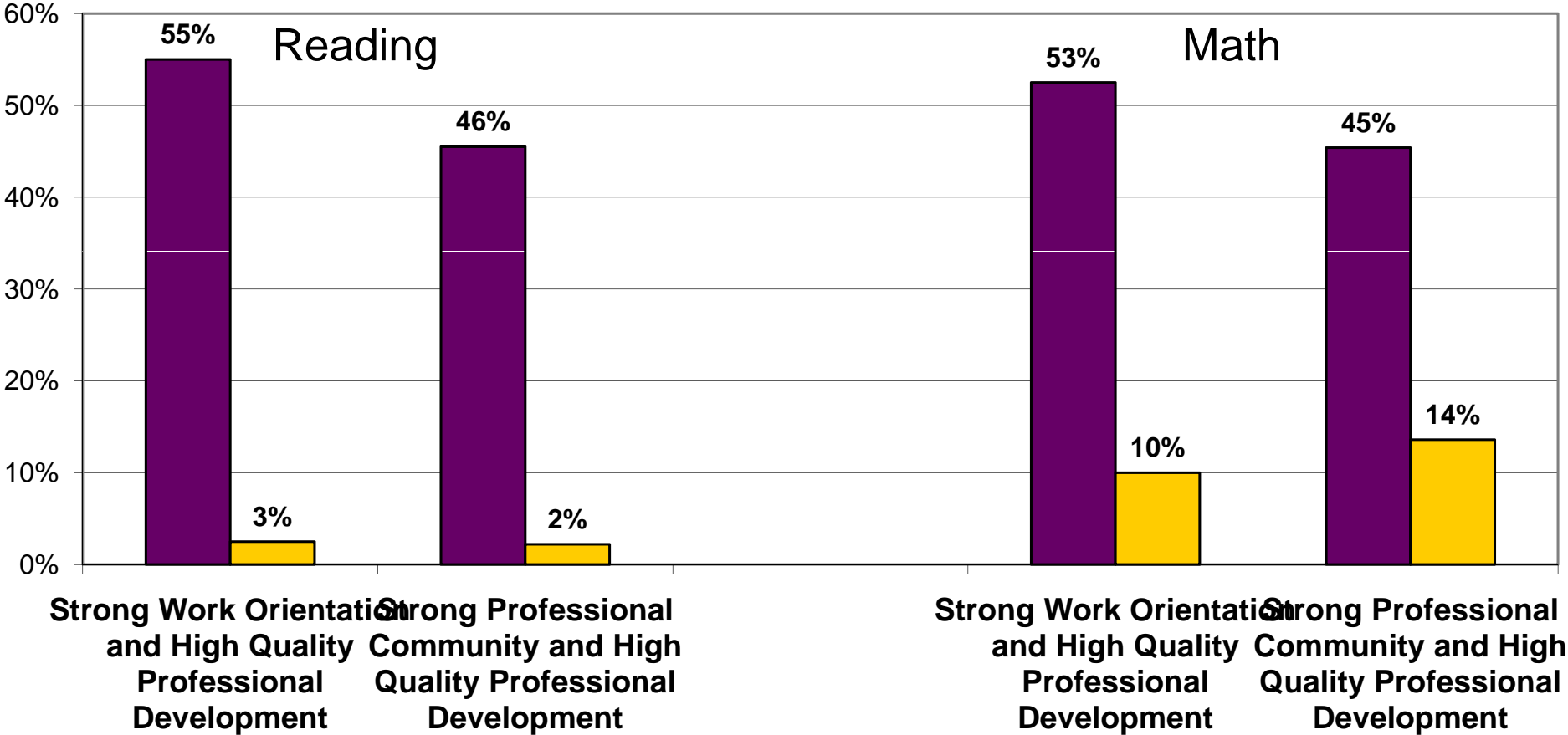
## Schools were unlikely to improve their attendance if their learning climate was unsafe/disorderly and they had little quality professional development



# Improvements in Reading and Mathematics Learning

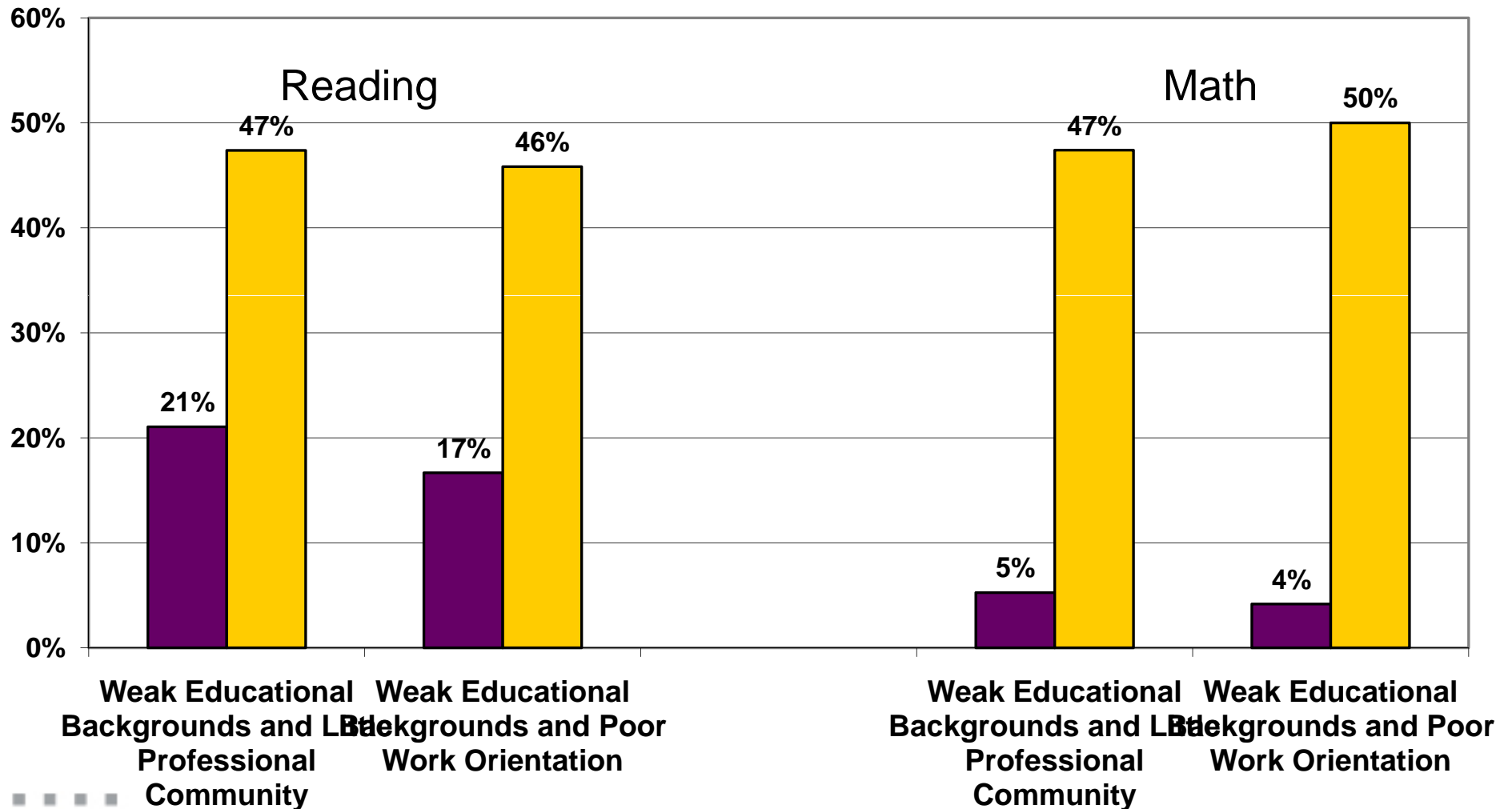
- Interplay of human and social resources among school professionals
- Social resources linked to curricular alignment

