Building Smart Education Systems

Annenberg Institute for School Reform | *Voices in Urban Education*

Building Smart Education Systems

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Through Many Voices, an Idea Is Born

Robert Rothman

When the Annenberg Institute for School Reform agreed in 2002 to create a quarterly publication to address issues in urban education, the goal was to bring to bear the Institute's strengths as a convener to inform and help shape the national dialogue. The Institute had held a number of conferences and meetings that brought together disparate voices – many of whom often disagreed – with the hope that a discussion on neutral ground could lead to common ground. Through the magazine, we hoped to do the same in print and on the Web.

Voices in Urban Education has succeeded in bringing together disparate voices. Authors have included students, parents, education practitioners, community leaders, researchers, district and state officials, mayors, and even a top official from Her Majesty's government in England. Many of these voices are seldom heard in national education policy discussions.

As we intended, the voices did not always agree. Community leaders, for example, sometimes spoke of their frustrations with district officials who appeared resistant to community involvement; district officials, for their part, spoke of community groups' narrow interests. Issues of race and class often reared their heads.

Yet, as we hoped, these disagreements also created opportunities for common ground. One instance comes to mind. In an issue on community engagement, Norm Fruchter and Richard Gray (2006) of the Community Involvement Program (then at New York University, now a part of the Annenberg Institute) wrote of the role of community groups in organizing

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parents and community members. In the same issue, Donald McAdams (2006), a former school board member from Houston and the director of the Center for Reform of School Systems, wrote that school boards should take the lead. Yet, in an interview for the *VUE* Web site, Fruchter and McAdams saw virtually eye to eye. What appeared to be a conflict paled in comparison with the common ground.

VUE has also had some success in meeting the Institute's goal of informing the national dialogue. Although our data on its impact are limited, we know that we have received numerous requests for copies from district and community leaders holding meetings, professors leading classes, and, we're proud to say, from the Obama Administration's transition team developing policies for the new President. *VUE* articles have been cited in other journals and publications, and the Web page is the most-visited section of the Annenberg Institute's site.

These accomplishments have been enormously gratifying. Yet *VUE* has also produced another accomplishment that the Institute might not have anticipated when we launched the publication: the development of an idea for a new kind of education
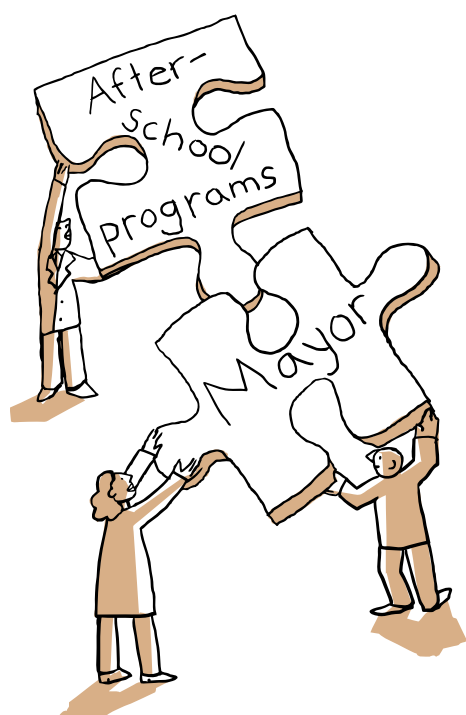
system. This idea, which the Institute calls a "smart education system," is now the focus of its work. This issue of *VUE* examines the notion through a range of articles that represent highlights from the first twenty-five issues.

Simply put, a smart education system links a high-functioning school district with a web of supports for children and families that collectively develop and integrate high-quality learning opportunities in all areas of students' lives – at school, at home, and in the community. Such systems actively engage youths and community members in the development and implementation of services, to ensure that they meet community needs. Community members provide pressure and support; districts and service providers are accountable to the community for improving a broad range of outcomes for children and youth.

This idea has gained prominence in the education reform debate nationally. Policy-makers from across the political spectrum have increasingly recognized the importance of linking improved schooling with supports for learning and development outside of schools. Other organizations, such as the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education agenda and the Time, Learning, and Afterschool Task Force, a panel convened by the Mott Foundation, have outlined similar ideas.

This issue of *VUE* describes some of the components of a smart education system, from a range of perspectives.

- Michelle Fine, Janice Bloom, and Lori Chajet, in the first issue, draw on youth voices to challenge some of the assumptions in education reform policy. Engaged and organized students are key to smart systems, because they bring perspectives that adults seldom see. According to students, the authors found, the physical and instructional conditions in schools make it impossible to achieve the ambitious goal of ensuring that all students learn to high levels. At a time when districts, states, and the federal government were

seeking to hold schools accountable for student results, the students made clear that governments need to be accountable for providing the means for students to succeed. (*Rethinking Accountability, VUE* 1, Spring 2003)

• Glynda Hull and Jessica Zacher, in an issue on adolescent literacy – one of the best-selling issues – broaden the definition of literacy to encompass higher-level abilities that schools seldom address, and they suggest that after-school programs might be ideal settings for helping develop such abilities. By analyzing a digital poem written by a fifteen-year-old student from Oakland, Asia Washington, Hull and Zacher show how the student's after-school program helped her develop the digital literacy skills that are increasingly vital in what the authors call the "visual age." The *VUE* Web site includes Asia's digital poem. (*Adolescent Literacy, VUE* 3, Winter/Spring 2004)

Go to <www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/spring04/video.html> to watch Asia's video.

• Michael Grady, Ellen Foley, and Frank Barnes, in an issue celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education,* consider the role of districts in promoting the twin goals of equity and excellence. Although smart education systems take into account students' learning outside of school, schools remain central to the vision. And "smart districts" are essential to ensure that all students have the opportunities and resources they need to succeed. The authors suggest that strengthening the effectiveness of school districts can help fulfill the promise of *Brown v. Board.* This issue of *VUE* was cited as one of the top reports of the year by the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy. (*Beyond* Brown v. Board, *VUE* 4, Summer 2004)

• Bill Purcell highlights the critical role of mayors in smart systems. Much of the writing about mayoral involvement in education focuses on mayoral control of school systems. But Purcell, then the mayor of Nashville, notes that mayors who do

not control schools can wield a great deal of influence by mobilizing parents and community members. In Nashville, Purcell's efforts to organize "first day" celebrations and make the system more transparent helped strengthen public support for the schools – and led to a substantial increase in funding. (*Engaging Communities, VUE* 13, Fall 2006)

- Joanna Brown highlights the role of community organizing in supporting educational improvement. In the case of Chicago, the community organizing group not only pressed for better schools, but also developed a unique resource by preparing parents to be teachers. This article highlights a major tenet of smart education systems: that community organizations and agencies bring to bear assets that can enhance educational opportunities for children and youth. And as a six-year study conducted by Annenberg Institute researchers later found, community organizing yields real improvement in educational outcomes. (*Skills for Smart Systems, VUE* 17, Fall 2007)

- Warren Simmons urges federal policy-makers to consider equity and community engagement to ensure that system improvements have the capacity to deliver supports that can meet the needs of *all* students. He outlines the principles of smart education systems and suggests that policies that support these principles will result in improved outcomes for all children and youth. (*The Evolving Federal Role, VUE* 24, Summer 2009)

While all of these elements are critical, the goal is to create a smart education *system* – a coherent organization that ensures that all young people have access to the services and supports they need. So far, this goal has remained elusive – although Great

Britain, highlighted in *VUE* 21, an issue not repre-
sented here, comes close with its Every Child Matters
agenda (Rothman 2008). The interest in the concept
suggests that communities on this side of the Atlantic
might approach that goal in the next few years, and
future issues of *VUE* will highlight them.

The success of *VUE* has been personally and
professionally gratifying to me. As I leave the editor-
ship, I want to thank the Annenberg Institute for its
strong and unwavering support for the publication;
the communications staff, designers, and illustrator
for their tireless work in producing consistently
high-quality publications and Web sites; the authors,
for their professionalism and willingness to add their
voices to the conversation; and the readers who make
the conversation happen. I look forward to joining
your ranks.

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Betrayal: Accountability from the Bottom

Michelle Fine, Janice Bloom, and Lori Chajet

Drawing on the voices of youth in New York and California, the authors find that the promises for improvement in current education policy represent a cruel hoax. Young people want a better education, but they are denied even the most basic conditions for learning.

Three days after taking office in January 2001, as the 43rd President of the United States, George W. Bush announced No Child Left Behind (NCLB), his framework for bipartisan education reform that he described as "the cornerstone of my administration." President Bush emphasized his deep belief in our public schools, but an even greater concern that "too many of our neediest children are being left behind. . . . The NCLB Act . . . incorporates principles and strategies includ[ing] increased accountability for states, school districts and schools; greater choice for parents and students, particularly those attending low-performing schools; more flexibility . . ." (U.S. Department of Education 2002, p. 1)

Are the President and the nation in a position to reach the stated goals of No Child Left Behind? This essay addresses this question through an accountability exercise. The authors join those who challenge the high-stakes standardized-testing implications of NCLB (Elmore 2002; Meier 2002), but in this essay we focus our concern on the NCLB promise of "choice" and "flexibility" to "our neediest children."

Drawing on data from poor and working-class youth of color from California and New York City, we analyze accountability from the "bottom." As you will read, these students yearn for a high-quality education. They believe deeply that they are entitled to a slice of the American dream. Yet they have been startled awake by their investigations into the quality of their education, as they recognize how public edu-

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cation in the United States has been redlined, with race, ethnicity, and class determining young people's access to high-quality schooling.

With the youth in these two contexts, we find the stated intent of NCLB – to support parents and students in low-performing schools – to be stunning and timely. Two of the Act's provisions, however, high-stakes testing and choice (specifically, the opportunity for students in low-performing schools to transfer to better-performing schools), reveal the cruel betrayal of NCLB for poor and working-class youth. For these students and their families, the language of "choice" rings brutally hollow. Systematic policies of inequitable urban school financing, maldistribution of quality teachers, and lack of access to rigorous curriculum ensure that the privileged remain privileged, while poor and working class students lag behind, all too predictably "failing" tests that seal their fates, with no choices in sight. "Choice" in this context sounds like an ideological diversion – a crumb held out to desperate students and parents whose real problem is underfunded schools (Kozol 1991).

Economist Albert Hirschman (1990) theorizes that members of declining social organizations may engage in any of three psychological relations with

their organizations: exit, voice, or loyalty. In school systems plagued by structural inequities, most poor and working-class youth sadly, if understandably, *exit* prior to graduation (see Fine 1991). This was true before the introduction of high-stakes testing, and drop-out rates have dramatically spiked, especially in low-income communities of color (Fine & Powell 2001), since the tests have been put in place. Exit reigns in these schools, and those exiting have migrated into prisons, where 70 percent to 80 percent of young inmates have neither General Educational Development (GED) certificates nor high school diplomas (Fine et al. 2001). Some teens we've spoken with capture this trend as they see it: "There are two tracks now in high school – the college track and the prison track."

But the voices you will encounter in this essay are not voices of despair spoken by dropouts (another critical voice of accountability). Instead you will hear from students who have remained in underfunded schools, narrating a blend of yearning and betrayal, outrage and loyalty, the desire to believe and the pain of persistent inequities. Remaining loyal, in Hirschman's terms, these youth did *not* walk from their schools. It has not escaped their attention, however, that America has walked away from them, refusing the obligation to provide poor and working-class youth of color quality public education (Anyon 1997;

Darling-Hammond 2001; Fine & Powell 2001; Kozol 1991; Mizell 2002; U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey 2000; U.S. Department of Labor 2001).

In such an America, any discussion of accountability requires a view from the bottom, told through the eyes of poor and working-class youth of color who want simply to be educated. We provide this view by bringing together college faculty, graduate students, teachers, and high school students, who work collectively to chronicle the uncomfortable truths of the accountability question (see Wells & Serna 1996 for parallel sets of issues concerning accountability and school integration).

You will hear, in this short essay, from high school students in two distinct settings. Across both settings, these young women and men are eloquent about the absence of *distributive justice*, that is, the unfair distribution of educational resources throughout America; and about the absence of *procedural justice*, that is, being refused a fair hearing from educators and the courts (Deutsch 2002). They ask: Will adults stand with them for educational justice? Theirs are necessary voices in the accountability debates.
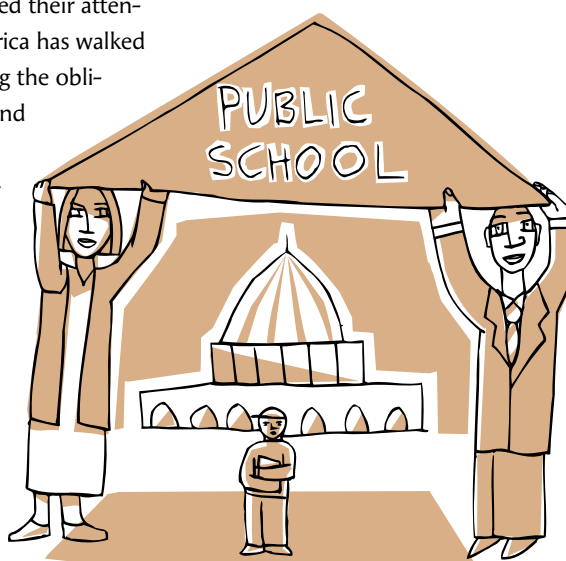
The Hollowing of the Public Sphere: A Violation of Distributive and Procedural Justice

In the early 1990s, one of us (Michelle) wrote *Framing Dropouts* (Fine 1991), which analyzed the ways that public urban high schools systematically exile youths of poverty and color, scarring souls and minds in the process. This essay may sound redundant – an echo produced a decade later or an echo of W.E.B. DuBois's (1935) question "Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?" almost seventy years later. But we believe, with concern, that the stakes for undereducated youth and for dropouts are far more severe today than they were in

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the past. For students of color and poor students, resources are woefully inadequate, access to higher education is increasingly low, and stakes for exclusion are rising. The economy remains hostile to young people without high school degrees (Poe-Yamagata & Jones 2000). Young women and men of color, even with high school degrees or some college, fare far worse than their white peers; those without a high school degree have little chance of entering the legitimate economy (Hochschild 1995, forthcoming).

We situate this work in California and New York because these states perversely represent "cutting edge" states in which historic commitments to affirmative action (in California) and remediation (in New York) in higher education have been retrenched, wrenching generations of African Americans

and Latinos out of even dreams of college and university (Hurtado, Haney & Garcia 1998). The public sphere of K–12 education has been hollowed; the academy has been bleached; the prison populations have swelled. California and New York, then, offer us an opportunity to ask how youth of color and poverty, now denied equal opportunity, assess the policies and practices of public education. These are perfect – if distressing – sites for reconceptualizing accountability from the bottom.

