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Essential Schools

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STUDENTS AS WRITERS:

ESSENTIAL SCHOOL

STUDENTS

ON

EDUCATION

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been different.

There could have been days where any single period could have been designated where the whole school would discuss what was going on in each design team and why it was that Tyee needed to change. Instead of teaching math or art, each teacher could have reported out on what was going on in their own design team, what was happening in the other teams, as well as holding discussions surrounding what needed to change. These discussions could have been instrumental in designing each school as each design team would have had the opportunity to gather feedback from the entire student body. So, as I stated before, things could have been different. This would have showed that the teachers were really trying to have student input in the creation of their school. This would have been above and beyond simply offering to allow us into their design team meetings and passing the buck when students didn't come. For those who couldn't make it to these early morning meetings, or simply did not even know about them, these in-school discussions could have been a way in which they would have had the opportunity to influence these three new schools as well as learn more about the entire conversion process.

Within the First Year at Odyssey

But once the school year started, one could see that the staff at Odyssey—the school I chose—was amazingly open to having students take a big role in whatever was going on. They made an effort to invite students to staff meetings as they tried to reiterate that they wanted us to take control and make it our school, to mold it into what we saw fit. This is easier said than done, of course, as we can't be expected to all of a sudden take control when all along we've been told that this is the way that things were going to be because someone else said so. When presented with all of this opportunity, we didn't quite know what to do with it. People who haven't been exposed to ideas like intersession (for us, intersession is three weeks at the end of each semester in which we take two classes that will fulfill our health, PE, and art credits along with other classes like hiking or spoken word) and being on teacher-hiring committees don't know that it's possible; few have taken the time to think about it. And then there is a problem with getting these ideas approved and to get them going when they come from students.

At times it feels that adults aren't as receptive as they could be about students' ideas for change. At times adults look at what students want and decide that it doesn't fit in with their agenda. Adults have their own ideas of what needs to be done and so have that as a top priority, forgetting that this isn't simply their school, it's our school. Our priorities as a school

should include concerns and plans from everyone involved. Just as we as students should have to tell the adults what we want and what we need in order to get things done, they should in turn tell us what must be done this school year and what they think they need since we are a community.

Before my experience on a design team, I had never given much thought to what could be better about Tyee besides the curriculum. So it's important to be aware of that and make sure that opportunities arise where students can be included. Always be thinking about how your decision will affect your student body. If it will, then students should have a say or, at least, a chance to give feedback on a decision. For example, in June 2005, a number of students got the opportunity to interview and help hire new language arts and math teachers at Odyssey.

Things that have also set our school apart are programs like lunch forums where students sign up to participate in a discussion during lunch (lunch is provided) on set topics that could range from inclusion to how well your school is or isn't doing and what needs to change. Meanwhile, the teachers sit on the outside of the discussion listening in, taking notes on our suggestions.

Odyssey also has S.P.P., which is short for Student Power Project. It's a space given to us as students once a week on a rotating period where we can come together to discuss different issues affecting our school and the community. From there, we try to formulate action plans so that we can do something to change it. One discussion that sticks out most in my mind is one that we had as a large group about the "n-word," who can say it, who can't say it, when it's okay, when it's not okay, and if it's okay at all, as well as the history of the word. It's been one of the best things for our school as we get to talk and learn about things that we don't usually get an opportunity to discuss in school, and it gives us the opportunity to develop deeper thinking around it as we take in other people's viewpoints.

But nothing has been easy. These programs are amazing, as are the people who created them at our school, Briana Herman-Brand and Jeremy Louzao, our school's student empowerment consultants. They among the multiple people who have been instrumental to the growth of student voice in our school. So I realize that we are blessed to have these two adults who work at our school solely to increase student voice.

But I still feel that deeply motivated people at other schools can start up their own programs centered on student voice. It isn't easy, but it's one of the simpler things that one can do to help the student body take ownership of their school. We at Odyssey still struggle and we still have a lot of work to do. S.P.P., for

example, has had trouble moving past the discussion part of our time together. But we are learning lessons from that and are moving forward to try and create a better experience, before starting it up again this fall. But just doing as much as we have done to include students and make sure that we have an active voice in our school has deeply helped to inspire pride in our school. It's the one thing that comes up time and time again when we're asked about what we like about Odyssey.

Lessons Learned

We've learned some lessons that might be helpful for other schools. First of all, make sure that if you do decide to open up and allow students to take part in the creation of your school, invite them for meaningful work that they will be able to influence. There's no need for a token student, just so that you'll be able to say that your school had student input. It'll show if your new small school does or doesn't include student voices. And make sure that you reach out to parents to keep them fully updated on what's going on. If you're a conversion school, make sure that you get that out there, that you tell families what's going on regularly through letters at the very least. And at least make an attempt to write those letters in more languages than just English and Spanish. In its last year, Tyee held multiple meetings to inform the community of the coming changes. In an area so diverse, it's important to keep everyone informed so they feel like a part of the community instead of

Odyssey: The Essential School

Odyssey: The Essential School, in SeaTac, serves the communities of Burien, Des Moines, Normandy Park, SeaTac, Boulevard Park, and White Center in Washington state. Part of the CES Small Schools Project, Odyssey is in its second year as a new small school created from Tyee High School.

excluded by default.

We're only in our second year as a school and yet the differences between then and now are already evident. For me the answer to the question, "Could the Tyee Campus head down the same path as Manual?" is already clear. We still struggle with attendance, but the number of fights on our campus has gone significantly down and already students feel more comfortable approaching their teachers as student-teacher relationships have improved. And students are experiencing a new type of power that has allowed us to grow proud of our school as we are given opportunities to voice our opinions and make things happen, thus allowing us to take ownership of our school. We're moving forward to a place where we can reclaim our voices.

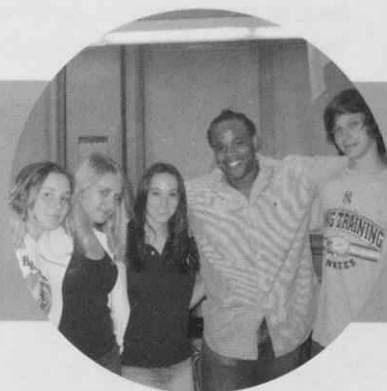
04

essay

It Had to Begin with Me by Caroline Ensler School of the Future

Adequately funded, well-functioning public schools in New York City are a precious commodity. Therefore, my parents searched long and hard for the "perfect" school for my brother and me to attend. They found School of the Future on Manhattan's East Side when I was ready to enter sixth grade. Five years later as a junior, I am inundated with SAT prep books and college brochures, and my educational quest continues.

After spending some time in School of the Future, I realized it wasn't perfect. The teachers were almost *too* kind and nurturing. This attitude may be appropriate for a middle school environment, but once I got to high school it began to frustrate me. We were encouraged to speak freely and collaborate on group projects. Some students mistook free speech in a democratic classroom to mean arguing and filibustering, and collaboration to mean chatting incessantly.



Caroline Ensler is a junior at School of the Future in New York City. She is presently a math tutor, a member of the debate and volleyball teams, and a student in a sociology class at Hunter College. This summer, she and her twin brother attended a college preparatory program at UCLA. Caroline hopes to begin college in fall 2008 on the West Coast.

santly and hoping the work would complete itself. I must admit chatting about clothing can be more interesting than discussing the Civil War. Although these side conversations were entertaining, funny and even meaningful at times, I was becoming more of an expert on Abercrombie and Fitch than on the Gettysburg Address.

Something had to change and it had to begin with me. I had to take charge of my own learning. I had risked alienating myself from my friends during class in order to focus on what I knew inside was really important. This is not an easy thing to do in high school. Would I be labeled as a “nerd” or a “teacher’s pet?”

The first thing I had to learn was not to care so much about the opinions of my peers, which was a valuable life lesson. A person can’t go through life worrying about what others think, especially when she knows what she’s doing is right. Second, I learned to appreciate and utilize the nurturing environment that once annoyed me. It was comforting to know that I could approach my teachers on their time and that they were always willing to help me. My school uses student research papers or “exhibitions” as an alternative assessment in place of the New York State Regents exams. When I was preparing my science exhibition

paper, I often sought the help of several of my teachers. In fact, my humanities teacher was quite influential in helping me strengthen my argument throughout the paper. Every time I approached him for assistance, he was willing to help me. This goes for all of my other teachers as well.

After this realization, side conversations were much less distracting to me than they were before. I found that if I focused on my work, and did not partake in these diversions, oftentimes those around me would follow. While the chatter in the classroom was not completely eliminated, I did find that those who wanted to concentrate on their schoolwork were not as easily sidetracked as they used to be.

I came to realize that a little piece of perfection can be found in even a seemingly flawed system. Despite my trepidation regarding the liberal educational philosophy that characterizes my school, I’ve come to appreciate the skills I’ve developed in this environment. Thanks to the classroom debates, in-depth discussions and intellectual atmosphere at School of the Future, I can work collaboratively, listen to and respect the opinion of others and have tolerance for the diversity of opinions found in our society. The most important lesson has been that personal growth is an important step for institutional change.

School of the Future

A small public high school in Manhattan founded in 1990, School of the Future is a CES Mentor School. School of the Future enrolls 625 students in grades 6-12.



Learning in the Real World by Ilyssa Buffalo, Vicki Kahn, and Ashleigh Read

City High School

essay 05

Our School

City High School is in the heart of downtown Tucson in what used to be the town’s oldest and most famous dress shop. It’s a unique location for a school, with everyone from dressed-up lawyers to hungry home-

less people passing by on the sidewalk every day. We even have a neon sign in our storefront window, like all of the other businesses along our street.

Our school is new. It opened two years ago in September 2004 with 85 ninth and tenth graders. Now

we're in our third year, and for the first time we have all four grades and over 140 kids. City High School is small and friendly. Everybody knows each other. Our students come from all over Tucson with lots of different backgrounds. It's not like other schools that are based on one area of town and can be really segregated.

