

Unpacking School Transformation: Lessons from Defense Schools and Labor-Management Collaboration



SAY WHAT?

I grew up in a military family, born on a military base, then later went into education as a teacher, leader, and now educational consultant supporting school improvement. This blog is deeply personal and remarkable—how my life path brings these worlds together.

In working for decades on improving schools, I'm often asked, "What's the secret sauce for fixing our public schools?" I am excited to explore how both military schools—known for remarkable gains in school improvement—and labor-management efforts—also gaining notoriety—offer powerful lessons. I've experienced both firsthand and see them come together in authentic ways. This is where my experiences converge around something with such shared public good: ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to a high-quality education.

School improvement is complex, but not impossible. Let's explore what the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and innovative labor-management collaboration advocated by the US Department of Labor can teach us—and how the CEC Logic Model brings these lessons to life for public schools.

SO WHAT?

The "Secret Sauce" for School Transformation

1 Coherence and Shared Ownership

DoDEA schools thrive on coherence: everyone—leaders, teachers, and families—works from the same playbook. Research on labor-management collaboration shows similar magic: when unions and management build trust and align around shared goals, schools become more agile and responsive. The CEC Logic Model (*see page 2*) highlights system culture transformation—transforming school culture from isolated silos to collaborative systems where educators share ownership for change.

Fullan calls coherence a "shared sense of purpose" that sustains improvements over time. Bryk et al. found that relational trust and shared ownership enable schools to implement complex reforms effectively. Coherence isn't just management—it's the foundation of real, lasting change.





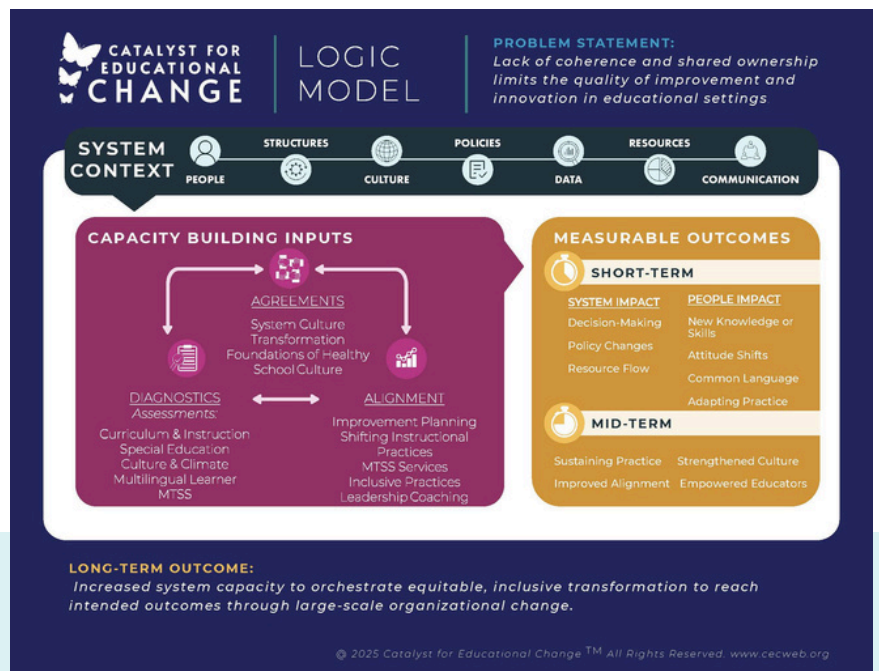
2 Capacity Building Through People

Defense schools emphasize teacher development and shared professional growth. Similarly, effective labor-management partnerships invest in joint learning and mutual respect. The CEC Logic Model prioritizes diagnostics and aligned improvement planning, creating conditions where educators develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes—the essential ingredients for meaningful change.