**Schools with high quality professional development and strong adult cooperative relationships were likely to show substantial academic improvements, and very unlikely to be stagnant.**

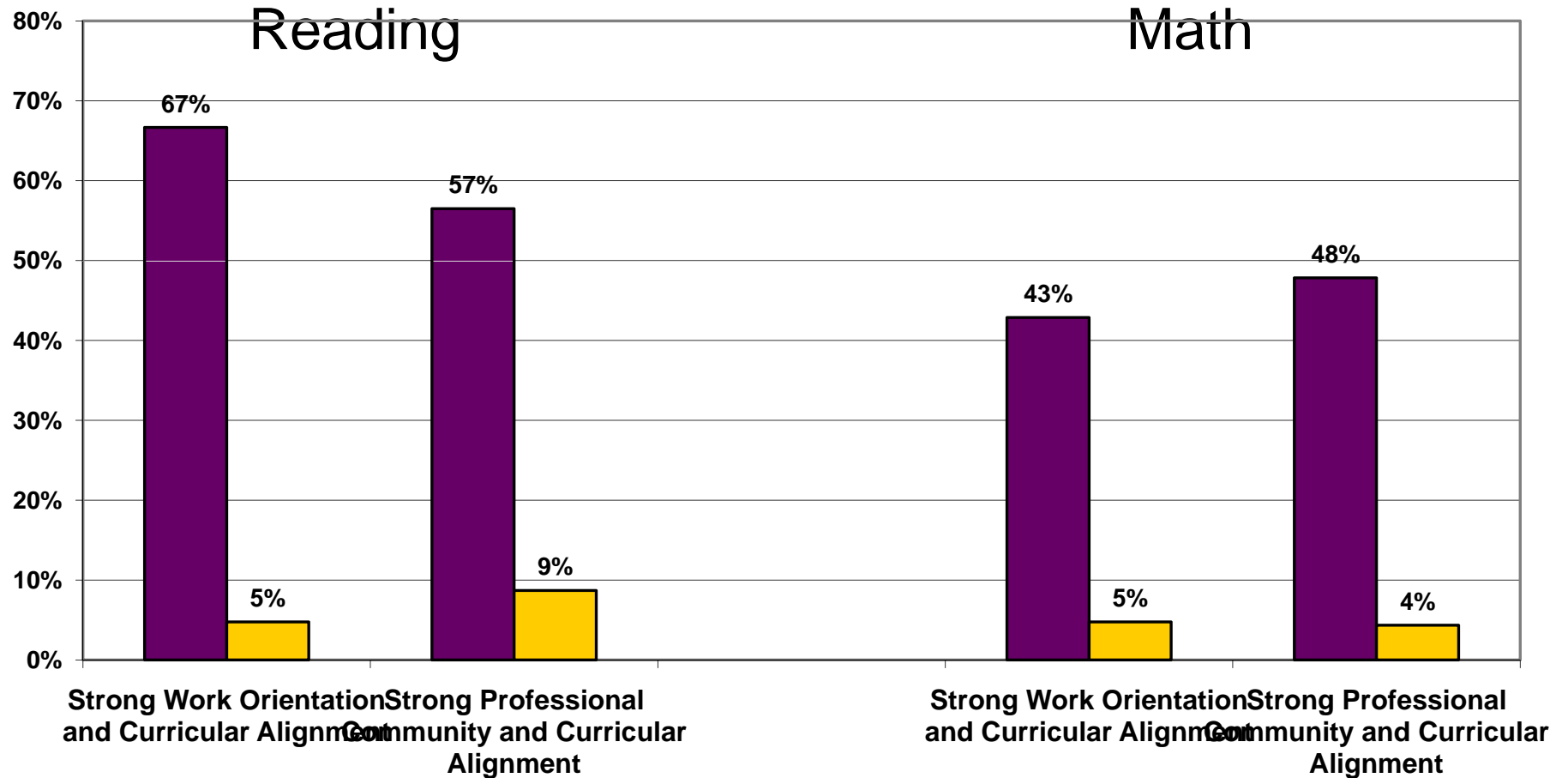


■ Percent that Substantially Improved      ■ Percent that Were Stagnant

## Schools with both weak human capital and poor social organization among teachers were likely to have stagnant academic productivity