Our school is special because it does so much to connect us with the community. We go on lots of field trips. We work with community partners. We have City Works classes. We even have our own garden. Every week we have a whole school meeting and guest speakers come and talk with us about cool programs we can get involved in.

Most schools are pretty good about teaching the basics like math and writing, but very few really teach teens how to apply all those skills and facts in the real world. At City High School, our learning goes beyond textbooks and tests. It's not always easy, but we learn a lot.

Our Experiences

There is much we could say about what we do at City High School, but time and space are limited, so we decided to share just a few experiences that stand out in our minds. We hope that other students and teachers get inspired to try out ideas like these in their own schools. By the way, all of us mention "City Works" in our blurbs below. In case you're wondering, that is the name of our school's service-learning program. In addition to their regular core classes and electives, students are required to take City Works classes, which meet for a long block period every Wednesday.

Ilyssa

In my City Works class last year, we had an *intercambio* with students from a high school in Nogales, Mexico. We took a few trips to Nogales, which is an hour away, and the students from Nogales came north to Tucson to visit us. We used a combination of Spanish and English to communicate, and it was fun to get to know the other kids and teach each other things. I understood some of what they were saying, but I'm not used to their Spanish. Together we all worked on different projects related to restoration of the Santa Cruz River. One time we dug holes to plant trees along the riverbank. Another time we built a greenhouse to grow seedlings, so that others could eventually put more plants by the river. We did a "now and then" project, comparing the Santa Cruz River from today to 100 years ago. We researched old photos at the Arizona Historical Society of the river and the way it used to look, and then we went up "A" Mountain and tried to take pictures of the exact same area as the old photos. We learned that there were big changes over the past 100 years. There used

Ilyssa Buffalo: I am sixteen years old, and I am a junior. I like to volunteer in my community. My mom and I do a lot of walks to raise money and awareness for major health issues, like AIDS, cancer, and diabetes. My freshman year, I went to a big school and didn't do as well. It was hard to get one-on-one help from the teachers and the classes were too big, so I switched to City High at the beginning of tenth grade.

Vicki Kahn: I am fourteen years old. I have been at this school since my freshman year, and I plan on graduating from City High. I live in the northwest part of town. I like coming downtown to school, where everything is more diverse and interesting. I was born in Hawaii and dream about moving back there one day.

Ashleigh Read: I am sixteen years old and have lived in Tucson my whole life. I have attended City High School for three years, since it first started, and each year I have seen how the teachers and students have made it better and better. I work hard in my classes, and I am planning to be a lawyer when I grow up.

to be a lot more trees, and now there are a lot more houses. People's attitudes have changed too. Today people think of the river as just a "dry wash" instead of a running river and don't really respect it. They throw trash and other stuff in there and they really shouldn't. I learned that we all need to help the environment.

Vicki

Throughout my freshmen year last year, I was involved in many activities out in the community, and they were all really cool. In City Works, I was part of a group that helped to recreate a garden that was previously vandalized and burnt down. We did a lot of manual labor. We dug swales to help catch rainwater for the trees. We planted beans, lettuce, melons, sunflowers, and other Arizona native plants. Now the garden is doing much better, and more students are keeping it going this year. They're hoping to grow enough food to sell at the local farmers market. In March, as part of our studies in science class, the whole ninth grade went to the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. We stayed for four days at the Center for Ecological Study of Deserts and Oceans. We learned about marine biology, and observed beach life and tides. The trip was amazing, with 40 kids and a bunch of teachers staying together overnight. We learned a lot and had a ton of fun. Currently, I am in a City Works class called Science in the City. We're taking a go-kart and making it run with an alternative fuel. Next semester, we'll present the final project to fourth graders and their parents to help educate them on alternative fuels and how they can help with the issues of pollution and oil shortages.

Ashleigh

My personal experiences in City Works have been nothing but educational. My first year, I took a City Works class focused on health and nutrition. For one of our big projects, the class prepared a lunch for the entire school. We were in charge of the whole thing. We had to plan a full and healthy meal to include fewer than 800 calories. We did the shopping, cooking, and serving. We created menus with nutritional information as a way of teaching our whole school about what we had learned. In that class, we also had workout sessions at the downtown YMCA facility. That might not seem like community service, but we were learning good habits for how to get and stay fit for life. We tried involving our parents in lots of the activities too, so that they could learn what we were learning. This year, I am in a City Works called *Along the Border*. This class is dealing with what else: the controversial issue of the US-Mexico border. I am learning the pros and cons and different sides of the immigration issue. The class has just started, so I don't know yet where it will take me, but I know from my past experiences in City Works that I'll learn

City High School

Part of the Tucson Small School Project, City High School is a small public charter school preparing its inaugural class for high school graduation in the spring of 2007. Guided by place-based learning and the CES Common Principles, City High School partners with a variety of local organizations to offer its City Works curriculum.

a lot about what's happening in the real world and that the class will make me and the other students be more active in our community.

Ourselves

All three of us are representatives on the Student Voice Committee, which is our school's student government group. We have a few things in common: we like to be very busy and involved in activities, we were all born in December, and obviously, we all live in Tucson. On the other hand, our lives are pretty different from one another. We live in different neighborhoods and went to different schools before. If we didn't go to City High School, we probably wouldn't know each other.



Small Schools = Better World

by Coral Ann Schmid

Eagle Rock School & Professional Development Center

essay 06

Communities are eager for change and are looking toward their young people to solve educational challenges. Schools continue making classes larger and harder for students to learn on an individual basis. Small schools like Eagle Rock offer opportunities to young people to expand their knowledge with structure and support. Eagle Rock was founded on values that lead students and faculty to find a healthy way to live out a desired lifestyle. We embrace values like intellectual discipline, service to others, cross-cultural understanding, and physical fitness to keep our bodies and minds constantly striving for improvement. Eagle Rock manifests the healthiest community possible and always recognizes struggles as if they were gifts and opportunities for learning.

I have been involved in numerous discussions where we challenge relevant issues of the day such as race,

education, politics, immigration, and poverty. We expand on topics like this daily, learning new methods to process information that gets distributed. We improve our language so we can more clearly understand each other and be able to use a multitude of opinions. Time for reflection at Eagle Rock is not

Coral Ann Schmid, age eighteen, arrived at Estes Park, Colorado's Eagle Rock School in January of 2004. She struggled in conventional educational situations and enjoys Eagle Rock's educational philosophy, including experiential learning experiences and the safe environment the school offers. Coral enjoys sailing and will be traveling to India this winter. After she graduates, she looks forward to continuing her passion for travel.

forgotten. A portion of the schedule is intentionally meant for giving students and staff time to re-process the learning experience.

As I am pushed with lessons of patience, honesty, and fortitude, I remember these are the foundation values that will accelerate my personal growth. As I take Eagle Rock's tools, I will use them in other educational environments to help me better understand my surroundings. Struggling to create safe environments can be the first major step for all schools. I am developing as an individual through Eagle Rock. I get the opportunity to work on myself in the safe and supportive environment of Eagle Rock's learning community.

Small schools everywhere continue to push educational limits and are creating inspired young people with aspirations of making changes and nurturing healthy communities across the globe. One person can make a difference. Students who dare to dream beyond what they're told and ask more from their education deserve small schools. To take a young person's dream and to accessorize it with tools gives that person the chance to fly and succeed. The generation of today is looking for a base of knowledge to lead them to their own successes, not someone to spoon-feed us.

Eagle Rock is an eclectic and balanced community with teachers, students, and visiting educators learning from each other. We are told to come in with open minds. Everyone is coming in with a bit of knowledge from many different places. We understand that a good balance of class and social time offers different environments for everybody. If we learn as a community together, we become closer in achieving our dreams as one.

Eagle Rock School

Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, in Estes Park, Colorado, is both a school for high school age students and a professional development center for adults, particularly educators. The school is a year-round, residential, and full-scholarship school that enrolls young people ages fifteen through seventeen from around the United States. Eagle Rock is a CES Mentor School.

I learned time management through my advisory, I gained endless amounts of honest communication skills in my classes, and I started to care for others while living with people from all walks of life.

Eagle Rock has given me the skills and purpose to achieve my highest dreams. My goals to sail around the world and write for *National Geographic* are honored and nurtured at Eagle Rock.

Young people everywhere need support and a sense of guidance from passionate educators who strive to listen and understand. Educators start spreading support as peers learn to guide one another through these times. Instructors that took that extra ten minutes to explain a problem more in depth are the ones that made the difference. I've been blessed with an education that I am grateful for and very proud of. I am confident that my contribution can make a positive difference in our fragile environment. I hope to work at an orphanage in the Himalayas and spend time doing service in all the local communities in which I live. Join me in supporting small schools and their mission to challenge our generation to positively impact our world.

07

essay

Nation Building: Out with the Old and In with the New by Michael Sawyer

The Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE)



Imagine, if you will, that you are a citizen of a small nation. Now this nation has been trudging along through the years, its citizens coming and going, most of them not angered, but never truly happy with their lives in this small land; it could always be better, someday, somehow. But alas, these unwitting citizens never really know how, or even care, to change their beloved nation. And so, the apathetic malaise contin-

ues to cloud the nation's skies.

But then imagine that all of a sudden a group of leaders from this nation decides that a change is needed, now. This nation decides to split three ways, into three smaller states, so that each could better attend the needs of its people, and make its citizenship worthwhile, productive, and most importantly, enjoyable.

Michael Sawyer is a senior at the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment in SeaTac, Washington. He is heavily involved in the expansion of student voice abroad and on campus, specifically through student government and its responsibilities to students.

This very sort of "Nation-Building" has taken place at the Tyee Campus in Washington state. Students, teachers, and administrators have taken the foundations of mediocre norms and pulled them down, laying the groundwork for a more rigorous learning environment not just for the students, but for all of those involved with the school. Three new small schools have been formed from the old Tyee High School: the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE), Global Connections High School, and Odyssey: The Essential School.