Denial and Alienation

Place: California

Context: Interviews with randomly selected youth who attend (or have graduated from) schools suffering from structural decay, high levels of unqualified educators, and/or absence of textbooks and instructional materials

Time: February 2002

"Every day, every hour, talented students are being sacrificed.… They're [the schools are] destroying lives."

—*Maritza, college student, speaking about her urban high school*

In *Williams v. State of California*, a class-action lawsuit has been waged on behalf of poor and working-class students attending structurally and instructionally underresourced schools in California in 2002. As the plaintiff's first amended complaint states:

> Tens of thousands of children attending public schools located throughout the state of California are being deprived of basic educational opportunities available to more privileged children attending the majority of the state's public schools. State law requires students to attend school. Yet all too many California school children must go to schools that shock the conscience. Those schools lack the bare essentials required of a free and common school education that the majority of students throughout the state

enjoy: trained teachers, necessary educational supplies, classrooms, even seats in classrooms and facilities that meet basic health and safety standards. Students must therefore attempt to learn without books and sometimes without any teachers, and in schools that lack functioning heating or air-conditioning systems, that lack sufficient numbers of functioning toilets, and that are infested with vermin, including rats, mice, and cockroaches. These appalling conditions in California public schools represent extreme departures from accepted educational standards and yet they have persisted for years and have worsened over time. (*Williams v. State of California* 2000)

As an expert witness in this case, one of us (Michelle) had the opportunity to organize extensive focus groups and conduct surveys in order to hear from over a hundred youths who attend schools in the plaintiff class about the impact of these conditions on their psychological, social, and academic well-being (see Fine, Burns, Payne & Torre 2002 for methodological design and findings).

Our qualitative and quantitative findings can be summarized simply: Children who attend structurally, fiscally, and educationally inadequate schools are not only miseducated, but they read conditions of resource-starved schools as evidence that the state and the nation view them as disposable and, simply, worthless (Fallis & Opotow 2002). Like children who learn to love in homes scarred by violence, they are forced to learn in contexts of humiliation, betrayal, and disrespect.

The youth in the California focus groups consistently told us that they want to be educated and intellectually challenged. They believe they deserve no less. They articulate, critically, two standards of accountability by which the state has failed them. First, they are
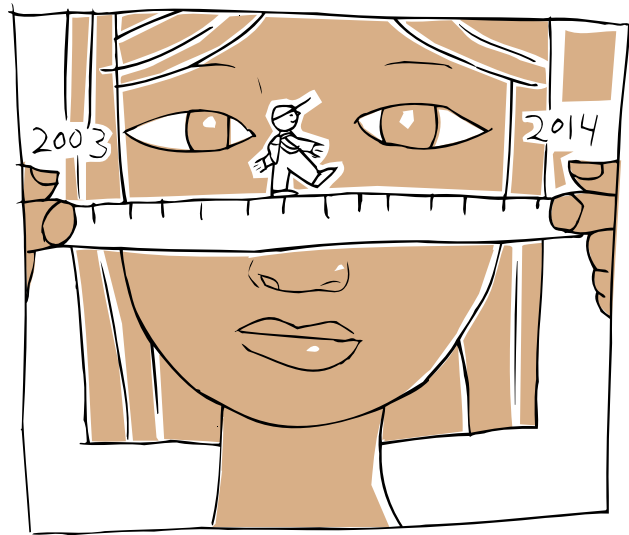
distressed about the lack of *material accountability* (fiscal, educational, and structural resources). And, second, they are outraged at the denial of *procedural accountability* (when they have complained to public authorities about their educational circumstances and needs, no one has responded).

Boy: "Because, before, we had a teacher for, like, the first three weeks of our multiculture class and then the teacher didn't have all her credentials so she couldn't continue to teach. And since then we've had, like, ten different substitutes. And none of them have taught us anything. We just basically do what we wanted in class. We wrote letters, all the class wrote letters to people and they never responded. We still don't have a teacher."

Girl (different focus group): "The teachers, they are there and then they are not there. One minute they're there, they're there for a whole week, and then they gone next week. And you try to find out where the teacher, and they say, 'We don't have a teacher.' We outside the whole day, you just sit outside because there ain't nobody going to come through. We ask the security guards to bring us the principal over there. They tell us to wait and they leave. And don't come back. They forget about us. We ain't getting no education by sitting outside."

"They forget about us. We ain't getting no education by sitting outside."

Students in another high school focus group became agitated as they contrasted how their schools ignored their requests for quality education but responded (if superficially) when the state investigated school policies and practices. As one student said:

> We all walked out, 'cause of the conditions, but they didn't care. They didn't even come out. They sent the police. The police made a line and pushed us back in. Don't you think the principal should have come out to hear what we were upset over? But when the state is coming in, they paint, they fix up the building. They don't care about us, the students, just the state or the city.

Scores of interviewed youth from California expressed this double experience of disappointment and betrayal. Disappointed by the relative absence of quality faculty and materials, they feel helpless to master rigorous academic material and powerless to solicit effective help. As if that were not enough, when these youth do complain, grieve, or challenge the educational inequities they endure, they confront a wall of silence, an institutional refusal to engage. Only 34 percent agreed or strongly agreed that "People like me have the ability to change government if we don't like what is happening."

On two fronts of accountability, the youth find the state lacking. These young people report high levels of perceived betrayal, resistance, and withdrawal by persons in positions of authority and public institutions (Fine, Freudenberg, Payne, Perkins, Smith & Wanzer 2002). These schools not only deny youth academic skills. These schools produce alienation from the public sphere.

Place: New York City

Context: Class discussion among seniors at small public high school in New York City – students are doing research on the issue of school funding in New York State

Time: September 2002

"If you're offering different things to different students in the city and suburbs, aren't you just segregating again?"

—*Seekqumarie, high school senior*

New York State is embroiled in a lawsuit, initiated in 1995 by a group of parents from New York City public schools who are represented by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE). CFE asserts that the state has failed to provide New York City's public school students with the "sound basic education" the state constitution promises all of its residents. This, it contends, is the result of antiquated funding formulas that grossly favor the suburban districts over the needier, urban ones. While some districts spend close to $13,000 per student, New York City – which educates 70 percent of the state's economically disadvantaged

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students, over 80 percent of its limited-English-proficient students, and 51 percent of its students with severe disabilities (Campaign for Fiscal Equity 2000; Education Priorities Panel 1999; *CFE v. State of New York* 2001) – spends only $9,623 per student (Regents and State Education Department 2001).

While the state's highest court considered an appeal of a lower court's decision on *CFE v. State of New York,* a group of seniors from one small public high school in New York City decided that they would study the origins, consequences, and persistence of financial inequities in New York State.

As youth researchers on the Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Opportunity Gap Research Project,[1] these students undertook a systematic analysis of fiscal equity policy documents; interviews with key informants (educators and policymakers on both sides of the debate); and a series of participant observations in elite suburban and poor urban schools. From within the city, the effects of inequitable funding were clear to the students. They regularly witnessed upwards of 50 percent of New York

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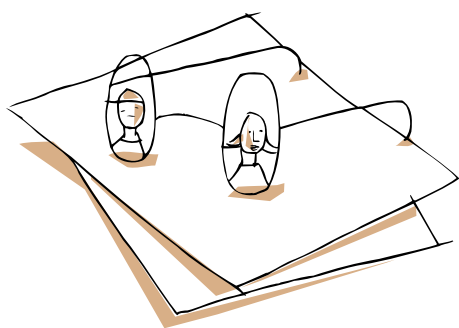
1 This research is part of a project, funded by the Rockefeller, Spencer, Edwin Gould, and Leslie Glass foundations, on Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Educational Opportunity: Youth Research the "Achievement Gap." Our youth researcher colleagues include: Candice DeJesus, Emily Genao, Jasmine Castillo, Seekqumarie Kellman, Monica Jones, Lisa Sheare, Noman Rahman, Amanda Osorio, Jeremy Taylor, and Nikaury Acosta.

City high school students failing to graduate in four years and 30 percent never receiving a diploma at all (Campaign for Fiscal Equity 2000). At the start of the research, however, they had little sense of what "good" schools might look (and feel) like.

In this work, they ask two related questions: To what standards should they and their peers be held accountable? What must their government and the adults around them provide in order for them to reach those standards?

The researchers (two of us – Janice and Lori – and the youth researchers) began by reviewing key legislative and judicial documents. We read Justice Leland DeGrasse's 2001 decision:

> The court holds that the education provided New York City students is so deficient that it falls below the constitutional floor set by the Education Article of the New York State Constitution. The court also finds that the State's actions are a substantial cause of this constitutional violation.
>
> With respect to the plaintiff's claim under Title VI's implementing regulations, the court finds that the State school-funding system has an adverse and disparate impact on minority public school children and that this disparate impact is not adequately justified by any reason related to education. (*CFE v. State of New York* 2001)

Just seventeen months later, based on an appeal filed by Governor George Pataki, the Appellate Division overturned the DeGrasse decision. This court sided with the state's argument that a "sound basic education" – defined as an education whereby students learn to "function productively" and participate in civic duties such as serving on a jury

and voting – is the equivalent of an eighth-grade education. We read, with dismay, Justice Alfred Lerner's decision:

> A "sound basic education" should consist of the skills necessary to obtain employment, and to competently discharge one's civil responsibility. The state submitted evidence that jury charges are generally at a grade level of 8.3, and newspaper articles on campaign and ballot issues range from grade level 6.5 to 11.7.... The evidence at the trial established that the skills required to enable a person to obtain employment, vote, and serve on a jury, are imparted between grades 8 and 9. (*CFE v. State of New York* 2002)

The court concluded, "That is not to say that the state should not strive for higher goals [than an eighth-grade education]; indeed…the new Regents standards…exceed any notions of a basic education" (*CFE v. State of New York* 2002).

Students were instantly struck by Judge Lerner's findings and by how disconnected they seem from the new requirement that all students must pass high-stakes five-test Regents for graduation, a mandate they have been hearing about, endlessly it seems, over the past several years. "If all schools have to

give is an eighth- or ninth-grade education, why are they making us take the Regents?" one student asked, as the rest murmured their assent. These students recognize that they live at the heart of a policy paradox: a raising of standards required for a high school diploma, along with a declaration that the state has no responsibility to educate students to the levels required for a high school diploma. While this paradox may escape both politicians and policy-makers, it is felt deeply by the students upon whose heads it comes to rest.

Outraged at Lerner's suggestion that students need only an eighth- or ninth-grade education to succeed in today's economy, the students began a dialogue. One pointed out: "It cannot be said that a person who is engaged in a 'low-level service job' is not a valuable, productive member of society."

"That's true that they're valuable," others agreed, "but what kind of job can you get? Working at McDonald's?"

The question of the pay at a minimum-wage job came up – what exactly does one earn in a forty-hour week at $5.15 an hour? One student pulled out her calculator: $206. The numbers spoke for themselves. The students sat in silence, stunned by the future that a New York State Appellate Division judge is willing to consign them to.

The significance of resources in reaching "standards" (see also Orfield et al. 1997/2001) was clear to the students. Although they feel privileged to attend a small school with what they consider to be high academic standards, they are far from immune to the shortages that plague city schools. "If you have to take gym, then they have to give you a good gym. And you need books and computers if you're going to get ready for the Regents, or for a job, or anything." These most basic resources are not something that they take for granted; their school gym is a cause of much consternation at the school, barely large enough for one full-court basketball game. Though there is no shortage of books at their own school, one student recounted his experience in summer school, where his English class was unable to read a class book because there were not enough copies for all the students.

"You need books and computers if you're going to get ready for the Regents, or for a job, or anything."

> "By not giving enough school-books or computers, some schools say, 'You're never going to amount to anything'. . . a child hears that and they say, 'Oh well. They say that's what I'm gonna do, that's what I'm gonna do.'"

Asked to construct a list of what constitutes a "sound basic education," they are expansive and recognize again the significance of material and intellectual resources. They include not only "the basics – math, English, science, history," but different languages, the arts, and a sophisticated political awareness. "You have to be able to form your own opinions about things: you need to know history in order to decide about current events," a young man explained. "How else can I decide if I think we should go to war with Iraq?"

Like the young people from California, they are aware that *someone* is supposed to be accountable for providing these resources equitably. As the race for governor of New York headed into its final stretch in the fall of 2002, they watched politicians keenly. One student pointed out, "I saw an ad last night on TV, where Governor Pataki says he has improved education in New York State. But how can he say that and appeal the decision?"

"What about the other candidate for governor?" someone else asked. "What is he going to do about education?"

"How do you know if the politicians are going to do what they say they will?" a third wondered.

In order to answer these and other questions, students went beyond legal documents to visit a series of suburban high schools – partner schools in the Opportunity Gap study – to investigate the material conditions of teaching and learning when most of the students are white and middle-class. Sitting on green grass waiting for their train back to the city, students expressed amazement at the differences between their own school and the large suburban complex they had spent the day visiting. "Did you see the auditorium? Okay, our auditorium

looks like...[crap] compared to that one. ..."

"Because they have money, they could actually have a darkroom that they can do photography in," another exclaimed. Others focused on the library: "They have a lot of books!"

"It's like a regular library."

"The computers!"

One student highlighted the difference in access to technology within the classroom and its effect on student learning: "I went to [a science class where] a girl gave a presentation about abortion. She had slides to show everyone [on a slide projector and a computer]...when we had that in our school we just did a poster." Several, having also visited science classes, followed up with remarks on the "real" science laboratories: the lab equipment, the sinks in the rooms, the materials for experiments. It was clear, in their minds, that the students at this suburban school enjoy an academic advantage because of the resources they largely take for granted.

In noting structural inequities between suburbs and cities, these students nevertheless refuse to shrink from holding themselves and their peers to standards of accountability. Berating peers whom they see as not holding up their part of the bargain, they believe strongly in an ethic of individual responsibility. But they cannot ignore the many places where the state fails to provide the necessary resources: "By not giving enough schoolbooks or computers, some schools say, 'You're never going to amount to anything'...a child hears that and they say, 'Oh well. They say that's what I'm gonna do, that's what I'm gonna do.'" This young woman spoke, unknowingly, in an echo of the betrayal voiced by her peers in California.

From this work we begin to see not only a profound distress at the lack of public accountability, but the virus of mistrust spreading toward politicians, the state, and government in general. This generation has grown up without memory of a state that stood for the people, a social safety net, or a collective common sense of "we." They are a generation born into privatization of the public sphere and privatization of the soul. They are held accountable, but the state and the school system are off the hook.