# Schools with strong teacher cooperative relationships focused on curricular alignment were very likely to show substantial academic improvements

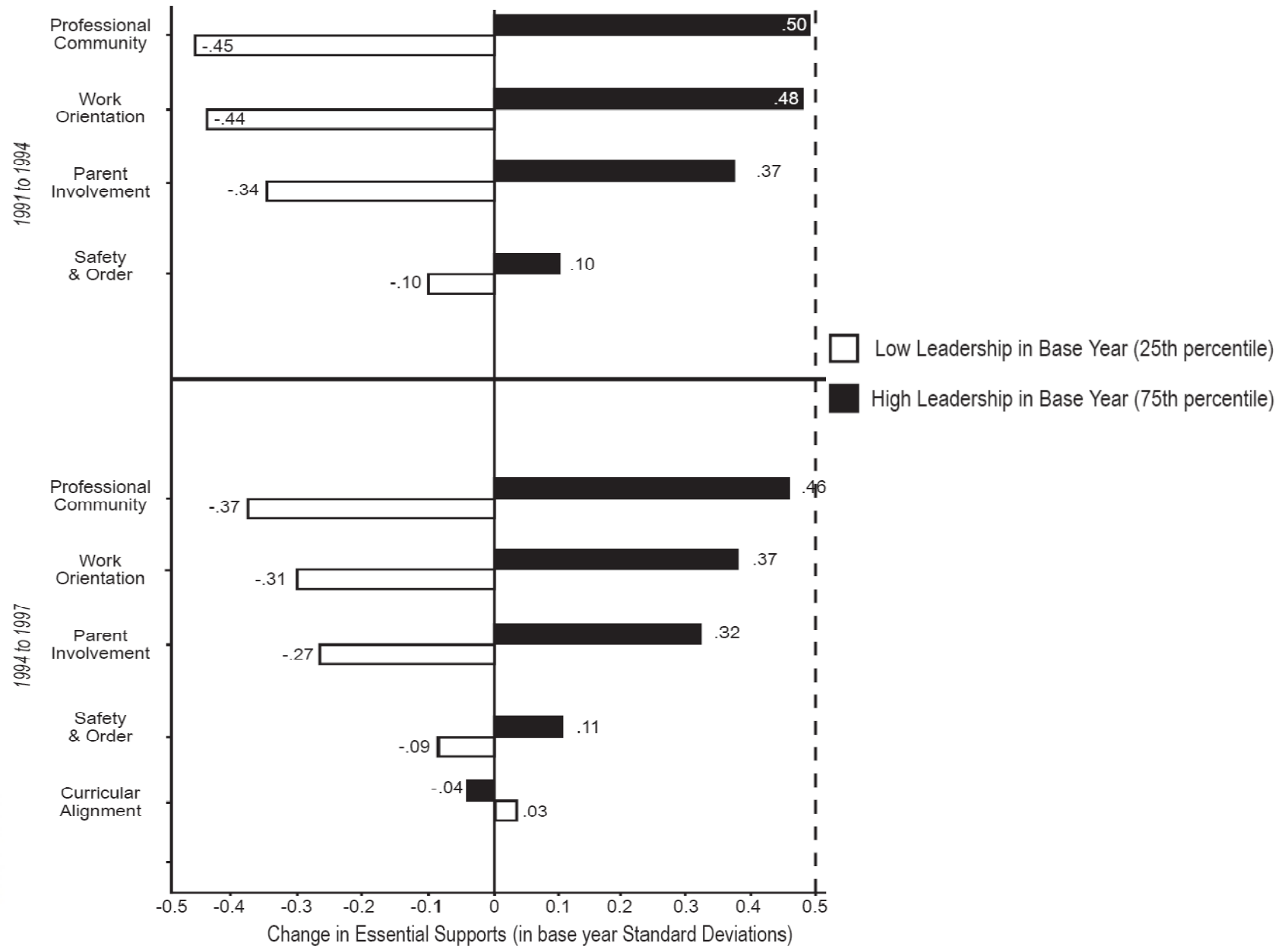


■ Percent that Substantially Improved      ■ Percent that Were Stagnant

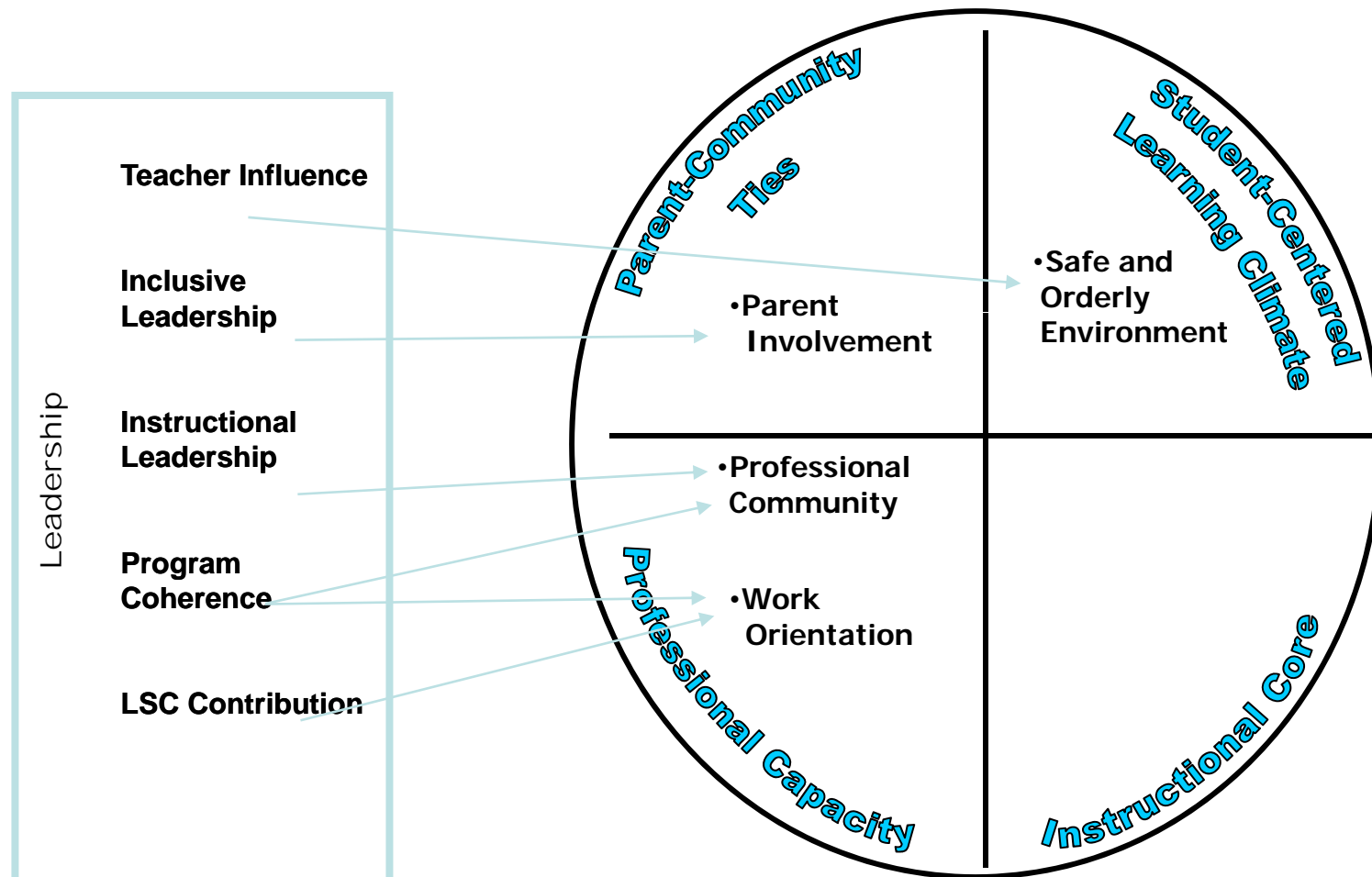