I myself am now a happy citizen of ACE, which is in its second full year. We have made major strides from where we were last fall. The students have taken the initiative to build the school they wish to be a part of, and it has shown in the results. One area in particular that I, along with several other students, have labored over this past year, and in the coming year, is forming a truly representative and fully efficient student government structure here at ACE.

Last fall, the administrators decided to place the responsibility of crafting a student-driven government squarely on the shoulders of the students, and we eagerly seized the opportunity with both hands. Right off the bat, we held elections in our advisory classes to see who would be our representatives from those advisories. We didn't quite know what we were going for, but as we sat around the tables in our meeting rooms, we knew what we wanted: a student-led governing body that could make actual decisions that equitably represented every single student voice at ACE. This list included student representatives from each grade level, students for whom English is a second language, students with hearing complications, and students with special needs, all members and all important to ACE. We wanted to be about more than just raising money for dances and supporting our sports teams; we wanted to have a say in what was taught, how it was taught, what kind of learning tools we should have access to, and how to make our small school better in any way we could.

We didn't realize just how tough all of this would be. Honestly, we simply spun our wheels on some issues. Every time we thought a decision was made, we brought ourselves back to what we were about: representing and making equitable decisions for ALL students. And so back to the drawing board it was for us, but we knew the next decision would include all

of our students this time, and everyone would have a voice. That became our driving force: "Every student has a voice."

And so in year two, we now know of ways to make every student's voice heard on every issue at our school. We have organized what we call "Chalk Talks," where we post an essential question dealing with issues of social justice, and students and staff may at any time add their opinions in writing on these boards in our halls. An example of such a Chalk Talk was the question: "What is the most pressing social justice issue of our time? How should we solve it?" Two student responses jumped out to me from the bulletin board. One was: "Prejudice in all its forms—race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender." The second read: "Students being comfortable with having social justice, because some of them have never [experienced] this. Teach students what social justice really means."

With the help of other student leaders here, I have crafted a Constitution that explains and is evidence of the purpose of student voice, so that we can now have a structure of student government in place that encourages and even demands student voice. We, as a school, held our first ACE Conclave in February 2006, halfway through our year, which was a time and place where students could assess the progress of their learning and the progress of ACE. Our advisors encouraged us to give ideas for new classes and curriculum changes. One suggestion was a photography class, and beginning this year, we now have a Graphic Arts and Digital Photography class, which truly shows just how much decision-making power we as students now have.

I wouldn't change a single moment of my experience from this past year. In working toward our goals of authentic student voice, I've learned just how many groups, not only in education, but also beyond the classroom, are not treated with fairness and equality. In order to reverse these social wrongs, the student leaders at ACE must continue to strive for inclusion of these groups, like the deaf and hard of hearing, English language learners, and students with special needs, and even younger students in the decision-making processes at ACE. I also learned that creating a working student government from scratch isn't as easy as "Just Add Water."

I, along with the rest of last year's student advisory representatives, have worked extra hours both at and away from school to make our goal become our reality, but we cannot rest on our laurels. We have to, and are going to, work even harder and smarter to completely fulfill our ultimate goal: having a school where all students are actively empowered to advocate for their own learning, actively involved in their

school and community, and actively pursuing social justice wherever they may go.

So just imagine our small nation again. But now, its citizens are empowered to sculpt their own learning pathways. These citizens are all involved in the direction of their nation. These citizens are excited to be part of their nation, and leave their nation ready for the world before them. This nation is closer to being a reality than you think. This nation is being built at the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment today.

The Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE)

The Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (ACE) is in its second year as a new small school created from Tyee High School. Located in SeaTac, Washington, ACE serves six communities in the Seattle area and is part of the CES Small Schools Project.

08

The Shelter of Leadership by Maria K. Walczuk

Connections Public Charter School



Creating challenging and personalized schools for all young people is the first step in giving the new generation of youth a strong foundation to start their lives.

I felt the energy of a mysterious environment as I walked through an unknown building. There was a familiar sense of school: a light smell of chalk and dry erase boards filled the air. My family and I were going to a meeting for students interested in Connections Public Charter School (CNPCS) located in Hilo, Hawaii. I prepared myself with low expectations of unkind teachers, irresponsible students, and an unwelcome environment. My adrenaline rushed at the thought of a classroom full of new students. Families and students began to gather in a room. There was no more time to get ready: the moment had arrived. I sat down as a future student.

I was startled that a group of students was facilitating. They spoke on all topics of CNPCS and answered every question with a surprising sense of humor. Their presentations illustrated a sincere eagerness to support their school. One topic sparked my attention: all CNPCS students are guaranteed opportunities to

stand up as a leader. They presented the possibility of exceptionally growing as students of the next generation of youth. The first essential step was to simply acknowledge that. This compelled me to understand the purpose of leadership more extensively.

The decision to embrace this innovative school was natural. Our first semester has encouraged me to grow more as a student of life. I feel I can set my mind to undertake any goal without the fear of failure. This school represents vast potential of supporting more leaders in life, not more followers. The teachers are unlimited sources of knowledge and the students are excellent examples of solid leaders. This is clearly evident when they work with each other. Teachers go out of their way to promote strength within us as leaders, and students create productive foundations to further ascend from.

CNPCS has many ongoing activities that are offered:

- **Advisories:** a teacher and a group of students gather together within school to communicate with one another. It signifies small communities where student input is incorporated in decisions. We discuss problems and concerns, share opinions and come up with solutions. Meeting with our advisory allows us time to examine issues more broadly. I think it is great method for disentangling difficulties. Each student is affected individually and it is important to stop and take a moment to look at the school's existing condition.

Maria Karin Walczuk is an 11th grader attending Connections Public Charter School in Hilo, Hawaii. She enjoys acting, dancing, filming, traveling and photography, and is currently pursuing her passion of performing internationally.

- Hui Ohana: a meeting held weekly with the entire school. We make announcements, discuss issues, and vote in a participatory democracy. This conference helps us to examine student life. We reflect on our school's involvement and that gives us a clearer picture of where we are heading. I find this essential in putting the pieces of our school puzzle together.
- Student-taught classes: contemporary classes taught solely by students. It is a brilliant way for any student to pursue an interest, instruct a class and get credit. These classes open doors for the youth of our school. It is a remarkable approach to learning to take responsibility one degree higher. My first experience with student-taught classes has inspired me to consider teaching a class.

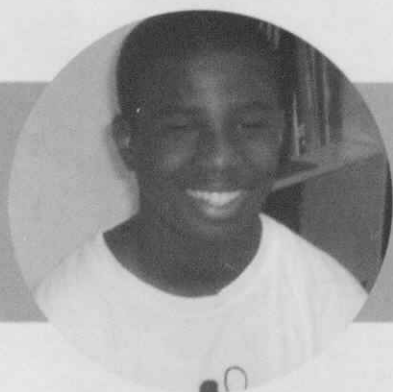
At Connections Public Charter School students learn to take the initiative and be more effectively involved in their education. CNPCS follows the principle that the school should be a place that is comfortable for students so students can rise to make a difference within the community. My main goal is to be more

Connections Public Charter School

Connections Public Charter School is part of the CES Small Schools project, working with CES Mentor School Harmony School to start a new high school that builds on the existing K-8 structure.

actively involved within school. I believe that by making mistakes, trying new things, and exploring your capabilities, you learn to become a more focused leader. Only by beginning with yourself can you start to benefit the community.

The challenge is persisting with each step. The necessary element is to realize that nothing develops in midair; everything takes time to unfurl. By following through, students reap the rewards of accomplishment. Young people *can* be full participants in the plans and process of education. In this new generation of youth, student leadership creates the shelter that keeps education alive.



Why I Am a Strong Believer in My School *by Nnamdi Nwaezeapu*

Capital City Public Charter School

essay

09

My name is Nnamdi Nwaezeapu. I am currently an eighth grader attending Capital City Public Charter School. Capital City (CCPCS) was established in the fall of 1999 and revolutionized the way that schools were designed in the Columbia Heights area of Washington, D.C. Capital City is one of the many successful Expeditionary Learning Schools throughout the US. I have been at Capital City since the school first opened on top of a CVS drugstore. Since then we have moved into a large and nicely renovated building.

Capital City has an Expeditionary Learning (EL) curriculum. The difference between a regular curriculum and an EL curriculum is that an EL curriculum allows students to learn hands-on, without a textbook. The curriculum is integrated between the different content areas as much as possible. Also, we have two or more teachers in each classroom and we use the workshop model in humanities.

CCPCS has embraced me and instilled its powerful message within me and that is why I make sure that I dedicate a good percent of my time toward making Capital City an even better place. One of the things that I did to accomplish this goal was to speak at the Washington, D.C. School Board meeting

My name is **Nnamdi Nwaezeapu**. I am thirteen years old. Some of my hobbies include basketball, flag football, squash, racquetball, karate and writing. I have two siblings, one younger brother and one younger sister. My brother is a gymnast and my sister is a very accomplished swimmer. I have two educated parents who both majored in chemical engineering. I am a very avid reader and a very big sports fan. My moral in life is that when life gives you lemons make lemonade—this means that you make the best out of your situation.

about our decision to amend our charter to open an upper school. I talked about several things at the meeting, for example, how our school is ethnically and economically diverse. I also talked about the fact that a lot of students in the metropolitan area have not been exposed to our type of learning and that the upper school would give them a chance to do that.

Not only did I talk about the upper school, I helped plan it. I was one of the students that assisted in the process of choosing the principal for the upper school. I also took a trip to a CES meeting in Washington state to gather ideas. I also went to a retreat to get a clearer understanding of how the upper school was going to look (might I mention that it was on a Saturday at 8:00 in the morning). Those experiences further connected me to Capital City.

Capital City has all of the qualities that a parent would want in a school: a safe environment, welcoming teachers, great facilities and a diverse community where everyone is accepted. It also has all of the qualities that a student is looking for: a safe environment, fun teachers, great facilities, great curriculum and a diverse group of students to make anyone feel comfortable.

Capital City Public Charter School

Currently serving 236 students in grades K-8, Capital City Public Charter School is a small, diverse charter school serving students from across the District of Columbia. CCPCS is part of the CES Small Schools Project as a new school, working with a CES Mentor School to add grades 9-12.