The youth research on public education suggests a persuasive strategy for democratizing public accountability. In this work, the state and schools became the "subjects" of analysis, while youth developed the skills of researchers. In the process, however, poor and working-class youth collected much data to confirm (unfortunately) their suspicion that the "public" sphere is no longer designed for them, but on their backs. As poor and working-class students they may have felt betrayed; as researchers for public accountability of public education, they were outraged.

Demanding a Public Sphere

In the early part of the twenty-first century, social policies of financial inequity transform engaged and enthused students into young women and men who believe that the nation, adults, and the public sphere have abandoned and betrayed them, in the denial of quality education, democracy, and the promise of equality. They know that race, class, and ethnicity determine who receives, and who is denied, a rich public education. And they resent the silence they confront when they challenge these inequities.

In California, the interviewed youth attend schools where low expectations

and severe miseducation prevail. In New York, the youth researchers attend a school of vibrant educational possibility and high standards, despite severe financial inequities. In both cases, however, federal offers of "choice" and "flexibility" ring hollow and sound insincere. What are their choices? What flexibility can they exercise? In states and cities scarred by severe financial inequity and/or inadequacy, a discourse of choice thinly masks public betrayal. Such federal policy leaves most poor and working-class children behind.

Poor and working-class youth of color carry a keen and astute consciousness for accountability. They condemn financial inequity and educational redlining, and reject standardized testing as a valid assessment of their knowledge. They witness juvenile detention facilities being constructed in their neighborhoods, as public schools crumble and/or shut their doors. Most, as Hirschman would predict, exit high school prior to graduation. But those who stay are generous enough to offer us a powerful blend of possibility and outrage. Demanding accountability from the bottom, they ask only for a public sphere that represents the interests of all. They ask not for the choice to leave; nor for the opportunity to take a test that misrepresents memorization as learning. They want simply to be well educated, in their own communities, in their own well-funded and intellectually thrilling schools.

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What Is After-School Worth?
Developing Literacy and Identity Out of School

Glynda Hull and Jessica Zacher

Today's visual age demands a broadened view of literacy that encompasses understanding and using new technologies. After-school programs can provide venues where young people can develop this form of literacy and express their newly created identities.

"How much is a life worth?" asked Asia Washington, a fifteen-year-old resident of Oakland, California, in her digital movie about current threats to life – wars, terrorism, drugs, violence, a lack of belief in self – and about the universal need for love, acceptance, and understanding.[1] Articulate and confident, a budding filmmaker, and a participant in an evening multimedia and literacy program called DUSTY (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth),

Asia began her movie by querying the worth of a life, and ended it with the answer: "Priceless." With this choice of words, she smartly appropriated the language of a recent credit card commercial to serve her own ends. We, in turn, borrow from Asia and ask, What is the value of after-school programs? What is their worth, especially as spaces in which we might foster powerful literacy practices among young people?

In this essay we draw on Asia's digital movie, along with our experiences in conceptualizing, participating in, and documenting after-school programs, to discuss new kinds of literacy.[2] We advocate recognizing new communications strategies arising from multimodal and multimedia composing, including the juxtaposition of visuals with print, audio, and music, as well as the appropriation of words, compositional techniques, and images from popular culture, as illustrated by Asia's movie. We believe that such communicative channels are pervasive, potentially effective, and, most important, satisfying aspects of literacy,

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[1] We thank Asia Washington and her mother, Sonja Stewart, for sharing their insights about multimedia composing and about Asia's creative work with *VUE*'s larger audience. We would like to acknowledge the pivotal role of Michael James, director of the DUSTY programs, in making DUSTY a safe, creative, and innovative learning space for children, youth, and adults. Alberto (Beto) Palomar was the instructor for Asia's Digital Visual (DV) poetry class; his skill and care as an instructor are well known and much appreciated. Korina Jocson was instrumental in beginning and sustaining DV poetry and is a fine poet and multimedia composer in her own right, as well as a literacy researcher. We thank each of these individuals, as well as the larger DUSTY staff and community. DUSTY development, operation, and research have been supported by a range of institutions and grants, all gratefully acknowledged. These include the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley; the University of California's UC [University-Community] Links project; the U.S. Department of Education; the Community Technology Foundation of California; the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth; the Robert Bowne Foundation; the Allen Temple Baptist Church; and the Prescott-Joseph Center for Community Enhancement.

[2] In keeping with our interest in exploring an promoting new forms of communication such as multimedia, multimodal composing, Asia's movie, "How Much Is a Life Worth," and audio tapes of interviews with Asia and her mother are available on line at <www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/spring04/video.html>.

especially for youth (Buckingham 2000). And we believe that many out-of-school programs are well suited to foster these new forms of literacy.

We begin with an overview of the historical origins of after-school programs in the United States and a sketch of the current after-school landscape. We include a discussion of some of the debates that have arisen around literacy within and outside of school and some of the theories that we have found helpful in thinking about literacy, out-of-school spaces, and the design of after-school programs for Asia and other children and youth. We then return to Asia's digital movie and the question of worth.

A History of After-School Programs in the United States

After-school programs have existed in the U.S. since at least the late 1800s. They came about when the need for child labor decreased, and, at the same time, societal expectations that schooling should be compulsory grew. These shifts created a new temporal zone: the out-of-school hours. Youths must have found this freedom to play in the streets, escape crowded housing, and mix with a range of people greatly appealing; but adults came to regard unsupervised after-school time as worrisome – drawing children into potentially unsafe activities or making them vulnerable to new dangers such as street traffic (Halpern 2002).

Eventually, in response to these concerns and to those of educators and reformers who wanted to "improve" working-class children, outdoor or playground programs were developed, and those programs expanded to include indoor activities (Gagen 2000). The historical research of Robert Halpern (2002) provides an example of the
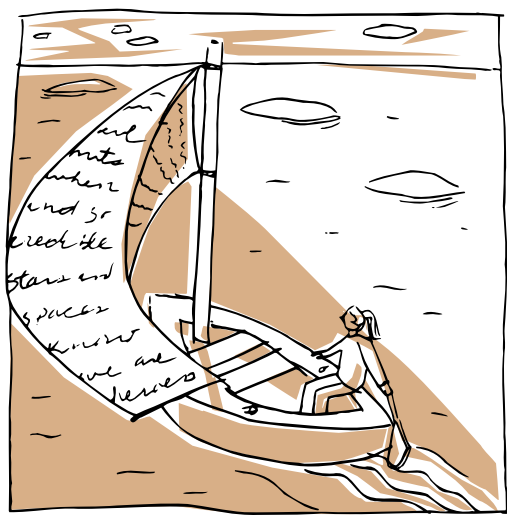
sorts of activities and programs available at a boys' club that first opened in Manhattan in 1876. Staffed by middle-class volunteers, the club included a fife, drum, and bugle corps; singing classes; wrestling; natural history studies; bookkeeping; writing instruction; and a reading room.

The long-term perspective on the after-school movement in the United States reveals several tensions that remain unresolved. First, after-school programs (particularly those serving low-income children) have always been underfunded and overly dependent upon volunteers. Yet they are regularly asked to assume more and more responsibilities, to take up the slack for overworked families, and to assist students whose schools struggle to help them.

Second, as the Manhattan example suggests, after-school programs have typically had a range of emphases – academic, athletic, artistic, social – and have used their flexibility in programming to distinguish their offerings from those of schools. But they face continued and increasing pressures to serve as academic, test-heavy extensions of the school day (California Dept. of Education 2002; U.S. Dept. of Education 2000). Finally, there have long been

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conflicts between their regulatory functions and their commitment to youth development. On the one hand, for example, they are expected to ensure safety and socialization through the control of children's and youths' time and movement. On the other, program officials see their mission as enabling youths to grow toward adulthood by giving them the freedom to take ownership of their activities and products and placing their interests and desires in the foreground.

Interest in after-school programs has grown many-fold in the last decade. Driven by the much-publicized worry over "latchkey" kids forced to stay home alone in the afternoons while their parents work, along with concerns over youths' safety in those hours, more and more public and community agencies have created after-school programs to provide safe and productive activities for adolescents (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids 2000). These programs have also been aimed at improving students' academic achievement and reducing the fiscal and societal costs associated with poor school performance (University of California 2002), although there is some debate over how effective after-school programs are in improving academic knowledge and skills.

For whatever reasons, some three million to four million low-income and moderate-income children currently attend after-school programs (Halpern

2002), including large-scale efforts such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (U.S. Dept. of Education 2000) and New York City's After School Corporation (After School Corporation 1999), as well as thousands of independent local efforts. And the need for these programs is expected to continue growing, regardless of whether funding is available (University of California 2002).

Literacy in the Visual Age

The predominant push in after-school programming in the United States today is literacy development. To be sure, literacy activities have always been staples in after-school programs. But now, with federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind and accompanying funding requirements and instructional mandates to measure reading (as well as a school's worth) through student performance on standardized tests, the pressure is on for after-school programs to redouble their focus on literacy.

Some research has shown that literacy improvement – or rather, school-based conceptions of literacy improvement – is not the forte of most after-school programs, whose personnel usually do not have specialized training in such areas (Halpern 2003). Yet, while academic literacy – the ability to write academic essays and read school-based texts – remains critically important, we believe that after-school programs can play a unique role in developing a different form of literacy, one that we think is especially important today.

It has become commonplace to acknowledge that we live in a visual age. Pictures are pushing words off the page or the screen. The lives of young people, especially, are increasingly dominated by television, music, movies, images, and popular culture, often via the Internet and companion technolo-

gies like MP3 players and video games. Those of us who are interested in adolescent literacy must understand forms of communication other than writing and learn how youths value and use them. We must also learn to recognize the value and place of these new means of communication in our own lives.

Typically, American adults, especially overburdened teachers and other school staff, dismiss or fear these new forms of communication, believing that they will corrupt or deaden youth. Others, meanwhile, romanticize new technologies as educational and societal panaceas. Neither position is adopted here. In the words of David Buckingham (2000, p. 206), an observer and researcher of media and their uses by youth, "The new forms of cultural expression envisaged by enthusiasts for digital media will not simply arise of their own accord, or as a guaranteed consequence of technological change: we will need to devise imaginative forms of cultural policy that will foster and support them, and ensure that their benefits are not confined to a narrow elite."

New technologies, including new forms of communicating via multiple modalities, do not determine uses, although they facilitate and influence them. It is up to people and institutions to imagine and foster supportive social practices and to create equitable ways to meaningfully use new technologies and communication channels. As will be illustrated below, this is where we see a possible important role for after-school programs.

The development of a broadly conceived form of literacy is important for all young people. But we have been especially concerned, as has much of the after-school movement, with youth who face the greatest challenges in construct-ing positive life pathways. Most of these youth live in neighborhoods described as "low income," most are people of color, and many are first- or second-generation immigrants. For some, English is a second or other language.

The achievement gap separating youth along income, ethnic, and linguistic lines in the United States is well known, as is the failure of many schools to engage increasing numbers of these youth (Thernstrom & Thernstrom 2004). And many adults tend to demonize certain groups of young people, particularly African American males, for their preferences and creations in music, dress, language, and style. Of all the difficult questions that face educators, surely the most critical is how to transform schooling and its principle activity and means – literacy – so as to engage young people and sustain their participation. After-school programs can provide at least a partial answer by offering youth the opportunity to communicate via multiple modalities.

Asia's Digital Poem

Asia Washington came to DUSTY because her mother, Sonja, made the arrangements, accompanied Asia to
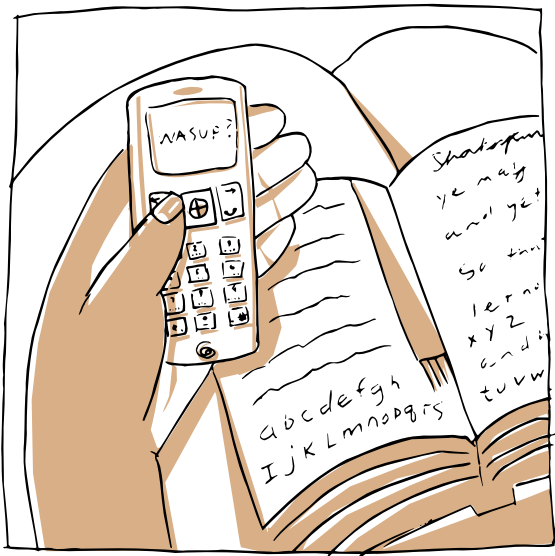
classes, and even created her own digital poem. "Young people sometimes don't stick with things," Sonja noted; she was determined that this would not be the case with Asia. Once the classes were under way, however, and Asia understood and became invested in what she was working toward, attendance and follow-through were no longer an issue.

The Digital Visual Poetry program (DV Poetry) met during weekday evenings for eight- to ten-week cycles; it began with writing workshops and proceeded to multimodal composing via computers. Participants recorded and digitized their voices as they read or recited their poems; searched for images to illustrate their words and ideas; selected or composed a sound track as background music; and then assembled the whole digitally, adding transitions to connect images, adjusting pace and timing, and sometimes adding special effects. The result was a three-

to five-minute movie later shown to a wider audience of friends and family.

Asia, Sonja, and other DUSTY participants premiered their digital poems on a big screen at a special celebration held in Oakland. Afterwards the artists came up on stage to answer questions from an attentive and appreciative crowd. Sonja especially enjoyed a question from a young boy about the sibling relationships that she had humorously depicted in her digital poem. Later Asia premiered her movie before a different group, taking it to her high school and showing it to her English teacher and classmates. She noted that she saw her teacher wiping tears from her eyes as the lights in the darkened classroom were turned back on. Such emotional reactions and expressions of interest and pride during showings are not rare.

Asia's digital visual poem, which we describe and analyze below, is three minutes long and contains fifty-one images. Narrated in her voice, the piece compels viewers to reflect on the worth of a human life. "How much is a life worth?" she asks at the start of the poem and several times again at the end. When she asks this question, an image of stacks and stacks of dollar bills carefully arranged in a glass case appears on the screen; instrumental music in the background evoked both the tinkling of coins and, remarked Asia, the church bells of her childhood.