# School Leadership as a Catalyst for Change

- Strategic orientation
- Nurturing multiple leaders
- Focus on instructional improvement
- Effective management of operations

# Leadership Promotes Development of Supports



**Figure 5.14**  
**The Components of Good Leadership**



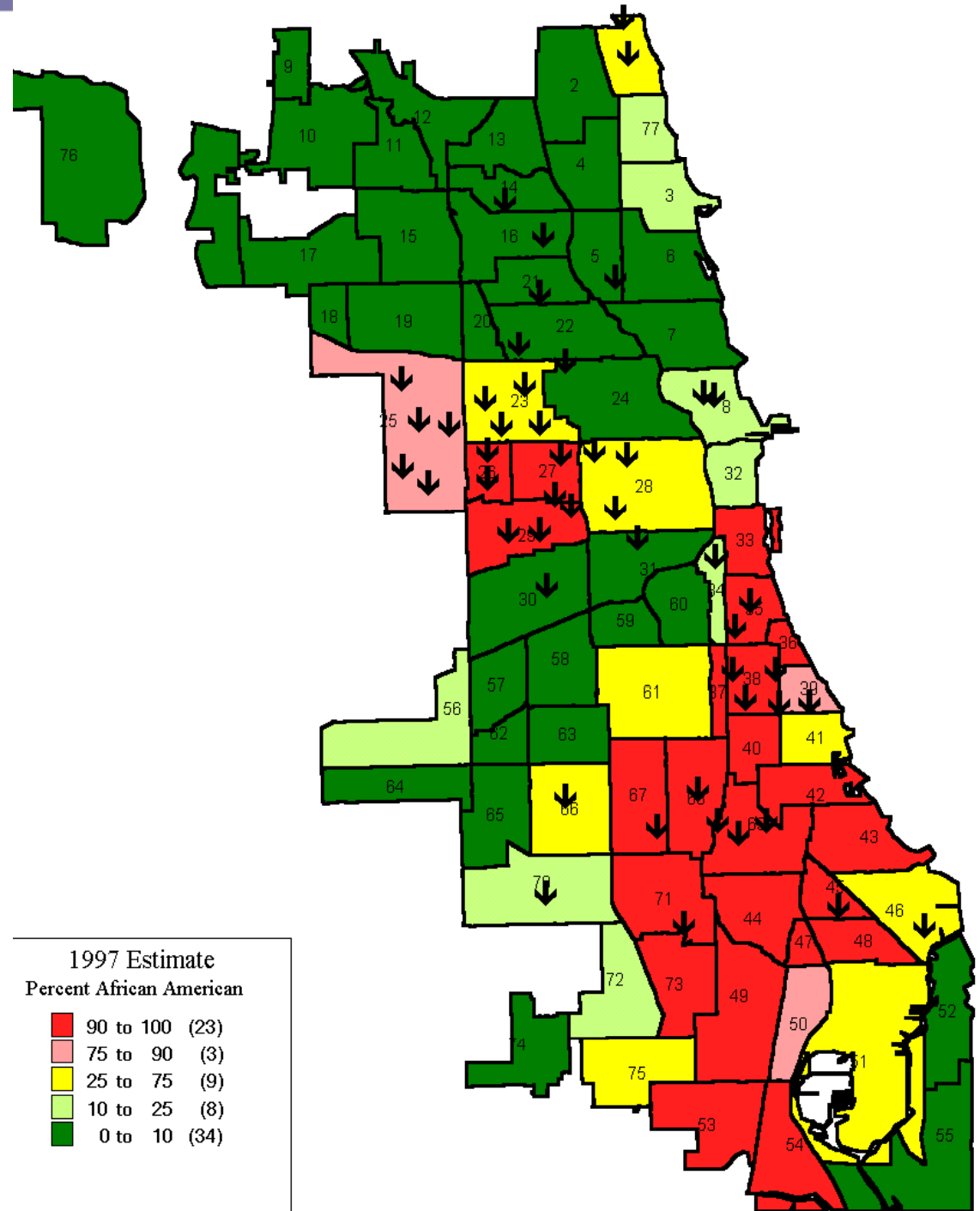
# Evidence on the Model of Essential Supports