I am a strong believer in Capital City. It has really changed my life for the better. I feel that I now have the skills to excel in other aspects of my life. For example, Capital City has provided me with solid leadership skills to utilize in several activities from sports to troubling situations. Capital City has also taught me to look at situations from a different perspective and that is one of the rules that I now live my life by. I hope that Capital City will be able to continue to embrace students in the same way it embraced me and to continue to evolve as the great school that it is.

10 essay

My Educational Activism by Emma Brightbill

Yarmouth High School

Yarmouth High School (YHS) may look like an ordinary brick high school with parking spaces in the front, the American flag waving by the front door, and the flocks of kids waiting for the buses in the afternoon. But inside, it is a school that strives for excellence in every way.

YHS does not emphasize perfection, knowing it isn't possible. Instead, Yarmouth's mission—*To Empower all Students to Create Fulfilling Lives in a Changing World*—is based on its core values of trust, honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, integrity, loyalty, caring, respect, citizenship, pursuit of quality, responsibility, and, last of all, positive self-esteem. Like the Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the core values at YHS help students become active participants in their education.

When I arrived at YHS as a freshman, I was nervous about being around upperclassmen, fitting in, finding my way around, and making a difference. Like any other student, I had the usual first-day butterflies about my classes, where to eat, if I would be late, and so on. I soon discovered that the teachers care about the students and really want the students to take advantage of their education in all the ways possible to succeed. This happens in a variety of ways to suit learning differences.

YHS has helped me personally become an active participant in my education by giving me encouragement to advocate for myself, different ways to assess learning, opportunities for school involvement, and by having good resources such as experts who can reinforce learning.



The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles

Demonstration
of mastery



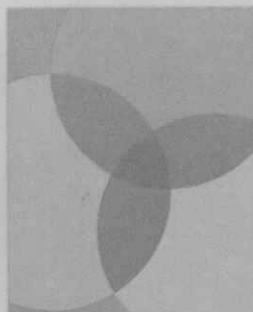
Commitment
to the entire
school

A tone of
decency
and trust



Goals apply to
all students

Resources
dedicated to
teaching and
learning



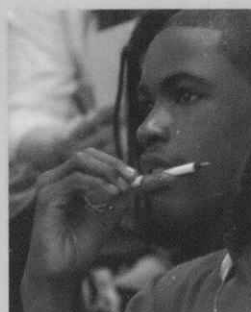
Less is more,
depth over
coverage

Learning to
use one's
mind well



Personalization

Student-as-
worker, teacher-
as-coach



Democracy
and equity

The Coalition of Essential Schools

Imagine schools where intellectual excitement animates every student's face, teachers work together to improve their craft, and all students thrive and excel. For more than 20 years, the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) has been at the forefront of making this vision a reality. Guided by a set of Common Principles, CES strives to create and sustain personalized, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

The CES network includes hundreds of schools and 22 Affiliate Centers. Diverse in size, population, and programmatic emphasis, Essential schools serve students from kindergarten through high school in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Essential schools share the Common Principles, a set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling. Reflecting the wisdom of thousands of educators, the ten Common Principles inspire schools to examine their priorities and design effective structures and instructional practices.

CES was founded in 1984 by Theodore R.Sizer and is headquartered in Oakland, California. Please visit our website at www.essentialschools.org for more about CES's programs, services, and resources.

Horace

CES publishes its journal *Horace* quarterly. Combining research with hands-on resources, *Horace* showcases Essential schools that implement the ten Common Principles in their structures, practices, and habits. Within four focus areas—school design, classroom practice, leadership, and community connections—*Horace* explores specific questions and challenges that face all schools in the CES network.

Subscriptions to *Horace* are a benefit of affiliating with CES National as a regional center, school, or network friend. We invite you to visit the CES website at www.essentialschools.org for information on affiliation and to read *Horace* issues from 1988 through the present.

Jill Davidson, editor of *Horace*, welcomes your comments, issue theme and story ideas, and other feedback via email at jdavidson@essentialschools.org.

Lewis Cohen
Executive Director

Jill Davidson
Publications Director

Emma Brightbill is a sophomore at Yarmouth High School in Yarmouth, Maine. She likes reading, doing yoga, walking and being with friends and family. She wants to be an English or history teacher one day.

I was told that one key to surviving high school (and even life) is asking questions and making sure you have the right idea on assignments. Mastering this skill is one reason behind my increased ability to advocate for myself. I had an eccentric teacher who was frequently vague on assignments. The reason I did somewhat well in that class is because I asked about and clarified anything I misunderstood. Talking with my teachers before class also helps because it allows the teacher to know that I am doing my best but have a small issue that can be resolved. An example of this is an issue that came up recently: I had problems with opening my gym locker but emailed the gym instructors and told them my concerns. My gym instructors answered and said they could help me get an easier combination so it would be possible to open my locker. The action of the email was small but went a long way. Voicing my concerns helped open communication with my teachers. I advocate for myself in this way because it helps me, and it helps my teachers understand me better.

As a math-challenged individual, I couldn't be happier to get out of math class when it ends! It took me all through middle school to admit that I didn't understand some (well, actually, all) parts of math. With some coaching from a very patient instructional strategist, I eventually figured out that I didn't want to admit defeat by saying that I didn't get something. I started my high school career by admitting to my math teacher, learning center teacher and myself that I have difficulty admitting what I don't get. My first year of high school math at YHS was better in the sense that teachers really wanted me to learn to remember basic math skills such as how to solve an equation using X. I took advantage of the extra help with lots of practice and improved my math skills and grade overall. The challenge required perseverance and hard work but I learned and remembered how to do many math skills. Being involved in the success of my mathematical education and asking for, and accepting, help when necessary not only made math class more enjoyable but also gave me a model for improvement in other classes.

Having students as workers and teachers as guides is the best way to learn, as my math experience taught me. The teacher is coaching the student toward a path of knowledge and the student uses his or her knowledge and ability to go the rest of the way. The teacher

helps by asking questions, by being a source of information, and most of all by giving support. It is up to the student to use what the teacher offers.

During my freshman year, I took Physical Science One to fulfill part of my science requirement. The second major unit was on geology, the study of rocks. As the final assessment, each student created a web site with a glossary, bibliography, links page, geology map and timeline, rock and mineral guide, and a piece on the history of Portland Headlight. The project was divided into different parts so that it couldn't be done in one night before it was due. The first two drafts of geology timeline and map needed to be shown to the teacher for accuracy and completion. Then, it was up to the students to check their work and make sure it was completed on time. Whenever I had finished a draft or a step in the process to completion, I would check in with my teacher to see if there could be any improvements or suggestions. I made sure every step along the way that my work was complete and accurate. My teacher acted as support and a source of information along the way, which helped me have my web site submitted for citywide recognition.

Another way of demonstrating learning at YHS is the Socratic Seminar. Teachers ask students questions that start generally and eventually become more specific. The questions are usually focused around a topic that is being studied in both the English and history classes. Students are expected to talk at least once during the seminar. They can refer to and use examples from web sites visited in their English and history classes, handouts, old homework assignments and other reference materials. The Socratic Seminar, however, is not my favorite way of showing my knowledge. I am often shy, reluctant to raise my hand in class, and this issue shows up in the seminar, which does not work for all people because their talents and abilities may not be able to be used in a more social display of knowledge.

This summer, I was on a committee to help re-design student government at YHS to increase student involvement. I was one of five representatives for my grade. I spoke for my grade as best as possible. Not all people in my grade will have the same opinions, and I honor that. I tried to represent my grade by keeping an open mind and sharing opinions, even when we discussed an idea for a senior project. As a result, we've helped draft a new constitution and revised the student government to create a student senate and class council. Despite my shyness, I've decided to put up my hand and run for student senate.

At YHS, we also have access to other ways to learn, such as the Career Exploration Program (CEP), a three-day career job shadow for sophomores and juniors to help them get a chance to see what jobs may

Yarmouth High School

Yarmouth High School, in southern Maine, has 490 students in grades 9-12. All Yarmouth High School students receive an Apple iBook laptop for their school use.

interest them. The school's goal is for all students to have a positive learning experience during their career exploration and to connect this with the future. That's why the CEP is required, regardless of differences in opinions, demographics, backgrounds, and learning styles. As I think about a few career interests such as library science, education, literature, fashion and running a store, I'm looking forward to my first CEP this spring.

Other ways of learning at YHS include a graduation requirement of at least 60 hours of community service, the use of iBooks by students, and honors and AP classes. The teachers' hope is that the students will participate and take advantage of these opportunities and learn from them. At YHS, students can show their learning in different ways, based on their learning styles and strengths, such as in essays, projects, standardized testing, portfolios, annotated bibliographies, PowerPoint presentations and even web blogs and web sites. Having a mixture of ways to measure students' knowledge is better and provides variety. Having the variety makes the student more interested in studying and learning; it makes the teacher enjoy seeing the students discover and use their academic talents.

11

essay

Meaningful Learning for the "Real World" by Tina Cassidy

Quest High School



For many teenagers, school is just school; a place to go and learn about numbers and things that happened way before we were born and nothing more. But for me, school is something that holds much more meaning. When I walk through the school doors each morning, I am embraced with the feeling of being home. I feel a sense of ownership, as do many other students, because this is our school and our community. Here at Quest High School, students and faculty work together as partners to better the school. Through this partnership, each person takes on responsibilities and duties to ensure that our school is a place that is valuable and safe for everyone. At Quest, each and every student and their voices count, and that is why I cherish my school so much.

I am now a senior at Quest and have been there since the start of my freshman year. We are a very small school community in Humble just north of Houston in the Lone Star State, with around only 250 students, while the other high schools in our district exceed 2,000 students each.