The poem continues by identifying hatred as "the reason that most lives are no longer here," and represents the instruments and products of hatred through a set of images that are grim and visceral: a pile of bodies from a Holocaust photo; a man's torso, shirt pulled up to reveal a the gun in the waistband of his jeans and another held between his legs; gangsta tattoos on the arms and chests of Latino and
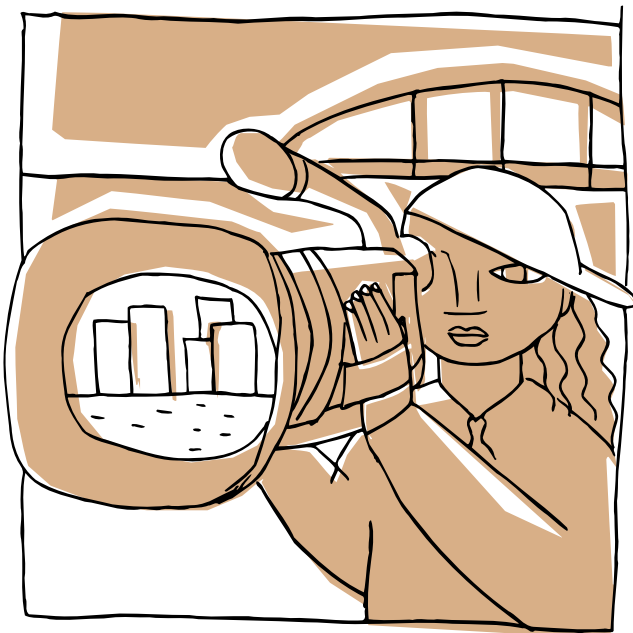
African American men; a white girl's face, bruised and purple from a beating; a picture of crack cocaine.

These graphic images are occasionally juxtaposed – to lighten the mood, and for humor, Asia explained – with cartoonish figures and line drawings: a small child sits, legs crossed, and sadly stares; a pink fox flashes on the screen, too quickly for most viewers to see his defiant hand gesture; two oblong potato heads with arms attached punch toward each other. Other sets of images depict recognizable people, places, and icons from history and contemporary pop culture – Frederick Douglass, Alicia Keys, Tupac, the Twin Towers, a Powerpuff Girl – in service to Asia's points about human emotions and desires.

In the second part of her digital poem, Asia considers hate's opposite: the need, desire, and lack of love. She points to community as "a form of love" that some people don't even know they have. Using a satellite image of the earth, a portrait of the cartoon Simpson family, and a photograph of a sorority group gathering, Asia writes, in some of her most striking lines, "Communities are worldwide/It's like an ocean with no tide."

In the last part of her digital poem, Asia returns to her first line, using three distinctive images of question marks to signal her repetition of the question at hand. The poem crescendos with the images of question marks and the money encased in glass, the repetitive (but not soothing) instrumental music, and lines questioning the value of the lives of those involved in "black-on-black crime," of "people getting killed in the army every day," of "girls and boys getting raped and molested every day," and, ultimately, of the "people on this earth who don't know why." Asia's penultimate image, the last question

mark, is half black and half white; she told us she chose it because, as with the question at the heart of the poem, "you can have either/or opinions about it, you could argue about it all day." Asia ended by posing the question to herself: "How much is a life worth to me?" Her answer, "It's priceless," is accompanied by the initial photo of stacks of money, but this time covered with a large red "X."

The first point we want to make about Asia's poem is that it exploits to wonderful advantage many aspects of the multimedia composing environment. One power of the piece is its

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The poem's appeal goes beyond the juxtaposition of modalities. It represents a new kind of text – a new approach to composition.

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combination of an individual's voice and message amplified by images, movement across the images, and sound. This innovative combination of modalities is made possible and practical by digital technologies.

But its appeal goes beyond the juxtaposition of modalities. Asia's digital poem represents a new kind of text – a new approach to composition – that some have called *postmodern* (Buckingham 2000). One feature of these new texts is *intertextuality* – a semiotics concept that considers a single text to be embedded in a larger system of interrelated texts. In Buckingham's words, these texts tend to be "highly allusive, self-referential and ironic. They self-consciously draw on other texts in the form of pastiche, homage or parody; they juxtapose incongruous elements from different historical periods, genres

> What counts as literacy – and how literacy is practiced – are now in historical transition, and young people like Asia are at the vanguard of the creation of new cultural forms.

or cultural contexts; and they play with established conventions of form and representation" (p. 88).

Today's writers, artists, and musicians are in a stage of experimentation with such texts, and we should expect in the near future more and more examples of them, as well as new theories of texts that account for their aesthetic as well as their intellectual value. (See, for instance, the new on-line journal, *Born Magazine*, at *www.bornmagazine.com*, which publishes literary collaborations between poets and visual artists.) What counts as literacy – and how literacy is practiced – are now in historical transition, and young people like Asia are at the vanguard of the creation of new cultural forms.

A second striking aspect of Asia's digital poem is the way in which it is a vehicle for enacting a socially conscious self. A large body of work on identity formation has for many years theorized and illustrated the ways in which individuals enact, through language and other forms of representation, a sense of self – a version of who they are, have been, or want to become (Appiah 1994; Giddens 1991; Hall 1996). Although we are always enacting a self, there are certain periods, like adolescence, when a concern with identity comes to the fore. We argue that the genre of multimodal digital poetry such as Asia's allows the expression of emotion as well as reason, making it particularly well suited to examining and representing versions of oneself.

Asia represents herself in "How Much is a Life Worth" as a mature social critic but also as a compassionate person with a sense of humor. As the poem's narrator, she comes across as someone engaged with big ideas who is unafraid to name the world's ugliness but who nonetheless holds onto a sense of idealism and a belief in the power of human beings' ability to love. What an impressive identity to enact and strive for! Interestingly, Asia had to fend off attempts from her writing group and her mother to persuade her to choose a different topic. Here is how she described that pressure and her decision:

> Everyone said, "I think you should stick to the other poem. . . . The "how-much-is-a-life-worth" poem – it's too complicated, too deep!" They were thinking "It's too deep for a teenager – a fifteen-year-old. What's she going to do with this deep poem?"

Asia suspected that everyone, including her mother, wanted her to choose a topic that was "kiddier," but she stuck to her guns and, in the end, all were impressed and proud.

The importance of the power to choose – to be supported in writing about topics of interest and to be allowed and encouraged to use literacy activities to represent, analyze, and understand one's own world – cannot be exaggerated for adolescents. Asia took great pleasure and care in illustrating her poem with just the right images; in fact, she reported that three-quarters of her work on the poem consisted of searching the Internet for photographs, drawings, and illustrations.

These images had personal relevance for Asia and were thereby loaded with an authorial significance that might not be immediately apparent to

viewers. About a photograph of three young African American men standing by a corner liquor store, she remarked that it reminded her "of a store right around the street from my Grandma's house . . . where, you know, in the 'hood, people just stand outside all day at the liquor store. They don't have a job or anything, [they] just stand outside the liquor store." The importance of authorial agency for Asia was strikingly illustrated by her decision not to major in journalism, even though she loved to write; as she notes below, her journalism class at school did not allow her to write about things that interested and concerned her:

> And then she's [her teacher] talking about you gotta do all this writing, and it was writing that wasn't that interesting to me. She said, "Write about the new principal." Who cares about the new principal? I mean, not to be mean or anything, I'm interviewing people around the school: "What do you think about Miss Canton, the new principal?" "Who's Miss Canton?" "Who cares?" "Who's Miss Canton?" "That's the new principal!" She's talking about, write three or four pages, for homework, about Miss Canton. I said, "I don't care about Miss Canton." I thought I was going to be writing about things that interest me. So I decided I want to be a writer, a director, of film.

Of course, many productive activities in school and in life require doing things that do not seem to be of immediate relevance or interest. Nonetheless, it is important to note the power of connecting, wherever possible, our assignments as well as our creative work to adolescents' lives and interests.

A final notable aspect of Asia's digital poem is its creation at DUSTY. In composing and sharing her poem, Asia traversed school, home, and community. The idea for the poem originated in an art class at school, where, in the wake of 9/11 and the most recent Iraq war, Asia created a collage. This artwork became the second image of Asia's digital poem. In writing her poem she consciously drew on literary techniques that she had learned in school, including the use of alliteration and the repetition of words and ideas.

She also relied on her knowledge of and concerns about her own community – where the number of homicides has topped 100 for two years running – as she developed her themes and selected her images. At DUSTY she acquired expertise in multimedia composing, and she found a social space that allowed her to bring her own interests center stage. Sharing her poem included taking it back to school, as well as sharing it among friends and family.

After-School Programs: An Alternative Space for Literacy

For Asia, moving across social and geographic spaces appeared to be a seamless and natural activity – a kind of movement that we believe is characteristic of one way young people use after-school programs. The programs can provide material resources, social relationships, and social practices – including particular uses of multimedia technologies – that complement and extend, sometimes in dramatic ways, the kinds of educational and literate experiences available in school and other contexts.

For other youth, after-school programs play a different and in some ways more crucial role, serving as their primary public space for the development of certain kinds of expertise, for acquiring a sense of self as valued and capable, and for exercising their claim on attention, care, safety, and their right to be heard. As one young male participant

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explained, "[DUSTY] just took me off the street. . . . And it gave me a chance to use my creativity and tell my story."

We think of literacy in this way: a familiarity with the full range of current communicative tools, modes (oral and written), and media, plus an awareness of and a sensitivity to the power and importance of representation of self and others. This literacy, we argue, can be fostered most easily in spaces that support readers and writers in their critical, aesthetic, loving, and empowered communication.

We have tried in this essay to illustrate how after-school programs can be key institutions for providing young people with opportunities to become literate, confident, and influential communicators. After-school programs can be constructed as safe but vibrant social and physical spaces that allow youth much-needed out-of-school opportunities. They can offer equal access to material and symbolic resources and relationships; chances to engage in productive activity through the creation and performance of valued popular cultural products – music, videos, poetry, and art – and places to develop identities as powerful actors able to describe and impact an unsettling, yet changing and changeable, world. A tall order, yes – but one that keeps time with an important theme in the history of after-school programs in this country and one that pushes toward a vision of after-school programs as alternative public spheres. This is the vision that drives DUSTY and its DV Poetry program.

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The Third Generation: Contemporary Strategies for Pursuing the Ideals of Brown v. Board

Michael K. Grady, Ellen L. Foley, and Frank D. Barnes

Three generations of children have enrolled in our nation's schools since Brown v. Board of Education. *Yet, we have fallen far short of* Brown's *ideals for racial equality. The major challenge in education today – improving learning conditions for children in historically neglected and underfunded schools – requires new approaches to distributing resources and supports.*

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This year the nation celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, honoring the ruling as a watershed event in American history that set us on a path toward racial justice and equality. In the stroke of their pens, the nine justices obliterated America's legalized system of racially segregated public schools.

Tempering these commemorations is the recognition that we, as a society, have fallen far short of the ideals of racial justice embodied in *Brown*. The stark fact is that since that day in May 1954, two generations of schoolchildren have passed through our nation's public schools and a third generation has now matriculated – yet today we still see school systems that are separate and unequal. Underfunded urban districts struggle through problems endemic to communities of concentrated poverty. Meanwhile, other school systems enjoy a markedly higher quality of instruction, better facilities, safer environments, and better-prepared teachers, and they place their graduates on secure pathways to college, careers, and civic life.

Throughout this fifty-year struggle, America has pursued many avenues for securing equal protection for children of color. In this article, we trace the evolution of these three generations of society's attempts to respond to the mandates of *Brown v. Board* – and examine the causes and consequences of their shortcomings. We then turn our attention to a contemporary approach in which the school district is a principal lever of equity as we strive toward the twin goals of results and equity at scale.

In pledging our support for these goals, we believe we are holding fast to the principles underlying the *Brown* decision. As Chief Justice Earl Warren noted in delivering the unanimous opinion of the court, the aim of ending segregation was not just to eliminate the disparities in resources and educa-

> "To separate [children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

tional quality that characterized White and Black schools; it was also to affect the "intangible" qualities that make segregation particularly pernicious. Chief Justice Warren argued: "To separate [children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

First Generation: A Decade of Avoidance

Charles Ogletree and others have documented the systematic resistance by states and school districts to school integration in the immediate aftermath of the *Brown* decision. These critics have argued that the court's subsequent "all deliberate speed" guidance in *Brown II* (see Ogletree 2004) encouraged public officials to delay any action to dismantle dual school systems; in worst cases, the decision sanctioned legislative resistance that became common throughout

the South. Closing public schools and replacing them with private "resistance academies" was a tactic introduced by the Virginia state legislature that later spread throughout the South (Bickel 1964). Students from closed public schools received a state voucher that covered tuition to attend these newly privatized schools, which were shielded from federal law and court jurisdiction.

At the same time, southern communities, and, later, those in the North, attempted to gerrymander student attendance zones to create firewalls between Black and White communities and protect the status quo of dual systems. All in all, these strategies in the decade before the Civil Rights Act lent credence to the popular southern manifesto "as long as we can legislate, we can segregate" (Meador 1959).

The effect of this defiant inaction in the first decade was profound: a full decade after the *Brown* decision, only 2 percent of Black children in the South attended integrated schools (Woodward 1974). Indeed, the Black children of Topeka, Kansas, and Clarendon County, South Carolina, and the other plaintiffs who prevailed in the original *Brown v. Board of Education* received no material relief at any time during their school years.

Second Generation: Affirmative Desegregation in South and North

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several key decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court began to change this dynamic of delay and resistance. *Green v. County School Board* in 1968 and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* in 1971 helped establish standards of evidence for finding school districts liable for constitutional violations and defined the scope of remedy.

These decisions and others in the early 1970s triggered the acceleration of desegregation in the South. The most common approach to desegregation taken by the courts involved reconfiguring student attendance patterns to ensure racially integrated student bodies and, later, teaching faculties. These decisions ushered in the busing era in the South in the late 1960s and, within five years, in northern cities.

During *Brown*'s second generation, the federal courts assumed a more activist stance, finding scores of school boards and states in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. The struggle shifted to how defendant states, school districts, and elected officials responded to their obligations to provide adequate remedy in the face of near-constant monitoring by plaintiffs and judicial supervision. The Supreme Court decisions in the 1970s clarified local and state responsibilities regarding the scope and expected pace of relief. A strengthening civil rights movement also heightened the public's consciousness about racial equality.

With this added pressure, educators developed new strategies to promote racial integration of the schools in order to augment citywide busing plans. Magnet schools with specialized educational programs were introduced to encourage the voluntary transfer of students to enhance racial balance.

The Detroit desegregation decision in the mid-1970s created a precedent for allowing some schools in a district to remain segregated on the condition that the district and state provide substantial compensatory educational services to these schools (*Milliken v. Bradley* 1974; *Milliken II* 1977). These educational measures included preschool, all-day kindergarten, lower class sizes, after-school programs, and summer instruction.