- Good local leadership and governance promotes development of cooperative adult relationships across a school community
- Engaging instruction in a safe and orderly environment is critical for improvements in attendance
- Human resources matter for improvements in learning, but more important is the capacity of a professional staff to work together
  - Adult cooperative work focused on instruction is key
- Sustained school improvement is intrinsically a social enterprise



# Influences of Community Context

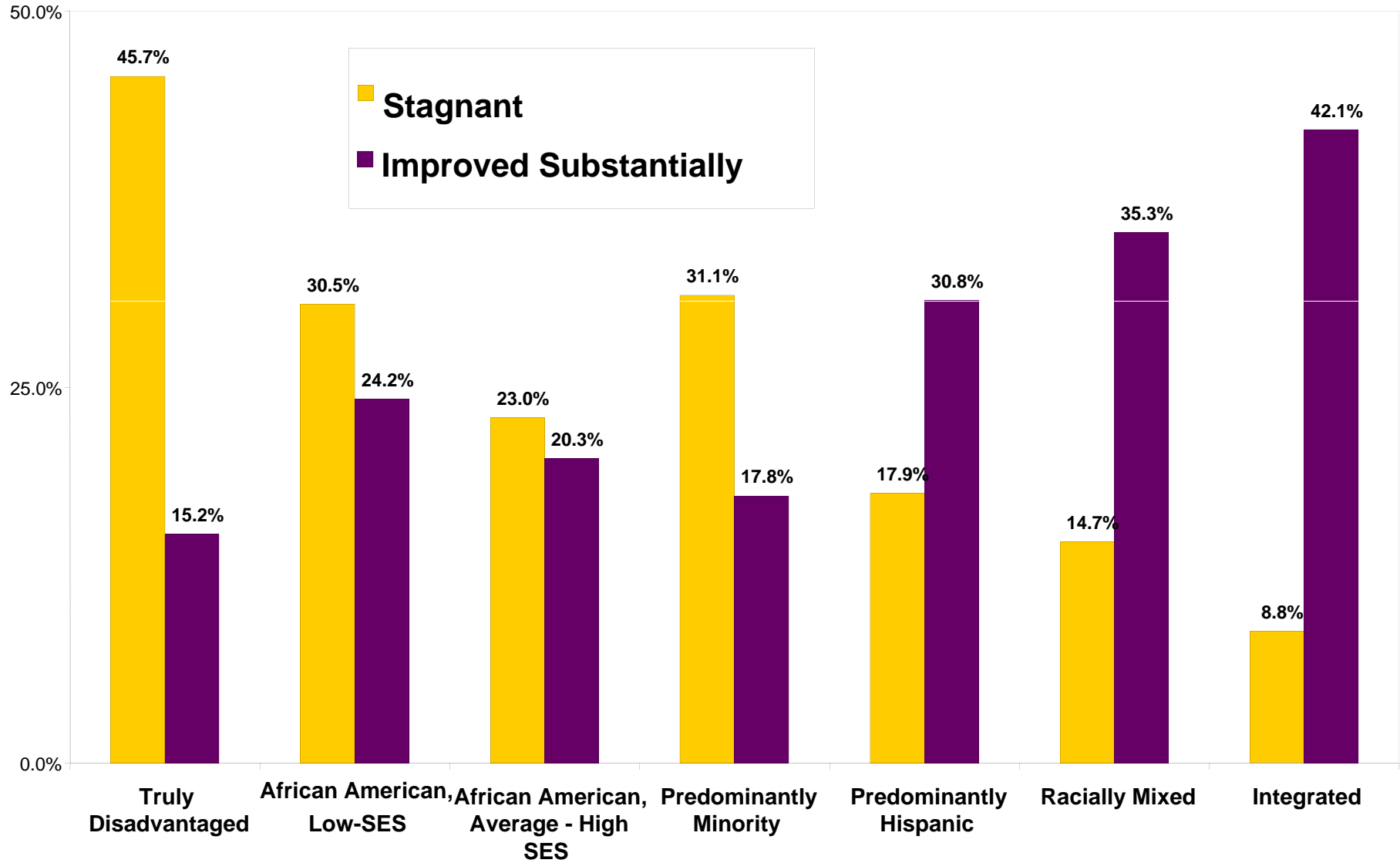
# Non-improving Schools by Percent African-American



# Classification of School Communities by Students' Racial/Ethnic and SES Composition

|                               | <b>Percent African American</b> | <b>Percent Latino</b> | <b>Percent White</b> | <b>Median Family Income</b> |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Truly Disadvantaged           | 100                             | 0                     | 0                    | \$9,480                     |
| African-American Low SES      | 99                              | 1                     | 0                    | \$19,385                    |
| African-American Moderate SES | 99                              | 1                     | 0                    | \$33,313                    |
| Predominantly Minority        | 34                              | 61                    | 4                    | \$23,293                    |
| Predominantly Latino          | 3                               | 93                    | 4                    | \$23,381                    |
| Racially Diverse              | 21                              | 56                    | 17                   | \$33,156                    |
| Racially Integrated           | 14                              | 35                    | 40                   | \$37,350                    |