Capacity building is not a one-year project; it takes multiple years to grow staff expertise and foster high-quality instruction. Research shows that effective teaching practices deepen over time, with cycles of feedback, reflection, and coaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Our systems must allow teachers the space to refine their craft—quick fixes rarely transform classrooms. Sustainable improvement happens when educators are supported to develop mastery, not just compliance.

CEC's Logic Model brings our lessons from decades of school improvement into capacity building inputs for schools to orchestrate better outcomes.

Cultivating Strong Working Relationships Service Offering.



3 Data-Informed, Inclusive Practices

DoDEA and labor-management success stories stress the importance of data-driven decision-making and equity. The CEC Logic Model builds on this by emphasizing inclusive practices—ensuring every student, regardless of background, gets what they need to thrive. This is not a one-time checklist but a continuous cycle of assessments, alignment, and adaptation.

No Silver Bullets—Only Systems Change

4

Here's the kicker: **there's no quick fix**. Research reminds us that real transformation is iterative and sustained. The CEC Logic Model embraces this complexity: change unfolds in short-, mid-, and long-term phases, addressing not just people but also structures, policies, data, and resources. So, let's give schools the time they need to change—because real transformation is a journey, not a race!



NOW WHAT?

The Road Ahead:

School transformation is like building a house. You need a blueprint (logic model), skilled workers (capacity building), high-quality materials (data and resources), and above all, a culture of trust and collaboration. DoDEA and labor-management partnerships prove it's possible. With helpful blueprints like the CEC Logic Model, building that future is possible—one step at a time. Summer is a great time to sharpen those plans with your school teams.

Dive Deeper: Resources for Further Learning

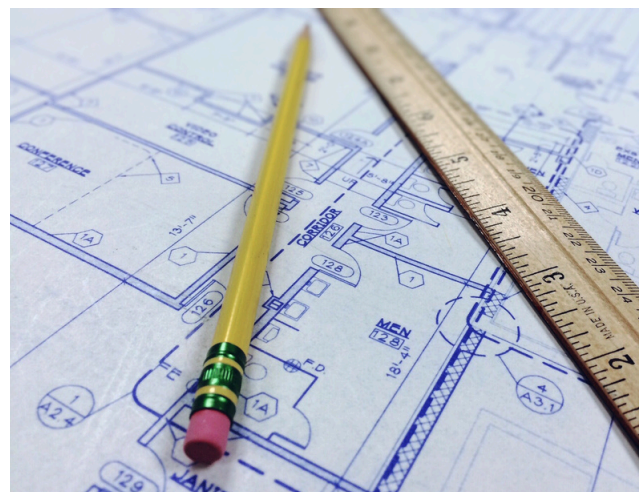
Looking to explore this topic further? Here's a list of recommended resources, studies, and articles that can expand your understanding of school transformation, labor-management collaboration, and the CEC Logic Model approach:

[DoDEA Outperforming All States on 2022 NAEP Test Article](#)

[US Department of Labor Blog on Labor-Management Collaboration](#)

[Have You Heard Podcast, #196 The Best Schools You've Never Heard Of](#)

[Baldrige Institute for Performance Excellence](#)



When stakeholders work together around shared agreements...the unthinkable is possible. CEC's focus on the **System Agreements** in school reform efforts aim to realign the adult culture and dynamics. We know when systems cultivate healthy, values-based relationships within each school and classroom measurable outcomes are more likely. People matter. And people working together really matters in schools. Developing a strong adult culture as a foundation of a change agenda is what makes CEC stand apart.

CEC uses **System Alignment** to create collective efficacy on the agreed upon improvement aims of a school or district. Our tools and processes are designed to empower those closest to the issues to own the work. Our change management approach intentionally paces improvement through attainable short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. It is the "secret sauce" of school improvement.

We invite you to explore the role our **Logic Model** might play in your system's large-scale improvement. Our website includes [FREE](#) resources that might be helpful in opening up dialogue with key stakeholders. Let's work together to turn ideas into action, so we can all see what's possible for our schools.

*Blog Authored by Shelley Taylor, Executive Director
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