The boldest innovations were metropolitan plans that encouraged the voluntary enrollment of suburban students in city schools and city students in the suburbs for purposes of improving racial balance on both ends. Boston's METCO program is perhaps the best known of these interdistrict plans. The St. Louis interdistrict program, at its peak, hosted 20,000 students, making it the largest program of its type (Grady & Willie 1986).

The second-generation response to *Brown* had a dramatic impact on racial integration. The percentage of African American children attending integrated schools increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cresting at 44 percent by 1988 (Orfield & Lee 2004). However, in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1991 decision in *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell*, which released school officials there from further court supervision, we saw

The second-generation response to *Brown* had a dramatic impact on racial integration. The percentage of African American children attending integrated schools increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cresting at 44 percent by 1988.

a reversal in these patterns, beginning in the 1990s. This was followed quickly by other courts' declaring school districts "unitary" – that is, no longer operating two segregated school systems.

Today the percentage of Black students in integrated schools in the South has slipped to a pre-1970 level of 30 percent (Orfield & Lee 2004). Thus, by the late 1980s, American public schools began a pattern of "resegregation." This time, segregation was not due to the pre-*Brown* legally enforced and state-sponsored system of separate school systems for Black and White children, with an explicitly racist rationale. Rather, it was due to a combination of demographic trends, residential housing patterns, and federal court decisions releasing school districts and states from further desegregation obligations. During this same period, efforts to close the achievement gap between White children and children of color stalled, after two decades of marked progress. These simultaneous trends throughout the 1990s toward resegregation and flat achievement have caused some scholars and policy leaders to call for bold action (Orfield 2004).

Third Generation: Pressure for Districts to Provide Equitable Learning Conditions and Outcomes

In overturning the separate but equal principle of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board* and its progeny declared that school authorities' attempts to provide African American children with educational programs that were materially equal, yet separate, from White students were inherently unequal and a violation of their constitutional rights. The mandate to school authorities was clear: the only way to remove the vestiges of dual school systems was to take what-

ever means necessary to desegregate all overwhelmingly Black schools.

In the mid-1980s, the Supreme Court's composition and the nature of its prevailing decisions began to change. The Court reasoned that, since segregation three decades after *Brown* was no longer the intentional result of districts' and states' acts, there was little the Court could order to change. Yet the problem that court-ordered desegregation attempted to address – an environment in which Black children were made to feel inferior and received an inferior education – had not been solved. Advocates stopped relying on the courts to achieve equality through integration and began to pursue other remedies. They focused on inequitable resource distribution and low expectations for disadvantaged students as the underlying problem, more than separation of the races in itself.

With this shift in strategy, the pressure point for equity has moved away from the judicial branch and toward standards-based reform initiatives enacted by state legislatures and Congress, most recently through pas-

sage of No Child Left Behind. All of these recent initiatives challenge school districts to achieve equal educational outcomes for all children, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or economic condition. Thus, during this fifty-year span, we see a transformation in the fundamental meaning of educational equity – from equal resources, to equal access to the same schools, to equal results for all student groups.

A New Approach: Communities of High-Quality, Equitable Schools

The highest hopes for enhancing equity of educational outcomes at scale for *Brown*'s third generation of children, in our view, rest on the shoulders of school districts and community leaders. With the strong winds of state accountability and No Child Left Behind requirements at their backs, local school districts are under greater pressure than at any time in history to produce positive learning outcomes for all students.

Achieving this goal requires that districts and communities confront deep structural problems in the way human, material, and financial resources – the fundamental conditions of learning – are allocated to schools throughout our cities. This new policy context creates an imperative for districts to ensure a level playing field for all students, if we hold out any hope that children will attain the same high standard of proficiency.

A New Kind of School District

To many, the idea that school districts, particularly large urban districts, can ensure equity and results for all young people might seem odd. Urban districts are often seen as the problem, not the solution. In many respects, this view is accurate. Districts were designed at a time when only a small proportion of students were meant to succeed aca-

demically. The results show that their design, in effect, worked. Virtually every city has schools that are inspiring models of what public education could be; schools that exemplify public education at its worst; and many examples in between the two extremes.

Recent educational reform efforts have attempted to bypass or ignore districts. But while these reforms have brought heightened and necessary attention to the needs of low-performing schools, the reforms themselves have been insufficient to bring about improved results for all schools and students. Accountability creates incentives for schools to improve but does not provide the wherewithal needed in schools with poorly prepared teachers and administrators or with inadequate curricula or instructional programs. And efforts to reconstitute schools and to develop charter schools, small schools, and "whole school" reform models – reforms that take a one-school-at-a-time approach – weren't designed to address the needs of whole *communities* of schools.

While many of these school-by-school efforts have had real successes, their limitation is that they provide for only the favored schools what *all* schools in a district need to produce the results that each child deserves. The

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plaintiffs in the *Brown* case emphasized this districtwide approach. They were advocating for improvements at a large scale, not just at individual schools.

School Communities that Work, a project of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, envisions urban education systems in which all schools meet high academic performance standards, with no significant differences in achievement based on race, ethnicity, or family income. Few city school districts currently meet these criteria. Many urban districts face major constraints – such as fiscal instability, difficult politics, and poor labor-management relations – that hamper their efforts to improve student achievement. In some cities, achieving this goal will mean a radical re-visioning of the district, such as breaking it up into smaller districts, moving the central office from service provision to contracting and brokering, or creating networks of autonomous schools.

But existing districts can redesign themselves to provide an infrastructure of services, policies, and expectations that support school-level improvements in teaching and learning and that ensure equivalent results across whole systems of schools. To do so, districts must ensure that schools have the wherewithal to provide the educational services their students need. And they must be able to provide supports to schools – not the same level of support for all schools, but tailored support that recognizes that student and school needs vary. In that way, districts can help provide some of the intangible qualities that Chief Justice Warren referred to and can thus help ensure that young people do not suffer from "a feeling of inferiority."

Student-Based Budgeting

Much of the literature and rhetoric on inequities in school resources has focused on interdistrict inequities. In more than

half the states, for example, groups representing underfunded urban and rural districts have sued states to seek a fairer funding formula that provides greater parity among districts.

However, it is becoming increasingly clear that inequities *within* districts are at least as great as those *between* districts. If districts are to achieve greater equity, they need to understand the ways resources are currently allocated, which often shortchanges the students who need the most support. Only then can they revamp the budgeting process to make strategic investments in schools based on the characteristics and needs of the student population in each school, rather than by program or staff position, the way funds are typically distributed in urban districts. This approach to allocating district resources is sometimes called student-based budgeting.[1]

THE MOVE TOWARD STUDENT–BASED BUDGETING IN THREE URBAN DISTRICTS

Three large city districts – Cincinnati, Houston, and Milwaukee – have recently undertaken major efforts to examine existing inequities and alleviate them through student-based budgeting.

The impetus for the reforms was different in each city. Cincinnati had already made a commitment to strong school-level accountability, part of which consisted of giving schools greater control of resources. At the same time, a new accountability system ranked Cincinnati schools according to student performance. Disturbingly, a number of consistently low-performing schools were also poorly funded schools with-

out special-program dollars. These results prompted district administrators to make the first moves toward student-based budgeting. Two years later, the school board saw the power of this funding strategy to create equity across schools, resulting in a call for a more comprehensive implementation.

Milwaukee has been actively promoting school choice and competition for the last decade, creating pressure to move to student-based budgeting on both the supply and demand sides. On the demand side, the dollars needed to move with students who chose new schools. On the supply side, schools needed to be able to design unique organizations in order to differentiate themselves. Like Cincinnati, Milwaukee soon found it could not continue to allocate resources in tightly defined staff positions and needed to convert to dollar amounts.

It is becoming increasingly clear that inequities *within* districts are at least as great as those *between* districts.

In Houston, the desire to decentralize decision making was at the heart of the move to student-based budgeting. The district leaders, with school board members pushing hard, aimed to create a regulated marketplace within the public school system driven by data and by peoples' true understanding of what was being bought and sold. Moving from allocating staff to allocating dollars provided this critical marketplace mechanism.

INITIAL RESULTS OF REALLOCATING RESOURCES

Implementation of student-based budgeting in all three sites is still in the early stages. Results vary across

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1 More information about student-based budgeting, including tools for assessing possible inequities in a district's current funding formulas, is available in the *Portfolio for District Redesign*, a publication of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and on the School Communities that Work Web site. For more details, see <www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/portfolio.php>.

An equitable system, one that adheres to the ideals of Brown, *would not provide the same level of support for each school; rather, some students, teachers, and schools require and would get more and different supports and resources than other students, teachers, and schools.*

the districts, due in part to differences in the formulas each has developed and implemented.

However, an analysis of the reallocation of resources among schools reveals substantial improvements in equity, with more schools now receiving allocations close to the weighted average expenditure (the district's average dollar expenditure, weighted for the mix of students at each school). In Houston, a drastic redistribution of funds has produced significant interschool equity, with only one in four schools now deviating from the weighted average expenditure by more than 5 percent. Cincinnati made significant changes to its formula over the first four years, resulting in gradual but substantial equity improvements.

In all three districts, there are now more dollars in school-site budgets, and there is more spending flexibility at the school level. All the districts report more discussion at school sites on what activities and staffing positions add value to student learning and make staffing decisions based on these considerations. For example, some schools in Cincinnati eliminated counselors and visiting teachers and used the money in other ways because they felt they could spend those dollars more effectively. Two of the three districts have witnessed another benefit of student-based budgeting: it encourages

schools to keep students, particularly those they might have considered "hard to educate" under staff-based budgeting. In these schools, the ideals of equality embedded in *Brown* still live.

**Central Office Review
for Results and Equity**

In addition to providing schools with the resources they need to educate all students effectively, districts that promote equity also provide supports to schools in an equitable manner. Districts typically provide many one-size-fits-all supports for schools, from instructional guidance to curriculum materials to professional development. Often, though, the schools that need the most support get the least. These schools suffer from inequalities at least as great as the segregated schools *Brown* sought to abolish.

An equitable system, one that adheres to the ideals of *Brown*, would not provide the same level of support for each school; rather, some students, teachers, and schools require and would get more and different supports and resources than other students, teachers, and schools.

We believe it is possible for school districts, particularly their central offices, to support schools more effectively, efficiently, and equitably. The Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE) is designed to help school district leaders improve support to schools

by participating in a five-step analysis of the work of the central office.

Often, central office departments, units, and even individual employees implement policy, interact with schools and school personnel, and provide services that are inconsistent with the system's objectives. Sometimes, central offices do not themselves deliver the supports they sponsor but, instead, act as brokers for services from outside vendors. The CORRE enables a district to examine the effectiveness and coherence of operations across departments, units, and levels and to help central office staff act in concert with the larger system's overall goals. After the CORRE, the central office might still provide various services to different individuals and groups, but it would do so after careful reflection and in proven support of its goals.

By participating in the CORRE, district leaders can improve supports to schools in a particular area and can learn a process for dealing with issues that might arise in the future. The CORRE helps school districts engage in a cycle of continuous improvement; ask important questions; and incorporate information, reflection, and feedback into their decisions, policies, and practices.

The CORRE process is carried out by a team of district leaders and consultants from outside the district who are experienced in content areas, systems and culture change, and leadership for learning. During the six-month period of the review, the team chooses a particular focus issue, examines quantitative and qualitative data about it, and develops plans for improvement. The process is supported by several tools intended to help guide the process, not to exhaustively define it; the CORRE is customized for each district. Once the process has been worked through, it

can be repeated, either focusing on different issue areas or following through on the initial efforts.

We are currently implementing CORRE in three medium-to-large urban districts. Although the process is still in an early stage in each district, we are seeing that the tool can help districts move toward a more equitable system of support for students and schools.

Hopes for the Fourth Generation

As we commemorate the compelling legacy of *Brown* and its impact on American legal and social history, we acknowledge our failure to make more progress in abiding by the ideals of the decision. It's likely that the nine justices of the Warren Court would be dismayed at the modest progress society has made in integrating our schools and communities. The two generations of schoolchildren who have lived through this period of stagnation and halting progress have suffered from this mixed record. The third and current generation watches warily as we launch a new effort, led by school districts, to achieve greater equity.
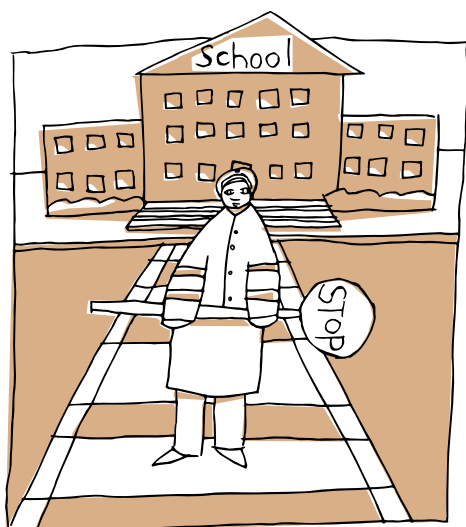
Thus we forge on under a new obligation to improve learning conditions for children attending historically neglected and underfunded schools. Our commitment to these children calls for high expectations for achievement, uniform and exacting proficiency and content standards, and families and communities that are fully engaged in the educational process. If we have the will and stamina to genuinely pursue these goals, we can improve the prospects that *Brown*'s fourth generation of children will graduate from school ready to succeed in college, the modern workplace, family life, and civil society – a society that more closely approaches its declared ideal of equal protection, opportunity, and success for all.

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Engaging a City:
Building Public Confidence and Support for Schools

Bill Purcell

After years of mistrust between the schools and community residents, the mayor of Nashville set out to rebuild confidence by opening schools to families and city residents, and the effort has paid off in increased support.

After a campaign in which he pledged to make education the top priority of the city, Mayor Bill Purcell of Nashville began, soon after taking office in 1999, to engage the entire community and rebuild public support for Nashville Public Schools. Through activities such as First Day, a civic celebration timed to commemorate the beginning of the school year, and a campaign to encourage parents to bring their children to school on the first day, Mayor Purcell has generated substantial support for the schools. And, in turn, the city has raised the school's budget by more than 42 percent since he took office.

Mayor Purcell has a long history of involvement in education. As a state legislator, he sponsored the state's education reform act. He was director of the Child and Family Policy Center at the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies. And he is the parent of a child in the Nashville Public Schools.

Voices in Urban Education editor Robert Rothman spoke with Mayor Purcell about the challenges and rewards of strengthening the relationship between schools and a city community.

Bill Purcell is mayor of Nashville, Tennessee.

What was the relationship between the community and the schools like when you took office?

I think, in retrospect, there was a significant amount of mistrust between the community and the schools. This went both ways. Schools wanted – genuinely wanted – the support of the larger community, but had an ambivalent attitude towards the active presence and involvement of parents. Parents felt that.