Though we are small, we most definitely have a great amount of pride for our school and everything

students and teachers have accomplished together. Our mission statement at Quest is something that is deeply woven throughout our entire curriculum and school culture, "Quest High School is committed to providing a personalized learning experience in a working partnership with the community to create life-long learners and successful members of society." Everything we do at school reflects our mission statement and the goals it holds for the students. And a very important aspect that our school is built upon is that we have a democratic system where everyone's voice and ideas are heard and considered equally. We have different governing bodies throughout our school that faculty, students, and even community members are allowed to participate in. And in these

I am seventeen years old and have a twin sister and an older brother and sister. I am a native Texan and was born in Humble. I am a karate instructor and have been training in karate for nine years, and I just recently made it to third degree black belt. And I am also a Texas A&M fan, Gig 'em!

different committees each is given a jurisdiction over certain areas of the school such as changing outdated and irrelevant policies and planning social events for the entire school.

One such organization is our school government called the Quest Community Management Council (QCMC). Within our government, we have a president, vice-president, and a few other officers. QCMC is in charge of dealing with issues about policies, student concerns, and even making sure that our Quest Constitution is being upheld. Last year, QCMC revised the constitution because it was written when the school first opened, and there were different issues that needed to be added. It is QCMC's responsibility to make sure that both faculty and students collaborate when it comes to trying to revise policies and other issues.

I was both privileged and honored to attend a conference this past summer for my school in our nation's capitol, Washington, D.C. Quest is also apart of the organization First Amendment Schools (FAS). This was an FAS conference focused on how to better the knowledge of our First Amendment rights as students. There were four students from our school, and throughout the entire conference we had educators from around the nation coming up to us students asking about our school because they have heard so much about it. It was an amazing experience as a student to teach the teachers and share with them the things that I have grown to love so much about Quest.

On the last day of the conference we had team planning, a time for all of the schools to get together with their own team and reflect upon last year's progress towards the goals of education and the practice of our First Amendment rights. This was a time where we all seriously had to look back and fix what hadn't worked and expand upon what had. We had three facilitators with us: our principal, assistant principal and a Spanish/history teacher. At Quest our teachers are called facilitators because that is exactly what they do; they facilitate our learning and guide us instead of just teaching us what to think. So they all vowed at the very beginning of that discussion that they would try their best not to lead the conversation but guide it and let us really express what we thought.

All four of us had a lot to say and everything was commented on by the teachers and they even had a few "ah ha!" moments from what they had heard. One such idea that we proposed involved the lack of communication between the students and teachers last year. We all thought that maybe being able to have QCMC representatives attend faculty meetings on a regular basis would allow for more collaboration between stakeholders. Our teachers thought this was a

Quest High School

Quest High School, in Humble, Texas, is a CES Mentor School paired with Empowerment College Preparatory School in Houston. Quest has powerfully influenced its own school district to cultivate personalization and implement service learning in all of its schools.

great idea and definitely something they would bring back to the staff for consideration.

The planning was a major success up there in D.C. but back at school things are moving slowly. We are now a few weeks into school, and our teachers have understandably been very busy, but our plans are still waiting to be put into action. And so my principal, Mrs. Kimberly Klepcyk, a woman that I deeply respect and owe so much to, personally confronted me and asked me to try and get the ball rolling with the implementation of our Washington proposals; something that needed to be done within our school government. Of course, I felt extremely overwhelmed, because I knew that this task would be no walk in the park. But I also felt tremendously empowered because making a difference in my school is something that I am always ready to do.

So the first step in the process of getting our proposals implemented was to get QCMC up and running because this is where decisions about any proposals are made, in our governance system. So I am now in the process of getting former QCMC members to speak about the organization in family (our advisory system at Quest), so that we can hold family elections to pick the two representatives from each advisory to be a part of the government. And then from there we are going to try and hold a schoolwide election to choose the QCMC presidents and such. We are going to try and make our election process as close to the real thing as possible, having students register to vote in family and even holding a schoolwide assembly where the candidates can give a speech to the student body about why they should be voted in. From there students will go to the voting poll (our school library) and cast their ballot for the candidate they want. By getting students involved, maybe it will strike their interest for other things in the future. This will also allow all students to give their voice in the decision-making process at our school and will make each day more meaningful for them, which falls back on our mission statement, "Quest High School is committed to providing a personalized learning experience..." Once the elections are finished, QCMC should be complete. We hope that once QCMC is ready to

go, we can finally make some progress toward our Washington goals for the year. At times, I feel like these plans aren't going anywhere and I should just give up, but I know it will be worth the time and effort in the end.

I feel strongly about our mission statement and the values our school was founded on, and I personally try and take advantage of every opportunity that is given to me. I feel so engaged at school and like what I have to say is important. Quest has provided me with a structured environment where feedback is praised. So throughout the years, I have given my input in discussions in family, was a facilitator for my family for a four-week well thought-out process called Project 540 in which we identified school issues and addressed them, attended faculty meetings when allowed to, and even attended a nationwide conference.

Being able to personalize and distinguish my learning makes being at school so much more priceless to me. Some community members do not consider Quest a valuable asset like we do and believe preconceived notions they have heard. These misconceptions about Quest hinder people to see the real facts behind our school. And I can honestly say that when an occasion arises to defend my school, I rise up and am more than willing to inform them of the truth. I have never been so proud to be a part of something than I am to say I attend Quest.

So what exactly have I learned these past few years at Quest? Just like any other high school student, I have learned some math and how to write, but most impor-

tant, I have learned how to be a better person for my community and for myself. Learning about my rights as an American citizen and how to appropriately use them is something that I will always carry with me and be able to use in my everyday life. I used to believe that what I had to say meant nothing and that nobody really cared, but I have found out that every little suggestion can make a difference. I have grown from being the shy freshman in the back of family keeping to herself, to the senior who seizes every opportunity to get involved. Once I leave Quest, I know that I will never go back to being the old me ever again, because I have experienced the power of using my voice and have seen the effects of it. In the future, I hope to use what I have learned at Quest to become an active member of society. I know that my vote counts and that what I have to say can make an impact. As for the near future, I plan on going off to college next year.

The facilitators at my school have been a huge inspiration in my life, and I will never know how to repay them. The path that I now feel like I am on is leading me toward a job in education, because I hope one day to be an inspiration to someone else like my teachers have been to me. And I hope to be able to teach the lessons I have learned to others. People say that the children are our future, and Quest has shaped me to be the best that I can be for the future of our nation, and I hope I will return this favor to upcoming generations. I love my school and all of my teachers, and I will never forget what I have learned there.

12

essay

"Student as Worker" Applied Outside the Classroom by Lou Vargas

Global Connections High School



Strongly implemented in CES schools across the country, the ten Common Principles have an impact on thousands of students. With the Common Principle "Embracing the metaphor 'student as worker'," students are able to revolutionize student culture to reach new heights, bringing it outside the

classroom and into the whole school community through student activism.

Having students as workers provides a sense of ownership in their productivity, allowing them to acknowledge their own efforts that lead to their accomplishments instead of doing work that is

My name is Lou Vargas from Seattle, Washington. I'm seventeen years old and I currently attend Global Connections High School as a junior. I'm really active at school, helping out as much as I can, devoting my services to the school and the students. I really enjoy doing extracurricular activities such as the CES Committee, assisting in the future development of our school. I'm also extremely involved in DECA, which is an international organization of marketing students. Another thing that I'm involved in at school is our Track team. I love to work out and stay fit. Outside of school, I keep myself busy with my job at the nearby Abercrombie store at the mall which I enjoy very much since my closest friends work there as well. In my spare time, I do a little bit of photography. It's definitely one of my passions. Other than that, I try to spend as much quality time with my friends as I try to balance school, extra-curricular activities, work, friends and family.

dictated by the teacher. In the classroom, there are only two parties that can recognize student accomplishments and development, the students themselves and the teacher. But why should the recognition of student accomplishments and development just stay within the classroom when it should already be a constant that teachers recognize their students' progress? It is not only in the classroom where students show growth.

Outside the classroom, there are loads of opportunities where students can be recognized by more people in a variety of ways. When students actually step into the community and make a difference, they can be rewarded far beyond just a pat on the back. Simply by being active in school, inside and outside the classroom, students can become well known by their peers as well as other people. Having others know that a student can truly make a difference gives the community confidence in that person—there couldn't be any greater reward than that! Student activism gives students opportunities to give back to their schools and become well developed independent workers. Consequently, this can also allow the student to gain more recognition and credit from their school and their peers.

When students begin to discover their potential and become active at school, they can only leap forward and become more involved in student activism and

even influence others as they bring their peers into the active student lifestyle. The only downfall for students is if they are never presented the chance to become involved at school. Students who do not recognize the importance of being active at school tend to depend on others who are more active to speak out, with most of the student voice representing theirs. This could also lead those same students to not be responsible citizens in the near future. These are not the type of students we are trying to cultivate in CES schools.

One might ask, "What does 'student as worker' look like when applied outside the classroom?" The answer to this becomes evident when students are motivated to become active in school as well as in the community. Through student activism, students are able to have their voices heard, have their ideas implemented, and be appreciated for their contribution to the school community. More than simply joining clubs and sports, student activism leads to community service and gaining a better sense of personal development. Also, student activists can contribute through attending the CES Fall Forum and Summer Institute, participating in school committees with teachers to shape the school the way students want it to be, and students taking responsibility for engaging all students in activities and in classes. These are some important ways that students can become more involved; allowing themselves to be able to contribute their own input as to how things can be as well as working toward a final goal, which is to create a more progressive and inclusive school community.

If students start to become more active at school and learn how they could benefit from that, this could become a whole new student culture as they get used to contributing to the school community and enjoy discovering their potential. In the end, students will be able to look back at what they accomplished along with what it took them to get there and look forward to how they can utilize their ability to be a well developed student as worker.

Global Connections High School

SeaTac, Washington's Global Connections High School is a small school created from Tyee High School. Educating students in six local communities, Global Connections High School is a member of the CES Small Schools Project as a new school.