# Percent of Schools Stagnant or Substantially Improving in Reading by Race-SES



# Community Characteristics

- **Bonding Social Capital**

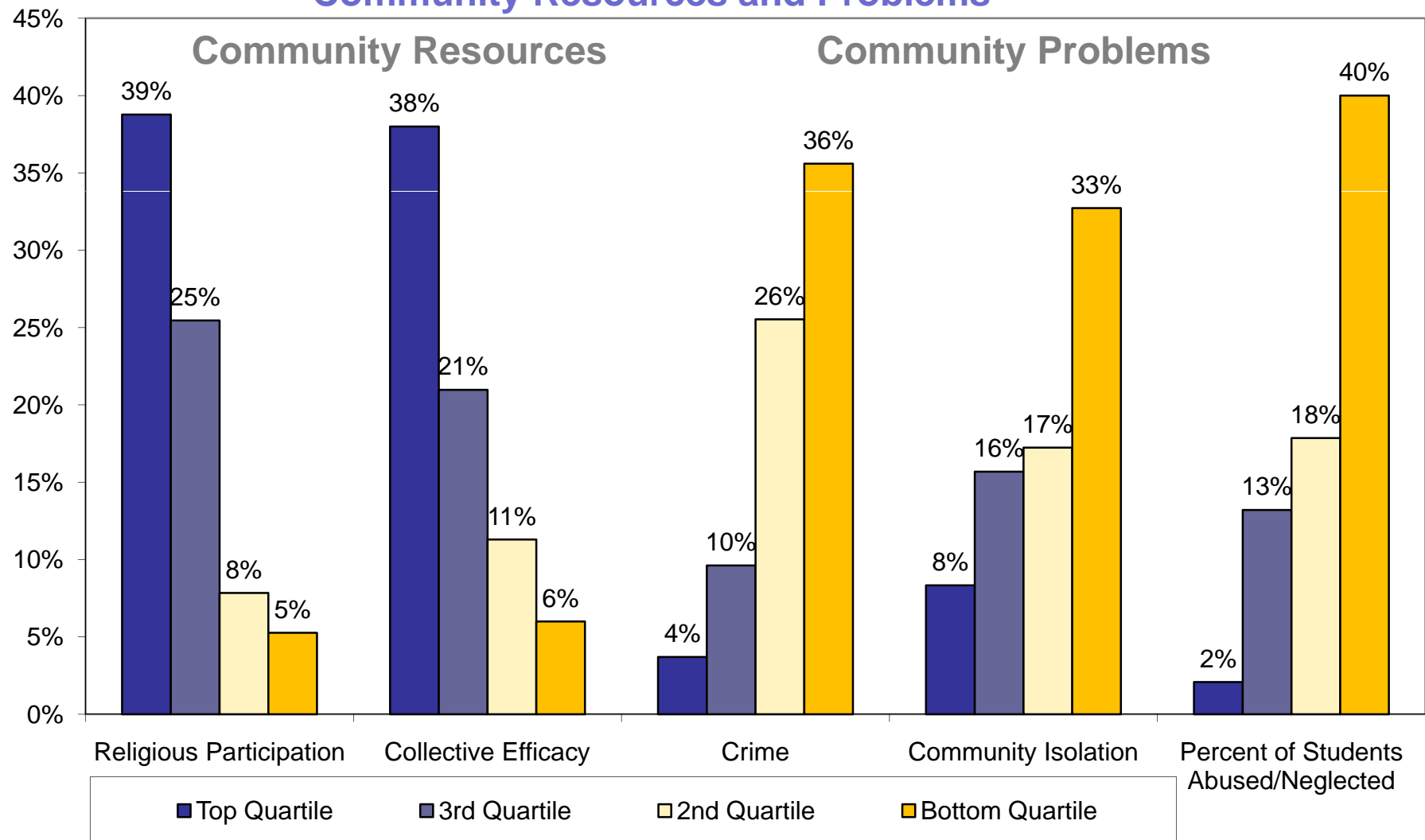
- **Collective Efficacy**
- **Religious Participation**
- **Crime statistics for school neighborhood and students' neighborhoods**