The school system had a great commitment to sharing the good news and good stories about the schools.

Parents knew that. But they also knew that the schools were very reluctant and, in fact, did not share the shortcomings that the parents and their students knew the schools suffered.

That, frankly, combined with the fact that the community's efforts to support the schools overall were not coordinated by the district, was at the heart of what I would describe as mistrust.

There were plenty of people trying hard to reverse this. The Chamber of Commerce actually had begun, almost ten years before I took office, to work to change this dynamic. And there were lots of people of good will on all sides

of the equation trying to reverse this. But at the core, "mistrust" would describe the overall relationship.

And you saw a concrete example of that mistrust in a letter from your daughter's school.

Oh, yes. I can still see the letter. I can see it in my hands in the kitchen as I'm sitting at the table reading, "Congratulations. School starts in two weeks." (Of course, that was a traditional school communication at that time; they let you know only two weeks in advance.) The only printing in bold face was the admonition that on the first day of school, no parent shall enter the building. There was nothing else in bold face. That was the one thing they wanted to be sure you took away: you weren't to go into that place on that day.

There was no suggestion that there was another day they encourage you to come in. They wanted to be darned sure you didn't come in on that day. And while that doesn't describe every principal in every school, that was the overall feeling that probably encapsulates the culture of the district as well as any other.

Education: The Most Important Thing a City Does

How did you go about trying to change that relationship?

I started in earnest as a candidate. I started out almost two years before the election saying, from the beginning, that education was the most important thing that this city did. Period. And I never left that message, from the moment I announced that I wanted to be mayor to the moment I was elected.

Having been elected, I continued at every opportunity to reaffirm that message. If there's one thing that I

think we have established firmly, it's that education is now the most important thing that we do; it always was the most important thing that we do; and it always will be the most important thing that we do. This will never change, in this city or any other city that wants to be successful.

Then, in affirmation of that message, I became personally and highly focused on the schools themselves. I started talking early on about the importance of being in the schools. I had committed to visiting every school in the city during my first year as mayor – at that time there were 127 schools in the city – and I made those visits. I walked through every kitchen and every classroom in every section of the building and sent reports back to the school system about what I was seeing. I tried to make sure that every teacher and principal knew that I was there.

Welcoming Parents into the Schools

I made those visits myself and, during that period of time, pushed the First Day initiative. There was some initial reluctance. When I first met with the then–school superintendent, he thought it was a good idea, but why don't we do it on the first in-service training day in October? And I said, "Why would you choose that?" And he said, "Well, because there are no students in the building."

And I remember sitting there thinking, "I must not be explaining myself." Because that's exactly not what I want to do. I think parents should be in the building when there are kids there and teachers there and learning is

going on. I think it ought to happen as soon in the school year as possible. That's the first day.

And, to the superintendent's credit, he relented, or agreed, depending on your perspective, I suppose, and said it was something they would try.

Accountability, with Support

We then offered a full-blown performance audit on the entire system, and offered to raise the funding for this from outside the school system. Normally, performance audits are paid for by the entity that's being audited, but in this case I felt that it was an innovation for the city, as a whole, and the school system, specifically, so I should raise the money outside. It was about $500,000, as I recall, and half of it came from general government and half from foundations here in Nashville. They agreed to this, and we began the performance-audit process, which, truthfully, culminated in a very impor-

tant report and an important level of understanding and attention to the school system.
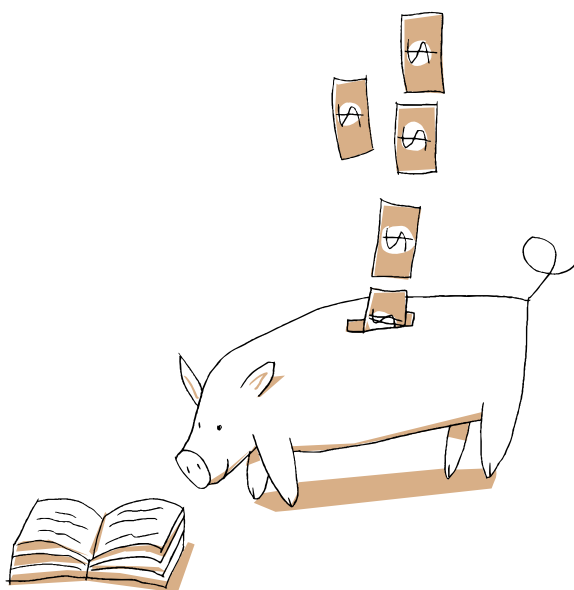
That was the process in the first eighteen months that I was mayor.

First Day: Engaging the Community

How have these efforts developed? I understand First Day is now a major event in the city.

In terms of First Day, we now have roughly 21,000 parents and students appearing at the festival, which we hold, presently, on the day before school starts. From the first year, we had a higher level of attendance on the first day than we've ever had. In fact, the first year, they found, I think, 400 students who, traditionally, would have missed the first day – parents were out of town, they didn't get the message, some problem – 400 kids who statistically never would have appeared on the first day, and some of them not for

several weeks, were in school. We immediately noticed, because of this attention, higher PTA and PTO membership and participation.

And the combination of all of these things really allowed us to do one of the most important things, which was significantly increase overall investment in our schools. That investment is financial: the school budget in the city of Nashville went from $397 million annually in the year that I came into office in 1999 to a total of $563.2 million for the current year, 2006–2007.

We've had significant capital investments, which we began doing, on my watch, annually. We've done, basically, six annual installments totaling $361.6 million.

As a result, I think you'd find here a much higher level of personal investment: investment by individual parents, investment by the business community overall. Our public alliance for education has raised $4 million, which is something that wouldn't have happened before; it *couldn't* have happened before.

The Ultimate Goal: Improved Student Achievement

Were there other goals you had for engaging the community in the schools?

Ultimately, we all want performance to improve across the board. We have, still, a distance to go on that. I think what we find is a much higher level of trust in the results the system itself is producing.

In Tennessee, I sponsored, as House majority leader, the Education Improvement Act, which passed in 1992, and which started regular testing

We have established firmly that education is now the most important thing that we do. This will never change, in this city or any other city that wants to be successful.

here. It was one of the earliest efforts in the country to bring regular and honest reports to parents. And it does so down to the subject and grade level, so you can tell how the third grade in your child's school is doing, and teachers and principals have information about the performance of individual teachers and classrooms.

The first year we had that in place was 1995. As a result of this process, I think we have a higher level of press interest and parental belief about what the school system itself is saying about how it's doing, about its accomplishments and its shortcomings. And a general belief that we have to do better and we *can* do better and we *will* do better.

At different points in our history, we weren't sure we *could* do better. At different points in our history, we were pretty satisfied we *wouldn't* do better overall. But, at this point, I think there is a general expectation in the community as a whole that we should, can, and will – and that we will do this in every school, not simply in certain sections of the city or certain magnet schools, but that, in fact, we can accomplish it across the entire system.

Investment won't continue without success, and I'm satisfied that success won't continue without investment of all the kinds I listed: money, and people, and general good will.

Successful Schools, Successful City

Now that the community is at this stage, what are the next steps?

I think the most important thing for me to imprint permanently is the notion that this is the way that schools – and the city in which they are located – succeed. You can't ever go back. There never will be a time when these schools
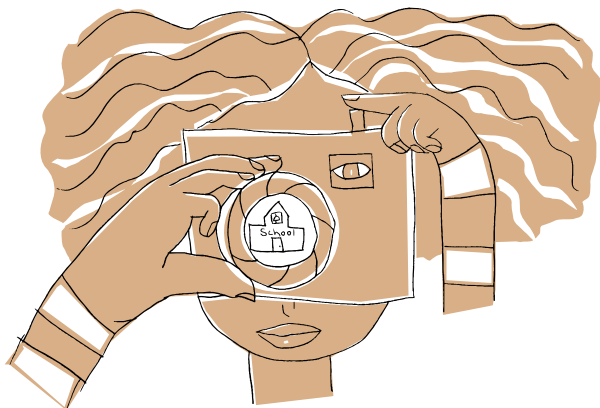
As a result of this process, I think we have a general belief that we have to do better and we *can* do better and we *will* do better.

aren't the most important thing that we have to attend to.

And that's, frankly, what I'm busily doing this next year. I have one more year as mayor, and my strong commitment is to make sure that's a permanent part of the culture of this city. Because I care a lot about the schools and because I don't think the city can continue to succeed without it.

The good news for us is that, with this focus, there have been other visible signs of success for the city. The last two years in a row we've been the number-one city in America for the expansion and relocation of businesses. Last year, we were the number-one city in America for corporate headquarters relocation. *Kiplinger's* magazine, two months ago, said we were the city in America that anyone should choose to live in – the number-one choice. These are indications, I think, along with lots and lots of individual decisions by corporate leaders to bring their headquarters here, that, in fact, this city is leading in a way we didn't lead before in America. This has everything to do with what we've been doing, first and foremost, focusing on education.

That connection is clear now, and my goal is that it is never forgotten or lost.

Parents Building Communities in Schools

Joanna Brown

An effort to engage parents in Chicago schools results in benefits to both the schools and the parents.

Joanna Brown is director of education organizing at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago.

On any given day, in nine public schools in Chicago's Logan Square community, about 170 parent mentors and parent tutors are in elementary school classrooms tutoring children; every evening two or three teams of parents and teachers make Literacy Ambassador home visits; about eighty mentors and several hundred other parents are attending school-based community centers to learn English or learn skills, while another sixty parents are in college classes to become bilingual teachers.

Most of these parents are immigrant mothers or the daughters of immigrants. Their schools are part of a network of schools serving low-income, largely Latino children, brought together by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) to create schools as centers of community – and serve the needs of the immigrant students.

Enter an LSNA school and you see mothers sitting in hallways with small groups of students who are intently reading out loud. A mother comfortably enters the principal's office to remind her of a meeting. Mothers meet in a corner of the cafeteria to plan a family reading night for all. As a teacher passes by she calls – "Cati, your son was looking for you upstairs." In the evening, 1,000 families participate in classes and activities held at the schools and managed by parents.

LSNA is the forty-five-year-old community organization of Logan Square, a mixed-income, majority Latino immigrant neighborhood of 84,000 residents on Chicago's northwest side. LSNA has forty member organizations, including churches, social service agencies, block clubs, and nine large public schools (two K–8, four K–6, one 7–8, and two high schools.) Some 8,300 students, 90 percent of whom are from low-income Latino families, study in these schools.

For more than fifteen years, LSNA has been organizing community members around education issues. In doing so, we started with some basic principles. First, as part of the 1989 Chicago school reform movement, which established elected parent-majority Local School Councils (LSCs), we knew that the Councils needed an organized community in order for their formal

authority to select and hire principals on four-year contracts to be meaningful. Second, as the community group for a particular neighborhood, we had a vision of opening the doors of fortress schools and helping them function as centers of community. Third, as organizers, we were committed to listen to and value what residents wanted and to build on community strengths.

We also suspected that disparities of education, language, and income were only some of many factors that created barriers to parent involvement in schools. And we believed that transformational learning happens through experience, by doing. We also knew that we would have to raise the money to pay for whatever we built.

However, we never imagined the full results that could be achieved by deeply tapping into the strengths and skills of parents.

Building a Successful Collaboration between Schools and Parents

In the early 1990s, LSNA built a coalition of principals, teachers, and parents to address school overcrowding. This coalition represented an early version of the shift in strategy more community organizations are making – from confrontational organizing against school administrations to a sometimes complex but highly productive inside-outside collaboration in which ideas, buildings, and power are shared by the schools and the community, particularly parents.

LSNA's new school-community collaboration was successful. By 1996 LSNA had won five large building additions and two new middle schools. At the coalition's insistence, the buildings were built so that they could be used as community centers in the evenings.
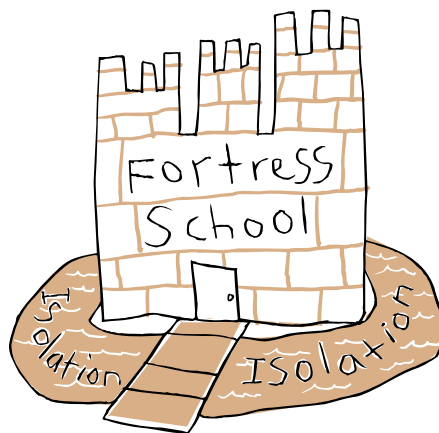
The social trust built by common struggle and victory laid the basis for the collaborative community-building efforts that followed.

Parents as Leaders: The Parent Mentor Program

The Parent Mentor Program was launched in 1995 and has served as the open door for many parents, particularly mothers, to become involved in their children's schools. It began in one school, Frederick Funston, a pre-K through grade 6 school. Principal Sally Acker, who had been active in the overcrowding campaign, asked LSNA to develop a "parent mentor" internship program to involve non-working mothers and help them further their education and find jobs.

Fifteen Funston mothers were recruited into the program, trained, and placed in classrooms to work two hours daily with students under the direction of a teacher. LSNA's initial one-week training helped mothers to see themselves as leaders, reflect on their skills, set personal goals, and commit to achieving them. It also provided the space within which to develop strong cohorts; mothers, isolated by such factors as their immigrant experience, lack of English, and small children shared common experiences and found personal support from each other.

Every applicant was accepted, regardless of education or language (many spoke only Spanish), and each was placed in a classroom where she could be helpful. They attended weekly workshops on a variety of topics and reflected together on their classroom experiences. They wrote journals. They held potlucks. They helped each other pursue their goals, usually involving learning English or returning to school. At the end of 100 hours they received a $600 stipend.

Changing the Family-School Relationship: Community Learning Centers

The parent mentors at Funston also helped plan the Community Learning Center (CLC) that was established as a result of the successful anti-overcrowding campaign. The mentors surveyed their neighborhood door-to-door, asking over five hundred families what programs they needed in an evening school-community center. LSNA raised funds to keep Funston open until 9:00 p.m. with adult education and children's programming and hired two parents to run the CLC.

The CLC helped change the way families and school staff saw the

Parents who walked freely in and out of the CLC began to see the school building as partly theirs and education as something that united their family.

school. Not only was the center accessible to parents (the school was close to home; classes and childcare were free; and children were tutored while their parents studied), but parents who walked freely in and out of the CLC began to see the school building as partly theirs and education as something that united their family. The CLC held Thanksgiving and Christmas parties to bring participants together. Daytime teachers got to know parents by teaching English or classes to prepare for General Educational Development (GED) tests at night, and some of the most popular classes were taught by parent mentors – whether Mexican folk dance for children or sewing for adults. The CLC was overseen by advisory boards that included parents as well as principals.