13

What Does Freedom Mean at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School? by Amanda Griffin & Kayla Reeves

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School



"A democracy is more than a form of government; it is a primary mode of associated living, or conjoint communicated experience." —John Dewey

Most high school students consider the day they graduate as the day they finally experience freedom in their twelve years of education. They are accustomed to having things done for them and have not been given the opportunity to create and inspire change. In most schools, the "democratic" inclusion of students' voices is generally limited to the select group participating in student government. At the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School, we strive to extend student voice to all students so that their high school experience is not created for them but *by them*. Students from Parker aren't necessarily much different from your average public high school student; there are some students who care a lot about important issues and some students who go to school because it's illegal not to. What does separate Parker from most public schools is "The Parker Way," an expression that anyone who's been to Parker understands. "The Parker Way" has no one definition. It is meant to be interpreted and defined by one's own experience at the school. For us, it's the freedom that the school allows students to express opinions and create change. The teachers and staff are there to support and encourage you to go after what you believe in and help you reach your full potential as an academic

Kayla Reeves is currently a sophomore at Parker Charter Essential School and has attended the school since seventh grade. In her spare time, she enjoys dancing, running and playing Ultimate Frisbee.

Amanda Griffin is a junior at Parker Charter School. She is an avid ski racer during the winter months. During the summer, she teaches rock climbing and lifeguards.

Kayla and Amanda recently received funding from Youth Venture and United Way to start a program that uses the game of Ultimate Frisbee as a tool to promote physical fitness as well as body image and other adolescent issues to inner-city girls in Worcester. They will be presenting a workshop at this year's Fall Forum that will focus on student voice beyond student government.

student and community member. As perfect as this may sound, it comes with many challenges, as does anything that's worth hard work. It requires taking on more responsibilities, which means a lot of work, long days and spending time working—on this article, among other things—on Friday nights. But, ultimately, this is what shapes us into becoming more independent, powerful leaders.

Each year at Parker, the junior class selects two possible essential questions which guide our critical thinking and help deepen our understanding of the connections between our own lives and what we learn about in school. Then the entire student body votes to choose one of the essential questions. This year, our essential question is, "What is relevant?"

One thing we do at Parker that is most relevant is the functioning of our Community Congress, known as CC. This body of student government is made up of one student representative from each of the thirty advisories. Each representative is responsible for attending the hour-long weekly meeting and then reporting back new information to their advisory. Time is allotted for an open forum when representatives bring up issues that have come up in advisory or in the school. This can range from complaints around the high price of school pizza to discussions of how an appropriate policy can be established to address the dilemma of "Public Displays of Affection" (PDA).

After students bring issues to the table, CC holds large group discussions in order for everyone's voice to be heard. As powerful and effective as this can be, it can also be extremely frustrating and time-consuming to even begin the process of drafting policy change. This is also true of American government as policymakers also face frustration when trying to make changes in public policies.

Last spring, we were elected as our school's co-advisors of the CC. The responsibility of being a co-advisor consists of running the weekly meetings, as well as meeting with the principal and other staff once a week. Though Amanda had not been a CC member for the past three years, the day before speeches were due, Kayla approached her with the offer of running

for co-advisor. Thinking we had a slim chance of winning, with so little preparation, we decided we had nothing to lose, so we gave it our all. We won with 60% of the vote. After the excitement of winning wore off, Amanda realized, "I knew nothing about the job of being co-advisor. And when you want to know about something, you have to ask questions. So, I asked questions and I found answers."

Being co-advisors means that we are ultimately responsible to be the voice of the students at Parker. We are the final link in the chain between student body, administration and the Board of Trustees. We are accountable to ensure the process of democracy continues at a high functioning level at our school. We would be lying if we said we were not afraid. Frankly, it's a huge responsibility with lots of chances to screw things up. What will be most difficult for us is adhering to the grueling process of democracy without wanting to quickly resolve the issue at hand and end the frustration. However, knowing that we are using the democratic way and helping to create positive change overrides our fears of making mistakes. We know there will be days when we will ask ourselves why we actually volunteered to take on this job. But we will always remind ourselves that we are creating change and inspiring others to be a part of that process. This experience of listening to the concerns of others and being responsible for the voices of the students who depend on us to represent them is the basis of democracy at Parker, just as it is the foundation of democracy in the United States.

At Parker, we make an effort to let everyone's opinions be heard because we value the true essence of what makes a functioning community. This is truly the "Parker Way" and what a real democracy embraces. Even though, at times, it feels as though

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

A six-year public secondary school of choice, the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens is open by lottery admissions to all residents of Massachusetts in grades seven through twelve. One of Massachusetts' first charter schools, Parker was founded in 1995 and currently educates 365 students from 40 towns in north central Massachusetts. Parker is a CES Mentor School.

we're headed down a long, dark, twisty road with no end, we are focused more on the process than on the outcome, which is the philosophy at Parker and at other Essential schools. Through this process we're learning communication skills and appreciating a difference of opinion, skills that are forever valuable. Even though it sometimes feels as though we are moving backwards, we are actually taking one step back and two steps forward in order to achieve a true democracy in which everyone feels they have a voice in the process.

Many of our Community Congress discussions have ended without resolution. While it may feel frustrating, we understand that this is part of the process of change. This is how it all begins in a true democracy. When we ask, "What is relevant?" we can say that what we actively practice at Parker is what our country is founded on. Parker is a microcosm of how our government functions. This practice produces strong leaders and powerful change. Parker has many issues that still await resolution. Through the process of trying to discover an answer, we have discovered more about the powerful work of how to create change. And that is what is most relevant for the students at Parker.



Katrina Volunteer by Julius Rainey

Urban Academy Laboratory High School

From July 10 to July 31, 2006, I went to New Orleans as a volunteer with a non-profit organization called People's Organizing Committee (POC). This organization's main goal was to get the people most affected by Hurricane Katrina to play a leading role in rebuilding

New Orleans. One year after the storm, the lower income communities still have not received proper care or been helped to rebuild their homes. POC decided to "get hands on" with helping these communities. The organization did this by having volunteers work with the victims of Katrina.

Julius Rainey is a recent graduate of the Urban Academy Laboratory High School in New York City. Formerly a Harlem resident, Julius now lives in the Bronx. He spent a good part of this summer in New Orleans working with the People's Organizing Committee and the Survivors movement. Julius is also an accomplished artist who works as a painter, illustrator, and photographer.

The volunteers did two things when working with POC. One group gutted residents' houses that were most affected by the storm. This group basically took everything out of the house until nothing was left but its frame. This group mostly worked on houses in the lower ninth ward, a mainly low-income community. While the "gutting group" was gutting, another group was canvassing in different communities in New Orleans to invite residents to a Survivors Council. In this Survivors Council, POC guided the residents to organize their community's top priorities. Some of these communities' issues were building schools for the kids, building hospitals for the sick, and getting the residents back in their homes. For three weeks I did this as a volunteer. This trip was an experience of a lifetime, personally and educationally.

Personally, before the trip, so much anger was building up in me as I lived and saw the conditions Black and Latino communities are living in. I felt this trip was not only an eye opener, but also an emotional cooler. Basically, POC's way of logically thinking through situations taught me to turn my anger into something useful, perhaps moving me to take a leading role in changing the direction of my communities' lifestyle or to join groups that agree with my views to make a change.

When I went to New Orleans and actually experienced a taste of what the lower class residents of New Orleans were going through, I became angrier. But the more time I stood down in New Orleans, I began to realize that being angry wasn't useful to myself or my community. In fact, it caused more harm than good. I soon began changing my whole attitude, and instead of being angry at the world, I realized I could fight passionately and smartly against the oppressor. What really inspired me were the Katrina victims. Just seeing how badly they were being treated by the government, I thought they would be angry and sour but instead they didn't let their condition bring their spirit down. These people were open-hearted and God-loving and didn't even show how angry they were. They fought for their homes, fought for their rights, and never gave up. Now I feel at peace. I feel like I'm ready to take on the world with a different attitude, a different understanding of myself. It may be tough, but I feel like I left New Orleans with a burden on my shoulder to change how minorities are treated in America.

This trip was also educational: I learned a lot about classism, racism and sexism. These issues were brought up

in several conversations down in New Orleans. POC's staff encouraged me to approach these issues logically and strongly which allowed me to take a stance on all of them. These issues are so large and complex I can't give you a solution for any of them, but this experience allowed me to think "out of the box" and attack some of them in my daily routine. For example, in my culture, the word "bitch" is a common word in speech directed to females. I was educated about how that might be sexist and how that affects how I treat women.

Another thing I learned when working with POC was bottom-up organizing. Bottom-up organizing is basically expecting the people at the bottom to take power in organizing whatever needs to be done in their communities. Instead of having the rich higher class or politicians make the decision for the working class, the working class should make the decisions telling the politicians what they need to do. This was POC's main goal and view and by working with this organization more and more, I understood bottom-up organizing and why it is key for America to function correctly with it.

I learned a lot of cultural things in New Orleans. Jazz is big down there so I learned a lot of interesting facts about jazz. Also, the housing structures down there were built by slaves and hold a lot of stories in the structures. The most interesting thing I learned was that in New Orleans, the deceased are buried above ground.

Overall, the experience was a life-changer. I came to New Orleans confused with my life and where it was heading, and I left ready to move onto the next chapter prepared. Now I know what direction I want to go in life. I don't want to be stuck in the "ghetto" all my life. I want to be the wise old man that lived through the darkness, but found a spark of light and used that one spark to move on and live in light. This trip was that spark. Even though it was only three weeks, this experience built my character a lot. This experience made me less passive and more aggressive with my future, more focused on the task at hand, less focused on my peers and girls. I learned to express myself and not close myself when people don't understand where I'm coming from. It may seem like all of a sudden I woke up a new man, but I see it like this: I just needed to clear my mind and really think about life in a new environment and not in chaos, which I'm usually the center of. I want to thank Herb Mack and the staff of Urban Academy for never giving up on me and allowing me to experience this trip. Thank You.

Urban Academy Laboratory High School

Urban Academy Laboratory High School, "a small school with big ideas," is a public high school in Manhattan, is a CES Mentor School. In addition to being affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools, Urban Academy is a part of the New York Performance Standards Consortium.