- **Bridging Social Capital**

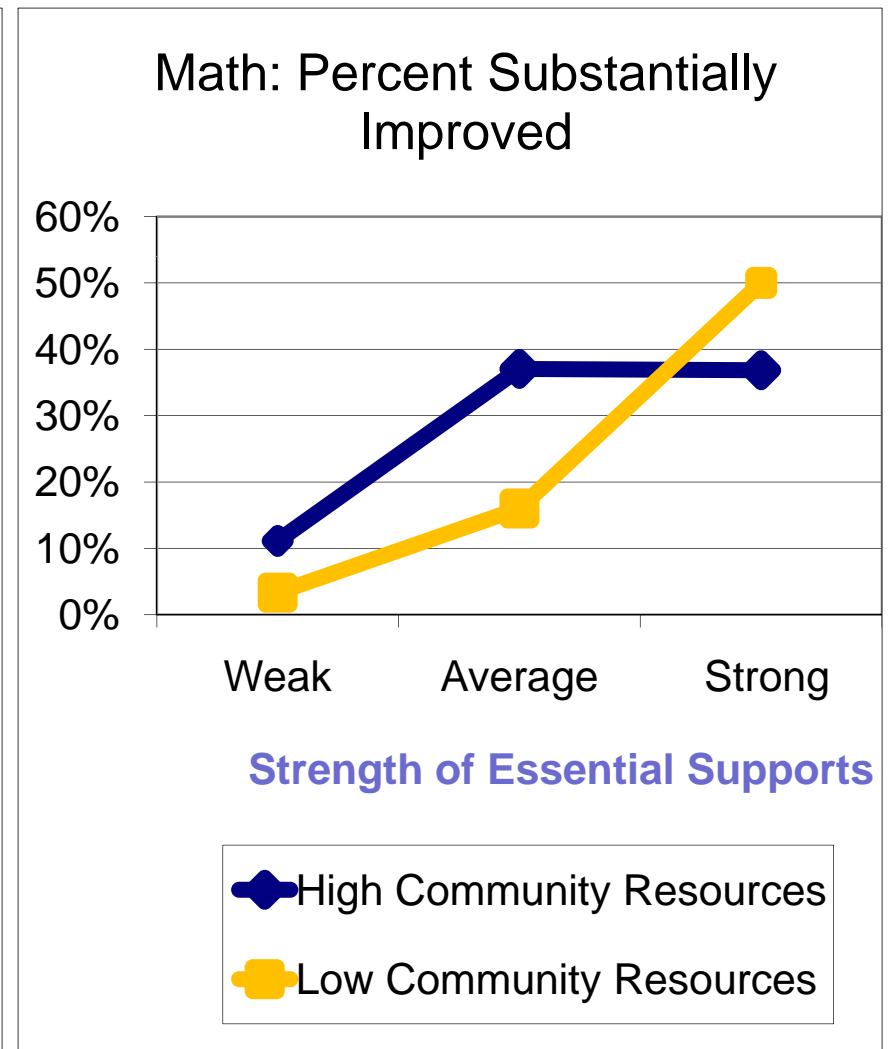
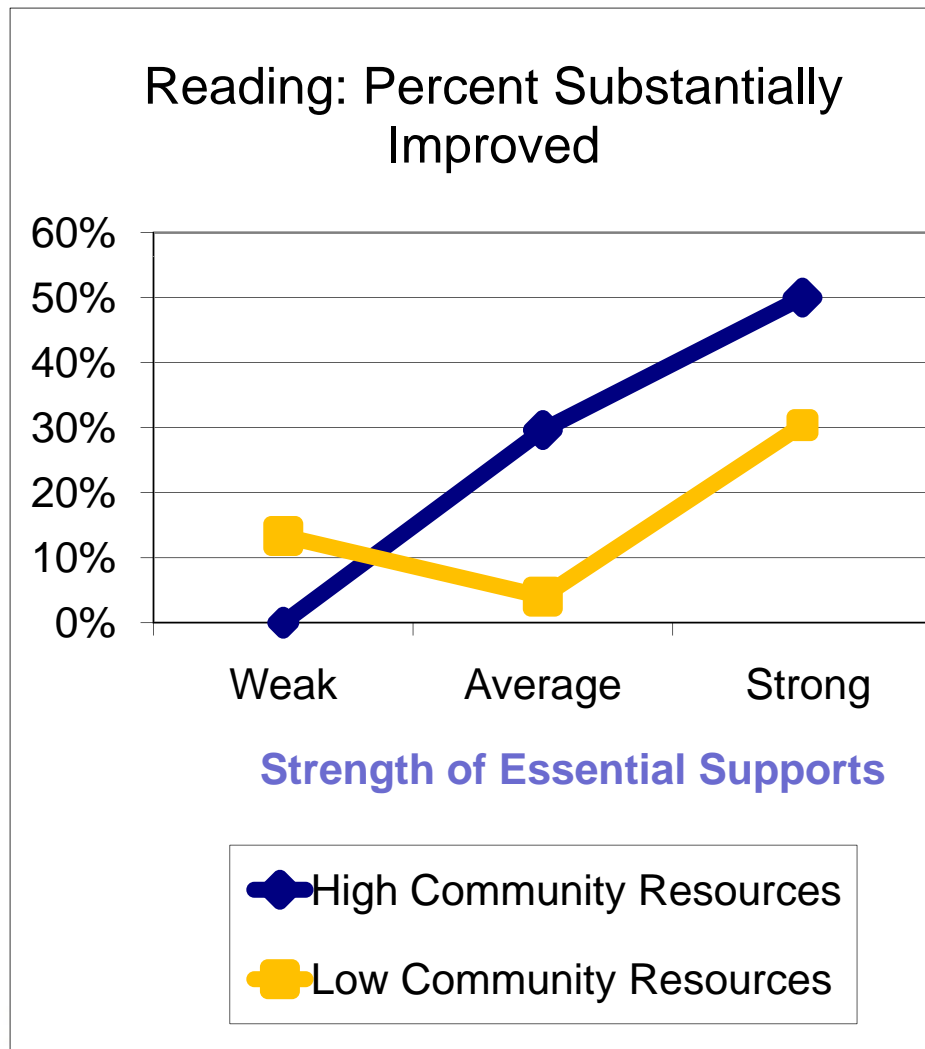
- **Contacts with people in other neighborhoods**
- **Percent of Students Who Were Abused or Neglected**

# The essential supports less likely to develop if school is in a community with low social capital...

Percent of Schools with Strong Essential Supports by Community Resources and Problems



# But the essential supports are just as important for school improvement in all schools



# Internal Essential Supports as Antidote to Weak External Social Capital

Disadvantaged communities – schools needed **robust** essential support practices to improve student learning.

Better off communities – some schools improve with even **average** essential supports.

*If external social resources are weak, internal social resources need to be strong*