Expanding Parent Involvement Programs into More Schools

Over the next few years, the process of establishing Parent Mentor Programs and CLCs was repeated in nearby schools as parents and principals asked for the programs. Today, LSNA has

CLCs in six schools and Parent Mentor Programs in nine schools; many other programs, activities, and organizing efforts grew out of these efforts.

The programs have reaped enormous benefits for the parents involved. Over 1,300 mothers have graduated from the Parent Mentor Program. The majority returned to school or got jobs. About fifty hold part-time jobs working for LSNA in schools running parent programs, tutoring, or working in community centers as childcare providers and security guards; ten have been AmeriCorps volunteers with LSNA; eight hold full-time jobs at LSNA as education organizers, community center coordinators, or health outreach workers; and two are teaching after graduating from LSNA's teacher training program. At the CLCs, thousands of adults have studied English, while 500 have earned their GED certificates. About 700 families participate weekly in activities that range from adult education and family counseling to tutoring, recreation, and music and art for children.

The Parent Mentor Program and CLCs have also proved highly generative. Parent mentors sought a way to involve parents who couldn't visit the school during the day and helped develop LSNA's Literacy Ambassadors program to bring parent-teacher teams to homes to read, share food, and build bridges with groups of families. Parents who surveyed neighbors became dedicated to block-club organizing and then health outreach, helping many uninsured families access affordable health care. When mentors found they loved working in classrooms, LSNA brought in experts from Chicago State University to create a bilingual teacher training program specifically for parent mentors. (It now serves as the model for a state-

funded, statewide Grow Your Own Teacher program initiated by a coalition of community organizations.)

The impact on the schools has been huge. "We add a lot of life to the school," said parent Lucila Rodriguez. "We run all the activities. And the students don't feel they are alone, because their parents are there too. And if it's not their parent, it's a neighbor, or the parent of a friend." School climates have become more positive and welcoming, and standardized-test scores have tripled. After visiting one of LSNA's centers in 2002, Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan called for 100 schools to establish CLCs, and many have done so.

Rules of Engagement

Despite the interest in the concept, the value and function of deep parent participation in schools is less well understood, if only to judge from the many visitors LSNA gets (from as far away as the Philippines and Russia) who ask: "How do you get parents involved?"

What has LSNA done to bring parents into the schools and keep them involved over the years? Here are some simple guidelines.

- *Real work*: While schools have traditionally tapped parents – as outsiders – to help with fundraisers, costumes, and the like, there is nothing quite so empowering as becoming part of the educational process. Transformation at LSNA has come from involvement in the real, respected work of teaching and learning and parents consistently rise to the challenges and achieve success. When a parent mentor tutors a failing student and that student,

for the first time, learns how to read, the parent, like the student, is transformed and committed.

- *Respect*: Respect is a complicated idea, taking on new meanings as relationships deepen. We find out what the parents know and care about. We value their culture, language, and experience – and tap their knowledge (language, culture, life experience, and knowledge about children) for the curriculum and to connect to the students. Respect also means following the "iron rule" of organizing – don't do for others what they can do for themselves. It's important to challenge them to keep moving forward.

- *Reciprocity*: Respect requires reciprocity – mutual support and mutual learning. Parents learn how difficult a teacher's job is, and teachers learn how much parents have to give, particularly their passion for children and strength in building relationships with them. Parents and students learn together and from each other.

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More specifically, here are some ways we operate:

- *Recruitment.* We recruit person-to-person, as well as by flyers. We take virtually every parent who applies, regardless of education or language; we have found from experience that everyone is useful in some classroom. We always look for new mentors and work to avoid cliques.

- *Stipends.* Money shows that work is valued. It is one way to tell mothers they are wanted and it is an extra incentive to overcome fears of the school or feelings that they have nothing to offer. For many mothers, the stipend is their only personal income, and legitimizes their work to their husbands.

- *Bridges and spaces.* A Parent Mentor Program graduate who runs the program can be the bridge across the school-community divide, backed by LSNA staff who help deal with cross-class or cross-cultural tensions. The initial training is a bridge and a space: on Day 1, mothers are shy and scared; by Day 5 they are ready, though a bit anxious, to meet their teacher and enter the classroom. The Parent Mentor Program creates a legitimate parent space inside the school, with its own rules and identities and its own cohort for support.

- *Apprenticeship.* We're not against informational workshops, but we believe deep knowledge and commitment come from experience. The Parent Mentor Program structures experience to provide the learning. Teachers are told that parent mentors must work directly with children, not make copies or clean floors. Parent mentors learn about the school as they experience it every day.

- *Leadership development.* The theme of the parent mentor training is, "You are leaders in the home, school, and community." Parents are challenged to be leaders – not clients. At every possible opportunity, LSNA is preparing parents to take on leadership roles – working as an "assistant teacher," speaking in workshops or public meetings, telling their story to the press or to funders, recruiting new parents.

- *Community engagement.* Parents are always encouraged to take on new challenges and to organize together to improve schools and community. Some forty-nine LSNA parents sit on the school councils, where they help select principals and approve budgets. They participate in LSNA issue committees, community meetings,

campaigns, and marches – taking positions on immigration reform, affordable housing, safety, or health. They pass petitions, testify, and meet with aldermen and state legislators.

Parent mentors and Parent Mentor Program graduates have reciprocated by creating community schools where families feel at home. They have:

- organized hundreds of family reading nights in the community centers where mothers provided storytelling and reading games side-by-side with teachers;
- created school assemblies where mothers explained Mexican history, displayed various kinds of Guatemalan houses and food, and told the story of Puerto Rican baseball hero Roberto Clemente;
- built Day of the Dead altars to Mexican grandparents, Princess Diana, and Mother Teresa in their school library and explained them to classrooms of students who visited;
- created parent lending libraries where mothers with small children can bring them during school to take out books in Spanish and English, drink coffee with neighbors, and learn about the community;
- organized Mother's Day assemblies and Children's Day festivals to celebrate these highly popular Latin American holidays, which they felt were neglected in their schools.

These are only a few examples. The point here is not to provide a list of things that organizations and schools should do. The point is to emphasize that by truly welcoming parents, providing them a legitimate space within the school, and encouraging and respecting their knowledge, one opens the door to limitless opportunities.

At the core of the parent mentor experience is a personal transformation from a private, often isolated immigrant or welfare mother to a person who sees herself as a school or community leader. Parents have led the transformation of schools, teachers, and the community.

Support and Challenges

This work may sound simple, but in practice, LSNA has had to build a structure to provide support for the parents. Each parent mentor group has a paid half-time coordinator who is a former parent mentor, works out of the school, and attends biweekly meetings with the other coordinators at LSNA. Her supervisor is an LSNA education organizer who is responsible for both the Parent Mentor and Literacy Ambassador programs in four schools. These organizers spend quite a bit of time at each school, mentoring the coordinators, meeting with principals, and getting to know the parents. In two schools, the parent mentor coordinator is paid by the school system as a "school-community representative" and, therefore, does additional work for the school.

LSNA's education organizers build bridges and trust in a variety of ways – from negotiating tensions, to inventing programs, to helping parents implement

By truly welcoming parents, providing them a legitimate space within the school, and encouraging and respecting their knowledge, one opens the door to limitless opportunities.
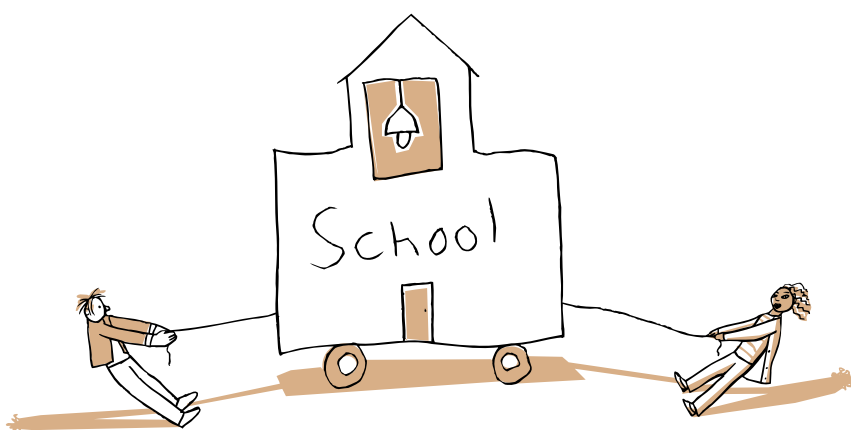
projects they create, to giving workshops about neighborhood issues and holding discussions to get people's input. At their biweekly meetings, coordinators exchange information, make joint decisions about the program, and solve problems.

At every level, people are mentoring each other and learning from each other. Supervisors try to take advantage of every leadership opportunity to help newer people develop while helping the organization thrive – running meetings, testifying at funding meetings, talking to the LSNA board, testifying at the Illinois State Board of Education. Technical assistance comprises everything from computer training to helping people write and practice their public speeches.

New ideas are always being implemented and can come from anywhere. For example, we developed a "minigrant" program where a group of parents in a school could apply for $300 to buy food or supplies for a parent-organized event that involved parents, students, and teachers and had some educational or cultural purpose. We did that after various parents had said they would like to hold events in the school but had no resources to do it. Similarly, the Literacy Ambassadors program was created in response to parents in focus groups saying they wanted ways to help connect with the parents that never came to school.

Yet, as we move forward, we face challenges. The work of involving parents in schools is continually breaking boundaries and subverting the mainstream paradigm of schooling. Teachers visiting homes? Low-income parents tutoring students? Most teachers have not been trained to place a high priority on relations with parents, much less lean on them for academic support. Most new parent mentors don't believe they can really tutor. Both believe teaching is primarily a "technical" rather than a "relational" act. Many teachers are afraid to visit poor families. Families are afraid to invite them, and wonder what they can feed them and if they have enough chairs. Experience has changed these and other divisive assumptions.

But getting some people to take the first step has required belief and persistence by LSNA staff and parents.

Principals also balk initially at sharing their buildings. Community centers have raised turf and power issues. Disputes often arise from such minor concerns as missing chalk and toilet paper. Teachers and janitors may complain to principals, who are caught in the middle. And polite but empowered parents and principals sometimes disagree. In one case, a principal did not want to keep his building open in the summer for LSNA's community center. Finally, one LSNA staff person (a former LSC parent member who had hired that principal) suggested that the LSC parents meet with him to talk about it. He was cordial and agreed to open the school, given a couple of provisions – he wanted us to hire his assistant to be there while the building was open.

Logan Square schools have become more complex. They are no longer just places where professionals teach poor children and the lines of power are clear. Non-professional parents are more present, have more power, and are becoming more educated. Students feel more ownership. In this cross-class, cross-cultural, more-democratic community, conflicts and misunderstandings arise frequently. LSNA is a constant informal mediator, always clear that families are its main constituency but that the project requires full collaboration with the schools. One of LSNA's roles has been to build the social trust that supports the complexity inside the school and the political capital to support it outside – whether at the district level, in politics, or with funders.

Funding, of course, is another constant challenge. For twelve years, LSNA has pieced together public and private funding to sustain its education work, now close to $2 million a year. State funds, thanks to Latino state legislators, and federal funds, courtesy of the 21st Century Community Learning Center program, have been essential, as has support from the many private funders who value the marriage of education reform and community organizing that LSNA has modeled.

Today we face two specific funding challenges. First, under rules of the federal CLC program, our community centers will likely not be refunded if our schools improve too much and are no longer classified as low performing. The second is the short-term nature of funding from foundations, who expect our work to become "self sufficient." Ultimately, to survive and become part of "what a school is," these programs must receive permanent public funding.

Changing the Paradigm of Schooling

Logan Square schools – large, urban, low-income, immigrant schools – have moved part-way down the road to transformation, with organized mothers in the lead. Transformation of parents, teachers, and schools is possible, but the paradigm of schooling must change. Students must be seen not as blank slates ready to be filled by information, but as already partially formed cultural beings with their own cultural and social capital. Bilingualism and cultural complexity must be seen as assets, not deficits to be overcome. Parents are central to the educational system, not outsiders. And by treating them as partners and welcoming what they have to offer into the classroom, we can create schools that engage students and increase student achievement.

Urban Education Reform: Recalibrating the Federal Role

Warren Simmons

Federal policies should address community engagement and equity in order to build "smart education systems" that improve outcomes for urban children and youths.

The brief economic boom of the 1990s brought an infusion of hope and energy to urban communities. The well-being of children and families in urban America were buoyed by an expanding, though increasingly stratified, labor market, housing redevelopment, and the entrepreneurial spirit brought by a new immigrants from Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, and the remnants of the former Soviet Union. During the 1990s, federal and state policies also began to treat cities more like catalysts for social and economic development, as opposed to indigent kin. As a result, urban communities experienced a brief renaissance marked by declining rates of teenage pregnancy, infant mortality, crime, and violence and rising incomes and population growth.

Public policy during that period was marked by an alliance between the public, on the one hand, and the political, financial, and business establishments, on the other. Together, these groups pushed an agenda that emphasized the wisdom and effectiveness of the private sector while dismissing the benefits of government and the public sector. The pursuit of excellence was extolled over the pursuit of equity in every sector, including education. Moreover, individual (private) accomplishment was privileged over community (public), with the latter perceived as an impediment to innovation and growth.

The recent economic bust has effectively destroyed the public's trust in the establishment and called into question these public policy assumptions. The nation has now experienced, if not completely learned, the harsh lessons of individual gain untethered from community well-being, as we witness home foreclosures, job losses, withered pensions, and an uncertain future that once seemed filled with promise, even if it was only attainable for a few.

The recent economic recession – for the poor, it's a depression – threatens to slow the pace of improvement in central cities that were beginning to reestablish themselves as founts for economic, cultural, and community renewal, where families seeking opportunity and inspiration joined with others to transform their lives and to forge a new society (Annenberg Institute for

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School Reform 2001). As this recession has painfully revealed, the transformative power of urban life is tapped more deeply by some and remains beyond the grasp of far too many. High proportions of low-income African American and Latino youth in urban areas continue to have their progress impeded by high rates of incarceration, displacement created by gentrification, and the lost opportunity caused by being on the wrong side of the achievement gap, the new "track" demarcating the fate of privileged and disadvantaged communities. These forces weaken and obscure the pathways to success available for disadvantaged youth as they seek to become more productive and engaged members of society, a task made more daunting in urban school systems, whose halting progress in closing the achievement gap is threatened by the loss of tax revenue caused by the downturn.