Notes on This Issue

A few notes and observations on how we created this collection and how you can participate...

In the summer of 2006, CES National circulated a call for submissions for "Students as Writers" widely throughout the CES network. We sent email to all affiliated schools, included an announcement of the project in the *E*ssential News* blast (our electronic newsletter) and posted the call for submissions on the Essential Blog. We also asked students who participated in the CES Summer Institute to send contributions.

The call for submissions, which we asked teachers and school leaders to distribute to everyone in their schools, covered what to write, how to write, when to write, and additional information. We asked for students to submit writing if they:

- feel passionately about the role of student leadership in education
- know how young people can be full participants in the plans for and process of education
- identify as activists for excellent schools for themselves and for all students
- create and sustain the curriculum, governance, operations or other aspects of their schools
- participate in school design through new school or conversion planning teams
- take the lead in creating the education that best suits them

We also circulated a rubric that we designed to assess writing that students submitted to the issue in five categories:

- voice (was the writer's unique voice and perspective evident?)
- understanding of CES and the Common Principles
- description of educational activism (did the writer provide specific evidence about the actions s/he took?)
- language usage
- artwork (did the writer provide a photo or other visual art to illustrate her/his article?)

We received a wide range of entries by the mid-September deadline and selected the essays included here for a three-week round of revisions. Jill Davidson, *Horace* editor, edited the essays, exchanging two, three and sometimes even four drafts with students. The results of the writers' hard work are what you have read here.

Other essays came in that we didn't select to include in these pages. In some cases, several students at a school submitted essays, and we chose to include only one essay per school. In other cases, students needed more time than the three weeks available for revision. And in yet other cases, students from schools that aren't CES schools submitted work. We are grateful for all submissions and are working with these students to get their writing ready to be included in the online version of this issue of *Horace* when it is posted in 2007.

And we're still looking for submissions! Through December 31, 2006, we will accept additional contributions for the online version of "Students as Writers." Please contact *Horace* editor Jill Davidson at j davidson@essentialschools.org for the full call for submissions and assessment rubric.

As we said in this issue's introduction, without students' full participation, we can't transform schools for all children to learn in personalized, equitable and challenging ways. And we know it's our job to create the space for that participation. We're grateful to all of the students, those whose words appear here and those who you will read online, who chose to move into that space with their words and ideas, and we hope that you are so moved. We look forward to reading what you have to say about how students can and must be active in the process of their own—and everyone's—education.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*

You've read the essays.
And the books.
You've heard the speakers.
And taken the workshop.

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22.4 FALL FORUM SPECIALS ISSUE

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This Year in Horace

22.1 School Design: How Essential Schools Create Prepared, Persistent Students and Citizens

Horace focuses on how the Common Principles guide Essential schools to cultivate the structures, guidance, and support for all students to be ready to be admitted to and persist in college and be ready for citizenship and leadership as adults.

22.2 Classroom Practice: Teaching and Learning Essential Literacy Skills: CES Teacher Voices

Horace spotlights the work of Essential school educators skilled in teaching heterogeneous groups while deepening meaning, relevance, and academic challenge for all.

22.3 Community Connections: Community-Based Learning and Essential Schools

Horace explores the challenges and value of internships, service learning, community collaborations, independent projects and other non-classroom centered learning opportunities in CES schools.

22.4 Leadership: Students as Writers: Essential School Students on Education and Activism

Produced in collaboration with CES's Small Schools Project, this student-written issue tells stories about and examines the impact of youth leadership in the CES network.

The national office of the Coalition of Essential Schools gratefully acknowledges support from the following foundations:

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Annenberg Foundation

Students as Writers: What We Can Learn

by Jill Davidson

Throughout its 23 years, *Horace* has featured student voices in a variety of ways, but this is the first time we have produced a completely student-written issue. Now it exists; this collection of students' descriptions of being active in the process of their own education is in your hands.

When we released the call for submissions to this issue, we had no real way of knowing what the response would be. This lack of control was both exciting and—I have to admit—a bit nerve-wracking. Usually, *Horace* is the result of collaborations between practitioners, family and community members, researchers, school leaders and me. This means that, as the editor, I don't always write the content, but I work with people—usually adults—who have specific experiences to convey on the subject at hand. Each issue of *Horace* is an adventure in collaboration, with its own unique delights and challenges. The work fascinates me, and I am just starting to feel like I have some mastery of the process of creating an issue. (Of course, feeling mastery often is the phase before comprehending how very little one actually knows. But for now, I'll enjoy whatever illusion of competence I can grasp.)

Even before the first deadline, students responded, and writing started to fill my email in-box. As I started to work with these students, exchanging drafts and comments, I realized that in their own particular ways, they were describing how they built relationships with adults at their schools that helped them become their best selves. These writers stepped into opportunities that they created for themselves in conjunction with schools committed to the realities of keeping students at the center of their work.

I am deeply grateful to all of the writers whose thoughtful words appear here. Thank you for your time and commitment to this process. All of you showed wisdom and focus, and the work you produced is a powerful testament to the requirement that students' voices be an equal part of the work of creating and evolving schools. Each of you demonstrates the productive, positive cycle of influence that can happen when a school community takes its students seriously and its students take the school and their responsibilities as community members just as seriously.

Most of you write about the messiness of taking an active role in your own education and the life of your school. You write about what it's like to have to deal with aspects of your schools that aren't that great, and you write about having to deal with aspects of yourselves that you want to change. Thank you for your honesty and clear descriptions.

These fourteen writers will help teachers create more space for student leadership and participation in their schools and their communities. We hope that after reading these students' words, educators and others find ways to do things differently. From my own experience, I can say that doing so may make adults feel a certain lack of control but the rewards are vastly worth it.

The editor of *Horace* since 2001, Jill Davidson is also the Publications Director for CES National. This is Jill's twentieth edition of *Horace*.

Listening to Students

by *Laura Flaxman*

Far too often in conversations about schools, educators talk about students rather than with students. The worlds of student leadership and school change orbit in separate universes. At the Coalition of Essential Schools, we have sought to alter this dynamic by engaging youth along with adults in the tasks of creating and transforming schools. In our experience, the most powerful schools are places where students share ownership of what happens there, where space is made for their voices to be heard and heeded.

As a school developer, CES encourages meaningful youth participation in our network meetings and professional development, and we ask our new school design teams and schools to do the same. This November, we are hosting our third Youth Forum during Fall Forum—as before, our student interns from local Bay Area schools are the Youth Forum’s facilitators. Last year, over one hundred youths from CES schools around the country and the world participated.

Youth leaders also play an important role in our annual week-long Summer Institute, assisting in the individual design work involved in their own particular schools, and facilitating and attending workshops alongside the adults. And they come together as a group to grow their leadership, share experiences and practices from their respective schools, and make recommendations to the Summer Institute participants as a whole. In these essays, Jurion Jaffe from Harmony School gives a taste of the Summer Institute experience and offers a persuasive argument for youth leadership in schools.

Schools can move beyond the traditional model of student leadership in which students plan dances and the prom to a model in which students are involved in essential functions like helping to shape classroom instruction, evaluate teachers and plan a large school’s conversion into small schools. We have seen this kind of meaningful student engagement among many different kinds of students in a variety of school settings and geographical regions. For example, students at Humanities Prep, a diverse public high school in New York City, serve on the school’s “Fairness Committee” to which anyone, youth or adult, may be brought if one of the school’s core values is violated. At Connections Public Charter School, a new school in Hilo, Hawaii, students lead Critical Friends Groups and teach classes. Students at Eagle Rock School, an independent residential school in Estes Park, Colorado, lead the orientation for both students new to the school and adults visiting the professional development center. On the ARISE High School design team for a new charter school opening next year in Oakland, California, students are creating and running the hiring process for teachers.

This issue of *Horace* is one way of asking the broader network of educators who are a part of the Coalition of Essential Schools to listen to young people, create spaces where student leadership can grow and serve as allies. Not only is this a critical component of fully enacting the common principle of “Democracy and Equity” but it is also a way to get your students fully engaged and make your classroom and school more successful. We hope that these students’ words will inspire you in this work.

Laura Flaxman joined CES in 2003 as the Co-Director of the Small Schools Project after serving as the founding principal at Life Academy and teaching in and leading change efforts in middle and high schools in New York City, Boston and Oakland. Currently, Laura is working on a book project at CES and helping to launch ARISE High School, a new small school opening in Oakland in the fall of 2007, where she plans to be principal.



"The Perfect High School"

by Kimberly Hill

Empowerment College Preparatory High School

01

Transition from middle school to high school can be very tense. You constantly worry about hairstyles, clothes, new teachers, harder work and the events of your social life. Upon attending a small school that's focused on academics, you notice you miss out on things students at regular schools enjoy. For instance, there are no pep rallies or football games at Empowerment High School (EHS). But the beautiful thing is that during our last two years of high school, we have the opportunity to attend college classes for free, and earn almost one year's credit in conjunction with graduating high school. In the beginning, it feels like you are being deprived of the perfectly illustrated high school life. However, the tremendous benefits quickly reveal a better image and promise of a better future. These benefits allow you to see that the "perfect high school" is one that prepares you for the next level of higher learning. Being able to be enrolled in college classes while attending high school is a positive challenge. You are exposed to the different aspects of college life, which give you an opportunity to learn what expectations a college holds. You learn that college is not a joke. You learn that it holds the key to your future.

One aspect of preparation for college is community service. Each Wednesday, EHS students are away from the EHS classroom, helping make improvements that we believe will help our community. We are able to improve our community, for example, by being mentors and tutors to elementary students to help close the achievement gap, providing food to the less fortunate, assisting the sick and participating in local civic groups. Knowing that we can effectively and positively impact our community influences us to make better choices to secure the lives we want as adults. These experiences will make us more active in our roles as citizens in this country. Going out into the community also opens our eyes to the realities

of our society and what its strengths and weaknesses are, because our community exists beyond just EHS. Through this experience, I have learned that I can be a leader and achieve my goals if my heart is truly into it. I have also learned my own strengths and weaknesses, and that has helped me develop as a leader, a writer and as a student.