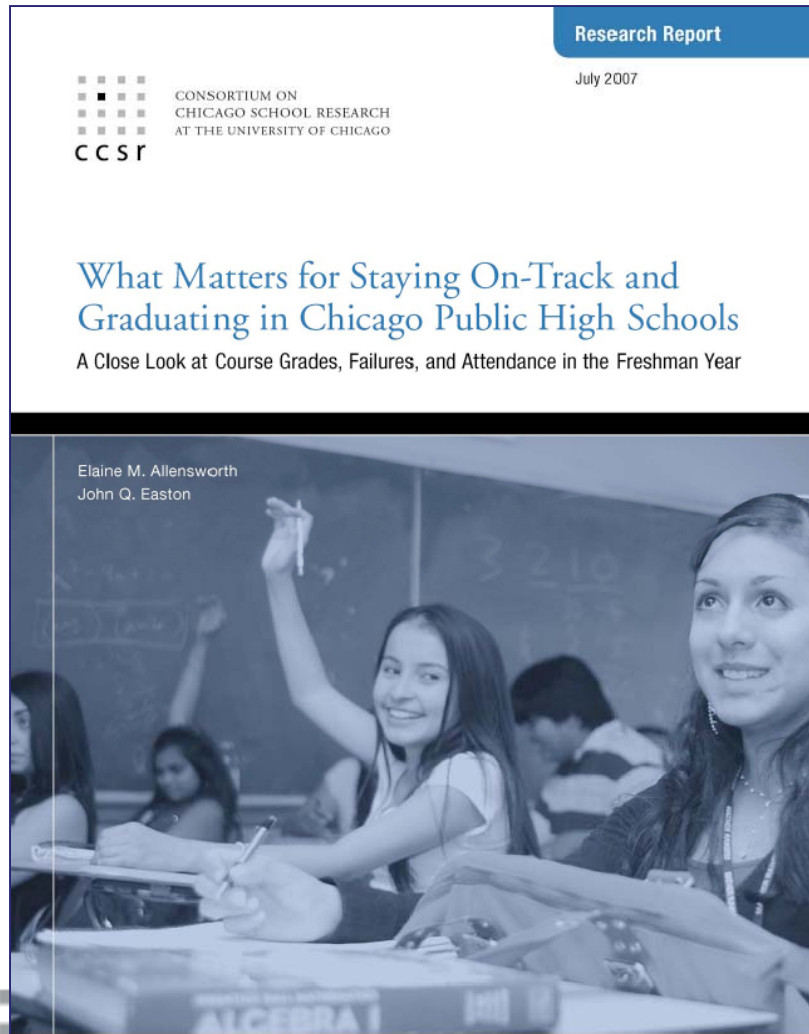


# More recent evidence

# Relationships of Essential Supports with Improvements in Value-Added, 1997-2005

| Essential Support                        | Effect of strength in base year | Effect of improvement |
|--|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>School leadership</b>                 |                                 |                       |
| Instructional leadership                 | .18***                          | .10**                 |
| Program coherence                        | .15***                          | .10**                 |
| <b>Parent community ties</b>             |                                 |                       |
| Parent involvement in the school         | .34***                          | .14***                |
| <b>Professional capacity</b>             |                                 |                       |
| Reflective dialogue                      | .03                             | .02                   |
| Collective responsibility                | .22***                          | .11**                 |
| Orientation toward innovation            | .21***                          | .08*                  |
| School commitment                        | .29***                          | .15***                |
| <b>Student-centered learning climate</b> |                                 |                       |
| Safety                                   | .43***                          | .17***                |

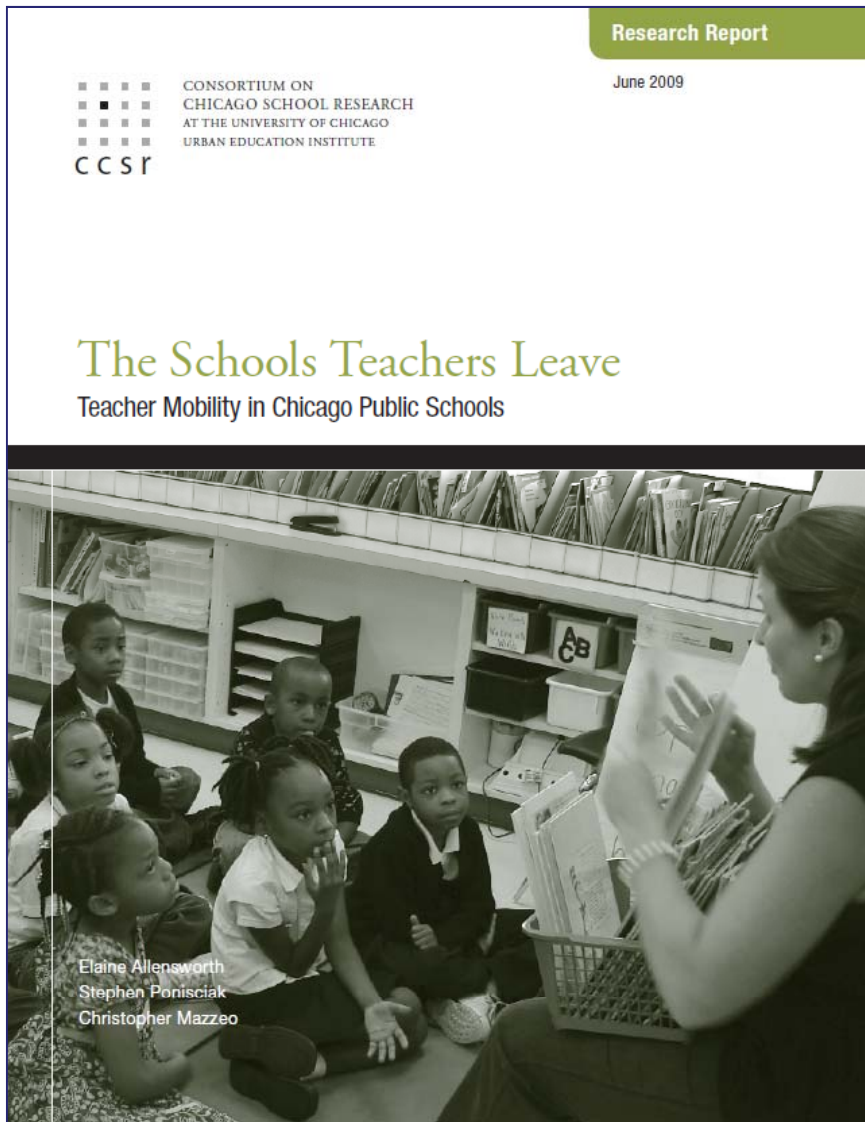
# CCSR research on high schools



Attendance, grades and pass rates are higher in schools with stronger:

- Instruction
- Student-centered climates
  - Teacher-student relationships
  - Safety
- Teacher collaboration
  - Collective responsibility
  - Instructional program coherence

# CCSR research on high schools



High school teachers remain in schools with stronger:

- Student-centered climates
  - Safety
- Teacher collaboration
  - Collective responsibility
  - Innovation
- Parent involvement
  - Teacher-parent trust
- Leadership
  - Program coherence
  - Teacher influence
  - Instructional leadership



# Concluding remarks

# School improvement requires systemic work on multiple fronts

Five Essential Supports for School Improvement

Instructional Guidance

Strong Professional Capacity

Robust Parent-Community Ties

Supportive Student-Centered Learning Climate

School Leadership as Driver for Change

- Narrow interventions are limited
  - Tools for improvement, not ends in themselves
- Leadership requires work on multiple levels
- The development of social capacity is critical

More information on CCSR  
research is available at:

[ccsr.uchicago.edu](http://ccsr.uchicago.edu)



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