The Standards Movement: Reshaping the Federal Role

A Nation At Risk engendered a significant shift in the federal role in education in a manner unseen since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. The *Brown* decision, while groundbreaking in significance for African Americans, followed a historical path of asserting federal involvement to address equity by eliminating legal barriers to access and/or by allocating resources to support specific groups. Traditionally, the federal government has left decisions about educational quality for all students, such as academic standards, assessment, curriculum and instruction, and school design, largely up to states and school districts (Ogletree 2005;

Fuhrman & Lazerson 2005). The *Brown* decision, after all, mandated integration with the expectation that greater access to schools would ensure greater quality. But the decision stopped well short of requiring the government to ensure that equity fostered quality, as the intervening years demonstrated so strikingly.

A Nation At Risk changed that dynamic. It inspired the standards movement, and the federal legislation it spawned (e.g., Goals 2000, the Improving America's School Act, No Child Left Behind) used federal Title 1 funds and other resources as leverage explicitly to improve quality by encouraging states to adopt voluntary national standards; embed these standards in accountability systems; and intervene in failing schools so that all students would receive the supports they need to meet national goals and standards.

While the deadline for meeting these goals and standards has shifted from the year 2000 to NCLB's 2014 deadline, the emphasis on *all* has

remained constant, while acceptance of an increased federal role has gained wider acceptance. The debate instead has turned to *how* the federal government should exert its influence, not *whether or not* it should. Moreover, with the recent passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the federal government has taken unprecedented steps to increase funding for states and districts as it reshapes its approach to how the funds should be used.

Gaps in the National Agenda: Community Engagement and Equity

ARRA's incentive grants focus on key levers for change – educator quality, data systems, innovation, technology, more rigorous core standards and assessments, and improvement of low-performing schools. Yet, this comprehensive technical agenda has two troubling oversights – a lack of attention to the need for community engagement, coupled with an implied, rather than explicit, emphasis on equity.

Community Engagement

Despite President Obama's background as a community organizer, the strategies outlined in ARRA proceed as though education reform occurs in a political, social, and cultural vacuum, as if communities take up reforms based on clear and objective results alone. This belief that success sells itself represents what Paul Hill and his colleagues would call a "zone of wishful thinking" – an implied assumption that is usually held despite abundant evidence to the contrary (Hill, Campbell & Harvey 2000).

This belief that successful results compel widespread adoption has undermined the efficacy of too many research-based designs/strategies/ programs and What Works clearinghouses to name here. Coburn's (2003) seminal article on scale emphasized the importance of building ownership both inside and outside the system as a key ingredient for taking reform to scale – a point underscored in Paul Hill and colleagues' case studies of districts whose reforms were weakened or undone by leadership instability and/or opposition from forces threatened by change (Hill, Campbell & Harvey 2000). If states and districts pursue the agenda outlined in ARRA but ignore the need to garner community ownership, they will find themselves vulnerable to resistance or

skepticism sparked by poor communication and a failure to obtain prior involvement. Predictably, this resistance often comes from groups that the reform is intended to help the most – communities whose students' performance lies on the wrong side of the achievement gap. Their concerns, however, are often left out of early planning and decision-making tables where the agenda is *set*, as opposed to *announced*.

Undoubtedly, ARRA's priorities were guided by research and informed by extensive meetings with elected officials, commissioners and superintendents, researchers, union leaders, the philanthropic community, and leaders of Washington-based think tanks and advocacy groups. And, given the constricted timeline for moving from planning to action, little effort was devoted to garnering knowledge and ownership beyond civic and political elites to involve those most dependent on urban systems for their children's and community's well-being: low-income families, African Americans, Latinos, and recent immigrants.

As a result, as usual, these critical constituencies will be asked to support reforms designed by "others" rather than participate in their development (Stone et al. 2001; Hirota and Jacobs 2003). The frustration, lack of knowledge, and distrust produced by this engagement gap positions poor parents and communities of color as an untapped and vulnerable resource that can be mobilized to oppose promising innovation based on poor political execution and unintended consequences overlooked by elites lacking in-depth knowledge and experience of the challenges and assets that exist in these communities.

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Equity – Where Art Thou?

In addition to diminishing political support and overlooking valuable assets, shortchanging the engagement of low-income families and communities of color in the reform of school systems their children attend, ARRA also repeats the reform movement's mistake of pursuing solutions intended to work for all students. This approach, while admirable, obscures the fact that urban districts, in particular, need help in delineating and developing supports that work for particular groups of students that are present in large numbers – English language learners, students with disabilities, recent immigrants, over-age and under-credited students, and students challenged by early parenthood, childcare and work responsibilities, previous incarceration, violence,

health concerns, and other factors that contribute to the achievement gap and a lack of engagement.

While some of the Obama administration's agenda reflects an understanding of the particularly needs of urban communities – especially the "Promise Neighborhoods" initiative, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone – the need for differentiated supports should be a priority rather than an afterthought in efforts to redefine standards, design new assessments, and turn around failing schools. Rather than lying on the periphery, equity as well as excellence should be a design principle that guides work both on what Richard Elmore calls the technical core of education – curriculum, instruction, and assessment – and on the supports students need to develop the social, cultural, and other forms of capital they need to become active participants in their own learning (Gordon & Bridglall 2005).

Unfortunately, the failure to address both the engagement and equity gaps has been a recurring theme in recent accounts of reforms in districts such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans – communities whose districts are operating a mix or portfolio of schools, with some being operated and supported by the district (and/or state, in the case of New Orleans), and some operated by organizations with charters or agreements waiving some district policies and practices (Aspen Institute and Annenberg Institute 2006; Gold et al. 2007; Cowen Institute 2008). Grassroots and civic leaders in these communities, as well

as many educators in the schools, often lament the lack of attention paid to local values and traditions in the design of new schools and programs. They also express concerns that the new approaches replicate previous patterns of privilege due to a failure to consider basic issues such as transportation, access to information, and differentials in power, status, and fiscal resource that, if left unaddressed, reinforce old inequities.

Each of these reports underscores the importance of dealing with equity and community engagement as a top priority to ensure that system improvements or reinventions have the capacity to provide supports that can be differentiated – for example, more time for greater outreach to inform planning and decision making; targeted interventions for students with disabilities, English language learners, and over-age/under-credited students; supports for struggling, as well as highly effective educators; and curricula that embrace local aspirations as well as national ones. For instance, the absence of resources and strategies to support arts, culture, and community service are a prominent critique of existing reforms, a fault that ARRA seems to share rather than ameliorate.

Equity, Excellence, and Community Engagement: Interdependent Factors

The interdependence among equity, excellence, and community engagement is demonstrated in *Organized Communities, Stronger Schools*, an Annenberg Institute report summarizing the outcomes of organizing efforts in seven communities (Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2008). The results of this seminal study offer promising signs that organizing fosters improved

student outcomes by increasing youth engagement and aspirations; building a climate of trust among students, parents, educators, and administrators; and informing district efforts to design, target, and distribute fiscal resources, new facilities, curriculum supports, data indicators, and professional development efforts, among other tools.

The Annenberg Institute's support for the Coalition for Educational Justice in New York, the Urban Youth Collaborative, and community efforts to analyze the efficacy of central office policy and practice further provides an expanding portfolio of examples of elite–grassroots partnerships that span the gaps between research, policy, and practice while strengthening reform by building political will.

In addition to building political will, broadening participation in research, planning, and decision making to include communities with students enrolled in urban school systems also corrects a flaw inherent in approaches that rely on the perspectives and values of elites. Too often, the elite view focuses almost exclusively on the need to redesign the nation's education system in order to prepare students for college and the workplace. Few would argue that these represent primary goals of our educational system, but throughout our nation's history communities have also argued and fought for schools that prepare students to:

- contribute to civic life;
- form and strengthen families;
- value and contribute to the arts;
- respect local culture and traditions while becoming part of the mainstream.

Policy-making and reform tables dominated by elites often fail to hear voices that emphasize these goals.

Too often, the elite view focuses almost exclusively on the need to redesign the nation's education system in order to prepare students for college and the workplace.

in cities while being silent about rising unemployment and economic stratification, increasing youth violence and homicide, and increasing proportions of new immigrants are tantamount to planting powerful ideas in ground that lacks essential nutrients.

While the Annenberg Institute's work over the past ten years demonstrates that urban school systems can and should do more to redesign schools and central office supports to advance learning and development and that there are numerous schools and school districts that beat the odds, many of the groups that inform our work ask why the odds must continue to be so great against low-income students and communities of color. If ARRA fails to help local education reformers and advocates – particularly those working in diverse and rapidly changing urban communities – develop partnerships that foster excellence while also addressing equity, the results produced by this unprecedented infusion of fiscal and intellectual resources will once again fall short of the goal.

Worse, as the policies generated by elites reach local communities that are more diverse, complex, and challenged than originally perceived, the gaps between policy and local capacity undermine the credibility and impact of national goals and strategies. For instance, NCLB's 2014 deadline for getting all students to meet standards in an era when urban schools have been chronically underfunded by the very states responsible for intervening in failing schools and districts presents a contradiction that might be clearer when viewing education from the bottom up than it is when looking and planning from the top down. Similarly, policies that exhort districts and schools to make annual improvements in literacy and math test scores

In our view, community-centered education reform can provide the political, social, and moral capital required to counter forces that derail and delay the succession of reforms tried since *Brown v. Board of Education*. The existence of the standards movement has clarified one important aim for community engagement – that is, communities should act to ensure that all students and schools receive the supports needed to meet high academic standards. In addition to this central aim, we believe that effective community-centered education reform should be guided by the following tenets.

- The specific needs of students, schools, and families are best understood and addressed when the local context is treated as a potential resource for development rather than solely as a neutral or negative condition.
- Building capacity for incremental or radical reform requires, but goes beyond, securing additional funding for schools or gaining support for new school/district policies and practices; it also entails revitalizing communities so that families and entire neighborhoods can offer the supports children and youth need to achieve the full range of positive outcomes (e.g., academic, health, emotional, social, spiritual).
- Broad-based coalitions of "communities" are formed not just to increase participation in the work of education reform, but also to engender a productive ecology for school reform. Thus, the inclusion of underrepresented groups becomes a primary objective and not a secondary outcome.
- Enhancing the capacity of "communities" to accomplish their work involves an examination of fundamental issues of power, race, class, and diversity that have traditionally undermined the efficacy of urban school reforms and muted the voices of students and their families.
- Researchers, practitioners, and advocates must acknowledge the multidisciplinary nature of schooling and explore the intersections of teaching and learning, community engagement, youth development, economic revival, and college readiness.

- Efforts to link education reform and reinvention to community engagement and development school be guided by research and evidence-based practices.

A Smart Education System

These principles require a significant shift in thinking about urban school districts and their relationship to the settings in and around them. A community-centered approach to reform underscores the need for school systems to develop "community" within schools, among schools, and in relationship to the neighborhoods and cities they rely on to support students' learning and development not just fiscally, but social, physically, culturally, and morally as well. This approach represents a departure from strategies that treat families and neighborhoods narrowly as clients or simply as sources for homework support, but as part of what the Charles Stewart Mott

Community-centered education reform can provide the political, social, and moral capital required to counter forces that derail and delay the succession of reforms tried since *Brown v. Board of Education.*
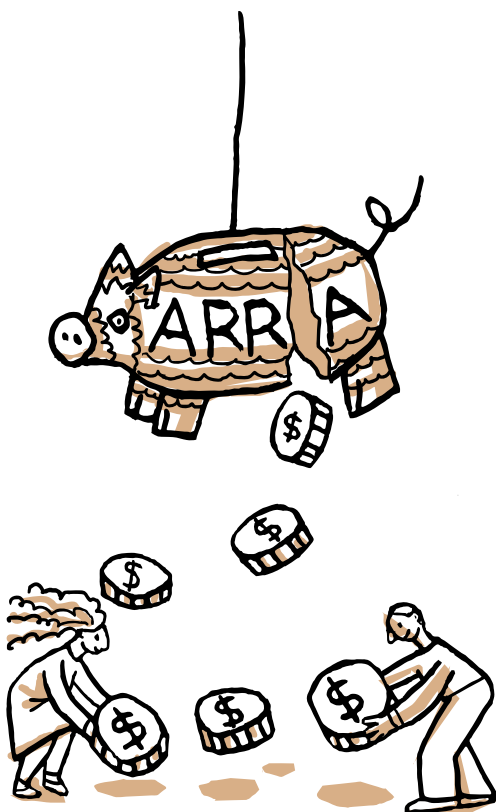
Foundation's Time, Learning, and After School Task Force called a New Day for Learning (Mott Foundation 2007). In their view, this would require systems, families, and communities to:

- expand the definition of student success to incorporate twenty-first century competencies that emphasize creativity and problem-solving, among other skills and dispositions;
- use research-based knowledge to design and integrate new learning supports;
- provide educators with new opportunities for leadership and professional development.

To meet these aims, we believe the resources furnished by ARRA should be leveraged to convert districts into organizations that function in concert with municipal agencies, cultural organizations, businesses, higher-education institutions, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups, rather than in isolation from or in opposition to this broad network of potential partners and resources. ARRA could encourage state and local education agencies to become part of what we call a smart education system by emphasizing the need for state education agencies and local education agencies to:

- maintain multiple and substantial cross-sector partnerships that provide a broad range of supports to young people and their families;
- achieve a broad set of positive outcomes – including, but not limited to academic achievement – for students, families, and communities and gather evidence of progress;
- develop indicators, measures, and processes that foster shared accountability across partner organizations and groups;

- create a systematic approach for bringing the work to scale;
- develop strategies for managing power differentials, for example by creating meaningful roles for all stakeholders and shifting partner relations away from the standard grassroots–grasstops conventions.

While ARRA is supportive of New Day for Learning and smart education system principles, they tend to be implicit rather than explicit themes in the priorities outlined in ARRA, with the exception of the call for Promise Neighborhoods. However, Promise Neighborhoods are treated more like a demonstration project than an overarching strategy for rebuilding the nation's education system in urban areas. Elevating the conceptual underpinnings of Promise Neighborhoods from a project to a major strategy would enhance the coherence of an array of initiatives and make their whole greater than the sum of their parts. To further this aim, the Department of Education itself must also examine how to integrate and align the fragmented bevy of programs, offices, and funding streams that reinforce the programmatic divides between equity and excellence, school and after-school, school and community, pre-K and K–12, and lower– and higher–adult education. Simply saying "pre-K to 16" doesn't create a system that makes it happen without concerted effort across the layers of institutions and agencies that support the learning and development of our nation's children and youth.

The recent economic crisis and the pain it has brought have created a brief unity of focus. As we consider new ways to transform the nation's economic, housing, health, transportation, and fiscal infrastructure, we must not forget the need to create a new education infrastructure as well.

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