We can always go to football games and pep rallies for other schools, but there are only a few schools where you can reach out to your community, and fewer still that prepare you hands-on for the college experience. In a smaller school, the environment is more personalized, and students are able to get personal assistance when they need it. No student feels embarrassed or uneasy to call a teacher about an assignment. Honestly, these are experiences that are not offered at a normal high school. Above all, the gains outweigh the losses.

Empowerment—My Small School

Gazing sadly at
Other schools
With their pep rallies and football games
Yearning to feel the excitement they feel
But my school is small
With no team to cheer
Just academics to study for
My friend, she goes to a normal high school
She's says they've just had their fifteenth fight this year
My school...?
Everyone focuses on helping each other
We're all trying to reach the same goal
There's no one competing
Over who dresses better
In my halls...you'll commonly hear
"I passed!" rather than "See my new Jordans?"
I start college classes next fall
My friend, she will not start until
The fall after graduation
It makes me feel good
Like I'm getting a head start on an important race
I am in
the most important race
Achieving the goals I need to make me successful in life.

Kimberly Hill is a member of the class of 2009 at Empowerment College Preparatory High School. She looks forward to her college graduation as part of the class of 2013.

Empowerment College Preparatory High School

Empowerment College Preparatory High School is a new small school, opened in 2005, enrolling students from anywhere in the Houston Independent School District attendance zone. With the opportunity to take dual credit courses at Houston Community College, Empowerment students have the ability to earn up to eighteen hours of college credit. Empowerment is part of the CES Small Schools Project, partnered with CES Mentor School Quest High School.

02

essay

Change with Our Help and Change for Our Sake by Jurion Jaffee

Harmony School



Set in Denver, Colorado, this year's CES Small Schools Project Summer Institute was a large success—especially because 60 students attended. The welcoming, almost family reunion-esque atmosphere created the perfect catalyst for discussing and sharing innovations in the small schools process. There were group workshops (set in rooms with an overabundance of Jolly Ranchers, pads of paper and pens), lively discussions over several catered meals, and, most important, an empowering full-day student-only workshop. To sum up this weekend in any detail would require a novel, not a magazine, so you'll just have to take my word for it: this conference was awesome. At the closing session, several students offered their thoughts about the experience—here's what I had to say.

The only constant is change. As educators, your goal, your permanent responsibility, is to prepare us for change as best you can.

You teach us, you inspire us, you *mold* us.

Now, let *us* mold *you*. Let us shake the infrastructures and loosen the bonds of traditional schooling. Let us, the students, build walls, maintain them and foster legacies in them. There is no better opportunity to reach more educators with this message than at a CES conference so...here is my piece, written concisely so it may be spoken clearly.

A little say in our school's structure is like a little love from a very beautiful woman: it's a tease. Traditionally, students are given committees with a little say, but in what? Planning their prom? Skirting real issues and throwing pebbles at the lesser ones? In many cases, they—we—have nothing more than a constantly half-adjourned Student Council and a few suggestions in a friendly box to sate our First Amendment right. It conjures images of the age-old Monkey on a Treadmill with a Banana Dangling Just out of Reach, albeit on a smaller and, we hope, less abusive scale.

Being a writer, I can't really give you a formal introduction in two sentences or less; it would feel like a caricature or an incomplete thought. However, I'm also a poet so I can appreciate the words left unsaid. I'm a senior at Harmony School in Bloomington, Indiana. Considering only my opinion, I'm a renaissance man—a jack-of-all-trades, master of none—but I prefer the term Professional Amateur. One thing's for sure: I love the fact that I've grown up in a school that celebrates individuality and opinion, instead of repressing them.

I don't mean this comment to come across as negatively charged. I mean it as a footnote in the small schools process; in saying it, I hope to dog-ear a page in a long, impossible-to-read novel called *Creating a School*, a novel written by someone who obviously took lessons from James Joyce.

In short, the more power you give students beyond the mundane, the more you share your problems with us as fervently as you share your cultures and knowledge, the more likely we are to be responsible with that power. The more likely we are to step up and work as adults, produce results as adults, and improve the structure of each school as *adults*.

I promise you that if a student's voice were heard and acted upon, if a student could propose an idea with every confidence that it would be enacted, you would *not* be disappointed. Maybe surprised, and maybe even a little uncomfortable, but *not* disappointed.

All I'm calling for is attention. All I want is for small schools around the country to do something doubtlessly innovative: to listen to your students with the same ear you cup open for your colleagues. To *consistently* manifest the untraditional, as many small schools have been doing for years. To redouble your efforts if you already boast student voice. To look at your school objectively and to not lose your students'

Harmony School

Founded in 1974, Harmony School is a small independent school in Bloomington, Indiana. Harmony School is a CES Mentor School.

confidence as you shuffle around buildings or disseminate one school into five.

Take this opportunity, as you leave this utopia of lush meals and scattered philosophies, to remind yourselves that you are, first and foremost, teachers. You are here for us. If our participation this week hasn't proven something to you about our capabilities, we will be back to prove it again in the fall and in the winter and in the spring and in the summer again. We are the students and we will always be subject to the ebb and flow of your decisions. To become truly and undeniably equitable, to honor and manifest the Common Principle of democracy and equity, we hope that you can steady that tide and show us what it really means to be a mentor. If the constant is change, change *with our help*, not *alone* and for our sake. For goodness sake.

Thank you.



Inclusion in a Different Sense

by Isaura Jimenez

Odyssey: The Essential School

essay

03

Like *Looking in a Mirror...*

Denver's Manual High School was a traditional comprehensive high school of 1,100 students with the city's lowest student test scores and a high concentration of low-income students. In 2000, Manual High School received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to break up into three autonomous small schools. But the test scores remained low, and Denver closed Manual in 2005.

As I took in all of this information at the 2006 CES Small Schools Project Summer Institute, I couldn't help feel bothered and worried. It was amazing to me to hear all of this. The similarities between Manual

High School in Denver, Colorado and Tyee High School in Sea Tac, Washington were uncanny and unsettling.

Tyee was a school of 1,200 students that was broken up into three autonomous small schools in 2005. As with Manual, Tyee is located in an area where more than half of the students are on free or reduced lunch. As with Manual, our test scores never fared well. The similarities stretched on; even the facility arrangements struck a chord—at both schools, small schools share a campus.

Those initial similarities amazed and concerned me. I wondered if it were at all possible for Tyee High

My name is **Isaura Jimenez**, I currently live in Sea Tac, Washington, where I attend Odyssey: The Essential School. This year, one of my main goals is to get ready for college as I'm set to graduate as part of the class of 2008.

School to head down that same road as Manual. But important differences were apparent. As I thought about it, I saw that the process with Tyee had something that it seemed Manual hadn't. It's the number one thing that comes up when students at CES conferences talk about what they wish they had more of at their schools. That thing is the Manual student voice, being able to impact what's going on in their schools, to simply be in the know. The ability to invest and trust in their students to know what they need and want out of school as they engage us in this necessary work is what I believe has made the conversion process at Tyee different. This is what will ultimately lead to the success of Tyee's three small schools.

The Making of a Small School

Although the decision to pick out our three small schools was rushed, the final decision was made with as much student input as possible at the time when Odyssey: The Essential School, Global Connections, and the Academy of Citizenship and Empowerment (A.C.E.) were chosen.

Following that, in the winter of 2004-2005, the Tyee staff did one of the smartest things that they could have done. They extended the invitation to join one of these three design teams to the students. Soon thereafter, in January 2005, the design teams started meeting. Due to support from the district, the staff was able to have certain days when there was no school, an early release, or a delayed start. At these times, when the students weren't there, the staff had time to develop each school. It was during these days that students who chose to come also attended these meetings, and for the most part we were given a chance to participate equally.

Not every student was always given the opportunity to do meaningful work. Sometimes students were there doing nothing in particular, just following along as teachers discussed things that we as students knew little about or had little say over. Because of this and other factors (besides coming to school when we could have been sleeping) some students stopped attending the meetings.

But there were others who stayed, so each school still had a handful of students working with it. There were days when teachers were off holding their own meetings. During these times, we as students held our own meetings as well which were facilitated by an adult

who made sure to give us our own space as he made us question our school system as it is now. We were given time to consider what made the perfect school and what it was that we needed in order to succeed today. This gave us extra time to think things through and enter back into our design teams with more ideas than before—although we weren't always given the opportunity to voice or implement our new ideas. For example, in an area like ours, it wasn't very likely that we would get student exchange programs or get to travel to different countries right off the bat.

But as the work continued and the end of the school year was drawing near, there were two important things left to do. The first was allowing students to choose their small schools. Everyone was given the chance to rank their schools by their first, second and third choice. But we weren't allowed to choose without first having everyone view a student-made video on the conversion process. The video was used to convey information about the three small schools as well as what CES is.

This was great since students got to be involved instead of standing by. And the incoming freshmen got to receive this information from their peers who had been there first hand.

The next important thing left to do was, of course, hire principals. It was a two-step process, and students were allowed to interview and give our input during the first step. Two students participated with teachers from their design team as they interviewed potential principals. Doing this is important since, essentially, your principal is a reflection of your school.

With the principals chosen and our schools getting ready to open, each school brought students from their design teams to the 2005 CES Small Schools Summer Institute in Tacoma. This was another way in which to involve us as students. Sadly, the students who got to go were the same who had been part of the whole process; it was not open to the entire student body. In one way, it's reasonable, since students wouldn't have any interest in going to a conference put on by an organization that they knew nothing about.

But the lack of widespread knowledge of CES was a sign of how communication could have been better. Even though it would have been difficult in a school of 1,200, we could have taken time to learn more about CES. As well, in the beginning, up until some time before we had to choose our school, a lot of students thought that the juniors and seniors would graduate from Tyee High School, thus phasing the school out while adding a new class of students each year. So some didn't know until later that we would all be thrown into this new experience together. Had communication been clearer, things could have